

L'Arria

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SEATTLE
Opera Guild

January 2023 • Volume 72 • 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.

Outgoing President's Message

Suzy Mygatt Wakefield

Greetings from your outgoing President! I am thrilled that Marilyn Leck, former Guild President from 1999-2000, has volunteered to serve as the Interim Guild President from January 1-June 30, 2023.

Patricia Pavia led a search committee that included Marilyn Leck, Florence Rose Thompson, Stew Law, and Emily Mattson, who recruited a full Interim Board to serve from January 1-June 30, 2023. Several Interim Board members have already served on the outgoing board, and are willing to continue, some in new positions. There are also members new to the Guild who wanted to serve on the Board. Bringing in new members to the Guild is critical to our survival!

My focus for the past two and a half years has been to provide service to each and every member who has paid at least \$60 to join the Guild for one year. I have worked hard to make that happen.

We signed a contract with Josh DeLacy, our webmaster, in April 2021 to redesign our website: www.seattleoperaguild.org. Josh brought the new website online on the Fourth of July! Our website incorporated our updated database, which was being set up that spring by Roberta Lyon. Roberta also developed our new 2021-2022 Membership Directory.

The Membership Directory provided the foundation to create our mailing lists for our special events, which began with the

Annual Summer Business Meeting and Luncheon at the Seattle Yacht Club on Thursday, August 12, 2021. It was 95 degrees that day, but 50 members and guests joined us at the Seattle Yacht Club for the luncheon outdoors under an awning along the beautiful Seattle Ship Canal. We enjoyed performances by two our outstanding SDA award winners.

Our next event was the October 10, 2021 preview of *La bohème* performed at Cogir of Queen Anne. Christine

Szabadi, our VP of Education, selected the pianist and singers--winners from our SDA auditions. Thirty-eight attended that event (only 40 were allowed as it was during COVID). There were many positive comments about this first preview event since the COVID pandemic began.

Our next large event was our Annual Holiday Luncheon on December 9, 2021 at the Seattle Tennis Club, co-chaired by Patricia Pavia and Suzy, and sponsored by Mark Metcalf. Our singers were SDA award winners (Grace Skinner and Ivy Zhou), accompanied by pianist Elisabeth Ellis. We missed the outbreak of the Omicron variant by one week!

On June 11, 2022, we held our Annual Business Meeting and Luncheon at the Seattle Yacht Club, sponsored by member Pam Johnson. Suzy had contracted Covid, so Judi Kalitzki ran the business meeting, and the newly revised bylaws were approved by the membership. About 40 attended, but sadly the scheduled music had to be cancelled due to COVID.

On Sunday, July 24, Guild members were invited to join the Musical Notes Club at Trilogy of Redmond Ridge to see a preview of Donizetti's *Elixir of Love*, performed by Glenda Williams, pianist, Rob McPherson, tenor (the "Drunken Sailor" for Seattle Opera), Glenn Guhr, baritone, and Ksenia Popova, soprano. About 50 attended in all, including 17 Guild members.

Patricia Pavia organized our first-ever Summer Opera Party, again at Cogir, on Saturday afternoon, August 20. Fifty-five members and guests attended. After the singing, the guests convened on the Roof Terrace at Cogir to enjoy their appetizers and cocktails. The temperature was in the 80s and we could see the Space Needle at this exquisite afternoon event. Gail Halpern won five tickets to the SO production of *La Traviata* in a drawing!

On Saturday, October 8, the Seattle Opera Guild presented a preview of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, again at Cogir of Queen Anne, sponsored by Florence Rose Thompson. Thirty members and guests attended the musical performance, coordinated by Glenda Williams, pianist and narrator, with Charles Robert Stephens, baritone, Corinna Quilliam, soprano, and Rob McPherson, tenor. Again, we convened on the Rooftop Terrace for appetizers, cocktails and wine.



Photo by Jay Wakefield

Marilyn Leck & Suzy Mygatt Wakefield.

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New SOG Interim Board President's Message



Marilyn Leck

We are a 66-year-old organization (founded in 1956, incorporated in 1962): 66 years of a continuum of volunteers. We've shared a relationship with Seattle Opera for its fifty-eight years. Both organizations have suffered from Covid exhaustion.

As I understand, a few months ago, our Seattle Opera Guild (SOG) Board of Directors (BOD), in their collective wisdom, conducted a consensus board meeting called by President Suzy Wakefield and facilitated by Judi Kalitzki, to consider the future of our organization and how to proceed with three BOD officer vacancies occurring as of December 31, 2022.

The Guild's value to the greater community was clear during this meeting: our opera previews, our name recognition, our singer development auditions and awards, our newsletter *L'Aria*, and our annual grants to Northwest Opera In The Schools, Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and Seattle Opera. Our members also speak volumes with their effort to attend our well-planned Annual Meetings and Holiday Luncheons, our all-Guild previews and other special events.

The consensus reached at this meeting was that SOG should continue and that a Search Committee be formed to fill the three BOD officer vacancies. I was approached, much to my surprise, by the Search Committee and asked to fill a BOD vacancy to shepherd the Seattle Opera Guild to continue our great work and help usher in the 2023-2024 BOD on July 1, 2023. I felt honored to be considered. Thank you to the Search Committee members, Patricia Pavia, Stew Law, Florence RoseThompson and Emily Mattson, for this extraordinary effort!

The motion filling the three vacancies was approved by the SOG BOD on December 1, 2022, and presented to the SOG membership during our Holiday Luncheon on December 15, 2022. On behalf of all our SOG members, I want to thank the following BOD officers departing and those accepting the responsibilities to fill these vacancies as of January 1, 2023.

Emily Bennett has accepted the position of BOD Secretary, replacing Mary Scott who has recorded SOG's pandemic survival. Stuart Sechrest has accepted the position of BOD Treasurer, replacing Sally Buckingham who kept us solvent throughout the Covid lockdown. Frank Gregory has accepted the position of VP of Communication and Marketing to fill the vacancy since Judi Kalitzki stepped down in June 2022 to concentrate on editing SOG's newsletter *L'Aria*. I have accepted the position of BOD President, replacing Suzy Wakefield who hit a grand slam juggling balls to hold the Guild together during three years of unknowns.

I look forward to where we go from here!

Outgoing President

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The last event was our Annual Holiday Luncheon, again at the Seattle Tennis Club on December 15. Sixty-nine attended this luncheon, enjoying their friends at their preview group tables and the festive holiday music performed by Lisa Bergman, narrator and pianist, Hugh Davis, baritone, Stacey Mastrian, soprano, and Heidi Vanderford, mezzo soprano, all winners of our 2022 Singers' Development Awards.

Florence Rose Thompson was honored for her 21 years of service to the Guild. Christina Scheppelmann, General Director of Seattle Opera, attended and brought three staff members who were interspersed with Guild members at the preview group tables so Guild members could get to know them. Maryanne Tagney, Chair of the Seattle Opera Board of Directors, also attended. Our outgoing Board members were honored and the new Interim Board members were introduced.

After 60 years, remarkably the Guild is still going strong, due to the dedication and commitment of many Guild members and friends, not just those who serve on the Board. I thank you for showing up at these events, as that has made all the difference in keeping the Seattle Opera Guild strong, visible and relevant. It has been an honor to have served as your President.

Special thanks go to my Board members who "kept the faith" in the viability of the Guild: Sally Buckingham, Treasurer; Patricia Pavia, VP of Special Events; Mary Scott, Secretary; Emily Bennett, Chair of Vivace; Florence Rose Thompson, Chair of Magnolia-Queen Anne; Frank Gregory, Database Manager; Judi Kalitzki, VP of Communication and *L'Aria* editor; Christine Szabadi and Jonathan Gerson, VP of Education; Zoe Erickson, VP of Membership; Stew Law, Trustee; Brenna Pink Pampena, Trustee, and Gayle Charlesworth, Past President 2017-2020 and VP of Administration. I couldn't have done it without you!

Save the Date

Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition – Northwest Region Auditions

**Sunday, February 26, 2023
1:00 PM**

**Benaroya/Nordstrom
Recital Hall**

\$48 general admission/
\$42.50 seniors/\$13 under 21

Benaroya Box Office
206-215-4747

or tickets@
seattlesymphony.org

Questions? Email
metoperanorthwest@gmail.com

2022 Holiday Luncheon

Gayle Charlesworth

How sweet it was to return to a familiar venue with friends for our annual luncheon! On December 15th, 65 members and guests gathered at the sumptuously decorated Seattle Tennis Club to conduct SOG business, greet friends and honor other members.

Guests from the Seattle Opera were Christina Scheppelmann, Dennis Robinson Jr., Alex Lokela Minami, Shannon Rolbiecki and Maryanne Tagney.

Out-going President Suzy Mygatt Wakefield presented a well-deserved award to Florence Rose Thompson for 21 years of service. Florence is the reason I joined the Board of Directors and is often consulted for advice. One of the treasures of our Guild is having long-standing members alongside newer ones.

Following a delicious lunch, Lisa Bergman gave us an update on N.O.I.S.E., a program Lisa directs that the Guild has proudly supported each year to bring live opera to elementary schools. Then the audience was treated to a delightful program presented by Lisa Bergman, piano; Hugh Davis, baritone; Stacey Mastrian, soprano; and Heidi Vanderford, mezzo. They gave us a lovely blend of voices and masterful performances. Highlights included a vivid rendition of the “Habanera” from *Carmen* by Heidi, a trio from *Così fan tutte*, “Soave sia il vento,” and a perennial audience favorite by Lisa Bergman: Christmas carols in the styles of great composers.

Everyone departed in a holiday spirit. Thanks to all who greeted us, donated baskets and sold tickets. Happy New Year to all!



Photo by Jay Wakefield

L to R: Barbara Stephanus, Christina Scheppelmann & Suzy Mygatt Wakefield.



Photo by Suzy Wakefield

Mary Scott



Photo by Suzy Wakefield

L to R: Hugh Davis, Stacey Mastrian & Heidi Vanderford.

In Memorium

Kit Herrod, member of Magnolia/Queen Anne, died in December after a short bout of aggressive cancer. She served on the SOG Board as VP of Communications from 2014-2016. She and her husband had relocated to Santa Fe, NM during the pandemic. Her memorial service will be held at the Thomsen Chapel of St. Mark's Cathedral on February 9 at 1:30 pm.

Dorothy Petersen, member and former chair of Allegro, died this past June very shortly after attending SOG's Annual Luncheon at age 94. Friend Gayle Charlesworth fondly remembers her outstanding raspberry jam, and noted she was a great fan of the Mariners.

Ibidunni Ojikutu: A SOG Award Winner's Career Trajectory

Judi Kalitzki

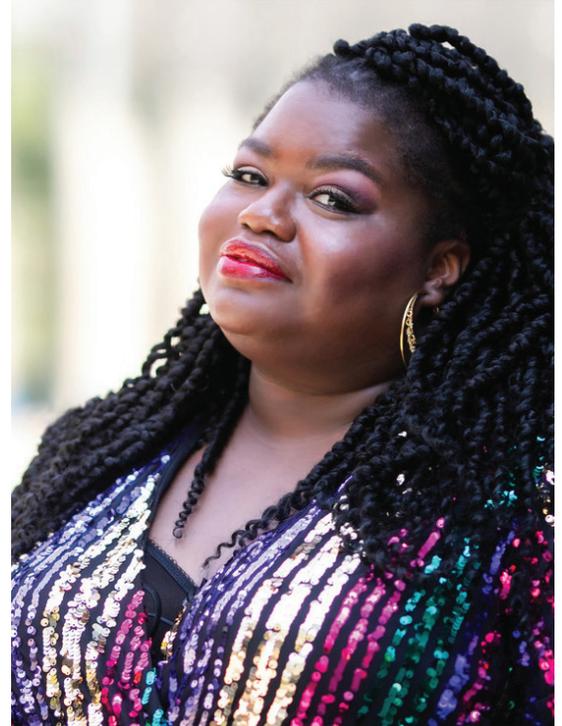
Ibidunni Ojikutu's voice just keeps changing on her. Starting her career as a lyric soprano who felt comfortable singing roles in both opera and musical theater, as well as the blues, Ibidunni now seems thrilled and yet almost astonished that she sang the role of Else in Wagner's *Lohengrin* for Sky Opera at Skyline Retirement Community. She explained that over the thirteen years she's been working with Jay Rozendaal as her voice teacher, her voice has continued to shift, getting bigger and richer, allowing her to think about someday fulfilling one of her operatic dreams: singing a Valkyrie in Wagner's *Ring*.

In the meantime, though, Ibidunni is busy appearing in and getting ready for new operatic roles. In March of 2022, Ibidunni had dual roles in Portland Opera's production of *The Central Park Five*: the mother of one of the young boys falsely accused and convicted of a heinous crime, and an assault survivor. The opera is based on a real case about an infamous miscarriage of justice, and Ibidunni admitted it was hard to figure out how to decompress from the trauma of the situation depicted in the opera. She was impressed, however, with the audience's embrace of this new and emotionally challenging opera.

In addition to her operatic work, Ibidunni has been collaborating with pianist Rebecca Manalac to produce concerts of songs about and by women. These concerts feature works by female American composers, many of them young African Americans, including Florence Price, Nina Simone, Libby Larsen and others. They debuted the west coast premiere of *Nobody Knows* with words by Mahze Kane and music by Nailah Nombeko.

With her roots in Bellingham, WA, where she earned her undergraduate degree in music at Western Washington University, Ibidunni enjoys adjudicating and offering master classes to Bellingham middle and high school students. She loves that students get to see a professional singer who looks like her, and enjoys encouraging students from all backgrounds.

Ibidunni has come a long way since winning SOG's Training Grant Competition (what is now known as the Singers' Development Award) in 2017. She debuted with Seattle Opera in its 2011 production of *Porgy and Bess* as the Strawberry



Woman, and reprised that role, along with making her debut as Serena in SO's 2018 production of that opera.

Ibidunni will appear in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* at SO beginning the end of February. There are only four main leads; all of the other roles will be shared by a small additional number of singers, including Ibidunni. She is thrilled to be taking part in a world premiere!

The Indispensable Jonathan Dean Judi Kalitzki

If there's one person at Seattle Opera that SOG members are familiar with and appreciate other than the General Director, it's Jonathan Dean, long-time dramaturg, lecturer, podcaster, and indispensable interface with so many different parts of Seattle Opera and its multiple audiences.

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Jonathan and will share insights he gave me into how SO pivoted so quickly and successfully during the pandemic, its commitment to new opera currently exemplified by the upcoming premiere of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and how General Director Christina Scheppelmann's extensive international experience has led to fruitful collaborations with artists from around the world.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit and shuttered opera houses along with every other entertainment venue, one of the first pivots SO made was to partner with KING-FM to air old recordings of SO performances. Fortunately, those performances had not just been recorded but had already been digitized, so it was easy to put them on air. However, the question asked was "How can we curate the broadcasts of these operas in a way to make them current?" For those of you who listened

to the Saturday morning broadcasts, you know that along with regular commentary by Scheppelmann and Dean, there were often wonderful interviews with a wealth of opera figures known to SO audiences: Jane Eaglen, Gordon Hawkins, Vinson Cole, Peter Kazaras, Francesca Zambello, Stephen Wadsworth, Carlo Montanaro, Viswa Subbaramans, Giacomo Sagripanti, and Naomi André. We in the audience got to listen to marvelous SO performances and relish the memories and anecdotes these contributors shared.

Another venture that came out of pandemic-enforced constraints but continues after in-person activities have once again become possible, is offering classes on Zoom. Dean, for example, will be offering a class called Modern History Through the Opera Glass, a "survey of four centuries of history through the unique lens of opera, beginning with

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Summer Opera Party

Judi Kalitzki

On a beautiful August summer day, SOG hosted a delightful musical treat for members and guests at Cogir of Queen Anne. The program featured three of our former SDA winners: Andrew Etherington, Ibidunni Ojikutu, and Aria Manning. Each sang multiple arias in Cogir's lovely auditorium, and afterwards guests gathered on the rooftop deck for drinks and appetizers. Despite a bit of smoke in the air from the wildfires on Highway 2, the party was a complete success. Many thanks go to Florence Rose Thompson for hosting, to Jonathan Gerson, SOG's VP of Education, for arranging our entertainment, and to Patricia Pavia, our VP of Special Events.



Some of the highlights were the "Willow Song" from *Otello*, sung by Aria Manning; "La donna è mobile" from *Rigoletto*, sung by Andrew Etherington, and "My Man's Gone Now" from *Porgy and Bess*, sung by Ibidunni Ojikutu.

Adding to the conviviality and terrific singing, Patricia Pavia sold \$480 worth of tickets, giving those who bought one a chance to win five tickets to a SO performance of *La Traviata*. Patricia added \$20 to make it an even \$500 to be contributed to the Singers' Development Fund. A big thank you to members who bought tickets and to Patricia for her energy and generosity in finding a great way to bolster our SDA fund.

Sally Buckingham
& Frank Gregory



Kathryn Smith, Brenna Pink Pampena, Gemma Balinbin, Warren Wilcock & Debbie McCormick

Dean *continued from page 4*

the earliest operas at the end of the 16th century and continuing through the 21st." The class will be offered this winter, January 10-March 21. Dean said that even though some of these classes may also be held in person in the future, they'll continue to be offered on Zoom as well, knowing that for some people the Zoom option is simply more convenient.

One of Dean's many jobs is creating the supertitles for each opera. He shared a fascinating explanation about the differences between creating the captioning for live performances versus doing so for the video productions SO created when in-person viewing was not an option. First of all, Dean explained, the pace of the captions for an opera on video entirely depends on the shots the director chooses. If more than one person is on stage, but the shot the audience sees shows only one character, then only those words being sung by that character can be captioned. That's very different from an audience that sees multiple singers on stage simultaneously, no matter who is singing at any one time. Another insight Dean shared is that in the opera house, the captions follow the singer's breath lines. But when audiences are watching a video, it's the rhythm of how their eyes move, a much faster pace, that the captions have to take into account. He learned that where he'd write one caption for the supertitles, he'd write three for the video captions. One certainly gets the impression talking to Dean that he both excels at and thoroughly relishes learning new techniques and creating new programs.

As for the future, Dean told me that Seattle Opera has ambitious goals, artistically and in its commitment to equity. One way SO has shown both is in its productions of new operas focusing

on contemporary characters and topics like *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, and last season's *Blue*. This season Seattle audiences have the very rare opportunity

to attend a world premiere of an opera, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Khaled Hosseini. I'd encourage everyone to listen to a podcast about this new opera recorded by Dean last May, available on the Seattle Opera's website. Just listening to the gorgeous music will be enough to make you run out and get tickets for the opera, opening in February.

The last topic Dean discussed was how SO and its audiences profit from Director Scheppelmann's extraordinary international experience. Her connections throughout the world, from Brazil to Beijing, give her familiarity with new operas, new productions, and the wealth of talent, whether singers, designers or conductors, who might be wonderful collaborators with Seattle Opera. An outstanding recent example was the Argentinian team that produced the breathtaking projections that took the place of elaborate sets for this past October's *Tristan und Isolde*.

We who live in the Puget Sound area are lucky to have an opera company as outstanding as Seattle Opera, and Seattle Opera is lucky to have a dramaturg and teacher as knowledgeable, dedicated, and creative as Jonathan Dean!



SEATTLE Opera Guild

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January-June 2023 SOG Officers

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VP Education	Jonathan Gerson
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