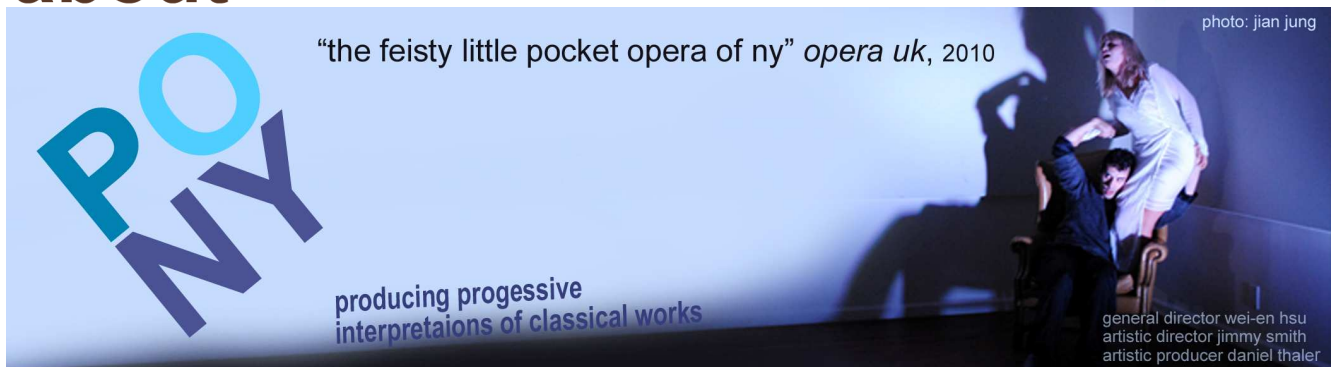


# about



## Mission Statement

Pocket Opera of New York produces progressive and experimental productions of great operatic works.

## Organization Information

PONY was founded in 2009 by its General Director, Wei-En Hsu and Chad Cygan, both alumnae of the Juilliard School. PONY is fiscally sponsored by Fractured Atlas. Throughout the 2009-2010 Inaugural Season, PONY presented productions of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and Händel's *Serse* and *Messiah* as well as concerts and recitals throughout New York.



PONY is fiscally sponsored by Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization.

## Advisory Board

- Alex Yastremski – *General Counsel, Gansevoort Hotel Group*
- Doug Fitch - *Director / Designer*
- Jordana Phokompe - *Associate Producer, Lincoln Center*
- Clifton Z. Taylor - *Lighting Designer*
- Alice Sachs Zimet - *President and Founder of Arts and Business Partners LLC*
- Ilene Antelman – *Publicist*
- Arthur J. Levy

## Administrative Staff

- Wei-En Hsu – *General Director*
- Jimmy Smith – *Artistic Director*
- Daniel Thaler – *Artistic Producer*
- Jessica Forsythe – *Consultant*

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For more information, please contact Daniel Thaler – [dcthaler@gmail.com](mailto:dcthaler@gmail.com) – 646-202-0929

# people



## Wei-En Hsu, General Director

A graduate of Juilliard, Wei-En is the driving musical force of PONY. He received his Bachelor's degree in piano from Taipei National University of the Arts, and attended RAM (London). Teachers: Malcolm Martineau, Aaron Shorr, Barbara González-Palmer, Warren Jones, Jonathan Feldman and Margo Garrett. Companies: One World Symphony, British Youth Opera, Opera Co. of Brooklyn, Aspen Opera Theatre. Programs: Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme in Aldeburgh and Music Academy of the West. He served on the coaching staff (Artist Diploma) at College-Conservatory of

Music, Univ. of Cincinnati. Awards: the Scott Huxley Piano Accomp. Prize, Major Van Someren-Godfery Prize Accomp. Award, the Ludmilla Andrew Russian Song Prize Accomp. Award, Sir Arthur Bliss Prize, and a Distinction Perf. Award from RAM. Recently, he made his debuts at Weill and de Singel, Belgium and conducted *Ariadne auf Naxos* at CCM. Current projects include music direction for PONY's 2010-2011 Season.

## Jimmy Smith, Artistic Director

Praised for his "wicked sense of humor" by the San Francisco Classical Voice and branded a "bad-boy imp" by the San Francisco Chronicle, Jimmy has been gaining momentum as an inventive director creating work for PONY, West Bay Opera, Trinity Lyric, Opera North, Commonwealth Opera, and Green Sea Theatre. He worked with many great directors including John Copley, Laurent Pelly, James Robinson, Peter Kazaras and Roy Rallo. He holds degrees from Bucknell and Wesleyan, where he traveled throughout Indonesia performing and researching *gamelan*. Having completed the highly coveted Merola Opera Program at the San Francisco Opera in 2008, Jimmy is at work developing several opera projects with Director / Designer Doug Fitch including the recently presented *Le Grand Macabre* (May 2010) and the *Cunning Little Vixen* (June 2011) for the New York Philharmonic, as well as planning and programming for PONY.



## Daniel Thaler, Artistic Producer



In addition to producing for PONY, Daniel has performed leading roles in *Albert Herring*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *La filled u regiment*, *La Traviata*, *Tosca*, *Pagliacci* with companies including Hartt Opera Theater, CT Opera, DiCapo Opera, Nat. Lyric Opera and PONY. Concert: The Garden State Arts Center, Acad. of Music in Philadelphia and Alice Tully Hall for the Mozart Bicentennial. Noted for his "sweet, supple operatic voice" and called "a singer to watch" (New York Theater Wire), Thaler is a member of AEA and has performed principal roles in *West Side Story*, Noel Coward's *Bittersweet*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *South Pacific*, *Pippin*, *Oklahoma*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Shandoah*, *Sound of Music* with companies including Media Center, MA Interntl. Theater Festival, Weathervane Theater, Surflight and Strand Theater. Other notable

performances include *Sonata Da Camara Obscura* at the Ontological Hysterical Theater and Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *The Break/s* at The NY Hip-Hop Theater Festival. Television: BRAVO, *Artzone* on OVATION and *The Making of an Opera* for PBS. He maintains a private voice studio in New York City and his students perform around the world in opera, theater and on the concert stage.

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# season

FALL 2010

October 13 - 16, 2010

## L'ENFANT ET LES SORTILÈGES & LA CHUTE DE LA MAISON USHER

The final operatic works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.

*A phantasmagorical evening of unleashed perversions and fantasy. PONY presents a semi-staged production of Ravel's haunting 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges' and Debussy's brief, but brilliant 'La chute de la maison Usher'.*

Performed in English with piano at The Bechstein Piano Centre - 207 West 58th Street, New York City

### Artistic Team:

Production - Isabel Milenski  
Musical Direction - Wei-En Hsu  
Piano - Yü Lee and Wei-En Hsu  
Choreography - Abigail Levine  
Costume & Scenery Design - Jian Jung  
Lighting Design - Lucrecia Briceno

### The Cast of Sortilèges:

The Child - Solange Merdinian  
The Mother, Cat, Squirrel – Shirin Eskandani  
The Armchair, Tree - Matthew Royal  
The Bergère - Laura Mitchell  
The Clock, Cat - Ricardo Rivera  
The Teapot - Chad Kranak  
The China Cup, Dragonfly - Tyler Wayne Smith  
The Fire - Lauren-Rose King

Shepherd - Jessica Peritz  
Shepherdess, Bat – Claire Kuttler  
The Princess - Elizabeth Hartnett  
The Little Old Man - Kevin L. Peters  
The Nightingale - Lori Rohrs  
The Bat - Claire Kuttler  
The Frog - Kirk Bangstad  
Chorus - Stephanie Horowitz and Principals

### The Cast of Usher:

Lady Madeline - Tanya Roberts  
Roderick - Ricardo Rivera

Roderick's Friend - Matthew Royal  
The Doctor - Clayton Okaly

Spring 2011

March 17 - 20, 2011

## ALCINA

by G.F. Handel

*A seductive sorceress turns lovers into stone and beasts.*

Performed with chamber orchestra in Italian at Atlantic Stage 2 - 330 West 16th Street, New York City

Artistic Team and Casting TBA

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# press



## AN UNAMPLIFIED VOICE

one operagoer's notes

October 31, 2010

### Not (just) for Children

October brought opportunities to see two smaller New York companies, each in a distinct phase of existence.

...

Pocket Opera of New York -- a company in its second season -- took a very different tack with *its* children's opera presentation. The stage direction of Hofstra's Isabel Milenski magnified every bit of the inner modernist in Ravel and Colette's "L'enfant et les sortilèges", turning a basically charming tale of childhood wonder (and, yes, budding sexuality and guilt) into a truly disturbing piece about the usual 20th-century hangups (sexual compulsion, violence, a bit of blasphemy...), unfit for any child's viewing. It was an interesting and memorable take, well sold by the young cast, but the whole was sort of joyless: some things are best left as subtext.

Milenski's all-out approach paid huge dividends, however, in the second part of the double bill. Debussy's partial, very free, and unfinished short adaptation of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" is something like a bizarro-world version of his completed operatic masterpiece *Pelleas*, with the fate-laden mystical space [between Maeterlinck's characters](#) warped, in the Poe, into claustrophobic madness. The performers here -- particularly baritone Ricardo Rivera, intense and commanding as Roderick Usher -- seized well on the dramatic opportunities of lunacy to put together a great short fragment of no-holds-barred opera.

PONY's youth showed in its limited resources: both operas were done before 65 seats in the back of the Bechstein (piano) Showroom, accompanied by a four-hand piano reduction rather than an actual orchestra. But the resourceful and atmospheric lighting of Lucrecia Briceno seamlessly turned the ad hoc stage into operatic spaces, and the musical preparation seemed undiminished. Anyway the company, led by director Jimmy Smith, doesn't lack for ambition: Handel's *Alcina* is planned for March -- in, I believe, a somewhat less tiny space.

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# press



## Child's play

by **manrico** | 2:52 pm | Oct 15, 2010



photo: jian jung

Simpler can be better, as Pocket Opera of New York demonstrated in the back of the Bechstein Showroom on Wednesday evening for their double bill of Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and Debussy's *La chute de la maison Usher*. When I heard these operas would be presented in English with piano accompaniment, I was initially dubious, but found myself won over by the strength of the production and the enthusiasm of the singers.

These seemingly disparate operas came together under **Isabel Milenski's** direction, turning from the more usual fairytale presentation of *Sortilèges* to reveal adolescent traumas and awakenings, and bringing out the full terror of Debussy's unfinished masterpiece.

*Sortilèges* is a bit of an oddity, written for a large ensemble of singing objects. The subject matter often suggests "children's opera" (the concept has a certain similarity to Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*) but the Pocket Opera took an entirely different approach. The Child in this production is closer to Sally Draper than Belle, living in an adult world that barely notices her. **Solange Merdinian's** dusky mezzo beautifully inhabited the trouser roll of a child falling through the rabbit hole to an adolescent acid trip.

The simple stage design of the first part of *Sortilèges* (merely a chair and a picture) allowed the action to travel away from a fable to some much more disturbing fantasies. Treating **Colette's** libretto abstractly, the Child barely destroys anything, merely ripping some pages from a book – instead the world around her misbehaves. The ensemble cast under the direction **Wei-En Hsu** and **Yu Lee** was quite strong, with special notice going to **Shirin Eskandani** as the boozy Mother, **Ricardo Rivera** as a masturbating Clock, and **Lauren-Rose King** as a whorish Fire.

As the stage began to fill with more props and actors when the action moved into the "garden," however, the production began to lose focus. In the small space, the English words became less clear, and the poor sightlines of the makeshift theatre made it difficult to navigate the more complex

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# press

tableaux. As the psychological journey ended, I found myself unsure of the final destination of the Child – her last word, a simple “Mama,” left me with a feeling of ambiguity.

## Child’s play [continued]

A powerful rendering of *La chute de la maison Usher* followed. **Edgar Allen Poe** and Debussy are a perfect match, and even in this unfinished work, and the piece brims with the uneasiness and dread that pervades the source material. Milenski’s direction this time was more succinct, and the results payed off. The score does not translate as well to piano as did the Ravel, but the reduced forces also allowed the singers to attain an incredible intimacy with the audience, making every breath central to the drama.

The production relied on simple visual cues, putting the focus on the acting of the singers. Roderick Usher (Rivera) begins hidden in a chair turned away from the audience, while his sister Madeline (**Tanya Roberts**) wanders through the audience, and across the stage. **Lucrecia Briceno**’s lighting casts ominous shadows against the blank back wall, completing the gothic ambiance. Add Debussy’s chilling opening notes, and we are in the Usher manor.

As the Friend, **Matthew Royal** possessed a firm, clear baritone that established him as the voice of sanity, a sounding board for the other characters to react against. **Clayton Okaly** sang the part of the Doctor lyrically, but the lightness of his baritone and his youthful good looks both worked against him.

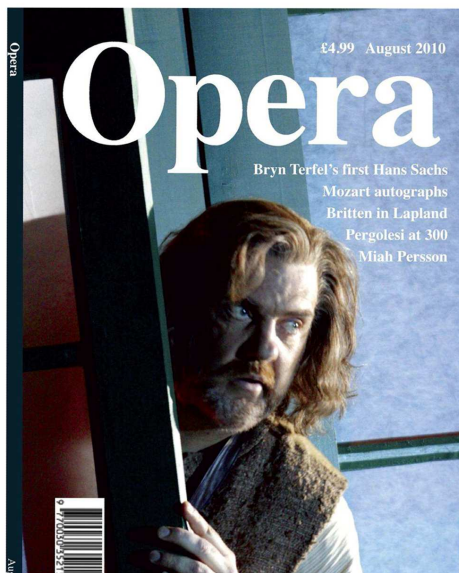
Roberts’ piercing soprano was perfect for the vocally brief part of Madeline. During her long, silent wanderings through the space, her harsh breathing and her hands scraping against the floors resonated in the space, creating a Poeish inequilibrium. Rivera deployed the intimacy of the room to shade his voice with a wide range of colors. His Usher began despondent, and quickly tipped over the brink of sanity, all the while maintaining clear diction.

Pocket Opera is a relatively new company, but I was impressed both by the vision of the regie, which allowed the ensemble to turn an undesirable performing space to their advantage, and the commitment of the singers. I’m excited to see what they come up with for *Alcina* in the Spring.

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# press



## Opera UK August 2010

David Shengold's  
review of PONY's  
Pagliacci

The feisty little POCKET OPERA OF NEW YORK ('PONY') gave a committed performance of *Pagliacci* (April 10) at the demi-black-box SECRET THEATER in Queens: just one subway stop but an atmospheric scene-change from crowded Manhattan. The publicity stressed using the recent *cause célèbre* of a local politician being cast out of New York's incorrigibly corrupt State Senate (for slashing his fiancée's face) to explore gender politics. Jimmy Smith's production, alternately riveting and baffling, utilized the requisite sleek cheap suits and iconography. Daniel Snyder's stentorian Canio waved to voters, flashing crocodile smiles, Rod Gomez's solidly-voiced Tonio was a bullish enforcer/bodyguard and Dan Thaler a clueless local party hack: his Beppe got the full Christopher Alden 'play cartoon appearances, not feelings or text' treatment, sporting silly '70s duds and specs and switching to bad drag for Arlecchino. Beppe readied himself for sex when Canio (inexplicably) removed his shirt before putting it back on during 'Vesti la giubba'. Nedda (the very likable and promising Shermayne Brown, with a striking spinto and a lovely face for the stage) was meant to be a drag queen, though only a removable wig connoted this; her Colombina resembled an undergraduate idea of a butch lesbian. The Silvio, a roarer incapable of soft singing, was a working-class hysteric with a travel magazine. Snyder sometimes evoked the gut-busting recordings of Frank Mullings, but there's a useful instrument there; entering into Smith's wall-pounding concept, he threw himself into the part movingly. The artistic director, Wei En-Hsu, played the piano alongside the conductor Ryan Dudenbostel's four other talented players (bassoon, clarinet, flute and *way* under-rehearsed violin). These forces, plus the hard-working but good-sounding choristers (Keiko Kai, Laura Mitchell and Nina Riley) conveyed a surprising amount of Leoncavallo's musical achievement; only the bell-ringing chorus was cut, an abridgement I'd welcome in 'standard' performances of *Pagliacci*.

[pocketoperany.org](http://pocketoperany.org)

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April 15th, 2010

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## Monserrate Portrayed As Gay, Sad Clown

By KAITLYN KILMETIS

Last weekend in Long Island City Pocket Opera of New York performed a modernized version of the Italian opera "Pagliacci" with a political spin especially appealing to theatre patrons across the borough.

The tragedy's program read that in the updated adaptation of the opera, the iconic sad clown Conio was inspired by former Queens Sen. Hiram Monserrate.

Traditionally in the play, Conio murders his lover Nedda and the man she is cheating with in a jealous rage. In Director Jimmy Smith's version, in addition to the murder, to tailor the piece to the Monserrate situation, the chorus, who turns on Canio at the play's close, is meant to depict the Senate who voted Monserrate out earlier this year. Additionally, in Smith's adaptation, Nedda is actually a man who pretends to be a woman, signaling that main character Canio is a covert homosexual.

Smith said he used the rendition of "Pagliacci" to explore Monserrate's domestic abuse charges, the former Senator's "no" vote to Gay Marriage and the vast differences in Monserrate's public and private life. He also added that the only reference to Monserrate was in the show's program and attendees would not know about Smith's inspiration otherwise.

He said although initially he decided to loosely model Pagliacci after Monserrate, in the end he was pleased the show ended up being more poetry than documentary.

"At first, I wanted people to see the hypocrisy of someone who is espousing one thing and then has this violent dark life and is also very homophobic," Smith said. "I think people walked away not thinking of Hiram Monserrate. I think they just walked away seeing a sad story. I think ultimately it wasn't so much a big comment on Hiram Monserrate as just a starting point to get the creative process going."

Smith said PONY endeavors to re-imagine traditional operas in ways that appeal to contemporary theatergoers.

"There's definitely a modern approach or at least an attempt to rediscover a work for a modern audience," he said. "It doesn't necessarily mean the story is updated, just thought about in a way that's relevant now."

Monserrate did not respond to multiple requests for comment on PONY's depiction of Pagliacci.

For more information about Pocket Opera of New York, visit [pocketoperany.org](http://pocketoperany.org) and for information about LIC's Secret Theatre, visit [secrettheatre.com](http://secrettheatre.com).

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