

**ISSUE 56
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BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

By TOM LADY

As the Opera League celebrates a milestone birthday, we reflect on how far it's come and look forward to where it, and opera itself, are yet to travel.

As a wit once said: "Forty's not old, if you're a tree."

The Opera League has come so far and accomplished so much since its 1981 founding. Like trees, however, we are just getting started.

To mark the occasion of another round-numbered birthday, we invited six Opera League members to share their thoughts: three to look back and three to look ahead. Here are their stories.

ARTICLE CONTINUES ON PAGE 3 ▶

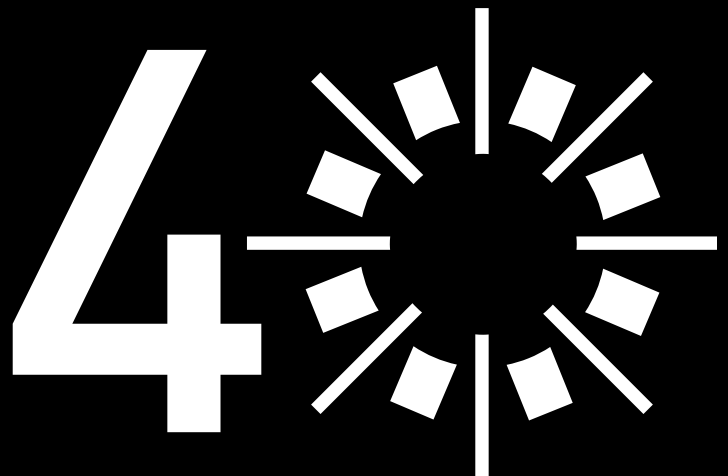
WHAT'S INSIDE

**Catching up with the
Opera League's Founders**

**Volunteer Spotlight:
Fred Dear**

**Opera League's
Logo Refresh**

THE BIG



From the President

Photo by Kenny Goldberg



The Big 4-0

Happy Fortieth Birthday, Opera League!

Yes, the Opera League has hit the big 4-0. To celebrate, we've designed a celebratory 40th anniversary logo that we'll be using on our digital and print materials throughout 2021. Starting in 2022, the Opera League's parent logo will have undergone a refresh. You can read about our new logos in this issue.

Our cover story will be a bit different this time around, as it has been co-written by six League members just like you: three veterans reflecting on how far the Opera League has come in forty years, and three relatively newer Leaguers sharing their vision for the Opera League, and opera in general, in the next forty years. Complimenting that is our interview with the three women who started the Opera League in 1981.

A milestone like this prompts one to reflect on one's past. Before the days of Instagram and TikTok influencers, I would sometimes tuck the front page of our local newspaper, the *Press-Telegram*, into my suitcase at the start of a family vacation. When we arrived at some photo-worthy destination, such as Key West, Mount Rushmore or the Isle of Bute, I would have my picture taken there, holding my copy of the *Press-Telegram*. After we returned home, I would get the photo developed, mail it to the *Press-Telegram*, then eagerly await each Sunday edition to see if they had published my picture, along with a few other readers' vacation photos.

The *Press-Telegram* continues this fun tradition, even during the pandemic, as viewers now digitally send in photos, mostly from their own homes or nearby safely reached destinations. It is a fun way to stay connected.

In November I packed a few copies of our Fall BRAVO into my backpack for a five-day trek along the Trans Catalina Trail on Catalina Island. One copy was for selfies (below), the others I distributed to friends I made that week on the island, as I carried out the Opera League mission of community outreach and opera education. Always seize the opportunity!



As I mentioned in my last President's Message, one silver lining during our lockdown situation is that we have been able to reach out even further than during "normal" times, to our community and audiences, due to Zoom and other online avenues. Our virtual gatherings have blossomed into a cherished pandemic tradition, attracting opera buffs from across the U.S. with the occasional attendee chiming in from Europe. In October we hosted our first virtual seminar where the speaker presented from his home in Zurich.

I invite you all, dear readers, to take your copy of this BRAVO and photograph yourself, or someone else, with it, as we celebrate forty years strong of Opera League

pride. You can be in your home, yard or anywhere else you have safely ventured. Kindly email your photos to Ldhowat@aol.com with the subject line "BRAVO Photo." If we get enough, we will publish a collage in the next issue of BRAVO.

I am so grateful for all your continued support and encouragement during this "hiatus" from live opera. The Opera League is taking this time, between producing our virtual events, to look at our organization and find ways to improve it, so that when we emerge from isolation, we will be shining brighter and stronger than before, ready and eager to champion LA Opera and promote opera in the community.

Have a healthy, happy and safe 2021!

Laurel Howat
PRESIDENT



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VISIT US AT operaleague.org

Send email to: info@operaleague.org
Send mail to: Opera League of Los Angeles
PO Box 49-1057
Los Angeles, CA 90049-9057
24-hour League Message Line: 213.972.7220
Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/operaleague
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BRAVO TEAM

Editor: Tom Lady
Photographer: Alma Guzman
Contributors: Nicholas Dahl, Diane Eisenman, Bill Green, Judith Hyman, Bill Kennedy, Gary W. Murphy, Mónica Gutiérrez Roper
Newsletter Design: Studio Fuse, Inc.
Printer: Licher Direct Mail

LOOKING BACK...



Photo by Susan Heard

DOLORES KERR

To understand the Opera League, you have to know what, and who, came before.

The “who” is Dorothy Chandler. Buffy, we called her. But never to her face! Right after she led the effort to create the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles in the 1960s, she was determined that folks knew that the Music Center was truly for everyone. That’s where the “what” comes in: a passionate group of Music Center volunteers called Reach Out. Eventually I became co-president of this group.

We volunteered for all the resident companies of the Music Center. We produced seminars, emerging young artist recitals, backstage tours, artist services and Music Center Plaza events. And we distributed free tickets! To get all this done, we had awesome mentors and financial support. Our events featured big name headliners from the entertainment industry such as Robert Guillaume, Charlton Heston, Gregory Peck and Sidney Poitier, just to name a few.

When the Opera League was formed in 1981, I didn’t hesitate when co-founders Alice Coulombe and Carol Henry invited me to join.

These past 40 years I have been honored and privileged to sit on the League board, where I oversaw Overtures, and where I represented the African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO) chapter right after that formed in the 1990s. My husband Ben and I have hosted so many events in our

home over the years. It’s been so fun to see Buffy’s spirit of civic engagement up close and personal in the form of so many passionate volunteers who have made the Opera League what it is today.



Photo by Lynne Mitchell

LYNNE MITCHELL

Before joining the Opera League, I was pressed into cooking, serving and cleaning up at a League cast dinner for a double technical rehearsal. We fed the cast in the basement near chorister dressing rooms. We had no sink, stove or refrigerator. It was exciting seeing the singers rush down the halls and up the steps in full makeup and costume on their way to the stage. We kept the singers and stage managers well fed with delicious home-cooked meals. Our pay? Much thanks and the opportunity to attend the rehearsals after dinner. I was hooked!

As a need was identified by the opera, League volunteers filled it with no fanfare. Eventually, I became Cast Dinner Chair and Light Walking Chair, and I helped with mailings, unloading buses for students and seniors, selling raffle tickets on the Plaza and monitoring the Young Artist auditions.

At first, all our work had to be done by phone and mail. I learned how to be a good team member, how to organize and train volunteers, how to write by-laws, raise money, etc. Along the way, I have learned so much about opera, singing techniques and stage craft. However, most rewarding have been the wonderful friendships with a variety of interesting, dedicated and likeminded people.



Photo by Ben Gibbs

GARY MURPHY

As I look back, I am amazed by the transformation of the League’s opera shop, officially known as Shop at the Opera, from a charming cloth-covered folding table into a stylish and chic boutique that grosses over \$100,000 in annual sales.

If you had walked into the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in 2000, on one side of the lobby you would have found opera super fan Larry Rappaport’s Opera Shop behind a makeshift counter where he would sell music-themed merchandise from his West Hollywood shop. On the opposite side you would have found Opera League President Warren Shubert with wife Melody at a table selling an array of LA Opera merchandise.

All that changed in 2004 when the League’s new president, Rebecca Bowne, found retail inspiration at both a Pittsburgh Opera Volunteers International convention followed by a Houston Grand Opera seminar on how to run an opera boutique. Out went the LAO baseball hats and in came jewelry, gem-encrusted purses, CDs, DVDs and men’s silk ties and scarfs.

Over the years, the improvised cabinetry gave way to custom-built Music Center-approved glass counters and cabinets, and an ever-changing roster of sales force managers, all Opera League volunteers, who became expert merchandise buyers, plus dozens of additional League volunteers to help staff the Shop.

LOOKING AHEAD...



Photo by Wilma Freeman

WILMA FREEMAN

My hope for the future is to see the opera come to life for those less fortunate in our local communities. I would love to see the opera go into the local retirement homes, nursing homes, children's hospitals, veteran hospitals and youth detention centers to bring opera to them on a much smaller scale. These are our family members, neighbors and friends who are hurting and need some extra attention when it comes to showing them the arts that we so love and enjoy.

A community opera that could set up a stage, bring in youth cast members and backstage technicians, and bring the experience to these individuals. They would gain such a wonderful insight of the opera.

We are not always able to take someone out of their current situation, but we can bring the magical experience to them. Creating the stage for those to have their lives enriched and uplifted by way of music, song and dance would be a great gift to give back to the community, a great way to increase the love of opera for those who may have never thought they could come to know and love the opera as I have.



Photo by Steve Cohn Photography

MÓNICA GUTIÉRREZ ROPER

Opera has been my refuge in a world of many positive and some negative pressures. In opera, I find beauty, peace, misfortune, excitement and wonder. The Opera League has supported this musical passion of mine, expanding my daily routine with the enjoyment of another enriching world outside my own.

In the next 40 years, I will still be volunteering with the Opera League, enthusiastically contributing to it. With each opera, I have the opportunity to learn about the composer, the plot, world history, musical theory and also the artists, depending on the Opera League seminars or gatherings I attend.

Most importantly, I want to continue meeting stimulating people, like the friends I have made through the years at the Opera League. My fellow opera lovers are remarkable human beings, keeping themselves active, open and always increasing their operatic knowledge. In the next 40 years, I want to see more opera and will do everything possible for the Opera League to get more people to fall in love with the art form, as I have.



Photo by Shane Woodson

JERILYN PHIPPENY

I think it's tempting for modern society, with its goldfish-like attention span and habitualization to entertainment-on-demand, to dismiss old arts such as live opera as "stodgy" or "difficult." It may seem easier for a twentysomething to sit at home playing on her smartphone than to venture into the city and experience four hours of heavy drama in a foreign language. Easier isn't always better though. Exposure to opera touches the pathos in all of us—as long as we can access it. That's why I think educational outreach is the most important service that the Opera League provides.

Educational programs like elementary school field trips and pre-performance talks demystify opera. Despite the bustle of modern life and noise of digital marketing, I think human beings still long for connection to great art. We are always drawn to great storytelling, world-class acting and virtuosic musicality. It's not that we don't like opera; it's that we don't know about it. Far from being a dying or a dead art, opera can be a living and growing art—thanks to the tireless work of volunteers like those of the Opera League. Here's to 40 more years of supporting great art—and 400 after that. 🌸



SERVICE, GOOD TIMES AND FRIENDSHIP

By BILL GREEN

THE OPERA LEAGUE'S FIRST THREE PRESIDENTS REMINISCE ABOUT THE LEAGUE'S FORMATIVE YEARS

The Opera League was organized several years before there was a resident opera company in Los Angeles.

This past November, the League's first three presidents came together via Zoom to share fond memories and stories surrounding the formation of the Opera League, and the role League volunteers played in the formation of a resident opera company in Los Angeles. These women served collectively as Opera League President from 1981 through 1988, a time characterized by our second president, Lorraine Saunders, as a time of "service, good times and friendship." The bonds of friendship between these three women have endured for over 40 years.

A FATEFUL ENCOUNTER AT A BOX OFFICE FLOP

The first president was Alice Coulombe (1981-84). During the 1960s, Alice's late husband Joe ("Trader Joe") had served on the board of a short-lived Pasadena opera company. At one point Alice decided to invite the neighbors to come by and enjoy some TJ wine before a performance. She described the performance as a disaster. By intermission, only the Saunders were left.

A little later, Alice met Carol Henry and her late husband Warner at a dinner party. After what is reported to have been a few rounds of sake, Alice convinced Carol to get involved in the fledgling League. "To this day," Carol says, "Alice continues to find rewarding ways for me to spend 99% of my discretionary time."

OPERA TOURS: A LEAGUE IS BORN!

After the Music Center opened in 1964, the Music Center Opera Association (MCOA) was created to coordinate visits of touring opera companies, including New York City Opera and San Francisco Opera.

In 1981, Carl Princi, radio announcer for classical music station KFAC, and Sol Rubin, board member of the MCOA, approached Alice and Lorraine, who were involved in local Metropolitan Opera auditions, to ask them to form a support group of volunteers

to help out the touring opera companies while they were in town. They immediately recruited Carol, and the three of them went to work putting together what became known as the Opera League of Los Angeles.

THE EARLY YEARS: A POST OFFICE HEIST

Carol recalls planning an elaborate fundraising event at the Biltmore Hotel and dropping the invitations into the mail at a local post office. The day the envelopes were mailed was the same day thieves decided to pilfer the social security checks that had been delivered to the post office. During the heist, they also made off with the Opera League's fundraiser invitations. Undeterred, hardy League volunteers took to the phones to get reservations in for that event.

THE OPERA LEAGUE TAKES GOLD!

In the lead-up to the 1984 Summer Olympics, which would take place in L.A., plans had been made for London's Royal Opera to perform several works at the Music Center during the Olympic Arts Festival. This would entail 400 visitors, counting family members and the full company, visiting L.A. for weeks. Opera League volunteers handled the logistics supporting the RO's extended stay.

Lorraine's term as president began with the arrival of the RO that summer. "If people

said to me then: 'Do you have dreams for an opera company in L.A.?' That wasn't even a thought in my head. At that time, our goal was to support whatever opera company was coming to the Music Center."

BIRTH OF LA OPERA

LA Opera started with three employees, including General Director Peter Hemmings. Opera League volunteers worked in the office and hosted receptions for the visiting companies.

"A Tradition Begins with the Opera League" was the headline of a 1986 *Los Angeles Times* article documenting the League's organization of "17 buffet receptions, cocktail parties, desserts, teas, and dinners..." held all over Southern California, raising funds and obtaining season ticket commitments to support a new resident opera company.

By LAO's inaugural production of *Otello* in 1986, League membership had swelled from 107 charter members in 1981 to 823. The three League founders emphasized the League's goal of engaging people from all walks of life and providing them a meaningful path to support a significant presence of opera in our diverse community.

"The vision we had," says Alice, speaking for the group, "was we were workers who had a passion for opera. We really didn't care who you were, or where you came from. If you liked opera and were game to bring a casserole, you were in."

That attitude has not changed in the 40 years since the League's founding. The adage "Service, Good Times and Friendship" continues to guide the Opera League today, as we look forward to emerging from the pandemic as strong and vibrant an organization as ever. ☀️

For the complete version of this interview, please visit our website at operaleague.org.

REFRESHING AT 40

By GARY W. MURPHY

Whether it be fashion styles, haircuts or food choices, what worked at age 20 might not work so well at 40. Right, mullet?

When the Opera League of Los Angeles introduced its current logo with all lower-case lettering in the 1990s, it was following the trend set by LA Opera's look, which was then styling itself as "los angeles opera." With its red and black circular sunburst, the Opera League's logo reinforced its relationship with both the company and its home, The Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, with its glorious explosion of mirrored glass.

Now, as we enter 2021, and the League celebrates its milestone 40th anniversary, a logo refresh was arranged with one of L.A.'s finest performing arts graphics experts, Jennifer Logan of Studio Fuse.

"The most common reasons to update a look," says Jenn, "are that the current logo is outdated, or the company is evolving. For the Opera League, we had a little bit of both. The old logo had a strong mark, but the type was outdated and a bit challenging to work across all media because of its width."

It was a bit of a shock, but not surprising, to learn that even logos tend to add width with age.

As much as League members may like the now twenty-something "youthful" logo, it was time for a change. "The all-lower-case look is a trend that comes and goes, but it's a look that's generally used for more playful or casual brands," Jenn explains. "An upper-case logotype is more refined and commands more authority."

Not only would the polished new look have to retain the red and black sunburst, it would have to incorporate the number "40," which offered an additional design challenge. Jenn deftly handled that task by simply adding a "4" to the left of the mark, which will then be deleted when the anniversary ends at the end of 2021.

"While the mission of the Opera League is not necessarily shifting, the organization is marking an important anniversary," says Jenn. "And a milestone such as 40 years is definitely worthy of a mini-makeover!"



ABOVE: Updated standard logo versus original. RIGHT: New stationery look for 40th Anniversary correspondence.



OPERA LEAGUE TIMELINE:

THE FIRST THREE PRESIDENTS (1981-1988)

ALICE COULOMBE (1981-1984)

- Music Center Opera Association (MCOA) meeting requesting formation of volunteer support group
- First Opera League Board meeting: November 16, 1981
- Opera League Mission Statement and By-Laws completed
- New York City Opera annual visits to The Music Center until 1983
- League conducts recital series and educational events

LORRAINE SAUNDERS (1984-1986)

- Royal Opera performances during 1984 Olympics are sell-outs
- Peter Hemmings named Executive Director of MCOA
- League hosts welcome reception for Hemmings at Ambassador Auditorium
- League supports Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Deutsche Oper Berlin touring companies performing at The Music Center
- League assists at student dress rehearsal of Deutsche Oper at Shrine Auditorium performance
- League organizes and conducts 17 meetings in homes, obtaining season subscriptions and donations supporting first season of LA Opera (LAO)

CAROL HENRY (1986-1988)

- League membership reaches 800
- LAO's first season begins with Verdi's *Otello* in 1986
- League activities resemble today's operations—volunteering, support of LAO community outreach, artist services, seminars, regional gatherings, social events, support of educator and student events, etc.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Alaysha Fox (Dorothee), Michael J. Hawk (Ophéon), Tiffany Townsend (Léontine), Robert Stahley (Valcour), Jacob Ingbar (Colin) and Gabriela Flores (Jeanette) in *The Anonymous Lover*. Photo by Larry Ho.

LIVESTREAM GOES MAINSTREAM

HOW LA OPERA ADAPTS TO A NEW PERFORMANCE REALITY

By GARY W. MURPHY

Often in times of strife, opportunities arise for innovation, and it is no secret that COVID-19 restrictions presented brand new challenges to producing opera. LA Opera was at the forefront of opera companies when it launched original programming in response to the pandemic.

LA Opera On Now is a proven success story (nearly 800,000 views and counting!) that has become a permanent part of LAO's programming. Here visitors can find a wide selection of fascinating musical programs. In need of a little caffeinated pick-me-up? Stop by Coffee with Conlon and enjoy your morning beverage with Maestro James Conlon. Is it time to expand your horizons with some cutting-edge music and visual delights? Digital Shorts is your place to find company-commissioned short works by Matthew Aucoin, David Lang, Du Yun and others.

When it came to staging a live full-length opera such as November 2020's *The Anonymous Lover*, LAO reckoned with no shortage of logistical headaches. This LA Opera On Now production of the little-known 18th century work by composer Joseph Bologne was mounted at the Colburn School, just down the way from the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

"COVID has affected everything we do," said Rupert Hemmings, LAO's Vice President of Artistic Planning. "As I'm sure is the case in every industry. Live performance became impossible so we refocused our energies onto producing a live performance that we could stream out to our patrons."

Director Bruce A. Lemon, Jr. chose not to be intimidated by the restrictions but to utilize them. "A lot of the inspiration for the staging came from COVID-19 and the restrictions we had to adhere to for safety," he said. "When we knew we couldn't have an audience, we decided to use the entire building space and not just the stage in order to give everyone the proper space required."

Two weeks prior to the streaming, the LA Opera Orchestra recorded the music in the Colburn School's large grand rehearsal room to provide social distancing amongst the players. "In an orchestra, winds and brass instruments need much more physical distancing than string instruments," said Hemmings. That recorded music was then played to the performers via a small earpiece so they could hear the orchestra as they sang live with Maestro Conlon who conducted them from the center of the auditorium.

Soprano Tiffany Townsend (LEFT) as Léontine and tenor Robert Stahley (RIGHT) as Valcour, with dancers Andrea Beasom and Daniel Lindgren, in a scene from *The Anonymous Lover*. Photo by Larry Ho.



Onstage, the six singers were required to stand 15 feet away from each other and not move for a few seconds after they finished singing to let the air settle—restrictions that became design elements incorporated into the production's aesthetic. Singers would appear in the empty side boxes and make entrances down the two side aisles, and

ballet dancers wore masks for the mid-opera pas de deux. The sets, costumes and lighting utilized for the streaming were much bolder than you would see on a normal opera stage, with deep saturated colors that burst through your computer screen. Even the curtain call had a now familiar boxy Zoom-like flare.

Hungry for more? As part of LA Opera On Now, LA Opera Connects on YouTube contains a wide array of COVID-inspired programs. Among many others is Associate Chorus Master Jeremy Frank's charming Opera Happy Hour, where he picks an operatic theme, discusses it and plays music on his piano to illustrate it, all perfectly paired with an appropriate cocktail. Before COVID, Jeremy had no idea how to create a web series, but now his living room has become a high-tech recording studio complete with multiple cameras, professional microphones, warm acoustics and soft lighting.

One final example of breaking new virtual ground was the recent on-demand streaming of *Modulation*, a collaboration between LAO and the Prototype Festival. For a \$25 ticket, audiences were given digital access for one week to explore a landscape of new musical pieces—each with its own visual component. With themes of isolation, identity and fear, with the connection of breath, the experience brought together 13 of the most provocative and diverse voices in the contemporary musical idiom for an unforgettable auditory and visual journey where you, the audience member, were in control of the experience.

While none of us can wait for the moment when we step foot back into the opera house, it is gratifying to see our city's resident opera company pivoting to creative, groundbreaking programming to help sustain operagoers in the meantime. 🌟

IN THE PITS?

CATCHING UP WITH LA OPERA ORCHESTRA MEMBERS

By DIANE EISENMAN

Have you been wondering about the LA Opera Orchestra members during this time of social distancing?

I wondered too.

In almost every issue of BRAVO for the past several years, I've interviewed these very talented musicians as part of our "In the Pit" series. Recently I reconnected with four "In the Pit" alums to see what life has been like for them in our restricted environment. Below is what they had to say.



Photo by Diane Eisenman

STEVEN BECKNELL, PRINCIPAL HORN

I really miss the group music making that I've been doing pretty much my entire adult life. Showing up at that first

read-through in the opera pit, and then rehearsing all the way through the dress rehearsal into opening night is an experience that's hard to put into words.

At first, when we thought it was only going to last for a couple weeks, I worked on musical arrangements, composing and whatnot. But as time went on and it became apparent we wouldn't be getting back to work anytime soon, that died down, and I just spent more time practicing on my instrument. I practice pretty much every day. I have been able to work on things that, as a brass player, I couldn't normally have done due to the rigors of a busy performance schedule. So that has been good. But I really want to get back into that pit and start making music together with my colleagues.



Photo by Brenden John

JOHN WALZ, PRINCIPAL CELLO

Musicians are, by nature, social creatures. Our greatest joy comes from making music with others. So these past many months

have been very hard on us—mentally, financially, emotionally...

I'm lucky to still have a lot to do, teaching at both Idyllwild Arts and the Colburn School. Online, of course, which presents its own collection of problems. My trio has done a number of virtual concerts, videotaped and streamed to the respective concert subscribers. Musicians are an industrious lot, so we have adapted to do what we have to.

One thing I have always wanted to do, and never had time, was prepare my own edition of the Bach Cello Suites. So the shutdown has afforded me the time to do this, and I learned the music preparation software, Sibelius, in the process.

On a side note, my Dachshunds, who are the neediest dogs on the planet anyway, have gotten so used to my being home all the time, that when I do leave the house, they have a meltdown!



Photo by Diane Eisenman

HANA KIM, VIOLIN

Thankfully, having a family, especially two young children, has helped me keep moving forward at a time when our usual routines have

been completely disrupted. My husband and I decided to embark on a completely unfamiliar journey of homeschooling in the fall.

"Musicians are an industrious lot, so we have adapted to do what we have to."

My only public school experience was back in Korea. I never learned American history, and my math and science was already falling behind my ten-year-old's. Not to mention my lack of confidence in the English language.

I decided that knowing so little about what I was about to get myself into might actually be a good thing and may save me from having expectations that could drive all of us crazy.

To my surprise, not only did I genuinely become interested in my children's learning materials, but I also got to find out so many different habits and

“I very much look forward to getting back to playing opera and imagine the tears of joy I will have upon returning for opening night.”

personalities of my own children that I had never noticed before.

I miss playing with my fellow musicians and feeling the chills and goosebumps while performing. I try playing my scales to keep my body supple around my violin, hoping we will resume that truly blessed life soon. But I also know that when I look back to this time later in life, it will fill me with more gratitude than anything.

Photo by Diane Eisenman



**WILLIAM MAY,
PRINCIPAL BASSOON**

I am fortunate to have a part-time teaching position and unemployment benefits to get me through. My faith in things getting better and hope for

a massive outpouring of artistic support after the pandemic have allowed me to remain mostly positive and peaceful during this difficult time.

I have not touched my bassoon much, and it has been illuminating in many ways to have the time off. The most substantial thing I have done with the extra time is becoming a certified yoga instructor. I have been practicing yoga regularly for over ten years and always wanted to learn more about the discipline and become a teacher. I want to share with others the many benefits that I've experienced from a regular yoga practice.

I very much look forward to getting back to playing opera and imagine the tears of joy I will have upon returning for opening night. 🌸

ICE CREAM AND CAKE WITH A QUIZ ON TOP

The Opera League hits the big 4-0 in 2021. Let's celebrate...

...with a hearty selection of brain strainers!

Mark Lyons, LA Opera's Associate Director of Communications and Publications, has whipped up the perfect "forty"-themed quiz to help get the party started.

1. The 40th production staged by LA Opera (in December 1992) was the surprisingly belated company premiere of a repertory staple, featuring the company debut of mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves in her signature role. Name that opera!

- A. *Madama Butterfly*
- B. *Carmen*
- C. *Tosca*
- D. *La Cenerentola*

2. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro measures his new bedroom, counting out "cinque [5], dieci [10], trenta [30], trentasei [36]..." before reaching the final number. Sing along with Figaro to see how long his bed can be!

- A. quarantuno [41]
- B. quarantadue [42]
- C. quarantatre [43]
- D. quarantaquattro [44]

3. This composer would have celebrated his 40th birthday in 1960. But since he was born on leap day (February 29, 1792), that birthday arrived more than nine decades after his death in 1868. While his Italian bel canto comedies are audience favorites around the world, he wrote many serious works too, including the French grand opera *William Tell*. Who is he?

- A. Domenico Cimarosa
- B. Alessandro Scarlatti
- C. Antonio Salieri
- D. Gioachino Rossini

4. Gaetano Donizetti wrote nearly 70 operas, in French as well as in Italian, including several comedies and dramas that hold the stage as repertory staples today. His 40th opera, an 1832 comedy, tells the story of a naive young man who

falls for a con artist's deception. (All ends happily, and our hero never even realizes that he was duped.) Name that opera!

- A. *Don Pasquale*
- B. *La Favorite*
- C. *Lucrezia Borgia*
- D. *L'Elisir d'Amore*

5. Which of the following composers was the only one who lived past the age of 40?

- A. Giacomo Puccini
- B. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- C. Vincenzo Bellini
- D. Georges Bizet

6. This 1840 opera features the prominent non-singing role of the Duchess of Krakentorp, a part that has attracted performers including Beatrice Arthur, Marian Seldes and Kathleen Turner (all of whom performed the role at the Met). Name that opera!

- A. *The Daughter of the Regiment*
- B. *The Queen of Spades*
- C. *Andrea Chenier*
- D. *Hamlet*

7. Another 1840 work, Verdi's second opera, *Un Giorno di Regno* [*King for a Day*], was a big flop, closing after the opening performance. What effect did that disaster have on the composer?

- A. He returned to his conservatory for additional studies with Rossini.
- B. He moved to Paris to relaunch his career at the Opéra.
- C. He took a 14-year break from composing and became a conductor at La Scala.
- D. He didn't write another comedy for more than five decades.

CATCHING THE FIRE

YAPPING WITH A YAP: JANAI BRUGGER, SOPRANO

By JUDITH HYMAN

I was feeling apprehensive when I took on the assignment of writing an article about Janai Brugger, a graduate of LA Opera's Young Artist Program (YAP).

Janai, after completing the YAP program ten years ago, went on to be the 2012 winner of Operalia and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She then went straight onto the Met in the role of Liu in Puccini's *Turandot*, later reprising the role at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

I knew Janai had played the role of Clara at the Met in the sellout production of *Porgy and Bess* in 2019-20. More recently, I had read in the *Los Angeles Times* about her role in the HBO series *Lovecraft Country*, as she exquisitely laments the Tulsa massacre in Laura Karpman's requiem, "Tulsa, 1921: Catch the Fire."

Would such a successful former YAP have time to talk to me for the BRAVO interview?

I phoned Janai in her native Chicago where she lives with her Uruguayan-born composer-violinist husband, Javier, and their eight-year-old son, Sebastian. To my relief, I found a warm, receptive response reinforced by a delightfully happy voice, interspersed with laughter.

I plunged into *Lovecraft Country*. The voice part was written with Janai in mind, as composer Laura Karpman had heard her voice years ago as a YAP and only had to hear it again a few years later at the Colburn to cinch the deal. Janai is passionate about the role and its place in history as well as its "timeliness in today's world." She admires how Laura Karpman fashioned this "requiem or aria" to the words of the Sonia Sanchez poem, which asks, "I say where is your fire? Can't you smell it coming out of our past?" The synchronicity of this poem

and the Black Lives Matter movement is palpable in Janai's rendition of the music that Laura Karpman created based on Sanchez's poetry.

Karpman was inspired by hearing Leontyne Price's recording of Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. Coincidentally, and prior to learning this, I listened to an exquisite aria sung by Janai called "Depuis le jour" from Charpentier's *Louise*. When I listened to Leontyne Price's recording of this aria, I was struck by how similar their voices are. Much to my surprise, I was taken in more by Janai's rich, supple tones. It is no wonder Karpman thought of Janai after hearing Price.

Equally fascinating is how the music for this HBO production was recorded during the pandemic. Janai's talented musician husband, Javier, with help from Home Depot, set up a professional studio in the basement floor of their Chicago duplex. As was the case with Janai, each musician heard in "Catch the Fire" was recorded in their own local environment. "Miraculously," Janai says, "Laura Karpman managed to bring all the sounds together," intertwined with Janai's exquisite voice.

Janai made her debuts at the Met and the Chicago Lyric Opera as Liu in *Turandot*. Among her favorite roles are Micaela in *Carmen*, Pamina in *The Magic Flute* and Suzanna in the *The Marriage of Figaro*. "A wished-for role in the future is Mimi in *La Bohème*," she says. "I think I'm ready for it." For now, she has commitments until



Photo by Afnan Graber Malik

2024. We can only hope her 2021 winter role of Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at LAO will be rescheduled.

Speaking of which, how is Janai coping with the shut down? "It's hard work keeping my voice warmed up, and *Lovecraft* really helped. I am working on building up my repertoire on Facebook, and since *Lovecraft Country*, I've been getting more requests to hear a broader repertoire." With her positive attitude, she looks to some of the benefits of being homebound and appreciates the everyday things—laundry, caring for her son, cooking (although she prefers Javier's cuisine). She appreciates the leisurely pace rather than her usual hectic schedule, relishing the extra time with her son and Javier, along with Javier's family, who traveled from Uruguay to help out, along with her own supportive extended family in Chicago.

Looking back, Janai is so grateful for her years as a YAP and raves about her "amazing time spent at LAO." The opportunity to go on stage as she did, in early roles like Barbarina in *Figaro*, "is the very kind of training needed in such a program." She remembers with fondness "the collegial support to help understand how to approach conductors, and the background on understanding of the music business along with the wonderful training in voice, language."

One very special highlight for Janai? The Opera League cast dinners!

"The cast dinners for me?" Janai chuckles. "I looked forward to that all the time." 🌸

POMP AND SUBSTANCE

By
NICHOLAS
DAHL

GET TO KNOW ONE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE'S NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS.

Hovik Harutyunyan lives for spectacle: the spectacle of a ballet with its dancer silhouettes gliding through air, the spectacle of an opera with its enchanting arias, mesmerizing set designs and beautiful costumes.

His love for spectacles goes beyond the stage. This Opera League volunteer knows that "all the world's a stage." Growing up, his parents were the consummate party hosts. "Hospitality and celebration are keystones in my family," says Hovik. "Anytime someone would come over, it was a production. The planning, the décor, the food - each detail given great attention to make guests feel special and looked after. It was all exhilarating. I fell in love with the idea of hand-crafting celebration experiences."

These experiences eventually inspired Hovik's appetite and passion for spectacular parties. Today, he is the founder of Harutyunyan Events, a full-service event planning and design studio. Hovik loves planning because "it is both creative and analytical." Hovik explains a beautiful celebration is about more than just pretty flowers—it's about research, problem solving, timelines, vendor management and understanding client needs. "My clients are the inspiration for everything I do," says Hovik. "I learn everything I can about them to make sure their event truly reflects who they are. I want each of their guests to be WOWED from the moment they receive the event's invitation to the lifelong memories they will cherish after."

Hovik takes this same meticulous approach for all of his passions, including ballet, mixology, travel and especially opera. Hovik remembers going to see his first opera, LA Opera's production of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*. "I studied everything I could," Hovik explains. "I learned about the production's history and storyline. Watched older productions on YouTube. I joined the Opera League to learn more. League gatherings proved to be such a great educational resource. By the time performance night came, I was a bit of an expert."

After being an Opera League member for two years, Hovik joined the board in the summer of 2020. As a volunteer, he focuses on what he knows best: planning and helping to produce Opera League events. While events are placed on pause right now, he has committed to learning how to create League events virtually. "We sadly can't experience opera or Opera League events in person right now, so we will have to get creative," he says. "In addition to learning more about opera, I joined the Opera League to help promote opera to potentially new opera enthusiasts. Before I knew I loved opera, I had to go see an opera. And from the moment the curtains rose and the orchestra started playing, I knew I had found a new passion. By volunteering with the Opera League, I want to help others also discover the opera experience."

Not all spectacles happen on a stage. Except, of course, when they do. 🌟

To learn more about Hovik and his work, you can visit www.HarutyunyanEvents.com.



TO TRAVEL THIS ROAD

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS FOR LA OPERA (AALAO) REFLECT ON HOW FAR THEY HAVE COME, AND WHAT THEY THINK SHOULD COME NEXT.

By TOM LADY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1994.

That was the date of the first board meeting of African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a brand new chapter of the Opera League of Los Angeles.

AALAO's mission? "Bring more Black folks to see opera," sums up Eva Grant, AALAO's founder. "There weren't many attending opera back then."

Eva became an opera fan early on in her hometown of Washington, D.C. She had been married to her husband less than a month when he moved out here to attend the University of Southern California en route to becoming an organic chemist. Eva and their daughter followed soon after.

While it was wonderful to have the Grant family together, Eva went solo to the opera. Suffice it to say that when a certain volunteer organization of passionate opera lovers came together in 1981, she was among the first in line to join.



Photo by Alma Guzman

REACH OUT

Also at the front of the line was Delores Kerr. Like Eva, Delores had been sating her opera appetite with trips to the Shrine. More than that, she'd also volunteered with Reach Out, the original volunteer organization of the Music Center of Los Angeles, organized and led by the woman who led the charge to build the Music Center itself: Dorothy Buffum Chandler. Or Buffy, as those in the know called her.

Delores, who became co-president of Reach Out, recalls: "When the Music Center was built, Buffy said, 'I can build this building. But I can't be sure all the people of Los Angeles County know it belongs to them. The Music Center belongs to ALL of the people.'"

And so Reach Out did just that, and in so doing innovated a full slate of programming that included seminars, emerging young artist recitals, backstage tours, artist services... Any of this sound familiar, Opera Leaguers?

IT'S TIME

Eva Grant was on the Opera League Board of Directors when she, as well as Gwendolyn "Gwen" Wyatt, a dramatic soprano with a doctorate in music,

conceived of a new chapter of the League called African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO).

In that pre-social media age, Eva got the word out the only way you could for a nonprofit grassroots venture: word of mouth.

And let us not forget the precious intermissions at LA Opera productions in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

TO XERXES AND BEYOND

Joyce Nembhard was attending a Saturday matinee of Handel's *Xerxes* at LA Opera in the fall of 1994. During intermission, Eva approached her and introduced herself and told Joyce about a new organization she was forming called AALAO. Would she care to join? Joyce of course said yes. As an aside, she told Eva the story of her growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, and how her mother would always turn the radio on at 11am to the Met's Saturday broadcasts. One Saturday when she was 10, and her mother flicked on the radio, "Ombra mai fu," the opening aria of *Xerxes*, was playing. Joyce thought it was the most beautiful music she ever heard. And now here she was, decades

later, experiencing *Xerxes* live, being invited to join a group of opera die-hards with the mission of growing and diversifying opera's audiences.

SUMMERTIME

The very first AALAO recital took place at a private residence in the L.A. neighborhood of Baldwin Hills on May 5, 1995, concurrent with an LA Opera production of *Porgy and Bess*. Performing at the recital was none other than Bess herself: soprano Marquita Lister. Many more recitals followed. AALAOers also took field trips hither and on. "We took a trip to San Francisco to see Marquita Lister perform in *Aida* for SF Opera," says Joyce. "It was delightful to see these beautifully trained, lovely voices. And how more opportunities opened up for Black singers for both stage and recital."

Eventually the recitals were held mostly at the residence of Delores and her husband Ben, an aircraft designer whose career took him to McDonnell-Douglas and Boeing. They would also host dinners for the Premier-level members and donors. And in the age before *Shop at the Opera*, the annual sweepstakes took place at their place. Opera League co-founder Alice Coulombe and her late husband Joe would also host one recital a year.

AALAO 2.0

So what would the veterans like to see from AALAO in the future?

"We need to go back to our grassroots," Delores says. "Like recitals at churches, more advertising in *The Sentinel*. How about more free tickets like we used to do?...And yes, more members. We need some young blood. Some of us have been traveling this road a long time."

In the meantime, the pandemic has not crimped their style. Indeed, AALAO members were the very first to push the Opera League into the Brave New World of virtual programming with a virtual recital on Father's Day 2020. On February 21 they'll produce a virtual recital featuring bass-baritone Cedric Berry. And when local safety guidelines allow it, they intend to get right back to their in-person recitals, dinners and receptions. 🌟

To read this article in its entirety, please visit operaleague.org.

CEDRIC'S GAMBIT

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH BASS-BARITONE CEDRIC BERRY

By TOM LADY

Cedric Berry will be our featured vocalist at the African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO) Black History Month recital on Sunday, February 21.

BRAVO: WHAT IS ONE HOBBY OR ROUTINE THAT YOU INITIALLY STARTED AS A TEMPORARY HOBBY TO TIDE YOU OVER DURING THE PANDEMIC, BUT THAT NOW YOU FEEL YOU'LL CONTINUE DOING EVEN POST PANDEMIC?

Cedric Berry: Because I have a multifaceted career (vocal performance, administration and real estate/design), I have always had a very tight schedule with little time for additional hobbies. Although the pandemic has increased the time required to navigate my responsibilities, I have created time to get back into wood working and design. This was largely inspired by my desire to have custom outdoor spaces in order to safely entertain. The outcome rekindled a spark that will definitely persist beyond the current climate.

BRAVO: 2020 WAS A WATERSHED YEAR FOR EXPOSING THE CRITICAL NEED FOR MORE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AND EQUAL RIGHTS. HOW DO YOU HOPE THAT CASCADES DOWN TO THE ARTS WORLD AND OPERA SPECIFICALLY?

CB: Media of all types has been and will always be at the forefront of influence on our society. What happened last summer is an opportunity for general directors and all programmers to seize the moment by instituting inclusive productions that represent the diversity of our community. I am confident that it will forever change the landscape of our industry for two reasons: inclusive programming will undoubtedly increase their bottom line and open their eyes to a treasure trove of talent that will be impossible to ignore going forward. Traditional casting is stodgy and antiquated. Embracing diversity is our best chance at revitalizing the art form.

BRAVO: NAME A SHOW OR MOVIE YOU'VE STREAMED DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE ADAPTED INTO AN OPERA.

WHICH PART WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY?

CB: The ones that have resonated with me include *Nurse Ratched* and *The Queen's Gambit*. They both are period pieces with great wardrobe and production design. *Nurse Ratched* lends itself best to opera adaptation since it is very dramatic and very over the top. The two characters who would be interesting to play are the narcissistic chief medical director of the asylum or the murderous psycho inmate who is the other central male character. Both personalities lend themselves squarely within the parameters of a typical bass-baritone role.

BRAVO: SINCE YOU'RE A BASS-BARITONE, ARE THERE ANY TENOR ROLES OUT THERE THAT HAVE MADE YOU GO, "OH I WISH I WAS A TENOR SO I COULD PLAY THAT PART!"?

CB: Tenors typically play the lead love interests and/or heroes of the show. All of their roles should be rewritten for warmer, more masculine lower voices. And we baritones and bass-baritones should be paid more for improving the production.

BRAVO: WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING ROLE YOU'VE TACKLED TO DATE AND WHY? IS THERE A BASS-BARITONE ROLE YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED YET THAT YOU'RE DYING TO SINK YOUR TEETH INTO?

CB: While I've enjoyed portraying many characters in traditional operas by Mozart, Rossini, Gounod etc., the most challenging roles have been in more contemporary productions by Adams, Britten, Wuorinen and the like. The complex rhythms and harmonies enhanced my musical agility. In recent years, I have premiered characters in new operas which has allowed me to draw upon my experience and personalize performances. I now view each new role as an opportunity to create something unique rather than portraying what has been done before. 🌟

Be sure to join us for the Black History Month Virtual Recital featuring bass-baritone Cedric Berry on February 21. Visit operaleague.org for details.

LIKE A ROCK

DOES THIS VOLUNTEER LOOK FAMILIAR? FRED DEAR HAS BEEN THERE SINCE THE BEGINNING. By BILL KENNEDY

Many of us recall our first opera—that single event that took us on a lifelong commitment to the art form.

But Fred Dear has an encyclopedic memory, recalling not just his first opera but the principal singers as well.

“It was *Madama Butterfly* at the Shrine Auditorium,” he recalls. “I was a sophomore at Santa Monica College in 1961, and it was the San Francisco Opera on tour. Licia Albanese was *Butterfly*, and Sandor Konya sang Pinkerton. I was hooked.”

That was a good thing for opera in Southern California in general and the Opera League of Los Angeles in particular, because it was Dear’s first step towards a long history of volunteer service to the Opera League.

That commitment to volunteering was one Dear made before LA Opera was born. “I told myself that if Los Angeles ever had an opera company, I would volunteer to help.”

That started with Dear greeting visitors to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, a role he recalls with delight in part because Lorraine Saunders, Opera League co-founder, would make it a point to thank him. “She was

very gracious,” Dear says. “I never forgot that.”

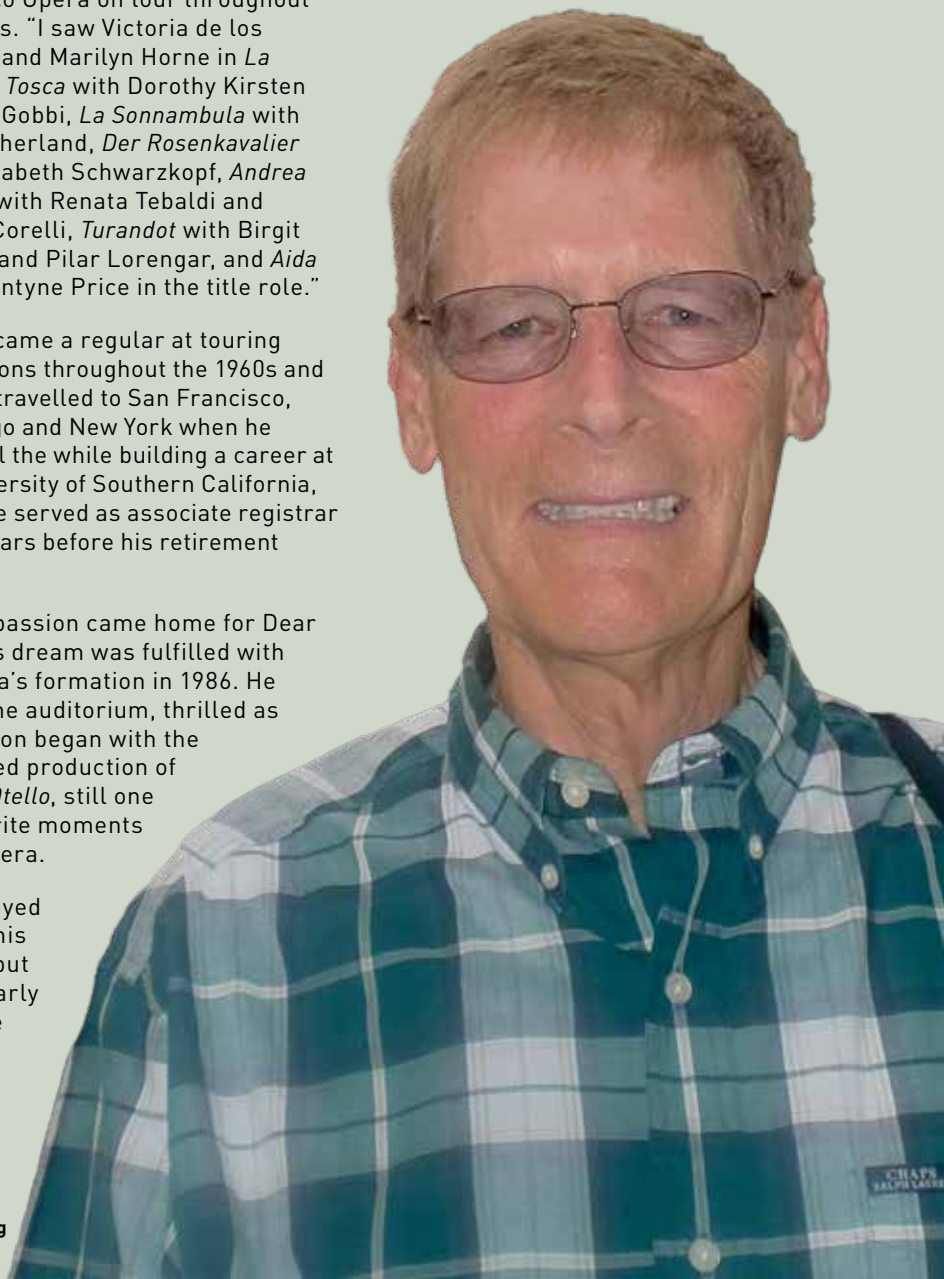
Even before that, Dear had a chance to hear the greats, buying a group of tickets for performances of the San Francisco Opera on tour throughout the 1960s. “I saw Victoria de los Angeles and Marilyn Horne in *La Bohème*, *Tosca* with Dorothy Kirsten and Tito Gobbi, *La Sonnambula* with Joan Sutherland, *Der Rosenkavalier* with Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, *Andrea Chenier* with Renata Tebaldi and Franco Corelli, *Turandot* with Birgit Nilsson and Pilar Lorengar, and *Aida* with Leontyne Price in the title role.”

Dear became a regular at touring productions throughout the 1960s and 70s and travelled to San Francisco, San Diego and New York when he could, all the while building a career at the University of Southern California, where he served as associate registrar for 40 years before his retirement in 2005.

All that passion came home for Dear when his dream was fulfilled with LA Opera’s formation in 1986. He was in the auditorium, thrilled as the season began with the acclaimed production of Verdi’s *Otello*, still one his favorite moments at LA Opera.

Dear stayed busy in his career, but by the early 1990s he was a fixture

at the Opera League kiosk at the Dorothy Chandler, distributing brochures and answering questions about the opera and encouraging visitors to join the League.



Humility and gratitude are important to Fred Dear, and he recalls being truly grateful when LA Opera's founding director Peter Hemmings would frequently stop by the kiosk and thank the volunteers for their contributions "not just to Los Angeles Opera, but to the art form."

Dear went on to serve the Opera League in introducing speakers for Overtures, the pre-performance talks, in leading the charge for the League's benefits, in overseeing dress rehearsal ticket distribution and chairing the Gatherings Committee. He has twice served on the Opera League board.

"I told myself that if Los Angeles ever had an opera company, I would volunteer to help."

Dear is emphatic about sharing the credit for his work, naming Rebecca Bowne, Dorothy Wait, Judy Lieb, Diane Gray and many other Opera League presidents who were especially helpful to him. He also singles out Molly Seifert for her leadership with the Western Region Auditions program for the Metropolitan Opera, another passion for Dear.

Modesty is humility's companion, and Fred Dear is nothing if not modest. "I guess you could say I'm not one for the limelight."

BRAVO is not about to let him stay completely in the background.

As Tom Lady, BRAVO's editor, reports: "When I announced to the League leadership that the Winter 2021 issue would have the League's 40th anniversary as its theme, Fred Dear was the first person they recommended we interview. And they didn't hesitate, saying he'd been quietly one of the most, if not the most, solid, dependable volunteer the League's ever had."

The Opera League thanks you, Fred Dear. Its members are awfully glad you went to see that performance of *Madama Butterfly* 59 years ago. 🌸

Answers for *Ice Cream and Cake* with a Quiz on Top on page 9:
1(B), 2(B), 3(D), 4(D), 5(A), 6(A), 7(D)

HISPANICS FOR LA OPERA: VIRTUALLY AWESOME

By MÓNICA GUTIÉRREZ ROPER



Photo by J Armijo

Hispanics for Los Angeles Opera (HLAO), a support group for LA Opera (LAO) founded in 1992, promotes the appreciation of and attendance at opera performances of LAO by the Hispanic community of Los Angeles through educational and cultural activities. Our HLAO programs include recitals, lectures, interviews, award banquets, Hispanic artist meet-and-greets, wine receptions, BBQs and posadas.

Since March 2020, our gatherings have switched to online recitals and virtual happy hours. We have hosted one or two recitals a month on Facebook, featuring renowned Hispanic singers and promising young stars. We also have had stimulating conversations with artists via Zoom during our virtual happy hours. One recent virtual happy hour featured Emmy Award winner and internationally acclaimed mezzo-soprano Suzanna Guzmán (ABOVE LEFT), who generously conversed with our HLAO audience about the many rewarding experiences throughout her career.

In 2021 we will continue reaching out to Hispanic audiences with virtual activities. Of course, we also eagerly await a return to live programming.



To learn more about us and our offerings, visit laopera.org/hlao. And get social with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Just go to those platforms and do a search for HLAOpera. We'll see you there!



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OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER AND SPRING 2021 *Please note that all of the below events will be conducted virtually via Zoom. Event details, including how to join, will be broadcast via operaleague.org with supporting eBlasts.*

FEBRUARY

RECITAL

***AALAO Presents: An Afternoon with
Bass-Baritone Cedric Berry***

Sunday, February 21 at 3:00pm

VOCALIST: Cedric Berry

ACCOMPANIST: Cathy Miller

(See our interview with Cedric in this issue!)

GATHERINGS

***Stories We Love: Cinderella and
Romeo and Juliet in Opera and Film***

Sunday, February 14 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Mary Johnston

SPONSOR: Beverly Hills Gathering Group

HOSTS: Ruth Bachofner

Debauchery in Opera

When: Sunday, February 28 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Ron Streicher

SPONSOR: San Gabriel Gathering Group

HOST: Michael Sholer

MARCH

GATHERINGS

Puccini among Friends

Sunday, March 7 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Larry Verdugo

SPONSOR: Hollywood, Hancock Park,
East San Fernando Valley Group

HOSTS: Anne Russell and Gayle Kirschbaum

Divas Part 2: Mezzos

Sunday, March 21 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Mary Johnston

SPONSOR: South Bay Gathering Group

HOST: Laurel Howat

APRIL

GATHERINGS

Play Ball!: Baseball in Opera

Sunday, April 11 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Steve Kohn

SPONSOR: Downtown L.A. Gathering Group

HOST: Kathy Crandall and Libby Wilson

Tosca and Its Real-Life Italian Locales

Sunday, April 18 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Bill Green

SPONSOR: Westside Gathering Group

HOSTS: Ruth Bachofner

I Secondari

Sunday, April 25 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Ron Streicher

SPONSOR: San Gabriel Gathering Group

HOST: Michael Sholer

MAY

GATHERINGS

Wagner's Influence on Classical Music

Sunday, May 2 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Steve Kohn

SPONSOR: West San Fernando Valley Gathering Group

HOST: Karen Kohn

Turandot: The Quest for a Perfect Ending

Sunday, May 23 at 1:30pm

SPEAKER: Ron Streicher

SPONSOR: South Bay Gathering and Downtown L.A.
Gathering Groups

HOSTS: Laurel Howat (South Bay), and
Kathy Crandall (Downtown L.A.)