

**ISSUE 68
SPRING 2025**

BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

INNOVATIVE DEDICATION

By
GARY W. MURPHY

Leslie Dorman, an LA Opera board member who has engaged in the leadership and advancement of the company and its mission to preserve, promote and advance opera in Los Angeles County, is this year's Peter Hemmings Award honoree presented by the Opera League.

ARTICLE CONTINUES ON PAGE 3 >

WHAT'S INSIDE

**Volunteer Award Conversation
with Larry Verdugo**

Founders Legacy Overtures

Ainadamar Preview

In-School Opera Programs

Terence Blanchard at The Soraya

Women Under Cover Quiz

**Leaguers Welcome
LA Opera's New Season!**

Leslie Dorman



From the President



A Season of Renewal

Dear Opera League Members and Friends:

To me, spring always signifies a rebirth, with its trees in bloom and longer days, an annual renewal which feels especially welcome this year.

The January wildfires greatly impacted Los Angeles and its residents. Our heartfelt condolences go out to those who suffered losses.

We are a resilient community, both Los Angeles and the Opera League of Los Angeles. As LA Opera's primary volunteer support organization, the League joined the company as they spearheaded a special fund to help artists and staff impacted by the wildfires. To date, over \$150,000 has been raised to support those LA Opera family members in need, and we remain committed to aiding those requiring our help.

The Opera League's Winter BRAVO was delayed due to the fires as well. Now, with LA Opera's season resuming this Spring, our activities—gatherings, seminars, music salons—and the Spring 2025 issue of BRAVO are also back on schedule.

A SAMPLING:

- The 2025 Peter Hemmings Award Gala Dinner will take place at the California Club on Saturday, May 17. This year, we honor longtime LA Opera champion, **Leslie Dorman**, for her unwavering dedication and support to LA Opera. Opera League veteran **Larry Verdugo** will receive the Volunteer Award for his ongoing and tireless efforts in promoting opera to students as the League's longtime Education team leader and one of our most sought-after Community Educators.
- Music from two operas by composer and jazz trumpeter **Terence Blanchard** will be performed at The Soraya, California State, Northridge (CSUN), on Sunday, April 6. The program—a partnership with LA Opera Off Grand—features excerpts from *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and *Champion*. Leaguers are invited to a special pre-performance reception at The Soraya's Porter Pavilion.
- Esteemed Verdi baritone **Quinn Kelsey** will conduct an exclusive Opera League Master Class on Tuesday, June 10.
- Maestro James Conlon concludes the 2024-24 season with Giuseppe Verdi's masterwork, *Rigoletto* (May 31-June 21). Ahead of opening night, Maestro Conlon invites you, League members, to attend his always insightful seminar on Monday, May 26.
- This season's edition of Backstage Magic takes place Wednesday, May 7. Rupert Hemmings, Vice President of Artistic Planning, and Jeff Kleeman, Technical Director, take us behind the scenes of the opera *Ainadamar*, which is having its LAO premiere this spring (April 26-May 18). Rupert and Jeff will show us the nuts and bolts of how lighting, sound and projections help bring the historical drama to life.

With fresh blooms and fresh League programming set to blossom, I very much look forward to seeing all of you as we continue our opera journey of renewal.

Sincerely,

Gary W. Murphy
PRESIDENT & CEO

gmurphy@operaleague.org | 213.700.9645

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Gary W. Murphy President & CEO

Todd Calvin Acting Vice President;

Seminars, Volunteer Coordinator

Fernando Sanchez

Treasurer/Vice President Designate

Banke Balogun Acting Secretary/

Social Committee Director

Diane Gray President Emeritus; Strategic Planning Chair

Kelly Marble Marketing/Communications Chair

Clayton Morell Parliamentarian

Holly Harrie Shop at the Opera

Jessica Rodriguez-González Social Committee

Simon Russell Membership

George Solomon Cast Dinners

DIRECTORS

Karyn Benkendorfer Marketing Committee/Cast Suppers

Bill Green BRAVO and Website; Finance Committee

Alma Guzman Finance Committee

Jade James African Americans for LA Opera

Mary Johnston LAO Connects

Gayle Kirschbaum President Emeritus, Gatherings

Y. Anne Kwun Finance Committee/Fundraising

Tom Lady BRAVO and Website

Tanya Len Eblast Communications/

Rehearsal Ticket Coordinator

Jule Levtow Social Committee/Photographer

Mary H. Lewis African Americans for LA Opera

Beth Long Finance Committee

Regina Merwin Eblast Communications/

Membership Coordinator

Trevor Roper Membership Committee

Anne Waterman Message Center Management/

Arts Hospitality

CONSULTING DIRECTORS

Larry Verdugo Education Volunteer Coordinator

W. Allan Edmiston, MD Opera Docs Coordinator/Seminars

Mary Riggs Shop at the Opera

Judy Lieb President Emeritus/Shop at the Opera

Lynne Mitchell Light Walking Coordinator

VISIT US AT operaleague.org

Send email to: info@operaleague.org

Send mail to: Opera League of Los Angeles

135 N. Grand Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90012

24-hour League Message Line: 213.972.7220

Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/operaleague

Follow us on Instagram: instagram.com/operaleaguela

BRAVO TEAM

Editor: Tom Lady

Contributors: Bill Green, Gary W. Murphy

Newsletter Design: Studio Fuse, Inc.

Printer: Licher Direct Mail



John and Leslie Dorman with James and Jennifer Conlon

INNOVATIVE DEDICATION

CONTINUED FROM COVER

With her husband John, the Winnetka, Illinois native has generously supported many of the company's most important programs and productions, including the Domingo and 20th Anniversary Angels campaigns, two productions of *Tannhäuser* (2007, 2021), *Falstaff* (2005, 2013), *Tristan und Isolde* (2008), *Die Walküre* (2009), *Don Giovanni* (2012), the *Ring* cycle (2010), as well as many of the company's community engagement and education programs.

Beyond her tireless service to LA Opera, Leslie previously served for eight years as executive director of the Whitecap Foundation, which funded projects involving family support, youth education and wildlife conservation. She has also held positions as assistant executive director of the Los Angeles Educational Partnership and director of development for KUSC-FM.

For ten years before that, Leslie worked with the nonprofit Los Angeles World Affairs Council, a nonpartisan international affairs organization. Currently, she serves as an emeritus board member of the Yosemite Conservancy and is president of the

Sterling Foundation. Recently, and despite being impacted by the Palisades fire, Leslie sat down with BRAVO to catch us up on her ever-busy cultural life, and to reflect on her remarkable journey

BRAVO: LA OPERA HAS JUST ANNOUNCED ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON. AND YOU HAVE BEEN THERE SINCE THE BEGINNING.

LESLIE DORMAN: That's true. I began my association with LA Opera on the first day, as I was serving as the Development Director at KUSC in 1986. I raised funds to facilitate the live broadcast of the opening night of the company: the infamous *Otello* production with the stuck curtain.

As a gesture of appreciation, LA Opera generously provided me with tickets to attend performances of my choosing. After a short while, my husband John and I decided to subscribe to the opera so that we could experience all of the productions.

BRAVO: WERE YOU INTO OPERA AT THAT TIME?

LD: Although I was involved with LA Opera from the beginning, I wasn't initially a devoted opera fan. Growing up in the Chicago area, I enjoyed various music genres, played the violin, attended

As a proactive board member of LA Opera since 1999, Leslie Dorman chaired the Development Committee for ten years and served as a member of both the Budget and Finance Committee and the Executive Committee. She currently serves as a Vice Chair of LA Opera and as Chair of the Campaign Committee.

theater and the Ravinia Festival, but had never been fully exposed to opera.

In 1987, my perspective changed when I attended the David Hockney production of *Tristan und Isolde* twice in one week – the second time with my friend, and KUSC colleague, Gail Eichenenthal. That performance profoundly moved me. During the Act II love duet, I felt like I was being pushed to the back of my seat, and I've never been the same since. This shared experience deepened my love for opera, and it marked the start of my long and close friendship with Gail.

BRAVO: YOU MENTIONED YOUR WORK AS KUSC'S DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR. YOU ALSO WORKED WITH THE WHITECAP FOUNDATION AND WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL, AMONG OTHER NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS. DID THOSE EXPERIENCES GIVE YOU A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE WHEN YOU JOINED LA OPERA'S BOARD?

LD: I consider my career to have two distinct phases.

The first sixteen years were spent working for nonprofits. Since 1991, when I was hired by a family to help develop their philanthropic program, my career has focused on philanthropy. I have worked for two different foundations.

Although it is not exactly an even split between the two phases, transitioning from a nonprofit to a philanthropic role has been beneficial. Particularly, experience in fundraising provides insight into the perspective of those receiving assistance, allowing one to understand

both sides of the table. A former colleague of mine at the Arco Foundation only hired people with nonprofit experience to ensure they understood the perspective of those they were helping.

I've been fortunate in my career, doing jobs I love and engaging in program development, fundraising, strategic planning, facilitation and other roles within the nonprofit sector. I even took financial and management accounting courses at UCLA to understand financial statements better. In nonprofits, especially smaller ones, it's vital to be a jack of all trades and grasp every aspect of the business. When you work in philanthropy, it's crucial to understand what you're looking at when evaluating a nonprofit. Recognizing both warning signs and positive indicators is essential because you are accountable to your own foundation board.

The question of whether arts organizations differ from other types of nonprofits made me reflect deeply. Having worked with a wide range of nonprofits with diverse missions and structures, I have found that the issues that each nonprofit faces are individual, but not necessarily unique. They face common challenges and typically look for individuals with critical and innovative thinking skills, creativity and dedication to the mission in order to be successful.

BRAVO: I BELIEVE YOU JOINED THE LA OPERA BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN 1999. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT TRANSITION?

LD: Elizabeth Kennedy, the Development Director at the time, persuaded me to join the board. Soon after, I became Chair of the Development Committee, serving for ten years. From the beginning, most of my work on the board has been behind the scenes.

I worked with LAO founder Bernie Greenberg to plan a board retreat in 2001, then had the opportunity to work on another retreat in 2017, which led to the idea for a capital campaign. These retreats involved extensive planning.

My role as Development Chair was also largely behind the scenes, leveraging my experience as a nonprofit manager. I've

primarily collaborated with staff and have functioned more as a colleague due to my professional background.

BRAVO: WHY IS A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN IMPORTANT TO A COMPANY SUCH AS LA OPERA?

LD: The planning for the capital campaign commenced following the board retreat in 2017. It required approximately one year of preparation before its launch in 2018. Since that time, the campaign has remained in its initial quiet phase.

The three primary objectives of our campaign have been: building working capital, enlarging the endowment and retiring debt. Working capital is crucial for our current operations and stage productions, while the endowment provides significant income presently and contributes to future growth. In comparison to our peer companies nationwide, we have had the smallest endowment due to the relatively young age of our company.

In the early years of LA Opera, our longevity was uncertain. However, forty years later, we are an established and respected company, nationally and internationally. Today, increasing the endowment is vital, and addressing cashflow issues by building working capital also remains a primary goal.

BRAVO: WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME AWARE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE?

LD: As a member of the LA Opera board, I have come to recognize the League's vital role in supporting our artists and presenting programs to our audience. The Opera League enhances the company's fabric significantly. Artists enjoy coming to Los Angeles, largely due to the League's personalized experiences. These efforts are especially valuable as artists spend weeks here without knowing anyone but each other.

The League's touches, from personalized activities to thoughtful gestures, make a big difference in making Los Angeles feel like home.

BRAVO: LET'S DISCUSS YOUR WORK AS A CONSERVATIONIST AND MEMBER OF THE YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY, WHICH IS CLEARLY ANOTHER PASSION OF YOURS.

LD: Growing up in the Chicago area, I spent nine years attending summer camp in the Northwoods of Michigan, beginning the summer after third grade. And it wasn't a "princess camp" experience. This extensive exposure to nature has been a significant part of my life, engaging in activities such as canoe trips, hiking to outposts and various water sports.

The natural world holds great importance for me, which is evident from my current residence in the mountains of Colorado for half the year.

My connection to Yosemite began when I traveled to college in California with my brother, who was attending graduate school at Stanford. Our journey took us along I-80, entering Yosemite through Tioga Pass. We first hiked in the high country and later descended into the valley at night, staying at Camp Curry. Waking up to the stunning views of Yosemite Valley in 1968 filled me with shock and awe and left a lasting impression on me.

When John and I met at Occidental College, Yosemite was already an important part of his family life. Originally from San Diego, John frequently camped in Yosemite with family and friends, fostering a strong connection to the park. Our daughter also engaged in outdoor activities at Sky Lake Yosemite Camp including backpacking in Yosemite and the Ansel Adams Wilderness.

John and I visit Yosemite once or twice annually. The Yosemite Conservancy has executed major restoration projects



John and Leslie Dorman

throughout the park, and we have actively participated in planning groups for these initiatives. Collaborating with Park Service personnel, biologists and other experts, we have worked on strategies to restore various sites within the park. Our involvement has given us a deep appreciation for the intricate details of Yosemite's ecosystem, making it an essential place for us.

BRAVO: AS AN AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER, I WOULD IMAGINE THE FIRST SIGHT OF YOSEMITE CERTAINLY BROUGHT OUT THE INNER ANSEL ADAMS IN YOU.

LD: I've been taking pictures for fifty years. When I'm out in nature with my camera, I completely lose track of time, and I'll often return home frozen in winter. I don't use Photoshop or any technical tools; I just enjoy taking pictures. I'm untrained and consider myself a strict amateur, focusing on light and design to capture a decent photo.

BRAVO: LOS ANGELES IS STILL RECOVERING FROM JANUARY'S FIRES. I THINK YOU LIVE IN AN EVACUATED AREA. HOW ARE YOU?

LD: Our Santa Monica area was under mandatory evacuation for some time. John and I were in Colorado but, upon returning to Los Angeles, we felt a palpable pall over the entire city due to the loss of life, property and security. It reminds me of the big earthquakes and COVID times. I think that just about everyone knows someone who has lost their home, making the collective pain widespread.

How can we bounce back? As an opera company, we believe the arts can help us navigate traumatic events and build emotional resilience to loss, whether personal or shared. The arts provide hope and solace, which is essential for our mission.

The impact on fundraising remains unknown, but I think that many people consider opera and the arts as part of the recovery process. Attending opera performances can provide a sense of shared joy for the audience. Being in a theater when the lights dim and the performance begins is an unmatched and soul-stirring experience. I can't wait to return! 🌸



FOUNDING THE OVERTURES

THE OPERA LEAGUE HONORS ITS THREE FOUNDERS RENAMING THE PRE-PERFORMANCE LECTURE IN THEIR HONOR.

By GARY W. MURPHY

In December 2024, the Opera League launched the Founders Legacy Initiative fundraising campaign to honor our three esteemed founders and first presidents: **Alice Coulombe, Carol Henry and Lorraine Saunders.**

We are thrilled to report that our generous members contributed to supporting our programs, particularly our pre-performance lectures, the Overtures, which engage nearly 40,000 opera enthusiasts annually.

As of LA Opera raising the curtain on Mozart's hilarious, and hilariously clever, *Così fan tutte* on March 8, our Overtures will be presented under the following acknowledgment:

"The Pre-Performance Lecture is sponsored by the Opera League's Founders Legacy Initiative Honoring Alice Coulombe, Carol Henry and Lorraine Saunders."

As the League's first presidents, Alice and Lorraine collaborated with Carol Henry, the current Chairman of LA Opera's Board of Directors' Executive Committee, to establish the nonprofit Opera League. This dedicated group of volunteers played a crucial role in laying the foundation for Los Angeles's new resident opera company.

Without their vision, perseverance, dedicated volunteerism and unwavering support, LA Opera would not have achieved its present stature. Forty-three years later, the League continues to uphold the principles set forth by its founders.

To those Opera Leaguers who contributed to our Founders Legacy Initiative, we extend a bravissimo for your generosity in preserving the legacy of three remarkable ladies and helping make their vision a reality. 🌸

MAKING THE GARDEN GROW

By BILL GREEN

It all started with children's records. Then came a love of movies, which then led to the discovery of opera movies. Specifically, opera movies from Italy. Among his favorites? The 1947 adaptation of *Pagliacci*, that gorgeously wrought tragedy by Leoncavallo about love, betrayal and bloody, lusty revenge in 19th century Italy, starring bombshell Gina Lollobrigida as Nedda.

It would be difficult, nigh impossible, to fall for a movie like that without a similar experience with the medium that inspired it. And so, naturally, one might say inevitably, his passion for opera films led to a passion for, yes, opera.

By the time he turned 20, Larry Verdugo had amassed a vinyl collection of over 50 opera recordings. As with *Pagliacci's* Canio after he bumps off his wife Nedda and her boyfriend, there was no going back.

Larry sustained and nurtured that passion as he and his Master's in Social Work spent decades at Kaiser Permanente counseling patients and their families who were adjusting to the challenges of living with cancer, while also monitoring foster homes to ensure the safety of children in Los Angeles County's foster care system.

Upon retirement, while he sought out ways to spend his newfound free time productively, volunteering in the opera world seemed the most logical and attractive. A friend suggested Larry get his feet wet attending the monthly dinner talks at Julienne, a French-style cafe in the Pasadena suburb of San Marino. It was there where volunteers from a local nonprofit called the Opera League of Los Angeles delivered talks about opera, usually deep-diving on whichever opera was currently being staged or about to be staged at LA Opera.

Larry struck up many a friendship with League members at Julienne and learned more about the nonprofit and its many and myriad volunteer opportunities. Among other things, he learned that the League, founded in 1981, not only predated LA Opera, but worked with the Music Center to create our resident opera company in 1986. Soon, he found himself volunteering at LA Opera's educational and community outreach events, such as the student matinees and the Saturday Morning series. He also enrolled in LAO's rigorous two-month opera speaker course so he could become a certified Community Educator, just like those speakers at Julienne.

It speaks volumes about Larry's volunteering in subsequent years that this year, on Saturday, May 17, at the

LARRY VERDUGO WILL RECEIVE THE OPERA LEAGUE'S HEMMINGS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN VOLUNTEERING.

Opera League's annual Peter Hemmings Award Gala Dinner, our flagship fundraising event, we are presenting Larry Verdugo with the Hemmings Award for significant contributions to opera through volunteering.

Diane Gray and Todd Calvin, the co-chairs of this year's Hemmings Gala, and who both also happen to be past Opera League presidents, concur that nominating Larry as the 2025 Hemmings Award for Excellence in Volunteering was a no-brainer. Diane (Opera League president from 2011-13) recalls first meeting Larry when they both volunteered on the League's Education team. Larry offered to help Diane recruit League members to volunteer at LA Opera's student matinees. Upon becoming League president in 2011, Diane tapped Larry to join the League's leadership team, officially known as the executive committee, as the leader of the Education team, where he could do what he does so well: recruit and manage the small army of passionate Education volunteers. To this day, while he no longer sits on the executive committee, Larry's role is no less critical in coordinating Education volunteers.





“[Larry] always brings such warmth and compassion and knowledge to our communities of students and newcomers, and he has been truly a collaborative and empathetic partner to our evolving programs and needs.” - ANDRÉA FUENTES, VICE PRESIDENT OF LAO CONNECTS

“Because there is such a large need for volunteers for the League’s programs, Larry is often members’ first contact with the League,” explains Todd (Opera League president from 2021-23). “He has been instrumental in managing and scouting for volunteers for LA Opera’s education programs, and was my first point of contact with the League when I volunteered to chaperone college students at an OperaWise event.”

“Larry has served well as a great League chair for our Education and Community Engagement programs for many years,” says Diane. “He is a good communicator, is great at coordinating his volunteer teams at events. He has been an active LA Opera Community Educator, and hosted a long series of opera talks at Burbank Library. He possesses great communication skills. He has an impact on young students, and they love and enjoy his opera talks.”

Diane adds, “Larry gets up very early on Saturday mornings to run those family events. That’s a lot. I wouldn’t do it.”

The League’s Education volunteers lend their passionate hands in myriad ways and at a variety of programs:

elementary student matinees, family events on Saturday mornings, hosting high school students at dress rehearsals and many other events produced by LA Opera Connects, the team at LA Opera that oversees community engagement and education programs. As the Opera League’s Education volunteer coordinator, Larry works in lock-step with the LAO Connects team. At the start of the season, the LAO Connects folks give Larry a copy of their event schedule, complete with the number of volunteers needed for each event and what their tasks would entail. Larry forwards the schedule to the Education volunteers and invites them to sign up for whichever event(s) fit their schedule, tracking all signups online.

“I have had the good fortune of being connected with Larry Verdugo almost from my first moments at LA Opera,” says Andréa Fuentes, vice president of LAO Connects. “He always brings such warmth and compassion and knowledge to our communities of students and newcomers, and he has been truly a collaborative and empathetic partner to our evolving programs and needs. His leadership has provided so much guidance and foresight, and he has ensured the ongoing success of our

relationships with students and teachers when they visit us. We owe him so much.”

League member Mary Johnston recently teamed up with Larry in managing the Education team. As she settled into the role, she quickly realized the sheer amount of work necessary to provide volunteer support for Connects, which is made easier thanks to the system Larry devised.

“Larry is the liaison with the Connects staff,” Mary says. “He created and now manages the system through which volunteers sign up for events, keeps track of volunteer requirements and meets with new volunteers as needed. For each separate event, he sends emails to all his volunteers before and after the event. He personally attends virtually all the Connects events during the season.”

Having been an all-star Education leader for the Opera League for so many years now, coordinating and leading volunteers at countless events, Larry has a hard time picking a single favorite experience. “There are a couple of student matinees that come to mind,” Larry muses.

During one student matinee, Larry found himself escorting a group of boys to the restrooms on the lower level of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion before the performance start time. While waiting for the students, Larry noticed one youngster standing motionless and bewildered in the middle of the restroom. “What is this place?” the student asked Larry. “It’s like... a dream...”

“The boy’s teacher later explained to me that their school’s restrooms were dilapidated and not well maintained at all,” Larry says. “Coated with graffiti.”

Another memorable student matinee experience happened during a performance of *Candide* presented to approximately two thousand students. As the music rose during the opera’s final number, “Make Your Garden Grow,” the kids jumped to their feet and began cheering well before the song ended; the ovation lasting several minutes. “I felt like I had just witnessed probably the best ovation those performers would ever hear in any opera house,” Larry smiles. 🌸

The Opera League’s annual Hemmings gala takes place Saturday, May 17 at the California Club in downtown L.A. To RSVP, visit our website, operaleague.org.

MORE POTENT THAN ANY PISTOL

By SYLVIA SHERNO

IN ANTICIPATION OF LA OPERA'S PRODUCTION OF *AINADAMAR* (APRIL 26-MAY 18), FROM ARGENTINE COMPOSER OSVALDO GOLIJOV AND CONDUCTED BY LAO RESIDENT CONDUCTOR LINA GONZÁLEZ-GRANADOS, WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE TRUE STORY OF THE REMARKABLE ARTIST WHOSE ALL-TOO-SHORT LIFE NONETHELESS LEFT AN INDELIBLE MARK ON HISTORY.

THE OPERA

The city of Granada, in southern Spain's Andalusia region, is the birthplace of one of that country's most revered modern writers, and arguably one of the most recognizable names in 20th century European literature: Federico García Lorca. The poet and playwright is also the subject of Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov's opera, *Ainadamar*. The Grammy-awarded "opera in three images" premiered in Tanglewood in 2003 and is next up in LA Opera's 2024-2025 season.

Named for the natural spring found in the hills above Granada, *Ainadamar* (in Arabic "fountain of tears") depicts the final hours of García Lorca's life, as remembered by

the Catalán actress Margarita Xirgu, García Lorca's friend and muse who appeared in many of his plays. The opera traces some of the parallels running through García Lorca's life, artistic themes and political beliefs. Margarita Xirgu, for example, devoted much of her career to the role of the 19th century liberalist heroine and martyr, Mariana Pineda, protagonist of García Lorca's 1925 play of the same name who also figures importantly in *Ainadamar*.

Mirroring Pineda's antipathy to tyranny, both García Lorca and Xirgu opposed the fascist forces that were threatening to overtake the Spanish political landscape. The actress, like García Lorca, was known to the authorities for her socialist

sympathies; she eventually sought safety in Uruguay. Despite her urging, however, García Lorca remained behind in Spain and, tragically, was captured and executed one month after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

García Lorca's own biography anticipates some of the parallels suggested in the opera.

A GUSHING CREATIVE WELLSPRING

Born in 1898 in Granada, Federico García Lorca early on exhibited an undeniable artistic bent. Even as a child, he was drawn to music, poetry, puppetry and theater, enthusiasms that, in turn, became the well-spring of his own creative expression. A gifted pianist and guitarist and a



Metropolitan Opera's 2024 production of *Ainadamar*. Photo: Marty Sohl



Metropolitan Opera's 2024 production of *Ainadamar*. Photo: Marty Sohl

precocious composer, the young Federico planned to make a career in music. Although he soon turned to literature, music remained a passion throughout his life, as the inherent musicality suffusing his poems and his dramatic works attests.

As a youth, García Lorca was also a talented caricaturist whose drawings often accompanied his letters to friends, as well as the books he read or inscribed. His whimsical illustrations were published in newspapers and exhibited in galleries, and came to grace the pages of his own works and those of other writers. He continued drawing throughout his life. Indeed, his understanding of color, space and line enriched the staging of his dramatic works.

The arts were not his only focus of attention, however. While he might have hailed from a wealthy, landowning family, García Lorca, the eldest of four, was nonetheless exposed to the social and economic disparities in his native Andalusia. The desperation of the landless poor, the disenfranchised status of women in a historically patriarchal society, the oppression exercised by rigid and outmoded social, political and religious forces: these are among the diverse strands that García Lorca wove into the fabric of his own enduring art.

GOING "DEEP"

During his prolonged university stint as a less-than-engaged law student, García Lorca was befriended by the much older composer Manuel de Falla. The Spanish composer's model of artistry and his passion for the music of Andalusia, especially the traditional Romani "deep

song" (*cante jondo*), stirred García Lorca's imagination.

In 1922 the two collaborated in the organization of a *cante jondo* festival and competition, with the purpose of revitalizing this traditional folk genre. In a lecture on the "Architecture of the *Cante Jondo*," García Lorca distinguished between "deep song" as an expression of the pure voice and spirit of the Romani people; and flamenco which, in his view, was *cante jondo's* clichéd, inauthentic twin. For García Lorca, true *cante jondo* conveyed the most sensual of passions alongside a profound awareness of death's inevitability.

Residing within what he called the "bloodcurdling" sounds of the "deep song" was the true Romani voice, the voice of a historically marginalized people and its culture. When García Lorca published his own *Poem of the Deep Song* in 1931, he was paying homage to the "marvelous artistic truth" he sensed at the root of the old Romani form. Interestingly, the poem is built around a theme and variations, an organizing principal García Lorca had absorbed in his musical studies.

Romancero gitano (*Romani Ballads*) (1928) is probably García Lorca's best-known poetry collection and the book that brought him to widespread public prominence. His ballads were inspired by the medieval Andalusian romances, songs by traveling Spanish minstrels that recounted sparsely detailed, enigmatic stories of universal human emotions.

Romancero gitano retained the lyric flavor of the original ballads and used deceptively simple language to narrate tales of heroic

Romani characters often caught up in tragic circumstances. In *Romani Ballads*, García Lorca created a new Romani mythology around bronze-skinned horsemen and unfaithful wives, smugglers and silversmiths silhouetted against the night, under the watchful eyes of a green moon, or moved by mysterious green winds. Or hunted, as the poet knew from harrowing real-life stories heard in the Granada of his childhood, by the vicious Civil Guard. García Lorca's understanding of Spain's social and political hierarchies, which effectively relegated the gypsies to society's margins, likely accounts for the sympathetic light the writer shed on his characters.

Not surprisingly, García Lorca's sympathies extended to other peoples and communities who were, like the Roma, victimized and marginalized. When, fatigued by all the attention unexpectedly showered upon *Romani Ballads* in Spain (not to mention the envy directed toward him by friends and colleagues), the poet fled to Cuba and New York, where he spent an artistically fertile several months between 1929 and 1930. Even before his arrival in New York, "citadel of Western capitalism," García Lorca had already articulated a distaste for what he anticipated would be a "horrible" city. Those early imaginings of the city's human throngs, stridently roaring cars and looming buildings proved prescient. He lamented the absence of nature and human warmth amid the harsh dissonances of the concrete cityscape, and concluded that America's much vaunted democracy merely meant that "only the very rich have maids here."

Feeling alienated in the big city, he nevertheless challenged those conditions by making them the basis of a new artistic project, a volume of verses entitled *Poet in New York* (1929-30). In poems like "Dance of Death," "King of Harlem" and "Sleepless City (Brooklyn Bridge Nocturne)," García Lorca employed shocking language and surrealistic images to transform dehumanized ugliness and an aura of death into artistic energy. Even the depredations suffered by Blacks in white society, while not erased, are lifted by expressions of vitality. So, too, in "Ode to Walt Whitman," did García Lorca allude openly to New York's derided, shadowy homosexual subculture, re-envisioning homoerotic love as a part of nature that "bestows crowns of joy."

We might speculate that García Lorca's homosexuality sensitized him to the repression and asphyxiating silence

Metropolitan Opera's 2024 production of *Ainadamar*. Photo: Marty Sohl



endured by others. Whatever the origins of his empathy, women occupied a special place in his artistic regard. His observations of relatives and neighbors drew his attention to the limited roles historically ascribed to women in Spanish society: namely, wife, mother, spinster, nun. Ruled by rigid social conventions and the strict disciplines of Catholic orthodoxy, women were expected to pay unquestioning obeisance to male authority and to accept, in silence, their inferior status, even within the confines of the domestic sphere.

THE RURAL TRILOGY

García Lorca's trilogy of so-called "rural tragedies" dramatized the problematics of Spanish womanhood and, by extension, of Spanish society as a whole.

Blood Wedding (1933), the first in the trilogy, was inspired by a notorious scandal involving a bride who eloped with her cousin on her wedding day. García Lorca raised the story of forbidden love and death to the level of classical Greek tragedy, the characters remaining nameless archetypes (Bride, Bridegroom, etc.) – all except Leonardo, the hypermasculine lover. Interestingly, the writer's passion for music is evident in the way he "orchestrated" alternating male and female voices, as in a Greek chorus. *Blood Wedding*, in fact, is thought to be the most musical of García Lorca's plays.

Yerma (1934), the second of the rural dramas, was referred to by its author not as a play, but as a "tragic poem." Poetic passages are interspersed throughout, while much of the dialogue contains the rhythms and rhymes of poetry. The play revolves around the question of fertility, motherhood and the inability to attain one's destiny. Central to the drama is the question of gender as a fulfillment of nature. The title character herself is seen as "mannish" by the townspeople, and Yerma's husband, Juan, is associated with images of sterility. Ironically, the protagonist's name, Yerma, refers to a barren expanse, thus anticipating the thwarting of nature that is the character's dramatic and personal tragedy.

Completing the trilogy is perhaps García Lorca's best-known play, as well as his final, completed work: *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936). García Lorca described the play as a "drama of women in the villages of Spain," thereby enlarging his scope beyond the stage to address the oppressed circumstances of Spanish women in general. García Lorca relied on his painter's eye to define precisely the play's setting: all three acts take place within the thick, white walls of Bernarda's house, the white in sharp contrast to the black clothing required by custom to mark the period of grief on the death of a husband. The house is inhabited by Bernarda, the despotic matriarch, her five daughters, representing various degrees of social and sexual inhibition and restraint, and two maids. The stage is

occupied exclusively by these women, who pass their time with needle and thread, gossiping, trading malevolent remarks and stealing glances at the men outside. Men are, in fact, conspicuously absent from the stage. The play ends tragically after the death of the youngest daughter, with Bernarda fabricating her own reality out of the appearance of reality. García Lorca's underlying message is that, in such dogmatic and authoritarian circumstances, both men and women are victims.

García Lorca, whose leftist political affiliations and liberal social attitudes were well known in Spain, quite consciously depicted in *The House of Bernarda Alba* against the backdrop of the ever-tightening noose of fascist tyranny. He did not live to see the play produced.

Federico García Lorca was executed, almost certainly by soldiers in the army of General Francisco Franco, in August 1936, one month after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He was 38 years old.

The site of his execution was Ainadamar.

The House of Bernarda Alba was produced in Buenos Aires in 1945 but was not staged in Spain until 1950. Until then, even reading the play was strictly prohibited. 🌸

Sylvia Sherno holds a PhD in Spanish literature from UCLA, where she taught for almost thirty years. Her specialty is contemporary Spanish poetry.

HEMMINGS AWARD FUNDS SUPPORTS IN-SCHOOL OPERA

By TOM LADY

The funds raised by this year's edition of the Peter Hemmings Award Gala Dinner will support opera education and cultivation for the next generation.

LA Opera Connects, the LA Opera department that oversees community engagement and education, will take Opera League members' generous Hemmings support and extend that support to two special in-school opera programs, one designed for elementary schools, the other for secondary schools.

ELEMENTARY IN-SCHOOL OPERA

Students in grades four and five discover creativity in expression through a full operatic production, from music

rehearsals to a performance day for their school community. This entails meeting once a week for five weeks for a full day's operatic rigor building up to the capstone performance days for friends, family and our opera-savoring community.

This past year's edition saw the budding opera stars stage *Figaro's American Adventure*, a kid-friendly opera celebrating Giacomo Rossini's comic masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*. Set in colonial America, the wily barber and

his band of fellow sneaky barbers and colonial compatriots take the audience on a musical goose chase.

SECONDARY IN-SCHOOL OPERA

Students in grades seven through 12 partner closely with LA Opera professionals to bulk up their performance skills by creating an operatic experience all their own. This entails meeting once a week for ten weeks for a full day's workshop, culminating in a full-scale opera production. Along the way, the students master both Common Core and Visual and Performing Arts standards.

Last fall's class performed *The Wreck of the Miranda*, an original youth opera commissioned by LA Opera Connects from composer Nathan Wang and librettist Matthew Leavitt. Set in a Southern California seaside hamlet where the residents begin to fall mysteriously ill, a local eco-conscious highschooler named Eva suspects a local shipwreck is to blame and sets out to crack the case.

Knowing your support of the League's annual Hemmings Gala makes possible incomparable educational opportunities like the above truly brings home the difference League members make.



"The steadfast support of the Opera League is a transformative force for LA Opera's community engagement and learning programs," says Andréa Fuentes, Vice President of LAO Connects.

She adds, "This season alone, their generosity through the Peter Hemmings Gala will help us bring the magic of opera to thousands of children through our elementary and secondary in-school opera programs, providing not only student-centered musical instruction but also the unforgettable experience of witnessing opera come to life for school communities across Los Angeles County.

"We are profoundly grateful for the League's commitment to inspiring the next generation through the power of music and storytelling."

- ANDRÉA FUENTES, VICE PRESIDENT OF LAO CONNECTS

FEEL IT IN YOUR BONES

Jazz legend **Terence Blanchard** partners with LA Opera Off Grand to bring his operas in concert to The Soraya.

OPERA LEAGUE MEMBERS ARE OFFERED A DISCOUNT TICKET AND AN INVITATION TO A PRE-PERFORMANCE RECEPTION.

By GARY W. MURPHY

Highlights from two operas by composer and jazz trumpeter **Terence Blanchard** will be performed at The Soraya, California State, Northridge (CSUN), on Sunday, April 6. The program features music from *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and *Champion*. Leaguers are invited to a special pre-performance reception at The Soraya's Porter Pavilion.

Commissioned by The Soraya, this concert is being produced in partnership with LA Opera Off Grand, an LAO initiative to expand the definition of what an opera company is, and who it's for.

Opera League members are offered a discount ticket and an invitation to a pre-performance reception in The Soraya's Porter Pavilion.

Born and raised in New Orleans where he studied with the Marsalis brothers at the famed New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, Blanchard kicked off his movie soundtrack career doing mostly Spike Lee joints, including *Do the Right Thing*, *Jungle Fever*, *Malcolm X* and *Crooklyn*. For *Mo Better Blues*, Blanchard "ghosted the trumpet" for Denzel Washington. More recent credits include *The Woman King*, *One Night in Miami*, *Harriet* and HBO's remake of *Perry Mason*. Along the way, Terence Blanchard has become the most prolific jazz musician ever to compose for motion pictures.

Blanchard made history in 2021 as the first Black composer to premiere an original opera at the Metropolitan Opera. Based on the 2014 memoir by *New York Times* columnist Charles M. Blow, *Fire Shut up in My Bones* continues to take the world by storm.

Blanchard did it again in 2023 with another groundbreaking opera, *Champion*, based on the life of Emile Griffith (1938-2013), the African-American welterweight boxer who won world titles in three weight divisions.

For the April 6 performance at The Soraya, Blanchard leads his own jazz quintet, E-Collective, along with baritone Justin Austin, soprano Adrienne Danrich and the Turtle Island Quartet.

Launching LA Seen, The Soraya's bold new series, Blanchard's Opera Suite in Concert strips away the traditional stage scenery, allowing the music to take center stage. Blanchard explains, "Doing concert versions is interesting to bring to an audience as we are bringing the music and not the scenery of the opera. I've been working to pair everything down to the E-Collective, Turtle Island String Quartet and two vocalists. It is working well. When the singers come on, people get into the story and forget that it is a string quartet, my band and singers, and just get

engrossed in the story itself. That's the beauty of these performances that I want people to appreciate."

Through this groundbreaking concert, audiences will experience the powerful fusion of opera and jazz, highlighting the intricate storytelling and emotional depth of Blanchard's compositions. This world premiere event at The Soraya promises to be a captivating journey, showcasing the transformative power of music and the profound talent of Terence Blanchard and his collaborators. 🌸



JOIN THE OPERA LEAGUE, WIN A NEW CAR!

The Opera League of Los Angeles, always seeking ways to increase membership, is thrilled to announce a contest for new members to win a brand-spanking new car with all the latest bells, whistles and whatnots...

... DID WE FOOL YOU?

Sorry, this article is not really about a new car program. Let us remove our extravagant wig and phony beard to reveal what this article really is:

AN OPERA QUIZ ABOUT WOMEN IN DISGUISE!

Women who go undercover, for a variety of reasons, have long been a proud operatic tradition, a narrative device that never fails to keep a fast-paced plot a-thickening.

To wit: Mozart's rom-com masterpiece, *Così fan tutte*, which LA Opera is staging this spring, features the wily Despina disguising herself not once but twice, first as a doctor, then as a notary. That inspired us to explore other examples of women characters in opera who go undercover.

Mark Lyons, LA Opera's Associate Director of Communications and Publications, helped lead this fun, if tricky, exploration.

Now let's test your eye. Can you spot the pretenders?

ANSWERS FOR WOMEN IN DISGUISE
AT THE BOTTOM OF PAGE 15

1. Several Verdi operas exist in a few different versions. One has a scene, generally cut from the "standard" version usually performed today, in which two women exchange masks before an evening of public festivities. (This helps explain why a man proclaims his love for the "wrong" woman a bit later.) What's the opera?

- A. *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata / Jérusalem*
- B. *Don Carlos / Don Carlo*
- C. *Les Vêpres Siciliennes / I Vespri Siciliani*
- D. *Stiffelio / Aroldo*

2. In the final scene of what opera do all of the female characters (and all but one of the men) put on costumes or disguises?

- A. *Falstaff*
- B. *Die Fledermaus*
- C. *Un Ballo in Maschera*
- D. *The Marriage of Figaro*

3. In what comedy does the heroine take on the persona of "Sofronia," a meek and docile fiancée who becomes a tyrannical new wife?

- A. *La Finta Giardiniera [The Pretend Garden-Girl]*
- B. *Il Segreto di Susanna [Susanna's Secret]*
- C. *Don Pasquale*
- D. *Naughty Marietta*

4. In *Andrea Chénier*, why does Maddalena go undercover in a prison as Idia Legray?

- A. To convey a top-secret document to her lover
- B. To die with her condemned lover
- C. To say one final farewell before fleeing the country
- D. To help her lover escape

5. Three of the following works have scenes in which a servant wears her mistress's clothes. Name the one where this doesn't happen.

- A. *La Rondine*
- B. *The Marriage of Figaro*
- C. *Così fan tutte*
- D. *Die Fledermaus*

6. What famous diva hides her true identity?

- A. Flöra Tosca in *Tosca*
- B. Stella in *The Tales of Hoffmann*
- C. Madeline Mitchell in *Three Decembers*
- D. Florencia Grimaldi in *Florencia en el Amazonas*

WHEN PREVIEWING IS NURTURING

LA OPERA'S 2025-26
SEASON PROMISES
TO BE ONE FOR THE
PROVERBIAL BOOKS

By TOM LADY



Let us rattle off the milestones to come: LA Opera's 40th anniversary season; Music Director and Principal Conductor James Conlon's 20th season; Maestro Conlon's final season (yes, his last one!) before transitioning to Conductor Laureate; the season-opening company premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*; the season-closing encore production of the "globally acclaimed staging" of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* that sees "Mozart's catchy melodies meet astonishing project animations in this perennial crowd pleaser."; three of the five mainstage productions conducted by the maestro (*West Side Story*, *Falstaff* and *The Magic Flute*) while the other two are helmed by LAO's Resident Conductor Lina González-Granados (Puccini's *La Bohème*) and the Ukrainian-born Finnish guest conductor Dalia Stasevska (*Akhnaten*), who made history herself four years ago when she became the first female chief conductor of Finland's acclaimed Lahti Symphony Orchestra.

That is but a sample of what will bate our breath...

And yet, ask any Opera Leaguer who attended the League's season preview watch party at downtown Los Angeles's

Bunker Hill Towers, what sparks that beam of fond recollection is not the season announcement's "Wowers!" factor, but the watch party itself, hosted by League board member of past president, Marlene Chavez.

Getting together and mingling with fellow Leaguers over wine and bite-sized yum-yums is hardly a new experience if you've been a League member for more than five minutes. Perhaps because we appreciate, even savor, such camaraderie as we emerge from a historically devastating January of record-scorching wildfires and so much resulting loss, or maybe it's that the League's Social Events team is naturally adept at programming events you won't soon forget, or maybe it was having the preview scheduled around the same traditional time as Happy Hour, or a combination thereof. Whatever the reason, this shindig felt like one for the books as much as LAO's forthcoming season.

"Although we were gathered to learn more details about LA Opera's next season, everyone's ultimate enjoyment seemed to be derived from just being together as a group," says George Solomon, one of the League's Social Events team leaders. "Socializing with others who share the same passion, catching up with old friends and getting to know new members, all while sampling the amazing buffet offerings. The evening was a strong testament to

Anthony Roth Constanzo as Akhnaten and J'Nai Bridges as Nefertiti in LA Opera's 2016 presentation of *Akhnaten*.
Photo by: Craig T. Mathew

the bonds we nurture through the League and our wide variety of events. Everyone went home smiling and satiated."

As always, it takes a village to pull off such events. Hosted by board member and past League President Marlene Chavez, three additional board members helped put the evening together. Afterward, the League President Gary Murphy had nothing but praise. "Jessica [Gonzalos-Rodriguez], Banke [Balogun] and George pulled off so much great work setting things up and providing tasty food and beautiful ambiance."

Not one to take for granted such ambience and camaraderie is veteran League member and volunteer, Virginia Fawcett.

"It is always more enjoyable to be together during the announcement for the new opera season," Virginia says. "We always enjoyed attending when it was in person, and we have really missed being there during the past few years. Having this opportunity to at least watch it with our fellow Opera Leaguers was a step in the right direction."



OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SPRING 2025

The most up-to-date information on Opera League events can always be found on the League website calendar, at operaleague.org. Event details will be broadcast via operaleague.org with supporting eBlasts.

MARCH

SEMINAR

Così fan Tutte

Sunday March 2

Reception at 11:30am

Program 12pm to 2pm

SPEAKER: Dr. Kristi Brown-Montesano

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion
4th Floor Rehearsal Room 1

EDUCATION

OperaWise: Così fan Tutte

Tuesday March 4 6pm to 10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Opera Prep: Così fan Tutte

Thursday March 6 11am to 5pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Dress Rehearsal: Così fan Tutte

Thursday March 6 2pm to 5pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

SPECIAL EVENTS

LA Opera Community Performance at Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels #1

Friday March 14 5:30pm to 9:30pm

LOCATION: Cathedral of
Our Lady of the Angels

LA Opera Community Performance at Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels #2

Saturday March 15 5:30PM to 9:30PM

LOCATION: Cathedral of
Our Lady of the Angels

APRIL

SEMINAR

Ainadamar

Sunday April 6 12pm to 2pm

SPEAKERS: Denise Blasor & Jeremy Frank

LOCATION: The Wilshire Ebell Theatre

SPECIAL EVENT

Opera League Night at The Soraya: Terence Blanchard Opera Suite in Concert, in collaboration with LA Opera Off Grand

Sunday April 6

Reception 6pm Concert at 7pm

LOCATION: The Soraya at
Cal State Northridge,
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge 91330

EDUCATION

OperaWise: Ainadamar

Tuesday April 22 6pm to 10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Opera Prep: Ainadamar

Thursday April 24 5pm to 10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Dress Rehearsal: Ainadamar

Thursday April 24 7:30pm to 10pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

GATHERINGS

San Gabriel Valley Gathering: Ainadamar

Monday April 14 7pm to 9pm

LOCATION: Private Residence

Santa Clarita Gathering: Ainadamar

Monday April 21 7pm to 9pm

LOCATION: Private Residence

MAY

SPECIAL EVENTS

Backstage Magic with Rupert Hemmings and Jeff Kleeman

Wednesday May 7 2pm to 3pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Pride Night Reception after Ainadamar

Wednesday May 7 9pm to 10pm

LOCATION: Vespaio,
225 Grand Ave,
Los Angeles 90012

Annual Peter Hemmings Gala Award Dinner

Saturday May 6pm to 10pm

LOCATION: The California Club
538 South Flower St.
Los Angeles 90071

GATHERINGS

Beverly Hills Gathering: Rigoletto

Sunday May 11 10am to 12pm

LOCATION: Private Residence

Santa Clarita Gathering: Rigoletto

Monday May 14 7pm to 9pm

LOCATION: Private Residence

San Gabriel Valley Gathering: Rigoletto

Monday May 19 7pm to 9pm

LOCATION: Private Residence

JUNE

MASTER CLASS

Master Class with Quinn Kelsey

Tuesday June 10

Reception at 6pm

Master Class 7pm to 9pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion
Rehearsal Room 3

AALAO EVENT

Ben Oliver Kerr Memorial Father's Day Recital

Sunday June 15 12pm to 2pm

LOCATION: The Ebell of Los Angeles

We always need volunteers for our Volunteer events. Interested? Please contact Larry Verdugo at (626) 590-5697 or larryverdugo@icloud.com.

ANSWERS FOR WOMEN IN DISGUISE QUIZ ON PAGE 7: 1(B), 2(A), 3(C), 4(C), 5(C), 6(D)



THE
OPERA
LEAGUE
OF LOS ANGELES

135 North Grand Ave. | Los Angeles, CA 90012

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Pasadena, CA
Permit #740

SAVE THE DATE

PETER HEMMINGS AWARD DINNER

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025

HONORING



Leslie Dorman
PETER HEMMINGS AWARD 2025

and



Larry Verdugo
OPERA LEAGUE
VOLUNTEER AWARD 2025