

Your Guide To Upcoming Opera League Events

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BRAVO

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES



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Photo by Diane and Pete Gray

A GRAY MATTER

AN INTERVIEW WITH HEMMINGS HONOREES
DIANE AND PETE GRAY By BILL KENNEDY

Some of us come to classical music and opera as children. Others, later in life. Many come to instrumental music first, then opera later.

But for Diane and Pete Gray, both came almost simultaneously and virtually from the cradle.

From the President

Photo by Kenny Goldberg



Birds of a Feather

During a recent late afternoon walk along the Los Angeles River near my home in Long Beach, I witnessed what many of you have probably seen, one of nature's serendipitous, impressive performances.

A tightly formed unit of little shore birds swooped and swirled in quick bursts, darting through sudden maneuvers in perfect unison above the water: an air ballet corps. Then they plunged towards the river where they dispersed to look for dinner in the shallows. I could see each individual bird focused intently on its mission. Then, just as suddenly as they had landed, they again took flight, cohering into that harmonious movement.

Watching this incomparable display of nature's beauty, my thoughts flew (pun intended) to you, our Opera League members. When we are apart in our daily lives, we perform individually at work, at home, in our communities, and in other capacities.

When we come together at the opera house, or other opera-related events (e.g. seminars, student matinees, master classes, gatherings, musicales...), we are beautifully united in our desire to enlighten ourselves and the Los Angeles community about the emotional and spiritual significance of opera. And our enjoyment shows, much as I imagine the birds feel as they fly above the earth.

Recent events described in the news regarding leadership in LA Opera serve to reinforce the strong commitment that the Opera League has to our city's flagship opera company. Our devotion is not linked to individuals, but to the entirety of the art form and how that manifests itself in Los Angeles. This has been a process for nearly forty years, since the Opera League was formed to help establish LA Opera. I am convinced that our synergistic partnership will not only remain strong, but will flourish as we pursue new ways to connect with each other and the community through opera.

Don't forget to Like us on Facebook (facebook.com/operaleague), and be sure to follow our brand new Instagram at instagram.com/operaleaguela.

See you at the opera!

Laurel Howat
PRESIDENT



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A GRAY MATTER

CONTINUED FROM COVER

“We’re both from families with a strong love of classical music, opera and the arts” says Pete. “So, growing up, music was always playing in our homes.”

Not surprisingly, classical music and opera were one element that brought the two of them together more than 40 years ago. That passion continues to this day and is part of what makes their marriage so obviously warm and joyful.

The generosity stimulated by that passion has led both of them not just to a philanthropic commitment to opera in Los Angeles, but to serving on the board of LA Opera [LAO] and, in Diane’s case, to the presidency of the Opera League.

It is for their long-standing commitment to the art form and to LA Opera that Diane and Pete have been selected for this year’s Peter Hemmings Award, the Opera League’s premier recognition. They will be honored personally at the League’s annual awards dinner at the California Club Saturday, April 4, 2020.

Their romance began in 1972 after an introduction by a mutual friend, and in true operatic fashion it was not without a plot twist.

Diane had two tickets to see Beverly Sills sing the three heroines in Offenbach’s *Tales of Hoffman* at the Music Center. She had two gentlemen in mind as possible escorts, “and I chose the wrong one,” she said. When she got home, she called Pete, and told him so. He needed no further encouragement.

That beginning was followed by marriage and a full life, raising a family of five children with both parents working. Pete created a wholesale photographic business, specializing in macro and medical photography, which he recently sold to his employees. Diane taught elementary students in the Los Angeles public school system for twenty years and then became a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), where she spent another twenty years dedicated to children’s programs and victims of domestic violence.

As an educator, Diane taught opera to 5th and 6th graders and prepared them for their first experience in opera, which included busing with them to the Shrine Auditorium. As parents, they took their children to classical music at the Hollywood Bowl and sat in the balcony at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion for opera.

In the 1990s they became regular subscribers and donors to LAO and joined the Opera League and Wagner Society. The year 2000 was Peter Hemmings’ last as general director. Pete came up to him after a performance to thank him for all he had done to grow and preserve LA Opera. Hemmings’ two-word response set the course for both Pete and Diane. Hemmings said, “Nurture it.”

Within a year, Pete had joined the board. He and Diane subsequently helped underwrite productions of Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* in 2007 and *Die Walküre* during LA Opera’s 2010 production of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. Among their favorite experiences was serving as Patron Chairs of LAO where they got to know so many in the opera community.

Meanwhile, Diane became more involved on the board of the Opera League, including, ironically, chairing the Hemmings committee for several years. Diane was Opera League president in the 2011 and 2012 seasons (“I couldn’t have done it without Pete’s support,” she says).

Pete served on the LAO Board for 10 years and then ceded his chair to Diane where she actively serves today.

Their shared German background has left its imprint. Diane and Pete have been to 25 productions of the *Ring Cycle* over the years and still maintain a friendship with Achim Freyer, who directed LAO’s 2010 *Ring*. Their shared passion for travel has enabled them to visit Bayreuth, Germany frequently. Diane even left her appendix there one day in 2007 but still appeared on schedule for the following day’s performance of *Götterdämmerung*.

But LA Opera is their first love. Diane says: “We have been privileged to get to know the company from the inside and out. The commitment, passion and professionalism of the 250 to 300 people involved in each production are truly remarkable.”

Both note that the Young Artist Program (YAP) gives them confidence in the future of the art form. They have often traveled



to see and hear many of the YAPs as they launch their careers.

Speaking for both of them, Pete says what makes LA Opera stand out is its “inclusiveness and accessibility. [LA Opera CEO] Christopher Koelsch is a visionary. We are so proud of the opera’s efforts at community engagement and audience building, including televised opera in the park and the Off Grand smaller-scale productions.”

Koelsch is equally appreciative of the Grays. “It is truly a pleasure to work with philanthropists like Diane and Peter who bring passion, insight and connections to both the art form as a whole and individual artists in particular,” he says. “As subscribers, supporters, volunteers and leaders of the company from its very inception, they embody the qualities of the distinguished past recipients of the Peter Hemmings Award.”

LA OPERA CONNECTS WITH ITS AUDIENCE

By GARY MURPHY

As Opera League members know from their countless hours of volunteering to support LAO's educational programming, LAO's extensive engagement efforts are growing and reaching people of all ages throughout every corner of Los Angeles County. The company currently offers 29 different programs that reach more than 135,000 people each season—a reach that's nearly double the average of other American opera companies with annual budgets greater than \$15 million, according to an OPERA America survey.

The goal is both to welcome all Angelenos into the world of opera as well as deepen the connection to opera for those already

THIS PAST SUMMER LA OPERA ROLLED OUT A NEW NAME AND A NEW LOOK FOR ITS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ENDEAVORS: LA OPERA *CONNECTS*.

"LA Opera's education and community programs are as foundational to our artistic identity as our mainstage productions on the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion stage or our eclectic range of *Off Grand* performances in other venues," says Stacy Brightman, Vice President, LA *Connects*. "For some time we've wanted to convey—simply and effectively—the wonder and promise of these efforts. We believe that the new name, LA Opera *Connects*, will do just that."

enchanted by the art form. These offerings fall into four basic categories:

- **OPERA FOR ALL:** Making opera performances accessible for little-to-no cost
- **GET ON STAGE:** Helping community members learn about opera through performing
- **CLASSROOM INTEGRATION:** Teaching kids in schools and training teachers to inspire them
- **CONTINUING EDUCATION:** A variety of opportunities to learn about opera on one's own or in a group setting

LA Opera *Connects* is complemented by the thriving engagement programming produced and presented by your very own Opera League, which sponsors African Americans for LA Opera, and through Hispanics for LA Opera.

"We believe everyone has a right to experience opera," says Ms. Brightman. "We're committed to forging connections across generations, across all communities, for all ages, genders, ethnicities and economic backgrounds. Opera is an art form for all people. It is our greatest privilege to partner with scores of other nonprofits to build diverse opportunities to engage with opera and connect through story and music." 🌟



CONNECT WITH EURYDICE

By GARY MURPHY

From January through March 2020, the elusive nymph Eurydice will be found throughout Los Angeles as LA Opera *Connects* brings together scholars, musicians, actors, writers and more for **Eurydice Found**, a multidimensional countywide initiative inspired by the upcoming world premiere of Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* on February 1, 2020, with a total of six performances that month.

Eurydice Found will upend the ancient myth, introducing daring new understandings of its enduring hold on us. Say bye-bye to the vague preconceptions and misconceptions about this mythic woman who gets left

behind in the underworld. Instead, **Eurydice Found** will let Eurydice speak for herself, through a wide range of performances, conversations and happenings, with a special emphasis on works created by female artists.

Events include: an "Orphic soundwalk" through Grand Park created by theater maker Marike Splint; the new dance piece *Underway* presented by Heidi Duckler Dance under the historic 7th Street Bridge; screenings of Kandis Williams' performance piece *Eurydice* and the Academy Award-winning 1960 film *Black Orpheus* at the Hammer Museum; the U.S.

premiere of Stefano Landi's landmark 1619 opera *The Death of Orpheus*, performed by LAO's Young Artists; and so much more.

As part of this festival, the Opera League will present a brain-growing seminar called *The Enduring Power of Myth* on **Sunday, January 19, 2020**, from noon to 3pm. Michael Hackett, Professor of Directing and Theater History, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, will explore the legend of Eurydice. For more information and to order tickets, visit the League's website operaleague.org.

For more information about all festival events, visit laopera.org/eurydicefound.

THE HEART SPEAKS A THOUSAND WORDS

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT ON SACHIKO HIGUCHI By SHELL AMEGA

During her dozen years and counting as a treasured volunteer at Opera League cast dinners, Sachiko Higuchi has managed to engage remarkably well with fellow League volunteers and LA Opera casts despite English not being her native language. Indeed, Sachiko humbly describes her English-speaking skills as "taciturn."

Yet no language barrier can stop Sachiko from communicating beautifully in the language of her heart, manifested in her incomparable cast dinner meals, not to speak of her exquisite piano music, also served up at cast dinners. Sachiko has been playing piano since the age of four.

"Sachiko is a very appreciated volunteer at the cast dinners," says Diane Henderson, Cast Dinner team leader. "Not only does she always bring a wonderful dish, she always comes early to help set up, works during the dinner, then stays to help with clean-up. In any downtime before the cast and crew arrive, she entertains with her exquisite piano playing to the delight of all listening."

Sachiko recalls that after a few years of contributing only desserts to cast dinners, she decided to step it up a notch with Japanese-style curry, "because I thought the cast members would need more beef and would like the beef curry with rice." If you have never had the pleasure of experiencing Japanese-style curry, think Asian spices enhancing onions, potatoes, carrots and celery. Sachiko says all that cooking "makes me happy."

When Sachiko is not in her garden, she is parked at her easel, painting in a style she describes as "between traditional and modernism." Among her many creations are oil paintings reflective of her enthusiasm for opera, music and nature, including portraits of Gustavo Dudamel, a self-portrait and nature scenes of lakes and mountains.

Sachiko's journey to skilled pianist was somewhere beyond circuitous. She was just hitting a groove with the instrument when her father, president and CEO of a pharmaceutical company in Japan, died when his company and factory were destroyed during Allied bombing. Coupled with post-war inflation,

Sachiko's mother could no longer afford piano lessons for her daughter and so donated the family piano to a local school in need.

Suffice it to say Sachiko eventually reconnected with the piano. If you attend cast dinners, you are a beneficiary of the results. It's no accident that she refers to cast dinners as a "great music place."

Perhaps most poignant of all, it is Sachiko's beloved late father who continues to fuel her drive and passion for volunteerism courtesy of a priceless axiom he gifted her with when she was a child: "Even animals in the wild help each other. Humans must also take care of and help each other." ☀



Photo by Laurel Howat

PLAZA 2.0

AT THE AUGUST 2019 CIVIC DEDICATION CEREMONY, THE MUSIC CENTER UNVEILED THE NEWLY RENOVATED, ACCESSIBLE OUTDOOR URBAN SPACE AND RECOGNIZED IT AS THE “PLAZA FOR ALL.” By GARY W. MURPHY



The presentation revealed The Music Center Plaza as a principal public square for Los Angeles County, providing a place where people can not only dine and gather, but also connect with friends and colleagues.

As the first renovation of the Plaza since The Music Center opened in 1964, this major makeover makes the space more accessible while doubling the capacity of the space from 2,500 to 5,000 people. The expanded infrastructure effectively creates a fifth Music Center venue, offering a new food destination and meeting spot, while also empowering the performing arts center to provide free and low-cost programming in the space. New gardens, such as the recently christened Blue Ribbon Garden, include California native and low-water evergreen plantings that provide places to relax and enjoy beautiful vistas of Grand Park and the Civic Center.

After this 20-month, \$41 million renovation, we wanted to know from Opera League members: Is the Plaza for All the Plaza for You?

Photos by Tim Street-Porter

"Everything looks so much better! My husband, Stuart, and I watched the construction every day from our condo windows. Every morning we would walk past the Plaza and talk to the construction guys who were always busy and well informed. It was thrilling to watch Jacques Lipchitz' 15-ton "Peace on Earth" sculpture successfully moved! I love it all: the fountain's amazing colored lights, artistic projections on the video screens, wider selection of food in both taste and price range, the changing chefs at Abernethy's, the return of summer's Dance DTLA, no stairs in the center of the space for much easier use, and the Grand Avenue escalators and real bathrooms! It not only adds more excitement to our Music Center visits, but it's a great addition to the neighborhood." –Rebecca Bowne

"Aesthetically, it's very pleasing—a nice welcoming feel and an elegance that suits a major city's arts center. I think they did a wonderful job. It makes one want to arrive early or linger afterwards." –Todd Calvin

"The simplicity of it is quite lovely and so inviting for the community and the residents of downtown. The new Plaza seems to draw people to The Music Center for performances at the venues and for the free and low-cost events on the Plaza and at Grand Park. The food choices are reasonably priced, creative, and serve the needs of the community. It's wonderful to see people come to the coffee bar early in the morning for an al fresco meeting simply enjoying the ambience. I am very proud to be part of The Music Center and the revitalization of the Plaza as it adds so much to the cultural life of our city." –Adina Paritzky

"As the League's Education Volunteer Coordinator, I am on the Plaza for many of the student activities. [W]hen the students leave via the main entrance, the expanse of the Plaza is much more impressive, especially to those who have never been to The Music Center. The Plaza is now so grand that it invites many buzzing with comments." –Larry Verdugo

"My favorite feature on the new Plaza is the dancing fountain, which is a show by itself with its changing light and water patterns. Sometimes it has an added benefit of dancing teenagers who try to sneak to the fountain's center and take selfies before getting wet!" –Tanya Len

"Our new Plaza is truly becoming an exciting new destination for the DTLA community as well as patrons of The Music Center, and I am so happy to be a part of it. From first-hand experience, I can tell you that all of the new dining options are wonderful. Abernethy's continues to delight with its changing chefs. Go Get Em Tiger's coffee is wonderful as are their pastries. The Mullin Wine Bar's daily offerings of wine and changing dishes from local food trucks offer a new experience every day. I especially enjoy the views to the new garden areas and across to Grand Park and the surrounding buildings." –Clairette Brand ☀️

SONGS OF LOVE AND JUSTICE

By
SHELL
AMEGA

SOPRANO MARLAINA OWENS DELIVERS A SOARING PERFORMANCE AT THE FALL AALAO RECITAL

Soprano Marlaina Owens, accompanied by pianist Junko Nojima, enthralled the crowd at the African Americans for Los Angeles Opera (AALAO) Fall Recital with an ambitious repertoire that featured arias by Handel and Strauss as well as spirituals and avant-garde melodies.

Most remarkable was the duo's performance of "Songs of Love and Justice: Justice, Difficulties, Decision, Love" by composer Adolphus Hailstork, featuring lyrics from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches. Owens and Nojima learned and perfected the challenging piece over the course of a year while Owens was pursuing her MFA in Vocal Arts from UC Irvine. Owens' sublime soprano voice spoiled us with the results. And did I mention how splendid she was decked out in a stunning black gown highlighted by a floral design of bright red roses?

AALAO Board Members Mary Lewis and Beverley Clarkson served as the MCs, and Opera League co-founder Alice Coulombe, also a founding member of AALAO, welcomed the audience. League President Laurel Howat also greeted the guests. A moment of silence was held for Michael Melton, longtime AALAO board member who recently passed away.

Marliana Owens earned her BA in Music from Loyola Marymount University before her aforementioned MFA in Vocal Arts from UC Irvine. Her numerous operatic roles include: Rosalina in Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Zweite Dame in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and the title role in



Purccini's *Suor Angelica*. She is also a featured soprano member of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers.

A delicious buffet meal was served afterward as guests enjoyed mingling with Owens and Nojima.

AALAO is dedicated to increasing the awareness of opera throughout the Los Angeles community. The next AALAO event will be held at the home of Beverly and Clarence Clarkson on February 16, 2020. Keep your eyes on operealeague.org for details. ☀️

IN THE PIT

HANA KIM, VIOLINIST VIBRATING WITH SOUND

By DIANE EISENMAN



Singing was an important part of Hana Kim's family life in South Korea, and led her to study piano briefly. But her mother wanted an instrument for Hana that she could carry around with her, so she was given a violin to study. Hana found learning the violin came easier than her other school subjects, so she decided to pursue it seriously.

At age 13 Hana was invited to enroll at The Purcell School of Music, a prep boarding school in London, where she remained until completing her studies at 18. From there she hopped the pond to attend Juilliard in New York. Her breakthrough soon followed.

When Hana participated in the Music Academy of the West the summer after her freshman year at Juilliard, she became what she calls a "born-again musician." She explains: "I didn't understand before how beautiful the music was. I experienced such joy playing incredible music with amazing players. This was the moment I said that this is what I want to do with my life."

After Juilliard, Hana relocated to Los Angeles, joining her parents who had emigrated from Korea, and enrolled in the Colburn School's two-year Professional Studies Certification program. Her first paid job after Colburn was with the Charleston Symphony. Hana commuted to and from L.A. and South Carolina for two years before deciding to settle permanently in L.A., both to care for her mom and to finalize her relationship with the special man in her life, whom she met when he was her immigration lawyer.

Over the next decade Hana worked part time as a private teacher and substituted frequently for the Pacific Symphony while creating a home for herself, her husband and their two children. In 2016 she was offered a part-time position in the LA Opera

Orchestra. With her background in mostly symphonic music, playing for an opera orchestra provided a great opportunity to challenge and evolve her already formidable skills. “Trying to be in tune together and be ready for each other—that is the special part of making opera music, but the hardest part as well,” Hana says. “In the pit, with the sound so exposed, keeping in tune is a challenge. There is no forgiveness there.”

Hana just received her tenure with the LA Opera Orchestra and feels excited to be a full member of the “Pit” family. She loves learning from more experienced players. Listening to Maestro James Conlon discuss the history of a particular opera inspires her as well. Hana’s favorite operas so far are *Tosca* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Indeed, LAO’s production of *Tosca*, with soprano Sondra Radvanovsky in the title role, remains a highlight of her opera experience. She says she felt deeply moved with Radvanovsky’s strong and beautiful voice filling the Dorothy Chandler. “It was a moment I will never forget. At one point, every corner of the house was vibrating with sound.”

When not in the pit, Hana treasures her family time. Skiing, hiking, and jaunts to Hawaii are among favorite pastimes. Hana’s younger son, seven, is already taking up jazz piano. Mother and son are also learning guitar together. Her older son, nine, is taking to the rink with a passion for ice hockey.

“I didn’t understand before how beautiful the music was. I experienced such joy playing incredible music with amazing players. This was the moment I said that this is what I want to do with my life.”

Of course, we have to mention that being part of the LAO family means that Hana has become a fan of the Opera League, especially our legendary cast dinners. “Because we musicians need to focus on performance, we very much appreciate Opera League members providing rehearsal dinners, and other support, to give us room to do a better job.” 🌟

QUIZ GET YOUR TIME! MYTH ON!

The world premiere of *Eurydice*, Matthew Aucoin and Sarah Ruhl’s much anticipated take on the Greek myth, will soon be on stage at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

To get your brain cells warmed up, we asked Mark Lyons, LA Opera’s Associate Director of Communications and Publications, to test your gray matter on mythology in opera.

1. Which of the following Richard Strauss operas was *not* inspired by Greek or Roman mythology?

- A. *Ariadne auf Naxos*
- B. *Salome*
- C. *Elektra*
- D. *Daphne*

2. The ending of Gluck’s operatic version of the Orpheus tale (seen at LA Opera in 2018 in the composer’s French adaptation, *Orphée et Eurydice*) departs from the original myth in what major way?

- A. Orpheus joins Eurydice in the Underworld for eternity.
- B. Eurydice is revealed to be perfectly content in Hades; she decides to remain there and sends Orpheus back home.
- C. Maddened with grief, Orpheus commits suicide.
- D. Amour, the god of love, reunites Orpheus with a now-living Eurydice.

3. Which of the following operatic characters fought in the Trojan War?

- A. Ulysses in *The Return of Ulysses* by Monteverdi
- B. The title role in *Idomeneo* by Mozart
- C. Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell
- D. All of the above

4. The famous tune traditionally associated with the “can-can” dance comes from which mythology-inspired work?

- A. *Tancredi* by Gioachino Rossini
- B. *One Touch of Venus* by Kurt Weill
- C. *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Jacques Offenbach
- D. *Les Troyens* (The Trojans) by Hector Berlioz

5. In Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, what is Tristan’s connection to Arthurian legend?

- A. He is a Knight of the Round Table
- B. He is the son of Lancelot and Guinevere.
- C. He is protected in battle by Merlin’s magic.
- D. He inherits King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur.

6. What opera features a Roman deity among its characters (even though all of the other characters are Christian)?

- A. *Tannhäuser* by Richard Wagner
- B. *Falstaff* by Giuseppe Verdi
- C. *The Queen of Spades* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
- D. *Albert Herring* by Benjamin Britten

7. Helen of Troy, whose abduction sparked the Trojan War in Greek mythology, is a singing character in which opera based on Goethe’s *Faust*?

- A. *Faust* by Charles Gounod
- B. *Mefistofele* by Arrigo Boito
- C. *The Damnation of Faust* by Hector Berlioz
- D. All of the above

8. Richard Wagner’s *Ring* cycle is drawn from Norse mythology and Middle Age Germanic epic poetry. But Wagner played fast and loose with his source material. Which of these major plot elements is entirely Wagner’s invention?

- A. Siegfried passes through a wall of fire to awaken Brünnhilde.
- B. Siegfried wins a treasure by slaying a dragon.
- C. The self-immolation of Brünnhilde redeems the world.
- D. A cursed ring causes the deaths of several characters who possess it.

DOUBLE-TAP TO LIKE

NEW BOARD MEMBER KATHERINE VYSOTSKY HAS A PLAN TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO ATTRACT NEW OPERA LEAGUE MEMBERS.

By BILL GREEN

One of Katherine Vysotsky's passions is introducing friends in their 20's and 30's to the world of opera. As a new board member and part of the Marketing and Communications team, she has the assignment of expanding the Opera League's social footprint to include Instagram, the social media platform of choice for her demographic. Through Instagram she can broadcast League events in real time, showing off our vibrant portfolio of volunteer-driven programming that supports LA Opera.

I'm interviewing Katherine in a park near her Century City office in West Los Angeles. A native Angeleno, Katherine grew up on the Westside with parents who began taking her to classical music concerts and ballet at an early age. As she got older, they introduced her to opera. She still recalls seeing her first live opera performance, an LA Opera production of *Carmen*, and the impact it had on her. She took violin lessons and eventually selected a college-level Music Theory course in high school.

While double-majoring in Economics and Psychology at Georgetown, Katherine took an elective called History of Opera. The more opera she experienced, the more she realized that opera productions synthesize several of her personal interests—music theory, travel, history and artistic expression. Her favorite opera? *Don Giovanni*.

As she wrapped up her studies at Georgetown, Katherine pursued business opportunities in the arts. She parlayed internships at Sony and Universal into her current job at 20th Century Fox where she does market analysis for potential feature film products and works on about 40 films a year.

While seeking volunteer opportunities in the arts, Katherine came across the Opera League website and, through that,

LA Opera's site. In no time she became a volunteer on the League's Education team, which partners side by side with LAO's Education team, recently rebranded as LA Opera *Connects*. Katherine volunteers at Saturday Mornings at the Opera, where she's led dancing activities for kids, as well as Opera for Educators. She especially enjoys working with children. Larry Verdugo, head of the Opera League's Education team, raves: "Not long after becoming involved, she asked me how she could become more involved with the League. Because of her appealing manner, energy and apparent zest, I recommended her for a board position."

Tom Lady, fellow board member and head of the League's Marketing and Communications team, met Katherine at her first board meeting in July of this year. He says that for some time the League was interested in establishing an Instagram presence in order to engage the younger demographic. "Katherine is the perfect person to enhance our social presence because she has not one, but two Instagram accounts, the only person I know who can say that. She has an uncanny sense of knowing just the right kind of photos to post to Instagram."

Katherine also serves as the Opera League liaison to Aria, LAO's social program for adults ages 21-40 (Katherine herself is a member of Aria). Aria members get discounted tickets to selected performances, access to intermission receptions and after-parties, and invitations to special events.

As my interview ends, I look around this Century City park and see many young professionals grabbing a quick lunch. Almost all of them have a phone in their hand, immersed in their own space within the universe of social media. I couldn't help but think that this is a community that could bring new energy to the Opera League, and how we now have just the right person on our board to tap into that community in Insta-worthy style. 🌸



Photo by Bill Green.

INSTA-LEAGUE!

By TOM LADY

The 2019-20 season had barely started when your friendly neighborhood Opera League, after five and a half years on Facebook, decided to stretch its social footprint, from one of the oldest social media platforms to one of the newest.

That's right. The Opera League is now on Instagram.

What does that mean for you? Well, for starters, if you happen to be on Instagram, you need to follow us. The easiest way is to visit [Instagram.com/operaleaguela](https://www.instagram.com/operaleaguela), then click that bright blue FOLLOW button.

And then? Tell all your Insta-contacts to follow us as well. Obviously it costs nothing to follow the Opera League on social media, and it is by far the easiest way for non-members to keep up with all that we do so they can decide, from the comfort of their phone, if being a League member is right for them.

So how does Instagram work?

First and foremost, you need a phone. While you can certainly peruse your Instagram on your home computer, you must have a phone in order to post photos and videos to your account. If you see a photo or video that you like, simply double-tap it to give it a heart. Or if you're on your computer, double-click. And should you feel compelled to share or comment, the Insta-platform allows for that as well, on mobile or desktop.

No one has ever accused the Opera League of being too hip, but that doesn't mean we can't try to get there. 🌸

WHEN FANTASY BECOMES REALITY

By JUDITH HYMAN

YAPPING WITH A YAP: ROB STAHLEY, TENOR AND FIRST-PLACE WINNER OF THE 2019 WAGNER SOCIETY COMPETITION



Photo by Rob Stahley

Rob Stahley wanted to work the lights for a production at middle school when a friend urged him instead to try out for a part in a musical. Rob obliged...and was shocked when he landed the male lead. The seed was planted.

This LA Opera (LAO) Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist (YAP) began taking voice lessons while pursuing his courses at a technical high school studying marine biology. Rob recalls the very day when, suddenly, he turned to a friend in class and said, "I don't want to do this anymore. I know in my heart I just want to focus on singing."

Declaring a major at U Mass in Amherst, Rob was well aware that he was far behind his fellow students. First, he had to learn how to read music and practice vocal exercises. Nothing daunted him. He knew he wanted to sing and that he was good at it. As he had never been exposed to opera, however, Rob hadn't even considered that genre.

Until... he was assigned to listen to some recordings of classical opera in his course work, and then to write about them. Rob reminisces about his emotional response to his first recorded opera: *Il Trovatore* with Sherrill Milnes and Pavarotti. "I fell in love with opera immediately. I knew this was my destiny."

Not until his junior year, when traveling on a choral trip in Munich, did Rob see his first live opera performance: *Tales of Hoffmann*.

After U Mass, Rob understood that he needed more time to develop his instrument and skills and entered graduate school at College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati College (CCM), a preeminent institution for the performing and media arts. He spent four years at CCM earning his masters and an Artist Diploma.

So how did he get into Wagner?

"I had a box set of Otto Schenk's *Ring Cycle* produced in the mid-80s, which I was assigned to study, and once I heard it, I was hooked. I knew that's what I wanted to do. I kept on being told 'you can really sing,' which encouraged me even more to long to someday sing the part of Siegmund from *Die Walküre*." As Rob is a huge self-proclaimed "fantasy nerd," he describes *Die Walküre* as "like Tolkien in its density and world."

Perhaps you noticed Rob Stahley as Parpignon in LAO's season-opening production of *La Bohème*, or as First Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*. Next summer he will be working with the Santa Fe Opera while his fiancée, a professional soprano, who will by then be his wife, will be singing at the Des Moines Metro Opera.

Rob is drawn to Los Angeles and soaks up the diversity of the terrain, the people and the food. One of his favorite haunts is Grand Central Market in downtown L.A. "So many great places to eat, and only a ten-minute walk from the opera. Tacos Tumbras a Tomas is one of my favorites, so cheap and so good, I go there more than I should!" He also likes hiking, reading and the beach.

New Year's Day 2020 is Rob's wedding day, "to one of my best friends and the most beautiful woman I have ever set eyes upon." He and Ashley met at CCM. They have never been assigned a gig on the first of January so they figured it was the perfect day for a wedding and to celebrate anniversaries to come.

If only Siegmund and Brünnhilde had been that good at planning for the future. 🌸

GRAND PROJECTS

BETH MORRISON'S EPONYMOUS COMPANY HAS BECOME A CORNERSTONE OF LA OPERA'S OFF GRAND SERIES By BILL KENNEDY

Who knew that LA Opera's President and CEO Christopher Koelsch makes cold calls?

Beth Morrison knows.

She recalls: "It was 2013, and Christopher cold-called me in New York and asked me if I would come to meet with him in L.A."

She said yes, of course, and from that beginning emerged a five-year partnership between LA Opera (LAO) and Beth Morrison Projects (BMP). That relationship has become a cornerstone of LAO's Off Grand effort to provide new and intimate operatic work to Angelenos in addition to the company's more traditional mainstage productions.

From the standpoint of the partners, it has been a thorough success.

Says Koelsch, "At that time, I had seen *Dog Days* and had heard the music from *Song from the Uproar*. When I realized that both of these pieces had been produced by Beth, I knew that I wanted to start a conversation with her about bringing extraordinary new works like these to Los Angeles. Our collaboration is now in its sixth season, and it's become such an important part of our mission to forge the future of the art form."

Morrison embraces that mission. She acknowledges that, with exceptions, it is just too expensive and risky to launch full-scale new operas on mainstages. Most companies aren't equipped for the developmental process that is required to bring a new opera successfully to the stage. So, she says, "Our niche is to nurture and produce 21st century chamber opera and to create a new lasting canon of work."

BMP's works here have been universally well-received. Ellen Reid's *prism*, which premiered here in 2018, won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Music. Du Yun's opera *Angel's Bone*, which will be presented here in May, won the same award two years earlier.

Together, BMP and LAO have developed a new audience for contemporary opera in Los Angeles. "One of the incredible facts of this partnership is that 75% of the audience in our first presentations was new to LA Opera," says Morrison. "We continue to draw on that and expand the audience for these works. While some of those newcomers do cross the street to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, there are others who are strictly interested in contemporary work in intimate venues. The beautiful thing, and the real point, is that the audience for opera is growing in L.A. as a result of these projects having a home here."

A native of Auburn, Maine who trained as an opera singer and earned two degrees in vocal performance, Morrison gradually came to sense that opera—at least in the U.S.—"started to feel removed from a contemporary experience. It was my art form, and I realized I had never seen a production that felt relevant to me and the world I was living in."

Not one to shrink from a challenge, Morrison decided that her life's mission would be to foster a new aesthetic in opera. She wanted to make opera immediate and relevant to a younger, more diverse audience.

She went off to Yale to get a Master in Fine Arts in Theater Management and Producing to gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a producer and took full advantage of New York City's theater and music scene to further her breadth of knowledge and build a network of contacts and artists that she was interested in.

In 2006, Beth Morrison Projects was born, a first-of-its-kind company dedicated solely to producing new works in opera-theatre and music-theatre.

The company is based in New York and launched and maintains the Prototype Festival of new works there each January, but Morrison understood the dynamic arts scene that was building in Los Angeles and the emergence of young, daring companies focused on innovation in new music and opera.

The partnership with LA Opera was just the first step in BMP's deliberate transformation into a bi-coastal organization.

Says Morrison of Los Angeles, "In some ways it's easier to do this kind of work in L.A. because there's a built-in understanding of the value of R&D in the arts here."

In addition to May's LAO Off Grand production of *Angel's Bone* on The Broad Stage in Santa Monica, the company is offering two other works in L.A. in the spring.

Home ("A large scale performance work that explores and explodes the relationship between house and home.") on the Broad Stage in early March, and *Place* ("... examines the complex consequences of a rupture in the place we call home.") at Disney Hall later in March.

There are a couple of signature components of a Beth Morrison project.

First, the company's reputation means that Morrison sees proposals from more composers than she could possibly work with, so she starts with the determination that the composer have "an authentic and unique voice and an ability to create a wholly new sound world, as in *prism*."

The second is that each project is the result of a collaboration between

“Our niche is to nurture and produce 21st century chamber opera and to create a new lasting canon of work.”



composer, librettist, music and stage directors, as well as sound and lighting designers, Beth as creative producer, and sometimes lead performers. For example, noted baritone Nathan Gunn is working on a project in development called *In Our Daughter's Eyes* for a future season at LAO.

Collaboration is never easy, but it is central to what Morrison is trying to accomplish. And when the collaborators trust one another and have the same vision, the results can be magical.

So it means something when Morrison says: “LA Opera is my absolute favorite company to work with.” 🌸

Photo by Michal Fattal

THE By TOM LADY BARBER TAKES SAN DIEGO

Seville?

Pshaw, that's yesterday's diva.

A month before LA Opera opens *The Marriage of Figaro*, the Opera League invites you on a spring choo-choo joy ride down the coast to San Diego, the city Figaro and Susanna would've no doubt honeymooned in had modern air travel been available. Before the “King of Lather and Foam” wins his “queen,” though, he has to help Count Almaviva do the same in *The Barber of Seville*.

On the morning of Sunday, May 3, 2020, we'll show up at Union Station in downtown Los Angeles, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and with an appetite for sublime music. Enjoying ocean views from our business class car, our train will arrive in San Diego in time for brunch at Grant Hotel. From there we'll hop and skip over to San Diego Civic Theatre in time for a pre-performance lecture before the curtain rises on Rossini's masterpiece at 2pm.

As a bonus for LA Opera regulars, the cast includes tenor Carlos Santelli as Count Almaviva. Carlos is an alumnus of LAO's Young Artist program and winner of 2018's Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

All lathered up and foaming at the mouth to join us? The number of tickets is limited so if you want to be part of a trip that shows fundraising at its most joyful and fulfilling, don't hesitate to reach out to Brita Millard, the Opera League's amazing Special Events and Fundraising Chair. You can reach her at bmillard_99@yahoo.com or call 310-877-6285. 🌸

CALENDAR

JANUARY

Seminar

EURYDICE

Sun, Jan 19, 12:00-3:00pm
COLBURN SCHOOL, THAYER HALL

Opera for Educators

EURYDICE

Sat, Jan 25, 8am-12pm

Cast Dinner

EURYDICE

Sat, Jan 25
Mon, Jan 27
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

LA Opera/Opera League Season Announcement

Sun, Jan 26
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Opera Prep Activities

EURYDICE

Wed, Jan 29, 4:45pm-10:30pm

Seminar

ROBERTO DEVEREUX

Sun, Feb 9, 12:00-3:00pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

AAAO Black History Month Celebration

Sun, Feb 16, 3pm-6pm

Cast Dinner

EURYDICE

Tue, Feb 18
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

Operawise

ROBERTO DEVEREUX

Tue, Feb 18, 6:45pm-10:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Opera Prep Activities

ROBERTO DEVEREUX

Wed, Feb 19, 4:45pm-10:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

Leap Year Musicale

Sat, Feb 29 IN A PRIVATE HOME

Annual Peter Hemmings Award Dinner Honoring Diane and Peter Gray

Sat, Apr 4, 6PM
CALIFORNIA CLUB

Opera League Volunteer Appreciation Event

Fri, Apr 17

Cast Dinner

PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Fri, Apr 24
Mon, Apr 27
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

Sat, Apr 25, 9:15am-12:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Opera for Educators

PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Sat, Apr 25, 8am-12pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION
REHEARSAL ROOMS 1&4

Seminar with Maestro James Conlon

PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Tue, Apr 28, 6:00PM RECEPTION, 7:00PM PROGRAM
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 5TH FLOOR

Opera Prep Activities

PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Wed, Apr 29, 4:45pm-10:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION
REHEARSAL ROOMS 1 & 4

FEBRUARY

Elementary School Matinee

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Wed, Feb 5, 8:45am-1pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Elementary School Matinee

MAGIC DREAM

Thu, Feb 6, 8:45am-1pm
Fri, Feb 7, 8:45am-1pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Master Class with Tenor Ramon Vargas

Thu, Feb 6, 6:30 to 8 pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR
REHEARSAL ROOM 1

Opera for Educators

ROBERTO DEVEREUX

Sat, Feb 8, 8am-12pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Sat, Feb 8, 8:45am-11:30am
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

MARCH

Opera League Santa Barbara Trip

Sat, Mar 14
CONTACT: BMILLARD_99@YAHOO.COM FOR INFO

Opera for Educators

ARTS-INTEGRATION

Sat, Mar 21
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION
REHEARSAL ROOMS 1&2

Open Door Days

Mon, Mar 30, 9:15am-12:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

APRIL

Open Door Days

Wed, Apr 1, 9:15am-12:30pm
Fri, Apr 3, 9:15am-12:30pm
Sat, Apr 25, 9:15am-12:30pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION

MAY

Opera League San Diego Trip

Sunday May 3
CONTACT: BMILLARD_99@YAHOO.COM FOR INFO

Opera for Educators

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Sat May 30 8am-12pm
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION
REHEARSAL ROOMS 1&2

Cast Dinner

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Sat May 30
DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION 4TH FLOOR

EDUCATION EVENTS

Open Door Days

Volunteers help move groups around the Dorothy Chandler, greet bus groups and assist with the lunch table.

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.

Saturday Mornings at the Opera

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

Operawise

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

Opera Prep Activities

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

Elementary Student Matinees

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

CONTACT INFORMATION

CAST DINNERS: Diane Henderson
HOME: 323.874.8214 / CELL: 323.251.7484
dhenderson3417@sbcglobal.net

EDUCATION: Larry Verdugo
larryverdugo@icloud.com

GATHERINGS

Beverly Hills

Anne Russell 323.697.9733 *RSVP*
Ruth Bachofner 310.273.5039 *RSVP*

Eurydice and *Roberto Devereux*

Sun, Jan 12, 10:00am

Pelléas et Mélisande

Sun, Apr 19, 10:00am

The Marriage of Figaro

Sun, Jun 7, 10:00am

335 South Almont Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90211
Host: Ruth Bachofner

Hollywood / Los Feliz / Hancock Park / East Valley

Phoebe Heywood 323.733.9091 *RSVP*
Anne Russell 323.697.9733 *RSVP*

Eurydice and *Roberto Devereux*

Sun, Jan 5, 2:00pm

Pelléas et Mélisande

Sun, Apr 19, 2:00pm

The Marriage of Figaro

Sun, Jun 7th, 2:00pm

3331 Bennett Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90068
Host: Anne Russell

Orange County

Lorna Blancaflor 562.259.7426
Christa Marks 714.871.5525 *RSVP*

Eurydice and *Roberto Devereux*

Sun, Jan 26, 2:00pm

Pelléas et Mélisande and *The Marriage of Figaro*

Sun, Apr 19, 2:00pm

6132 Fernwood Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92648
Host: Dick Wollmer

San Gabriel Valley

Michael Sholer 818.502.1988 *RSVP*

Eurydice

Thu, Jan 16, 7:00pm

Roberto Devereux

Thu, Feb 6, 7:00pm

Pelléas et Mélisande

Thu, Apr 23, 7:00pm

The Marriage of Figaro

Tue, May 26, 7:00pm

5278 La Cañada Boulevard
La Cañada, CA 91011
Hosts: Barbara and Jack Dawson

Santa Clarita

Dr. Kimberlyn Jones 661.713.7001 *RSVP*

Check with the organizer (above) for updates
on their events.

24709 Fourl Road
Santa Clarita, CA 91321
Host: Dr. Kimberlyn Jones

South Bay

David and Jessica Feldman
jessyfeldm@gmail.com *RSVP*
(email preferred) or 310.753.9032

Roberto Devereux: Steven Kohn
Sat, Feb 15, 3:00pm

4212 Miraleste Drive
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275
Hosts: David and Jessica Feldman

West San Fernando Valley

Karen & Steve Kohn 818.726.9779

Eurydice and *Roberto Devereux*

Sun, Jan 26

Pelléas et Mélisande

Sat, Apr 25

The Marriage of Figaro

Sun, May 31

Hosts: Karen & Steve Kohn

Westside

Valerie Estes 310.826.0288
Chuck Bragg (Apr 25 only) 310.454.9662 *RSVP*

Eurydice and *Roberto Devereux*

Sat, Feb 8, 1:00pm

1179 Amalfi Drive

Pacific Palisades, CA 90272
Hosts: Beverly and Mike Phillips
Contact: Valerie Estes 310.826.0288

Pelléas et Mélisande and *The Marriage of Figaro*

Sat, Apr 25, 1:00pm

585 Almar Avenue
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272
Hosts: Alice and Chuck Bragg

SEMINARS

A DEAD BRIDE, A QUEEN AND A BEAUTIFUL AMNESIAC WALK INTO A BAR... SPRING SEMINAR PREVIEW

By TOM LADY

Your friendly neighborhood Opera League has an epic trilogy of opera deep-dives lined up for you as we head into the second half of LA Opera's 2019-20 season, and what a season it has been, eh *Monostatos*? We've already seen a fairy-tale romance nearly undone, a Florentine romance nearly undone, and a Parisian romance completely undone by tuberculosis.

But like Brünnhilde said to her sisters: "We're just getting started, ladies!"

Sun, Jan 19, 2020 | Noon-3pm | *Eurydice*
Thayer Hall at the Colburn School

Presented as part of the **Eurydice Found** festival from LA Opera *Connects*, the League's first seminar of the New Year will take place just a hop and a skip down Grand at the Colburn School. UCLA Professor Michael Hackett will fascinate us about the enduring power of myths in our culture. LAO Young Artist Coach Nino Sanikidze will delve into the musical aspects of this brand new piece by Matthew Aucoin.

Sun, Feb 9th, 2020 | Noon-3pm | *Roberto Devereux*
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor Rehearsal Room
(use the Artist's Entrance on Grand Avenue)

So Queen Elizabeth I was the Virgin Queen, eh? The title character in this piece might humbly beg to differ. Please, Professor Williams, tell us more! Yes, Simon Williams from UC Santa Barbara will discuss *Roberto Devereux* as one of a three-piece set by Donizetti collectively known as the Three Queens Operas, the other two concerning Mary Queen of Scots (*Maria Stuarda*) and Anne Boleyn (*Anna Bolena*). And the bonus? Members of LA Opera's Young Artist program (the beloved YAPs) will be on hand to sing excerpts.

Tue, Apr 28th, 2020 | 6-9pm | *Pelléas et Mélisande*
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 5th Floor

Yes, we know driving downtown on a weeknight isn't exactly your idea of a bacchanal (unless your name is Scarpia, but he was a weirdo, am I wrong?), but trust us, this will be so worth it. Maestro James Conton will join us to make us smarter about this early 20th century piece by Claude Debussy. Need more enticement? Free food and booze will be on hand. So we'll see you there?

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.

Answers for Get Your Myth On! on page 9: 1(B), 2(D) 3(D) 4(C) 5(A) 6(A) 7(B) 8(C)



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DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

Seminar: *Eurydice*

Sun, Jan 19

Annual Season Preview

Sun, Jan 26

Master Class with Ramón Vargas

Thu, Feb 6

Seminar: *Roberto Devereux*

Sun, Feb 9

AAALAO Black History Month Celebration

Sun, Feb 16

Hemmings Award Dinner

Sat, Apr 4

Seminar: *Pelléas et Mélisande*

Tue, Apr 28

San Diego Opera Day Trip: *The Barber of Seville*

Sun, May 3

AAALAO Father's Day Membership Recital

Sun, Jun 21

WHERE ORPHEUS SHOPS FOR EURYDICE

By TOM LADY

Your Shop team is so thrilled, we could scream like *The Magic Flute's* Queen of the Night that our sales for the first half of the season were on fire. Indeed, like magic, our merchandise vanished from our shelves and racks, clearing up space for the second half of the season that kicks off on February 1 with *Eurydice*.

Just as Orpheus couldn't resist turning around, you won't be able to resist looking twice at the bling in our wares. No, we're not telling fables. We're talking the finest-quality jackets and scarves, jewelry and handbags. And of course we may also be carrying a few specialty items you will not see until next season. What sorts of items, you ask? Don't ask Hades! Just pop on by the Shop, located safely above ground, on the right as you enter the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion lobby, and let any of our volunteers show, not tell.

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year from your hard-bustling Shop team. Here's to a second half of the 2019-20 season that'll be the stuff of myths! ☀️