

## SJOG BRUNCH

A Grand Success



From left to right: Peggy Heiman, raffle and silent auction chair; Olga Nespole, Event chair; Susan English, President SJOG. All attending the brunch enjoyed the day made possible by their leadership.



From left to right: Irene Dalis, Opera San José General Director; Melinda Whittington, Soprano, Merola Opera Program and SJOG Sponsoree; Larry Hancock, Opera San José General Manager.

If you would like to see what you missed, check out SJOG's face book page. A link is provided at [sjoperaguild.org](http://sjoperaguild.org). Photos by John Eurich

## 2012 FALL LECTURES

by Steve Zilles

The Fall Lecture Series of the San José Opera Guild begins, once again, before Labor Day this year. We have a wonderful collection of presentations on operas that will be performed in the Bay Area this year, with talks on the Fall season of San Francisco Opera, and season overviews for Opera San José and West Bay Opera. All of these presentations will be from 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon at 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. And, we have arranged parking in the church parking lot next to the JCC to avoid conflicts with the other users of the JCC.

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## Fall Lectures from P. 1

The season begins on Tues., Aug. 28, with a lecture by Prof. Laura Basini on *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi. The opera, one of Verdi's great mid-career operas, is full of posturing, intrigue and love. Rigoletto, the jester of the Duke of Mantua, has one possession of great value, his daughter. His cruel jests on the Duke courtiers lead to his undoing. The Duke glides above all this, freely attracting every girl in sight. Dr. Laura Basini is an Associate Professor of Music History at Sacramento State and last spoke to us on *La Fanciulla del West* in the summer of 2010. Dr. Basini's research interests include the relationships between music and politics, particularly in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italy, very appropriate for *Rigoletto*.

The next lecture, on September 25th, begins an intense week of lectures. It is given by Prof. Mary Ann Smart on *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* by Vincenzo Bellini, written in 1830. This opera follows the basic plot of the story Shakespeare called *Romeo and Juliet*, but in a variation different from Shakespeare and based on Italian Renaissance sources. It was the hit of the season the last time it was performed in San Francisco in 1991. Dr. Smart is Professor of Musicology at U.C. Berkeley where her research focuses on the social dimensions of opera in nineteenth-century Europe. She has particularly written about opera in Italy from 1830 to 1848. She last spoke to us on *La fille du Regiment* in 2009 and *Lucrezia Borgia* in 2011.

Following this lecture, in the same week, is a presentation, on Friday, 28 September, of the West Bay Opera Company season which includes the *Tales of Hoffman*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Otello*. Maestro José Luis Moscov-

ich, the company's General Director, will give an introduction to the season, and this will be followed by excerpts from the season's operas by singers from the West Bay Company. This presentation will be held in conjunction with the Friday Shabbat lunch at the Jewish Community Center and all senior (55+) attendees are invited to purchase lunch tickets (in advance) if they wish to stay for the lunch.

On the following Tuesday, October 2, we will return to the Fall Season at San Francisco Opera with a lecture on *Moby Dick*, a new opera by Jake Heggie whose premier opened the new Dallas Opera House in 2010. Jake Heggie is seen as one of the pre-eminent contemporary opera composers, and we are fortunate to have the librettist for this opera, Gene Scheer, giving our lecture. Mr. Scheer has written acclaimed lyrics for a number of 21st century operas, including several by Jake Heggie and Tobias Picker. He has written the lyrics for songs (many composed by Mr. Heggie) for such singers as Renee Fleming and Nathan Gunn. We are indeed privileged to have Mr. Scheer as our lecturer.

Our final San Francisco Opera Lecture is given on October 16th by our old friend, Prof. Simon Williams on *Lohengrin* by Richard Wagner. This opera, with wonderful mid-career music by Wagner, tells the story of the trials of Elsa of Brabant, the knight (Lohengrin) that rescues her and the way innuendo can cast doubt on and destroy a relationship. Dr. Williams is Professor and Chair of the Department of Dramatic Art at U.C. Santa Barbara and has written several books on Richard Wagner. In the past he has lectured to us on *Tannhäuser*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Die Walküre* and last year, *Don Giovanni*. ###

# Opera Traveler

By Mort Levine

Unique 20th century opera brings a rarity to Bay area and a resounding Merola success

If you wanted to test the outer limits of opera's creativity, you should have gone a short trip north to San Francisco's Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason to catch one of the two performances of Dominick Argento's semi-surreal 1971 work *Postcard from Morocco*. The 90-minute one act showcases seven singer-actors in some extremely difficult arias and ensemble numbers. The composer brings together a wide assortment of styles and textures that mirror the changing moods of the absurdist plot.

Written to a libretto by John Donahue, the setting implies an old fashion grand railway station which is typically featured in post-cards sent by tourists. None of the four men and three women know each other, and, while they share slivers of biography of themselves, the audience is left to fill in a lot of blanks such as where are they going and why each is carrying some kind of prop. All seven are assigned a common item although only one of the characters is named.

The young singers from SF Opera's Merola program will also be performing Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera* at the Cowell Theatre on August 2 at 8 p.m. and August 4 at 2 p.m. These performances will be followed with the annual Merola Grand Finale at the opera house on August 18 at 7:30 p.m.

The composer is a careful operatic craftsman with more than a dozen works to his credit. The *Aspern Papers* based on a Henry James novella may be his most successful. An upcoming performance at Dallas opera is scheduled. Another Argento one-act, *A Water Bird Talk* was given some years back by San José State's opera workshop.

In *Postcard*, the masterful Argento touch is evident in a centerpiece of the show labeled a "Souvenir of Bayreuth" in which singers and the eight piece orchestra under Merola music director Mark Morash quotes and parodies Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*. Other musical flights include a operetta singer's torch song to an absent lover, sung by Soprano Aviva Fortunato while twirling a very long bright red sash.

There are some creative dance touches as well, proving the singers' versatility.

Tenor A. J. Glueckert provides a poignant portrayal of an unfulfilled artist, always tightly clutching a painter's box. When pressed to show the brushes and tubes of paint, he finally opens the box to reveal it contains nothing. His role is one which encapsulates the pathetic longing which marks all of the opera. He concludes it by telling of the boyhood fantasies of having a naval fleet sailing on a staircase at his command.

The articles the other singers possess also seem to reveal an emptiness in their lives. Bass-baritone Matthew Scolin totes a cornetcase but admits he can't play. A traveling salesman swaggeringly sung by Baritone Joseph Lattanzi carries a large suitcase with shoe samples each in a pocket of velvet or fuzz.

The high soprano of Susan Rigden who sings "a lady with a bad mirror" in an atonal aria which sets an early mood, but the composer's tonal lyricism provides a sharp contrast. This is evident as mezzo soprano Carolyn Sproule talks about the hatbox and sings of the hats made for movie stars. Tenor Andrew Stenson

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# Career Updates

Soprano **Rebecca Davis** (Opera San José & Merola) was awarded first prize of \$15,000 at the sixth annual Irene Dalis Vocal Competition held May 19, 2012 at the California Theatre. During the summer of 2012 she will be a featured soloist with the Midsummer Mozart Festival. She performed the role of Violetta in three productions of *La Traviata*, (Opera Santa Barbara, Festival Opera, and Opera San José.) She made her role debuts as Ilia in Mozart's *Idomeno* at Opera San José, Mimi in Puccini's *La Boheme* with Opera Santa Barbara, and Baby Doe in Opera Idaho's production of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*.

**Christie Hageman** was also one of the ten finalists in the vocal competition. She had been second place winner in our own SJ Opera Guild/SJSU vocal awards competition in 2006. Her many credits include finalist in the Rocky Mountain Region of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2011 and 2012. She won 3rd place in 2011. Tenor **Christopher Bengochea** has a busy, exciting schedule beginning in July with performances of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* in Osaka, Japan. In August he will be closer to home when he performs in *Carmen on Broadway* at the Walt Disney Hall and the Festival on the Green in Los Angeles. In September he will be at Hakone Gardens in Saratoga where he will be soloist at their gala concert. In December he will appear in Weill Hall-Greeb Music Center with The Santa Rosa Symphony at Sonoma State University. He will finish out the year by traveling to Zurich, Switzerland to perform in "Viva Verdi," Lofti Mansouri-Director, Maestro Edoardo Müller-Conductor.

Sopranos **Rebecca Davis** and **Christina Major**, tenor **Christopher Bengochea**, and bass **Kirk Eichelberger** (all former OSJ resident

artists) gave solo performances at the midsummer Mozart Festival July 19-July 29.

Soprano **Talise Travigne** (OSJ) will perform the role of Pip in San Francisco Opera's production of *Moby-Dick*. She will be joined in that cast by Merola's tenor, **Matthew O'Neil** (2005) in the role of Flask.

Bass baritone **Mark Delavan** (Merola 1985) will perform the role of Scarpia in SFO 2012-2013 production of Puccini's *Tosca*. He was described by the *New York Times* as a "menacing, yet elegantly mannered Scarpia."

Former Opera San José Resident Artist **Scott Bearden**, baritone, who took 1st place in the 2008 Irene Dalis Vocal Competition, went on to sing lead roles with companies throughout the world, from Connecticut and Tennessee to Peru and Tel Aviv. Mr Bearden's 2012 engagements include Iago in Knoxville Opera's production of *Otello* and a return to Caramoor as Zambri in *Ciro in Babilonia* (July).  
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## Opera Traveler

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portrayed a puppeteer as well as doubling as the sad man with old luggage, because it doesn't pay to buy new luggage for a trip.

An epigraph is attached to the score of the opera quoting two lines from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. One is "we built a ship upon the stairs," and the other is "But Tom fell out and hurt his knee, So there was no one left but me." Even though the libretto lines convey the underlying sadness and terror, it is the music that really spins out the magic of *The Postcard from Morocco*.

###

# Calendar

## **AUGUST 2, 8PM & AUGUST 4, 2PM:**

Merola Opera Program will present *La Finta Giardiniera* by W.A.Mozart, at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center, San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$60/40

**AUGUST 18, 7:30PM,** Merola Opera Program will present the Merola Grand Finale at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$45/35/25, (Post-event Reception, \$50)

**AUGUST 28,** San José Opera Guild lecture, Laura Basini will speak on *Rigoletto* by Verdi 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 28rd which is a Friday) SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

**SEPTEMBER 8,** Season Opening Gala for Opera San José, Before the opera, enjoy a three-course dinner and, following the performance, meet the performers for a champagne reception at the Sainte Claire Hotel. \$150 includes valet parking. For more information: 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

**SEPTEMBER 8-23,** Opera San José presents *The Pearl Fishers* by George Bizet. California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

**SEPTEMBER 25** San José Opera Guild lecture, Mary Ann Smart will speak on *I Capuleti e Montecchi* by Vincenzo Bellini, See Aug. 28th for further information.

**SEPTEMBER 28** (Note that this is a FRIDAY) San José Opera Guild lecture, West Bay Opera Preview by José Luis Moscovitch with singers, See Aug. 28th for further information on location. Lunch is available after the lecture at the JCC for seven dollars.

**OCTOBER 2** San José Opera Guild lecture, Gene Scheer will speak on *Moby Dick* by Jake Heggie, See Aug. 28th for further information.

**OCTOBER 12, 14, 20, 21,** West Bay Opera presents *Le Contes d'Hoffman* by Jacques Offenbach 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 13 9:55 AM,** Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *L'Elisir d'Amore* (new production) by Donizetti, live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and Cupertino 16, 871-2262. Please check with the theaters closer to the date of the opera. 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 16** San José Opera Guild lecture, Simon Williams will speak on *Lohengrin* by Richard Wagner, See Aug. 28th for further information.

**OCTOBER 27, 9:55AM,** Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, *Otello* by Giuseppe Verdi. See Oct. 13th for more information.

**NOVEMBER 10,** Opening Night Dinner for Opera San José, \$70, For more information: Call 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

**NOVEMBER 10 - 25,** Opera San José presents *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss, Jr., California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org).

**NOVEMBER 13,** San José Opera Guild lecture, San José Opera Preview by Larry Hancock with Resident Artists, See Aug. 28th, for further information.

San José Opera Guild  
c/o Argo Gherardi  
P.O. Box 33025  
Los Gatos, CA 85031-3025

## 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 it's 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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