

# 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*



We in the Seattle Opera Guild are so lucky to have an organization in which to share our love of music. I don't know when I've appreciated music so much as during this last year. Recently, we attended an online memorial service for a dear friend, John Shevlin. He and his wife Carolee were new members of the Guild, having joined last fall. The service was deeply moving and when they played Mozart's Requiem, the effect of the music was profound. It resonated with my feelings of deep sorrow and yet was comforting at the same time. This is truly the power of music, isn't it?

Things are moving right along with the Seattle Opera Guild, and we look forward to being able to meet in person in not too many months. Penny Wade, our intrepid VP of Administration, chairs the Directory Committee with Roberta Lyon and Maria Van Horn. Look forward to receiving an up-to-date printed directory in the near future. We had a fundraiser in lieu of our Holiday Luncheon at the Seattle Tennis Club in early December, and with the creativity of Penny Wade and Maria Van Horn who

purchased a \$100 gift card at Amazon as a prize, netted \$3,000! Every ten dollars of your donation amounted to a chance on winning that gift card, and the money kept coming in even after the winners were announced: Carl and Carol Corbin!

Christine Szabadi chairs the Award of Distinction Committee, as she was the last to receive that award which is presented each year to a member who has given so much to the Guild with their energy, time, focus and skills. Christine is also in charge of our Singers' Development Awards Committee, and is beginning to plan this year's auditions, likely in late summer.

Mary Scott is our secretary of the Board of Directors and takes elucidating minutes, keeping us on track with our various projects. Sally Buckingham continues as our undaunted Treasurer, keeping us up-to-date Development Awards. We hope to donate to Lisa Bergman's NOISE (Northwest Opera in the Schools) Program, in which Lisa and her singers visit and

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## A Tribute to Erich Parce

*Christine Szabadi*

Many of you who attended the highly successful Diamond Jubilee celebration in 2017 will remember how much fun it was and how outstanding the entertainment. It almost didn't happen at all! With a last-minute cancellation by the featured singer, plus difficulties obtaining available tenors, it threatened to fall flat on its face. Then along came our super-hero, Erich Parce to "save the day"! Not only did he perform, but he organized the whole program. We in SOG have known him for many years as performer, teacher and director. He has delighted us all in fundraisers, previews and special events - a true friend of the Guild. Please read on for Erich's story in his own words.

## Seattle Opera: My Good Luck Charm

*Erich Parce*

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine being an opera singer. I didn't see my first opera until my junior year in college when I was at Western Washington University getting a degree in pre-med. My girlfriend, Kaaren Herr, was studying to be an opera singer and took me to see Boito's Mefistofole at Seattle Opera. I was completely stunned the minute that Norman Triegle danced onto the stage, collapsed to the floor, and sang "Ave Signor." I can still feel the impact of his vocal and physical presence in my bones. I was hooked. I came back to college, finished up my pre-med studies and started taking voice lessons.

In my senior year I was able to join the opera workshop at WWU and sing a horrible Metropolitan Opera audition with SO favorite, Archie Drake as the judge. After the audition he told me to "Come back when you grow up, kid." I took this as a challenge

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# My Good Luck

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and returned to Seattle three years later, after having studied with baritone Martial Singher and winning the Western Region Met Opera auditions, moving on to the finals in New York City. Since my parents now lived in the Seattle area, I came to visit and once again was mesmerized by two performances I saw at SO. Sherrill Milnes singing *Don Giovanni* (with piano, due to a Symphony strike) and the amazing Kostas Paskalis and Grace Bumbry in *Macbeth*. I decided to stay and audition for General Director Glynn Ross for the 1980-81 season. The audition went well, and Glynn hired me to sing Valentin in the English series of *Faust* that fall.

Here is where my SO luck began. In those days SO not only had two casts, but two different conductors and stage directors for each show. The English and International casts never worked together, except for the chorus rehearsals. At the opening night of the French performance, I went backstage 10 minutes before curtain to wish the baritone, Charles Long, good luck for the performance. He desperately asked me if I could sing the performance for him, since he had no voice due to a severe allergy attack. I told him that, besides the aria, I only knew the role in English. *C'est la vie!* We called the stage manager in, okayed the change with the conductor (who was not pleased, to say the least), got a costumer to pin his too large costume on me, and I warmed up to enter the stage 10 minutes later singing "*Avant de quitter c'est lieux.*" Everyone on stage was shocked, since I had not met any of the other leads, and they just motioned to me where to go while I sang. Probably the most shocked was Glynn Ross, who was in the audience and had no idea that all this was happening.

Everything went well until the death scene of Valentin. After the sword fight, I fell to the ground downstage right to die. Jeanette Pilou, the Margarite, came onstage and knelt downstage left to where I was supposed to have died. I died, slowly crawling across the front of the stage, since she refused to move. It probably had an unintended very dramatic effect. The performance went well, but I went home feeling less than satisfied, and a little nervous, since Mr. Ross did not come backstage to say anything to me. The next morning, however, I got a call from him saying "Thanks for saving our butt last night. I'll be sending you a check and something else." The check was minimal (which was customary

for Glynn Ross), but the letter also contained contracts for 6 lead and secondary roles in the next two seasons. I moved to Seattle!

A little side story: The first day of rehearsal for *Faust* the Mephistopheles, Archie Drake, kept looking at me inquisitively during our sing through. At the first break he smilingly came up to me and said "You're that kid who sang so badly at the Met auditions a few years ago. Right?" I answered "Yes, I came back when I grew up. Thank you for encouraging me." Archie and I became close friends and ended up singing many memorable performances together.

In 1983 luck intervened again when the new General Director, Speight Jenkins, was in the audience for the *Barber of Seville* performances in which I was lucky enough to be singing the dream baritone role of Figaro. On his first day at work, I was in the SO offices and he saw me in the hall. He said "I saw you in the Barber. Could you come into a rehearsal room right now and sing some *Boheme* for me?" We grabbed pianist/conductor Roger Cantrell and sang through all of Schaunard's role. He hired me on the spot. This led to a wonderful 15 years of performing with Speight and company.

A highlight of 1985 was the SO debut of Carol Vaness in Massenet's *Manon*. With Manuel Rosenthal at the helm and Met favorite Nico Castel in the cast, excitement for the production was electric. Singing the role of Manon's brother Lescaut, I was challenged to compete with this great cast. As my SO luck would have it, before the final performance, conductor Rosenthal came to my dressing room and asked if I would be interested in singing Lescaut in some of the performances of the new Ponelle production of *Manon* at the Met the next season. After three seconds of thought, I said "With pleasure Maestro! Thank you." Performing this role at the Met catapulted my career to a whole new level.

After almost 20 years with SO, I knew that I was getting older. With Seattle favorite Vinson Cole in the title role, I played the older husband, Albert in *Werther*. Later that year, I sang in probably the most beautiful show of my career; Daniel Catan's *Florenca en los Amazonas* was truly magical! The stunning sets, costumes and dancing were only surpassed by the beautiful and powerful music. I will never feel as powerful as I did flying (yes, literally flying) across the stage to embrace Sherrie Greenawald in my 40 foot wings to end the opera. The most difficult part of the production was the countless hours I had to spend in the gym getting ready to inhabit my acrobatic, skimpily clothed character.

I came to a fitting full circle 20 years later with once again singing Valentin in *Faust* in the fall of 1998. On stage again with colleagues and friends Vinson Cole, Cynthia Hamon and Greer Grimsley we rocked the new opera house. With great love and gratitude, I say thank you to SO for giving me the best music, the best friends and some of the most exciting moments of my life!

From the very beginning of my time living and singing in Seattle, The Seattle Opera Guild was also a part of my musical life. As a recipient of their scholarships, I was more easily able to pay for weekly lessons and coaching with the top coaches in Seattle and New York. I also sang numerous opera previews for the shows that I was not directly involved in. These previews were a wonderful part of not only learning new roles, but bringing opera to the living rooms of the Seattle public. It was so exciting to sing grand opera up close and personal. People were blown away by the emotional power of the human voice. Today I am thankful to the SOG for helping fund lessons for many of my students and giving them a chance to perform at the opera previews, just as I did many years ago.



Erich Parce and Carol Vaness in 1985 SO production of *Manon*.  
Photo provided by Erich Parce



## Interview with Brenna Corner, Director of *Don Giovanni* Judi Kalitzki

Asked why she chose to focus her directing career on opera, Canadian Brenna Corner, who directed Seattle Opera's recent production of *Don Giovanni*, answered: "Because it's such a collaborative art form! The singers aren't alone; the orchestra is inspiring the

sub-text. And every moment is heightened, because so many people are creating that moment."

With a perspective like that, it must have been awfully challenging for Corner to work her directorial magic during a pandemic, I guessed. But in fact, she did travel to Seattle for eleven days of intensive rehearsals, working closely with the conductor, the cast, the video director, and all the other contributors to the production. And Corner said that Seattle Opera's approach to safety was amazing. "They'd thought of everything!" She really wanted to give kudos to SO for making everyone feel so safe.

However, to say Corner had already spent a lot of time thinking about directing *Don Giovanni* before she came to Seattle is really an understatement. This production had begun *three and half years earlier* as a co-production with Glimmerglass. Then in late August of 2020, SO started talking with Corner about directing the opera as a film. That's when she was inspired by the 1984 film of Hamlet starring Richard Burton. It was filmed in black and white, with minimal set and costumes, stripping away the layers of hundreds of years of convention to focus on the basic human problems and emotions the play presents. Corner said that idea really appealed to her, since she, too, wanted to focus on the complex human emotions of the central characters, particularly the women, of *Don Giovanni*.

I asked Corner what it was like to produce a filmed version of an opera, versus a staged production. "There definitely was a

learning curve," she said. "In film you tell the story through the angles" (with which the camera captures the actor—or in this case, the singer). She and video director Ken Christensen had already spoken frequently before they had the chance to collaborate in Seattle, although even then, Corner and Christensen couldn't be in the same room during rehearsals, due to COVID restrictions. Instead they sent *lots* of notes back and forth. Corner praised Christensen as "incredibly collaborative," saying she learned so much from him. He'd ask, "Why do you want this shot?" And after she explained her thinking, he'd say, "There's a better shot to accomplish what you want emotionally."

An interesting insight I learned from Corner is that it's much easier to lip synch in Italian than English! Because the cast recorded their singing in Tagney Jones Hall before they began filming the production on the stage of McCaw Hall, the sound track of the film had to synch the recording of the music with the way the cast was singing during their filmed performances. Italian is apparently much easier to fudge a little bit when synching lip movements, since it has fewer consonants than English or German, for example.

As a woman in a traditionally male dominated field, has Corner's gender created any difficulties with singers, conductors, or any of the other professionals who help create opera? Corner's answer was nuanced. First, she expressed an enormous gratitude to those women who preceded her in the field. "They definitely made it easier for me, no question." That said, Corner admitted she's had some experiences that were harder "because I wasn't a man." Nevertheless, the industry is moving toward better equality. And having the experience of directing *Don Giovanni* with a female conductor was amazing, Corner said. Having that "double female lens" helped to realize her goal for this production: to focus on Donna Elvira, Donna Anna and Zerlina not as victims but rather as women with agency, the true heroines of the opera.

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perform at many elementary schools around the state. One of the Guild's primary missions is to "promote opera education for all age groups to ensure future opera audiences." For many years we have also donated to the Metropolitan Opera National Council/Northwest (MONC/NW). John Marzano, Seattle, was our regional winner this year and will compete for more prizes at the Metropolitan Opera in NYC this spring.

Judi Kalitzki is our *L'Aria* newsletter editor, and has produced two exquisite issues for September, 2020 (featuring SOG's early history) and January, 2021. We are so fortunate to have her remarkable expertise as editor. We learn much from each issue— if you have ideas for our newsletter, please contact Judi ([judikalitzki@aol.com](mailto:judikalitzki@aol.com)).

Our past president, Gayle Charlesworth, has picked up the role of Historian, along with her role of VP of Membership. We also so appreciate the contributions of Danielle Gaines and Patricia Pavia during our monthly board meetings.

Seattle Opera's online production of *Flight* will have closed by the time you read this, but I hope you had the chance to view it online. Two previous winners of our Singers' Development Awards had roles: Sarah Larsen and Margaret Gawrysiak. You might remember Sarah and Margaret from *The Consul* in 2014, about people trying to get through interminable office red tape to get to America. (It was a compelling opera.) Andrew Stenson also performed in *Flight*—SOG helped him with his training when he was a member of SO's Young Artists Program in 2010-2012.

We look forward to working closely with Seattle Opera's Christina Schepplmann, General Director, Allison Rabbitt, Development Director, and Alejandra Valarino Boyer, Director of Programs and Partnerships, as they proceed with SO productions. Keep enjoying your music. It helps us enormously to get through this difficult period and look to better times!



# We Get by With a Lot of Help from Our Friends

Allison Rabbitt, Director of Development for Seattle Opera

There is so much mystery around Development. Is it because we ask for money? Or because our work is the result of building many one-on-one relationships over time? Or that there are multitudes of reasons people are inspired to give – and it is our job to discover them? You will likely get just as many answers as people you ask.

In fact, though, because the Seattle Opera Guild is all about supporting opera and building community, you already know very well what Development work is about: inspiring joy, building relationships, and partnering to achieve goals. Raising money is the result of matching care and passion with need... and, yes, asking for money is one aspect of it, but certainly not the biggest.

It's such a joy to work at SO and welcome you all to an experience that opens our minds and lifts our spirits. We love bringing you closer to artists and behind the scenes work, with more people involved off stage than on-stage. All of this joy generation and connection building is dependent on SO's delivering its mission, which we define as live, in-person performances and programs. COVID19, of course, changed everything.

Just a week before the first 'Stay Home' order was issued on March 23, 2020, we hosted the Big Opera Party on the McCaw Hall stage with 400 people saying "Yes!" to opera by supporting and celebrating amidst the set of Charlie Parker's *Yardbird*. It was SO's biggest fundraising event in years – we were euphoric. Then, almost overnight, there was silence. We moved into crisis planning. Singing and gathering were deemed dangerous, information on how to stay safe changed constantly. We were one of the lucky organizations to complete our fundraising event before a season of cancellations. The proceeds of that event created a cushion for the revenue lost on *Yardbird* ticket sales and it was also one of the last

large gatherings held in Seattle. The pandemic attacked the very core of our work: gathering people and presenting live performances.

Thinking back to those weeks last spring – so much was unknown and there was a mountain of difficult decisions to be made. How long could our resources last? What about staff? Artists? How could we keep operations going so that we could launch the 2020/21 season? Could we present *La Boheme* in May? How could we still keep people connected? It helped that everyone was in the same storm. Our boats might look different, but we were all home, isolated, and with the same great need to connect with our community.

Our team stayed grounded with a few simple rules and a mantra: stay safe, stay connected, simplify, and keep resources flowing. Development work is a team sport and relationships are dynamic. To stay safe, we agreed to no in-person visits with patrons or colleagues for 6-8 weeks (that was extended!) To stay connected we committed to reaching out to as many of our patrons as possible through phone, email, or handwritten notes. One of our team mantras has long been to "Keep resources flowing." Resources could mean: time, energy, money, or all three! The mantra helps us to remove barriers when we are stuck in our individual work, it fosters collaboration and creative problem solving. The resilience of the human spirit!

Staying creative while coping with so much loss required us to focus on what we could control. Our team changed in size and as the pandemic dragged on, we continued to adjust. Remote work touched every aspect of our team: how would we check the mail and process gifts? How could we print hundreds of documents every week using our at-home printers? Every procedure and process needed to be revised or recreated. Donor benefits, primarily events-based and dependent on being in-person, all moved onto Zoom and YouTube. We worked together, gave each other grace, and tried to keep our sense of humor amidst it all.

As usual, artists kept everything interesting. Video meetings created an intimacy with our SO community that will long be treasured. Each online event was full of surprises. Two experiences that stand out were when an artist joined our call in their pajamas and another artist who hosted an outdoor fireside chat with us in the dark!

The only thing a Development professional can control is activity. This means reaching out, checking in, and when the timing is appropriate – "the ask." Throughout this unprecedented period, the SO has yet to be accused of not asking for support! And this year, our community has said "Yes!" to the innovation of our artists and a future where we again gather to be moved by beautiful music and stories.



Allison and her staff on a Zoom call. Photo provided by Allison Rabbitt

# New Date for 2021 Annual Meeting

**Maria Van Horn, VP Events**

In order to ensure all our members have a chance to be vaccinated before we gather together, the Annual Meeting has been moved to Thursday, August 12, at the Seattle Yacht Club. Mark your calendars now as it promises to be an extra special meeting as we celebrate post-quarantine! More details will be mailed out closer to the event.



# Declutter!

**Gayle Charlesworth, SOG Historian**

Many of us are doing just that while staying at home, or perhaps getting ready for a move to smaller premises. SOG will be happy to take those old items you have been holding on to such as opera programs, directories, invitations, SOG newsletters, etc. If you can get them to my house, that would be super! If not, please call and arrange a transfer.

Our former archivist, Bob Milnor, did a good job, and we will miss him on so many levels, but the work continues. We have a history of over 60 years to keep!

## Seattle Opera at Lowell Elementary School

**Patricia Pavia**



Seattle Opera has developed an in-school program called Opera Time to bring opera to students. Young singers introduce the opera experience through story telling. The students sing, dance, and help create an opera based on a story suggested by the teaching artist. The Opera describes it this way: “Read together and

sing together! This musical storytelling program, delivered by a teaching artist, fosters literacy in and through the arts.”

As an Opera loving grandmother of twins at Lowell Elementary in Seattle, I decided after reading about this program to gift it to their first-grade class. Those students enjoyed it so much I also gifted it to their second-grade class. They had four sessions over the course of the year. The thank you notes you see in this picture are from the second-graders.



## L’Aria Contributions From Members Heartily Encouraged

**Judi Kalitzki**

As the editor of *L’Aria* for the past year, it’s been wonderful to get article ideas from members of the Guild. Even better has been to get articles written by Guild members themselves. I’ve encouraged members to send me a description of a Seattle Opera or Seattle Opera Guild event that was particularly memorable. In the June issue, for example, I got Joan Herald’s recollection of singing one of the Valkyries in SO’s very first complete *Ring* cycle, and Lisa Bergman’s memories of how hard her mother worked on raising funds for that first *Ring* when she was president of the Guild. Having received these two memories, I added a third: my own memories of attending that first *Ring* cycle my first year after moving to Seattle.

So what’s your most memorable SO or SOG moment? Write it up (no particular length requirements: it can be a single paragraph or a whole page), and send it to me at [judikalitzki@aol.com](mailto:judikalitzki@aol.com)



And thank you for continuing to be a vital part of the Seattle Opera Guild as we all wait to get back together again in person.

# SEATTLE Opera Guild

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## *Find SOG Online!*

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### **Editorial Staff:**

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*Photographs* should include subjects' names & name of the photographer.

**Editorial Policy:** Editorial changes to submitted articles, other than correction of grammatical errors, will be made after consultation with the contributor.

## **SOG Officers**

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