

Opera League Seminars You Don't Want to Miss in 2008-2009

By Anne Kokarwa Prokopovych

The Opera League Seminars are opportunities for newcomers as well as seasoned fans to learn about opera and enrich our experience of the art form. Each distinguished speaker shares unique perspectives on aspects of an opera as well as the opera's connections to culture, history and our personal lives.

All Opera League Seminars this season will take place in the 5th floor salon of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Music Center. The moderator for the seminars is Dr. Allan Edmiston, who shapes each program by carefully selecting speakers with masterly depth and range of scholarship and experience.

The first seminar, on Sunday afternoon, August 31, from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, will cover the first two works of LA Opera's performance season, *Il Trittico* and *The Fly*.

Writer and lecturer Evan Baker will explore Giacomo Puccini's collection of three one-act operas, *Il Trittico* (*The Triptych*). *Il Tabarro*, the first opera, is very dark and brooding, full of the violence and grit associated with verismo opera. *Suor Angelica*, the second opera, is an uplifting tale of religious redemption. *Gianni Schicchi*, the third opera, is a comedic farce full of greed and conniving. Los Angeles Opera will be staging *Il Trittico* in its entirety, with two Academy Award-winning filmmakers, William Friedkin (*Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*) and Woody Allen (*Gianni Schicchi*), bringing their distinctive artistic visions to the stage direction.

Dr. Baker's many lectures, publications and upcoming book on the history of opera staging weave together modern technology, humor and lively enthusiasm that fulfill his mission to show the relevance of opera to the current craving for larger—than—life entertainment.

A panel of the creative team will introduce us to *The Fly*, in advance of the U.S. premiere of the LA Opera-commissioned opera. *The Fly* is a dark romantic tragedy that explores human frailty and the fragility of our physical and psychological being.

The opera is directed by David Cronenberg who also directed the 1986 film upon which the opera is based. Academy Award-winning composer Howard Shore (*Lord of the Rings*) composed the score for the 1986 film as well as the opera. The creative team also includes librettist and Tony Award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly*), Academy

Award-winning designer Dante Ferretti (*The Aviator*, *Sweeney Todd*), and conductor Plácido Domingo.

The second seminar will be on Saturday, November 1, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. Dr. Simon Williams, Professor and Chair of the Department of Dramatic Art at UC, Santa Barbara will explore the exoticized romantic construction symbolized by the iconic Spanish Gypsy in one of the most popular operas of our time, Bizet's *Carmen*. Dr. Mitchell Morris, Professor of Musicology at UCLA, will present fresh insights into the playful yet profound ritual and symbolism of Mozart's masterpiece, *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*).

In preparation for the inauguration of the first performance of Wagner's four-opera Ring Cycle by Los Angeles Opera, we will have a full-day seminar on Saturday, February 14, 2009, from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm, including an optional luncheon.

Four speakers familiar to Opera League seminar attendees will deepen our understanding and appreciation of the first two operas of the Ring Cycle, *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, that are part of the 2008-2009 season: Dr. Evan Baker, Dr. Mitchell Morris, Dr. Simon Williams and Dr. Michael Hackett.

The final seminar of the season is scheduled for Sunday, April 5, 2009, from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, and will feature examinations of one new and one returning production. Dr. Michael Hackett, Professor of Theater at UCLA, will introduce us to Walter Braunfels' *The Birds* (*Die Vögel*), adapted from Aristophanes' extravagant and whimsical allegory with a serious political motif. This production of *The Birds* is a continuation of LA Opera Music Director James Conlon's multi-year "Recovered Voices" project that strives to raise public consciousness to the significance of works of composers whose lives and compositions were affected by the Holocaust and the Nazi regime. The seminar will also include a presentation on Verdi's masterpiece of romantic opera, *La Traviata*, a timeless work that transcends sentimentality to reinforce the notion that the highest virtue in a human being is a good heart.

The Opera League continues with one of its most important stated goals of making exemplary opera-related educational opportunities available to its members and the community, and we hope that you will mark your calendar and plan to join us. The invitation for the August 31 seminar is on page 5.

a word from our president

Dear Members and Friends,

We're moving into an exciting time for the Opera League as we plan in tandem with LA Opera's new season and the onset of the first two operas of the "Ring" cycle. We also look forward to the remaining two "Ring" operas performed in the following season, climaxed by three complete cycles in June of 2010. As the primary support organization of LA Opera, we will participate on many levels in their most ambitious venture. The League is a dynamic, growing, prospering group of opera lovers and we hope you will be part of this ascendancy.

With sincere appreciation and gratitude we acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of our retiring directors: Gerald Elijah, former Volunteer Services Chair, calendar custodian, and the Opera Volunteers International representative; Jackie Johns, former Overtures and Public Relations Chairs and 24 hour line responder; Kathleen Leonard, former Insider Preview Chair, Parliamentarian, 24 hour line responder and Hemmings Event Chair; and Ernie Prokopovych, former Cast Dinner Chair, Nominating Committee Chair, Membership assistant and 24 hour line responder. We will miss them, but know we will continue to see them as volunteers at various events.

It is with pleasure that I welcome our new directors: Millicent Gappell, Joe Lee, Paul Lowe, Patricia O'Donnell and Thomas Shepard. I'm



Dorothy Wait, President

confident they will make significant contributions during their service on the Board.

I like to set goals for our League and then see how we measure up. Our first goals for the new season are:

- Continue to evolve electronically – our website is in the process of being professionally designed;
- Continue our outreach to the many diverse communities within the Los Angeles area. We are establishing a new Gathering in the Whittier area for the Latino community and for all members who wish to attend;
- Develop new fund raising activities in addition to the Boutique.

Please contact me or any member of the Board via info@operaleague.org or leave a message on the 24 hour message line at 213.972.7220 with your concerns, questions or suggestions. If there is a response required we will do our best to respond in a timely manner.

Warm regards,
Dorothy



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Visit us at www.operaleague.org or
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We need your current e-mail address! Please confirm your address by sending an e-mail to www.operaleague.org and remain eligible for last minute notices and benefits. As we evolve electronically more of our communication will be done by e-mail.

Calling All Volunteers for August Cast Dinners

Be a part of something special. The Opera League is sponsoring eight cast dinners in August for *Il Trittico* and *The Fly*. Help us feed the casts of these operas and be eligible to see the technical rehearsals, if available. Full dress rehearsals for these operas will be closed.

To volunteer to prepare a dish, contact Laurel Howat at ldhowat@aol.com or 562.984.4393.



Photo: Judy Lieb

Volunteers Preparing for a Cast Dinner

African Americans for LA Opera Holds Annual Membership Concert

On Father's Day 2008, African-Americans for Los Angeles Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League, held its annual membership recital at Dolores and Ben Kerr's home in Hancock Park. The program of arias, songs, and duets featured Haqumai Sharpe, tenor; Ralph Cato, baritone; and Frank Fetta, pianist. Blanche Bell, AALAO's new president, welcomed an overflow crowd. Another highlight of the afternoon was when Alice Coulombe, the Opera League's founder and a charter member of AALAO, presented Dr. Eva Grant with a trophy of appreciation. The tribute acknowledged Dr. Grant's efforts in establishing, developing, and guiding AALAO since its inception in 1993.

AALAO's mission is to support opera in the Los Angeles community and to present African-American artists in recitals. All AALAO members are also members of the Opera League. When one joins African-Americans for Los Angeles Opera, one automatically becomes a member of the Opera League



Photo: Ben Kerr

Michael Melton, Chair; Frank Fetta, Accompanist; Ralph Cato, Bass; Eva Grant, Former President; Haqumai Sharpe, Tenor

of Los Angeles, the primary volunteer support group for the Los Angeles opera.

Following the recital, wine and refreshments were served.



Island Enchantment Musicales in Orange County

Imagine yourself on an island, be it somewhere in the South Pacific, Japan or Great Britain (to name a few). You are dressed casually, perhaps in a Hawaiian shirt, enjoying some wine and refreshments while listening to inspiring music. This sets the stage for our first Musicales of the season in Orange County.

Join us on Sunday, September 28 at 2 pm at the lovely home of Sylvia and Gordon Traub in Placentia. Our new Musicales Chair, Steve Kohn and Assistant

Chair, Thomas Shepard, are planning an "Island Enchantment" event. Victoria Kirsch, the musical program planner and accompanist, returns to lead two artists in opera songs from island countries. Please see the invitation on page 5 to make your reservation. Once received, Ed Shaff, our Treasurer, will send you directions to the event. Stay tuned through our e-blasts and the website to learn more about the artists and this event.

calendar

August

Cast Dinners

Saturday, August 16, 5:30 pm

Thursday, August 21, 5:30 pm

Friday, August 22, 5:30 pm

Monday, August 25, 5:30 pm

Wednesday, August 27, 5:30 pm

Thursday, August 28, 5 pm

Saturday, August 30, 5 pm

Sunday, August 31, 5:30 pm

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor

Contact Laurel Howat, Ldhowat@aol.com

562.810.5724

The First Opera League Seminar

Il Trittico and The Fly

Sunday, August 31, 1-4 pm

See "Invitations" Page

Reservations are required

September

Cast Dinners

Friday, September 19, 5:30 pm

Wednesday, September 24, 6 pm

Sunday, September 28, 5:30 pm

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor

Contact Laurel Howat, Ldhowat@aol.com

562.810.5724

Opera For Educators

September 13, 8-4 pm

September, 20, 8-4 pm

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor

Contact Alma Guzmán, Nr1Hugr@aol.com

"Island Enchantment" Musicales

Sunday, September 28, 2 pm

See "Invitations Page"

Reservations are required

October

Opera Talk at Julianne's

Monday, October 6, 7 pm

2649 Mission St., San Marino

\$10 for program and beverage, an extra \$10 for the "Light Supper Box"

Reservations are required
626.441.2299 ext 15
or email Julie@julienne.bis

Opera For Educators

October 4, 8-4 pm

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor

Contact Alma Guzmán,

Nr1Hugr@aol.com

Opera 101

October 18, 8-4 pm

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor

Contact Alma Guzmán,

Nr1Hugr@aol.com

IL TRITTICO, THE FLY and MADAMA BUTTERFLY GATHERINGS

Please contact the person in charge
for more information and to make a
reservation.

Antelope Valley

Il Trittico and The Fly

Sunday, August 31, 2-4:30 pm

43422 25th St. W., Lancaster

Dr. Harald Krueger 661.728.0671

Beverly Hills

Il Trittico and The Fly

Sunday, August 24, 10 am

10430 Wilshire Blvd. #504 Westwood

Millicent Gappell 310.836.4676

Anne Russell Sullivan 323.697.9733

Madama Butterfly and Carmen

Sunday, September 28, 10 am

Millicent Gappell 310.836.4676

Claremont

Il Trittico

Sunday, August 10, 2-5 pm

150 N. Mountain Ave., Claremont

Patricia O'Donnell 909.447.5038

The Fly

Saturday, August 23, 2-5 pm

Patricia O'Donnell 909.447.5038

Madama Butterfly

Sunday, September 28, 2-5 pm

1548 Whittier Ave., Claremont

Patricia O'Donnell 909.447.5038

Hollywood/Hancock Park

Il Trittico and The Fly

Saturday, August 23, 2 pm

441 S. Lucerne Blvd., Los Angeles

Mike and Claudia Margolis

323.935.3366

Orange County

Il Trittico and The Fly

Sunday, August 24, 2-5 pm

19556 Grandview Circle, Huntington

Beach

Claire Chambless 714.533.4186

San Fernando Valley

Il Trittico and The Fly

Sunday, August 24, 3-5:30

15926 Valley Wood Rd., Sherman Oaks

Jackie Johns 818.980.5743

San Gabriel Valley

The Fly

Tuesday, August 26, 7-9:30 pm

5278 La Canada Blvd., La Canada

Michael Sholer 818.502.1988

Il Trittico

Thursday, September 4, 7-9:30 pm

Michael Sholer 818.502.1988

Santa Clarita

Il Trittico and The Fly

Monday, August 18, 7 pm

23710 La Salle Canyon Rd. Newhall

Kathy Crandall 661.255.9661

Madama Butterfly

Sunday, September 21, 7 pm

Kathy Crandall 661.255.9661

South Bay

Il Trittico and The Fly

Location, date and time to be arranged

Please call for information

Bob Lerner 310.543.4544

Ventura County

Il Trittico

Sunday, August 10, 2-5 pm

520 San Clemente Way, Camarillo

Ann Randall 805.444.6021

Westside

Il Trittico and The Fly

Monday, August 11, 7:15 pm

425 South Burlingame Ave., Los Angeles

Monica Whitaker 310.826.4743

Chuck and Alice Bragg 310.454.9622

In the Cool of the Evening ...

A fortunate group of Opera League Patron Members enjoyed a gorgeous Santa Monica evening filled with fine food and delightful companionship. The annual Patrons' Dinner was held this year at the beautiful home of Howard and Cathy Stone. Their flower-filled patio garden served as the perfect backdrop for special guests Dr. Sherwin Sloan, Founder and Chair of the Wagner Society of Southern California, and John Nuckols, LA Opera Vice President for Advancement. Both musical sages spent a bit of time sharing their own very special operatic tales and insights.

Opera League President Dorothy Wait and Vice President Judy Lieb welcomed arriving guests, while bartenders Ernie Prokopovych and Ed Shaff served the evening's signature drink, pomegranate martinis. Patrons dined on gourmet soup, salad, entrees, side dishes and desserts. The fabulous food was prepared by Opera League Board Members: Fred Dear, Monica Gutierrez, Alma

Guzman, Judy Lieb, Brita Millard and Anne Prokopovych, along with Trevor Roper, Monica's husband, and former League President Toni Bird. Thanks go to Board Member Ed Lieb for sound system operation.

Once again we are greatly indebted to Ace Party Rents for all their support, advice and help in planning this dinner. Dale Ross chaired the memorable event. Please join us next

year for the annual
Patrons' Dinner by



Salute to Our Marvelous

On the evening of June 17th Opera League volunteers were honored during the Annual Volunteer Celebration in a rehearsal room at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Every volunteer received a gift, enjoyed homemade light refreshments and a slideshow of the events held throughout the year.

The program began with a welcome from President Dorothy Wait. Gary Murphy, Director of Communications and Public Relations, LA Opera, greeted the volunteers on behalf of the Company.

The highlight of the evening was the interview with bass-baritone David Pittsinger by Vice President Judy Lieb. David, who performed Rambaldo in the recent production of *La Rondine*, talked about his career and opera experiences with wit, charm and intelligence.

The program concluded with the recognition of the many hours contributed to Opera League activities by our volunteers. Special thanks go to event chairs Eleanor Gnup, Judy Lieb and Wendy Van Haerlem.

behind the scenes

Somewhere, Over The Rainbow

By Bob Bernard

The “thing” about myths is their universality: What is portrayed in Wagner’s Ring is readily seen to also play out in our lives today.

Wotan contracts for a Step-Up Mortgage in building his family estate. When the accelerated payment [the goddess Freia] comes due, he renegotiates his construction loan through the services of an unlicensed broker [Loge]. This massive re-financing is ultimately paid for by the working masses [the Niebelungen]. Finally, even with everything apparently settled, one [financial] giant [JPMorgan/Fafner] buys out [kills] the other [Bear Stearns/Fasolt].

The wisdom in Ecclesiastes 1:9-14 is reconfirmed: There is nothing new under the sun, or, for that matter, beneath the Earth in Niebelheim.

This summer Los Angeles Opera [LAO] has continued to build upon the foundation of last year’s Bauprobe [staging] with a month of rehearsals in preparation for next season’s productions of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*.

Pre-performance preparation for a new production typically calls for the Creative Team and singers to be resident here for 5-6 weeks, with an occasional early visit of individual members of the Creative Team during the year preceding the opening. A typical Creative Team is comprised of a Stage Director, Set Designer, Costume Designer, Lighting Designer, and (sometimes) a Choreographer.

By comparison, the pre-performance preparation for each of the operas of *The Ring* is an on-going exercise of Brobdingnagian proportions. The Creative Team from the German side, besides, of course, Director/Designer Achim Freyer, is comprised of:

- 2 Associate Directors
- 2 Associate Set Designers

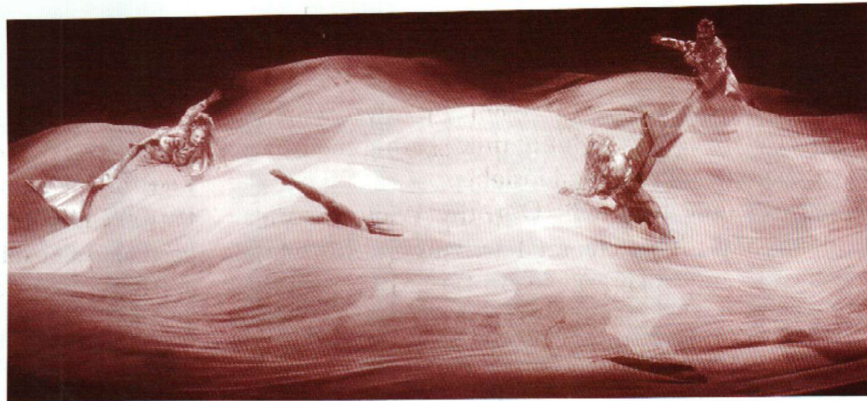


Photo by Monika Rittershaus for LA Opera

From the Bauprobe: Alberich approaches the Rhinemaidens in the opening scene of *Das Rheingold*

- 2 Assistant Costume Designers
- 1 Co-Costume Designer
- 1 Lighting Designer
- 1 Assistant Set Designer
- 1 Movement Coach/Choreographic Assistant
- Photographer

The LAO Summer Ring Staff is comprised of:

- 2 Costume Supervisors
- 2 Assistant Stage Managers
- Production Stage Manager
- Design Coordinator
- Costume Production Coordinator
- Assistant Director

So that LAO might obviate the necessity of putting up any close relative as collateral when the bills come due, LAO has identified and put into practice several cost-saving decisions of its own ‘Oversight Committee’, coordinating its recommendations with the desires of Director/Designer Achim Freyer. These include:

- 1) Instead of employing the entire Freyer-Ensemble, this diversified group’s members who specialize in acting, acrobatics, singing, and dancing have been replaced with a like number of artists, recruited locally.

- 2) Involvement of the principal singers in the creative process only begins in the last six weeks before the opening performance. This is pretty much of a “no-brainer”, given basic economic realities and the existent international commitments of our singers.

- 3) Live music isn’t used in the creative process until the principal singers become involved

This selection of a “Replacement Ensemble” for the Freyer Ensemble has been relatively easy to do. Given that our metropolitan area has an abundance of highly-qualified actors and dancers (to say nothing of the many bartenders and waitresses who have been—temporarily, one hopes—diverted from their career goals, the auditions, conducted one year ago, efficiently pared the original 150 candidates down to the 12 taking part in this month’s rehearsals.

As Stand-Ins for the principal singers, another group of five local artists are so employed.

The recording used for this summer’s rehearsals is that from 1967 in Bayreuth, Karl Böhm conducting. Many consider the Solti London/Decca set to be the

Continued on page 8

Rainbow (cont'd. from page 7)

standard, but the Böhm was selected because of the superior diction of the singers.

So, with these thirty-seven artists from the two Teams and seventeen local artists working six 10-hour days per week, the month's work will yield a set of two Production Books. As is customary, Volume #1 will be the usual amalgam of schedules, cast data, prop, wardrobe & set listings, lighting, and sound & music cues. Volume #2, the Director's copy, will contain the annotated score.

With Production Books in place, the final preparation for opening will then approximate a production revival, rather than a 'working from scratch' situation. The overall developmental game plan for what Director Freyer has christened the "Millennial Ring" then has this timeline:

- July 2008: Preliminary rehearsals and Production Books for *Rbeingold* and *Walküre*
- December 2008: Preliminary rehearsals and Production Books for *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*
- January 2009 – Mid-February: Final rehearsals for *Rbeingold*
- February 22 – Early April: Final rehearsals for *Walküre*

The libretto for *Das Rheingold* calls for the gods to traverse to Valhalla over a rainbow bridge, all the while hearing the Rhinemaidens mourning their lost gold and the curse of Alberich hanging about in the mind, much like a gloomy tapestry. Many of us saw Britten's *Noye's Fludde* (Noah's Flood)

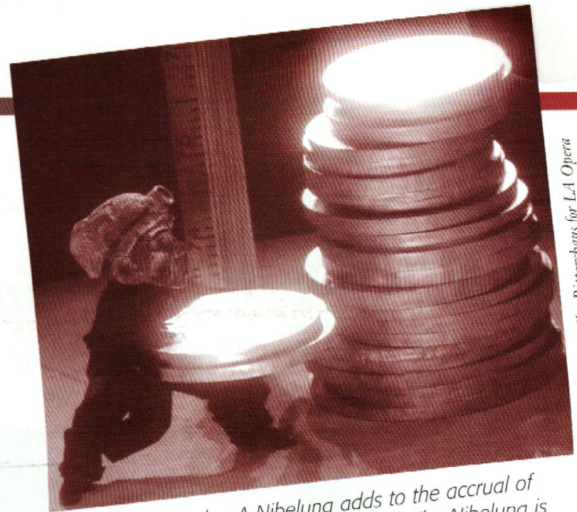


Photo by Monika Rittershaus for LA Opera

From the Bauprobe: A Nibelung adds to the accrual of gold. The scene has a humorous touch: The Nibelung is misshapen, but not really ugly.

at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels a year and a half ago. The end of Noah's Flood left us with both a rainbow and a promise. And one of our childhood myths is that a 'pot of gold' lies at the end of the rainbow.

Whether we find a curse, a promise, or a pot of (cultural) gold at the end of our Ring journey, we are well on our way to go over—and beyond—the rainbow.

Acknowledgement: Many thanks to Lyla Forlani, LAO Resident Production Stage Manager, for taking some of her precious few non-working hours to contribute to the above.



135 North Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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INVITATIONS ARE INCLUDED

★ Seminar – Aug 31

★ Musicale – September 28

See p. 5 for more information

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