



NEWSLETTER

August 2009

From the President

A TRIBUTE TO JOY HULME

Our long-time lecture chair and board member, Joy Hulme, has decided to enjoy the lectures and activities of the Guild as an active member, rather than continuing on the board and being responsible for the San Francisco Opera lectures. She has made this decision after more than fifty years of dedicated, unparalleled service on the board, and we applaud her longevity and success. Her graciousness, diligence and attention to detail have greatly contributed to making the Guild an influential and respected institution in our valley. Her

dedication to the Guild has been a model for all of us. We wish her well and look forward to her presence as we strive to live up to the high standards she has established.

We are most fortunate to have Steve Zilles take over Joy's duties as chair of the San Francisco Opera lectures, and we know that he will provide quality leadership in this very important aspect of our work.

Joy, we salute you and wish you much happiness as you enter a less strenuous phase of your very dedicated life.

FREE LECTURE PASS

Any non-member of the Guild who has never attended one of our San Francisco Opera lectures may use the pass printed below, one time, to attend a Fall, 2009 Lecture. (See the schedule in the newsletter calendar), Our goal is to increase our lecture attendance, as well as our membership, by encouraging people to attend and find out how stimulating our lectures are, what friendly members we have, and what impressive contributions we make to our community. MEMBERS, PLEASE CUT OUT AND GIVE THE PASS TO A FRIEND.

FREE PASS
ONE FALL, 2009 LECTURE

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SJOG's Longest Active Member?

Joan Shomler, Membership Chair

My husband and I were talking over dinner the other afternoon and speculating who has been the longest continuous member of SJOG still active.

When I took over as membership chair in 1996, the very good records I got from the chair before me, Catherine Sturrock, contained no dates indicating when people had first joined the Guild. I asked my trusty institutional memory, Joy Hulme.

Joy's response was, and I quote directly from her e-mail to me, "I may be the longest active member." She goes on to say,

"I joined the Guild in the summer of 1957, after being invited to a summer event at Lorraine Boccardo's home, at which Miss Marta Morgan spoke about the coming season of the San Francisco Opera, 1957-58. I was invited to join the Board at Miss Morgan's request, in 1958, and served in that capacity until July of this year, 2009.

Marta lectured on each opera the San Francisco Opera Company produced, two hours each lecture morning, and sometimes a second lecture, four hours – (on an opera if it were new, or never had been done in S.F. before.) I worked very closely with Marta for thirteen years. She became ill after that and did not lecture any more. She passed away a few years later. I felt as though a huge chunk of my life and source of my learning and enjoyment went with her.

I knew several of the founding members, – Faith Davies, Mary

Tantau, Mim Haskins, and Zora Lindsay. All their efforts went to making it possible to have the San Francisco Opera productions brought to San José. They raised the funds for this project and brought two different productions in two different years to the old Civic Center in San José. The endeavor was successful, but entailed so much work that they finally decided to concentrate on education and on sending a prepared audience to San Francisco, rather than bringing the opera to San José.

I have worked with the Lecture Series for all these past years (even while serving as President) serving under 26 Presidents of the San José Opera Guild, starting with Louise Sawyer, who was President when I joined the Guild. Now, I don't think that any of the founding members of the Guild are still alive. The earliest President whom I know is still alive is Pauline Pace, (1971-72). Also, I happened to see Doreen James not long ago. After her came Ethel Worn (very much alive), Mary Jane Clauss (whom I sat with at a luncheon in Palo Alto recently) and the current active members, such as Olive Leeper, Margaret Boddy, Argo Gherardi, and our present President, Myrna Fleckles."

We would like to acknowledge and recognize our longest time members. Do we have other active members who joined in the 50s? Please let me know by sending your response to SJOG, Attn: Joan Shomler at P. O. Box 33025, Los Gatos, CA 95031-3025.

###

Career Updates

The last edition of these Career Updates noted that Adler Fellow **Alek Shrader** was one of the featured artists in the Metropolitan Opera's documentary *The Audition*. *Opera News* (May 2009) reviewed this film stating that **Mr. Shrader**, "a tenorino with the looks of an Abercrombie & Fitch model, tosses off the high-C loaded 'Pour mon âme,' from *La Fille du Régiment*, with security and ease." Chloe Veltman in the *Los Angeles Times* (4-19-09) commented that, "Alek Shrader ...hits the ambitious arias (Ah! mes amis) notorious nine high Cs as effortlessly as he pockets one of the competition's \$15,000 grand prizes." **Mr. Shrader** will be featured in two *On the Wings of Song* recitals in New York this season, and will make his European Debut in the 2009/2010 season as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* at the Grand Theatre in Bordeaux.

1995 Merola alumnus **John Relyea** is the winner of the Metropolitan Opera's Beverly Sills Artist Award for young singers. The award, which comes with a prize of \$50,000, has been given annually since 2006 to singers between 25 and 40 who have appeared in featured solo roles at the Met. His performance as Méphistophélès in *La Damnation de Faust* was broadcast as a part of the Met's Live in HD series.

Current Adler Fellow and 2006 Merola alumna **Heidi Melton** stepped in at a four-days' notice for an ailing Patricia Racette as a soloist in Verdi's *Requiem Mass*. This gala concert, honoring Maestro Donald Runnicles, was reviewed by Joshua Kosman in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (6-1-09). He notes that **Ms. Melton**, "swatted away any hint of nerves with a big, gleaming and tonally resplendent

performance." **Ms. Melton**, along with soprano **Amanda Majeski** (2008 Merola alumna), and **Sean Panikkar** (2004 Merola alumnus and former Adler Fellow), were awarded the 2009 George London Award at the George London Foundations Awards Competition. **Ms. Melton** received the George London/Kirsten Flagstad Memorial Award (for singers with Wagnerian potential).

San Francisco Opera's Summer Season featured a number of Merola alumni and former and current Adler Fellows. Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* was performed in the War Memorial Opera House and at AT&T Park. Joshua Kosman reviewed the opera in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (6-4-09) noting that "the redoubtable bass-baritone **Dale Travis** (Merola alumnus) made an enjoyable Sacristan in the mode of Danny Kaye." Kosman also commented, "The Adler Fellows were well represented by **Austin Kness** as Sciarrone and **Kenneth Kellogg** as the Jailer." All three of these gentlemen sang roles in the second opera of the summer season, Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*.

La Traviata featured 1996 Merola alumna **Anna Netrebko** as Violetta Valery, and 1998 Merola alumnus **Charles Castronovo** as Alfredo Germont. Richard Scheinin reviewed this opera in the *San Jose Mercury News* (6-14-09). He writes of **Ms. Netrebko**, "There was the sheer beauty of her voice to consider: pouring like liquid amber, then bubbling up to all those high A-flats and Cs. But it went beyond that...a complex psychological portrait of the jaded courtesan." Of **Mr. Castronovo** Scheinin wrote, "His voice is robust, round and sweet." *San Francisco Classical Voice* celebrated **Ms. Netrebko's** performance by noting, "She and conductor Donald Runnicles

Career Updates

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wove the poetry and music in Verdi's score back and forth from stage to pit in perfect rapport."

The final opera in San Francisco's Summer Season was *Porgy and Bess*. **Laquita Mitchell**, 2002 alumna of Merola, gathered considerable attention as Bess. The Examiner (5-28-09) wrote, "Seven years ago, **Laquita Mitchell** was a 'Merolini,' a young artist learning her craft...Now she is back in The City, starring in the company's new production of **Porgy and Bess**. Joshua Kosman reviewed the opera in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (6-11-09) saying, "**Mitchell**...gave an evocative performance as Bess, compounded of tempestuous need and penitence. The love duet 'Bess You Is My Woman Now' was a soaring, passionate high point." Allan Ulrich in The Financial Times considered both **Ms. Mitchell** and fellow Merola alumna **Karen Black** in his review. "**Laquita Mitchell's** initial foray as Bess heralds a striking soprano who rises to moments of surpassing eloquence in 'My Man's Gone Now.' **Karen Black** introduces a definitive Serena."

Several Merola alumni have been busy with the Los Angeles Opera this spring. The L.A. production of Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* is being introduced over two seasons, beginning last February. The first installment is *Das Rheingold* which featured 2006 Merola alumnus **Beau Gibson** as Froh. *Opera News* (May, 2009) recognized **Mr. Gibson** with, "Outfitted with a rainbow-colored concertina – [he] provided a smooth-voiced Froh." The second installment of the L.A. *Ring Cycle*, *Die Walküre*, included two Merolini: **Melissa Citro** as Ortlinde, and **Ronnita Nicole Miller**

as Schwertleite. Also last spring, L.A. Opera produced *Die Vogel* (The Birds) as a part of its Recovered Voices Program. Merola alumnus, **Matthew Moore**, sang Eagle/Zeus in this Braunfels opera, and will return next season to in the third Recovered Voices opera, Schrekker's *Die Gezeichneten* (The Stigmatized).

Laura Claycomb, former Adler fellow and Merola alumna, has just completed singing at Tanglewood Festival. There she was a soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Before this, she sang Tytania in the Canadian Opera Company/Houston Grand Opera co-production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Reviews were very positive including this from *The Globe and Mail*, "The fairy royals, Oberon and Tytania, were beautifully sung by countertenor Lawrence Zazzo and soprano **Laura Claycomb**. Their sullen duet 'Ill met by moonlight' was a delicious mixture of grandeur and pique. **Claycomb's** coloratura was freshness itself, and in her close-fitting gown and long gauzy trains, she exuded the formal sensuality of a Gibson Girl."

Baritone **Brian Leerhuber**, former Artist in Residence with Opera San José, recently sang Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* with the Houston Grand Opera. *Opera News* noted, "As Dr. Malatesta, the oil that greases this elaborate conspiracy, **Brian Leerhuber** was sleazy in character but fleet of voice..." **Mr. Leerhuber** also recently sang Marco in *Gianni Schicchi* with the new Los Angeles Opera production, directed by film legend, Woody Allen. **Mr. Leerhuber** returns to OSJ as a guest artist this season, appearing in the title role of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Two more former Artists in Residence

Career Updates

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with OSJ will be performing this month in Mendocino. **Cynthia Clayton** and **Hector Vasquez** will perform at the Mendocino Music Festival in *La Bohème*, and as soloists in Mozart's *Requiem*. The couple still resides in Houston, where **Ms. Clayton** is an Assistant Professor of Voice with the University of Houston.

OSJ alumna, **Talise Trevigne**, has a busy fall coming. She will sing in recital with Warren Jones at the Inaugural Concert of the Rising Stars Series at The Granada in Santa Barbara on September 12, 2009. In November she will perform in the New York City Opera's Grand Opening Gala. December will take her to L'Opera Bastille in Paris to sing *The Beloved* in Liza Lim's *The Navigator*.

Another former Artist in Residence with a busy fall is **Jason Detwiler**. He just completed singing Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly* with the San Diego Opera. Kenneth Herman with San Diego.com wrote, "As Prince Yamadori, the playboy Goro tries to foist [himself] on Butterfly after Pinkerton leaves Nagasaki, baritone **Jason Detwiler** crafted an unusually sympathetic portrait." **Mr. Detwiler** will perform Dandini in *La Cenerentola* with Opera Coeur d'Alene in September, and Valentin in *Faust* with Opera Idaho in October and November.

Opera Idaho will host two more OSJ former Artists in Residence in September. Both **Kenneth Mattice** and **Rochelle Bard** will sing at the Season Opening Concert on September 11, 2009, at the Egyptian Theatre in Boise, Idaho. Following this performance, **Ms. Bard** will travel to Florida to sing in *La*

Rondine with Opera Tampa.

Susan Gundunas, former OSJ Artist in Residence, has just sung *A Celebration of a Worldly Stage* with Seventh Avenue Performances in San Francisco. This production is a celebration of Shakespeare's 445th birthday with a theatrical and musical layering of scenes, sonnets, and songs from Shakespeare atop the music of different composers from the 16th – 21st centuries. Denise Battista of *PlayShakes* notes, "**Gundunas** is both adorable and theatrically impressive as she plays Juliet as Juliet waits for and receives news of Romeo's intentions of marriage. **Gundunas** proves her stock on this stage as a seasoned soprano, opera diva, and actress." **Ms. Gundunas** will appear in the Bay Area in October in Halloween Concerts for San Francisco Renaissance Voices.

OSJ alumna, *Lori Phillips*, has a demanding season planned. She will make her debut as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* with Hawaii Opera Theatre, then perform Turadot with Opera Lyra Ottawa. **Ms. Phillips** will travel to the MET to cover Giorgetta in *Il Tabarro*, Gertrude in *Hansel & Gretel*, and Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

Two former OSJ Resident Artists, **Sandra Bengochea** and **Christopher Bengochea**, joined current Resident Artists **Rebecca Schuessler**, **Betany Coffland**, **Alex Boyer**, **Daniel Cilli**, **Krassen Kragiozov**, **Isaish Musik-Ayala**, and **Silas Elash** in an evening concert celebrating Bastille Day at Santana Row. The artists selected arias from French composers and sang to an appreciative audience of several hundred. ###

CALENDAR

AUGUST 15: Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Saratoga and Cox Avenues in Saratoga, presents a concert of Wagner's music on Saturday, August 15 at 2:00 p.m., featuring Jessica Leash, Delmar McComb and Carlos Aguilar, conducted by Michel Singher, and accompanied by Hadley McCarrol. Tickets at the door, \$20.00, general admission; \$12.00 for students and seniors. For further information call Jessica Leash at 831 724-7268.

AUGUST 30: San Francisco Opera Guild, East Bay Chapter presents Maestro Luisotti, new Musical Director of the San Francisco Opera who will be interviewed by David Gockley, San Francisco Opera General Director. After the interview the audience may ask questions. Heavy hors d'oeuvres, wine and other beverages will be served. Cost: \$45 (approx \$30 tax deductible). All proceeds benefit the San Francisco Opera's education program for students and young singers. Information: Silvia Lin, 925 838-9255 or LLLLLL@juno.com Reservation deadline: August 22. Send check to Clyde Allen, 1463 Indian Head Circle, Clayton 94517. List all names and any additional contributions to the Education Fund.

SEPTEMBER 1: Opera San José Season Preview of *Manon* by Massenet with Larry Hancock and OSJ Resident Artists, Beethoven Center, MLK Library, 4th and San Fernando, Noon to 1 p.m., free.

SEPTEMBER 8: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, *Il Trittico* by Giacomo Puccini, Lecturer Timothy Flynn, Time: 10 a.m., Location: Church of Latter Day Saints, 15985 Rose Avenue, Los Gatos, SJOG Members free

and non-members \$10. For more information contact Steve Zilles 408 356-7692

SEPTEMBER 11: Hakone Gardens in Saratoga presents an opera program in the garden on Friday, September 11 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. featuring Sandra Rubalcava Bengochea and Christopher Bengochea, among others. Call 408 741-4977 for ticket information. Reserve early. Space is limited.

SEPTEMBER 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 22, 25, and 27, Opera San José presents *Manon* by Jules Massenet, California Theatre, San Jose, Call 408 437-4450 or visit www.operasj.org

SEPTEMBER 15: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, *The Abduction from the Seraglio* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Lecturer, Evan Baker. See Sept 8th for further information.

SEPTEMBER 29: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, West Bay Opera: Season Overview. Lecturer, José Luis Moscovitch with singers. See Sept 8th for further information.

OCTOBER 4: 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Opera San José Event, "A Sentimental Journey", this year's major benefit for Opera San José. An afternoon of Broadway Melodies and Opera Classics performed by the resident artists. Catered Champagne Event: \$250, \$150; Call 408 437-4450 for more information.

OCTOBER 6: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, *The Daughter of the Regiment* by Gaetano Donizetti; Lecturer, Mary Ann Smart. See Sept. 8th for further information

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 10: Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD of *Tosca* at local theatres. 10 a.m. Locations have not been announced. Check http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/broadcast/hd_events_current.aspx for further information at a later date when they have updated website.

OCTOBER 13: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, *Salome* by Richard Strauss, Lecturer, Richard Taruskin. See Sept. 8th for further information.

OCTOBER 16, 18, 24, and 25: West Bay Opera, *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini, Call 650 424-999 for times, tickets and venue.

OCTOBER 20: San José Opera Guild Lecture Series, Opera San José Season Overview with Larry Hancock and Resident Artists. See Sept. 8th for further information.

OCTOBER 24: Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD *Aïda* by Giuseppe Verdi at local theatres, 10 a.m. Locations have not been announced. For further information check http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/broadcast/hd_events_current.aspx at a later date when they have updated their website.

###



Le Roi Roger Opera Bastille, Paris

by Connie and Steve Zilles

My wife, Connie, and I had a very interesting experience at the Opera Bastille in Paris in June. We saw a performance of the 20th century opera, *Le Roi Roger* (King Roger) by the Polish Composer Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937). Yes, there is opera in Polish. This opera is one of only two operas written by Szymanowski and its music shows similarities to Straus, Debussy, Stravinsky and Janáček.

The King Roger of the title refers to the 12th century Sicilian king of the same name, but what is really important about that reference is the setting in a Christian state in an idyllic spot in the Dark Ages. The librettist, Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz, a cousin of Szymanowski, has fashioned a tale that is difficult to effectively stage. Into this Christian state comes a shepherd who is preaching a new religion of radiant sensuality and abandon, think Dionysius. In the three acts of the opera, the shepherd first converts the court, then the king's wife, Roxanna, and finally the king himself. (The king starts out as a fairly repressed character who clearly sees the shepherd as a heretic and a threat and ends up being transformed by him.) The drama and the emotion in the wonderful music come from the tension between the king and shepherd.

The libretto calls for the first act to be in a Cathedral, the second in the palace and the final act in a Greek theater (emphasizing the Dionysian aspect). Then, there was the staging at the Opera Bastille. Making some of Pamela Rosenberg productions look good, this production set the opera in what looked like an extraordinarily decadent spa complete

Le Roi Roger
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with an onstage swimming pool with a dead body floating in it and attendant heroin dealers, only the fedoras were missing. The excellent chorus was animated by projecting videos taken at odd angles on a huge screen above the swimming pool. The director might have been excused for trying to add drama to a book that seemed a bit repetitive, but his attempts did not work for me (and apparently not for much of the audience who booed the director when he went on stage at the curtain call). Because of the sensuous music (and in this production, fine singing), I would certainly see another performance of the opera, but I would like to see one in the intended setting of the opera before I see another “re-invention”. ###



Fall Lecture Series
by Steve Zilles

The Fall Lecture Series of the San José Opera Guild is about upon us. We have a terrific line up of events all of which will be at 10 AM on a Tuesday at the LDS Church in Los Gatos (15985 Rose Ave.). There will be five lectures on operas that will be presented by the San Francisco Opera and two season previews by Opera San José and West Bay Opera. The season begins on September 8th with a lecture on Puccini’s *Il Trittico* by Timothy Flynn on Tuesday, 8 September. *Il Trittico* is an evening of three one act operas written to be performed together. The first of these, *Il Tabarro* (The Cloak) is a very dark story with tinges of Pagliacci. The second, *Suor Angelica*, is a story of the redemptive power of love and, the third, *Gianni Schicchi*, is a comedy on the greed that runs in families. Timothy Flynn, who last lectured to us on *Samson et Dalila* in 2007, is currently the chair of Performing Arts at Olivet College which is between Lansing and Battle Creek, Michigan. He directs choral groups, and the opera and musical theater performances on campus as well as play the organ. He has published recent books on Saint-Saëns and Gounod.

Our second lecture, on September 15th, is on *The Abduction from the Seraglio* by Evan Baker. This opera is Mozart’s wonderful story of a Spanish nobleman retrieving his beloved from a Turkish harem and the Pasha who desires her, not without a few laughs. Evan Baker is an internationally published and recognized scholar in the history of opera production, who specializes on the interplay of theatrical traditions, the requirements of production, and the musical inspiration required to produce an opera. Dr. Baker last spoke to us about *Don*

Fall Lecture Series continued from P. 8

Giovanni in 2006.

On September 29th, our third “lecture” is really a preview of the West Bay Opera season given by José Luis Moscovich and singers from West Bay Opera. Their season includes: *La Bohème* by Puccini, *Der Freischütz* by Weber, and *La Traviata* by Verdi.

The Daughter of the Regiment is the topic of the fourth lecture on October 6th. The opera, by Donizetti, is about the desire of a local Tyrolean, Tonio, to marry Marie, a foundling adopted and raised by the regiment. Needless to say, much gets in his way. Our speaker is Mary Ann Smart, who is the Gladys Arata Terrill Professor of Music at the University of California, Berkeley. She is editor of the critical edition of Donizetti’s last opera, *Dom Sébastien*, and of the articles on Bellini and Donizetti for the revised *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

October 13th is the date for our fifth lecture which is given by Prof. Richard Taruskin on Richard Strauss’s *Salome*. This opera, about the intrigues that lead to the death of John the Baptist, provides an interesting evening in the theater. Prof. Taruskin is well known to us, having last lectured on Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* in 2008. Prof. Taruskin is known for many things: as a performer, conductor, musicologist and critic. His writings range from program notes to scholarly papers and he is recognized for his contributions to the *Oxford History of Western Music*. His lectures give refreshing new insights into the works that he describes.

Larry Hancock and singers from Opera San José will deliver our second “season preview” on October 20th. Opera San José’s season begins with *Manon* by Jules Massenet in September and continues with *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella) by Rossini, *Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart and *La Rondine* (The Swallow) by Puccini. This last opera, with similarities to *La Traviata*, tells of the (requited) love of a young man for a kept woman and the consequences thereof.

The final lecture of the Fall Season is on November 3rd. The topic is Verdi’s opera, *Otello*. Our lecturer will be Alexandra Amati-Camperi. Prof. Amati-Camperi is the Director of the Music Program at the University of San Francisco. Her interests include the Italian Renaissance, Italian opera, and the presentation and treatment of women in opera. Prof. Amati-Camperi last lectured to us on *L’Elisir d’amore* in 2008. ###

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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.

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