

L'Arria

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SEATTLE
Opera Guild

January 2022 • Volume 70 • Issue 1

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



SOG is at an exciting pivot point, faced with both challenges and opportunities. We've taken advantage of the COVID-enforced lull in our activities to revise our bylaws. Roberta Lyon and Judi Kalitzki led the effort, a complicated job as we had to rethink our priorities. We looked closely at the Preview groups and decided to keep them intact, although they no longer will have to have their own slate of officers. Each group may be represented by a chairperson on our Board of Directors, and each will have a vote in our Board meetings. We have simplified the bylaws to be consistent with where the Guild is now. The Board approved these bylaws revisions, and those attending the annual meeting approved that decision.

We have continued our annual luncheons, with over 40 attending our Summer Board Meeting and Luncheon on June 11, 2022, and 65 attended our annual Holiday Luncheon in December of 2021. We will continue to offer opera previews, with one scheduled for *Elixir of Love* on Sunday, July 24, at 3 PM at Trilogy of Redmond.

The most innovative idea to help shape our future as a Guild is our new survey, chaired and sent out to you via post, email and the website by Board Officer at Large Brenna Pink Pampena. We are very honored to have Brenna on our Board, with her creativity and ability to manage current technology. She is our Facebook editor as well.

Gayle Charlesworth and Zoe Erickson have sent out recent reminders to renew your membership, so I hope many of you will renew.

It is an honor to be your President for a third year, as we pivot into our future. Thanks so much for your support, and we look forward to seeing you again and again!

Seattle Opera Guild's Liaison to Seattle Opera Tells His Story

Alex Minami

Working in the opera industry means that I am among the fortunate few whose job also happens to be my main hobby. I have been in my position of Community Engagement Manager for over three years now, and during that time, my admiration and awe for this fascinating and complex industry has only deepened.

My personal background, prior work, and education didn't necessarily set me on a course toward opera. I grew up on O'ahu in a family for whom the term "music" exclusively meant Hawaiian music. It was only in school that I discovered classical music and opera, and it was thanks to my school's partnership with Hawai'i Opera Theatre that I was exposed to this art form for the first time.

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Let There be Music! Let There be Song! Let There be Opera!!

Christine Szabadi

There is nothing quite like the human voice singing. It is the most personal and unique of all instruments. With infinite timbres, and seemingly from out of nowhere, emerge the most glorious sounds. Those who sing are blessed and those who listen are blessed as the darkness of our times melts away and we experience pure joy.

On Tuesday, May 24, 2022 ten singers, three judges, an accompanist and about 35 audience members shared such an experience at the Singers' Development Award auditions in the Tagney-Jones Hall at the Opera Center. So uplifting were the marvelous performances of all the singers that in the end it really didn't matter that there were delays, largely due to Covid protocol.

It always amazes me how talented and professional these young singers are. One of our contestants was only 19, thrilled to be participating, and bringing her own "fan club!" As always, accompanist David McDade worked his magic.

After carefully deliberating, the judges, Jennifer Krikawa, James Brown and Charles Robert Stephens, announced the winners as follows:

- First Place..... **Michaella Cipriani**, soprano
- Second Place **Hugh Davis**, baritone
- Third Place **Heidi Vanderford**, mezzo-soprano
- Suzy and Jay Wakefield,
Encouragement Award **Stacey Mastrian**, soprano
- Ernesto Alorda
Encouragement Award **Elizabeth Feeney**, mezzo-soprano

We wish all the contestants well in their chosen careers as we follow their dreams with them, and listen to their progress.



The winners, left to right: Elizabeth Feeney, Stacey Mastrian, Heidi Vanderford, Michaella Cipriani, Hugh Davis

Photos: Judi Kalitzki



Judges, left to right:
James Brown,
Jennifer Krikawa,
Charles Robert Stephens

Results of SOG's Survey

Brenna Pink Pampena

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our Spring 2022 Member Survey. We received responses from more than 25% of our members. There is overwhelming support of the Opera Guild's mission to support Seattle Opera, fund vocal scholarships, promote opera education, and to assure future opera audiences. Everyone who answered selected that they strongly agree or agree with the Guild's mission. We are proud that we are aligned with our membership in our mission and purpose.

Of great interest to the board was our membership's perspective on the future of the Guild. Membership was most frequently selected as the critical issue facing SOG today. Your board agrees with you! Many have emphasized the need for a more diverse membership, particularly younger members. The board feels the same way and recruiting new and diverse members will be a major emphasis for the next year.

Our survey results let us know that Opera Previews are important to most of our members. There was no consensus regarding the future of individual groups, whether we should consolidate in some way or keep the groups as they are. At our Annual Meeting our members voted to remove the fundraising component of Preview Groups, which was a significant change. At this time, the Guild will continue to plan Previews for all members to come together to enjoy the music and take advantage of the opportunity to meet and mingle with other opera lovers.

We are excited to know that our members are open to new and different events. Opera in the park is something nearly everyone selected as an event of interest to them. Opera social hours, parties, and opera cruises also piqued our members' interest! Our VP of Events, Patricia Pavia, is eager to plan some fun and different activities. Keep an eye out for future announcements.

Your input is critical to the future of the Guild. We are so pleased that nearly everyone indicated they would be renewing their membership. Your continued support means the world to us. We are inspired by the support and feedback. Thank you!

Liaison *continued from page 1*

Despite its foreignness, there was something that felt familiar about opera to me. Hawaiians are a people with music in their blood, and the idea of telling stories through mele and oli (songs and chants) couldn't have been more natural. In fact, musical storytelling may have been more important in Hawaiian culture than Western culture. In the absence of written language, songs and chants were the primary means through which cultural knowledge was passed down through the generations.

I was able to feed my growing interest in opera when I came to the University of Washington. My studies weren't particularly music-focused—I studied political science, German, and Middle East Studies—but I took advantage of the discounted student tickets to attend nearly every production that Seattle Opera put on. My German language studies also took me abroad to Vienna, where I bought standing room tickets to as many performances as I could at the Vienna State Opera and Volksoper Wien, going as often as three times a week.

After graduating, I continued to attend Seattle Opera productions as a BRAVO! member (our club for patrons aged 21–39) while I worked in the field of international education. I worked as a program administrator in a language and study abroad program for underserved high school students in Seattle and Highline, and I worked with foreign exchange students from Germany and Austria. But opera remained a passion of mine throughout this time, and when the opportunity arose to join the team at Seattle Opera, I jumped on it.

As Community Engagement Manager, my responsibilities include overseeing our learning programs for adults and fostering our partnerships with community organizations. This means that the work I do is tied directly to Seattle Opera's mission of "drawing the community together" to "create life-enhancing experiences that speak deeply to people's hearts and minds." My programs aim to broaden the impact of the art form beyond the stage, to have it resonate in our contemporary lives and place it in the service of good work being done in our community.

The goal of our adult learning programs is to make opera more accessible to newcomers, as well as to enrich the experience of longtime operagoers. Importantly, we offer these programs either for free or for a sliding fee, meaning that participants can adjust the fee according to what they can afford. Our programs include our pre-performance lectures and post-show talkbacks that take place before and after every performance in McCaw Hall. We also host several free Opera Talks throughout the year, which allow participants to gain in-depth insight into the art form, and during the pandemic, we launched a new series of opera classes. The course topics have included "Opera 101," "Modern History through the Opera Lens," "Opera in the 20th and 21st Centuries," and "Opera and Literature." We even offered a libretto-writing workshop, in which the participants wrote aria texts, a composer

set them to music, and a professional singer performed them.

Some of our formal, ongoing community programs include our Community Conversation series, which connects operatic themes to important current issues affecting our communities. Most recently, the topic was about the recovery of the arts community after the pandemic, and previous conversations included Black representation in opera, and the role of the conductor in the work of furthering progress on racial equity within the industry.

Another ongoing community program is our Veterans Choir, which is entering its third year. The choir grew out of a partnership with Path with Art, which began during our 2019 production of *The Falling and the Rising*. In addition to learning the ins and outs of vocal technique from a professional opera singer, the participants have been able to write a gorgeous choral piece about perseverance, with the guidance of a poetry teaching artist and a composer, and the U.S. Army Soldiers' Chorus even performed and recorded it for them. Many of the Veterans Choir participants are recovering from homelessness, addiction, or other trauma, and the choir has been an important way for them to stay connected with a community during the pandemic.

Over the past year, we have also offered a number of outdoor serenades to bring some joy and comfort to our neighbors most affected by social isolation. We performed for places like women's shelters, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing locations, low-income retirement communities, and the Seattle Vet Center. There are any number of additional community projects we've done, like our supply drives for Plymouth Housing and our guest performances at local community events.

Underpinning all of our work is our focus on racial equity, meaning that we are committed to having our art form reflect, celebrate, and serve the diverse communities of the Pacific Northwest. In our education programs, this means that we teach opera in a way that champions the art's value while also acknowledging its shortcomings—its historical (and contemporary) lack of diversity; its appropriation and misrepresentation of cultures beyond Europe; its tokenization of artists of color; and its self-cultivated environment of elitism and exclusivity. Meanwhile, in our community engagement work, we aim to lift up the important work being done by individuals, artists, and partner organizations that advance the wellbeing of communities of color.

Although I came into this industry through a circuitous route, and I happened to enter it at the cusp of the most tumultuous period in its recent history, I am so grateful that fate decided to bring me here. In my position, I get to be a direct witness to the real difference opera can make in people's lives, and I hope that my work contributes in some small way to opera's continued impact for many years to come.

Editor's Note: The author of this article, Alex Minami, is a valuable ally and friend of the Seattle Opera Guild. He was essential in helping our annual Singers' Development Award final auditions happen virtually during the first year of the pandemic; without Alex, SOG surely would not have been able to hold that event. Whenever I have a need to contact someone on the Seattle Opera staff, Alex has been there to smooth the way. Those of us who put on events or work on communication for the Guild know Alex is always ready and able to help.

2022 Annual Luncheon and Meeting

Judi Kalitzki

On a somewhat cool but blessedly dry day (not a given after the drenching Seattle had been getting that week!), members of the SOG joined together on Saturday, June 11 at the Seattle Yacht Club for its annual meeting and luncheon, sponsored by Pam Johnson (thank you, Pam!).



Judi Kalitzki, Patricia Pavia, Loveday Conquest

After all the enforced isolation of the last couple of years, it was great to see one another in person. In addition to the 40 members and their guests, we were lucky to have Maryanne Tagney, Chair of SO's Board of Directors, Allison Rabbitt, SO's Director of Development, and Alex Minami, SO's Community Engagement Manager, join us for the lunch and meeting.

Patricia Pavia, VP of Special Events, was our gracious Master of Ceremonies. Unfortunately, SOG President Suzy Wakefield had to miss the occasion, having contracted Covid after a recent trip to Scotland and Iceland. In her place, Judi Kalitzki, outgoing VP of Communications, handled the business meeting. The two main items of business were approving the slate of officers for the 2022-2023 Board of Directors, and accepting the Board's approval of the revisions to the Bylaws. Both passed with no objections.



Zoe Erickson and Jonathan Gerson



Sally Buckingham, Mila Vladi, Alex Minami

Brenna Pink Pampena, who had spearheaded creating and distributing a survey to all SOG members, passed out copies of the survey so those who had not already sent it in could fill it out right then and there. The feedback collected from the survey will be invaluable in giving the new Board insight into the priorities and direction SOG members wish the organization to take.

Sadly, our entertainment by three of the previous year's winners of the Singers' Development Awards auditions had to be cancelled, as two of the three had COVID. Their program promised to be amazing, and I'm sure we'll be hearing them at a future SOG event, perhaps at our December Holiday Luncheon.

The Award of Distinction was presented to Suzy Wakefield. The presenter, Sally Buckingham, praised Suzy's dedication to the Guild, her generosity in supporting it, and all the enthusiasm and hard work Suzy has put into keeping the Guild going during the last two years. Suzy will be continuing as President of the Board for one more year.



Maryanne Tagney, Patricia Pavia

Other officers for the 2022-2023 year are as follow:

- President..... Suzy Mygatt Wakefield
- VP Membership Zoe Erickson
- Treasurer Sally Buckingham
- VP Communications Katie McCormick
- VP Administration..... Gayle Charlesworth
- VP Education Jonathan Gerson
- VP Special Events Patricia Pavia
- Secretary Mary Scott
- SOG Trustee:..... Brenna Pink Pampena
- SOG Trustee:..... Stew Law



Gale Kessler, Martha Galvin, Ruthie Kallender, Gayle Charlesworth

The Flourishing Career of Cheryse McLeod Lewis

Judi Kalitzki

What a privilege it was for Seattle Opera audiences in February and March of 2022 to attend the West Coast premiere of the award-winning opera *Blue*. And members of the Seattle Opera Guild got to experience the thrilling experience of seeing a former first-place winner of our Singers' Development Awards appear in a significant role in this timely and heart-breaking new opera.

Mezzo-soprano Cheryse McLeod Lewis was the first-place winner of our competition in 2015. At that time she was already a member of Seattle Opera's chorus, and had appeared as Bess in the first National Broadway Tour of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.

She has also appeared with a number of regional opera houses, singing such roles as Carmen, Rosina in *Barber of Seville*, and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. In addition to her operatic roles, Cheryse has been busy with concerts and recitals, including *Then Sings My Soul: Songs & Spirituals* from the American Experience. Cheryse's first solo role in a Seattle Opera production was as Annie in 2018's *Porgy and Bess*.

2022 has been a breakout year for Cheryse's career, with important roles in two new operas. In *Blue* Cheryse is one of Mother's girlfriends, who visit Harlem to rejoice in the news that their good friend is expecting a baby. Their joy, however, quickly turns to concern when they learn Mother is carrying a son. In a moving and disturbing trio, the girlfriends lament that Black boys can never be safe in today's America, and mothers of Black boys cannot rest easy so long as their sons are in danger of being harmed by a society that always suspects the worst of Black boys and men. When the worst does happen in Act II, when the now-sixteen-year-old son is shot and killed by a police officer at a protest, the girlfriends return to Harlem to lament his fate and support their friend at the son's funeral.

Every scene in this opera wrenches the heart, and the girlfriends' roles as observers of and commenters on the action act as important stand-ins for those in the audience. What an amazing opportunity for Cheryse to participate in *Blue*'s first production not only in Seattle but on the West Coast.

And yet her brilliant year was just beginning! Because in May and June of 2022, at the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, SC, Cheryse premiered the role of Omar's mother, Fatima, in the world premiere of *Omar*, by composers Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels. A review in the Post and Courier had this to say: "As Omar's mother, the captivating mezzo-soprano Cheryse McLeod Lewis is a majestic, apparitional ancestor, guiding Omar through dark days with a voice that embraces the entire theater in its maternal warmth and wisdom."

Since Cheryse calls Seattle home, we in the SOG can undoubtedly look forward to more roles and impressive performances with Seattle Opera and other operatic and musical venues in the Puget Sound area. Congratulations, Cheryse!



Cheryse as Annie in SO's *Porgy and Bess*
Photographer Philip Newton



Ibidunni Ojikutu
(SOG award winner)
as Strawberry Woman
and Cheryse as Annie
in *Porgy and Bess*.

SEATTLE Opera Guild

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

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VP EducJonathan Gerson
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Secretary Mary Scott
Officer at Large.....
Trustee.....Brenna Pink Pampena
Trustee..... Stew Law

SAVE THE DATE!

Summer preview of
Elixir of Love

July 24, 2022 3:00 PM

Trilogy of Redmond