

Your Guide To Upcoming Opera League Events

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BRAVO

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

TOUCHDOWN!

By GARY W. MURPHY

After leaving his mark on the gridiron, Morris Robinson now scores big time on the stage. Before he conducts the Opera League's Master Class in May, he stopped by to talk about his unlikely career path.

WHAT'S INSIDE

2018 Peter Hemmings
Dinner Recap

Spotlight on composer
Ellen Reid

In the Pit with
KT Somero

Photo by Lawrence Brownlee.

From the President

Photo by Gary West



“I think what fascinates me about it is the fact that it seems like a very simple opera, but practically speaking, it’s not a simple opera...Or an easy one.”

So said John Neumeier, director, designer and choreographer, in the September 2017 issue of *Opera News*, describing the production of *Orphée et Eurydice* that he brought to LA Opera in March.

I love that quote because it so succinctly crystalizes a universal truth about opera. When we witness control and eloquence in acting, movement and singing on the stage, it seems as if those skills were magically placed there from the outset. However, we Opera Leaguers are acutely aware of the immense efforts involved from inception to sublime performance. Those of you who volunteer at our cast dinners literally come face to face with the cast and crew as they show up hungry and bedecked in their characters’ garb.

Whether at a cast dinner or a dress rehearsal, we are ever cognizant of the intense demands of the operatic repertoire, of the interminable patience and persistence of musicians and singers repeating measure after measure of the score until they’ve tamed and mastered it. Witnessing that journey can be just as thrilling and fulfilling as taking in the final destination on opening night.

That brings us to our cover story on Morris Robinson. What a journey he has had! The former football player headlined LA Opera’s production of *Nabucco* and will star in the forthcoming season closer, *Rigoletto*. I am thrilled you will have the opportunity to watch Morris coach Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artists at the Opera League’s annual Master Class on May 23. We love to follow the paths of these rapidly up-and-coming artists as they progress within the operatic world; and on May 23 we get to witness Morris serving as their guide. This is one Master Class not to be missed. But first, check out Gary Murphy’s insightful interview so you can learn more about one of the most fascinating bassos working in opera today.

Of course, volunteering with the Opera League can be a journey. The events we provide for our members, for LA Opera and for the community happen because of the camaraderie and devotion of many dedicated volunteers. It takes countless hours of preparation and execution to bring you even one seminar, or Saturday Morning at the Opera, salon, recital, or this issue of BRAVO. That is why on May 30 we will bring you our Volunteer Appreciation event, to honor those dedicated Leaguers who volunteer a minimum of twenty hours a season. And as a bonus, we’ll have the privilege of interviewing Opera League co-founder Alice Coulombe. I can never say this enough: Neither the Opera League nor indeed LA Opera could do what we do without you. This has been true since the days when Alice was running the show.

HUGE THANKS to all of you who turned out for our Hemmings Gala on April 7 to honor Mindy and Gene Stein, the “Stein” of LA Opera’s Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist program. As in previous years, proceeds from Hemmings go straight to LA Opera’s Opera Camp, the annual summer program that trains and captivates young and budding performers. You can check out the Hemmings recap and photo spread in this issue.

We now have a gift membership page! Yes, next time you log in, you’ll see the gift membership page linked in the My Membership dropdown menu. I encourage you to give a friend, colleague or loved one a gift of an Opera League membership so they, too, can share in our rich programming.

Warm regards,

P.S. Don’t forget to Like us on Facebook!



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TOUCHDOWN!

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Morris Robinson is considered one of the most interesting and sought-after basses performing today.

With nearly two decades of singing on the international opera stage, Robinson's operatic path originally began on the football field, first in his native Georgia and then in South Carolina where he sang in the church choir while attending college on a football scholarship. It was only after college while he worked at a Boston corporate job that he applied and was immediately accepted into Boston University's Opera Institute. Within a short time, Robinson landed his first opera role as the King of Egypt in *Aida* at Boston Lyric Opera.

Q: WELCOME BACK TO LA OPERA! YOU'RE THE SINGULAR INDIVIDUAL WHO TRANSITIONED FROM THE FOOTBALL FIELD TO THE OPERA STAGE. DID YOUR FOOTBALL TRAINING BETTER PREPARE YOU FOR THE RIGORS REQUIRED TO SING OPERA?

MR: The connection between the two is more substantial than people might think. In many ways, opera singing is an anaerobic exercise. We have muscle groups that we must train to sustain our vocalism throughout our rigorous schedules. Athletic training requires some of the exact traits as being an opera singer—discipline, hard work and a good work ethic, flexibility, coachability, personal accountability, teamwork, mental toughness ... all of these things are very important in both athletics and music.

Voice lessons and vocal coachings are similar to going to the gym and working out on a regular basis. This is called preparation. If you lie around all summer, get out of shape and don't work out, when training camp rolls around, you will find yourself out of a job. What is worse, you could find yourself in a game situation going head to head with another guy who did work out all summer and stayed in shape. Such an occurrence would account for a very long day of intense physical punishment, all because you weren't disciplined enough to get yourself physically ready for competition.

In music, if you don't study, train your technique, memorize your score, you will find yourself in a very similar situation.

Q: SPARAFUCILE IN LA OPERA'S UPCOMING RIGOLETTO MARKS YOUR SIXTH APPEARANCE HERE, CORRECT? ARE THERE ANY OTHER LAO ROLES YOU HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF?

MR: My debut opera was *The Magic Flute*, but everyone was gearing up for the first of the Ring operas, *Das Rheingold*, in which I sang the role of Fasolt. It was a great experience, and I really enjoyed the creative process with Achim Freyer.

But most memorable was the off-site rehearsal space and its location just west of La Brea on Pico Blvd which caused my colleagues to complain about the lack of eateries in the neighborhood. On my first day, I walked outside the building on a break and heard some R&B music blaring over a loudspeaker across the street. As I walked towards the music, I discovered Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles! I went back and informed the entire Ring production staff of their good luck. Ultimately, we had lots of wonderful lunches and dinners, which created a phenomenon that we affectionately named the "Waffle Coma." We loved Roscoe's and gave them lots of business. The restaurant's management team even came to the *Das Rheingold* final dress rehearsal as our guests!

Q: YOU WILL CONDUCT THE OPERA LEAGUE'S ANNUAL MASTER CLASS WITH THE LA OPERA YOUNG ARTISTS ON MAY 23. IN READING ABOUT YOUR LIFE, I GET THE SENSE YOU HAVE A STRONG DESIRE TO MENTOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF SINGERS. CAN YOU TALK A BIT ABOUT THE MASTER CLASS EXPERIENCE, WHAT YOU BRING TO IT AND WHAT YOU HOPE TO INSTILL IN THE YOUNG SINGERS?

MR: When I work with young singers, I have a few goals in mind. First and foremost, I want to help them become better to reach their full potential. Also, I try to instill them with the confidence to go out into the real world and to compete, to make music and be champions of our art.

As young singers, we often hear about the things that we don't do very well. That is the nature of instruction. We are reminded, and prodded, and chastised. I approach the students in my Master Class as works in progress, as we all are. I create a safe, laid-back environment where we can learn from each other. As singers, we face much pressure which hinders performance. I always tell kids in my classes they should sing bad notes, forget words, make

mistakes. It's a safe environment so let's make those mistakes and learn how to fix them so as not to carry them over into real situations.

I also want them to realize that, at the end of the day, it's not really that serious. Of course, we want to be great and do the best we can, but it's not a matter of life or death. We are all blessed and privileged to do what we do. God has only chosen a select few and blessed us with the ability to reach and touch people through our art, on an intimate level. Take pride in it and enjoy the blessing. Don't let it drive you crazy! You are a vessel through which the composer, the librettist and the music speak, and that itself is a beautiful thing.

*Morris had much more to say. To read the full interview, including Morris's very thoughtful approach to *Porgy and Bess*, head over to operaleague.org.*

The Opera League's Master Class with Morris Robinson will be held on May 23, 2018. For information, please go to operaleague.org. Rigoletto performances are May 12–31, 2018.

Care to follow Morris? His website is morrisrobinson.com. Find him on Twitter and Facebook at @morrisDRobinson, and on Instagram @MDRBass. ☀



Photo Courtesy of MorrisRobinson.com

A CONSTELLATION OF SERVICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH VETERAN OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEER BEVERLEY CLARKSON

By SHELL AMEGA



Beverley Clarkson has created a marvelous constellation of service in the worlds of opera, song and classical music.

With a quiet, diplomatic demeanor, she has been an active member of African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO) since 2001, where she currently serves as board secretary, and her name is still spoken with appreciation by members of the Opera League board where she served from 2011 to 2016.

It's interesting to note that she not only supports singers, but has become one herself. Twelve years ago, Beverley discovered

she could sing alto, mezzo and soprano, which she currently does in three different choirs throughout Los Angeles: the Hollywood Master Chorale, where she served as president for three years, the Ebell Chorale and the Los Angeles Athletic Club Athena Women's Chorus.

Her introduction to AALAO came through the late Alice Parrish, who invited her as a guest to an AALAO event at the Omni Hotel in downtown L.A., a "Tribute to Florence Quivar, Metropolitan Opera." "I was really moved by the organization's spirit and the goals they set to provide a foundation for African Americans interested in opera," says Beverley. "I spent my whole life in classical music, and it was nice to work with people who likewise had a passion for the work ahead."

Beverley's classical career included playing viola in the Ball State University Symphony, the Indiana All City Orchestra, String Orchestra, Concert Orchestra and the Inglewood Symphony.

During her college years at Ball State in Muncie, Indiana, Beverley met the love of her life, Clarence Clarkson, with whom she will celebrate a 49th wedding anniversary this June. They taught together in LAUSD, have one daughter, and raised her niece from the age of 13. Clarence also loves music and for a number of years

was involved with the Hollywood Doo-Wop Hall of Fame. He is so supportive he is known as an honorary member of AALAO.

The two of them have hosted many annual AALAO Black History Month events in their extraordinary View Park home. Built in 1927, it is included in the National Register of Historic Places and is on the United States federal government's official listing.

Guests at AALAO events in the Clarkson home have enjoyed the beautifully maintained hardwood floors, original art deco light fixtures, Batchelder fireplace tiles, milk glass and crystal door knobs and vintage glass bricks. Beverley notes that, out of sight of any guests, they even have a laundry chute to the basement where they house an original incinerator. "Yes, our home has a basement," she remarks with a smile.

Some of the artists who've performed at her home include bass baritone Cedric Berry, lecturer Van Young presenting the music of William Grant Still, and Victoria Burnett who was featured in "Stories That Sing." Beverley and Clarence have hosted singers at their home before AALAO concerts, and have often transported them to and from the events. In the process, they have developed special friendships with singers such as India Carney, mezzo soprano, and Sheronda McKee, soprano.

Beverley is also an author of a soon-to-be-published memoir called *It's of No Consequence*. "It's about my grandmother, mother and me," she explains. "As a child, I did not know my grandmother, because she lived in Jamaica, W.I. But I grew to know her through letters, gifts and packages. From my mother, I learned that my grandmother grew up in a prosperous family and attended private boarding schools." The story unfolds as her grandmother becomes pregnant at an early age. Beverley's mother is later abandoned. In the 70's and 80's Beverley and Clarence help her grandmother through some challenging times. "The book is written partially in a patois as I tried to capture my grandmother's comfort language and stitch together my mother's memories, my grandmother's and my own."

If you happen to see the multi-talented Beverley, perhaps volunteering at LA Opera's Opera Camp finales and other education events, remember her constellation of service and be sure to say thank you. 🌟



THE WORLD PREMIERE OF ELLEN REID

By BILL KENNEDY

Photo by James Matthew Daniel.

Just two composers will be heard at each of Los Angeles' "big four" musical performance organizations in 2018.

One of them is Ellen Reid.

Reid's *Petrichor*, part of Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra's Sound Investment original composition series, had its world premiere in February at the Alex Theater in Glendale.

Mother's Day will see another Reid world premiere, entitled *dreams of the new world*, performed by the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

She will be providing a sound installation as part of the LA Phil's kickoff of its Centennial Season in September.

And finally in late November, LA Opera will present yet another Reid world premiere, *Prism*, part of LAO's Off Grand series in collaboration with Beth Morrison Projects.

So just who is this wunderkind who has burst across L.A.'s musical skyline like an unexpected comet? Who is this artist whose work as a composer on The Industry opera company's 2015 *Hopscotch* was hailed as "ineffably moving" by Mark Swed of the *LA Times* and "radiant" by Alex Ross of *The New Yorker*?

Start with a high school senior in Oak Ridge, a small city of about 30,000 in East Tennessee, a teenager of broad interests, intent on moving to New York City and pursuing a liberal arts degree.

Send her to Columbia University in uptown Manhattan where, during her first week, terrorists bring down the World Trade Towers, smoke and dust clearly visible from the campus.

Reid had a musical background but was by no means headed for a musical career. However, as she says, her distance from home and the experience of seeing her world under attack somehow drew her to compose. "Music is related to time and the body," she says. "Music allowed me to sit with the unknown, with the complexity of the universe."

From those beginnings, Reid, whose energy and enthusiasm seem barely contained within her petite frame, was able to leap into all the various musical and music theater offerings New York had to offer.

Unconstrained by any single genre of music, she studied Eastern musical traditions in Thailand after graduation, an experience that cemented her interest in musical storytelling, which she sees as central to her compositions.

Her unwillingness to be pigeonholed led her across the country to Cal Arts and its broad exposure to music of all forms. There she received her MFA in 2011 and fell in love with the City of Angels. Reid now sees herself as bi-coastal, splitting her time between L.A. and New York. Wherever she is, she says, "I love writing music, and in those two cities, I'm in a really great place."

Within the storytelling framework, Reid focuses on "new and different ways of expressing tension and resolution in musical terms." She is intrigued by "different sounds and complex rhythms." And she is at heart a collaborator, more at home working with others than scribbling alone in an upstairs garret.

These characteristics will all be evident in both *dreams of the new world* and *Prism*, both collaborations with others.

dreams of the new world is built around the aspirations of people living in three American cities – Memphis, Houston and Los Angeles – at three different times in their histories. Based on a libretto using the contemporaneous voices of people in those cities, Reid's piece focuses on striving for freedom, prosperity and the frontier – the American Dream.

Prism, by contrast, is more personal and narrower in scope, an opera dealing with "the depth of destruction, loss and violence against a young girl's body," as Reid explains.

The work of Ellen Reid is both deeply personal and broadly universal – perhaps reminding some of the body of work of the only other composer whose works are being heard at each of the "big four" this year. His name?

Mozart. 🌸



RAISE A STEIN (OR TWO)!

Held once again at the California Club in downtown L.A., this year's April 7 Peter Hemmings Award gala honored philanthropists Mindy and Gene Stein, the "Stein" of the Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist program. The Steins have been generous donors to LA Opera (LAO) for many years. Gene himself has been on the board for 15 of them. By TOM LADY

If you read the cover story on the Steins in the previous issue of BRAVO, you know another focus of their philanthropic zeal is supporting the healthy development of very young children, pre-natal through age three. So it seemed logical to combine their love of opera with supporting development of the art form's own younger people, in this case emerging artists.

Opera League President Gayle Kirschbaum kicked things off welcoming and thanking everyone for giving their Saturday evening to this event, and of course thanking our amazing volunteers for pulling this off with nary a hitch. Marlene Chavez, the League's Immediate Past President,

delivered remarks from LA Opera Board Chairman Marc Stern. And finally LAO CEO Christopher Koelsch, last year's Hemmings recipient, presented the award to the Steins.

Mindy Stein gave her acceptance speech first, followed by her other half. They each told personal narratives that placed not just their careers, but their life stories in the larger context of the decisions they've made to reach this point. Suffice it to say they weren't opera lovers from the very beginning, but look at them now.

Appropriately, given their Young Artist support, the evening was capped off with Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artists taking the stage and wowing us with their

vocal prowess. They included Liv Redpath (soprano), Joshua Wheeler (tenor), Carlos Enrique Santelli (tenor), Theo Hoffman (baritone) and Michelle Siemens (mezzo). If you know anyone who went, just ask about the nine high Cs. Young Artist coach Nino Sanikidze provided the accompaniment.

Yes, this year's Hemmings was another blockbuster. Net proceeds, as always, go to LA Opera to support Opera Camp, one of their educational initiatives.

The Opera League established the Peter Hemmings Award to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of opera in the greater Los Angeles area. ☀



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 Photos by Alma Guzman.

IN THE PIT

KT SOMERO: THE CODE BREAKER By DIANE EISENMAN

What is a librarian doing in the orchestra pit?

That is no ordinary librarian. It's KT Somero, Music Librarian for the LA Opera Orchestra.

KT "loves the Big Show," and opera, of course, is the biggest show in town. She gets excited about every element – the singers, the orchestra, the backstage activities, the sets, the costumes. "Every opera is an individual puzzle," she says. "It's fun to crack the code. Each opera is new and exciting, never the same. It is so thrilling to see all of these people working together to make a huge, amazing production."

Originally interested in being more of a hands-on musician, KT studied clarinet performance at UCLA, then moved to Chicago to get her master's at DePaul University. She freelanced as a clarinetist but found it more interesting to work backstage as a music librarian with its variety of responsibilities. Her first full-time behind-the-scenes job was at Northwestern University where she managed the orchestra department and library.

So what exactly does a music librarian do? "My job is to get the right music to the right people at the right time," KT says. Sounds simple enough, but behold all that goes into that.

While an opera is under consideration, KT must locate the music scores, find various editions, identify licensing requirements, research its availability, and estimate the total cost of obtaining and using the music, should that opera be selected. Once an opera is chosen and the edition selected, she acquires the music either through purchase or rental. Suffice it to say it can be a long and complex process. Dealing with the source for licensing, for example, can involve international searches and reckoning with esoteric licensing laws. It is up to KT to submit the correct paperwork, and in plenty of time.

When the music finally arrives, she must produce a perfect copy for each musician exactly as the conductor has requested. This inevitably involves changes in the score to incorporate cuts and inserts and sometimes to re-orchestrate sections for a sound and balance that suits the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion's acoustics.

In many cases, KT and her team create a brand new set of materials if the music arrives having suffered years of wear and tear. It may be illegible in places, have misprints and wrong notes, missing sections or conflicting scores. Every detail is proofed. Page turns are changed when necessary.

The goal is to have the music ready a month before the first rehearsal so musicians can practice their parts. Because the conductor and musicians make changes during rehearsals, all of the string bowings are marked in pencil for each music stand so that the instructions are changeable. Often KT will need to build a piano score of the opera, incorporating details specific to the production. Singers will prepare from this score, and it will be used by the stage managers and audio technicians during the performances.

KT takes quick notes on edits and changes the conductor requests during rehearsals, sometimes producing new music pages with very little notice. As KT sums it up, she helps “the conductors realize their vision for the work.” And so at each performance you will see KT in the pit carrying the conductor’s music to the podium and placing the musicians’ parts on their stands.

As if all that weren’t enough, KT freelances as music librarian for the LA Master Chorale, Dance at the Music Center, and the Celebrity Opera Series at the Broad Stage.

In her rare free time, she enjoys yoga, hiking, traveling, attending concerts, and visiting museums. She plays clarinet for fun but looks forward to having time someday to play in chamber groups as she once did in Chicago.

“It is thrilling to watch James Conlon and Plácido Domingo collaborate here at LAO,” she says. “They are true musical geniuses. Having the opportunity to work with such amazing artists, and in a setting where everyone is so skilled at what they do, is very rewarding. It is unbelievable that I get to help in a small way and be part of the Big Show.” 🌸

“It’s fun to crack the code. Each opera is new and exciting, never the same.”



Cedric Berry



L to R: Delores Kerr, Gayle Kirschbaum, Shell Amega and Jacque Lyne Wallace.



Photos by Alma Guzman.

SO IN LOVE

ARIAS, SPIRITUALS AND LOVE SONGS ADORN THE AALAO BLACK HISTORY MONTH RECITAL.

By SHELL AMEGA

Baritone Cedric Berry performed a repertoire of arias, spirituals and love songs at the African Americans for Los Angeles Opera’s (AALAO) Black History Month event hosted by Beverley and Clarence Clarkson in their lovely View Park home.

Held just three days before Valentine’s Day, the attendees enjoyed a slate of arias touching on all the different kinds of love, from steamy lust to bottomless romance. Berry vocally illustrated this by singing “Madamina, il catalogo è questo” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and “Te Deum” from Puccini’s *Tosca* as well as Cole Porter’s “So in Love.”

In honor of Black History Month, Berry performed a dramatic reading of Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech. He was accompanied by pianist Catherine Miller Popovic who played “Give Me Jesus” as background music. He also sang spirituals including “Ride on, King Jesus” and “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

The reception afterwards included delicious soul food catered by Chef Marilyn.

AALAO is dedicated to increasing the awareness of opera throughout the Los Angeles community.

Mark your calendars! The AALAO Father’s Day Membership Recital will be held on Sunday, June 17, at 817 Keniston Avenue, Los Angeles from 3-6:00pm. The AALAO Fall Recital will take place in October at Village Gardens in Pasadena. Exact date TBD. For more information, contact Jacque Lyne Wallace at 424.227.7254. 🌸

Ida Lanza with Ana María Martínez

UN FORTE ABBRACCIO!

AN INTERVIEW WITH NEW VOLUNTEER IDA LANZA

By RENEE SALICK, ED.D.

If Ida Lanza were a tripod, one foot would be anchored by her devotion to her family; the second, her formidable embrace of Italian language and culture; and the third, her enthusiasm, as an Italian language teacher, to impart the exquisite beauty of opera.

Perhaps now Ida will evolve a fourth leg: her volunteerism for the Opera League.

Photo by Ida Lanza.

Barely a year out from her retirement as a public school teacher in L.A., Ida has already become a staple at gatherings. She co-chairs the Westlake Village gatherings and has already given a talk there. Those of you on the League's Education team may have already met her at one of the Opera Preps where she helps chaperone those hungry minds. And she has also brought food to cast dinners.

Born to Italian parents and raised in an ethnically and culturally rich neighborhood in Brooklyn, Ida's mother was addicted to the Saturday Met opera broadcasts. Her grandfather, pinching pennies from his modest pay to buy Caruso records, also influenced her greatly. The Italian spoken at home was often in a Tuscan dialect inflected with a pinch of English that led to, yes, "Itanglish." With her vibrant family life, her Italian core was cinched with Napolitano songs.

Her fluency of Italian was accelerated at age 12 courtesy of—who else?—Dante. That's when the Brooklyn tween stumbled upon a children's copy of the *Divine Comedy*, part English/part Italian, in her neighborhood library. Her imagination captured by the story of heaven, hell and

purgatory, and with her mother's help with the pronunciation, she learned to read and enunciate the Italian words, her mouth eventually molding and mastering the vowels and accents. The Italian deal was sealed four years later when her grandmother took her to the homeland. Suffice it to say Ida fell head over heels with all things Italian, especially with those places and things tied to her family's lineage and which tourists typically don't get to see or experience.

While Ida's high school didn't offer Italian, they did offer French. *Mai oui!* French not only became her second language, it increased the richness of her Italian. In college Ida majored in Italian to the chagrin of her counselors who said she would never find a job with that skill set. She spent a graduate year in Bologna and made fast friends with fellow opera buffs. These starving students flocked to any production they could afford. Bologna is also where she met her husband. Eventually she earned her second master's degree (MPhil) from Columbia (yes, in Italian Language and Literature).

Don't tell her college counselors, but Ida landed every job she ever wanted and has

taught elementary school, high school and college. By now she has spread her love of opera to thousands of students. Some have gone on to find work in the opera world. One former student is a mezzo-soprano studying voice and opera at UC Santa Barbara and is already giving recitals.

She may be officially retired, but her passion for opera and passion to share it has only gone up. In addition to the above-mentioned volunteerism, Ida has enrolled in LA Opera's rigorous training curriculum to become a Community Educator, perhaps the most committed level of volunteers on the Opera League's Education team.

Beyond the League, Ida is still active in various organizations that promote Italian language and culture, such as the American Association of Italian Teachers (AATI) and the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF). She's also on the selection committee for the Coccia-Inserra Award for Excellence in Teaching Italian.

At the end of the day, Ida Lanza has always been and always will be determined to pass along her love of Italian language and culture. We would all be fortunate to be her students. 🌟

MEISTERSINGERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By IVAN HUBER

Hearty congratulations and bravissimo to the five Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artists who won awards at the Metropolitan Opera National Council (MONC) Auditions, Western Region.

The 61-year-old MONC Auditions is a prestigious competition that provides a venue for over 1,000 young up-and-coming opera singers from across the country, at different levels of experience, to compete at the District level. The district winners progress to compete at the Regional level where one or two are chosen from the 12 regions to advance to New York to compete in the semifinals.

Young Artist Carlos Enrique Santelli was one of the first-place winners of the Western Region. He co-shares first place with soprano Julia Metzler. As this went to press, the two traveled to New York to compete in a group of 23-25 singers in the semifinals on April 22. Approximately ten of the semifinalists will be selected as National Finalists and will compete one week later on April 29 in a public concert, the so-called Grand Finals Concert at the Met that will be broadcast nationwide on the Metropolitan Opera Radio Network.

The four other Young Artists recognized in the Western Regionals include Joshua Wheeler (second place), Michelle Siemens and Brian Michael Moore (Special Encouragement Award) and Taylor Raven (Encouragement Award). You can get to know Taylor on page 12.

The mission of the MONC is to discover exceptional young talent for the Metropolitan Opera and the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Program. Auditioning for this competition means you are heard by a representative of the Met and could potentially receive a cash reward. Suffice it to say that to be recognized at this level is a huge deal and could serve as an invaluable means of exposure and promotion to accelerate your opera career. Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, Thomas Hampson, Jessye Norman, Sondra Radvanovsky, Deborah Voigt... Those are just a sampling of past National Council winners.

Bravissimo Carlos, Joshua, Michelle, Brian and Taylor. You are quickly becoming among the brightest stars in the opera firmament. 🌟

DON'T CENSOR THIS QUIZ

In honor of LA Opera's upcoming production of *Rigoletto*, the Verdi masterpiece that ran afoul of the censors, we thought we'd test your knowledge of opera censorship.

Censorship was alive and well in 18th- and 19th-century opera houses.

Verdi, in particular, frequently ran afoul of the Austrian censors who controlled the Italian theaters during much of his career. For *Rigoletto*, based on a Victor Hugo play that depicts the real-life king François I of France as a womanizer, Verdi was forced to demote his operatic counterpart to a duke.

BRAVO asked Mark Lyons, LAO's associate director of communications and publications, to prepare this quiz to test your knowledge of how censorship affected some of the best-known operas in the repertoire.

1. In the last act of *Rigoletto*, the Duke of Mantua is in a squalid inn with two sordid companions, the assassin Sparafucile and his pretty sister and accomplice, Maddalena. In Verdi's original libretto, the Duke demands two things from Sparafucile: "Your sister and some wine!" This was deemed too racy. What was this line changed to? (The original line is often sung now.)

- A. "Some food and some wine!"
- B. "A room and some wine!"
- C. "A stable for my horse and wine!"
- D. "Some wine—and not the cheap stuff!"

2. *La Traviata* had many elements that censors found objectionable, but Verdi's biggest battle was with the management of the Teatro La Fenice, the Venetian opera house where the opera premiered in 1853. What did they insist on changing for the premiere? (It was just temporary; Verdi's original intentions soon became the norm.)

- A. The setting, from Verdi's own time to the past, circa 1700
- B. The finale, with Violetta surviving to live happily with Alfredo
- C. The location, from Paris to Venice
- D. The length, by omitting the party at Flora's house

3. When Rossini debuted *La Cenerentola*, the censors objected to the impropriety of a naked foot on the stage, so instead of a glass slipper, what object does the heroine leave behind?

- A. A fan
- B. A pumpkin
- C. A love letter
- D. A bracelet

4. In 1907, one of J.P. Morgan's daughters attended a dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera. What she witnessed shocked her profoundly. Her father,

a member of the Met's board, had all remaining performances cancelled, and the opera didn't return to the Met stage for another 27 years. What was this scandalous opera?

- A. *Elektra*
- B. *Powder Her Face*
- C. *Salome*
- D. *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

5. *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a 1934 opera by Dmitri Shostakovich, was a smash hit for two years after its first performances. But in 1936, a famous person in the audience was shocked by its lurid sexual content and shaky morality, and the work vanished from Russian stages for decades. Who was it?

- A. Rival composer Sergei Prokofiev
- B. Furious writer Nikolai Leskov, upon whose novel the opera was based
- C. Dictator Joseph Stalin
- D. Beloved bass Feodor Chaliapin

6. Mozart based his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* on a scandalous play. To avoid disapproval by the authorities, librettist Lorenzo da Ponte took it upon himself to self-censor several elements in the play's original plot. Which of the following was NOT one of those changes?

- A. Insubordinate servant Figaro was transformed into the Count's noble nephew.
- B. Figaro's final speech in the play, a denunciation of the Count's noble privilege, became an aria condemning adulterous wives.
- C. The Countess became as much of an antagonist to the Count as the rebellious servant Figaro.
- D. The play's Marcelline, an ardent feminist, was softened and became a largely comic role, Marcellina, in the opera.

RAVING OVER RAVEN

By JUDITH HYMAN, PH.D.

Little did Taylor know that singing alongside her parents in her Fayetteville, North Carolina church choir in her early years would mark the start of a journey to the opera stage. Today Taylor is one of the newest members of LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program.

Taylor was just being practical when she declared a double major in math and science at UNC-Chapel Hill. Her original career goal was to become a teacher. Nonetheless, at the end of her freshman year, she felt an inner drive to build a more creative balance in her program. She turned to a language other than math—the universal language of music.

Almost immediately her music teacher Louise Toppin noted her vocal gift and the quality of her voice. She emphatically encouraged Taylor to immerse herself further into the world of music. And yet imagine the curiosity that Taylor had never, throughout her church choir days, actually learned to read musical notation.

To overcome this hurdle, she enrolled in a theoretical music graduate program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. "Colorado is such a magical place," Taylor says. "It is very easy to remain zen when you can look outside and see something as majestic as the Rocky Mountains. It breeds an active, adventurous lifestyle that gave me such a calm, easy approach to life (and singing)."

Along the way she met a trumpet player named Ryan. Once again proving Uncle Walt was spot on when he said it's a small world after all, Taylor and Ryan discovered they had grown up only minutes from each other in Fayetteville. "We were meant to be," Taylor sums up. Today Ryan still plays trumpet while teaching part time.

During her Boulder days Taylor found

When 5'9" raven-haired beauty Taylor Raven takes to the stage, everybody sits up and listens. Struck by her rich mezzo-soprano voice with its strength and beauty, the audience notes immediately the impressive stature of her presence and warmth.

the theory of music similar to math. Helping her find her true voice was Professor Abigail Nims. The combination of math and music was a perfect yin and yang for Taylor. "I always liked the exactness and puzzle of math. It fed my brain and my soul. In music I have that and more. Rather than being alone, I am working collaboratively, bringing out the extroverted aspects of myself."



Taylor was heard by our own beloved pianist and Young Artist Coach Nino Sandikidze at a Tucker Foundation audition. Not only was she awarded a grant, her performance was brought to the attention of Marta and Plácido Domingo. Upon hearing that voice, they knew she would be an inspired addition to the Young Artist program.

Taylor made her LA Opera debut earlier this year in *Candide*, playing the part of Vanderdendur. Previously, she sang in the main role of the recently produced opera song cycle *As One* for the Seattle Opera. As part of Black History Month celebrations in February 2016, the Virginia Opera asked her to sing the part of Marian Anderson in the world premiere of *Deep River*. The production was brought to local elementary and high schools. Taylor felt the admiration of the young audiences who came up to her and said, "I want to be like you!"

So what do she and Ryan do for fun? "We have a dog," she says. "Eighty-pound Retriever / Shepherd mix, and we take him on hikes as often as we can. We did this a lot in Colorado and are enjoying exploring the trails in LA. We hope to have a pack of dogs as soon as possible!"

Does she still have the opportunity to get her nerd on with math and science? "Not directly," Taylor says. "My interests have sort of morphed since I've become a singer. However, there is such an analytic, nerdy aspect to a musician's life that I feel like I feed my left and right brain pretty evenly."

Maybe one day we will all have a chance to hear her feed both sides of that brain as she sings her dream role of Charlotte in Massenet's *Werther*, her favorite opera. I, for one, hope to be that lucky. 🌟

Taylor Raven as Vanderdendur in *Candide*

Photos courtesy of LAOpera.org

IN GOOD COMPANY

LA OPERA COMPANY MANAGER NICKI HARPER CONDUCTS THE GRAND ORCHESTRA OF LOGISTICS. By PAULA CORREIA

“We attempt to make their stays as smooth as possible when they come here,” says the petite, blue-eyed, light-haired woman before me.

As the Company Manager for LA Opera, Nicki Harper heads up the nerve center of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. It is Nicki, her Assistant Company Manager Dominic Domingo, and their team who orchestrate all logistical aspects for the internationally acclaimed artists who fly in either to perform or otherwise bring life to productions at LAO. Everyone from the singers, directors, conductors, set designers, costume designers, choreographers, and more, fly in from all points of the planet to share their gifts.

“It’s difficult for many artists who are constantly on the move and have to acclimatize quickly,” Nicki says. “Therefore it’s even more important for us to make their stay pleasant and problem-free.”

To get the job done, Nicki contracts with nearby hotels and apartment complexes to assure comfortable accommodations. “Our mission

is to facilitate a seamless transfer to their temporary housing and create a sense of home-away-from-home for the artists while they are engaged at LA Opera,” she says. “We take care of as many aspects of their stay as we can.”

She is also responsible for making sure that all contracts previously negotiated with artists are properly executed. When the Joffrey Ballet came to town for *Orpheus and Eurydice*, one of her jobs was “to make sure their union and the opera’s union worked together seamlessly. A lot of work happened beforehand to ensure that both unions work in tandem.”

Then there’s us, the Opera League! Nicki and her team work closely with the League’s Artist Services team, a group of about 50 volunteers who do everything from drive the artists from and to the airport, take them shopping, sightseeing and arrange for any doctor appointments, help provide babysitters, or fulfill any other request artists may have.

Nicki hails from the San Francisco Bay area where she attended UC Berkeley. Majoring in music, she played flute throughout grammar school and college, marched with the UC Berkeley Marching Band, but considers herself now “retired” from the flute.



Photo by Leah Thompson.

She has been in some form of artist management for close to 20 years now. Previous stints include San Francisco Opera, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley, and Asia Society in New York. She arrived at LA Opera in 2014, starting out as Rehearsal Administrator.

“I love my job and L.A. Finding your community is like a puzzle, but it’s fun along the way. L.A. has really nice people, and there’s so much to do.”

So what does Nicki do during her downtime, assuming she finds any? “I love to travel,” she says. “I’m learning to play golf and bridge, but I also love reading and hanging out with friends.”

Keep a lookout for Nicki at her favorite restaurants: Papilles or Spicy BBQ in Hollywood. She is building her community. 🌟

WHEN GENERAL GRANT MET MAESTRO PUCCINI

TURANDOT IN SAN DIEGO By RENEE SALICK, ED.D.

I had always heard the most remarkable things about Opera League Board Member Brita Kohlfuerst-Millard’s fundraising trips, whether local or abroad, and I absolutely lucked out to score a ticket to *Turandot* at the San Diego Civic Theater on Sunday, March 4.

Starting at Union Station in downtown Los Angeles, a luxurious emerald bus with plush seats made the two-hour drive down the 5 fly by. Brita served snacks and drinks to quell our appetites. Good conversation was had with my like-minded opera-adoring seat mate, Carol Ann Peterson, who shared the anticipation of seeing an acclaimed production.

Our appetites may have been quelled, but they were not conquered. Hence, our first stop in San Diego was the exquisitely renovated

U.S. Grant Hotel, not just to eat brunch but to experience it with fine linens and china, five-star service, and exotic fruits for dessert.

Puccini died in 1924 before he could finish composing *Turandot*. It was finished by a close friend in the commedia dell’arte style of the play it was based on. Suffice it to say that when it premiered in 1926, it entranced Europe the way the San Diego production entranced us. Champagne was served at the two intermissions, and the opera closed with rapturous ovations.

The cast of this performance included former Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Angel Joy Blue as Liù. Lise Lindstrom played the title role, while Carl Tanner (Calàf) and Brian Kontes (Timur) rounded out the principal cast. The conductor was Valerio Galli.

Talk about dessert, Brita arranged for us to meet the principals of the cast for a Q&A session that thrilled us as much as it educated us.

Perhaps best of all, the trip raised a pretty amazing donation for the Opera League. Some of the funds went into the Hemmings gala on April 7 (check out the photo spread in this issue), which in turn supports LA Opera’s Opera Camp summer program. The rest of the proceeds go to the League’s General Fund to support our slate of programming. 🌟

CALENDAR

APRIL

Pasadena Showcase

Sun, Apr 22 – May 20

NEED ? VOLUNTEERS

CONTACT: IFANG HSIEH AT

PERHAPS_PAGANINI@YAHOO.COM OR 310.279.9927

Opera for Educators

RIGOLETTO

Sat, Apr 28, 8:00-11:00am

NEED 4 VOLUNTEERS

MAY

Elementary Student Matinee

VERDI OPERA TALES

Thu, May 3, 8:30am-1:00pm

Fri, May 4, 8:30am-1:00pm

NEED 20 VOLUNTEERS EACH

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

VERDI OPERA TALES

Sat, May 5, 8:30-11:30am

NEED 12 VOLUNTEERS

Premier Dinner

Sun, May 6

PRIVATE HOME

Cast Dinner

Wed, May 9

RIGOLETTO
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Operawise

RIGOLETTO

Wed, May 9, 6:30-10:30pm

NEED 7 VOLUNTEERS

Opera Prep

RIGOLETTO

Thu, May 10, 11:30am-5:00pm

NEED 12-15 VOLUNTEERS

Senior Dress Rehearsal

RIGOLETTO

Thu, May 10, 12:30am-5:00pm

NEED 5 VOLUNTEERS

Opera for Educators

AMERICAN OPERA

Sat, May 12, 8:00am-12:00 noon

NEED 5 VOLUNTEERS

Master Class

Wed, May 23, 7:00-9:00pm

7:00pm Light Reception, 7:30 Program

MORRIS ROBINSON INSTRUCTS DOMINGO-
COLBURN-STEIN YOUNG ARTISTS

DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION
ARTIST'S ENTRANCE 4TH FLOOR
REHEARSAL ROOM #2

Volunteer Appreciation

Wed, May 30, 6:00-9:00pm

6:00PM RECEPTION, 7:00PM PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH ALICE COULOMBE

DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION,
ARTIST'S ENTRANCE 4TH FLOOR
REHEARSAL ROOM #3

JUNE

AAAO Father's Day Membership Recital

Sun, Jun 17, 3:00-6:00pm

817 KENISTON AVENUE, LOS ANGELES 90005

QUESTIONS: JACQUE LYNE WALLACE 424.245.4659

JULY

Hollywood Bowl

DUDAMEL AND VERDI'S OTELLO

Sun, Jul 15

5:00PM PICNIC, 7:30 PERFORMANCE

SIGN UP ON WEBSITE AT OPERALEAGUE.ORG,

OR CALL HOTLINE AT 213.972.7220

QUESTIONS: ANNE RUSSELL AT ANNERS@AOL.COM

AUGUST

European Trip: Munich and Salzburg

Jul 25-Aug 7

CONTACT: BRITA KOHLFÜRST-MILLARD AT

310.877.6285 OR EMAIL BMILLARD_99@YAHOO.COM

EDUCATION EVENTS

Elementary Student Matinees

Volunteers provide welcome, supervision and guidance to elementary school age children who attend opera.

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. Please note that, for this program only, LAO requires a background check, including a new set of fingerprints and a negative TB test.

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

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

CONTACT INFORMATION

CAST DINNERS: Diane Henderson, M.D.

HOME: 323.874.8214 / CELL: 323.251.7484

dhenderson3417@sbcglobal.net

EDUCATION: Larry Verdugo

CELL: 626.590.5697

larryverdugo@icloud.com

GATHERINGS

Beverly Hills

Carol Daskal 310.552.2765 RSVP

Anne Russell 323.697.9733

Hollywood / Hancock Park

Phoebe Heywood 323.733.9091 RSVP

Rigoletto

Sun, Apr 29, 1:00pm

1121 South Gramercy Place

Los Angeles, CA 90019

Host: Judy Reidel

Orange County

Lorna Blancaflor 562.259.7426

Christa Marks 714.871.5525 RSVP

San Fernando Valley

Karen & Steve Kohn 818.347.2926 RSVP

San Gabriel Valley

Michael Sholer 818.502.1988 RSVP

Rigoletto

Mon, Apr 30, 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

Rigoletto

Wed, May 7, 5:30pm

25506 Longfellow Place

Stevenson Ranch, CA 91381

Hosts: Ann Anderson and Ron Gordon

Westlake Village

Ida Lanza 805.428.5403 RSVP

Renee Salick 805.701.1061

Rigoletto

The Poetry of Italian Opera Lyrics

Sat, Apr 28, 12:00pm

2239 Knollcrest Place

Westlake Village, CA 91361

Host: Renee Salick

Westside

Chuck Bragg 310.454.9662

Valerie Estes 310.826.0288 RSVP

VISIT THE WEBSITE CALENDAR FOR
CURRENT INFORMATION: OPERALEAGUE.ORG

OPERA TALKS

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.



A BANDIT, A BULLFIGHTER, AND TRUTH FORCE

THE OPERA LEAGUE'S SEMINAR SLATE FOR THE 2018-19 SEASON WILL MAKE YOU SMARTER ABOUT ZARZUELA, GANDHI, AND MORE. By TODD CALVIN

LA Opera's season is in full swing with mainstage performances of *Rigoletto* to come. If you're chomping at the artistic bit to learn about next season's seminars, we've got news.

First, on Sunday, September 16, we will explore Verdi's *Don Carlo*. Based on the play by Friedrich Schiller, the opera weaves together personal, political and theological conflicts. Longtime League favorites Professor Michael Hackett of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television and Professor Simon Williams of UC Santa Barbara's Department of Theater and Dance will shed light on Verdi's grand opera and all its various iterations.

On Sunday, October 14, we will grow your brains with a seminar on the Philip Glass work *Satyagraha* (Sanskrit for "truth force"). The opera is inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's early years in South Africa where he developed the concept of nonviolent political resistance. *Satyagraha* caps off LA Opera's trilogy of biographical operas by the amazing Mr. Glass, following

Einstein on the Beach in 2013 and *Akhnaten* in 2016.

The New Year of 2019 will make history when LA Opera stages its first-ever production of Mozart's *The Clemency of Titus*. On Sunday, February 17, we will present a seminar to introduce League members and their guests to this rarity and how it fits into Mozart's incomparable oeuvre.

Finally, the League concludes its seminars of tomorrow on Sunday, April 14 with an exploration of the Spanish musical theater idiom known as zarzuela, and specifically Manuel Penella's *El Gato Montés*. Penella's work returns in a production new to LA Opera with Plácido Domingo in the title role. The lyrical piece contains echoes of Puccini, verismo and *Carmen* with a central rivalry between a bandit and a bullfighter for the love of a woman (naturally), a prophecy of doom and a climactic scene outside a bull ring (of course).

Please note that some dates are tentative, and we are still confirming locations. Stay tuned to the website and BRAVO for more details.

See you at the seminars! 🌟

OPERA LEAGUE MEMBERSHIPS

There is an Opera League membership for everyone! Join at 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.

DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

Premier Dinner

Sun, May 6

Master Class with Morris Robinson

Wed, May 23

Volunteer Appreciation

Wed, May 30

AALAO Father's Day Recital

Sun, Jun 17

Hollywood Bowl Picnic and Performance

Dudamel and Verdi's *Otello*

Sun, Jul 15

SHOP AT THE OPERA: WHERE MASHA ARCHER IS OUR BFF

You think you've got bling? You don't know bling until you've visited the Shop. We're in the lobby of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. When you walk in, just make a beeline to the right where you'll see glass cases full of awesome.

In addition to our new line of jackets for spring, we are featuring the beautiful jewelry designed by Masha Archer. We are selling this very collectible jewelry at 25% off the listed price. Yes, you read that right.

The stylish merchandise in our boutique changes all the time, giving you all kinds of reasons to stop by to say hi.

Shop at the Opera opens two hours before curtain.

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



Ruth Bachofner presenting boutique selections.



Photos by Alma Guzman.