

L'Arria

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SEATTLE
Opera Guild

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Mission Statement

The Seattle Opera Guild is a non-profit organization that supports and promotes opera. The Guild provides financial support for Seattle Opera, funds vocal scholarships and promotes opera education for all age groups to ensure future opera audiences.

A Word from your President

Suzy Mygatt Wakefield



The question continues, “Where do we go from here?” Our mission stays the same, despite the pandemic: The Seattle Opera Guild, a non-profit organization, continues our commitment to supporting Seattle Opera, funding vocal scholarships, and providing opera education for all age groups to ensure future opera audiences.

I hope many of you subscribers were able to watch Seattle Opera’s recent production of *Elixir of Love*, featuring David McDade and Jay Rozendaal each playing their own piano (in place of a full orchestra), and a pared down cast with only the five main characters appearing onstage to sing their roles. One of the five, Tess Altiveros, who sings *Gianetta*, was given a Singers Development Award by Seattle Opera Guild, and she appeared at one of our luncheons. So encouraging to see a singer we helped appearing in a Seattle Opera main stage production! And so heartening and exciting to see how cleverly the director and cast of this production managed to create a lively, funny, and moving opera even as the cast had to practice staying at least six feet apart from one another throughout the opera!

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Message from Seattle Opera’s General Director, Christina Schepplemann

This year has certainly been a year unlike any other in recent history. What felt like a short intermission between scenes in early spring, has become a hiatus from the theatre that none of us could have anticipated nor wanted to experience!

But just as opera has endured over the past several centuries, when circumstances and safety regulations forced us to cancel our season in its originally planned form, Seattle Opera didn’t falter. We took it as an opportunity to explore every possibility we still had to continue bringing our audiences the announced titles of the 20/21 season and the joy of opera in new and creative ways. While, yes, we cannot deliver the titles and productions unaltered due to the pandemic and the subsequent rules and regulations, we made them a part of our new normal, and Seattle Opera sprang into action to create an expansive and memorable, albeit modified, season.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we spent the initial months solidifying virtual events for our extensive audience base and for our nearly 7,000 season subscribers, while expanding our understanding of how we could produce quality performances with

the necessary limitations and technology we had. Several of our beloved artists, like Angel Blue, Mary Elizabeth Williams, Will Liverman, and more, rose to the occasion and took part in our *Songs of Summer* series. These artists worked with our accompanists to record their pieces locally, around the United States, and globally. As fall neared, each department worked with one another to comply with state regulations to market, produce, and stream our season virtually. While it was a bold step to produce a virtual version of our original season, this past summer and early fall has been a lesson in resiliency and our staff did prove to be extraordinarily resilient! Our production of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* was a simplified production, reduced to musical excerpts with piano, socially-distanced singers, and a painted background to set the scene.

As we went through the process of creating a virtual production, we gained new skills and became more flexible using the technology available to create productions even closer to what our audiences could experience in the hall. For the first time,

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Scheppleman

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Seattle Opera took on the role of becoming a part time opera company and part time film studio. For our virtual production of *The Elixir of Love*, we hired a film director to record this unique socially-distanced production in addition to a wonderful stage director, allowing us to introduce an even more elaborate product to our audiences. Without a chorus or the orchestra, we kept high vocal and theatrical standards for our production of *Elixir*, and this entire process has been a balance in creativity, imagination, and innovation. As opera lovers, we understand that there is a certain risk in losing the magic of what makes opera special in a live setting. However, we have taken the utmost care to not compromise the artistic integrity and quality of the works, and will continue to work hard to bring you productions that engage you and entertain you.

As our spring season carries on in 2021 with *Don Giovanni*, *Flight*, and *Tosca*, Seattle Opera will continue to bring you excellent productions that will reach you and impact you at home. You can rest assured that we are doing everything necessary to create a safe environment for our artists and staff members who are involved in the productions. If we didn't have the extraordinary support from you, our audiences, and our community, we likely wouldn't have the same drive and determination to create such a special season. Thank you for your continued support.

President

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Toward the end of this opera the soprano sings one of the most beautiful arias in the Italian repertoire, Una Furtiva Lagrima, a furtive tear. Opera lovers often hear this on collections of favorite arias without knowing its context. This is where it comes from, and the oboe accompaniment, onstage in this production, brings such sadness and depth that you will want to cry when you hear it.

Donizetti's opera, *Elixir of Love*, was written quickly, over only six weeks, and first was produced in Milan in 1832. It has become a favorite of many and is played in opera houses all over the world. (Just check out You Tube.) This version by Seattle Opera was filmed and edited from a live performance at McCaw Hall in mid-October, and it has received rave reviews in the Seattle Times. We are so fortunate that we can still enjoy live opera, albeit online, from Seattle Opera during this pandemic.

The Seattle Opera Guild continues with almost 100 members, and we enjoyed a wonderful audition on August 8th of seven singers, with David McDade the accompanist. He spoke very highly of their enthusiasm and their talent. We will host another audition for young singers next spring or summer, giving young singers that terrific experience of performing for prizes as well as getting the practice of performing before an audience.

The Guild is creating a new website, which will be up and running soon. Please check it out and like us on Facebook.

King FM (98.1) broadcasts recorded Seattle Opera productions every Saturday morning at 10 AM. So please continue to connect with opera. We are somewhat in the stage of "Una Furtiva Lagrima," a furtive tear, as our world has become so different, but we cling to the hope that much that we have lost will be restored as we go forward into 2021. If you get a chance, please listen to that exquisite and timely aria!

Membership Update

Gayle Charlesworth, VP Membership

Why should you renew your membership in the Seattle Opera Guild? No operas, no previews!

As a result of our fall membership drive, a heartening number of members not only renewed but increased the level of their membership. However, it's clear some have asked themselves the question above. So let me share what SOG has been doing lately.

- We had our auditions virtually, thanks to Seattle Opera, giving eight splendid singers a chance to advance their careers, and giving members the opportunity to watch live performances.
- We have our monthly Board meeting over Zoom, and they are surprisingly productive!
- We have a budget for this year that includes gifts to Seattle Opera, N.O.I.S.E. and MONC. Why? Because, like all arts organizations, their funding is severely reduced and SOG would prefer to be part of the solution so they are prepared to perform again.
- We are compiling a directory and want YOU in it.
- We want to plan a big party and have opera previews again once it's safe to do so. We need enthusiastic members like YOU to be a part of that.

Please renew and join us as we walk towards the light at the end of this tunnel hand in hand. To renew, go to our website to get the form, which you can fill out online or print out and send in. Cheers!

My First Ring

Judi Kalitzki

I have a complex relationship to Richard Wagner. My parents, great opera lovers, were German Jews. They were lucky to escape Germany with their immediate families before the organized mass killing of Jews began.

While I was growing up in California, my parents listened to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts Saturdays on the radio. They had an extensive collection of operas on records that I heard when they played them on our stereo (or the “hi-fi” as we called it). But I never heard any Wagner. So I knew nothing about him or his music growing up.

It was not until I took a class on opera at U.C. Berkeley that I was exposed to the exquisite music of the Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* and the love duet between Sieglinde and Siegmund in the first act of *Die Walküre*. Although I occasionally ventured across the Bay from Berkeley to San Francisco to attend the opera, none were by Wagner.

After graduating from UC Berkeley I moved to Seattle to attend graduate school at the University of Washington. That first year of grad school I was far too busy to even think of attending the opera! But my first summer here, in 1975, Seattle Opera embarked on the incredibly audacious experiment of mounting the entire *Ring* cycle. A grad school friend who loved opera convinced me we simply must attend. I was dubious: first of all, it was a lot of money for someone living on a TA's salary. But maybe a more serious objection was a feeling that if I attended this Wagner extravaganza, wouldn't that be disrespecting my parents? So I talked it over with my dad (my mother, sadly, had died just before I graduated from college), and he encouraged me to go, saying it was important to let the music speak for itself.

So go I did, and as those of you who have experienced seeing the *Ring* within the space of a single week know, the music is like a tidal wave that pours over you, with each succeeding opera building on top of the previous one. Each leitmotif penetrates more deeply into your brain, until by *Götterdämmerung*, you are so familiar with and sensitive to the music that the action on the stage and the music flooding your ears seem not really human at all, but something grander. As you can tell, I became a convert to the *Ring*. I have learned not to overlook but to separate the Wagner who wrote hate filled anti-Semitic essays from the musician who wrote such glorious music. I recognize that while Wagner's operas were favorites of the Nazis, this should not keep music lovers from embracing these splendid operas.



Photo credit: Chris Bennion



Photo credit: Chris Bennion

Joan Falskow Herald as Ortlinde in Seattle's First Ring

Joan Falskow Herald

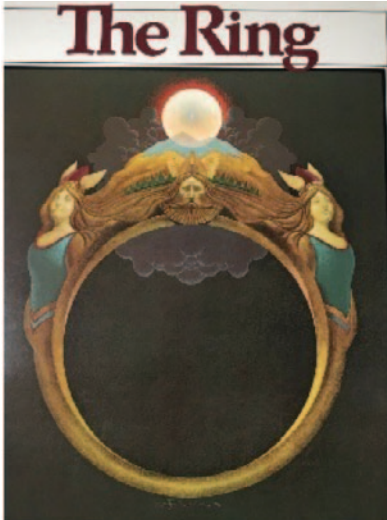
As one of the first seven sopranos hired by Glynn Ross for the new Seattle Opera, I have many happy memories during my sixteen years with the company. One of the most memorable was being cast as Ortlinde, one of the Valkyries, in the original *Ring* series! This was a most interesting and rewarding time as a performing artist.

The conductor was Henry Holt, who knew *The Ring* so well that he was mouthing the words through the entire opera. George London, our director, had been an incredible Wotan in many *Ring* productions until he retired. Ingrid Bjoner sang Brunnhilde. We sang the first week in German and then repeated the entire production the second week in English. I recall it was the first time the entire production was performed in both languages.

The audience was composed of attendees from a number of countries and from around the U.S. Some publicity shots were taken on the Monorail, and one with me in it was published in Newsweek magazine! My performing name back then was Joan Falskow.

SOG Behind the Scenes

Lisa Bergman



Seattle Opera's first *Der Ring des Niebelungen* in 1975 was an exciting time. That year my mother, Helen Bergman, was installed as Seattle Opera Guild's president serving until 1977. The names Wotan, Fafner and Mime became household words. A daily topic at home was the sheer wonderment of experiencing four consecutive operas with a full running time of SEVENTEEN HOURS. We marveled at the clever public relations jargon from Seattle Opera such as "Siegfried for President" and "The Ring's the Thing".

I remember well (just barely out of high school) the electrical charge of entering the Opera House with Glynn and Gio Ross – all smiles – greeting the public. SOG was very much present too, not only as patrons, but on the job with tables in the lobby piled high with custom-designed *Ring* memorabilia – most notably the note cards, as fundraising. On opening night I was escorted by a handsome date, a Lieutenant JG visiting from San Diego, dressed in his whites. My mother gave us an assignment: to stand by one of the lobby tables to manage sales. Within moments, he had completely rearranged all the piles of card boxes with special groupings and expert touches. In response to my surprised look he stated calmly "No big deal. I know a thing or two about merchandising – I run the ship's store." Even the US Navy was saluting Wagner!

But behind the scenes, undistracted by what was happening onstage, SOG had not lost sight of its mission: to support and promote opera in part through financial support of Seattle Opera. As SOG members know well, fundraising doesn't fall from the sky. Enormous events, before-during-and after *The Ring* took place, made possible by hundreds of SOG volunteers – for example:

The annual "Divas and Diamonds" (a luncheon AND a glittering evening event). In 1974 it was held at the Olympic Hotel in the Grand and Spanish Ballrooms with the participation of Laykin's Jewelry and I. Magnin's and hundreds individual patrons. The hard-working team met and exceeded their goal of \$10,000!

The grand opening of the newly redecorated and refurbished "Opera Room" in the Opera House was truly notable. The committee worked with famed architect Roland Terry on designing the room which included bronze beveled mirror paneling covering more than half of the wall surface; wall sconces and a mural painting of Kabuki theatrical forms by Roger Shimomura were just a few of the eye-popping features. The cost was \$15,000 and with Seattle levy dollars and private donations that amount was raised quickly.

These financial feats and more have been the signature of the Seattle Opera Guild that has lived up to its mission since 1956, supporting and promoting opera through creativity, dedication and determination. *Bravo* Seattle Opera Guild!

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

By Ann Milam



"Hobo" cake.
Photo credit:
Ann Milam



Marlene Holbrook.
Photo credit:
Ann Milam

How do SOG members respond to difficult times? We really get creative! Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, last April our Mercer Island Preview group held a successful *La Boheme* fundraiser by Zoom. Back in '08, in the midst of the Great Recession, our Bellini group reacted by throwing a party, "Brother Can You Spare A Dime?" We dressed like bums, covered our tables with brown paper and enjoyed Depression era refreshments— Ritz crackers with Velveta, hobo stew, iceberg lettuce salad, Jello and a hobo cake. Best of all was the lively musical program of Depression era songs by Megan Renae Parker (nee Chenovick) and Mark Chenovick, accompanied by Glenda Williams. We had been impressed by Megan when she performed in the MONC District Competition and awarded her a SOG Training Grant.

Our 35 Bellini members and guests really enjoyed themselves, plus we actually raised some money and made the most of that other hard time in our country's history!



L to R: Megan Renae Parker,
Glenda Williams & Mark Chenovick.
Photo credit: Suzy Wakefield.

Our Magnolia/Queen Anne Preview Group

By Ann Milam

The Magnolia Group began in ~1975 with a handful of energetic members, chaired by immediate past SOG President Leta Autry. It soon grew to about 30 members who met in their homes and listened to tapes to learn more about opera. As the group grew, Seattle Opera provided singers and speakers for their previews. This group has always loved to party and with the Mercer Island group, co-hosted a Russian fundraiser at the old Roycroft Theater (now the Russian Community Center).

The group grew to over 50 members and was renamed Magnolia/Queen Anne (M/QA) in ~2006, meeting first at Jarene and Bertil Lundh's Porcelain Gallery in Magnolia, then in the party room at 111 West Highland Drive hosted by Sy Iffert and Casey Carlson Iffert, and currently in the Cogir of Queen Anne Retirement Community hosted by Florence Rose-Thompson.

Current members have fond memories of their group's events. Florence Rose-Thompson comments, "I've enjoyed the camaraderie among our members, our social events to help young singers and the opportunity to meet interesting new people and introduce them to opera." Frank and Sue Gregory agree, "It's a great opportunity to meet new and very interesting people and to learn the stories and some of the music before we attend an opera. It's really an eye-opening experience to hear exciting young and experienced performers."

The Highland Drive venue was ideal for annual summer fundraisers including "A Classy Event; A Classy View" in 2012 with Corinna Quilliam, Tony Kalil and Glenda Williams. M/QA was eager to help Tony with his studies in the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Program and raised funds in 2012 with "A Tea with Tony Kalil" featuring Tony and Glenda Williams in Ann Milam's Broadmoor home. "Summertime," our *Porgy and Bess* preview/fundraiser in 2018 was held with three Seattle Opera mainstage performers, Cheryse McLeod Lewis, Ibidunni Ojikutu and Dierre Lopez, accompanied by Li-Tan Hsu.

Our M/QA preview group has a distinguished history of fundraising for Seattle Opera and assisting young singers by engaging them to perform in fundraisers. Most of all, the group has cherished memories of joining with friends to enjoy outstanding opera previews and fundraisers!



Summertime" Porgy and Bess performers (L to R): Li-Tan Hsu, Cheryse McLeod Lewis, Ibidunni Ojikutu and Dierre Lopez. Photo credit: Ann Milam



Two of our performers, Dierre Lopez and Cheryse McLeod Lewis, were models for Seattle Opera's production of Porgy and Bess. They were featured all over town, on the sides of busses, lamppost posters, refrigerator magnets and in the opera program!

SEATTLE Opera Guild

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