



NEWSLETTER

Argo Gherardi, Editor

November, 2008

Election of Officers and Board Members

On Tuesday, October 21, at our lecture at the LDS Church, an election will be held for continuing board members and officers for fiscal year 2009.

The Nominating Committee, co-chaired by Peggy Heiman and Beth Weymer, included the following members: Susan English, Jan Eurich, and Judy Jaeger. Their recommendations, which follow, were unanimously approved by the Board of Directors on September 10, 2008. Please plan to vote on the following motions on October 21.

1) As recommended by the Board of Directors the following incumbents will continue in office for the 2009 fiscal year: Vice President, Olga Nespole; Recording Secretary, Margaret Boddy; Corresponding Secretary, Nina Gherardi; Treasurer, Elliot Swanson; and, Parliamentarian, Gerry Pighini. (President Myrna Fleckles will serve the second year of her two-year term.)

2) As recommended by the Board of Directors the following directors, in addition to the above-named officers, will continue during the 2009 fiscal year: Corinne Carter, Wendy Dewell, Susan English, Jan Eurich, Lea Frey, Argo Gherardi, Peggy Heiman, Joy Hulme, Judy Jaeger, Mary Reily, Hannelore Romney, Jack Silveira, Joan Shomler, Ginger Stoddard, Alice Swanson, Doug Turner, Beth Weymer, Phyllis Whitney, Connie Zilles, and Steve Zilles.

Recruitment and YOU

“How many new members have I brought into the Guild?” This is a question each of us needs to ask. We have excellent lectures, warm and gracious social events (which also serve as fundraisers), and interesting and friendly members. We’re an outstanding group! Let’s convince others to join for the stimulation and fun that we enjoy, and for the opportunity to contribute to the careers of emerging young singers through our philanthropic efforts.

Please make an effort to bring guests to our lectures and give them a membership form from the publicity table or direct them to our website at www.sjoperaguild.org from which they can download a membership form. Talk to your friends about what we do and the benefits you have gained as a member. Let’s each try to bring in one new member within the next year. We can do it!!

save the date!

January 18, 2009

For a Winter Party at

The Plumed Horse

featuring Opera

San José singers



The Board of Directors of the San José Opera Guild is looking forward to seeing all of you at the Winter Party.

Date: January 18th

Time: 11:30

Place: The Plumed Horse
Saratoga, CA

Our program will be provided by some of the very talented Opera San José singers. Invitations will be in the mail by the end of December.

Opera Traveler

Bay Area's famed composer, Kirke Mechem, goes back to his roots for his latest premiere.

BY MORT LEVINE

The tall, striking figure next to me in the coffee line at the intermission of Opera San José's splendid *Eugene Onegin* provided a reunion opportunity with one of America's outstanding contemporary composers. Kirke Mechem is a fan of Opera San José, which performed his *Tartuffe* back in the '80s. The Molière comedy was Mechem's first opera, and he's been hooked on the artform ever since.

His reputation as a choral and symphonic composer stretches back nearly a half century. He's been a San Francisco resident since 1963. Opera offers an especially intriguing challenge, but his talents go much beyond composing. He does his own libretti and has a special flair for the dramatic.

A number of local opera fans trekked back to the nation's heartland last spring to the

world premiere of *John Brown*, an operatic masterwork, on one of the most mythic characters in American history. Appropriately, the performance took place not that far from Potawatowmie where the rifle toting, bible thumping abolitionist was hanged. The opera was commissioned by the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Mo. and has had an amazing impact on raising the image of the company. The *Kansas City Star* said the opera caused "the sort of magical success that composers and musicians only dream of at which the crowd lept to its feet and clapped so long that hands grew sore".

The work had a gestation period of 20 years because of its challenging complexity. In the interim, Mechem has been extremely busy with chamber music, artsong, choral work and a range of orchestral pieces. His two sympho-

continued on P. 3

Career Updates

Opera Traveler continued from P. 2

nies have been performed under Joseph Krips by the San Francisco Symphony.

And, new operas haven't been neglected either. Mechem's two new operas include a rollicking comedy, *The Newport Rivals*, based on the Sheridan restoration comedy and the famed novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Both have been workshopped in different parts of the country and are being prepared for full scale performance.

The music from *John Brown* has been worked into an orchestral suite called *Songs of a Slave*. Since its premiere in 1994, it has been performed over 70 times.

The friendly, unassuming composer has his roots in Kansas, having been born in 1925 in Wichita and raised in Topeka. His mother was a German trained concert pianist and his father was a writer of novels and plays. So the words and the music come together naturally. His musical training was with some of the great teachers at Stanford, Harvard and abroad. He's lived with his wife and children in Vienna and London.

The true greatness of Mechem's music is its ready accessibility to audiences. He's lived through the long period of purely "intellectual" music which dominated much of the 20th century, especially in academic circles.

As he explained it: "I'm too old to be taken in by trends or jargon. I want to love a piece of music, be delighted by it, moved to tears or laughter, or to be taken by it out of myself."

After *John Brown*, it is long past time for a Mechem opera premiere right here in the bay area.

The *Bonesetter's Daughter*, composed by Stewart Wallace, premiered on September 13, 2008 at the San Francisco Opera. *San Francisco Chronicle* music critic Joshua Kosman reported that it was "a triumph for the company." In describing one former Adler Fellow and Merola Opera participant, he wrote, "the superb mezzo-soprano **Zheng Cao** in a career making performance (sang) both daughters Ruth and the young LuiLing." The *New York Times* printed a review on the front of their September 15, 2008, Arts section with a picture of Ms Cao. The review, by Anthony Tommasini noted, "As Ruth, she sings with an alluring combination of tonal heft and emotional vulnerability. And her performance as the young LuiLing is even more finely etched." (Opera Guild members may remember Ms Cao's performance at our Winter Gala at the Los Gatos Opera House a few years ago.) A native of Shanghai, Ms Cao has clearly created excitement with her performance in this new and vividly memorable opera.

Another Merola alumna, **Laura Claycomb**, was featured on the front of the Arts section of the *New York Times* (8-4-08). The page showcased a photograph of Ms Claycomb with countertenor David Daniels from Santa Fe Opera's performance of Handel's *Radamisto*. Anthony Tommasini also reviewed this opera and noted Ms Claycomb "sings Polissena with plush sound, agile passagework and nobility..." The *Santa Fe New Mexican* review echoed the *Times* with "Laura Claycomb's high-flying, bright soprano and dramatic concentration made Polissena poignantly memorable..." In early November Ms Claycomb will join the Saint Louis Symphony

Career Updates

continued from P. 3

in Handel's *Ode for Saint Cecilia's Day*, and in later November she will sing the third soprano soloist in the Mahler *Symphony No 8* with Michael Tilson Thomas at Davies Symphony Hall.

Elza van den Heever, a 2003-2004 Merola participant, was selected by the Seattle Opera as winner of their Second International Wagner Competition. Ms van den Heever sang selections from *Tannhäuser* and from *Lohengrin*. She received a prize of \$15,000, and won the Audience Favorite Award as well. Seattle's General Director, Speight Jenkins noted that "the level of competition was even higher this year than the first year."

The Fremont Opera, performing at Smith Center at Ohlone College, presented a semi-staged performance of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* in August. Three Merola alumni starred in the production: **Nikki Einfeld**, **Eugene Brancoveanu**, and **Kirk Eichelberger**. Ms Einfeld, a former Adler Fellow, sang Rosina. She is scheduled to sing Ophelia in October at the Opera Lyra Ottawa in an opera in concert of Ambroise Thomas' *Hamlet*. Mr. Eichelberger, who is also an Opera San José alumnus, sang Basillio in *Barber*.

Kirk Eichelberger performed in August with Festival Opera of Walnut Creek in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This opera was reviewed by Joshua Kosman in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He noted "the star here was bass Kirk Eichelberger, who added yet another item to his list of local triumphs with an uproarious and commandingly sung turn as Bottom. From his stage-hogging introductory scene, in which he insists on playing every role in the upcoming theatrical presentation, to his lazy romantic interlude with Tytania,

Eichelberger endowed every episode with grandeur and controlled temperament." In October, Mr. Eichelberger will sing Don Fernando in *Fidelio* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia. In November, he will sing Ferrando in *Il Trovatore* with Manitoba Opera.

Jorge Garza, a 1996 Merolini, also sang in Festival Opera's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His role was Lysander and sang, according to Kosman, "in a performance that combined gorgeous tone, superb diction and romantic ardor into an irresistible blend." Kosman went on to characterize the production as a "splendid 'Dream.'"

Yet another East Bay opera company, Livermore Valley Opera, is busy this season. In October they will be presenting Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and featuring two Opera San José alumni. **Layna Chianakas** (1995-1997) will sing Rosina, and **Robert McPherson** (1997-1999) will sing Count Almaviva. They will be directed by Daniel Helfgot who has directed numerous productions with Opera San José, West Bay Opera, and Festival Opera, as well as many national and international opera companies.

West Bay Opera will tap OSJ alumni to open its fifty-third season with Bizet's *Carmen*. **David Cox** will direct, and **Jason Detwiler** will sing Escamillo. *Carmen* will be performed October 17, 19, 25, and 26, 2008. Mr. Detwiler will have just completed singing Germont in *La Traviata* with Opera Plus in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. **Christina Major**, another OSJ alumna joined Mr. Detwiler in the performances of *La Traviata*, singing Violetta.

Additional OSJ alumni have had busy fall schedules. **Thomas Rolf Truhitte** has sung

Career Updates continued from P. 4

the title role in *Parsifal* with Genova Opera, and Siegmund in *Die Walküre* with Brazil's Manaus Festival. **Jonathan Hodel** sang with Asheville Lyric Opera as Romeo in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*. **Christopher Dickerson** performed in *Carmen* with the San Antonio Opera as Zuniga.

OPERA SAN JOSE' CELEBRATES SILVER ANNIVERSARY

A gala celebration was held on September 20, 2008. The event began with cocktails and dinner at the Fairmont Hotel, then continued to the California Theatre for presentations and a concert by many OSJ alumni who returned to pay tribute to **Irene Dalis** and Opera San José. A video retrospective featured Dr. John Bunzel, Jeanne McCann, Mayor Susan Hammer, Dr. Frank Fiscalini, **Eilana Lappalainen**, Bob Ruff, David W. Packard, and Placido Domingo. The concert began with the Prelude from *Carmen*. Then **Scott Bearden** sang the Te Deum from *Tosca*, and later in the program sang Eri tu from *Un Ballo in Maschera*. (Mr. Bearden will be covering the role of Varlaam in *Boris Gudonov* for the San Francisco Opera this October and November.) The 25th Anniversary Concert continued with a duet from *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* sung by current Resident Artist **Michael Daily** and former Resident Artist **Daniel Cilli**. Another alumna, **Layna Chianakas**, sang O don fatale from *Don Carlo*, and also sang with the Opera San José Chorus the Anvil Chorus (Stride la vampa) from *Il Trovatore*. **Christopher Bengochea** sang Che gelida manina from *La Bohème* and joined **Barbara Divis** in O soave fanciulla following her presentation of Si, mi chiamo Mimi from *La Bohème*. (Mr.

Bengochea recently sang as tenor soloist in the world premiere of *From Greater Light* by Alva Henderson with the Pacific Symphony at the Segerstrom Concert Hall in Orange County. In November, he will be singing Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Opera Idaho. He will be featured in that production with another OSJ alumna, **Rochelle Bard**. Ms Divis will travel to the Atlanta Opera in October to cover the role of Cio Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, then will sing that same role for Florentine Opera in Wisconsin in November.) OSJ's Concert continued with **Khori Dastoor's** presentation of Sempere libera from *La Traviata*, and ended with the evening's cast singing the Brindisi from *La Traviata*. As Mayor Chuck Reed noted, Opera San José has brought much to the city of San José in culture and economic growth. David Woodley Packard concluded his remarks with, "Nobody thinks it's surprising that a successful business could start in a Silicon Valley garage...Why should a major opera company in Silicon Valley be surprising? I expected no less."

San José Opera Guild Newsletter
November, 2008 Issue

Publisher

San José Opera Guild

President

Myrna Fleckles

Editor

Argo Gherardi

Publicity

Phyllis Whitney

408 269-2479

Calendar

Elaine Veloz

Career Updates

Susan English

SJOG Newsletter is published four times a year in
February, May, August, and November by
San José Opera Guild,
P.O. Box 33025,
Los Gatos, CA 95031-3025.

Calendar

SEPT. 23-OCT. 12: The SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets Information, (415) 864-3330 or www.sfopera.com. Free previews 55 minutes before each performance.

OCT. 4: THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA will present a lecture, *Romanticizing the Medieval Legend of Tristan and Iseult* at 2 p.m. at the UCSF Laurel Heights Conference Center, 3333 California St., San Francisco Wagner Society members free, guests, \$10. Information, (415) 421-4412 or www.wagnersf.org.

OCT. 7: THE SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD will present a preview of Mozart's *Idomeneo* at 10 a.m. at the LDS church, 15985 Rose Ave., Los Gatos. Cost, \$10; SJOG members, free.

OCT. 9: THE WEST BAY OPERA GUILD will offer a free preview of Bizet's *Carmen* at 8 p.m. at the Palo Alto Art Center, 1313 Newell Rd., Palo Alto. Information, (650) 424-0000 or www.wbopera.org.

OCT. 11: THE CANTONESE OPERA ASSOCIATION SILICON VALLEY will present the China disabled People's performing Art Troupe in *My Dream* at 1:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at the Center for the Performing Arts, 255 Almaden Blvd., San Jose. Tickets (\$45-\$130), 1-888-455-7469 or www.sjtix.com. Information, www.coasv.com.

OCT. 11: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *Salome* by

Richard Strauss at 10 a.m. (1 p.m. Eastern time) in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Oct. 22. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

OCT. 14: THE SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD will present a preview of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* at 10 a.m. at the LDS church, 15985 Rose Ave., Los Gatos. Cost, \$10; SJOG members, free.

OCT. 15-31: The SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Mozart's *Idomeneo* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets Information, (415) 864-3330 or www.sfopera.com. Free previews 55 minutes before each performance.

OCT. 17-19; 24-26: WEST BAY OPERA will present Bizet's *Carmen* at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays at the Lucie Stern Community Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto. Tickets, information (650) 424-9999 or www.wbopera.org.

OCT. 21: THE SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD will present a preview of Donizetti's *Elixir of Love* at 10 a.m. at the LDS church, 15985 Rose Ave., Los Gatos. Cost, \$10; SJOG members, free.

OCT. 22-NOV. 15: The SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets, information, (415) 864-3330 or www.sfopera.com. Free previews 55 minutes before each performance.

OCT. 28: THE SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD and OPERA SAN JOSÉ will present a free preview of Donizetti's *Elixir of Love* at noon in the Beethoven Center at the Martin Luther King Library, 4th and San Fernando Sts., San Jose.

OCT.29-NOV. 26: The SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets Information, (415) 864-3330 or www.sfopera.com.

NOV. 8: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *Dr. Atomic* by John Adams at 10 a.m. (1 p.m. Eastern time) in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Nov. 20. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

NOV. 8-23: OPERA SAN JOSÉ will present Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* at 8 p.m. Tues.-Sat., 3 p.m. Sundays at the California Theatre, 325 So. First St., San Jose. Tickets, Information (408) 437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Free previews 1 hour before each performance except opening night.

NOV. 15: THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA will present a lecture, *In Wagner's Musical Forge: Das Rheingold* at 2 p.m. at the UCSF Laurel Heights Conference Center, 3333 California St., San Francisco Wagner Society members free, guests, \$10. Information, (415) 421-4412 or www.wagnersf.org.

NOV. 13: THE PHANTOMS OF THE OPERA GUILD will meet at a downtown San Jose restaurant for dinner at 6 p.m., followed by the 8 p.m. performance of *The Elixir of Love* at the California Theatre. Information, Alice Skurko, (408) 356-7651.

NOV. 22: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *La Damnation de Faust* by Berlioz at 10 a.m. (1 p.m. Eastern time) in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Dec. 3. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

DEC. 7: THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA will host a celebration of Cosima Wagner's birthday at Harris' Restaurant, 2100 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. Information, reservations: (415) 421-4412 or www.wagnersf.org.

DEC. 12: THE ITALIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE FOUNDATION will present a benefit for Opera San José at the IAHF Cultural Center, 425 N. 4th St., San Jose. Information (available in November) (408) 293-7122.

DEC. 20: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *Thais* by Massenet at 9 a.m. (noon Eastern time) in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Jan. 5, 2009. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

JAN. 10: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *La Rondine* by Puccini at 10 a.m. (1 p.m. Eastern time) in

movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Jan. 21. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

JAN. 18: THE SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD will host a Winter Luncheon. Details will be available on invitations sent to all members before the event.

JAN. 24: The METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD series will present *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Gluck at 10 a.m. (1 p.m. Eastern time) in movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. Repeats Feb. 4. Tickets (\$22-\$24), information: www.fathomevents.com or check local theater listings.

In Memoriam

Margaret Benson Slemmons

As our last newsletter went to press, our long-term and devoted board member, Margaret Slemmons passed away after a valiant struggle with pulmonary fibrosis.

Margaret was a beloved wife, mother, grandmother, sister and friend, who worked tirelessly as an advocate for the arts, politics and literacy. She served as president of the San José Opera Guild from 1998 to 2000, and made many significant contributions during her tenure as a board member. She will be greatly missed.

Contributions in her memory may be made to Hospice of the Valley, Saratoga Foothill Club Foundation, Planned Parenthood, or San José Opera Guild.

Check Your Membership Rosters

Half of the 2008-09 membership rosters are missing the following information. Please check your copy to see if there is a page 28, if not, please cut this out and add it to your roster. Thank you!

Wunderlich, Margaret

(408) 996-8052

10092 Mossy Oak Court, Cupertino, CA 95014 marwilli@webtv.net

Yamaguchi, Lari

(408) 978-7368

1938 Johnston Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125
lariy@mindspring.com

Yamate, Emie

(408) 353-2854

21700 Summit Road, Los Gatos, CA 95033
eyamate@aol.com

Zilles, Connie & Steve

(408) 356-7692

115 Lansberry Court, Los Gatos, CA 95032
Connie: czilles@compuserve.com
Steve: steve@zilles.org

New Members

Charmot, Sylvie

(408) 364-0327

1150 Steinway Avenue, Campbell, CA 95008
sylviecharmot@yahoo.com

Yao, Marina

20488 Stevens Creek Blvd, #1316,
Cupertino, CA 95014 yaom5@hotmail.com

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.SJOPERAGUILD.ORG

San José Opera Guild
c/o Argo Gherardi
P.O.Box 33025
Los Gatos, CA 95031-3025

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AN INVITATION TO JOIN

Established in 1947, the San José Opera Guild was formed to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the operatic arts and to provide both volunteer and financial support to opera.

The Guild incorporated in September 1958 as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California. The original purpose of the Guild has not changed over the years since its founding. Financial support of promising young artists in the community is a high priority for the Guild, which helps sponsor singers each year at Opera San José, and the Merola Opera Program, as well as other opera groups.

Throughout the year, the Guild sponsors lectures and previews at three different venues to coincide with the San Francisco Opera and Opera San José's seasons.

Name _____

Name of Family Member _____

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Memberships: Family \$60
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Does your company have a matching grant program?
Visit our website at www.sjoperaguild.org