“Bold and vivid. This small, adventurous company strives to make opera a visceral, intimate and immediate ‘encounter.’ Their alterations to masterpieces aim to get past dated elements that can mute the raw emotions and the timeless issues coursing within the original works.”


“This pioneering company radically reinterprets the classics, not just updating them through contemporary productions, but cutting, reorchestrating and rearranging them.”

- David Allen, The New York Times

“A categorically imaginative company, [Heartbeat] has made its name with vital reshapings of repertory operas. A radical endeavor -- less pint-sized grand opera than an appropriation of the genre for theatre of the black-box type.”

- Alex Ross, The New Yorker

“One of the most agile and dynamic companies on New York's indie opera scene. Every Heartbeat event feels like a happening. Judging by the average audience age and enthusiasm level, the company is succeeding.”

- Joanne Sydney Lessner, Opera News Cover feature

“Urgent, rigorous, and young, Heartbeat Opera poses another beacon of hope against New York City's gloomy operatic landscape. Heard and Prosko are a pair of auteurs to watch for. Their intelligence and warmth saturate the respective works, making for a thoroughly enjoyable evening at the opera house.”

- Patrick Clement James, Parterre Box

“There is nobody out there on the NYC independent opera scene offering such a complete package at this level. They’ve got the singers. They’ve got the acting chops. They’ve got the directorial vision. Scale and means do not matter when opera gets this intimate and is so perfectly crafted in each and every aspect, it is indeed distilled to its essence.”

-Allegri Con Fuoco
LA SUSANNA (2019)
a co-production with Opera Lafayette

“A thoughtful production that did full justice to a forgotten work. Heard gave new punch to an old story of female abuse at the hands of men.”

-Anne Midgette, The Washington Post

Changing the gender of Testo and Daniel is a “small but crucial shift” which is “the difference between this story being one of a helpless woman’s male savior, or of a young feminist’s coming into her own.” Lucía Martín Cartón sang with “unadorned, celestial purity that later turned to emotive exasperation.”


“A fascinating production. A great way for neophytes to introduce themselves to an art form with a long and complicated history. The soaring melodies and vocal stylings are gorgeous all on their own, and it’s amazing to see people within this medium challenging what it means to put on an opera in the fallout of Trumpism.”

-Observer

“A highly theatrical version with political resonance today, never scanting the exquisite baroque musical sensibility of the piece.”

-Parterre

“A marvel both musically and dramatically. Artistic past and political present mingled in a way both uncomfortable and thought-provoking. Heard pulled no punches.”

-Washington Classical Review

“Superb. Beautifully staged. Revives wonderful, rarely-heard music and tells an old, forever-new story with love, humor, and seductive grace.”

-Blog Critics
“The dedication and achievement of all participants is remarkable. High standard of music-making … gripping and entertaining.”

- David Shengold, Opernwelt

"Imaginatively deconstructed and reconceived. Ingenious seven-player arrangements of their orchestral scores…[with] artful transitions."

- Heidi Waleson, The Wall Street Journal

"No holds barred … Donna Anna knows damn well who’s in her bedroom, Donna Elvira means business when she threatens to rip out Giovanni’s heart, and Zerlina isn’t about to let her bumpkin husband keep her from a sexual adventure. Director/adaptor Proske delivered that version—and more."

- Joanne Sydney Lessner, Opera News

"I saw Fidelio, and was blindsided by its impact. Leading the cast were Nelson Ebo, grittily affecting as Stan, and Kelly Griffin, giving a confident, full-voiced performance as Leah. But the heartbreaking centerpiece of the production was the chorus ‘O welche Lust.’ Heard and Schlosberg refused to coat this wrenching spectacle in feel-good sentiment. Mindful of American reality, they discarded the opera’s happy ending and imposed a bleak coda, with a scrambled, dissonant collage of Fidelio music and other Beethoven snippets to match."

- Alex Ross, The New Yorker

"A Mozart lover’s wet dream … Heartbeat’s Giovanni successfully bucks tradition … I’d given up hope that Giovanni’s plot could surprise me. … I implore Mozart fans and novices alike turn out for this singular production."

- Schmopera

"Urgent, powerful, and poignant. I nearly missed Heartbeat Opera’s Fidelio, and I’m so glad I didn’t. The production, staged smartly, deftly navigated the tricky art of adaptation with new English-language dialogue."

"Excerpts from [Butterfly’s] Act I — especially crucial scenes when we see the beer-swilling Pinkerton (the vibrant tenor Mackenzie Whitney) before his wedding and some melting strands of the love duet — are intriguingly presented as dreamlike recollections. The most affecting element was the presentation of their child, a silent character. The devotion of the company to Puccini’s music was evident in the sensitive arrangement of the score for five strings and harp, a richly detailed yet delicate rendering that enhanced the drama’s intimacy.

“The gritty modern production ... and smoldering Carmen (Sishel Claverie) won me over. Then, at the end, after Don Jose brutally murdered her and the house went dark, the lights came on, revealing the bloodied, shaken Carmen staring at the audience. After a dramatic pause, Ms. Claverie finally sang the "Habenera." Now that was a riveting and unexpected moment. "


“Relevant and worthwhile. What’s so pleasing about Heartbeat’s Butterfly is how well its artistic intentions dovetail with its limited means. The orchestra is cut down, but to an arrangement for harp and string quintet that recalls the mellifluous elegance of the original. The cast members are young but promising enough that you wouldn’t mind hearing them in a grander production and a bigger space.”

- Russell Platt, The New Yorker

"Gripping as music theater in its own right, not just as a gloss on a (straw man) "traditional" reading. Proske set out to examine and challenge the all-too-timely oppositions structured around borders of all types. This was an anti-touristic Carmen ..."

- Opera News

"[Heard’s Butterfly was] a work of exceptional intelligence and unwavering artistic integrity."

- TheaterScene

“Proske moved her brilliant Carmen to the Mexico-Texas border, where she let Don José patrol as a US border guard and Bizet-cell phone ringtones played a key role.”

- David Shengold, Opernwelt

“[Proske’s] productions are full-fledged dramas, affecting their audiences as complicated, well-thought-through, emotion-packed narratives as well as occasions for expressive song. …I have never felt [this special variety of theatrical magic] at an opera to quite the same extent. Or rather, I hadn’t until I saw Proske’s Carmen.”

- Wendy Lesser, The Threepenny Review

BUTTERFLY and CARMEN (2017)
“In Proske’s conception [of Lucia], the heroine is mad from the outset, the story unfolding as an extended hallucination in a hospital ward. Schlosberg’s scoring—whistling tones of bowed vibraphone and cymbals, the harplike sound of strummed piano strings, the slide of a shot glass on an electric guitar—put a modernist frame around the action, although the substance of Donizetti’s score came through. Jamlyn Manning-White was an agile, fiery Lucia.

“[In Heard’s Dido & Aeneas] a cocktail party degenerates into surreal anarchy, with witches prancing about and the lovers copulating in a bathtub. The dynamic young baritone John Taylor Ward—portraying Aeneas, a witch, and several subsidiary characters—threw himself into the proceedings with stylish abandon. Ashworth, leading from his violin, elicited a performance that was elegant, boisterous, and melancholy by turns. And the scale of the show felt exactly right.””

- Alex Ross, The New Yorker

“An ingenious rescoring by Schlosberg … the unexpected instrumental timbres heightened director Proske’s arresting concept, which had Lucia, in a locked mental ward, feverishly hallucinating the story. …Jamlyn Manning-White, a knockout Lucia, delivered a high-octane mad scene …”

- Heidi Waleson, The Wall Street Journal

“Among this Lucia’s many highlights, Proske’s smart direction offers the most cause for celebration. … Framed by the institutional restrictions of the hospital and psych ward, the opera’s concept never overburdens its text, but instead offers a way for the director to negotiate opposing terrains of realism and surrealism. Proske drives her ensemble vigorously through the opera’s proceedings with measured intelligence, all the while unearthing Lucia’s absurdity, pathos, and even humor.

“Well paired with Proske’s Lucia, Heard’s direction of Dido & Aeneas is similarly intelligent, emotional, and efficient. Doubling as supporting roles and ensemble, the cast moves the narrative along with infectious, drunken spontaneity. Jablonski’s Dido is deeply felt and well sung—handsome, tasteful, and majestic. As much as the singers and musicians in both Proske’s Lucia and Heard’s Dido contribute to the overall success of the double bill, the essential reason to see both operas lies with the staging.”

- Parterre Box

“With its six singers, five instrumentalists, and 90 minute running time, Heartbeat’s compact Lucia packs a wallop; one could imagine it being taken up by other companies as a provocative and inexpensive way to introduce opera to the uninitiated.”

- Musical America
KAFKA-FRAGMENTS and DAPHNIS & CHLOÉ (2015)

“Kurtág's athletic music ranges from the fiercest dissonances to bits of lyric nostalgia, and the totally committed performers made it savage, moving and—when appropriate—funny.”

“[Daphnis & Chloé is] hilarious, witty. A stellar young cast. It is easy to over-egg Offenbach and turn his humor into crude slapstick; Proske ... kept it light and just naughty enough.”

- Heidi Waleson, The Wall Street Journal

“It is by no means obvious that there is gripping drama in this compelling and masterful but deeply enigmatic work [Kafka-Fragments], but that is precisely what Rosen and Ashworth brought to it, under the clearly inspired guidance of Heartbeat co-artistic director Heard. Purely as a feat of virtuosity, the hour-long performance was extraordinary. Yet beyond that, Rosen and Ashworth deployed their dazzling musical skills while enacting an intensely interactive two-person drama. Their joint music-making, usually singing and playing to each other at the same time, wove a fully-fleshed spectrum of emotion and experience, ranging from the soothing to the sensual to the terrifying. This reinvention of Kafka-Fragments, with thoughtful, well-integrated contributions from [the designers], is an odyssey through alienation and near madness to a kind of transfiguration, and a flat-out triumph for its two fearless performers.”

“[Daphnis & Chloé is] a gleeful bacchanal with choice comic touches ... and overflowing innuendo.”

- Joshua Rosenblum, Opera News

“Both mezzo-soprano Rosen and violinist/Heartbeat co-music director Ashworth commanded the stage in a gripping and imaginative new production by Heard. ...If this production is any indication, the young Heartbeat Opera will be a company to watch, with the talent and ambition to make compelling music drama out of the very meanest of resources.”

- Musical America
DRAGUS MAXIMUS, a homosexual opera odyssey (2018)

“The company is known for its timely adaptations of classics and forward-thinking rearrangements. But its collaborative spirit is fully realized in its annual Halloween Drag Extravaganzas, of which Dragus Maximus is the fifth. Visually and musically stunning. A wild, sexy bacchanal.”

- Observer

“Dragus Maximus left us grinning from ear to ear. The entire evening was dazzling. Supernally creative. Manning-White is a riveting performer with equal dramatic and vocal skills. We could not imagine a better celebration of the arts and gender diversity/fluidity!”

- Voce di Meche

“Stunning. Captivating. Eye-popping. The entire evening was a free-wheeling, fun-loving operatic romp, with tongue firmly in cheek but with beautiful music filling the air.”

- Feast of Music