

# Curator of everything BOB MARTIN

An interview with the Lensic's executive director

James M. Keller | The New Mexican



**Executive director Robert Martin** points out that the Lensic Performing Arts Center is a 10-year-old with the body of an 80-year-old, as the historic Lensic Theater was built in 1931 as a movie and vaudeville palace. The Pueblo-deco building had fallen into disuse by the time Martin arrived from San Francisco 11 years ago to oversee the theater's physical renovation and its transformation into the modern performing-arts venue that Santa Fe sorely lacked at the time.

The Lensic Performing Arts Center celebrates its 10th anniversary on Saturday, April 16, with an event involving several of the performing groups that regularly appear on its stage. *Pasatiempo* caught up with Martin at the theater whose personality he has shaped through the past decade.

**Pasatiempo:** Congratulations on reaching the 10-year milestone. Ten long years or 10 short years?

**Robert Martin:** It has gone by so fast it seems unreal. When I began, I really didn't know if it would work. The original plan was that there was a group of eight founding organizations, and their performances were going to fill about 60 to 70 percent of the Lensic's schedule. By the time I came, the number had changed to about 35 percent. When the moment came to put bookings on the calendar, they had become realistic about what they actually could use. That meant our occupancy was about half of what had been planned, so our challenge was to figure out what would fill the other 65 percent of the time. Today the founding groups' percentage is probably even a little less than that. I think that was a good thing in the long run, because it provided time in which other things could happen. The Lensic could not have relied too much on one type of performance, one genre of art, and made it in a town this size. It had to be eclectic and diversified to make it 200-plus nights a year.

**Pasa:** Which were the founding groups?

**Martin:** María Benítez Teatro Flamenco, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Santa Fe Concert Association, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Santa Fe Opera, Santa Fe Pro Musica, Santa Fe Symphony and Chorus, and Santa Fe Stages. I feel blessed that our founding groups present work of such quality. Most involved classical music, and we were lucky that the Lannan Foundation and Aspen Santa Fe Ballet came in right away, although they weren't among the founding groups. The Lannan series is one of the most incredible literary offerings in the country, and I have nothing but respect for Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, watching them grow to develop a national and international reputation.

From the beginning we were doing our own programming, too, although a lot of people didn't realize it. The Lensic itself was producing world music concerts, showing movies, working with local artists to create something like Circus Luminous. The goal has been to bring



people of different ages and different sensibilities into the Lensic. To do that, we needed to tap into as many people as possible in any given month.

**Pasa:** How many of your 200 yearly events are Lensic-produced, as opposed to rentals?

**Martin:** If you consider Lensic-produced as meaning all the things we are deeply involved in putting together, plus the community sponsorship events we present, it's now probably 35 to 45 percent. When it comes to community groups, we subsidize them to be here, and I consider how their programming figures in the arc of the Lensic's overall presentations. These would include, for example, the Piñon Awards, the Fiesta Council — events to which we give full or partial sponsorship. There are usually 15 to 20 of them each year.

**Pasa:** Are you comfortable with your current mix of presenting and producing?

**Martin:** Yes. The balance is just right for what the community responds to and what our staff can handle. When we look at our programming, it really is the combination of the presenting plus all the producing we do — the New Mexico Jazz Festival, Circus Luminous, the Met and National Theatre high-definition broadcasts, the World Music Series. Then there are the education programs we do — the 15,000 kids coming to see shows each season — and our tech internship program and the Future Voices of New Mexico incentive that we do with National Geographic and the community sponsorship program. We also own and operate Tickets Santa Fe, which provides box office services for many organizations in town. And of course, we take care of our building.

**Pasa:** The Lensic recently purchased the theater it inhabits and is now an owner rather than a renter. Why was that important?

**Martin:** About three years ago, we looked ahead at what would be involved in keeping the theater state of the art, and we realized that over a 10-year period it was going to be in the ballpark of a million dollars if we wanted the space to continue to be beautiful and up-to-date. It wouldn't have been impossible to raise that money if we didn't own the place, because we did have a long-term lease, but I believe it would have been a lot more difficult to ask people for money for these things if the nonprofit wouldn't benefit from them in the long run. We had a silent fundraising campaign with the board and a few other donors, and we raised the \$3 million that made the transaction possible. Now we're launching the next phase, the Fund the Future campaign. It will bring in another \$3 million — half for building needs and the other half to secure the programming and educational and community incentives.

**Pasa:** What building improvements do you anticipate?

**Martin:** New stage flooring, improved digital projection capabilities, enhancements to the sound system. We could let our technology lag behind and have touring companies say, "That's software from two years ago, and we don't work with that anymore." Or we could have tour personnel say, as they do now, that this is one of the best spaces in the country, because it's beautiful and well taken care of, and it has great staff and state-of-the-art equipment. We don't want to stop hearing that over the next 10 years.

**Pasa:** Do you personally vet all the rental events that take place in the Lensic?

**Martin:** Every single one. I like to think I'm the curator of everything that goes on. Sometimes things are proposed that would probably sell well, but I've felt I just didn't want them here. For example, tribute bands — the tribute Eagles band, the tribute Beatles band. I just feel those should not be in a performing arts center.

**Pasa:** What if someone dropped a check on your desk today that freed you up to do things beyond what your fundraising campaign is crafted to cover? What would you love to do at the Lensic?

**Martin:** I would develop projects with local artists or that somehow relate specifically to this area that would have more national impact. There are incredible people, incredible minds in Santa Fe, not just in the artistic community but in many fields: political, social, environmental,



File photo

Santa Fe Pro Musica performance for local school children, October 2010

scientific. How could the Lensic connect them to artists, to make the arts more important in people's lives everywhere? Saying that, I would never want to do it at the risk of continuing to support all the programs we're already involved with.

Actually, we're just now putting final touches on a project that goes in that direction. It's a production called *Tempest*, an adaptation by Richard Clifford of Shakespeare's play. It was given at the Folger Shakespeare Library last year. We're presenting it on June 18 and 19 in conjunction with Santa Fe Pro Musica. It will involve 18 musicians, two singers, and three actors. One will be an actress from here, and the others will be Richard Clifford and his partner, who is Sir Derek Jacobi. Getting somebody of that stature here is exciting. It came about through a connection with John Andrews, who is fairly new to the Santa Fe community and previously worked at the Folger. That's the creative balance I have in mind, with musicians and an actress from here, but Clifford and Sir Derek coming in — an example of local talent working at the level of these gentlemen.

**Pasa:** How would you like the Lensic's audiences to evolve?

**Martin:** I would challenge people to take more chances, to come to see art forms they don't usually go to see. People tend to be very centered on a single genre. Jazz audiences don't go to classical music; classical audiences don't go to world music; modern dance people don't go to ballet. It's not a question of intelligence but rather of curiosity. You've got the Lensic; it's a safe zone. You've got good prices, you've got a parking lot across the street. Wouldn't it be good to go to something that stretches your boundaries now and then? This happens everywhere, not just in Santa Fe, believe me. So I would challenge the audience to be more curious, to go to something they wouldn't normally attend and to be open to what they discover. ◀

## details

- ▼ Lensic Performing Arts Center 10th Anniversary Gala, featuring a film retrospective about the Lensic & performances by members of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet; the Santa Fe Indian School Spoken Word Team; Wise Fool New Mexico; & the 10th Anniversary Lensic Ensemble, featuring members of the Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra, Santa Fe Concert Association, and Santa Fe Pro Musica performing music of Bizet, Bach, Beethoven, and Dave Grusin
- ▼ Lensic Performing Arts Center, 211 W. San Francisco St.
- ▼ 5 p.m. Saturday, April 16; champagne reception begins at 4:30 p.m.
- ▼ \$25 & \$50; \$250 includes premium gala seating & 7 p.m. post-performance black-tie gala dinner at La Fonda on the Plaza; at the door or from Tickets Santa Fe at the Lensic (988-1234, [www.ticketssantafe.org](http://www.ticketssantafe.org))



# Island magic

## *The Long and bumpy journey of The Tempest*

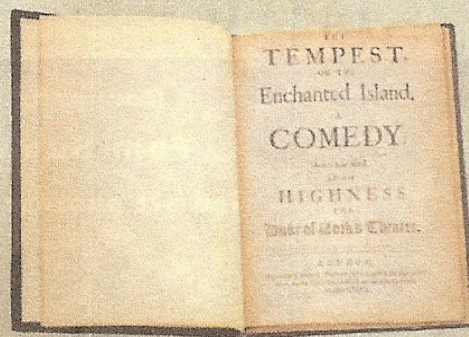
**THE TEMPEST**, first performed in 1611, is widely considered to be William Shakespeare's last great play, or at least one of his final two, along with *The Winter's Tale*. Following those, he wrote two more, at least in part — *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the latter certainly being a collaboration with John Fletcher — and neither has staked a claim in the public's affection. We might view *The Tempest* as just one stop on a literary journey that began far earlier and would extend centuries beyond. For all his originality, Shakespeare drew liberally on historical and literary sources. *The Tempest* accordingly includes among its progenitors Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Erasmus'

*Naufragium* (probably), and Montaigne's *Essays* (certainly the essay "On Cannibals"), as well as an account of a 1609 shipwreck in Bermuda — or "the still-vexed Bermoothes," as the sprite Ariel puts it in Act I, Scene 2. Today *The Tempest* is acknowledged as a keystone of the literary canon, but it seems not to have gained extraordinary attention when it was new. Following its premiere, which was played for the court of James I, it resurfaced at some royal wedding celebrations in the winter of 1612-1613. After that, it entered the world of theatrical adaptation.

A substantially altered version was produced by Fletcher and Philip Massinger under the title *Sea Voyage*, and Sir John Suckling borrowed greatly from *The Tempest* in his 1638 play *Goblins*. *The Tempest*'s true popularity began in 1667, when John Dryden and Sir William Davenant unveiled *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island*. Their changes were vast, and what was already a complicated-enough plot became positively byzantine as they added further layers of characters and subplots, with Dryden's poetical style, however appealing, clashing noticeably with Shakespeare's own. No matter: it remained in the repertoire for a century, and it paved the way for further altered versions.

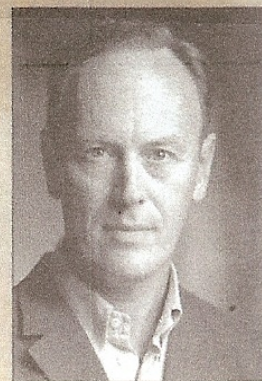
The most notable was Thomas Shadwell's revision of Dryden and Davenant's version, first staged in 1674. The Shadwell setting served as the basis for the production directed by Richard Clifford that is performed at the Lensic Performing Arts Center on Saturday and Sunday, June 18 and 19, under the name *Tempest*. Clifford's résumé bursts with acting and directing credits from the Royal Shakespeare Company as well as from Broadway productions and many films. He not only created and directed *Tempest* but also appears in it as an actor alongside the Shakespearean luminary Sir Derek Jacobi and Santa Fe's own actor-director Acushla Bastible.

"The isle is full of noises,/Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not," observes the brutish Caliban in Act 3, Scene 2 of *The Tempest*. Indeed, *The Tempest* is among the most musical of



An early engraving of Caliban, Miranda, and Prospero

Right, Richard Clifford, who adapted *Tempest* from Shakespeare



Shakespeare's plays, and even in its original version it offered such enticing songs as "Where the Bee Sucks," "Come Unto These Yellow Sands," and "Full Fathom Five." When Shadwell adapted Dryden and Davenant, he decided to expand the musical component, turning the work into what is sometimes described as operatic but might more accurately be considered a masque. For this enterprise Shadwell commissioned a musical score from Matthew Locke, a kingpin of English musical life at the time; and he augmented Locke's score with a few further movements by such lesser composers as John Banister, Pelham Humfrey, and Pietro Reggio. When Clifford created *Tempest* (unveiled a year ago at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.), he maintained the score by "Locke and friends," added a few other musical items (notably a pair of Handel arias on nautical texts, from the 1720s), and reorganized the whole contraption to bring it more in line with the drama as Shakespeare had left it. "I decided to look at the themes of the original text," he writes in





Left, the shipwreck scene, *The Tempest*, frontispiece from Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition of the plays of Shakespeare

Below, John William Waterhouse's *Miranda*, 1916



a program note, "and rearranged the musical order to suit the original Shakespearean story. Betrayal, revenge, love, and reconciliation are the most important. In doing so I have chosen to omit the majority of the characters and concentrate on those around the character of Prospero, and I have included Stephano and Trinculo to achieve the balance and to continue the theme of revenge and betrayal, seen from another angle."

Locke's music took the form of an extensive suite of dances, and in the 17th century the performances drew on forces that might include more than 30 singers and an instrumental ensemble that exceeded the normal theatrical orchestra of a dozen players. In Santa Fe, the score is played by the Santa Fe Pro Musica Baroque Ensemble, and director Thomas O'Connor is assembling a group of 18 performers playing on string, woodwind, and keyboard instruments. Also joining the assembly are two singers well known to Santa Fe audiences: mezzo-soprano Deborah Domanski, who appeared in Handel's *Radamisto* at Santa Fe Opera in 2008 and now lives in town; and baritone David Farwig, for many seasons a mainstay of the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, who is increasingly performing as a solo artist.

O'Connor is following the production as it was done at the Folger Shakespeare Library, which, he said, "provided all the materials very well organized." He noted that "in terms of orchestration there's some latitude, but the pieces themselves, and the order of the pieces, were

decisions Clifford came up with, and we're sticking with that exactly." Locke's music is famously quirky, and his contributions to Shadwell's *Tempest* adaptation are no exception. "He's very unpredictable in his modulations," O'Connor said, "sometimes pivoting back and forth between two keys, often taking abrupt, unexpected turns. There's nothing mundane about these dances."

Still, asked to point to the score's finest moments, O'Connor can't resist giving pride of place to Handel. "Locke was wonderful, but Handel was a great genius." Still, Locke's music provides a fine underpinning to the production. "Whether the dances belong specifically in the places we use them, we don't really know. But it is up to us as performers to understand what's happening in the plot and to try to underscore the emotion of each dramatic passage through our interpretation of the music." ◀