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NY CULTURE

Blog Puts Attendees on Stage at the Metropolitan Opera

Photographer Rose Callahan Searches the Crowd for Style

By CORINNE RAMEY

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Photographer Rose Callahan sizes up an outfit for Last Night at the Met. *Stephen Remich for The Wall Street Journal*

It was the opening night of "Werther" at the Metropolitan Opera, and Rose Callahan was there, camera in hand, searching the spiral staircases for style.

She ignored the omnipresent tuxedos and ball gowns, instead looking for the quirky and colorful—a man in a bright orange blazer and matching bow tie, for example—and taking their photos against the Met's velvet walls.

Ms. Callahan, 40 years old, is the photographer for [Last Night at the Met](#), the opera company's fashion blog. Started this season, it is produced by the Met in conjunction with Serino/Coyne, its advertising agency. Traffic from individual visitors to the blog, which is built on the Tumblr blogging platform, has tripled in the past month.

While several celebrities have appeared on its pages—dancer and choreographer Mikhail Baryshnikov, designers Carolina Herrera and Austin Scarlett and fashion journalist Hamish Bowles—it is largely a portrait of what Ms. Callahan calls "unique personal style," or sartorially inclined ordinary folk. Recent posts include a [man clad in form-fitting, head-to-toe leather](#), and a [blonde bombshell](#) whose off-the-shoulder dress showed off her extensively tattooed back.

"The idea was really to do the Met's version of the [Sartorialist](#)," said Matt Dobkin, the Met's creative director, referring to the blog that popularized street-style fashion photography. "You capture the essence of who comes here and that it's not just people in black tie and gowns."

Last Night at the Met is intended as a buzz-creating social-media tool ("It's not the kind of thing that translates into ticket sales in a calculable way," Mr. Dobkin added), but it serves a practical purpose as well: answering the perennial question of what to wear to the opera.

During the first act on Tuesday, Ms. Callahan—wearing a custom-made purple blazer, a vintage '70s blouse, black Anthropologie dress, blue tights and heeled two-tone Oxfords—talked about opera, something she had little exposure to before this job. "I thought the opera would be really esoteric," she said, "and that you'd have to be totally sophisticated."



Photographer Rose Callahan at work for the Metropolitan Opera's blog, Last Night at the Met. *Stephen Remick for The Wall Street Journal*

Now that she has seen her share, she has decided that most are emotionally charged love stories, with dashes of violence. "It's just amped-up human drama," she said.

Ms. Callahan typically starts working well before the overture, capturing attendees as they arrive at Lincoln Center. She prefers to skip the first act so she can be ready for intermission, when more photography ensues.

She has noticed how the crowds differ depending on the night or production. At the October opening of Nico Muhly's "Two Boys," "of course there were tons of gay couples," she said, whereas weekend performances draw dressed-up couples enjoying date nights.

Ms. Callahan, who lives in Williamsburg, spends much of her professional life as a commercial photographer, and devotes her own time to photographing impeccably dressed men. She maintains her own fashion blog, [Dandy Portraits](#), and is the photographer for the recent book "I Am Dandy: The Return of the Elegant Gentleman."

She is soft-spoken and claims timidity, particularly when walking through a crowd and implicitly rejecting potential subjects. "It feels really awkward," she said. "I get kind of shy."

Behind the camera, however, Ms. Callahan is assertive, coaxing her subjects into poses and complimenting details—a sparkly clutch, a hemline's craggy shape, tiny golden opera glasses—while taking close-ups.

When the intermission bell chimed, she began climbing the Met's many staircases, hoping to shoot the crowd in the cheaper seats. Partway up, she found two cuddly women, smooching on the staircase. She reached for her camera but missed the kiss.

"Don't you want another?" she asked, imploringly.

The couple, one in a long skirt with a feathery train, the other in an embroidered, Victorian-style velvet jacket, struck various poses: another kiss, a flirtatious glance, a seductive leg.

Onlookers gathered. Another woman, reaching for her phone, asked, "Are they famous?"

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