

ISSUE 70
WINTER 2026

BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

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By DIANE EISENMAN

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TENURE AS LA OPERA'S MUSIC
DIRECTOR, THE OPERA LEAGUE
CELEBRATES HIS INDELIBLE
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

From the Co-Presidents



Transporting Your Soul

"If [you] ever stopped being moved by *Boheme* it would be time to leave the business." *Operawire*, Oct 2025

CEO of LA Opera. Indeed, LA Opera's Herbert Ross production of *La Boheme* was beautiful and moving. It was enchanting to see Janai Brugger and Erica Petrocelli in the leading roles of Mimi and Musetta, as they had trained at LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist program.

Opera League members have interacted with Janai, Erica and other Young Artists behind the scenes, over the many years. Our well-attended and fun-filled dinner and salon at Miceli's Restaurant in December featured two current award-winning LA Opera Young Artists, Gabrielle Turgeon and Nathan Bowles, who sang excerpts from opera, operettas and more.

And it's not just our members who are moved by LA Opera's singers and productions. Thanks to your membership and donations each year, we continue to fund the buses that transport thousands of students from elementary to college age to LA Opera productions. During the November dress rehearsal for *La Boheme*, our volunteers accompanied the many students that filled the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and when the lights went out, the students were the most enthusiastic audience during the performance.

While the Opera League continues to dedicate its volunteer hours and funds to LA Opera, our members can also look forward to more of our own upcoming events, including an in-depth seminar on *Falstaff* with Music Director James Conlon, a Volunteer Appreciation event, a Musical Salon, and a Premier level membership event. Members can also upgrade to the Premier level to attend this event. We will offer a special tribute in May to Maestro Conlon on his close to 20 years with LA Opera, at an informal "Backyard Barbecue" for our League members.

As Co-Presidents of the League, we thank those who participated in our recent Founders' Initiative donation drive. With this we can fund the pre-performance lectures at LA Opera productions as well as other educational projects that transport your soul into the world of opera.

May our warmth and enthusiasm move you to stay involved and enjoy all that we offer at the Opera League. With our updated website, joining or renewing your membership and signing up for events, should be easier than ever.

Whether we are enjoying gatherings in members' homes, a day trip to San Diego or Santa Barbara, a week at Santa Fe Opera this summer, as well as Seminars, the Hollywood Bowl Picnic, or helping LA Opera during its productions, our many volunteers are there for you. May we continue to transport your soul with shared moments together; and may this New Year be filled with fun, festive, and meaningful offerings from our "house" to yours in the coming months.

And as you explore our new website, consider giving a gift of membership in the Opera League for a friend, colleague or family member, anytime of the year.

Sincerely,

Gayle Kirschbaum & Todd Calvin
CO-PRESIDENTS



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Newsletter Design: Studio Fuse, Inc.

Printer: Licher Direct Mail

THE OPERA LEAGUE SALUTES JAMES CONLON

CONTINUED FROM COVER

As he steps down as LA Opera Music Director after a twenty-year leadership role, the Opera League takes this moment to salute Maestro James Conlon and reflect on his impact on Los Angeles' opera community.

GAYLE KIRSCHBAUM

Conlon as Creator of the Cathedral Opera Project, and Recovered Voices Project

It is common knowledge that the Opera League adores Maestro Conlon. But it is not merely his warmth, musical brilliance, lectures and seminars, and commitment to LA Opera that has captivated us.

Two other contributions stand out. One is his involvement with LA Opera's annual Cathedral Project, which has enabled countless lay people to sing, dance, and play instruments in a community-based operatic production. Another is his *Recovered Voices* project, which has raised our awareness of composers whose works were quashed and who lost their lives or careers during the Holocaust—and brought us a vast repertoire of previously lost or unknown operas and compositions, including those performed under his baton at LA Opera.

Maestro Conlon's impact has been profound. His efforts to educate and inspire are helping to shape music for the present and future while confronting the evils of the past. We are truly enriched and better informed by all that he has taught us.

This writer first encountered the then-faculty member James Conlon at the Aspen Music Festival in a delightful spontaneous sidewalk chat. Already his magnetic personality, his interest in people, and his enthusiasm for great music was evident. He shared his enthusiasm for LA and his excitement for collaborating with young musicians. His ability to communicate with music in context made him a teacher par excellence.

The Opera League of Los Angeles, the all-volunteer organization set up to support our first-class opera company, has successfully incorporated all his talents in programs in which he gladly took part. What follows are comments from several former League presidents on the incredible contributions James has made to promoting opera in our city through activities he has wholeheartedly enjoyed and supported.

TODD CALVIN

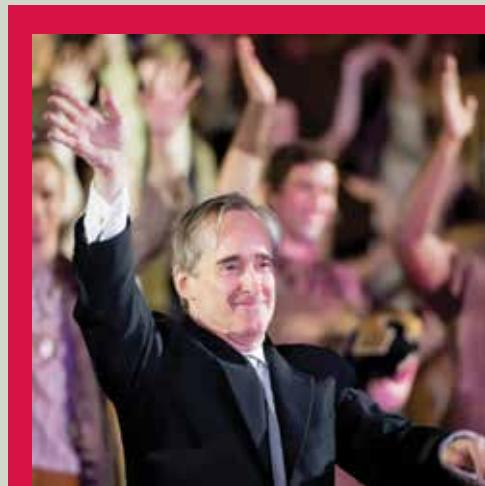
Conlon as Opera League Seminar Leader

Maestro Conlon's seminars are one of the most popular events the League produces. He appreciates that our members are more knowledgeable about opera than a typical ticket buyer and thus fills his talks with wonderful historical background, putting the opera in the context of the period in which it was written. His enthusiasm is infectious and our members sit rapt at his every word. James has been a longtime major champion of the Opera League for which we are very grateful.

MARLENE CHAVEZ

Conlon as Conductor and Lecturer

James Conlon has been a bright light in the many years during his term at the LA Opera. His warmth shone through as he engaged with members of the Opera League, the orchestra, the staff, and his fans. Audiences were thrilled when he strode out to the pit to lead the orchestra. All eyes were focused on him as he acknowledged and welcomed the attendees. He also consistently had a magnetic personality, ever present in his pre-concert lectures. And he graciously and generously explained the current opera to the crowd that filled the seats in anticipation. It is an honor and pleasure to have interacted with the Maestro.



SAVE THE DATE
5.31.26

**THE OPERA LEAGUE
CELEBRATES
JAMES CONLON
Sunday, May 31 at 4pm**

The League will be hosting a private backyard barbecue for members to commemorate James Conlon's distinguished 20-year tenure as Music Director of LA Opera at a residence in Hancock Park. For further information, please visit operaleague.org.



CONTINUES ON PAGE 4 ▶



GARY W. MURPHY

Conlon's Pre-Performance Lectures at LA Opera

For seasoned attendees of LA Opera, arriving at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at least an hour prior to curtain time has become essential. This ensures a seat at the pre-performance lecture, which frequently fills to standing room only—especially when Maestro James Conlon is conducting.

He is profoundly committed to emphasizing the importance of music in both civic life and the broader human experience. His talks artfully blend musicology, literary analysis, historical context, and social science perspectives, all aimed at illuminating the enduring significance and impact of opera and classical music.

The privilege of introducing him at these lectures is always a distinct honor for the Opera League, which helps underwrite this program, now entitled the Founders Legacy Initiative. Over the past two decades, these talks have captivated audiences totaling nearly 400,000 people, a testament to his widespread appeal and influence. *Viva Verdi! Viva Conlon!*

KATHY CRANDALL

The Peter Hemmings Award, Post-Opera Gathering at Kendall's Restaurant

I became President of the Opera League in July 2013. One of the first things one does in July/August is to decide whom should be honored for the Peter Hemmings Award. Among other things, it needs to be someone who has done much for opera/the Opera League and who is well known enough that members will want to get together to honor him/her.

My colleagues and I decided to approach James Conlon as an honoree and much to our delight, he accepted. He was such a pleasure to work with—always outgoing and engaging, whether relaxing at Kendall's Brasserie after conducting an opera or thanking League members for their pre-



Covid cooking at cast dinners. James attended the Hemmings Award Dinner with his charming wife, Jennifer Ringo, and their two beautiful daughters, Emma and Luisa.

The following year, we were honored to have Marilyn Ziering join us, and, in keeping with a long Hemmings tradition, James kindly attended once again to present her with the award, offering heartfelt words that recognized her generosity and dedication.

His absence will be missed, so I am glad he will continue as LA Opera Conductor Laureate. And we appreciate his warm welcome of our new conductor, Domingo Hindoyan.

DIANE GRAY

Rehearsals, Student Scholarships, Recovered Voices, The Ring Cycle, Rehearsal Dinners

My introduction to Maestro Conlon was listening to his pre-performance lectures that bring opera music to life. Soon after, I met James at an orchestra rehearsal in the Grand Hall. We were invited to more rehearsals and, over time, attended many opera Sitzproben—first full rehearsals with singers facing the orchestra, focused solely on the music.





Many opera participants benefited from his generosity. He regularly welcomed undergraduate and graduate students to rehearsals and performances and, at times, sponsored internships, opening the world of opera to young musicians and scholars in a deeply meaningful way.

In 2007, LA Opera launched the *Recovered Voices* project, spearheaded by James, reviving works by composers whose lives and careers were cut short by the Nazi regime. We were privileged to attend his *Recovered Voices* classes, where he illuminated the lives and works of composers we had never encountered before.

Opera League members were also devoted supporters of the LA

Opera's 2009-10 *Ring Cycle*. Hearing insights from both James and the director, Achim Freyer, on both the music and staging was an unforgettable experience.

Numerous volunteer League members contributed potluck dishes for the pre-Covid cast suppers held during dress rehearsals. James was a consistent attendee, and it was well recognized that he particularly appreciated the cornbread provided by one of our members. We ensured that Maestro Conlon always received his preferred cornbread.

I have been fortunate to be part of the Los Angeles opera world during James' 20-year tenure as Music Director. It has been exciting, challenging, and deeply thrilling to hear the music and to watch the man. His music, generosity, and intellect have shaped our lives in ways that will endure long after the final curtain. His legacy at LA Opera—and in our lives—will resonate for years to come. We wish him well in all that lies ahead. ☺



TENOR ANTHONY LEÓN RETURNS FOR A SPECIAL RECITAL & MASTER CLASS

The League is collaborating with Opera Buffs to feature tenor Anthony León, a former LA Opera Young Artist, in both a Recital and a Master Class at the Pasadena Conservatory of Music on Sunday, April 19th at 3pm. Anthony, a League favorite who will play Fenton in LA Opera's upcoming production of Verdi's *Falstaff*, has earned top honors at the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and the 2022 Operalia Competition.

Special Opera League members price of only \$20 per ticket can be purchased at operaleague.org.—Order now as this one will sell out. ☺

A SPIRITUAL GLAM

Please note this article is edited for space and the full version can be found at operaleague.org.

By TOM LADY



Joel Graham and singer Ashley Faatoalia



Gertrude Bradley

"THESE ARE NOT JUST SONGS TO SING. THEY'RE SONGS TO EXPERIENCE, SONGS TO BREATHE OUT, SONGS TO LIVE THROUGH..."

Soprano Gertrude Bradley discusses her thought process with me in putting together a set list for this year's Black History Month Recital. Produced by African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League, this year's recital takes place Sunday, February 15 at the Ebell of Los Angeles.

FOR JOEL

Gertrude curated this set list with particular attention, as her entire performance is dedicated to honoring the memory of Joel Graham, esteemed longtime AALAO leader, member, and veteran volunteer, who passed away in the autumn of 2025.

While this will be Gertrude's third AALAO recital, it will be her first in over ten years, her last appearance being the Father's Day 2013 recital at the private residence of AALAO co-founder Delores Kerr. What prompted her to come back after all this time? The better question would be who: Joel Graham.

"Many times over the years, Joel would tell me he wanted me back for another AALAO recital."

Returning, Gertrude brings decades of vocal and spiritual expertise, rooted in her early years in Denver. Her work with nonprofits has helped her support new vocal talent hiding in plain sight in underserved communities. Driven by her rock-solid Christian faith, Gertrude continues to forge her own path, achieving and inspiring others along the way.

As with many such journeys, it started with an itch.

A MILE HIGH VOICE

"I did a lot of community theater in Colorado," Gertrude says. "I also spent a lot of time studying vocal technique, how to use my voice, how to speak."

These voice classes were taught by a man she affectionately refers to as Professor Bwana Todd, "bwana" being Swahili for "mister." "Bwana Todd taught us how to project, how to use our bodies, incorporate dialects, how to use our voice with ease, how to create depth. And rapid speech, how to slow it down, be dexterous with our speaking voices, all with the aim of

being maximally effective with our theatrical stage roles."

Looking back, Gertrude realizes that what she began to do, instinctively, was connect her two voices: the speaking and the singing, for the purposes of forming, developing, and performing characters, doing it all while singing.

Indeed, the decision to study under Professor Bwana Todd would continue paying off over the years, especially when Gertrude eventually made the decision to boldly step into the world of opera.

Meantime, she continued finding performance opportunities to apply what she was learning. By the time she was in her early twenties, Gertrude had racked up a robust list of credits.

Until, that is, she hit the proverbial ceiling and itched to go somewhere that would let her spread her wings even more, both artistically as well as spiritually.

"I came to feel Colorado was a bit limited when it came to performance opportunities, the kinds of performances beyond just community theater. I felt like a big fish in a small pond. That is why I came to Southern California. I felt like I could do more here, get more involved in theater as well as music, film, other cultural pursuits and opportunities that weren't available in Colorado." ☺

To read the full article about Gertrude's extraordinary, inspiring life, career and mission, go to operaleague.org.



Mimi Rotter and Anne Russell Sullivan

(FROM LEFT): Nathan Bowles, Gayle Kirschbaum and Gabrielle Turgeon

George Solomon

REMEMBERING DR. MICHAEL HACKETT

Dr. Michael Hackett, a former Peter Hemmings Award winner and Opera League Lifetime Premier member, passed away on December 14, 2025. He was that rare scholar-artist whose work ensured that history does not merely survive, but sings. At LA Opera and for the League, he was a highly regarded opera lecturer whose lively, informative, and always entertaining seminars were deeply valued by members.

Dr. Hackett was a distinguished director, scholar, and professor of directing and theater history at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television. He held leadership positions such as Chair of the Department of Theatre and Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Renowned for his scholarship and dedication to students, Professor Hackett left a lasting legacy.

as a director of wide-ranging accomplishments and a teacher who made theater and opera intellectually rich and vibrantly alive for generations of countless opera lovers. He will be remembered with respect and affection by those who knew him, learned from him, and worked with him.

Through his joyful and generous collaborative leadership in creating the LA Opera Oral History Project with Stacy Brightman, he helped safeguard the living memory of artists, visionaries, and cultural builders whose voices shaped opera in Los Angeles—transforming individual recollections into an enduring public archive.

To listen to the LA Opera Oral History Project interviews, visit LA Opera Behind the Curtain at laopera.org. ☀

O SOLE MIO, AND MUCH MORE AT MICELI'S

By JULIE LEVTOW

Miceli's, one of Los Angeles' most charming restaurants, recently hosted a holiday musical evening for members of the Opera League and their guests. Known for its singing wait staff and nostalgic filled ambiance, Miceli's provided a fitting backdrop for performances by LA Opera Young Artists Nathan Bowles and Gabrielle Turgeon, accompanied by pianist Jeff Urban. The event, organized by League Co-President Gayle Kirschbaum and dedicated member Anne Russell Sullivan, was highly successful, promoting camaraderie and leaving a lasting impression on the more than fifty Opera League members and their guests.

Look for more musical salons on the League Calendar in the coming months. You won't want to miss it! ☀



VERDI GETS AN OSCAR NOMINATION!

By GARY W. MURPHY

The song "Sweet Dreams of Joy" from the acclaimed documentary *VIVA VERDI!* has been nominated for the Oscar for Best Original Song. Opera League members attended the film's opening last November after following its development over nearly ten years.

Nicholas Pike's song, performed in the film by soprano Ana María Martinez, is one of five contenders for the 98th Academy Awards. Other nominated songs include "Dear Me" (from *Diane Warren: Relentless*), "Golden" (from *KPop Demon Hunters*), "I Lied to You" (from *Sinners*), and "Train Dreams" (from *Train Dreams*).

VIVA VERDI!, produced by Opera League member Christine LaMonte, is an intimate glimpse into the lives of the celebrated opera singers and musicians currently living out their 'third act' while mentoring



international music students who live among them at Milan's unique retirement home, Casa Verdi, built by Giuseppe Verdi in 1896. The feature documentary follows the lives of

these distinguished masters, shining a spotlight on Verdi's legacy.

The Academy Awards will air on ABC-TV and stream on Hulu on March 15 at the Dolby Theater. ☀

A BRAND NEW US!

LEAGUE WEBSITE UPDATE THAT REFLECTS THE MOMENTUM By KELLY MARBLE



The LA Opera League website update was guided by the organization's continued growth and evolving needs. With more than 500 members and over 100 events, volunteer initiatives, and engagement opportunities each year, the League required a digital platform that could accurately reflect its scale and operational rhythm.

The refreshed site offers a more refined and efficient experience. Content is organized with greater clarity, navigation is streamlined, and key information is easier to locate across devices. Members can quickly

stay current on events, initiatives, and opportunities to participate in the League's many volunteer opportunities.

This update supports the League's ongoing mission to advance and sustain LA Opera through education, advocacy, and philanthropy. By strengthening how information is presented and managed, the website reinforces the League's professionalism and long-term vision while supporting consistent engagement across its growing community.

Stop by and check us out at www.operaleague.org. ☀



JUGGLING & OPERA?

By GARY W. MURPHY

THE OPERA LEAGUE GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH BACKSTAGE MAGIC

On Wednesday, March 4, Opera League members will discover how the visual spectacle of juggling helps illustrate Philip Glass' Grammy-winning score of *Akhnaten* through unique magic tricks as the League's exclusive **Backstage Magic** returns.

Akhnaten is a spellbinding operatic tribute to Ancient Egypt. And reviews for Phelim McDermott's production are overwhelmingly positive, praising its hypnotic beauty and visual spectacle—including juggling! So how did juggling make its way into the

show? According to McDermott, the earliest known record of juggling is a four-thousand-year-old wall painting found in Egypt's Beni Hasan cemetery complex. A tomb belonging to Baqet III, a provincial governor during the later years of the 11th Dynasty, depicts dancers and acrobats juggling up to three spheres.

"While there is a symbolic connection to these first-known representations of juggling, the juggling featured in this production of *Akhnaten* has a purposely equivocal role," says Sean

Gandini, choreographer of the juggling ensemble. "In some ways, the objects are altering egos to the characters' ideas: miniature globular deities, bouncing thoughts, desert sand."

To learn more about this fascinating production, and to witness an *Akhnaten* juggling demonstration, please join us at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on Wednesday, March 4 at 6:30pm. ☀

To RSVP for Backstage Magic, please visit operaleague.org.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH MARTIN GIMENEZ

Hi, I'm Martin Gimenez, a Board Member of the Opera League and part of the Los Angeles Opera's Sound Department. You may have met me at Opera League events such as the League cast suppers or at the pre-performance lecture at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion or elsewhere.

I know what you're thinking, "Opera is an acoustic musical genre, there's no need for a sound department in this line of work!" While our job tends toward the invisible in productions, we are integral to most every production that LA Opera produces. If you would allow me, I'd like to take you on a journey of our typically varied tasks and duties to help you appreciate what we do.

First and foremost, we are stagehands, all members of IATSE Local 33, with eight members in our Audio/Video Department. In a theatre, orchestra sound is designed to acoustically go out to the audience, but not necessarily back onto the stage, so our primary job is to help singers hear the orchestra onstage using foldback speakers, which relay

sound from microphones in the pit. We also manage video feeds of the conductor to keep singers visually connected, distributing the maestro camera to monitors throughout the theatre.

At the center of any stage production is the stage manager, who oversees the show from a console located stage right. There, they have access to their calling score, a foldback feed, the maestro camera, and, crucially, backstage communications—a key responsibility of the audio team. Our department manages and maintains our Coms system for the stage, enabling the stage manager to efficiently relay cues to multiple departments that must coordinate seamlessly during a performance.

For all productions, stage management needs to coordinate cues for props, special effects, costumes, hair, makeup, performers, lighting, and video. Several other departments also use internal Private Lines (PLs), making our Clear Com system tailored to handle many simultaneous conversations during a show.

Besides foldback, maestro monitoring, and backstage communications, we occasionally need to amplify offstage singing or offstage banda (a small musical ensemble) playing.

The challenge is determining whether the set allows performers to be heard acoustically as an offstage presence, or if they must be placed further backstage and have their sound

amplified through speakers. These decisions are made case by case, based on the maestro's preferences and the set's physical constraints.

Those are our routine tasks, but the fun lies with other, more challenging shows. Take the recent production of Golijov's opera *Ainadamar*, which called for synthesizer programming and amplifying principal vocalists.

To amplify voices, we attach small microphones to performers and connect them to radio transmitters, sending the signal through our sound console to the speakers. Every time we do this, our team needs to expand to include a couple of "A2's"—whose sole job is making sure the microphones adhere to the singers and the signal gets back cleanly to the console. This job requires careful attention, as it involves entering performers' personal space and using items like medical tape and a ridiculous number of hairpins to secure the microphones.

The other task that modern operas (and quite frankly more than a few standard repertory operas) require is sound effects and synthesizer programming. With *Ainadamar*, the sound designer Mark Grey built an extensive sound file that mapped many of the show's sound effects (like galloping horses and a chorus of gunfire) to keys on a musical keyboard so a music staff member could play it. However, program synthesizers are not exclusive to *Ainadamar*—we regularly use the same software for thunder effects, *Tosca*'s bell chorus, and dozens of other sound effects that productions call for.

Although opera is mostly acoustic, our audio team plays a key role in supporting shows, recordings, broadcasts, and promotional materials. Next time you notice offstage sounds or special effects, remember our work—and thank my colleagues when you see them managing events at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. ☺



OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER 2026

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.

FEBRUARY

RECITALS

African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO)
Black History Month Recital with Gertrude Bradley
Sunday, February 15 at 12:30pm
LOCATION: The Ebell Theatre

GATHERINGS

Akhnaten
Saturday, February 21 from 12pm to 2pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in Westside

Akhnaten
Monday, February 23 from 7pm to 9pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Clarita

Akhnaten
Wednesday, February 25 from 7pm to 9pm
LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)

LA OPERA CONNECTS

Opera Wise
Tuesday, February 24 from 6pm to 10:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Opera Prep
Thursday, February 26 from 5:30pm to 10:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

MARCH

GATHERINGS

Akhnaten
Sunday, March 1 from 10am to 12:30pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in Beverly Hills

LA OPERA CONNECTS

Elementary School Matinee
Thursday, March 12 from 8:45am to 1pm
Friday, March 13 from 8:45am to 1pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Saturday Morning at the Opera

Saturday, March 14 from 8:45am to 1pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

BACKSTAGE MAGIC

Juggling & Opera in Akhnaten
Wednesday, March 4 at 6:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion
Open to All League Members

SEMINAR

Falstaff with James Conlon
Tuesday, March 31 at 6pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

AUGUST

The League Goes to Santa Fe Opera!

Aug 9-17, 2026
Madame Butterfly, Eugene Onegin, Rodelinda, The Magic Flute, and world premiere of Lili Elbe
Limited space available. Contact Gary W. Murphy at gmurphy@operaleague.org or 213.700.9645

UPCOMING OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

WE'RE STARTING UP AGAIN!



In less than a month, LA Opera Connects education schedule will be up and running once more.

Specifically, on February 24th and 26th the *Akhnaten* Opera Wise and Opera Prep students will be filling the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion auditorium. Soon after, LAO's Cathedral Project

begins, Elementary Student Matinees and the popular Saturday Morning at the Opera will bring the zest and sparkle of children to the opera house. If you would like to join the energetic Opera League team of volunteers to assist during these early morning events, please contact Larry Verdugo at larryverdugo@icloud.com.



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AT LA OPERA?**

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OPERA FROM EXPERTS?**

**MEET PEOPLE WHO SHARE
YOUR LOVE OF OPERA?**



*Drop by
the Opera League's
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All profits go to support
LA Opera's educational
programming.*

Serena Malfi, Cinderella
(2021). Photo: Eliza Logan

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