

No Place Like Home: The Industry at a Crossroads

How does an arts organization that prides itself on eschewing traditional venues react when given the chance to settle in a space of its own? This case centers on the Los Angeles-based experimental opera company known as The Industry. The relatively new organization was founded with an idea to transform the performance of opera by bringing it outside the confines of the opera house. The case details the early success of The Industry, free from the shackles of a permanent space, and unfolds the three-year strategic plan to guide the enterprise. Amid plans for continued operations, the executive director of The Industry is presented with the opportunity to hold a residency at a new museum in Los Angeles, one very much in line with the opera company's contemporary cachet. This study outlines the prospects of the proposed museum residency, but questions at the board level remain about how an organization that has grown up without a home base for productions should react to the chance to forge a relationship with an institution that could bolster—or hinder—its success.



This case study was prepared by Michael Alan Anderson, Associate Professor of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music. *The Eastman Case Studies* are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

The Industry

The Industry is an artist-driven enterprise, which develops and delivers productions that renew and refresh the genre of opera. Striving to transform the venerable art form into one that is urgent, contemporary, and vital, The Industry maintains that opera is still relevant to modern audiences and that experimental tools and new artistic techniques can respond to issues of our time. Founded in 2010, The Industry's work touches a broad contemporary audience and challenges the

"The coolest opera company in the world."

– Brian Lauritzen,
classical music radio
host, KUSC.

traditional model of passive spectatorship, offering projects that center on audience engagement and interactivity. Although the young organization has already captured international attention for its productions, it has fostered deep ties within the city of Los Angeles, enlisting local

composers and artist collaborators for its works. The local press has heaped praise on The Industry: the *Los Angeles Times* lauded The Industry for "quickly and dramatically making itself an essential component in American opera," while the local alternative newspaper *LA Weekly* raved that The Industry is "turning LA into a hipster opera paradise."

One reason that The Industry has turned so many heads as an opera company is that it has shattered some of the basic premises of the art form in which it participates. The idea for the enterprise traces to a single individual—The Industry's founder, Yuval Sharon. Sharon challenges his performers to step out of their comfort zone as passive practitioners who execute scores and blocking instructions. He further invites his audiences to be participatory co-creators of the productions. And above all, Sharon's artistic vision rests on unshackling productions from the large opera house setting, which could mean

bringing the works to train stations or inside moving vehicles. Historically, opera has been a rich and mutable art form, responsive to its surroundings and audiences. Music—with and without text—is joined with spectacle to create a feast for the senses that speaks to its time and place of production. An opera for our time demands high expectations and requires extension out of the norms of the genre. The Industry holds an interdisciplinary focus as part of its mission and seeks partners that can advance this goal. The company's collaborations in Southern California have included music collectives such as wild Up, dance companies like the LA Dance Project and the Ate9 Dance Company, and other diverse institutions ranging from the Hammer Museum to the area's local mass transit system, the LA Metro.

Beyond producing contemporary opera, The Industry endeavors to distribute and foster the art form as part of its organizational goals. In 2014, The Industry founded its own label, The Industry Records, for presenting high-quality recordings of new experimental American opera. Its first release in 2014 was *Invisible Cities* by Christopher Cerrone, an opera that was staged in Los Angeles Union Station with just eleven orchestra players and eight singers. Technology played a major role, as audience members were invited to wear wireless headphones and follow performers around the space. The Industry Records captured the essence of this genre-bending performance and remains a platform that allows opera to be distributed in a new format, one carefully controlled by the organization and experienced in new ways by viewers.

In addition to the label, The Industry keeps the pipeline of experimental opera fueled through a collaborative workshop known as First Take. First Take is the West Coast's only incubator for new operas developed in the United States, and it is sponsored in connection with the contemporary music ensemble wild Up. The workshop features musical artists of