

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.

President's Message *Marilyn Leck*



Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for the outpouring of support from across the Seattle Opera Guild (SOG) membership to bring us out from the depths of the pandemic. In particular, the interim Board of Directors: Stuart Sechrest, Emily Bennett, Gayle Charlesworth, Frank Gregory, Jonathan Gerson, Zoe Erickson, Patricia Derrig Pavia, Stew Law, and Brenna Pink Pampena joined me to begin our climb up the mountain last January.

We listened to membership sentiment, both vocally and via recent surveys, regarding top priorities. Clearly there were two areas to focus our strategy, volunteers and financial resources on: in-home opera preview parties, and Singer Development Auditions. In April we had our highly successful first post-pandemic in-home preview for *La Traviata*. Invitations were online only and we exceeded our attendance estimate. During that event, we held our first live donor ask. We again exceeded our estimate and raised enough funds to cover the prizes for our successful Singer Development Auditions held June 27!

July 1, 2023 began our 2023-2024 Seattle Opera Guild 67th fiscal year. We are grounded with board governance, strategy, financial stability, and working committees: Finance, Website, Education, Membership, and Special Events. Our committees will continue meeting throughout this summer.

Surveys and leadership feedback indicate we need to go back to basics: continue to offer in-home preview parties to support young opera artists, and showcase our unique Singer Development Auditions. To accomplish this, we will be evolving and modernizing our website while maintaining member privacy, and freshening our membership benefits. We want to be known for our go-to fun events that pay artists a wage so fair that they will turn down other opportunities to perform for SOG!

It's my honor to serve you, our membership! Our 2023-2024 Board of Directors: Stuart Sechrest, Judi Kalitzki, Brenna Pink Pampena, Jonathan Gerson, Zoe Erickson, Patricia Derrig Pavia, and Stew Law, will meet in early September for an all-day retreat to solidify our SOG 2023-2024 strategy and calendar with all activities and events. Watch for dates. Our Handel's *Alcina* themed in-home preview party is already scheduled for Saturday, October 7. Save that date. It will be one you will not want to miss!

When you are called upon to volunteer, please say "Yes," where your talents meet a need!

Supporting Opera

Jonathan Gerson, VP Education

When I was in the US Army I had a buddy who shared my passion for opera. He once said to me that he loved Opera because "when you watch opera you never know if you might be witnessing a great moment of humanity."

Once when I was on vacation in Guanajuato, Mexico I attended a concert in the Opera House which was built in 1865. The thought occurred to me that in 1865 opera was the only entertainment in town. There was no TV or radio. No movies. If you had the money and leisure time, you went to the opera. Now, of course, there are so many other ways to be entertained. A consumer has scores of choices for entertainment: the Seahawks, the Mariners, the Sounders, just to mention sports! And just think how expensive a good seat at a sporting event can be! So when people complain that opera is too expensive, I don't buy it.

Opera occupies a unique place in the myriad of choices for entertainment. When I attend an opera I think about all of the study and preparation that goes into a singer's career. There is a story to every singer and their dedication is truly inspiring. Opera singers deserve to be supported because they preserve the art form and make the world more beautiful. Opera should always be there for people who want something different, something classy.

I believe the Seattle Opera Guild has a mission to support these inspiring musicians who make and preserve the art form that we love so much. As Speight Jenkins once remarked, "Opera deserves to be supported because it has endured the test of time." See you at the Seattle Opera and at Seattle Opera Guild events, and please bring a friend or two.



Photo by Suzy Wakefield

2023 Singer Development Award Audition

Suzy Mygatt Wakefield

On Tuesday, June 27 on a beautiful, sunny afternoon from noon to 3:30 PM, about 15 members and guests of the Seattle Opera Guild attended its annual vocal competition in Tagney-Jones Hall at the Opera Center, graciously provided by Seattle Opera.

The ten contestants applied through the Seattle Opera Guild website. Jonathan Gerson, Vice-President of Education, coordinated the applications and the auditions. David McDade, Seattle Opera's principal coach, pianist and assistant chorus master, accompanied the singers on the piano. David plays with a light touch and always accompanies each singer flawlessly. We are so lucky that David provides this service to the Guild and to these wonderful young singers year after year!

There were three judges: Dr. Mitchell Kahn, Artistic and General Director, Pacific Northwest Opera (Mt. Vernon); Regina Thomas, Founder and Artistic Director of the Puget Sound Concert Opera; and Jennifer Krikawa, Co-founder and Artistic Director of Vashon Opera. SOG is very grateful to these three knowledgeable opera professionals for agreeing to judge our competition.



Photo by Suzy Wakefield

David McDade accompanies Hallie Schmidt



Photo by Suzy Wakefield

Award winners left to right: Malinda Wagstaff, Theodora Cotterel, Hallie Schmidt with accompanist David McDade

The winners were Hallie Schmidt, soprano; Theodora Cotterel, soprano; and Malinda Wagstaff, soprano. First place (\$3,000) went to Hallie Schmidt. Hallie dazzled us with her first aria, "Der Hölle Rache," sung by the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Magic Flute*. This is one of the most difficult arias in the operatic repertoire and requires a coloratura voice. Normally, a soprano singing this aria during the opera can warm up with earlier arias. It seemed amazing to one judge that Hallie could start out with that aria with no warm up! Hallie handled this easily and followed it with "Caro Nome" from *Rigoletto*.

After the auditions were over, Dr. Kahn mentioned that Hallie will be featured in two operas of Pacific NW Opera's next season, *Marriage of Figaro* in November 2023 and *Abduction from the Seraglio* in April 2024. Second place (\$2,000) went to Theodora Cotterel, who performed "Qui la voce sua soave" from *I Puritani*, as well as "Poison Aria" from *Romeo et Juliette* by Gounod.

Third place (\$1,000) went to Malinda Wagstaff, also a soprano, who sang "Il es doux, il est bon" from *Herodiade* by Massenet. Her second aria was the very well-known "Vissi d'arte" from Puccini's *Tosca*.

All of the other contestants received an award of \$100. Twenty-five donors from the Guild helped raise the needed funds at the April 22 Guild Preview of *La Traviata*. I encourage more members and friends of SOG to come to next year's auditions. It's a very special and heartening event to experience the wealth of operatic talent Washington has in its young singers.



Photo by Stew Law

SOG members enjoying SDA auditions

Save the Date

Alcina Preview

Saturday October 7, 2023

Life and Times of Malcolm X Party

Saturday February 17, 2024

The Barber of Seville Preview

Saturday April 27, 2024

2013 SDA Winner Tess Alitveros' Flourishing Operatic Career

Judi Kalitzki

Seattle Opera audiences have had the opportunity of seeing Tess Alitveros as Giannetta not once but twice in very different productions of *The Elixir of Love* over the last few seasons. Each was incredibly rewarding in its own way, said Tess in a recent interview. The first was in November of 2020, when SO decided to get back to the business of making opera less than a year after the pandemic started. There were many restrictions on producing that *Elixir*. It was filmed on the McCaw Hall stage, with the principals singing six feet apart, two pianos subbing for the orchestra and no chorus. Nevertheless, the audience watching the film found the production an utter joy, given the drought of on-stage performances at that time. As for the cast, Tess said getting back to a stage with other singers was an incredible balm after the loneliness of singing and recording at home. At the same time, it was almost surreal to be singing with no audience. "Our medium is live," she explained, "and normally there's nothing between your mouth and the ears of the audience."

The second production of *Elixir* followed less than two years later in August of 2022. I wonder if SO Executive Director Christina Scheppelmann decided that the joyous shenanigans of this opera just begged to be fully staged after the pared-down version Covid had forced the company to create. Tess said it was magical having the full chorus on stage this time and explained that director Stephen Lawless wanted the whole cast to be involved in the comedy. Tess got rave reviews: "Seattle Opera regular Tess Alitveros brought attitude to Giannetta, giving her flair that made her more than just Adina's sidekick. Her beautiful tone and playfulness in the second act with "Saria possibile" were worth the wait"(Bachtrack).

When I asked Tess about how her career started, she said that for her singing was always something that gave her "kernels of delight," from singing to the soundtrack of *The Little Mermaid* as a young girl to having the amazing opportunity at 15 to be in the youth chorus of *Turandot* on the SO stage. She was still completely an amateur at that point but said that being surrounded by all that sound on stage was a transcendent experience. "I decided I wanted to have that feeling all the time," Tess told me.

Tess's connections to SO continued during college and graduate school. She had the amazing opportunity of having Vinson Cole as a teacher while an undergraduate at the University of Washington, and then studied with Jane Eaglen in graduate school. Her relationships with fellow singers, directors and others in the opera world are what have propelled her career. She explained that although singers are of course in competition with one another for roles, they also love supporting one another.

An important opportunity for Tess came with her chance to create roles in a series of chamber operas SO commissioned. The first, *The Combat*, was a melding of music from Monteverdi and Couperin about a Muslim woman warrior, sung by Tess, and a Christian crusader who, unaware of each other's religion, fall in love but meet during a nighttime battle with tragic consequences. Tess had worked before with the director of *The Combat*, Dan Miller, and he chose her to participate in this innovative early music trilogy. That, Tess explained, gave her a real foot in the

door. She's since starred in two more SO chamber operas, *O + E* in 2018 and *The Falling and The Rising* in 2019. When I asked Tess what her favorite role is, she singled out *The Falling and The Rising*, commenting "An opera singer doesn't get many chances to portray a regular mother."

Another role Tess mentioned as a favorite is Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Not only is the character Susanna a lot of fun, Tess said, but being in a production of Figaro is always full of camaraderie, because the cast simply must work closely together for the opera to succeed. "*Marriage of Figaro* is a team sport," Tess explained, "the music is like that and the whole show is like that."

Tess considers herself very lucky to have been in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which had its world premiere this year at SO. Singing three roles (Nana, Market Woman and Midwife) in the opera gave her "a really extraordinary experience," Tess said. She marveled at the vastness of the undertaking: the expense of the preparations, the many teams involved, the musical complexity, the cultural coaches. She also feels privileged to have had the opportunity to observe Khaled Hosseini, author of the novel on which the opera is based, react to seeing his characters portrayed on stage.

In addition to her musical presence with Seattle Opera, SO's Associate Director of Community Engagement Alex Minami told me that "Tess has been a backbone of our work in community engagement, whether it's performing countless outdoor Community Serenades for local veterans' centers, women's shelters, and emergency housing shelters, or premiering the new operas that the participants in our Creation Lab program have spent a year workshopping. Tess's work makes real the aspiration that opera is a living artform that belongs to everyone."

A Seattle native, Tess told me she would very much like to perform in Europe. She has family abroad, her dad in Germany and an aunt in London. She spent summers there in her teens, explaining that at age 16 she was allowed to travel by herself in Europe. One of her most cherished memories is seeing *Tosca* and *Carmen* at the Arena in Verona, Italy, a Roman amphitheater built in 30 AD and still in use today. I am awestruck by Tess's adolescent courage and taste!

I know all her SO admirers who have followed Tess since she received our SDA in 2013 wish her good fortune as she continues her very successful career.



Photo by Danielle Barnum

Melinda Bargreen: Seattle's Classical Music Critic Par Excellence

Judi Kalitzki



In January of 1975, shortly after Melinda Bargreen moved to Everett after finishing graduate school in Irvine, CA, she read a review of Seattle Opera's production of *Gotterdammerung*, the final opera in Wagner's Ring Cycle, in the Everett Herald. The review seemed written by someone who hated Wagner's *Ring*. The reviewer complained about everything: the opera was too long, it was incomprehensible and in German, for god's sake! Clearly, Bargreen decided, the author had absolutely no understanding of opera. She promptly wrote a letter to the newspaper's editor, saying what a travesty the review was. The editor promptly told Bargreen to send him what she would have written instead. Upon receiving her review of the same opera, which she had seen and loved, the editor told her, "You have a job." That was thrilling, even though the "job" was only five nights a year, covering the five operas presented every season by SO. That started Bargreen on a path to a fifty-year career reviewing classical music of all kinds, mostly for the *Seattle Times*.

Given that Bargreen's academic studies were in English literature, I asked about her music background. She told me "I first got interested in music when my dear grandmother gave our family a piano. My older brother was seven, and my parents decided to give him piano lessons. I was four, and I was so entranced by the piano that I would climb on the bench and try to play what he had just been playing. My parents decided, if she loves it that much, she should have lessons, too. And that was the beginning of a wonderful life in music."

Bargreen summed up her approach to music reviewing by explaining, "I try to put my reader in the audience for each performance I've seen, trying to impart what it was like to hear the music and the musicians. How was this performance compared to what we have the right to expect to hear?" Of course, there are different standards depending on which musical organization is being reviewed, Bargreen explained. She pointed

out that even if one hears the same piece one has heard many times before, each performance is different. One of the joys of being a music critic, Bargreen said, is that even now she's always a bit surprised by the music she hears.

In the decades since its founding in 1963 Seattle Opera has had only four general directors: Glynn Ross, Speight Jenkins, Aidan Lang, and now Christina Scheppelmann. Bargreen waxed eloquent about the "two most remarkable men," Ross and Jenkins, who were "obsessed by opera," with a total fixation on Wagner. According to Bargreen, Ross put Seattle Opera on the map by producing the complete *Ring* in both German and English, an unheard-of undertaking. Those of us who have attended SO for many decades take this for granted, but the rest of the opera world was in awe of this accomplishment. Jenkins continued this tradition and both men went to any length to get the best singers for *The Ring*. Bargreen admitted rather sorrowfully that it's hard to imagine that SO will have the resources mount a complete *Ring* any time soon.

The main reason for that is the pandemic, of course. Bargreen said that clearly SO, like the Seattle Symphony and other music organizations, have simply not recovered their audiences or donors they had pre-pandemic. We also agreed that even pre-pandemic the landscape of corporate support for opera had decreased. The tradition of local corporate executives' feeling a commitment to support the arts in Seattle has diminished.

Nevertheless, Bargreen has a lot of faith in Director Christina Scheppelmann, who, she says, "knows and wants SO's audiences to experience the whole world of opera." The key, Bargreen is convinced, "is getting people into the hall more than once." Being inclusive and making people feel welcome will help keep opera alive here in Seattle.

Although opera is a very traditional art form, Bargreen agrees that there's a big appetite for new opera. SO is following a larger trend in American opera houses for mounting new operas. In the last few seasons, SO has produced *The (R)Evolution of Steve Jobs*, *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*, *Blue* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and will continue next season with *Malcolm X*.

But diehard Wagner fan Bargreen still hopes that SO can revive its tradition of mounting the entire *Ring*. It's a stretch right now, she admits, given the extensive resources this undertaking would require, but a complete *Ring* would certainly cement SO's reputation as the premiere Wagnerian opera house in the U.S.

2023 SOG Annual Meeting

Christine Szabadi

On Saturday, June 10, about 35 enthusiastic aficionados of opera gathered at the elegant Washington Athletic Club in Seattle. The occasion was the 66th Annual Meeting and luncheon of the Seattle Opera Guild. It was refreshing to see many new and almost-new faces, both in the general membership and the Board of Directors. Proceedings began with a warm welcome by interim President Marilyn Leck, who thanked the 2022-23 Board for their hard work during difficult times. The new slate of officers was then presented as follows by Nominating Committee Chair Florence Thompson:

President: Marilyn Leck
Treasurer: Stuart Sechrest
Secretary: Judi Kalitzki
VP Administrative Services: TBA
VP Communications/Marketing: Brenna Pink Pampena
VP Education: Jonathan Gerson
VP Membership Services: Zoe Erickson
VP Special Events: Patricia Derrig Pavia
SOG Trustee: Stewart Law
Officer at Large: TBA

In the business meeting portion of the event, our Board members gave their annual reports, which clearly showed their hard work towards assuring a rosy future for the Guild. SOG's final report and the annual financial statement will be available in September.

A special welcome was given to Alex Minami and Dennis Robinson from the staff of Seattle Opera who were presented with a check from the Guild by President Marilyn Leck.

After the drawing for the two gift baskets, the audience was treated to an outstanding musical program, introduced by Jonathan Gerson, VP of Education. Accompanied by Jieun Kim, Serena Eduljee, soprano, and Simon Petersson, tenor, gave a beautiful performance of operatic arias by Rossini, Mozart and Puccini, finishing the program with art songs that have special meaning for them. All in all, a delightful program.

It's always impressive to learn about the background of the singers who appear at our events. Mr. Petersson is a Swedish tenor who recently moved from Stockholm to Gig Harbor. In Stockholm, he performed with The Royal Opera House in both solo roles and as part of the Swedish Royal Opera Chorus for five years. He earned his master's degree in music from the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute at the University of North Carolina in 2016. Mr. Petersson is also an emerging composer who made his debut in 2014 with his internationally touring song cycle, "Songs of the Sea."

Serena Eduljee's soaring, rich, precise coloratura and "magnetic" acting (*Entertainment News Northwest*) has made her one of the Pacific Northwest's most in-demand young singers. Serena had the honor of representing the entire Northwest District and won 5th overall in the United States and Canada in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Award (NATSAA)



Photo by Patricia Derrig Pavia

Jieun Kim, Simon Petersson & Serena Eduljee

in 2020. Serena's education and training include OperaWorks Advanced Artist Program in Los Angeles and a Bachelor of Arts in Voice Performance from the prestigious Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, where she studies under world renowned opera star, Carol Vaness.

The Guild gives a very special thank-you to Barbara Stanton and Paul Maffeo, our sponsors at the Washington Athletic Club.



Photo by Stew Law

SOG Board members with check for Seattle Opera

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