

Your Guide To Upcoming Opera League Events

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BRAVO

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

By TOM LADY

EDUCATE! ILLUMINATE! CULTIVATE!

THE OPERA LEAGUE HELPS
THE NEXT GENERATION
EXPAND THEIR BRAINS
WITH CULTURE.

Photo by Alma Guzman.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Anais Montoya

The expression on my face must be of someone lost. For the first time ever, I'm heading into the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion for a reason other than just taking in an opera.

I'm volunteering at my first LA Opera Education event.

Never fear! Not one, but two veteran Opera League volunteers swoop to my rescue, armed with smiles and knowledge and colorful sign posts.

"Here's how it works," says Priscilla Yam. "This is an Operawise event. We're going to get a bunch of colleges here tonight, and we have to organize them and get them signed in. We'll organize them here." She gestures at the floor space separating the glass doors from the grand staircase.

From the President



I hope you enjoy the cover story on the Opera League's intrepid Education team of volunteers who toil tirelessly at LA Opera Education events to spread the love of opera and culture and the arts to the next generation. Like the previous cover story on Gatherings, the Education piece does a terrific job showing the sheer volunteer firepower required to pull off these programs to ensure an upscale and informative experience for you.

That's why I'm always thrilled every May when we have a chance to honor our volunteers. This year our volunteer appreciation event will take place on May 26. No less than Marc Stern, chairman of the board for LA Opera, will be speaking. Volunteers who pick up artists from the airport, provide a sumptuous home-cooked buffet on rehearsal days, speak at public venues, work with LAO's Education and Community Engagement team (EduCom) or sell our wares at Shop at the Opera, these folks are the heart and soul of the League.

However, one team of Opera League volunteers you might not be aware of is the Opera League's Communications team. Let's give these brainiacs a shout out, shall we? Led by Tom Lady (also the editor of BRAVO), the Comms team is the Big Brain behind our rapidly evolving technological infrastructure. This of course includes the website (operaleague.org), eBlasts, Facebook, as well as the cast dinner signups and volunteer tracking. Tom would like to give special props to fellow board members Christa Marks and Tanya Len as well as consulting director (and former Comms chair) Bill Green, League treasurer Julie Holland and Membership chair Regi Merwin for their invaluable support in improving our backend tech.

This team is diligently and patiently hand-holding the League into the 21st century. Bravissimo to them, am I right?

On that note, I will continue to encourage people to forgo hard copy RSVPs via snail mail, and instead do any and all event RSVPing through operaleague.org. It's a win-win-win: quick, easy and paper-free. You technophobes in the audience can let go of your fear. Simply contact Tom at webmaster@operaleague.org and he or someone from his team will happily give you a hand if you're new to online ordering.

At this point in my message, I hope you're chomping at the bit to be a League volunteer yourself, because Tom and the Comms team are looking for a few bright minds.

First, Tom is looking for anyone and everyone with writing skills to become contributors to BRAVO, the lovely publication you are holding in your hands. Got writing skills you want to flex? Just hit up Tom at webmaster@operaleague.org.

How are your computer skills? Ever done web development? Digital media? Ever wondered what it's like to publish something on Facebook on behalf of a nonprofit instead of to your own personal account (it's thrilling!)? Tom and team would love to add more tech talent to the Comms team. One more time: webmaster@operaleague.org is where you can reach out.

Gold stars to anyone who has "Liked" the Opera League on Facebook and knows what I'm talking about when I say that (head to [facebook.com/operaleague](https://www.facebook.com/operaleague) and all will be clear).

Speaking of which, see you at the opera!


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EDUCATE! ILLUMINATE! CULTIVATE!

CONTINUED FROM COVER

"Take this!" Bettyna Bluwal thrusts a wooden post into my hand that has a red sign at the top that reads "Pierce College Italian." "Hold that up so the kids from Pierce know to line up here."

I look around and see other volunteers bearing wooden posts with signs of various colors labeled with school names such as Master's College and Santa Monica College.

"We're getting seven schools tonight," Bettyna informs me. She confirms with Priscilla. "And what? A hundred fifty students or so? They'll be watching *Butterfly* technical rehearsals."

Just like that, I've struck up two friendships and learned a thing or two about Operawise logistics. Better yet, I no longer feel like an extraterrestrial visitor. I'm starting to get excited about this.



Photos by Alma Guzman.



This is no accident. Opera League Education volunteers are renowned for their welcoming spirit, bottomless passion and knowledge, not to speak of being the proverbial grease.

Opera League Education Chair Larry Verdugo sums up a volunteer's job this way: "In a word: smile. Smile at them. Welcome them...We want to teach them about opera, promote opera, nurture future audiences."

The volume increases commensurate with the influx of young folks, many glued to their smartphones, not heeding the instructions of the volunteers.

"Opera League Education volunteers are renowned for their welcoming spirit, bottomless passion and knowledge, not to speak of being the proverbial grease."

Folks like Bettyna are unfazed. She banters in Italian with the kids from Pierce (Italian is a common second language in Bettyna's native Argentina). Suddenly the kids have forgotten all about Candy Crush.

"The arts are so neglected in our school systems," Bettyna says. "Without art, life has no meaning. My life wouldn't be the same if music wasn't in it."

"I love classical music," says Priscilla. "And I want other people to love it too. In order for opera to have a future, the younger generation must be introduced to this art form, so they can appreciate it."

LA Opera offers quite the menu of Education programs for which Larry and his Opera League Education team provide an army of volunteers. The programs include Operawise (for college students), Saturday Mornings at the Opera (for elementary school kids), Opera Prep (high school students) and elementary student matinees during the week.

As for Opera Camp, offered every summer, the Opera League not only lends volunteer power, but thanks to our annual Hemmings gala, we help underwrite it as well.

For the adult crowd, Opera for Educators sees teachers attend interactive lectures by music professionals and then learn how to integrate their newfound knowledge into their curricula.

What Opera League volunteers are expected to do and how many are needed depends on the event. Saturday Mornings at the Opera and Opera Camp each need at least ten volunteers willing to get an early jump on the day. Duties include usher, chaperone, greeter, ticket taker, and safety warden. Opera for Educators? Two or three. Operawise aims for at least five volunteers, or at least as many volunteers as there are schools represented.

Specific duties notwithstanding, and as I learned firsthand at the *Butterfly* Operawise, volunteers are generally expected to help organize the masses of bright young minds.

"And my job in a nutshell is to liaise between LA Opera's EduCom team [Education and Community Engagement], the schools and the League volunteers," Larry says.

Larry of course is a passionate volunteer himself. When LA Opera hosted a weekday matinee for *The Magic Flute* that saw literally thousands of kids show up, Larry and team were all hands on deck. "We were supposed to get thirty volunteers but could only get twenty," he says. Volunteers grouped the kids by school while others greeted them as they got off the buses.



Oh yes, the buses are yet another invaluable contribution from the Opera League. "We have never turned down a request to provide buses that bring students to the opera at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion," Larry says.

"The Opera League provides critical funding for buses so that schools in underserved Los Angeles communities have an opportunity to come to the Dorothy Chandler and experience opera," says Nathan Rifenburg, Education Manager on LAO's EduCom team. "Once here, League volunteers welcome students with smiles and information."

Stacy Brightman, Senior Director of LAO EduCom, gushes: "I appreciate the passion, grace and service ethic of our many Opera League volunteers. They understand that they are the face of our company... The work is never glamorous, but I hope they feel the glory of it along with my deepest gratitude."

The pleasure, to turn a phrase, is all the volunteers'.



"I enjoy sharing my life of opera with young people," says Lenore Rodah, volunteer extraordinaire who also lends a hand at the Shop at the Opera and is one of our light walkers. "And encouraging them to develop a place for opera in their musical life." 🌟



Photo by Kristen Hoeberrmann



© Dallas Padova Photography

TRAVELIN' ALONG... SINGIN' A SONG... SIDE BY SIDE

By BEVERLY PHILLIPS

LA Opera Young Artists Summer Hassan and Frederick Ballentine are following amazingly similar paths as they pursue their operatic careers. They both studied at Cincinnati's Conservatory of Music where they first met in 2012. A few years later both were admitted to the Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program at LA Opera. This season they appeared in *The Magic Flute* with Summer singing the role of the Second Lady and Frederick performing as the Armed Guard. Both are 26 and from the South with Summer hailing from North Carolina and Frederick a native Virginian.

With such striking similarities in their background and musical training, it comes as no surprise that they have forged a very special friendship.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEARD THAT YOU WERE CHOSEN AS AN LAO YOUNG ARTIST?

FREDERICK: I was so excited because I knew they could do something with my talent. I knew my voice was strange after transitioning from baritone to tenor and that I needed to go where they could help me to understand it so I could grow.

SUMMER: It was midnight and I was already in bed when I received the email. I jumped up yelling and started screaming "What?! What?!" so many times that the neighbors down below thought I was screaming "Rat! Rat!"

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY OPERA?

SUMMER: My mom took me to see *The Phantom of the Opera* in Canada when I was six. I grew up with the music and by the time we saw the performance, I knew every word. I realized at that moment I wanted to perform.

FREDERICK: I was in middle school and had always wanted to be a lawyer. I had sung in church and a boy's choir, but nothing serious. One day my mom informed me that she had submitted my application to a performing arts high school, and that I had an audition that day! I had always been a confident boy soprano so when adjudicators asked me how I felt the school could improve my singing, I said I don't know how I could be any better... I honestly thought you were either good or not. I didn't know

you could take voice lessons to improve. Somehow they let me into the school.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR VOICE?

FREDERICK: Dark. People describe my voice as stentorian. I'll take that. It has a direct sound, steely, darker and direct. I am not a lyrical high tenor.

SUMMER: My voice is warm. I'm a lyric soprano who has to remember that sticking with lighter rep at the beginning will be better for my longevity. Our voices work well together.

SUMMER, YOU STAND 5'-3", YET YOU HAVE SUCH A GIANT VOICE. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

SUMMER: (laughing) Probably screaming a lot as a kid. No, it's learning proper techniques and not getting in the way of your voice. We have a bad habit of making singing harder than it needs to be. There are so many counter intuitive things that we do to make our voices louder that only hinder us...

FREDERICK: Right! Strip it down and let it out.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE ROLES SO FAR?

SUMMER: Norina in *Don Pasquale*. I never expected to be cast in this role. For once I didn't have to die! I finally had a chance to be the soprano comedic and fun soprano. The director said to have fun with the role and I did. I could be super goofy and I threw myself into it.

FREDERICK: T. Morris Chester in *Appomattox* by Philip Glass at Washington National Opera. It was the first opera I have done that I felt could make a difference in people's lives. T. Morris Chester was the first African American war correspondent during the Civil War and he was written to portray the mental state of African Americans at the time. I had to take on the emotions of an entire people and go out on stage and try to make the audience feel it.

YOUR MOST DIFFICULT ROLE?

SUMMER: Yet to come. This summer I will be singing Musetta in *La Bohème* at Wolf Trap. The whole concept of being sexy is rather daunting.

FREDERICK: The first time I did the Armed Guard in *The Magic Flute* a few years ago. It's a small role, and you're only on stage for five minutes. However, no tenor wants to sing it since it's so exposed and written in the most difficult part of the tenor voice.

WHAT ARE YOUR DREAM ROLES?

SUMMER: Countless ones. Sign me up for anything Puccini or Verdi that I haven't been able to sing thus far because of my young age. Liù in *Turandot*, *Anna Bolena*, *Peter Grimes*, Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*...

FREDERICK: I would love to sing *Don Carlos*, Radamès in *Aida*, Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*, *Peter Grimes*... maybe Siegmund? 🌟

LIKE AND SHARE

BY TOM LADY

With the dynamic duo of @KarenBacellar and @AmishaPatankar, #LAOpera's "social" skills have improved dramatically. How do you "Like" that?"

If an organization is to stay relevant in this wireless, hyperlinked, hashtagged world, social media is key. Thankfully, LA Opera nipped the relevancy problem in the bud last summer when it "Liked" Karen Bacellar and Amisha Patankar.

"I manage LA Opera's content," Karen says. "That includes the blog [blog.laopera.org]. I would say I write and edit the vast majority of the articles for the blog, and that nine times out of ten, they are determined by upcoming operas. After articles are published, I work with Amisha to promote the content through social media."

"We use multiple social media channels," Amisha says. As she ticks them off, my head spins: "Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and, new to the table, Snapchat."

Before I can recover, Karen adds, "Social media lets us reach a wide range of people who may not necessarily be LA Opera followers, or even opera fans...The ultimate goal is to grow our audience."

At the time of our interview, *Madame Butterfly* rehearsals are underway. Amisha uses Twitter to broadcast the rehearsal process in real time. She tweets photos and brief descriptions. "I try to make the captions light and fun," she says.

Karen, meanwhile, compliments Amisha's social reporting with an interview of *Butterfly* director Lee Blakeley that she publishes to the blog. Amisha then shares the link to that interview on Facebook.

The nature of social media all but begs the audience to get involved in content creation.

From the start of the season last September, people have been encouraged to #LAOpera their photos. This sends the photos to a queue where Amisha curates the comments onto LA Opera's Twitter page. It's a great way for her to harness the fans to produce a veritable real-time photo stream.

For *The Magic Flute*, Amisha launched a Twitter campaign called #FluteYourself, which invited LAOers to snap fun and goofy pics of themselves and their friends in front of the LA Opera video signage that used some of the projections from the show on the Music Center Plaza and then tag them with #FluteYourself. This fed the images to LA Opera's Twitter page and further generated excitement for the show.

Amisha also has a recurring Twitter program called Tweet Seats, whereby a handful of LA Opera's most "socially" adept fans are invited to live-tweet the final dress rehearsal.

As brave and new as this world may seem, it also contains a core aspect that's same old same old.

"Karen and Amisha are reporters," says their boss Fran Rizzi, Director of Public Relations for LA Opera. "They're telling a story. So, yes, while

things have changed, it's also the same as it's always been. Instead of using the phone, they're using digital technology, which allows for instant feedback. Like versus Love versus Wow. Friends get their news from other friends in addition to, and often instead of, the traditional news outlets."

Another parallel to the old world is a news calendar. "We update our content calendar very far in advance, like any news organization," Karen says. "We look at the upcoming season and consider each opera in terms of the kinds of content we'll create ...Of course, with how fast things move on social media, new content ideas also pop up later."

"Feedback from social media can drive content creation," Fran says. "The audience's voice can be in the content as they engage with it. This ensures there's something in it for them because it's also from them. We watch the numbers for every piece of content published."



How about those numbers? It wouldn't be a stretch to say Karen and Amisha have moved social mountains. From the time they came aboard in July 2015 to the time of our interview in March of this year, LAO has seen #socialnumbersexplosion:

- Over 3,000 new Twitter followers (with over 31,000 total followers)
- Over 8,000 new Instagram followers (with over 13,000 total followers)
- Over 4,000 new Facebook followers (with over 32,000 total followers)

"We use social media to build on the story, add to the story, and engage the audience," Fran says. "Every time users engage with a story, it should give them a reason to take a look at something else or dig a little deeper. Ultimately, social media should form bread crumbs that lead you to getting to know opera a little better and invite you to experience it live."

#LAOpera #LAO30

BLACK ROLES IN MOZART OPERAS CELEBRATED AT AALAO BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENT

By SHELL AMEGA

Los Angeles - African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO) held a seminar entitled "Black Roles in Mozart Operas" on February 7 at the beautiful home of Beverley and Clarence Clarkson in the designated historic district of View Park, a perfect setting for the Black History Month event. Van Young, President of the Friends of William Grant Still Art Center, was a dramatic featured speaker who shared his research findings regarding Mozart, culled from a larger study the presenter has conducted on black roles in opera.

Of particular interest was *The Magic Flute*, which was then playing at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Van Young pointed out that "Mozart and librettist Emanuel Schikaneder created both the hero Tamino and the villain Monostatos as black men. As shocking a concept for 1791 as it is for 2016."

Attendees were treated to copies of a Mozart-approved frontispiece for *The Magic Flute* and an explanation of its artwork imbued with esoteric symbolism including references to freemasonry and Egypt, the original setting of the opera. Van Young noted that Mozart demonstrates in *The Magic Flute* the now familiar concept that man should be judged by his character and not the color of his skin. Vocal artist Mark Broyard, who recently sang for Disney Hall's REDCAT, illustrated these points by singing several arias.

Van Young expressed hope that American opera companies that often replace roles written for blacks with non-black singers will begin giving opportunities to the rich talent-of-color that is available.

The event was attended by nearly 40 people in spite of the date coinciding with the Super Bowl.

AALAO is dedicated to increasing the awareness of opera throughout the Los Angeles community. Their next event, the Annual Membership Father's Day Recital, will be held on Sunday, June 19, at the home of Ben and Delores Kerr in Hancock Park.

The cost is \$25 in advance and \$35 at the door. It is advisable to reserve tickets early as most events fill to capacity. For more information, please contact Jacque Lyne Wallace 424.245.4659. Make checks payable to The Opera League of Los Angeles/AALAO and mail c/o Ben Kerr. 🌟

IN THE PIT

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERTO CANI, CONCERTMASTER


By DIANE EISENMAN

Experiencing a violinist on stage performing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in Milan, Italy, 7-year-old Roberto Cani determined then and there he would someday play that concerto. Attending Milan Conservatory, he practiced diligently to fulfill his dream. It was here that he remembers meeting Plácido Domingo, who was recording *Otello* but still took time out to greet young Roberto.

Moving to Moscow at age 20, he studied violin at the Gnessin Institute. He also traveled throughout Europe as a concert soloist, his repertoire including the Tchaikovsky Concerto, which he still enjoys playing. During the Paganini Competition, which he won, Abram Shtern heard Roberto perform and invited him to become his student. Roberto followed Mr. Shtern to Los Angeles in December 1992. Eventually receiving an Artist Diploma from the University of Southern California, Roberto continued to perform concerts in Europe and also served as guest concertmaster at La Scala, the London Philharmonic, and the Radio and Television Orchestra in Milan.

2010 was a milestone year for Roberto. He was hired as Concertmaster of Los Angeles Opera, and met his soon-to-be wife Helen, an opera lover from Kiev, at Kendall's after an opera performance. Roberto and Helen now have a 16-month-old daughter Sofia who already listens to opera and watches ballet. He says of this special year, "Everything comes when you don't expect it!"

The physicality of the violin makes it a challenging instrument to play. It requires a stable posture in uncomfortable positions. "You need to be in shape, like an athlete." The violin repertoire can be quite difficult, requiring considerable practice. "Today I feel quite lucky that I used to practice 10 hours a day, so most of the challenging music is still in my hands."



"Making these instruments has made a big difference in my performance"

By BOB BERNARD


A LEAP OF FAITH

We still have a year before LA Opera revives *Tosca*, but that doesn't mean we can't take the leap forward to one of our favorite moments in the piece.

Roberto deepens his understanding of the violin as a craftsman. Discovering that he likes to work with wood, he now makes violins and violas in addition to his own bows. "Making these instruments has made a big difference in my performance."

Like his father before him, Roberto especially enjoys Italian opera. He wishes LAO "would do more Rossini operas, and more happy and comedic operas, not so much the sad ones." The length and technical demands of German operas, especially Wagner and Strauss, provide the most challenging opera music to play.

As Spalla, or Concertmaster, he stands on the "shoulder" of the Maestro. The Spalla must prepare the bowing and dynamics for the whole string section before the first rehearsal. He sits on a short riser and makes large gestures to direct the orchestra members, listening for changing responses according to the Maestro in each moment.



Since becoming concertmaster, he has been working with the Maestro to create a more "Italian" sound – more expressive and emotional. After four years, the Maestro and Roberto are excited that it is really happening. "It is something you can't describe, but you can feel." In Italy, the audiences are critical, often knowing every note of the opera. Preferring the "old style" of performance, which is more about feelings and emotional expression, Roberto finds that "this is where the magic lies. And this magic fulfills my soul." 🌸

Mentioning *Tosca* probably makes your memories leap back to riveting stagings of the *Te Deum*, sublime renditions of the *Vissa d'arte*, and....the Leap.

Tosca's fatal leap from atop the Castel Sant' Angelo is one of those moments that sticks. First impressions are lasting, but so are final impressions. In the operatic repertoire, few final impressions are, well, as impressive, not to speak of truly final, as the Leap.

Opera-L, an online opera interest group, recently erupted into a lively banter about all things Leap.

Below is a list of sopranos who've taken the Leap, paired with a quote from someone on Opera-L who witnessed said Leap. I've organized this airborne nostalgia into three categories: Leapers, Non-Leapers, and the inimitable Bouncing Tosca.

LEAPERS:

1) Renato Scotto: "[A]s she took off for parts unknown, her skirt appeared to sprout wings as it enveloped the space around her. The last thing the audience saw as she fell to her eternal reward was that enormous raft of material floating in mid air. It was awesome. It was magnificent, and it brought the sold-out audience to its feet in frenzy."

2) Aprile Millo: "Her jump was literally a spread-eagle vault, and I swear she went horizontal for a few seconds!! We were stupefied."

3) Hildegard Behrens: "Behrens jumped waaaaay upwards above the parapet and that twist of the body, giving the impression she was going to fly up to heaven for that meeting with God right then and there. Then . . . WOOSH she was gone! ... very chilling."

4) Susan Foster: "Her *Tosca*...was the most chilling exit I've seen in this opera. She stood at the top of the parapet and flung the final phrase out while facing the audience - then with arms outstretched in a cruciform, still facing us, blindly fell backwards to her death. I get chills just thinking about it."

5) Eleanor Steber: "On the night she debuted as *Tosca* at the Met, Ms. Steber's Leap did result in an impact. She broke part of her front middle tooth. Her rival, Zinka Milanov, offered, 'See, Eleanor, I told you this role was too heavy for you!'"

NON-LEAPERS:

1) Kiri Te Kanawa: "Close examination of the telecast of her performance from Lyon will reveal the fact that she walked off stage only to be replaced by a life-size shadow on a screen



Catherine Malfitano takes a leap in the 1992 film adaptation of *Tosca*

that gets grayer and grayer until it disappears, giving the illusion of a slow-motion jump."

2) Montserrat Caballe [the Met]: "She didn't jump but simply walked calmly into the wings after singing, 'O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!' She made no attempt at characterization whatever, ambling offstage as if she was looking for the ladies' room! The men chasing her had to break into virtual slow-motion in order not to catch her!"

2) Montserrat Caballe [Vienna]: "She walked behind a pillar. Trouble was she stuck out on both sides of it."

BOUNCING TOSCA

Woe be the *Tosca* who forgets to roll upon hitting the trampoline, but instead bounces back into full view of the audience.

True to anything (or anyone) that bounces, it's hard to pin down the sopranos who rocked instead of rolled. That doesn't stop us from putting our ear to the gossip mill, however. Divas, am I right?

To wit:

1) An early bouncing suspect was Emma Eames.

2) Ditto Zinka Milanov.

3) Always competition for Ms. Milanov, Eleanor Steber is an alleged bouncer.

4) Ms. Steber, however, fingered Lily Djanel as a bouncer.

5) Dame Eva Turner insisted that she herself bounced, and how.

To bounce through the complete version of this piece, leap on over to Bob Bernard's Corner on operaleague.org. 🌸



ZEVOLUTION

By TOM LADY

That's right, on April 2 we made our annual pilgrimage to the incomparable California Club for the Peter Hemmings Award Dinner. On this night we toasted Zev Yaroslavsky, whose 20 years as a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors reads like a comic book about the superhero who rescued culture.

Consider. It was Zev who helped secure the critical bridge loan that allowed LA Opera to go through with the Ring Cycle during the global financial meltdown. It was Zev who played a pivotal role in kickstarting the Disney Hall project when it seemed to have crawled into a corner and died. It was Zev who provided leadership in the development of the Valley Performing Arts Center at Cal State Northridge.

Zev, not Superman or Captain America, added civic and financial muscle behind private-sector supported renovations and improvements at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Natural History Museum.

After we presented *Daredevil*—I mean, *Zev*—with a framed photo of himself as a supernumerary (what the movie and TV biz calls an extra) in the 2014-15 season opener of *La Traviata*, we kicked back with champagne and wine and the best food ever and took in bravura performances by LAO Young Artists Summer Hassan, Nicholas Brownlee and Migran Agadzhanian, accompanied by their head coach Nino Sanikidze.

Special thanks to Alma Guzman for the photos.

All that raucousness and glass clinking you heard the first Saturday in April belonged to the Opera League.

1. (ABOVE) Martene Chavez 2. Tom Lady, Taylor McCallum 3. Monica Gutierrez and Trevor Roper, Argyro Hadey 4. Nino Sanikidze, Migran Agadzhanian, Summer Hassan, Nicholas Brownlee 5. Zev Yaroslavsky, Marc Stern 6. California Club 7. Paul and Shell Brown Derouin 8. Gail Eichenenthal, Christopher Koelsch, Susan Stamberger, Rita Pudenz 9. (OPPOSITE) Migran Agadzhanian 10. (SEATED) Julie Holland, Anne Prokopovych, Mirjana Mahnovski, Mimi Rotter, (STANDING) Brita Kohlfürst-Millard, Susan Heard 11. Peter and Diane Gray 12. Susan and Bill Bloomfield, James and Jennifer Conlon 13. Eleanor Gnup, Christa Marks 14. Marilyn Ziering 15. Guy Crawford, Carol Ann Peterson 16. Jennifer Conlon, Eva Stern, Brita Kohlfürst-Millard 17. Zev Yaroslavsky, Martene Chavezman 18. Nina Haro, Kathy Crandall, Allan Edmiston MD 19. Larry Verdugo, Ernie Prokopovych. Photos by Alma Guzman.



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Photo by Tom Lady

LONE STAR

AN INTERVIEW WITH OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEER
(AND RENAISSANCE WOMAN) ANAIS MONTOYA By TOM LADY

“It’s humbling when you volunteer for something many people don’t think of. A lot of people think opera is a lost art, it’s dying. [She waves her hands around at the outdoor patio.] Ask anyone around here, ‘Do you like opera?’ And most of them will say, ‘Oh it’s boring.’ When you volunteer for something like this, you know you’re with people who are passionate about it, who don’t waste time.”

Anais Montoya is a full-time student at CalArts majoring in Voice Arts. This semester, though, she’s “only” taking sixteen credits. “Last semester I took nineteen and a half credits.” She laughs at my going agog. “I had no idea how much that would be!”

Don’t even get her started on Music Theory.

Anais was born and raised in Killeen, Texas to immigrant parents from Spain. The

youngest of four, she was the only one in her household born in the States. That’s not the only thing that sets her apart. “I’m the sole artist in a family of doctors, lawyers, engineers... In my family? Everyone went to UT [University of Texas at Austin] and pursued some sort of advanced degree. It [the household] was a very academic atmosphere. The arts were typically viewed as a hobby. So whenever I was singing, the attitude was like, ‘Okay, the fun’s over. Go back to your school work.’”

When I ask how and when she got into singing, she shrugs. “I’ve been singing as long as I can remember. I was always in a choral group, winning awards, getting in trouble.” She laughs, then tempers it with sincerity. “I grew up around people who may have been successful in their careers, but who weren’t very happy. I don’t ever want to look back on my life and regret not taking the path I wanted to take.”

Her focus at CalArts is classical singing. “If you can do that, you can do anything... The big challenge is the tricky breathing movements involving the throat, the rib cage, the abdomen.” She gives me a crash course, which I fail miserably. “Tricky, right? Renée Fleming talks about this in her autobiography. My mentor at CalArts actually sang with her when they were both students.”

Among her favorite opera singers is Romanian soprano Angela Gheorghiu. “She’s the type of woman who owns herself and her sensuality, and her singing reflects that with a certain spice. It’s very strong and powerful.”

Anais joined the Opera League in 2012 because she was seeking an outlet that would cater to both her musical passion as well as her desire to serve the community. Eventually she synced up with Larry Verdugo, the League’s Education chair. “I met Larry and he told me everything about the League, everything the League offers.” If you’ve been to any of the Education events, maybe you’ve seen Anais signing in the teachers and doling out those welcome packets and tickets.

Given everything on her overflowing plate, the question begs: At the end of the day, how does she unwind?

“*Friends!*” she gushes, referring to the enormously successful sitcom that ran from 1995-2004 and is still in global syndication. “I’ve watched the entire series all the way through four times...When I get home, I’ll hop on Netflix and watch an episode or two...It doesn’t matter how rough the day has been, *Friends* never fails to make me laugh.” 🌸

By BEVERLY PHILLIPS

MINISTER OF GIVING BACK

The ebullient Reverend Richard Bower DD, originally from Somerville, New Jersey, has been on stage, or rather the pulpit, all his adult life.

After receiving his Masters of Divinity from Drew University, he continued his studies at the Sorbonne and Oxford. His peripatetic ministry took him to Wisconsin, back to his native Garden State as well as the Golden State—most recently at the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles where he was Senior Minister. He has been National Moderator, has delivered myriad sermons, officiated at over 3,000 weddings and “a whole bunch of funerals” and has been retired for 20 years.

Richard’s no newcomer to opera. “I was introduced to opera in seventh grade. Our school’s music teacher had two tickets in the dress circle for every Saturday matinee at the Met, so we often had an opportunity to see performances with her. We also went to dress rehearsals for students. As I became older, I attended operas abroad at La Scala, the Paris Opera, and Covent Garden and also subscribed to the Met and NYC Opera.”

When he moved to L.A. in 1978, there was no opera company except for NYC Opera which came on tour once a year. “When Plácido Domingo came, it was like an answer to a prayer. I immediately became a subscriber as well as an Opera League member. I did not really become involved with the League until three years ago when Mary Riggs said I should. I love it because it’s fun and I’ve met such wonderful people. Everyone is happy and spirited and glad to be contributing to the support of the

opera. I participate in cast dinners, Opera Prep, dress rehearsals, educational events and gatherings.”

His favorite volunteer opportunity is dress rehearsals for students. “I especially want to pay back here because this is how I was introduced to opera myself as a child.

“Beverly Sills is my favorite opera singer. I was at the Met when she made her debut. It was so fabulous because she and Rudolf Bing had had this thing that they were not associating with each other. Finally, she was invited to the Met and when she came out, the audience gave her a 5-minute standing ovation. Bubbles, she was called.”

Richard’s favorite opera is *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, but his tastes span the whole range of operatic styles and periods. “Baroque to contemporary, there is very little I don’t enjoy.”

Richard may be retired, but he has surely not slowed down. In addition to volunteering for the League, he also volunteers for the LA Phil, attends weekly theater events and travels extensively, with a total of 11 cruises last year! This year? Well, there is China...Alaska...yet more cruises...and more volunteering for the League when he’s land bound. 🌻



Photo by Julie Holland

MISSILES TO NOODLES

By BEVERLY PHILLIPS

Have you ever eaten a delicious lo mein noodle dish prepared by a chef, a spec writer for ballistic missiles, and an electrical engineer who helped build the Dorothy Chandler? If you come to the cast dinners, your answer is surely yes, as he is volunteer David Wang.



Photo by Julie Holland

Born in Shanghai, the soft-spoken David Wang (pronounced Wong) relocated to Japan at age eight after WWII when his father was sent there on a diplomatic mission. That’s where David saw his first opera, *Madame Butterfly*. At 17 he left Japan to attend Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Although he wanted to study journalism, his father said, “Secure your rice bowl first and go into something like engineering.”

As it turned out, engineering was pretty thrilling.

“I wrote the electrical specifications for the launch control center and launch control support building at the Minuteman Wing 6 intercontinental ballistic missile launching facilities in North Dakota. I also did the electrical power design for the training facilities in Vandenberg, California.”

Electrical engineering later led him to the Music Center, of all places, where David worked for its designer and builder, Welton Becket. David worked

on the pavilion, the staging, special lighting for the Founders’ Circle and the fire alarm systems for all three theaters. “I have always felt a special connection to the Music Center because of my involvement in its actual building and design.”

He didn’t stop there. “I’m really a jack-of-all-trades. I’ve been around the country educating dentists on implant systems and have taught Chinese cooking for the LA City College Outreach Program. I was offered a TV cooking show but, regrettably, did not take it on. My last corporate job was director of facilities for a hospital, a challenging but successful endeavor.”

Now retired, David loves traveling, concerts, attending Opera League gatherings and cooking for the cast dinners. Come meet this charming man who says, “If I can make another person’s life a little easier to live, then my own life will be that much more worthwhile.”

Favorite operas? *Tristan and Isolde*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème* and, of course, *Madame Butterfly*. 🌻

By BILL KENNEDY

CATCHING UP WITH YAPPS

Everyone adores the star singers who adorn the stage of LA Opera, but Opera League members have a special place in their hearts for members of LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program, or YAPs for short.

League members see YAPs in mainstage productions but also hear, see, and mingle with them at many of the salons, musicales, seminars and special events that dot the League's calendar.

So, with the aid of the LA Opera staff, BRAVO sought to find out how the lives and careers of three recent Young Artists have developed since they moved on, and especially how they feel the program contributed to their personal and artistic development.

For all of them, the Young Artist Program was a launching pad for singing careers that are taking them into the stratosphere of the opera world.

Ironically, all three proved you can go home again by returning to LA Opera this season for major roles in mainstage productions. Sopranos Janai Brugger and Amanda Woodbury will both be taking on Musetta in the split-cast production of *La Bohème*. Earlier this year tenor Ben Bliss sang Tamino in *The Magic Flute*.

For all three of the emerging stars, their experience in LA has left them with personal recollections and connections that are as important in many ways as the professional ones.

Visit operaleague.org to read the expanded version of this article with their heartfelt recollections.



Since leaving the Young Artist Program in 2012, Chicago native **Janai Brugger** has leapt onto the world's top stages. While seven months pregnant four years ago, she made her Met Opera debut as Liù in the spectacular Franco Zeffirelli-designed production of *Turandot* and followed up in the role of Helena in the baroque/Shakespeare pastiche *Enchanted Island*. She has also sung in concerts led by both James Conlon

and Gustavo Dudamel, among others, and performed the role of Pamina in *The Magic Flute* last year at Covent Garden.

Janai is especially grateful for the improv training that is such an important part of the Young Artist Program. "You really need to know how to recover when things don't go as they should," she says. She also credits the program with getting her ready for "what you will face in the real world. You learn how to be prepared, act professionally and be a good colleague."

She has worked and compared notes with many other top young singers in the four years since she left the LA nest and has come to appreciate that the program here "really uses you and puts you on stage." She said some of her colleagues who came from other programs got plenty of work and were assigned as covers but didn't necessarily go on stage if the principal got sick."



Dallas native **Amanda Woodbury**, a 2012-14 Young Artist, echoes Janai's comments. She says the principal goal for the leaders of the program seems to be to serve the artists, not the company.

"We were worked hard, but never overworked," she says. "The leaders of the program

are very aware that it's easy for young singers to hurt their voices."

Since leaving LA, Amanda has performed as Konstanze in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at the Des Moines Metro Opera (with Ben Bliss as her Belmonte) and debuted at the Met in the trouser role of Tebaldo in *Don Carlo*. She also sang there again as Leila in the final performance of this season's acclaimed new production of *The Pearl Fishers*.

Amanda credits the program with allowing her to "step into the professional world with confidence and to know what to expect and what's expected of me."



Ben Bliss' entry into the Young Artist Program was less conventional. A music minor at Chapman University, the Prairie Village, Kansas native had embarked upon a television career but then decided to switch to singing. A mutual friend put him in touch with Joshua Winograde, LA Opera's Senior Director of Artistic Planning. From that serendipitous beginning

(and a chance to sing a beloved zarzuela piece for Maestro Domingo), Ben joined the Young Artist Program from 2011-13.

Since his prior musical training wasn't as extensive as that of his peers, it was especially important to Ben that the program provide him with "opera at a foundational level: good skills, learning and preparing music, working with conductors" and so on. The "family atmosphere" helped, too, making Ben feel "a part of all that's going on at the opera."

To further his foundational training, Ben entered the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. After working closely with Maestros Conlon and Domingo he went to NY and had the opportunity to work closely with Met Music Director James Levine. These are special experiences Ben will treasure forever.

While in the Lindemann program, he made his Met debut as Vogelgesang in *Die Meistersinger*. His 2015-16 schedule includes the aforementioned Belmonte with Des Moines and Flamand in *Capriccio* at Sante Fe Opera. 🌸

QUIZ TIME!

Being an operagoer means reckoning with a whole new vocabulary.

Below are five words from the opera world. Can you match the word with the right definition? (No using Wikipedia!)

1. SUPERNUMERARY

- A. A tracking spotlight
- B. A particularly spectacular production
- C. A non-speaking, non-singing role
- D. Highly ornamented singing
- E. None of the above

2. PARLANDO

- A. Recitative
- B. Milling about on the stage as in crowd scenes
- C. A small room within a larger set
- D. Italian term for Singspiel
- E. None of the above

3. SOUBRETTE

- A. A dinner setting
- B. In French opera, an aside
- C. A lighter voice type
- D. A maid
- E. None of the above

4. CADENZA

- A. An elaborate - often improvised - part of an aria
- B. A repetition of a passage within the score
- C. An increase in musical intensity and volume
- D. A type of dance
- E. None of the above

5. SINGSPIEL

- A. A comedic patter aria
- B. German opera mixing singing and spoken dialogue
- C. German term for parlando
- D. A run of 1/16th notes
- E. None of the above

Head to operaleague.org for the answers!

CALENDAR

APRIL

Opera for Educators

LA BOHÈME

Sat, Apr 16, 8:00-11:00am

NEED 4 VOLUNTEERS EACH

Pasadena Showcase House

Apr 17 – May 15

VOLUNTEERS CAN CONTACT

IFANG AT PERHAPS_PAGANINI@YAHOO.COM

Elementary Student Matinees

Thu, Apr 28, 8:30am-1:00pm

Fri, Apr 29, 8:30am-1:00pm

NEED 15 VOLUNTEERS EACH

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

Sat, Apr 30, 8:30-11:30am

NEED 12 VOLUNTEERS

MAY

Premier Dinner

Sun, May 1, 6:00pm

WILSHIRE COUNTRY CLUB

Backstage Magic

LA BOHÈME EXPOSÉ

Wed, May 4, 6:00-8:00pm

DCP

Operawise

LA BOHÈME

Tue, May 10, 2:00-6:00pm

Tue, May 10, 6:30-10:30pm

NEED 7 VOLUNTEERS EACH

Cast Dinner (TIME IS WHEN TO DELIVER FOOD)

Tue, May 10, 5:00pm

LA BOHÈME

(REHEARSAL ROOMS 1 & 2)

Opera Prep

LA BOHÈME

Thu, May 12, 4:30-10:30pm

NEED 12 VOLUNTEERS

Discover Opera

Sat, May 14, 9:00-11:00am

NEED 2 VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer Appreciation

Thu, May 26, 5:30-8:30pm

5:30-6:15PM RECEPTION

6:15PM INTERVIEW WITH MARC STERN

BY GARY MURPHY

7:00PM PROGRAM

DCP REHEARSAL ROOM 3

JUNE

AAALAO Father's Day

Membership Recital

Sun, Jun 19, 3:00-6:00pm

AT THE HOME OF DELORES AND BEN KERR

QUESTIONS: JACQUE LYNE WALLACE

424.245.4659

JULY

Hollywood Bowl

Sun, Jul 24

OCTOBER

San Diego Opera Trip

LA CENERENTOLA

Sun, Oct 30

QUESTIONS: BRITA MILLARD AT

BMILLARD_99@YAHOO.COM

EDUCATION EVENTS

Elementary Student Matinees

Volunteers welcome, supervise and guide elementary age children who attend opera.

Discover Opera (FORMERLY OPERA 101)

Volunteers will host and provide direction to teachers and sign-in participants.

Opera for Educators

Teachers attend sessions to advance their education on the operas of the season and earn salary points. Volunteers check in participants and provide information.

Operawise

College students and teachers attend a working rehearsal and observe the company at work. Volunteers chaperone and provide information.

Opera Prep

High school students attend a dress rehearsal and a special seminar that promotes careers in the arts.

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

Volunteers assist with elementary age children who attend opera and art workshops.

CONTACT INFORMATION

CAST DINNERS: Diane Henderson

HOME: 323.874.8214 / CELL: 323.251.7484

dhenderson3417@sbcglobal.net

EDUCATION: Larry Verdugo

CELL: 626.590.5697

larryverdugo@icloud.com

GATHERINGS

Beverly Hills

Mimi Rotter 310.479.0259 RSVP

Anne Russell Sullivan 323.697.9733

Hollywood / Hancock Park

Marlene Chavez 323.934.5777 RSVP

Sean Muhlstein 818.825.2228

Orange County

Lorna Blancaflor 562.259.7426 RSVP

Christa Marks 714.871.5525

San Fernando Valley

Regi Merwin 818.400.2578 RSVP

San Gabriel Valley

Michael Sholer 818.502.1988 RSVP

La Bohème

Mon, Apr 25, 7:00pm

5278 La Cañada Boulevard

La Cañada, CA 91011

Hosts: Barbara and Jack Dawson

Santa Clarita

Ann Anderson and Ron Gordon

661.259.9619 RSVP

La Bohème

Mon, May 9, 6:30 pm

25506 Longfellow Place

Stevenson Ranch, CA 91381

Hosts: Ann Anderson and Ron Gordon

South Bay

Ifang (ee-fong) Hsieh 310.279.9927 RSVP

Westside

Monika Whitaker 310.826.4743 RSVP

Alice and Chuck Bragg 310.454.9662

VISIT THE WEBSITE CALENDAR FOR CURRENT INFORMATION: OPERALEAGUE.ORG

OPERA TALKS

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Opera Talks at Local Libraries

Informative and exciting Opera Talks are presented monthly at a local library near you.

FOR LOCATIONS, DATES AND TIMES, VISIT THE LA OPERA WEBSITE: laopera.org/community. CLICK ON **General** AND SELECT THE **Opera Talks** TAB. CHECK BACK MONTHLY AS ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS ARE ADDED.

PUCCINI'S SEX LIFE

AND OTHER SEMINAR TOPICS By KATHY CRANDALL

"Ten Things You Didn't Know about Puccini," the title of our March seminar at UCLA, was enormously successful, if customer satisfaction is any gauge.

The Bruins' very own Dr. Michael Hackett was in bravissimo form as he regaled us with tales of Puccini's less successful operas, his interactions with his peers, the arts and artists of his time, and scandals involving his sex life. No shortage of attendees stayed afterwards to tell Dr. Hackett and myself how pleased they were with the afternoon and the singers.

Photographer: Brita Kohlfürst-Millard



Dr. Michael Hackett with tenor Nathan Granner



Kathy Crandall with soprano Marina Harris



Brita Kohlfürst-Millard, accompanist
Brad Smith, Mirjana Mahnovski

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Opera League of Los Angeles
123 S. McCadden Pl.
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For more information, call 323.934.5777, or send email to: docmar@ca.rr.com

SAVE THE DATES!

Mark your calendars for Sunday, September 11 and Sunday, October 30. Here's why.

Please note the above dates are subject to change.

Watch for the August BRAVO to catch the confirmed dates for all our 2016-17 seminars. You can count on some surprises.

Our 2016-17 seminar season kicks off on Sunday, September 11 with a seminar on the mad Scottish king himself. The *Macbeth* seminar will cover a certain Mr. Shakespeare, Verdi's love of the Bard's work, what inspired Verdi to adapt the Scottish play to opera, and where in his epic career this work fits into his formidable oeuvre.

Got a hankering for Ancient Egypt? Who doesn't? That's why on Sunday, October 30, you'll want to pop into our seminar on *Akhnaten*, the third in Philip Glass's trilogy of operas regarding landmark historical figures. What was happening in Egypt at the time and how does the music reflect this? You know you want to know this.



L to R, Marlena Pfeifer, Nancy Phang, Steve and Karen Kohn, Mimi Rotter. Photo by Marlena Pfeifer

SHOP AT THE OPERA

Open two hours before each performance in the lobby of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Stop by and browse our constantly updated collections of jackets, scarves, purses, jewelry....and always surprises! Then proudly don your purchases like a diva, knowing you are helping to support your Los Angeles Opera League's goal in bringing culture to our community.

The Shop at the Opera is the major fundraiser for the Opera League. Profits support the LA Opera Education and Outreach Program.

OPERA LEAGUE MEMBERSHIPS

There is an opera league membership for everyone! Join one of our six levels to enjoy our more than 60 activities per year, have fun and experience opera *Behind the Scenes*. Visit our website: operaleague.org and click on *Membership* to learn about the great benefits. Regular memberships and above are for two people.

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP	\$25
ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP	\$50
REGULAR MEMBERSHIP	\$100
CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP	\$200
SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP	\$350
PREMIER MEMBERSHIP	\$550

OPERA LEAGUE MISSION STATEMENT

The Opera League of Los Angeles, founded in 1981, is dedicated to supporting LA Opera and to stimulating interest and participation in opera in the Southern California community.



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DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

Pasadena Showcase House

Apr 17 – May 15

Premier Dinner

Sun, May 1

Backstage Magic

Wed, May 4

Volunteer Appreciation

Thu, May 26

AALAO Father's Day Membership Recital

Sun, Jun 19

Hollywood Bowl

Sun, Jul 24

San Diego Opera Trip

Sun, Oct 30

Non-Profit Org.
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Pasadena, CA
Permit #740

GO "BOWLING" WITH THE LEAGUE

How would you like to spend a glorious summer's evening with Gustavo Dudamel conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a concert performance of the extravagantly expressive music of *Tosca*?

Sure you would!

Join your fellow Opera Leaguers at the Hollywood Bowl to experience the intense drama of *Tosca*, sung by Julianna Di Giacomo in the title role, Fabio Sartori as Cavaradossi, John Del Carlo as the Sacristan and more including the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

Our annual summer outing to our native city's incomparable outdoor venue is approaching fast. Here's what you need to know.

The event is on **Sunday, July 24**. The picnic will be held in the reserved area at the Hollywood Bowl and starts at 5pm. You can feast on wine, water, sandwiches, salads and dessert. The concert starts at 7:30pm.

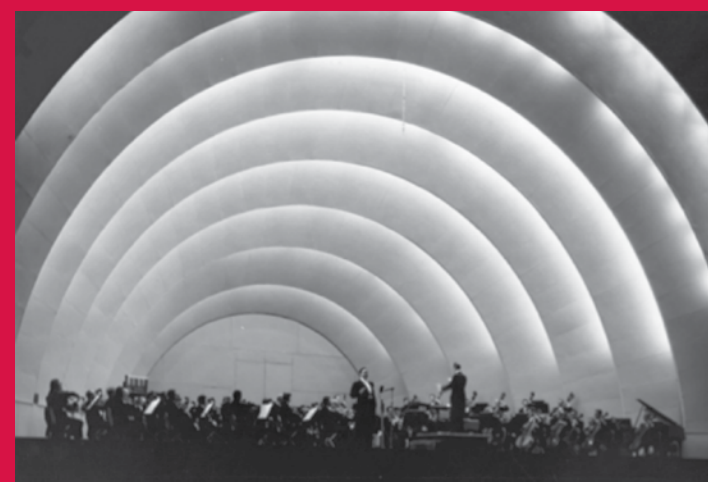


Photo by Paul Derouin

Tickets are **\$65** and include the performance and picnic. Parking is **not** included. This event sells out every year so don't procrastinate. Head over to operaleague.org to order your tickets. Tickets and map with the ever-important parking information will be mailed to you in July.

Questions? Hit up Marlene Chavez at 323.934.5777 or docmar@ca.rr.com.