



7-8 May 2011
Young Ears

PRESS CONFERENCE

On 7 and 8 May 2011, over 100 opera houses open their doors to celebrate the art of opera – “a truly European initiative” says EU Commissioner Vassiliou

On **20 April in Brussels**, the General Director of **la Monnaie/De Munt**, **Mr. Peter de Caluwe**, hosted a press conference to launch the **fifth edition** of the **European Opera Days**, organized annually on the weekend closest to **Europe Day**.

During the **European Opera Days**, opera houses throughout Europe invite all those curious to discover opera, highlighting their shared passion for this art - and their desire to transmit it to new and existing audiences. On **7 and 8 May 2011**, **103 opera houses** will be part of the event in **23 countries**. Last year's European Opera Days attracted **well in excess of 100,000 visitors**. Each year, activities are framed around a common, Europe-wide theme. This year, the focus is **Young Ears**: with activities specially designed for children and young people, for newcomers to the art form as well as opera lovers ready for new experiences.

The Directors of the three Belgian opera houses - **Mr. Aviel Cahn** (Intendant, De Vlaamse Opera, Antwerp/Ghent), **Mr. Stefano Mazzonis di Pralafra** (General Director, Opéra Royal de Wallonie, Liège), and the host **Mr. Peter de Caluwe** (General Director, la Monnaie/De Munt, Brussels) – presented the ambitious programmes of several European opera houses, with a special focus on the activities planned in Belgium. The theme **Young Ears** was wonderfully illustrated by a video message from the Canadian soprano **Mrs. Barbara Hannigan**. “*Opera speaks across national and linguistic boundaries, and can play a powerful unifying role in all our lives.*” said Mr. Peter de Caluwe.

Held on the same weekend all across Europe, the European Opera Days are “*an excellent cultural initiative that is truly European in nature*” said **Mrs. Androulla Vassiliou**, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, who honoured the press conference with her presence. Mrs. Vassiliou made several statements in support of opera, and on the role of culture in European societies. The Commissioner also underlined the engagement of the EU in supporting culture, and the importance of maintaining this engagement in the future: “*I am fully committed to strengthening EU support for the cultural and creative sectors in the new financial framework, and making this support as effective and relevant as possible to the sectors’ needs.*” – a statement warmly welcomed at a time when European institutions and Member states are launching their negotiations on the future EU budget.

Through the European Opera Days, but also through their ongoing programmes, opera houses across Europe show the vivacity of their art, their commitment to engage with new audiences, and the European nature of their work. In the words of Mr. Mazzonis di Pralafra, “*the European Opera Days are a way of attracting the attention of our decision-makers, a way of showing them that an active, vibrant, cultural network exists, one which is unifying, bold and innovative.*”

The European Opera Days are a joint initiative of Opera Europa and RESEO. For more information, visit **www.operadays.eu**.

The European Opera Days support the Europe-wide arts advocacy campaign *we are more* – act for culture in Europe, set up by Culture Action Europe in strategic partnership with the European Cultural Foundation. For more information, visit **www.wearemore.eu**.

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