

L'Arria

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SEATTLE
Opera Guild

January 2024 • Volume 73 • 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.

President's Message *Marilyn Leck*



Happy New Year to all Seattle Opera Guild members! We are halfway through our 67th fiscal year. Thanks to your generosity, we continue to support local performers by giving them opportunities to perform in front of a live audience.

We held a successful *Alcina* opera preview in October, again in a private home. Watch for your invitation to "Sunset Song," scheduled for February 16th at the Columbia Tower Club. This event will sell out! The event features music from African American composers, highlighting Florence Price. Come watch a beautiful Seattle sunset, enjoy delicious southern cuisine, beverages, and also learn highlights about Seattle Opera's production of *The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, composed by Anthony Davis.

Your Executive Board held a daylong strategy retreat in September looking at: "Where Have We Been, Where Are We Now, and Where Are We Going." The top four prioritized action items decided on are:

- Increase membership, aiming at a specific goal, by streamlining the recruiting process (including implementing a QR code on written materials and our website)
- Improve our communication and relationship with Seattle Opera
- Based on the above, ask Seattle Opera for dress rehearsal tickets for SOG raffles
- Set a goal for reserves in both operating and capital accounts; one way of accomplishing this is to create an endowment

The SOG Board of Directors accepted a balanced SOG July 2023-June 2024 Financial Budget at its December 3 board meeting.

The Seattle Opera Guild has a vision and a plan to accomplish it. Let's celebrate our good work at the Columbia Tower Club!

A Fabulous *Alcina* Preview!

Judi Kalitzki

Hidden away in a somewhat rustic neighborhood in south Seattle is the most fabulous venue for an opera preview. What was originally an enormous garage has been turned into a welcoming event space with all kinds of seating plus a stage and theater-style lighting. Although attendance was good—even more than expected, in fact—at least twice the number of guests could have been accommodated with ease.



Photo by Patricia Pavia

l to r: Hallie Schmidt, Myah Rose Padden, Glenda Williams, Robert McPherson

continued on page 5

Hallie Schmidt, Dazzling Winner of 2023's Singer Development Awards

Judi Kalitzki

Photo by here Jay Wakefield



Last June Hallie Schmidt knocked the socks off the audience and judges attending SOG's Singer Development Award auditions. Launching into the Queen of the Night's notoriously difficult aria "Der Hölle Rache" from a cold start, Hallie performed with extraordinary power. It was enough to win her first place. More recently I had the pleasure of seeing Hallie perform as Susanna in Pacific Northwest Opera's production of *Marriage of Figaro*, delighting the audience with both her musical and her dramatic talents. I therefore decided to interview Hallie in order to share more about this young rising star with the whole Guild.

Hallie laughed when I asked her what led to her operatic career. She said performing was practically her destiny! She was always turning the books she and her classmates read into plays and did her first "real show" when she was in fourth grade. She loved musicals, and says she "forced friends into putting on *Phantom of the Opera* during recess." Musical theater was her goal throughout high school and at the beginning of her college years. However, Hallie took part on Seattle Opera's teen opera studio during her high school years, from 2013-2016. Her voice teacher, Cyndia Sieden, recognizing her operatic potential, worked with her to explore and stretch her voice in that direction. Sieden is still Hallie's voice teacher, even as Hallie now does some teaching herself.

Once at college at Oklahoma City University, alma mater of Broadway stars like Kristen Chenowitz and Kelly O'Hara, Halle was sure she'd pursue a similar path. But she kept getting cast almost exclusively in operas, rather than musicals, and discovered she loved opera. "At first, I had no idea what I was doing!" But she explained that singing opera "invigorated me in a way I never expected. I love the process of studying an opera. It's so much hard work but the payoff is so rewarding. It was empowering—I loved the challenge of it,—always having to keep learning. And opera combines the fun of doing theater with the singing." During her sophomore year she sang Barbarina in *Marriage of Figaro*, and junior year did *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

At present Hallie is keeping up a busy pace by continuing to work with her long-time singing coach Cyndia Sieden, teaching voice herself, singing with Seattle Opera's School Opera Tour, and almost non-stop auditioning. She admits that the audition process is challenging, especially for someone based on the West Coast. When I spoke with Hallie she'd just gotten home from back-to-back trips to Houston and New York City. On the one hand, she loves auditioning. She relishes meeting other young singers and enjoys the very challenge of the whole process. On the other hand, it's a big financial investment, and just staying healthy while traveling can be tough. For every ten auditions, Hallie said, a singer may get one part.

So when an opportunity to learn and perform a role like Susanna on her home turf comes up, as it did this past fall at Pacific Northwest Opera, that's a real joy. Some of her closest friends are singers in Pacific NW Opera, and she spoke very highly of the opera's General Director, Dr. Mitchell Khan. "Mitchell is a genius," Hallie said. "He does everything, he's very musical, and incredibly supportive." Hallie will be appearing in Mozart's *Abduction From the Seraglio* with PNW Opera next spring.

Come January Hallie is looking forward to competing in the Met Opera's Laffont Competition Auditions again this year, in which she won an encouragement award last year. At least she doesn't have to travel for this event!

SOG members can feel proud to support talented young singers like Hallie Schmidt. It will be gratifying to follow her career as it undoubtedly flourishes.



Photo by Michelle Diamond

Hallie as Susanna, Jeremy Harr as Figaro.

David McDade: A Musical Force of Nature

Judi Kalitzki

I wish every member of SOG could spend two hours in the company of David McDade, Seattle Opera's Head of Coach-Accompanist since 2002. Since it's unlikely everyone will have that opportunity, I hope this synopsis of my interview will give some insight into David's wide-ranging knowledge, gifts, and interests. His duties include playing piano for coachings, rehearsals, recitals, and auditions, and serving as assistant chorus master. It's an enormous and critical role, and that's just the start of what David does.

David's musical education started early. When he was five, just in kindergarten, his mother taught him to read music and began his piano lessons. At 11 David started voice lessons, soon appearing in a community college's production of *Amal and the Night Visitors*, his first introduction to opera.

David's description of his early passion for opera and how he went about learning more about it was really quite extraordinary. For example, having read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a young teen, and learning that Wagner's *Ring* was an influence on Tolkien, he went to Portland's public library and checked out the entire *Ring* to listen to. If there's one thing I learned about David in our interview, it's that his appetite for learning and exploring anything and everything having to do with music (and not just classical music) is omnivorous and endless.

In addition to playing the piano and singing, David also played the French horn, majoring in that instrument at Portland State University. But because singers at PSU knew David also played the piano, they frequently asked him to accompany them in recitals. He was accompanying a few singers at the Met auditions when the Chorus Master of Portland Opera, Phil Kelsey, heard him and asked him to be that opera's accompanist. A career was born. David continued to play for chorus and staging rehearsals, which was great training. And David and Phil are still working together all these years later!

David received his Master's degree in conducting from the Peabody Institute of Music in Baltimore, MD. When discussing why he was drawn to conducting, David explained that for him conducting combines leadership and collaboration. In 1995 David got his first chance to work for Seattle Opera, an opportunity brought to him by Philip Kelsey, now the assistant conductor at SO. He accompanied the rehearsals of both *Rigoletto* and the *Ring*.



David playing at the 2023 Opera Gala.

The work David did for SO got him an audition with the Washington National Opera where he spent seven years, from 1995-2002, as Music Administrator.

David had clearly enjoyed his time at SO, since he accepted a full-time position in 2002. The amount and variety of his work sound almost herculean. While

David doesn't make it sound easy, the fulfillment he gets and his joy in collaboration shine through. He says one of his favorite things is helping singers "craft a role" they are performing for the first time. He says he's always listening for what the singer is trying to do, and sees his job as helping the singer achieve that to the best of his or her ability.

David loves working with all singers, but particularly the next generation. For young singers, like those who audition for SOG's Singer Development Awards, David sees his role as one of gently nudging and guiding them to do their very best. He clearly loves not just to teach singers but to mentor them, and many of them seek him out.

Although David says he can't "swing," he loves jazz, especially live jazz. He often plays the piano in a band at Kent Covenant Church, which, although not jazz, allows him to play in certain pop, folk, and gospel styles. And he has a steady side gig accompanying Robert McPherson, aka –"The Drunken Tenor." David finds it hard to say no, and it's clear that just about anyone and everyone who knows David's breadth and depth of musical knowledge and talent is eager to collaborate with him.

When I asked David if he had any favorites, whether singers, conductors, or directors, at first he demurred, but then admitted that indeed he has particularly enjoyed working with certain special artists over the years. He sadly pointed out that so many wonderful artists and friends with whom he'd collaborated over the years have now passed away. A few he said it was a joy to mention were singers Greer Grimsley, Ginger Costa-Jackson, and Arthur Woodley, director and singer Peter Kazaras, composer and director Stephen Wadsworth, conductors Heinz Fricke and Asher Fisch, and of course his continuing collaboration with his lifelong friend Philip Kelsey. The joy and gratitude with which David spoke about so many of the people he worked with over the years, those who mentored him and those he mentored, gave me the impression that the list of David's favorites could easily have been ten times as long.

Seattle Opera and the broader Seattle music community are lucky to have had David McDade guide, coach, mentor, play and collaborate with so many singers, conductors, directors, and musicians over the many years he's been part of our community. May we all enjoy his work and music for many more years to come.



IN MEMORIAM

Farewell To A Lovely Lady *Christine Szabadi*

Seattle Opera Guild mourns the passing of one of its most active members. For many years Gayle Charlesworth has been a passionate advocate for the arts, particularly the opera. She has served the Guild tirelessly in the capacity of Secretary, VP of Administrative Services, VP of Special Events and President, as well as being the Chair of Allegro Preview group. Working quietly in the background, Gayle always got the job done. She did a magnificent job organizing the Jubilee celebration in 2017. She was an extremely generous person, giving of herself to a wide variety of charities, and supporting many arts groups in the area. Many times she offered her beautiful home not only for Previews, but also for special events. Of course the Seattle Opera Guild was always close to her heart and she felt very strongly about its mission, especially the Singers' Development Awards program, often providing an Encouragement Award to a deserving young singer.

On a personal note, Gayle was a good friend. She never hesitated when asked to an event, an art exhibition, a weird concert or a Flamenco performance! She was up for anything. Gayle died peacefully on October 4. Her husband Michael died on November 22. They will be sorely missed.



Christine Szabadi and Gayle Charlesworth

Remembering Sonia Spear *Carol Corbin*



Carol Corbin and Sonia Spear

Our Opera Guild community mourns the death of Sonia Spear at age 109.5. Sonia's memory is a blessing to all of us. She joined the Seattle Opera Guild in 1962 to bring opera to Seattle by helping to make the costumes, assist with the production, and promotion efforts.

When the Guild became large enough to support more than one guild group, she became a devoted member of Amici. She hosted at least one opera preview a year at her home in Windermere where there was plenty of room for 50 or more guests, and of course she had a lovely grand piano to accompany the singers.

Sonia attended Seattle Symphony concerts starting at six years old, and continued that pleasure after the Benaroya Symphony Hall was built. She attended weekly symphony concerts with many friends. She thought nothing of buying two tickets and inviting a friend to go with her. I attended the symphony, opera, the ballet, and the Seattle Rep Theater with Sonia over more than 25 years.

When her husband, Abe, was alive, they traveled the world to explore it before it became popular to travel widely. Sonia was a very kind, cultured lady who loved anyone who spent more than ten minutes with her. It would be difficult not to return her affection.

Alcina Preview

continued from page 1

SOG members and guests spent their time before the preview socializing and enjoying an Oktoberfest-themed dinner from a food cart parked just outside. And then came the music we were all waiting for, sung by three marvelous young singers: Hallie Schmidt, soprano, and first-place winner of SOG's Singer Development Awards this past June; Myah Rose Padden, mezzo-soprano, who keeps busy as a member of both the Seattle Opera Chorus and Opera on Tap as well as being a regular host at KING-FM; and Robert McPherson, tenor, best known in the Seattle area as "The Drunken Tenor."

The singers were accompanied by pianist Glenda Williams, who also presented the background and plot summary in a way that was both helpful and entertaining. Her accompaniment was superb.

Thank you to everyone who attended, especially SO General Director Christina Scheppelmann. And to those of you who didn't make it—consider coming next time so you don't miss out.



Photo by Judi Kalitzki

Emily Mattson and Keiko Li enjoy the food cart's refreshments.



Photo by Judi Kalitzki

Christina Scheppelmann with cast and pianist/narrator Glenda Williams.

Save the Date

Met Opera Laffont Competition

The Washington District audition will be held on Sunday, January 14, 2024 at 11:00 am at Benaroya Hall.

The winners will return to Benaroya Hall the next Sunday to compete with winners from B.C., Idaho, and Montana at the Northwest Regional audition on Sunday, January 21, 2024 at 1:00pm.

Save the Date

Join your fellow SOG members and guests for "Sunset Song," February 16th at the Columbia Tower Club. The event features music from African American composers, highlighting Florence Price, and a talk by Alex Minami about the upcoming SO production of *The Life and Times of Malcolm X*.

SEATTLE Opera Guild

PO Box 5745
Lynnwood, WA 98046

Address service requested

Editorial Staff:

Editor:

Judi Kalitzki

Editorial Board:

Judi Kalitzki, Ann Milam, Joanne Sechrest,
Christine Szabadi and Suzy Wakefield

Web Manager: Josh deLacy

Graphics/Printing:

Spot-on Print & Design 425-558-7768

Submissions:

Send text and photographs to:
Judi Kalitzki: judikalitzki@aol.com
Photographs should include subjects' names
and 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.

June 2023-June 2024 SOG Officers

President	Marilyn Leck
VP Admin	TBA
VP Special Events	Patricia Derrig Pavia
VP Communications	Brenna Pink Pampena
VP Education	Jonathan Gerson
VP Membership	Zoe Erickson
Treasurer	Stuart Sechrest
Secretary	Judi Kalitzki
Trustee	Stew Law

Find SOG Online!

We're on the web: seattleoperaguild.org

Like us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/TheSeattleOperaGuild/