



Behind the Scenes : Elizabeth Long

Working Wizardry

Elizabeth Long is the Executive Director of Finger Lakes Opera, a company that was founded in 2012 through support from SUNY Geneseo and its college community where Gerard Floriano, its Artistic Director, is a professor of voice. She was hired to be the first professional staff in 2019, thanks to a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts through a workforce development program and part of the company's transition to a free-standing entity, and has been its organizational mainstay since that time. With her assistance, the company has established itself as a major presence in the region, giving mainstage productions in the summer, developing a fine Young Artist program, recitals, concerts, outreach to schools, and collaboration with other community organizations both in Rochester and Canandaigua. This included a great deal of digital programming and an outdoor production of *The Barber of Seville* during the pandemic, both formidable achievements. She is a very busy lady.



Elizabeth was born and raised in Emporia, Kansas, the youngest of three sisters. The older girls took violin and Elizabeth followed at age five, under the Suzuki method, which led to her mother being involved daily in her studies for many years. She added piano at six, and eventually became a violin performance major at Northwestern University. Unsure that she wanted to pursue a performance career, by junior year she was involved in art administration and found that she liked it. Her undergraduate advisor was Thomas Willis, music critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, who helped her secure internships with the Chicago Chamber Musicians and the Chicago Chamber Orchestra. During her senior year, she had an interview with the Public Relations Director of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, who admired her resume, but advised her to pursue a graduate degree. This she did, at the Cincinnati Conservatory, during which she had internships at both the Cincinnati and Atlanta Symphonies. On attaining her master's degree, her first job was marketing and public relations with the

Delaware Symphony. She was one of seven selected to be a fellow with the American Symphony Orchestra League, but, eminently practical, passed it up for job experience in Delaware. She met her husband, Curt Long, while working there and ultimately moved to Ohio upon getting engaged. At the time, Curt was the President/CEO of the Dayton Philharmonic and she secured a job as executive director with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra (just 45 minutes up I-70 from Dayton.)

Elizabeth served as the Springfield Symphony Orchestra's executive director for five years.. As Elizabeth puts it in her down-to-earth way, "I realized that I liked fundraising more than marketing. To me getting butts in seats is harder than asking for donations." When she and Curt started their family, however, her long commute was at least part of the reason she opted to become a stay-at-home mother to their eventual family of three children.

She has wonderful memories of Dayton, but then Curt was approached by the Alabama Symphony Orchestra where he became the President/CEO for 9 years. The energetic Elizabeth did not remain on the sidelines when their youngest entered grade school in Alabama. She was active in the PTA, became a group fitness instructor (try keeping up with her on walks) and also a grant-writer for the Alabama Network of Children's Advocacy Centers. She moved on to work for Main Street Alabama, an organization focused on

bringing jobs, dollars and people back to Alabama's historic communities. Elizabeth obviously knows how to deploy her talents in many contexts.

Fast forward now to 2017, when Elizabeth and Curt arrived in Rochester, he to become the President/CEO of the RPO. (See article on Curt Long and navigating the pandemic's challenges with the orchestra in the newsletter archive, May, 2021.) In 2019, Elizabeth was hired by FLO and her responsibilities have grown by leaps and bounds as she is involved in almost every aspect of the company's development. She has continually advocated in her skillful way for more programs, better organization, better staffing, better relations with musicians and backstage personnel, better everything.

Her conflict resolution skills are formidable, her approach always being to find common ground and appreciate everyone's contribution. With an appetite for on-the-job training, one of her challenges was becoming familiar with the production side of opera creation. Her dedication to her work is deservedly appreciated by her colleagues, who gave *her* the biggest applause at the 10th Anniversary Gala Celebration last year. May our music community long enjoy the contributions of Finger Lakes Opera, and Elizabeth Long's commitment to excellence, diversity, outreach, and, not least to this grandmother, children's opera!

Carol Crocca