

Robert Loy, music librarian

BY PETER BURWASSER

The lanky, animated figure fairly tumbled out of the stage door of the Academy of Music, bursting in the bitter December cold in his shirt sleeves, clutching a handful of scores. We almost ran into each other. “Are you Peter?” Why, yes. You must be Bob. We scurried into XandO’s, grabbed three cups of joe (one extra for his assistant), then hurried back into the Academy, straight into the midst of an ongoing performance of the Pennsylvania Ballet’s *Nutcracker*. This is the world of Robert Loy, music librarian.

The Academy of Music is Loy’s home away from home. He seems to know every brick of the grand old lady. Into the Green Room we went, past a bevy of sugarplum fairies awaiting in the wings, tense stage daddies and mommies lurking in the shadows. Then through the back stage, skirting between ropes and pulleys, and down a small stairway to the orchestra pit. Loy was handing out music, but not for the *Nutcracker*. He had that music on the stands hours before. Rather, he was networking with the free-lance musicians who also play in the orchestras of Loy’s other clients, including the Opera Company of Philadelphia, the Concerto Soloists, and the Philadelphia Singers. We said a quick hello to conductor Beatrice Jona Affron, as she calmly waited for her cue to bring the ballet to a close, and then we headed up another narrow set of stairs to the nerve center of Loy’s universe, the music library itself.

Actually, the score collection at the Academy is officially the home turf of the three Philadelphia Orchestra librarians, but this is a collegial and intimate community, and their home is Loy’s home. Stacks of music are everywhere, designated for all of the aforementioned groups. There are also the official Philadelphia Orchestra scores, neatly stored

in rows of metal drawers. “This is Mozart,” says Loy, pointing towards a foot-locker sized section of the collection.

Loy also oversees the music libraries of the Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Ballet, as well his private collections. But a music librarian, as Loy practices the craft, is the guy that makes sure the music arrives on the stands of the players in a form that is as user friendly as possible, via whatever permutations that are necessary. This evening, Loy’s immediate job is fairly routine, and most of his attention is spent on future projects.

Nutcracker is a “walkaway” set-up. That is, “the crew, the musicians, and me get to walk away after the performance. The music stays on the stands. The preparation is minimal. Mostly I tape together old scores. A lot of the musicians have been a part of this production for twenty years. So have I.”

At the opposite extreme of challenges is the wonderful, wacky world of opera. This past fall, the Opera Company of Philadelphia presented a relative rarity, Rossini’s *L’Italiana in Algeri*. OCP imported beautiful

stage sets from Italy, as well as the conductor, the brilliant young maestro Corrado Rovaris. There were no collections of the score available in Italy, and only two in this country. Loy located a set, still marked up from the previous user, from the New York music house Boosey and Hawkes. “First, we had to clean it up, remove the pencil marks that the previous musicians put in for cues, bowings, fingerings, and so forth. Did you ever see an electric eraser?” Loy held up a device that would have looked at home in a dentist office.

“Corrado wanted to see the music in Italy before he came here. Italian customs just happened to open



the packages and thought we were smuggling rare books. I think they became suspicious when they saw the astronomical insurance, but there are probably only two sets of the score available, so I had to insure it. It took ten days to straighten things out, and Corrado only got the music just before he left. He did most of the work on the plane.”

But Loy’s work was just beginning. He is a trained musician himself, not surprisingly, “playing piano on the cocktail bar circuit until Bob O’Brien, who is now the librarian for the Atlanta Symphony, offered me a job at what was then the Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts [now University of the Arts]” Coincidentally, Loy’s first assistant was Robert Spano, who is the current music director in Atlanta.

Loy’s current assistant, Steven Gearhart, is also a musician, a singer and composition student of Jay Reise, at Penn. For *L’Italiana in Algeri* the two of them had to number every measure for every orchestral part, literally thousands of measures. They had to arrange the music in such a way as to allow for comfortable page turns, “anything to make it easier for the musicians.” Loy showed me several options they considered for one crucial page turn, in the middle of a frenzied passage in the music. They considered designing an elegant fold out, but the dim lighting in the pit made this impractical, so they simply made an extra copy of the succeeding page to place on the stand, eliminating the need for a page turn, so the players could keep their busy hands on their instruments. In opera, music librarians must also deal with last-minute changes by the conductor or director, as well as the dreaded “diva-driven cuts.”

As the Kimmel Center nears completion, does Robert Loy’s world threaten to become even more hectic, since some of his customers are scheduled to move down the block from the Academy? “I sure hope so,” he responds, scarcely containing his glee. As it is, there have been nights when he had to shuttle between the Academy and the Merriam Theater next door, but at least the libraries and offices of the disparate groups will relocate to be along the Avenue of the Arts after the Kimmel is opened. “In some ways, it will be a better situation for me, since everything will be more compact, even if I am working in more venues. But I still expect to spend most of my time at the intersection of Broad and Locust.”

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