

# NEWSLETTER



## NOTICE

If a current SJOG Member is interested in being on the San José Opera Guild Board or in volunteering for a committee, please contact Hannelore Romney (rrhromney@aol.com) or Corinne Carter (corinne.carter@sbcglobal.net) for more information.

August 2011



Olga Nespole, Chair of the  
June Brunch Committee

Larry Arzie, donated  
the use of La Estancia

## Bountiful Brunch

by Susan English

On June 5, 2011 our Guild held a delicious, congenial, entertaining, and profitable event at La Estancia, the handsome home of Larry Arzie and David Stonesifer. Seventy people gathered to enjoy the catering of Café Primavera and the performance of nine arias. Layna Chianakas coordinated the selection of two of her voice students at San José State University: Jennifer Mitchell, soprano, and Alexan-

dra Mena, mezzo-soprano. They were accompanied by Elizabeth Heff. Their ambitious performance of arias by Mozart, Offenbach, Saint-Saëns, Puccini, Donizetti and Bellini was enthusiastically received.

Before the brunch, those attending browsed items provided by members and businesses for a raffle. A silent auction was also held. This new activity for the Guild was created and conducted by Peggy Heiman and Edna  
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# Der Ring des Nibelungen

in San Francisco

by Susan English

San Francisco Opera completed three cycles of the four operas of Wagner's *Ring* on July 3, 2011. The *San Francisco Classical Voice* presented a thorough discussion of the production by Lisa Hirsch. She writes, "Magnisterially conducted by Donald Runnicles, the company's much loved former music director, with a mostly stellar cast that delivers a powerfully integrated dramatic whole, it's a triumph for Zambello, the cast, and the company." Joshua Kosman of the San Francisco Chronicle wrote many reviews of the Ring operas, concluding "SF Opera's production is powerful." Nearly sold out audiences at each of the twelve performances were made up of people from across the United States and the world. Audience members were extremely quiet and appreciative throughout the *Rings*.

Kosman noted (6-21-11) "What makes the current production at the War Memorial Opera House such a musical and theatrical tour de force isn't director Francesca Zambello's decision to relocate the action of Wagner's epic tetralogy across a span of a century and a half of American history – though that certainly helps the audience feel some of the economic and political nuances of the drama. And it isn't the emphasis on the despoliation of the environment, an idea that comes from Wagner. What made the entire first cycle so arresting and so memorable was the sure-footedness with which the entire story was told, the attention to detail from both Zambello and former Music Director Donald Runnicles, and the accumulation of all those thousand details into a compelling narrative arc."

Numerous alumni from the opera companies in the Bay Area were part of this *Ring*.

Mark Delaven, alumnus of Merola and former Adler Fellow, sang Wotan. Kosman noted, "The Wotan of *Walküre* emerged as the strongest component of Mark Delavan's assignment. He tired a bit at the end, during Wotan's Farewell, but elsewhere he was superb, singing with assurance and flexibility." Elizabeth Bishop, former Adler Fellow and Merola alumna, sang Fricka and was described by Kosman as "the magnificent Fricka of mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Bishop, a performance that continues to grow in vocal splendor and dramatic insight." Kosman also wrote a review of Merolina, Heidi Melton, as she stepped into the role of Sieglinde in *Walküre*. He noted: "Her splendid appearance as Sieglinde signaled the arrival of a bold new voice for this difficult repertoire." Kosman went on to praise the performances of other Merolini including Daveda Karanas, Sara Gartland, Tamara Wapinsky, Renee Tatum, and Maya Lahyani. Cybele Gouverneur, alumna of Opera San José was also included in his praise: "Kudos, too, to the paratrooper Valkyries."

The shiniest star of this *Ring Cycle* appears to be the Orchestra. As noted by Hirsch, "But the success of the *Ring* has been about more than just the theatrical panache on display. In the pit, the Opera Orchestra has undertaken feats of musical heroism night after night, and Runnicles has shaped the cycle's rhythmic flow with uncanny dexterity." Testimony to their performance was seeing the entire orchestra on stage at the end of *Götterdämmerung* to acknowledge the audience applause, beside Maestro Runnicles and the Cast.

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# Opera Traveler

## A 65-year-old summer music festival with a different character each year

by Mort Levine

Ojai is an upscale bucolic little town inland from Santa Barbara in its own lush valley. Once each year the entire population devotes itself to the worship of an array of cutting edge opera and orchestral music. The 2011 version in June was all of that.

Key to the week was the ability to pull together some astonishing performers along with inventive ideas from the great American operatic soprano, Dawn Upshaw. It was her fourth appearance at Ojai but her first as its artistic director.

Over the years, we have been particularly drawn to Ms. Upshaw's operatic career. Her velvety mezzo tones make for a special kind of enchantment, given her extraordinary dramatic abilities. She's championed contemporary composers like Osvaldo Golijov (*Ainadamar*), Kaija Saariaho (*L'Amour de Loin*), John Harbison (*The Great Gatsby*) and John Adams (*El Niño*).

She is also a teacher who created an imaginative graduate vocal training program at Bard College on the Hudson. She brought a contingent of her class to perform a range of esoteric opera arias.

As the first and only vocal artist to win a MacArthur "Genius" award, she parleyed her commitment to the communicative power of music in a number of other directions. She is a devotee of a wide range of musical types. She is a great collaborator with talented musicians. Above all she is a fabled performer.

At Ojai Festival, she lured inventive and strongly opinionated operatic director Peter Sellers to pull together a gut-wrenching cham-

ber opera using a song cycle of old American folk songs by George Crumb, orchestrated to a haunting dissonance and slightly off-kilter satire, entitled "Winds of Destiny". The 150th year of the Civil War was its original theme. Sellers staged it with a distraught young veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Now mustered out, she is suffering from post traumatic stress and sings songs like "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again" through her pain. The other aspects of the festival were equally outstanding. Participating at Ojai for the first time was Maria Schneider, Upshaw's fellow Minnesotan who has a big jazz band which crosses over into classical framework. Ms. Upshaw sang a deeply felt piece called "Winter Morning Walks", premiered here and evoking the midwest landscape she shared with the composer.

Another highlight of the festival was hearing the virtuoso violinist Richard Tognetti leading the Australian Chamber Orchestra. The clever interweaving of a contemporary soundscape by Giacinto Scelsi and the Alfred Schnittke trio Sonata set a tone. It was climaxed by the Arnold Schoenberg *Verklarte Nacht*. It is a remarkable ensemble.

The festival's range of diverse musical offerings was stunning.

Ojai, this summer, celebrated the redesign and remodeling of its outdoor bowl in the town's central park. Seating is now much more comfortable with good sight lines and decent acoustics, interrupted only occasionally by passing birdsong.

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## Opera Traveler

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The Ojai Festival also features several special events such as symposia on the music moderated by Ara Guzalimian, dean of the Juilliard school. There are some dinner events and one unexpected pleasure, a magical surfing film starring Richard Tognetti on the surfboard accompanied by his own composition performed by his Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Next year's festival begins June 6 and will definitely be different. The music director is Leif Ove Andsnes with his Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and a range of Scandinavian composers.

If you can't get to Ojai, you can catch the festival's stars the week following at UC Berkeley's Zellerbach hall where a new collaboration called Ojai North will go forth.###

## Bountiful Brunch

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Herman. Their work resulted in considerable contributions which will aid in the Guild's ability to support opera organizations in the entire Bay Area. Others contributing to the success of this fund raising were: The Plumed Horse, Il Fornaio, Left Bank Restaurant, West Bay Opera, Pilates with Midge Firenze, Nilou Massage and Facial, Roman Alexander Salon, Summer Winds, Site for Sore Eyes, Lux Salon, and Tassels.

We are so appreciative of the event Olga Nespole and her committee created and to David and Larry for providing their lovely home. Hurrah to our singers and accompanist, to those members and businesses that contributed to our raffle, and to committee members Argo and Nina Gherardi, Elliot and Alice Swanson, and John and Jan Eurich. Bravo and thank you to all who helped make our day such a colossal success! ###

## Career Updates

by Nina Gherardi

During the 2011-2012 season **Christina Major** will return for engagements at the Arizona Music Festival to sing Beethoven's *Ninth* followed by her return to Opera San José to debut in the role of Electra in Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Other performances include Beethoven's *Ninth* with Greenville Symphony under the baton of Russian conductor Edward Tchivzhel, followed by a performance of *Carmina Burana* under the baton of Robert Moody with the Winston-Salem Symphony. In 2010 she was selected as a Grant winner by the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation. She was recently hailed in *Opera News* as being a "sensitive actress" who "brought about the highest emotional stakes of the evening."

**Rebecca Davis** will be performing the role of Violetta in Santa Barbara's coming production of *La Traviata*, conducted by Jose Condemini, who describes the soprano's singing as "...a beguiling blend of temperament, charm and vocal presence." She performed the same role at Festival Opera in Walnut Creek.

Soprano **Lori Phillips** made her triumphant debut at the Met as Senta (*The Flying Dutchman*) on May 3, 2010, when she filled in for Deborah Voigt. **Ms. Phillips** received a standing ovation for her performance. Other engagements this season included Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* with Hawaii Opera Theater and the title role in *Turandot* with Opera Lyra Ottawa and Portland Opera. Other roles covered at the Met include Giorgetta (*Il Tabarro*), and Gertrude (*Hansel und Gretel*).

Tenor **John Bellemer** appears in leading roles at opera houses across North America and Europe. He performed Don José in *Carmen* in a return to Boston Lyr-

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## Career Updates

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ic Opera, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* with the Arizona Opera Company, and Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* with Toledo Opera.

**Mel Ulrich** has enjoyed a 20-year international career as an opera singer. He has sung over 500 performances in many of the world's leading opera houses, concert stages and recital halls with a wide-ranging repertoire in the oratorio, concert, recital and opera venues.

In 2010 baritone **Jason Detwiler** performed the role of Silvio in *I Pagliacci* for Sonoma City Opera, Mr. Webb in *Our Town*, Melchior in *Amal and the Night Visitors*, and Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera Idaho.

In 2011 mezzo soprano **Michele Detwiler** performed with Opera Idaho in the roles of the spirited young student Siebel in *Faust*, the sassy Bloody Mary in this summer's performance of *South Pacific*, and a hysterical stepsister in *La Cenerentola*.

In 2010 tenor **Adam Flowers** appeared as Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) with Pacific Repertory Opera and was a featured soloist in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with Oakland East Bay Symphony. Recent performances for **Mr. Flowers** included the roles of E.T.A. Hoffman (*Tales of Hoffman*) with Berkeley Opera, Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) with Opera in the Heights, Capitano (*La Llorona*) in Santa Fe and Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) with Sacramento Opera.

**Brian Leerhuber** sang the role of Enrico in Festival Opera's production of *Lucia di Lammermoore*.

Part of the SJOG's mission is to support the Merola Opera Program, and is sponsoring, in part, one of the participants. This year that person is **Ana Maria Otamendi**, apprentice coach, from Caracas, Venezuela.

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## Lectures

by Steve Zilles

The Fall Lecture Series of the San José Opera Guild begins before Labor Day this year. We have a wonderful collection of presentations on operas that will be performed in the Bay Area, particularly, San Francisco Opera, Opera San José and West Bay Opera. All of these presentations will be from 10:00 AM to 12:00 Noon at a new venue, the Addison Penzak Jewish Community Center Silicon Valley in Los Gatos. This site, which is on Oka Road just off the intersection of Highway 17 and Lark Ave. is easy to find and get to.

The season begins on Tues., Aug. 30 with a lecture by Timothy Flynn on *Turandot* by Puccini. *Turandot* is Puccini's last opera and one of his greatest. It tells the story of a Prince who comes to win the icy Princess that chops the heads off suitors who fail her test of three riddles and the slave girl who loves the Prince but sacrifices her life that he may live. And, of course, there is the aria, "Nessun Dorma" which Pavarotti did much to popularize. Timothy Flynn last lectured to us on *Madame Butterfly* in 2010 and *Il Trittico* in 2009. He currently holds 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 and also plays the organ. He has published recent books on Saint-Saëns and Gounod.

On Tuesday, 6 September, Mitchell Morris will speak on *Heart of a Soldier* by Christopher Theofanidis and Donna Di Novelli. This World Premiere features the real life story of the Cornish soldier of fortune and Morgan Stanley security chief, Rick Rescorla, his best friend and fellow soldier, Dan Hill, and Susan

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# Lectures

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Rescorla, the love story of his life. The opera builds to September 11, 2001 when Rick manages to get Morgan Stanley's staff out of the World Trade Center prior to the second plane hitting their building. This is great opera material and promises to be a hit of the season. Mitchell Morris is an expert on 20th and 21st century opera and last spoke to us on *Die Tote Stadt* in 2008. Morris is an associate professor in the Department of Musicology at UCLA.

On Tuesday, 20 September, Mary Ann Smart will speak to us on Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, an opera being done for the first time by San Francisco Opera. This bel canto opera celebrates friendship even to the threat of death. The very name Lucrezia Borgia has come to mean poison. Come find out how poison plays in the plot of this opera. We have previously enjoyed Mary Ann's talk on *La Fille du Regiment* in 2009. She is the Gladys Arata Terrill Professor of Music at the University of California, Berkeley. Smart has published articles on the lives and public images of nineteenth-century female singers, on the ways madness is depicted in opera, on the ways musical performance intersected with polite conversation and political maneuvering in Parisian social life, and on the role Verdi's operas played in promoting the Unification of Italy. She has also written articles on Bellini and Donizetti for the revised Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

On Friday, September 23, we will have the first of our two Season Previews for local opera companies. This preview (on a Friday rather than a Tuesday) will cover the West Bay Opera season. The presentation will begin with an overview of the season by West Bay Opera General Director Jose Luis Moscovich which will be followed by selections from those pro-

ductions sung by singers from West Bay Opera. Following this presentation, attendees are welcome to stay for the regular Kabbalat Shabbat Lunch held once per month at the JCC. The cost is about \$10 for non-JCC-members. See the calendar section for dates and operas.

Our second season preview will be given by Larry Hancock, General Manager, Opera San José on Tuesday, 23 September. Larry, who has been a regular speaker for many years, will give an overview of the then remaining three operas in the Opera San José season, and Opera San José singers will be present to provide musical selections. These operas include the double bill of *Pagliacci* and *La Voix Humaine*, *La Traviata*, and *Faust*.

Our final two San Francisco Opera lectures are in October. Simon Williams will talk about Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on 11 October. Will the proud Don win out, or will the women he tries to seduce get their revenge, and will the Don's servant survive to the end? Scheming, revenge, deception, a walking statue and wonderful music, what can go wrong? Simon has given us a number of lectures and has most recently spoken on *Die Walküre* and *Simon Boccanegra*. He has directed several operas at UC Santa Barbara and is widely recognized as an authority on the history of acting and Shakespearean performance, as well as on opera as drama and on the history of operatic staging.

Finally, on 25 October, Bruce Lamott will speak on *Serse* (or *Xerxes*) by Handel. This opera is the opera from which Handel's famous "Largo" is taken. The plot, however, is anything but slow as Xerxes and his brother pursue the same woman, the daughter of one of Xerxes' generals. Find out how betrayal comes back to get one. ###

# Calendar

AUGUST 4 and 5 at 8 pm and August 6 and 7 at 2 pm Merola Opera Program will present *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco. San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$60/40

AUGUST 20 Merola Opera Program Grand Finale and reception at the War Memorial Opera House. San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$45/35/25

AUGUST 30 San José Opera Guild lecture, Timothy Flynn speaks on *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini at our new location at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesdays - 10 am to Noon. (Note the exception of September 23rd which is a Friday) SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

SEPTEMBER 6 San José Opera Guild lecture, Mitchell Morris will speak on *Heart of a Soldier* by Christopher Theofanidis and Donna Di Novelli. See Aug. 30th for further information.

SEPTEMBER 10,11, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23 Opera San José presents *Idomeneo* by W. A. Mozart. California Theatre, 8 pm except Sundays at 3 pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

SEPTEMBER 20 San José Opera Guild lecture, Mary Ann Smart speaks on *Lucrezia Borgia* by Gaetano Donizetti. See Aug. 30th for further information.

SEPTEMBER 23 (Note that this is a FRIDAY) San José Opera Guild lecture, West Bay Opera Preview by Jose Luis Moscovitch with singers, See Aug. 30th for further information on location. Lunch is available after the lecture at the JCC for seven dollars.

SEPTEMBER 27 San José Opera Guild lecture, Opera San José Preview by Larry Hancock with resident artists, See Aug. 30th for further information.

OCTOBER 6 West Bay Opera free preview. 8pm Site not yet decided.

OCTOBER 11 San José Opera Guild lecture, Simon Williams speaks on *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart. See Aug. 30th for further information.

OCTOBER 14, 16, 22, 23 West Bay Opera presents *Samson et Dalila* by Camille Saint-Saëns at the Lucie Stern Theater, Palo Alto, \$70/65, Seniors \$58/52, Youth 45/40, Call 650 424-9999 or visit [www.wbopera.org](http://www.wbopera.org).

OCTOBER 15 Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Anna Bolena* (new production) by Donizetti, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Eastridge Mall 15, 274-2274. Simulcasts are at 10am and cost \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. (The encores which occur later are at 6:30 pm and cost \$22.00 for adults and \$20.00 for seniors. Prices may vary for the various HD operas.

OCTOBER 25 San José Opera Guild lecture, Bruce Lamont speaks on *Xerxes* by Georg Fredric Handel. See Aug. 30th for further information.

OCTOBER 29 Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Don Giovanni* (new production) by Mozart, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Eastridge Mall 15, 274-2274. Simulcasts are at 10am and cost \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. (The encores which occur later are at 6:30 pm and cost \$22.00 for adults and \$20.00 for seniors

NOVEMBER 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27 Opera San José presents *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo and *La Voix Humaine* by Poulenc/Cocteau, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

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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 _____	Membership Individual \$45
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