

Maggey Oplinger

General Director and Chief Executive Officer – Florentine Opera Company
Member Since October 2017



As the Florentine Opera Company prepared to take the stage at Uihlein Hall to present Kurt Weill’s “Little Mahagonny,” Maggey Oplinger was excited but terrified.

It was May 2021, and not only was the Florentine the first group to perform in the Marcus Center’s newly renovated hall, it was the first opera company in the country to appear in a theater before a live audience in more than a year due to the pandemic.

“It was by far the most awe-inspiring moment of my life,” said Maggey, Florentine’s general director and chief executive officer. “It took hundreds of people to make that performance happen—figuring out new ways of operating and following strict protocols to keep everyone safe. It laid the groundwork for us coming back and I was so honored to be part of that.”

The challenge of building an opera during a pandemic was terrifying, according to Maggey, but she was in her element. After all, what she loves most about her job is overseeing all the moving parts of an opera company—the people, elements and logistics that go into creating something profoundly beautiful.

Maggey’s education, work and life experiences and passions—music, language, literature, design and the performing arts—make her a perfect fit for the role. Her parents instilled the value of being forthright, honest and respectful of everyone, while voice professor Lucile Evans taught her to approach every task with intention and integrity. Finally, there is her keen focus on gleaning valuable insight from mentors, peers and colleagues.

“When I took the job at Florentine, my first role as general director and CEO, I saw it as an amazing opportunity to sit down with current and former CEOs in Milwaukee to learn their lessons,” said Maggey. “It was an extraordinary experience, and the lessons—from people I wouldn’t ordinarily connect with—will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

One lesson she has mastered is the ability to pivot and adapt.

“There is always something changing in opera and the pandemic really just amplified that,” Maggey said. “So today, even though we’re an 89-year-old company performing art that is hundreds of years old, it’s an all-new horizon with an all-new playbook,” she said.

Maggey, who holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in voice performance from McGill University, and a graduate diploma in nonprofit business administration from John Molson School of Business – Concordia University, previously worked as director of community partnership and director of shared experiences for the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.



Before that, she spent five years with Johnson Controls as an innovation catalyst and sales proposal team lead.

When she's not leading Milwaukee's oldest professional performing arts organization, Maggey loves nothing more than spending time with her husband David and their five children.

"Our kids are ridiculous and awesome," she said with an infectious laugh. "Like me, they all love to read, so I'll curl up with a book and pretty soon a kid with a book will curl up with me and that is just the best thing in the world."

Once a personal chef in Europe, Maggie, loves to cook and is committed to getting back to creating beautiful meals and setting an elegant table for friends and family. Travel, especially including opera performances, is also something she is eager to resume, and a trip with fellow bourbon-loving pals to Kentucky is on her bucket list, too.

Maggey's other passions, not surprisingly, include supporting arts education and immersion programs in Milwaukee public schools, and 88 Nine Radio Milwaukee in its mission to champion music, arts, culture, neighborhoods and inclusivity. Supporting families enduring hard times through organizations like Saving Our Sisters and the Ronald McDonald House Charities is also important to her.

Maggey thrives on connecting, learning and giving back, so she quickly found her place in Rotary after being invited to a meeting by Ryan Daniels.

"I was so struck by Rotary's model and approach to conversation for the speaker that I told Ryan I wanted to join right then and there," said Maggey, who now fittingly serves as chair of the membership committee.

"When I'm in a room full of Rotarians, no matter what our beliefs or backgrounds are, I know I can call on any one of them for their insights about Milwaukee, to connect me to something I need to fill a hole in my world, and I know I can trust every single person whether I know them or not. The intention, the action, the engagement is simply amazing."

Maggey, who grew up in suburban Milwaukee the eldest sibling of six, said that despite living here for most of her life, she is still discovering all that Rotary has done for the city.

"The world in general needs more of what Rotary is."



Editor's Note: *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Mary Bolich.