Where do we go from here? We never dreamed that we would be facing anything like a worldwide pandemic that would virtually shut down the operatic world. So here we are in Seattle, Washington with the mission to support Seattle Opera, vocal scholarships, and opera education for all age groups.

I am a great believer in the concept of synergy—that by working together toward common goals, we can get more done, have more fun, and come up with more ideas than if we all worked independently. It is the enjoyment of opera music, watching young singers develop, and getting to know each other that have made belonging to the Guild so rewarding. Our Singers' Development Fund is our pride and joy!

We all still love and support opera. We can enjoy whatever online opera programs are offered by Seattle Opera, going to their website: www.seattleopera.org to see what is available.

The first program, “Songs of Summer” with artists singing along with a piano accompanist, streamed on youtube.com/Seattle Opera or facebook.com/Seattle Opera. One amazing performance was on June 25 with John Moore, the baritone who sang in Verdi’s Eugène Onégin. 

Every October the application form for the Singers’ Development Award is made available on our website, and the award is announced on several different sites for singers, setting into motion a process which culminates in the final auditions in front of an audience. At this time awards amounting to $6,000 are presented to the winners. This year was no different. I had reserved a venue, secured three judges and found an accompanist. I had gathered and organized the applications. Then my committee met one Saturday. We watched the videos; we chose the finalists; we started planning the final audition. All was going smoothly until…

along came the Virus and we were stopped dead in our tracks.

I remember as a child going to the beach and building a magnificent sandcastle with much care: All the trips to the water’s edge to mix the sand to the right texture, all the filling and emptying of buckets to create marvellous turrets, and then the digging of an impressive moat (more trips to the water to fill it!) occupied my time. What I hadn’t noticed was the tide coming in, silently and stealthily, until it overwhelmed my castle, depriving it of its very existence. The current situation elicited the same feelings I had back then.

So here we were, faced with a huge challenge. Following the motto from WWII to “Keep calm and carry on” we decided to meet that challenge head on. At one point, we thought we had it all organized, but the new venue decided not to risk opening. That’s when the miracle happened! On hearing of our plight, Seattle Opera came to the rescue and offered their beautiful facilities for the auditions. Not only that - they offered to live stream the event for our members. In order for us all to be safe, we had to adhere to strict rules, which included separate appointments for each singer, distancing, masks, sanitizer and limited movement for all who were there.

As to the competition itself, I was blown away by the level of performance! It was as though the singers had missed performing so much during these barren days that they threw their hearts and souls into it. The singing from every contestant was outstanding, continued on page 2
despite the fact that they had no rehearsal, just a phone conference. I cannot praise David McDade enough for his wonderful and sensitive accompaniment. The contestants were perfectly at ease with him, and he in turn remarked to me that this was the best group of finalists we had ever had! Our singers were thrilled to participate, writing to tell me how much they missed performing live, with accompaniment.

Our judges, Scott Dean, Ksenia Popova (a past winner) and Charles Robert Stephens, after careful deliberation, chose the winners - 1st Place, soprano Lindsey Nakatani; 2nd Place, mezzo-soprano Aria Minasian; 3rd Place, soprano Celeste Fraser; and Encouragement Award, soprano Lauren Kulesa. Kudos to them, who brightened our day during this pandemic.

All in all, we witnessed magic!


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President

this past January. Tim Barrick, the pianist, recorded at his home in Seattle, and John recorded his singing at his home in Minneapolis. The online performance was a meld of the two artists, doing their respective performances from home in their own states. Little did we know that our digital capability would come to the rescue when we must “socially distance” to keep ourselves safe and watch performances from our own homes.

Zoom also came to our rescue, as we staged our first Seattle Opera Guild Board meeting via Zoom on June 17 with the help of Paris Sakas, a new board member and host of our meeting. It was a very productive meeting, so let me introduce your new Board Members: President, Suzy Mygatt Wakefield; Penny Wade, Vice-President (VP) of Administration; Gayle Charlesworth, Past President and VP for Membership; Maria Van Horn, VP for Special Events; Christine Szabadi, VP for Education; Judi Kalitzki, Editor of L’Aria and VP of Communications; Mary Scott, Secretary; Sally Buckingham, Treasurer; Danielle Gaines, Trustee; and Patricia Pavia, Officer at Large.

Preview chairs include: Allegro, Dorothy Petersen; Amici, Maria Van Horn; Bellini, Suzy Wakefield and Sally Buckingham; Magnolia-Queen Anne, Florence Rose-Thompson; Mercer Island, Marilyn Leck; Parties & Previews, Paris Sakas; and Vivace, Emily Bennett and Mary Scott.

We look forward to serving you, and hope you will continue your Guild membership, as we need your support to get through this together.

We’ve now had the joy of watching the Singer Development Awards event live streamed by Seattle Opera from the stage of Tagney Jones Hall. What an exciting event! Enormous thanks go to Christine Szabadi, VP of Education, who poured her heart and soul into making this happen. We are equally thankful to all those at Seattle Opera who helped make this event possible. And finally, thanks to those of you who donated to the Singer Development Awards fund after watching these vibrant, talented singers. Couldn’t you just tell they were grateful to be performing live? So, you see, we are moving forward with great excitement and hope!
Signing Off As President

Gayle Charlesworth

With my usual silly grin, and great hope, I am handing over the gavel to a new President of Seattle Opera Guild. It has been my privilege to serve you as President for three years. Often rewarding and sometimes challenging, it has always been interesting.

We have forged a good relationship with Seattle Opera. In these changing times we need to continue to find links with our arts community. My place on the SOG board will change, but I promise you that my enthusiasm will not waver. We are doing good things, and must look forward to the time when we can hug and talk around the table again.

Now is the time to put our imagination to work on how we can move through Phases 1, 2, and 3. Kudos to Mercer Island Preview Group, which held a virtual fundraiser on Zoom!

We mustn’t forget our own Singers Development Fund and auditions. Our local talent needs all the encouragement we can give them.

Please don’t be downhearted. We will come through this period stronger and be together to celebrate our 65th Anniversary in 2021, and our 75th in 2031. Have Hope, Stay Well, Be Happy, Keep Smiling!

SOG’s Very First Zoom Preview!

Marilyn Leck

“Who will attend?” “Is Zoom too complex for our members?” My mind was racing with doubt Sunday morning, April 26, 2020.

Mercer Island Preview Group held our La Boheme preview fundraiser Sunday, April 26, 2020, at 2pm, via Zoom. It was a big success, with 17 attending. We were all so delighted to meet as a group, see familiar faces, flaunt our isolation talents, and share what we were eating and drinking. And Lorraine Del Prado and Nancy English narrated an opera preview complete with Puccini’s life, renowned aria recordings, virtual backgrounds of the sets for each act, and fun questions for us to answer. We raised nearly $1,700!

During this time when our daily lives, our communities, and our opera world are shaken by the coronavirus, I reminded myself that each of us in our preview group is grateful for each other’s friendship and support. Yes, it is difficult to stay away from family, friends, and familiar places, and we have had to adjust to the many changes in our daily routines. In times of uncertainty, we take strength remembering we are a group committed to each other and to opera.

To do our part to help “flatten the curve,” our Mercer Island Preview Group leaders, via telephone, decided to transform our La Boheme April 2020 fundraiser from a live event to a virtual event. All of our fundraiser underwriters said “yes” to keeping the funding level they expressed during our February MIPG preview gathering. We all enjoyed Easter and Passover in a whole new way: family, religious services, brunches, all at a distance with virtual hugs via online connections like Zoom. “We can do this!” I thought. Our money raised was vitally important for the future of our Seattle Opera Guild, Seattle Opera, and all the singers affected by jobs and uncertainty.

Comments from our members about the event:

“Innovative fundraiser via Zoom!” “Great attendance!” “Captivating narrative with scenes from famous productions!” “Wonderful old recordings of memorable singers!” “Enjoyed libations and hors d’oeuvres in a comfortable and safe setting!” “A team effort – thanks for an entertaining afternoon!” “Loved the change of Zoom backgrounds!” “So heartwarming to see you all!”

Like many organizations, the Seattle Opera and Seattle Opera Guild have suffered economic losses due to the lockdown. As we support organizations that are providing direct relief to communities devastated by the pandemic, let us also remember the important role of the arts in our lives.

La Boheme, Act IV. Houston Grand Opera, 2013
Let’s Celebrate Our History!

Judi Kalitzki

In this unusual time when we can’t get together in person, let’s remember and applaud the almost 65 years of Seattle Opera Guild’s dedication to celebrating the art of opera.

In future issues of L’Aria, we’re going to be treated to the history of each of our current guilds. In this issue, I’d like to emphasize that the central mission and activities of the Guild have not changed since its founding.

In an article on Seattle Opera Guild’s Genealogy by Aileen Finley, we learn that our organization began in 1956 as The Guild of the Pacific Northwest Opera Association, created to support that organization’s attempt to bring opera to Seattle. However, in 1957 the PNOA disbanded due to insurmountable financial problems. The indomitable women who had formed the Guild were not deterred: they “held a strategy meeting and decided to continue as the Seattle Opera Guild, with a commitment to ‘promote enthusiasm for, interest in, and knowledge of opera,’ with the proviso that ‘when the time finally comes that Seattle produces a grand opera, it will be handsomely supported by the dedicated members of the Seattle Opera Guild.”

That kind of determination and love of the operatic art form are certainly both impressive and heartening in this time of struggle by Seattle Opera and all other arts organizations.

Particularly interesting was discovering what the primary activities of the newly formed Seattle Opera Guild were, because they are remarkably similar to those of our current Guild. Study groups were created to help members learn more about operas; the Metropolitan Opera NW Regional Auditions were provided with both volunteer assistance and cash awards for winners; and a scholarship program was created to promote the careers of deserving young Northwest singers. It’s truly inspiring to see the longevity of these Guild activities. The study groups evolved into our much-loved previews; we still support the Met’s regional auditions; and, of course, we hold annual auditions for our Singer Development Awards, which we recently live-streamed to the public.

In 1961, Seattle Opera Guild turned its attention to introducing opera into the Seattle Public Schools. The Guild partnered with the University of Washington to support performance of a new opera, The Telephone, in four Seattle high schools. All these years later, the Guild still presents an annual donation to NOISE (Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc.), which continues the tradition of taking operas into local schools.

Some things have changed, of course. In reading the article about our genealogy, it struck me that each woman mentioned or whose picture was in the article was identified by her husband’s name. Mrs. Reginald E. Morgan, Mrs. George W. Stodddard, and Mrs. Frederick Scheyer were the founders of the Guild. In that regard, we’ve come a long way, haven’t we? Thanks to the 50th Anniversary edition of L’Aria, which contained a two-page spread of each Guild president from its founding in 1956 through 2007, I can tell you what the founders’ members first names were: Gemma Morgan, Marjorie Stodddard, and Synette Scheyer.

Particularly impressive was learning about the sheer amount of volunteer work the Guild members did for Seattle Opera, from providing food to the opera singers during rehearsals, to being available to drive singers from out of town wherever they needed to go while they were in Seattle starring in a production. Of course, we need to remember that most of the Guild members in its early decades did not have careers of their own, so they had time to support organizations like Seattle Opera in quite a magnificent fashion.

Let’s let those founding women of the ‘50s and ‘60s inspire us. We may not have the number of members the Guild had at its height (1798 members in 1978) but we have the same love of opera, and the same determination to support Seattle Opera!
We are making it easy for you to renew and many have already done so. Thank you! Below is a renewal form if you haven’t gotten around to renewing your membership to the Seattle Opera Guild. We have had six months of masking and social distancing in a year unprecedented in my lifetime.

Who knows what autumn will bring? No Seattle Opera on stage, but have you been listening to Saturday Morning operas on KING FM? Fantastic! We have had our Singers’ Development Award auditions, thanks to Seattle Opera and Christine Szabadi, and even a virtual fundraiser for the Mercer Island Preview Group.

Life will not be the same this season, but it is vital that we stick with our program and our work, with your help.

You’re not going to the movies or out to restaurants? Then you have the extra money to renew right now! Let’s do what we can do in anticipation of another year of loving opera! We have an exciting new board, and we still hold meetings thanks to Zoom.

Please consider raising your membership level when you renew. SOG will be stronger when you do!

Gayle Charlesworth, VP Membership

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**Membership Application**

Thank you to so many members who have renewed in support of *Seattle Opera Guild*!

Date: ____________________ 2020

Members Name: First __________________________________ Last __________________________________

FOR COUPLES - Second Members Name: First __________________________________ Last __________________________________

Any changes to your membership profile? Yes ______ No ______

If YES, update changes to your profile: First Member ______ Second Member ______ Both ______

Phone: Preferred __________________ (H-W-M) Alternate: __________________ (H-W-M)

Email Address: __________________________________________

Street Address: First __________________________________ Last __________________________________

Previews: *Allegro* *Amici Dell’ Opera* *Bellini* *Magnolia/Queen Anne* *Mercer Island* *Parties and Previews* *Vivace* *At Large*

2\textsuperscript{nd} Preview Group (optional) __________________________________________

2\textsuperscript{nd} Preview Group Additional $10 per individual, $20 per couple.

Membership: Individual: Patron ($145/year) ______ Sustaining ($85/year) ______ Supporting ($60/year) ______

Couple: Patrons ($195/year) ______ Sustaining ($120/year) ______ Supporting ($90/year) ______

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP: ____________________ 2020

Payment by: PayPal ______ (online only at www.seattleoperaguild.org)

Check ______ payable to Seattle Opera Guild

Please send check to: SOG

PO Box 5745

Lynnwood, WA 98046

Double your gift! If your employer, or your spouse’s employer, matches gifts, please contact your employer to obtain the necessary company form and submit it to the Seattle Opera Guild! Thank you!
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