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BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

COMMUNITY SPIRIT



By BILL GREEN

COMMUNITY EDUCATORS ARE LA OPERA TRAINED OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEERS WHO AVERAGE APPROXIMATELY 2,000 VOLUNTEER HOURS EACH SEASON.

WHAT'S INSIDE

All aboard Brita's Bus

An Interview with the
Composer of *Omar*

Bring on the Instigators!

To become a Community Educator, League volunteers must first enroll in a rigorous training program administered by LA Opera *Connects*, the LAO team that oversees all education and community engagement for the company.

Once trained, Community Educators set out to help strive toward our mission of increasing access to the art form of opera and bringing opera into the community by delivering talks and multimedia presentations: at schools, civic, philanthropic and community groups, libraries and senior centers. From tips for novice operagoers on how to enjoy their first opera to an in-depth analysis for the lifelong buff, these interactive presentations are dynamic, encourage discussion and dialogue and seek to inspire all generations to continue pursuing artistic experiences.



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operaleague.org

From the President

Photo by Stephanie Girard



Helping to Knit the Community Fabric

Big thanks to Opera League members and friends who joined us for our seminar over Labor Day weekend for the season-opening *Lucia di Lammermoor*, a co-production between LA Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. Having already seen this production as part of the Met's HD simulcast series, I am quite eager to experience it in person. Set in America's present-day Rust Belt, Simon Stone's mounting will resonate with contemporary audiences

in its depiction of society's current challenges.

Big BRAVO shoutout to the volunteers who helped make our *Lucia* seminar possible.

Indeed, speaking of volunteering, I am delighted that we are once again able to offer our League members so many in-person volunteer opportunities. We are always in need of reliable and friendly folks to help out, for example, at our Shop at the Opera on performance days. This humble fundraising powerhouse is managed and staffed entirely by hardworking League volunteers.

Volunteers are always in hot demand when it comes to checking in and greeting members and friends at seminars and other educational events, assisting with setting up and serving meals to LA Opera cast and crew during production tech week (the final week of rehearsals before curtain), standing in for performers at lighting rehearsals (the famous light walkers!) and staffing our membership table at select performances and events.

"LA Opera knows the value that Opera League volunteers provide the company," said Rupert Hemmings, LA Opera's Vice President of Artistic Planning. "Whether acting as stand-ins for our lighting designers, or simply helping out with cast dinners, the success we have for any production is due in part to the Opera League's constant support of the company."

Programs from LA Opera *Connects*, LAO's educational and community engagement team, offer the greatest number of opportunities for Opera League members. When I was a new League member, my first volunteer experience was chaperoning university students at an LAO Orchestra tech rehearsal. These students got an up-close glimpse at how the staging and musical elements come together, and I remember thinking what a great privilege it was, not only to watch the rehearsal process, but also to share my knowledge of opera with the next generation.

Speaking of education, this issue's cover story examines our Community Educators volunteer program, perhaps the League's most time-intensive but also rewarding volunteer opportunity. Community Educators deliver multimedia presentations at schools, libraries, community centers, senior and VA facilities and other such venues and serve as ambassadors for this wonderful art form and to the community.

Andréa Fuentes, director of LA Opera *Connects*, raves: "Opera League volunteers are invaluable... Without their support and their wonderful volunteers, we could never provide services for the over 150,000 people that [we] see each season. Our department, and the whole company, depend on their skills, knowledge and expertise to provide the experiences that bring our constituents back time and time again."

I cannot wait to see you all back at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion or, of course, at one of our many events out in the community.

Todd Calvin
PRESIDENT



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YAPPING WITH YAP GRADUATES: LIV REDPATH AND AMANDA WOODBURY, SOPRANOS

SHARING AND SHINING AS LUCIA By JUDITH HYMAN

In LA Opera's season-opening production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, operagoers will enjoy the unique privilege of seeing and hearing a pair of outstanding sopranos sharing the title role: Liv Redpath and Amanda Woodbury. As it happens, Liv and Amanda are alumnae of LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program, or YAP, as it's colloquially known. Amanda was a YAP from 2012-14 followed soon after by Liv, who enrolled 2016-19.

Since graduating, Amanda and Liv have taken on leading roles at such top-tier venues as The Metropolitan Opera. Indeed, while Liv was still YAPping, she and Amanda shared the stage in LAO's production of *Carmen* during the 2017-18 season, albeit in different roles: Amanda playing the role of Micaela while Liv played Frasquita.

I caught up with Amanda as she returned from a busy European schedule to her home in Louisville, Kentucky, where she "plays the role" of a mother to two small children, ages five and one. With support of her graphic designer husband and parents, Amanda juggles a busy operatic schedule with perhaps a busier home life. "When I take a job, it has to be really worthwhile to leave my family behind," Amanda says. Two such recent jobs included a pair of Charles Gounod operas: *Faust* (Marguerite) at The Met and *Roméo et Juliette* (Juliette) at Hawaii Opera Theater.

As for Liv, even though she has been out of the YAP program barely three years, she already has sung leading roles in Germany at the Bayerische Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper Berlin, and is set to make



Liv Redpath



Amanda Woodbury

wardrobe, Liv and I were able to catch up as she arrived in Edinburgh for that city's opera festival.

While this is the first time the two sopranos are sharing Lucia for the same production, it is not their first time singing Lucia. Liv sang Lucia in 2021 at Deutsche Oper in Berlin. And Amanda actually sang Lucia for LAO. During her final year as a Young Artist, in 2014, Amanda understudied for Lucia when the role was sung by soprano Albina Shagimuratova.

As they now prepare to share the role, Amanda and Liv are collaborating quite closely, as their respective interpretations of Lucia are quite complimentary. "[T]here are plenty of fundamentals we share in our approach to singing," Liv says. "That said, every voice is unique because of physicality and personality—the way all that information gets translated through the kaleidoscope of the mind and body. Kind of like how [American composers] Aaron Copland and Elliott Carter both studied with [French music teacher and conductor] Nadia Boulanger."

Amanda perceives Lucia's madness as a way to show us how "locked away and

brother. Feeling volatile and suppressed, Lucia goes to the supreme limits."

Commenting on how relatable Lucia is to other, similar characters, Amanda says, "The part I love most in Lucia's world of escaped reality is when she believes she is really getting married to the person she truly loved. She is saying, 'I am finally yours. You are finally with me.' It is so sad that she is so happy because it is a way of showing how wonderful it could have been if she had only married the person she really loved. I just love the music here, it is not as difficult to sing as other parts, but the way the vocal lines so exquisitely connect to her emotions so deeply touch me. Bel Canto is always a balance of attending to your emotions as well as your voice. Listening to the line of the music that relates so exquisitely to her emotions is so beautiful to me."

Along those same lines, Liv views the character of Lucia as retexturing an old but very relevant story, especially in light of LAO's production taking place in the contemporary American Rust Belt. "We live with drug addiction," she says. "And the disappearing middle class makes Lucia's situation more immediate and visceral to the audience."

As they get ready to share the dynamic title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the two sopranos agree that she is not a role to take for granted. "I am so grateful to be a Lucia because she is a definite fighter," Liv says. "From the moment we meet her, there is a lightness of character that bends towards the macabre in her imagination and, as it happens, her premonitions... Lucia is a woman born too large of spirit for her circumstance, and she feels it pressing in on her from the outset.

"As she says in the sextet, 'ahi la folgore piombo', she is driven to her fate by circumstance, all the while warning those closest to her: 'The lightning has struck.'" 🌩️

"...every voice is unique because of physicality and personality—the way all that information gets translated through the kaleidoscope of the mind and body." – LIV REDPATH

role debuts at Glyndebourne and Komische Oper Berlin later this season. Originally from Minneapolis, where she manages to visit every couple of months to change her

trapped she has experienced her life, encountering all too many blocks. She finally breaks as her way to take control, breaking in a violent way as she has learned from her



THE INSPIRATION

Not long after LAO was born in 1986, then-General Manager Peter Hemmings decided that the young opera company should make it a point to help the younger audiences discover and learn about the art form. This led him to ponder the idea of opera matinees catering specifically to students. After taking this idea to Llewellyn Crain, LAO's director of Community Programs at the time, the first student matinee was scheduled.

When it came to volunteer people power to help with logistics for student matinees, both Hemmings and Crain immediately thought of the Opera League, and many League members responded to their call for assistance.

During the first student matinee at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Hemmings and Crain watched, crestfallen, as approximately 3,000 kids, most of whom had received no information about what they were going to see, jam-packed the auditorium for a performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. After growing restless and distracted, some of them decided the DCP would be a fantastic venue for an impromptu paper airplane competition.

LA Opera leadership decided that any volunteers who wished to help with student matinees, or any future education programs, would need to learn more about how to communicate their knowledge about opera to young people, and how to describe the art form and the work that goes into mounting a production. This would involve training sessions with staff from several LAO departments.

OPERA FOR KIDS

Among the volunteers who responded to that first invitation was recently arrived Los Angeles transplant Carmen Recker.

Carmen arrived in the City of Angels with a decent amount of theater experience from Arizona as well as experience performing with touring companies that specialized in children's theater. She devised a more formal training program for the Opera League volunteers focused on developing interactive presentations. In time, her training, coupled with advance visits to schools by the aspiring opera speakers, eliminated the paper airplane contests. Indeed, it wasn't long before students attending a matinee of *Porgy and Bess* gave a standing ovation.

"I love to speak to young people," says Steve Kohn, Community Educator for 22 years. "When I give a talk on *Carmen*, I always introduce the kids to the young soldier whom Carmen seduces. I pronounce his name DON-JOE-SAY. Remember that this is a French opera, and so his name is not pronounced as DON-HO-SAY, as it would be in Spanish. I always get snickers from the audience, because there is always a large contingent of Hispanic kids who are sure I don't know how to pronounce his name. Of course, I explain it to them."

Mary Johnston has delivered talks at myriad venues over her ten-plus years as a Community Educator. One of her favorite venues by far is DaVinci Camp, an annual summer camp in Pasadena that seeks to promote academic excellence among Latino students in grades six to 12. "My talks are always followed by 30 to 45 minutes of questions from the kids," Mary says. "In the evening of the day they hear my talk, they watch a DVD of the opera I spoke about... When I spoke about *Tosca*, one of the themes was the diva. The staff said the kids called each other diva all afternoon after my talk. I was thrilled! They listened!" Indeed, Mary has received handwritten thank-you letters from DaVinci Camp students over the years.

DIVERSIFYING THE AUDIENCE AND THE TOPICS

When volunteers began expressing a desire to give opera presentations to adults as well as young students, Carmen's training programs expanded accordingly. As the program sessions went along, volunteers were able

to tailor their presentations to their audience's interests and develop their own speaking styles complemented by the appropriate presentation tools they were comfortable using.

From the start, LA Opera made the decision that Opera League volunteers, once trained, could prepare and present their talks using the training and guidelines they had received from LA Opera, and that the subject matter of their talks could either be related to the operas of the current season, or any other opera-related topic. Examples of the latter have included "Lawyers in Opera", "Opera on the Silver Screen" and "Women You Don't Want to Mess with in Opera".

Larry Verdugo, Community Educator since 2011, recalls one quite memorable audience interaction. "[It] happened during my talk on *Madam Butterfly* in a retirement home," he says. "Because my talk referenced the Second World War, several of the attendees who were vets began to recall their experiences. It became a very personal exchange. I learned to keep quiet, acknowledge their feelings and move on."

"Back in 2012, I presented a talk about Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* to a class of high school students," recalls veteran Community Educator Ray Busmann. "To give the students a better idea of the title character's personality, I shared a quote from the libretto, where Don Giovanni justifies his behavior. He says in the opera, 'I make love to whomever I please! I am sorry for the women who fall in love with me. But if I were faithful to one woman, I would be cruel to all the other women.' While most of the female students rolled their eyes, one good-looking guy turned to me and, without a hint of irony, said, 'Exactly! Story of my life!'"

EVOLVING FOR THE EVER-PRESENT FUTURE

"For the past two years, I've repeated a lot of talks via Zoom," says Len Lipman, Community Educator for over ten years. "And now I have a chance to briefly 'visit' while I'm doing so with friends from faraway places, such as Tel Aviv, San Miguel de Allende, Chicago, North Carolina and Hawaii. They could never have come to the Santa Monica Library in the past, so the chance to share my presentations with them makes up for the fact that the technical aspects of the

“With the Community Educator program, Opera League volunteers create opportunities for learning into some of the farthest reaches of L.A. County, opening doors to everyone from opera newcomers to long-time opera lovers alike.” – ANDRÉA FUENTES, DIRECTOR, LA OPERA CONNECTS

presentation via computer are not of the same quality as the higher quality sound system that I always strove for in person.”

As the technology that enables multimedia presentations has evolved and advanced, sometimes in increments, other times in leaps and bounds, so have the skills of the Opera League Community Educators adapted to meet the demands of all the new tech.

Not that the Community Educators haven't confronted a technology-related hiccup or three along the way. As a Community Educator since 2011, I would know.



One senior residential facility had told me they had a state-of-the-art video projection system, and all I had to do was connect my laptop. When I arrived, it turned out they did indeed have a great permanently installed set of equipment housed in an ornate cabinet, connected to a ceiling-mounted projector. The only problem was that the only way I could connect my laptop to their projector was from the back of the cabinet... I raced to my car, got the projector I always take to my talks just in case, grabbed a table, balanced my projector precariously on top of a pile of books and projected my talk over the heads of the attendees.

And then along came the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. LA Opera *Connects* Director Andréa Fuentes recalls that challenging time vividly, as she and her team wrestled with how to continue providing avenues for people to make opera a vital part of their lives. One of the answers was Zoom, a platform for virtual presentations with which Andréa and her team have been able to expand their audience, serving communities they had not reached before.

Given that the Community Educators are Opera League members and volunteers, the League, too, has leaned into all things virtual. In addition to speaking for LA Opera *Connects*, the Community Educators have for many years delivered talks at Opera League gatherings. Before the pandemic, League gatherings were cozy affairs held in members' homes. During

the pandemic, League leadership decided to move gatherings into the virtual space.

Ron Streicher, a Community Educator since 2010, calls Zoom a blessing and a curse. “The blessing is that I no longer need to spend hours on the highway traveling to and from distant venues and schlepping more than a hundred pounds of A/V equipment,” he says. “The curse is limited ability for personal interaction with my audience. One other benefit, however, is Zoom sessions being available to anyone who wishes to join online.”

While the League does plan to resume in-person gatherings, that does not mean giving up the virtual version. Either way, at the end of the day, it's all about connecting with the audience.

Adam LeBow, Associate Director of Community Programming for LA Opera *Connects*, says, “We are so grateful to our Community Educators, who selflessly dedicate their time to connecting with so many communities on behalf of LA Opera. Thank you for being passionate and inspiring ambassadors of this art form. We are excited for what promises to be a thrilling 2022-23 season!”

Sums up Andréa Fuentes: “With the Community Educator program, Opera League volunteers create opportunities for learning in some of the farthest reaches of L.A. County, opening doors for everyone from opera newcomers to longtime opera lovers alike.” 🌸



GHOSTS OF A CRY

AN INTERVIEW WITH
COMPOSER MICHAEL ABELS
By TOM LADY

In October, LA Opera will mount a mainstage production of *Omar* (performances run October 22 to November 13).

Omar tells the incredible true story of Omar Ibn Said, a West African Muslim scholar who, in 1807 when he was in his late thirties, was kidnapped and brought over to the United States where he was purchased as a slave in Charleston, South Carolina. He would remain a slave for the rest of his life.

In 1831, and at great risk to himself, Omar Ibn Said wrote his autobiography. It is the only known surviving American slave narrative written in Arabic. The opera *Omar* is adapted from this text.

Rhiannon Giddens, a North Carolina roots musician, Grammy winner and MacArthur Genius, was commissioned by the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston to write an opera based on Omar Ibn Said's life. After adapting the autobiography into a libretto, she composed a good bit of the score on her banjo, incorporating her deep knowledge of folk and vernacular musical traditions. But she wasn't done.

She brought in composer Michael Abels to complete the score with the truly grand and operatic feel that it was missing.

Omar had its world premiere at the Spoleto Festival USA over Memorial Day weekend this year.

In addition to opera, Michael Abels has composed the soundtracks to a wide array of films, most notably the psychological thrillers of writer-director Jordan Peele, including *Get Out*, *Us* and this year's summer blockbuster, *Nope*. He also composed the soundtracks for the HBO original *Bad Education*, the Netflix young adult fantasy *Nightbooks* and the documentary *Allen v. Farrow*.

Recently Mr. Abels took time out of his action-packed schedule to speak with BRAVO about *Omar*, and his lifelong journey with his love of music.

BRAVO: I READ IN ONE OF YOUR INTERVIEWS HOW YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMPOSING FOR FILM VERSUS COMPOSING FOR OPERA. YOU SAID: "IN FILM, WHEN AN EMOTION OCCURS TO A CHARACTER, THERE IS OFTEN A MOMENT WHERE THE AUDIENCE IS GIVEN A CHANCE TO INTERPRET THAT EMOTION AND REACT BEFORE THE MUSIC ENTERS AND CONFIRMS THAT REACTION. BUT IN OPERA, THE MUSIC OFTEN INTRODUCES THE EMOTION, AND THE CHARACTER SINGS INTO THE EMOTIONAL CONTEXT PROVIDED BY THAT MUSIC. THAT'S ONE OF MANY WAYS MUSIC TAKES THE LEAD IN OPERA IN WAYS IT USUALLY DOESN'T IN FILM." COULD YOU CITE AN EXAMPLE OF EACH THAT ILLUSTRATES THAT FOR THE LAY LISTENER?

MICHAEL ABELS: Okay, so for film, let's consider *Nope*. The character Emerald, played by Keke Palmer, succeeds in the end, and we see a long shot of her face. She's exhausted, and relieved, and weeping with relief, and she's looking at something. We don't know what she's looking at, but the music does not give away what she's seeing. That's a very deliberate choice on Jordan's [director Jordan Peele's] part, because he doesn't want to preview for the audience what Emerald is looking at before the audience gets to see it. I did compose music for that part, but Jordan opted not to use it. Now in opera, it's the other way around. The music is the storytelling device. The music sets the tone, so when the singer begins to sing, it matches the emotional backdrop. In *Omar*, for example, the music sets the intention to be more global than you might at first think. Let's take the overture, where we see Omar

writing, and the Arabic script in which he writes is projected onto a scrim. Omar is transcending the experience we are about to show you. In seeing him write at the very beginning, we see something he won't really do until act two, if that makes sense.

BRAVO: WHAT OR WHO INSPIRED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER IN MUSIC?

MA: In a way, it was Rodgers and Hammerstein. I was three when I saw *The Sound of Music*, and after that, I sang songs from it every day for the next two years. I'm sure my parents wanted to strangle me. I was a little too young to know it was what I wanted to do with my life, but it did lead to piano lessons. I was fascinated that people could just make up music like that.

BRAVO: THE TITLE CHARACTER OF *OMAR*, OMAR IBN SAID, WAS ORIGINALLY FROM SENEGAL. AND BECAUSE OF THAT, YOU MIXED SOME SENEGALESE MUSICAL INFLUENCES INTO THE SCORE. WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND WITH SENEGALESE MUSIC, OR WEST AFRICAN MUSIC GENERALLY? DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE ARTISTS OF THAT GENRE?

MA: After I graduated from USC, I audited a course at Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts in Valencia]. The course was on West African music, but it didn't go into Senegalese music. Instead, it focused on Ghanaian drums. Auditing that class helped me figure out the way the music works. I didn't approach the music like an ethnomusicologist would, but more as a casual listener who's just interested. That makes my take on it authentically my own. Because otherwise, the more you know, the more it stands in the way of what you're trying to do. As for how you'll hear it in *Omar*, there are some rhythms and harmonic choices all throughout the opera that are Africa inspired. But particularly, you'll hear the harp that plays gestures that are meant to sound Senegalese. And yet it's the harp, which is a traditional Western instrument, so it's a way to take something outside of opera tradition and put it into a Western context. And for anyone interested in West African music beyond *Omar*, I would definitely recommend Youssou N'Dour. He's a Senegalese singer, songwriter and composer, whom I admire greatly.



BRAVO: SO TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST LIVE OPERA EXPERIENCE, AND HOW YOU GOT INTO OPERA.

MA: *Carmen* was my first live opera. And get this: I was in it! It was at the Gammage Theater at Arizona State University. I was six years old, and I was in the children's chorus at the beginning of the opera. In my child's memory, it was absolutely wondrous. I thought the music was beautiful, the production was incredible. In my child's memory, the Gammage was absolutely huge, and the opera seemed like it was six hours long! [laughs] The Gammage is still there too, still going strong.

Other than that, I wasn't really an opera fan until I was an adult. It just felt like opera had no place for me. It wasn't until after college, well into adulthood, when I got into opera. I started out composing short operas. I composed a short opera for LA Opera's In Schools program. I thought that to really understand the genre, you have to write in that genre, or you'll never be taken seriously, and you'll never respect the genre. So, after I did some short pieces, all this stuff started happening for me. And I learned that opera was more performance art, less musical theater.

BRAVO: FAVORITE OPERA?

MA: *The Ghosts of Versailles* by John Corigliano. I saw LA Opera's production a few years ago when they produced the Figaro trilogy. And I just saw Corigliano's *Lord of the Cries* in Santa Fe, it's a masterpiece. But *Ghosts* is also a masterpiece.

BRAVO: BEFORE WE WIND IT UP, I'D LOVE FOR YOU TO TELL OUR READERS ABOUT YOUR NONPROFIT, THE COMPOSERS DIVERSITY COLLECTIVE.

MA: Yes! Thank you. The Composers Diversity Collective is a nonprofit I helped found about four years ago. Our mission is to increase the visibility of composers of color, in the media industry particularly but not exclusively. We want it to be a resource for the decision makers in media who want to be more inclusive in their hiring but don't know where to go. We host networking mixers once a month where our members get to network with folks from Netflix, Disney, Amazon and many other media companies. These mixers are great for introducing young composers of color to industry leaders, and to connect mid-career composers as well.

We are a nonprofit, and people can absolutely support us. Check us out at composersdiversitycollective.org. 🌟

BRITA'S BUS

NEXT STOP: AUSTRIA

By GARY W. MURPHY

Unstoppable Opera Leaguer, veteran volunteer and board member Brita Kohlfürst-Millard refurbished her "bus" this summer and set her sights on the Salzburg Festival 2022, with stops at the Bregenz Festival on Lake Constance as well as tours to the picture-perfect Austrian towns of Hallstatt and Innsbruck, and St. Gallen in Switzerland for a splendid 15-day European holiday.

As the League's guru for special events, Brita has orchestrated epic opera-centered trips both near and far, from Europe and Santa Fe to day trips to San Diego and Santa Barbara. What those disparate destinations have in common are Brita's meticulous attention to detail, a level of focus and dedication that makes for a memorable trip for all lucky enough to find a seat. From securing hotel rooms at the Sheraton Grand Salzburg to good recital, concert and opera tickets, Brita keeps a tight schedule for eager Leaguers from early morning to after-performance dinners.

At Salzburg Festival 2022, Opera League members were treated to a new production by Christoph Loy of Puccini's *Il Trittico* featuring former LA Opera Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Joshua Guerrero, who joined our group for dinner after the performance. Also on tap were Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Rolando Villazon's new production of *The Barber of Seville* featuring Cecilia Bartoli, plus two opening nights—director Barrie Kosky's compelling production of *Katya Kabanova* and Verdi's magnificent *Aida*.

If that were not enough, Brita brought the group to a lovely Mozart matinee with the Mozarteum Orchestra led by Adam Fisher, and a performance featuring Andris Nelsons conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. This was followed by a special Franciscan church organ performance by Professor Elke-Maria Saller, one of the leading concert organists who also played at Brita's Salzburg wedding over 30 years ago. Afterwards, Father Mag. Thomas Hrstnik took everyone for a brief tour of the historic 13th century gothic church.

How can one end such a magical adventure? Perhaps a horse-drawn carriage ride through the streets of Salzburg. Brita made it happen. We were enchanted.

For general information about our trips, hit us up at info@operaleague.org. 🌟



(LEFT TO RIGHT) Brita Millard, singer Joshua Guerrero and Barbara Schelbert

Next up for Brita's storied bus?

NOVEMBER 2022: Day trip to the Academy Library followed by the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, capped off with lunch at Fanny's, the restaurant attached to the museum.

APRIL 2023: Day trip to San Diego by train or bus for a Sunday matinee performance of *Tosca* at San Diego Opera starring soprano Michelle Bradley in the title role.

JULY-AUGUST 2023: Santa Fe Opera, and how about the lineup: *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tosca*, *Orfeo*, *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Rusalka*. Many of these productions will feature former LA Opera Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artists. Hello, Joshua Guerrero, whom we just saw in Salzburg, all set to sing the role of Cavaradossi in Santa Fe's *Tosca* next summer, while his fellow former Young Artist Angel Blue sings the title role.

If you are interested in any of these Opera League trips, please contact Brita Kohlfürst-Millard at bmillard_99@yahoo.com.

BRING ON THE INSTIGATORS!

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA LOOKS TO ITS FUTURE WITH A BOLD NEW INITIATIVE

By GARY W. MURPHY

As San Francisco Opera celebrates its 100th anniversary this season, the company is decidedly not looking backwards. With the June 2022 launch of its bold, innovative new program, Instigators, SFO is very much casting an eye to the next 100 years.

A multidisciplinary initiative designed to pioneer future directions for both SFO and the art form of opera, Instigators consists of six remarkable thinkers and creators who will participate in performances, conversations and immersive activities throughout SFO's campus.

SFO General Director Matthew Shilvock said at the June unveiling: "As we begin San Francisco Opera's second century, I'm thrilled to welcome the Instigators into our artistic family. Creativity is in this company's DNA, and this bold initiative will allow us to surge forward with a group of innovators leading our R&D [research and development] lab. Just as they push the boundaries of their own diverse disciplines, they will bring their rigor, intelligence and curiosity to opera. They will help us to envision future directions for our opera community and art form—ones we can't even imagine at this moment."

The inaugural cohort is comprised of writer/musician Jad Abumrad; writer/director Samantha Gorman; artistic director Abhishek Majumdar; design technologist Paula Te; chef/author Bryant Terry; and architect/software engineer Peter Zuspan.



San Francisco Opera Instigators and team (FRONT row) Jad Abumrad, Elena Park, Samantha Gorman, Paula Te, Jocelyn Clark; (BACK row) Matthew Shilvock, Peter Zuspan, Lee Helms, Bryant Terry (Abhishek Majumdar not pictured).

Over the course of a one- or two-year relationship with the company, the Instigators will immerse themselves in the art form, exchanging knowledge, experience and creative ideas with the SFO community, tapping into the company's resources and developing new approaches around the future of opera.

In the program's inaugural week, the Instigators met with artists, observed musical, technical and production preparation and explored ideas with key leadership, artistic and production personnel. The Instigators also travelled south to the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto where they met with futurists and took part in interactive work in their Emerging Media Lab.

Instigators will be led by SFO's Director of Innovation Programs, Lee Helms, Instigators Curator Elena Park and Instigators Creative Advisor Jocelyn Clarke. "We were looking for individuals doing singular and exciting work in fields outside of opera, who would bring fresh perspectives to the company and challenge and provoke us to dream about new pathways for the future," said Park.

To quote another San Franciscan from an earlier age, "I have seen the future, and it works!"

So, strap yourselves into your opera seats and prepare to see some of this magic in the not-too-distant future. ✨

THE MUSIC IN HER HEART

LINA GONZÁLEZ-GRANADOS IS LA OPERA'S NEW RESIDENT CONDUCTOR

By DIANE EISENMAN

When she was a child, Lina felt she had received the biggest gift of her life: a Casio keyboard.

Her parents found her playing symphonies by ear when she was six or seven. By 12, Lina was taking piano seriously, and by 15, she had decided to become a musician in a family of doctors and lawyers. Once her parents realized music was going to be their daughter's passion, they learned more about music just so they could remain close to her. They were also very thankful Lina had chosen a passion that kept her indoors, the safest place to be in Cali, Colombia, where the political situation was volatile.

To this day, Lina's parents are her biggest fans, traveling worldwide to hear her concerts. Her dad, now retired, is staying in Los Angeles for two months while Lina rehearses and conducts Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* for LA Opera (performances run September 17 to October 9). Her mother will join them for the performances.

During Lina's years studying piano in Cali, her mother encouraged her to honor her Latin American musical roots as part of her identity. And so Lina's piano teacher would prepare piano arrangements of traditional Colombian music. Lina says this music is now ingrained in her purpose and musical identity.

Pursuing her undergraduate degree at a college in Bogotá, she majored in piano and minored in conducting. By this point, Lina had decided to leave her native Colombia for the U.S. because she felt there were more conducting opportunities here. First, she attended the New England Conservatory in Boston, where she studied wind and chorus conducting. It was there where Lina met the aspiring trumpet player whom she would eventually marry. While earning her doctorate in orchestra conducting at Boston University, Lina founded the Unitas Ensemble for showcasing

Latin American music and began her international freelance conducting career. Today, Lina and her husband live in Philadelphia, where he plays with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

When I ask how she went from pianist to conductor, Lina explains that conducting best suited her personality. Growing up, she was by herself much of the time. Music became a kind of friendship, yet she missed the companionship of other children. Consequently, as a young adult, Lina became an extrovert, loved to go to parties and felt most aligned to her true self when making friends with others.

At first, conducting was about communicating with a myriad of people, not always an easy task. Then it became about the repertoire. "Now I prepare and study, making connections with the music, and through the music I make connections with the musicians," she says. These days Lina spends most of her time working alone, studying music history and performances as well as learning the score. It can take literally years of study for a three-hour rehearsal.

"I still love connecting with people," she says. "But I become a different person on the podium. There I concentrate on the moment. I forget the body and live the higher essence and purpose. In this spirit of conducting, I connect with others because I live in the music."

As a music student, conducting opera was a faraway dream for Lina. For one thing, there are far fewer conducting opportunities with opera productions than symphony performances. And progress toward more acceptance of

a woman conductor has been slow, even slower for women of color. And in 2010, upon Lina's graduation in Colombia, there was even less opportunity to conduct as a woman. Moving to the U.S. to study was a huge jump for her, the opportunity of a lifetime. While studying for her Doctor of Musical Arts in Boston, orchestras called her frequently to do guest conducting, which she did. But she was seeking another kind of opportunity. "I wanted to conduct opera," she says.

And then, last year, Lina landed two training opportunities: apprentice conductor to Riccardo Muti with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and conducting fellow with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nezet-Seguin. Lina had had great preparation and training. Now she needed the opportunity to demonstrate what she had learned.

By the time LA Opera called her about becoming their next Resident Conductor, Lina had conducted operas and many symphony orchestras as a freelance conductor in both the U.S. and Europe. After all that traveling, Lina says she is not only excited about conducting operas with a top-tier opera company, she is also thrilled not to be traveling quite so much.

As Resident Conductor, Lina will not only conduct LA Opera productions, she will also be a community ambassador for opera, creating opportunities for people to fall in love with music. "It is a huge gift I have been given to join LA Opera, a true vote of confidence," she says. "I am eager to meet you who are music lovers, who so generously give of your time and resources to support this beautiful world of opera." 🌸

Visit operaleague.org to read the full article.



IN THE PIT

BILL WOOD, SOLO CONTRABASSOON AND THIRD BASSOON

AN OCTAVE LOWER, SOARING HIGHER By DIANE EISENMAN

It has been described as a giant bassoon, with a tube about twice as long as a regular bassoon.

The long tube folds over on itself to make it more manageable.

The reeds are larger, and the tone holes are bigger. The fingering might be the same as a bassoon in the lower register, but it is very different in the high register.

The sound registers an octave lower than the bassoon. And indeed, it carries the lowest range of notes in the orchestra along with the tuba and the bass. In fact, its lowest sound equals that of the lowest Bb on the piano.



We are talking, of course, about the contrabassoon. And Bill Wood, who plays solo contrabassoon as well as third bassoon for the LA Opera Orchestra, is a contrabassoon master.

As is true for all double-reed instruments, Bill says that mastering the contrabassoon requires the player to make their own reeds. Bill makes a few reeds each week in various levels of readiness, saving the really good ones for special performances. He points out that only ten percent of the reeds actually make it to performance. And while reeds can last up to two weeks, Bill still has a constant need to make a new supply.

Joining the LAOO as a substitute in 1994, Bill toiled in the pit for just over 20 years before finally transitioning to permanent orchestra member in 2016. Along the way he has played contrabassoon in such staples of the repertoire as Verdi's *Don Carlo* and Strauss's *Salome*. For the 2022-23 season, Bill says he is especially looking forward to *Tosca*, *Pelleas and Mellisande* and *Otello*.

Born the youngest of four in Springfield, Minnesota, Bill moved with his family at age nine to Anoka, a Twin Cities suburb known for a fabulous music program. He began playing alto saxophone in sixth grade, then discovered an opening for bassoon in seventh grade band.

Having played with his oldest sister's oboe reeds for fun when he was younger, Bill recalls his fascination with their sound and feel. "I even made a bassoon out of the Christmas wrapping paper tubes and an old oboe reed," he says. But it was his second oldest sister who played bassoon, having switched from the alto sax a few years earlier. Bill joined her with his budding bassoon skills. Meantime, rounding out the musical family was his clarinetist brother.

From there, Bill learned and grew and thrived in what he calls his high school's "excellent" band program. It was during high school that he played with the prestigious Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony (GTCYS). He was a featured senior soloist with both his high school orchestra and the GTCYS. In ninth grade he was invited to play a Vivaldi concerto with his junior high school orchestra.

After high school, Bill attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN as a music major and was a tour soloist his senior year. For graduate school, he moved out to Los Angeles to enroll in USC where he studied with Michael O'Donovan and had weekly master classes with Norman Herzberg. With a Masters of Music in Bassoon Performance in hand, Bill embarked on what has panned out to be quite the fulfilling professional playing career.

Indeed, USC led Bill to the LA Opera Orchestra. It was during a rehearsal with the USC wind ensemble when he heard the principal oboist play and thought, "Now that sounds great. I'd like to play in a professional orchestra with her!" That oboist turned out to be Leslie Reed, the current principal oboe of the LA Opera Orchestra. They have been friends and colleagues ever since. And proving what a small world it is, Leslie Reed was featured in this very magazine as part of a group interview with LAOO's wind ensemble in our Fall 2014 issue.

In addition to a thriving career with the LAOO, Bill is also a member of the LA Master Chorale Orchestra, the New West Symphony and the Riverside Philharmonic. He has substituted for many years with the LA Philharmonic, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the LA Chamber Orchestra, the Pasadena Symphony and numerous other groups, in addition to the occasional dabble in studio work.

Along the way, Bill has forged lifelong friendships, including with his fellow Minnesota native from youth orchestra, bassoonist Duncan Massey, who after 45 years is Bill's colleague in both the New West Symphony and the Riverside Philharmonic.

In 2001 he met the man who would become his husband, Mark. Now a retired Episcopal priest from Santa Barbara, Mark keeps himself busy serving on several social service boards in the Santa Barbara area.

Bill, meanwhile, ever restless, developed a new musical venture in Santa Barbara at Mark's former church, a series of six half-hour concerts a year that occasionally include some of Bill's LAOO colleagues. These concerts span the gamut of musical genres, including jazz and folk in addition to classical.

While it might seem that Bill wouldn't have much free time outside all the music making, he makes the time for his twin passions of tennis and art. Bill loves to draw and sketch, especially with charcoal, and enjoys brushing up on art history. Depending on his knees, he always aims to play doubles tennis at least twice a week.

All the while, Bill Wood remains a proud, and vital, member, of the LA Opera Orchestra. "I love going to work with one of the greatest opera orchestras in the country!" 🌟

A ROMANTIC BRAIN STRAINER

Byron and Burns. Keats and Coleridge. Goethe and Blake and Shelley (Mary and Percy).

The roster of giants from the Romantic era is broad as it is deep, jam-packed with all-star poets and prose writers who have produced some of the greatest works in literary history.

And yet, none of them could survive this quiz on all things Romantic.

Since time immemorial, opera composers and companies alike have taken inspiration from every genre of literature. Kicking off the 2022-23 season with *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Frankenstein with Live Orchestra*, both based on early 19th century novels of the Romantic era, LA Opera is no exception.

Mark Lyons, LA Opera's Associate Director of Communications and Publications, would like to put your Romantic ABC's to the ultimate test with this quiz exploring the connections between opera and the Romantic era.

1. The prodigious literary output of Sir Walter Scott inspired several composers. His 1810 narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake* was the first of his works to be adapted for the operatic stage. Which Italian master composed *La Donna del Lago*?

- A: Gioachino Rossini
- B: Gaetano Donizetti
- C: Vincenzo Bellini
- D: Gaspare Spontini

2. Sir Walter Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* has been adapted for the musical stage numerous times. For one of those, a well-established partnership split up, when one of the pair just wasn't feeling it. Name the duo where only one of them gets credit for his *Ivanhoe*.

- A: Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II
- B: W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan
- C: Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito
- D: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte

3. In 2018, LA Opera presented Gordon Getty's *Usher House*, an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. A famous French composer tried and failed to complete an earlier adaptation of the story, only managing to draft one scene and part of another. Who was the composer of the incomplete opera *La chute de la maison Usher*?

- A: Maurice Ravel
- B: Claude Debussy
- C: Georges Bizet
- D: Jules Massenet

4. In 2015, Herman Melville's famous white whale came to the LA Opera stage. (The cast included soprano Jacqueline Echols, returning to LAO in *Omar*, as Pip). Who was the composer of *Moby-Dick*?

- A: Matthew Aucoin
- B: Elliot Goldenthal
- C: Ricky Ian Gordon
- D: Jake Heggie

5. Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, was a fertile source of inspiration for his nation's most important composers. Which of the following masterpieces was *not* based on a Pushkin work?

- A: Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*
- B: Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*
- C: Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*
- D: Borodin's *Prince Igor*

6. The works of French writer Victor Hugo have had notable success on musical stages around the world. (*Les Misérables*, anyone?) His play *Le roi s'amuse* (*The King Has Fun*) was the basis for which of the following Giuseppe Verdi masterpieces?

- A: *La Forza del Destino*
- B: *Rigoletto*
- C: *Un Ballo in Maschera*
- D: *Don Carlo*

MY FIRST SUSANA OPERA: HERNÁNDEZ

By GARY W. MURPHY



Although Susana Hernández Araico is one of the Opera League's newest members, she is no stranger to the world of opera.

Born and raised in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, Susana serves on the Steering Committee of Hispanics for LA Opera (HLAO) and has been a longtime subscriber to LA Opera.

Susana received her B.A., Summa cum Laude, from Mount St. Mary's University, her M.A. in Spanish-American literature and her Ph.D. in Spanish Renaissance and Baroque Literature from UCLA, where she currently works as a Research Associate for 17th and 18th Century Studies. She is also Professor Emerita of Spanish and Latin American Literature at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), where she taught Spanish Golden Age Literature, Literature of Mexico and Latin American Women Writers. Susana also serves on the Board of Directors for the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts.

BRAVO: FIRST OFF, WELCOME TO THE OPERA LEAGUE, SUSANA! WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR SOME TIME, MOSTLY THROUGH HISPANICS FOR LA OPERA, SO I WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT YOU ONLY RECENTLY JOINED THE LEAGUE'S MERRY BAND OF VOLUNTEERS.

SUSANA HERNÁNDEZ ARAICO: That's true. It's something that I always wanted to do, as I've been a guest at many Opera League events and wonderful seminars. I've been involved with HLAO for over 20 years. I attended the 1998 annual gala when composer Daniel Catán received an award, and I also met the wonderful Suzanna Guzmán, both of whom became great friends over the years. That night was so special as I enjoyed the company so much that I joined HLAO on the spot.

BRAVO: I UNDERSTAND YOU ARE NOW AN HISTORIAN FOR HLAO. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

SH: Well, HLAO founder and LA Opera board member Alicia Garcia Clark appointed me to that position, and it's the perfect assignment for me, as that's what I do. I feel that, in this role, I can help provide information to people about the history of opera in the Spanish-speaking world. I love doing the research and discovering different aspects of opera, as I write about opera at the major theatres such as Teatro Real in Madrid and Palau de les Arts in Valencia, Spain, as well as smaller houses such as Teatro Campoamor in Oviedo, or Teatro Solís in Montevideo, Uruguay, so people are aware of how much is happening all around the world.

BRAVO: SPEAKING OF WORLD TRAVELS, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE RECENTLY BACK FROM ITALY. WAS YOUR TRIP WORK OR PLEASURE?

SH: Both, actually. My academic field is 17th century Baroque theatre, and my main playwright is Calderón [Pedro Calderón de la Barca], perhaps the most distinguished writer of the Spanish Golden Age. After I finished an academic conference in Madrid, I travelled to Florence to see the Donatello sculpture exhibit at Palazzo Strozzi and also saw Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera, *Acis et Galatée*. I would have loved to have spent the summer with my European friends, but I had to return to L.A. and prepare for another upcoming conference this September in Toulouse, France.

BRAVO: IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN TO MOST OF THE WORLD'S GREAT OPERA HOUSES. DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE AT THIS POINT?

SH: Well, I have visited quite a few of the major opera houses including the Paris Opera's Palais Garnier and the Bastille, and houses in Munich, Rome, Venice, Berlin, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Bilbao, Barcelona, Marseille and several in South America including Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires and the Amazon Theatre in Manau, Brazil. I still need to go to the Municipal Theatre of Santiago, Chile where they presented Daniel Catán's *Il Postino* some years ago. That's on the list for sure.

BRAVO: I WOULD IMAGINE THAT YOUR LOVE OF OPERA GOES BACK TO CHILDHOOD. DID YOU START TO GO TO THE OPERA WITH YOUR SCHOOL?

SH: I was born and raised in Ensenada, just 70 miles south of the California border, and first went to the opera in San Diego. My friend's mother took several of us young high school students to see Verdi's *Otello*. To be honest, I was too young and not ready for it. It was only when I came to UCLA as a graduate student, and my two opera fanatic friends inspired me to go. I admired them so much as academics and scholars that I started to attend LA Opera performances by myself and fell in love with it.

BRAVO: WITH MORE THAN TWO DECADES OF LA OPERA PERFORMANCES UNDER YOUR BELT, DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE AT THIS POINT?

SH: I still love *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which is the first LA Opera production that I saw. Of course, I love all of Verdi's work, particularly *La Traviata*, and Puccini's operas. *Pagliacci* is up there, as well as Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*. We don't get to see too many Baroque operas in L.A., but I do remember the beautiful production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* that LA Opera presented in 2006. It was a completely enjoyable experience.

BRAVO: IS THERE SOMETHING SPECIAL ON LA OPERA'S 2022-23 SCHEDULE THAT YOU ARE EAGER TO EXPERIENCE?

SH: To be honest, I have a full season subscription, so I'm looking forward to everything, but my highlights include *Omar*, which certainly looks to be a historical staging for LA Opera, certainly given the current historical context. I've only seen a concert performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. I'm certainly looking forward to the Juan Diego Floréz recital in January. We hope that HLAO will have a gala event around the same time, so that should be even more special. Maybe we can convince him [Juan Diego Floréz] to create the new "Three Latino Tenors" with Javier Camarena and L.A.'s own Joshua Guerrero in time for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles! 🌸

YAPPING WITH A YAP: NICK ROEHLER, ACCOMPANIST ARTFUL COLLABORATOR

By JUDITH HYMAN

Singing showtunes from the time he was a tot has been among Nicholas Roehler's most passionate and pleasant memories.

A piano was brought into his nonmusical family when he was still in preschool, and by the time Nicholas was five, he was tapping away the tunes he loved singing from Broadway shows. Nicholas learned early on to sight-read this way. His favorite pastime as a youth was going to the neighborhood music store, picking out some favorite showtunes and inviting his friends over for singalongs.

When he reached high school, Nicholas discovered classical music and was immediately drawn to it. This was when he also fell in love with studying foreign languages. Today he is conversationally fluent in several.

After high school, Nicholas enrolled at SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music where, at first, he focused on the voice track. Soon enough it dawned on him that

he could take the piano track at the same time. "I thought,

"Why waste an opportunity when I can just get better at it [piano]," he says. Sure enough, once he started down the piano track, Nicholas found that he actually

preferred "being behind the piano instead of in front of the audience."

His graduate school training with Distinguished University Professor Martin Katz at the University of Michigan's Collaborative Piano Program was pivotal to Nicholas's evolving into an accompanist, or "collaborative" pianist. While some artists view the term "accompanist" as diminutive, a collaborative pianist requires great sensitivity, being flexible to work with their partners and knowing when, where and why they breathe. If there is text, Nicholas says, "we need to know what they are saying and how to say it, especially if a foreign language is involved. We also need to be personable because we work with others, so having good spirits in the rehearsal room is paramount. As a collaborative pianist, there is more room for creativity and exploration."

Nicholas was captivated with how Professor Katz worked with singers, showing them when to breathe and how to breathe to put across a thought or feeling. His method "conveyed the story behind the music," he says. He ended up earning a Master's Degree as a Specialist in Vocal Coaching and Collaborative Piano.

It was on a whim that Nicholas auditioned for LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program (YAP). "It was my favorite audition," he says. "The staff was so warm and the environment so friendly." This season will be his third and final year with the program.

What this earnest artist is drawn to in accompanying a singer is, of course, a beautiful voice. But then he adds: "It means nothing if it [the voice] isn't saying anything. I look for someone who is desperate to communicate with their audience. It is easy for singers to sound well-rehearsed, but to sound spontaneous, as if the music is being written in real time, allows the music to come alive." Indeed, as a collaborative pianist, Nicholas always maintains a dialogue with the singer, both during rehearsal as well as performance.

Classical musicians who have inspired Nicholas include Lang Lang, for his heartfelt

communication and his skill it making it sound so effortless. Renée Fleming holds a special place in his heart for stepping out of her operatic box and, in turn, introducing him to classical singing. The accompanist he most admires is Gerald Moore. "He paved the way for so many of us. He was always able to fully support the singer with various textures and touches while neither fading into the background nor taking the spotlight. His recordings have been invaluable resources for me in my study."

When Nicholas is not singing or playing the piano, he can be found walking the fifteen minutes to and from his downtown Los Angeles apartment and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. And wherever he is, he loves to sing. His other obsession is coffee. Stump Town Coffee Roasters, a gem of Portland, Oregon, is his favorite brand.

When I ask Nicholas about a plan B if the piano had not worked out, he said, "Actually, piano was my plan B. I originally wanted to be a performer on Broadway, which eventually morphed into being a classical singer, only to realize I didn't want to sing at all for a living. I realized playing piano could easily marry all my interests into one profession so that I could be around singing all day long and make music like I always loved to do."

When Nicholas was a year old, he was adopted into a family in Allentown, Pennsylvania with two older sisters, a nurse mom and a dad in the local steel industry. His biological mother was 18 at the time and believed her baby would have more opportunities with another family. Today, happily, Nicholas is realizing his ambition with the "in tune" guidance and support of both his adopted family as well as his biological mother and half-siblings.

As for those friends he used to host singalongs with when they were kids, many of them have gone into the music business as well.

"The only option for me has been and will always be to make music in any capacity, anywhere," Nicholas says. "I love what I am doing now at LAO, and I would like to do this forever." 🌸



THE HALO EFFECT

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHLEY FABIAN, LYRIC SOPRANO

By TOM LADY



African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League, is proud to present the Michael Melton Memorial Recital on Sunday, October 16 at noon at the Ebell of Los Angeles.

The featured vocalist will be lyric soprano Ashley Fabian.

A native of Charleston, South Carolina, Ashley has quickly established quite the career in the performance arts. In addition to opera, she has racked up credits in the worlds of musical theater, television and film. On the side, she runs Fab on a Dime, a

blog dedicated to budgeting for divas.

And if all that weren't impressive enough, in April of this year, Ashley was a contestant on *Wheel of Fortune*...and won!

After getting her BA and Artist's Diploma from The College of Charleston, followed by her MM from the University of Cincinnati - College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), Ashley cut her operatic teeth as resident artist at Pittsburgh Opera. She has been based in Los Angeles since January 2020.

When we sat down for this interview, LA Opera's season-opening *Lucia di Lammermoor* was a few short weeks from curtain, and Ashley had just gotten off the phone with LAO's *Lucia* team. They had no one to help cover the role of Lucia in rehearsals and asked her to take care of it. As it happens, Ashley has some *Lucia* experience, having made a mark with the title role for Hudson Opera Theater in June 2018. Critic Christine Chase of *Basso Buff* had nothing but praise, saying that, as Lucia, Ashley's "gorgeous and perfectly controlled coloratura tugged at my heart as her brave inexperience faltered at the hands of cruel manipulation and deception."

Consistently hailed for her "silvery tone" and "smooth legato", AALAO is honored to welcome Ashley Fabian as our featured vocalist at this year's inaugural Michael Melton Memorial Recital.

BRAVO: SO YOU'VE BEEN IN L.A. OVER TWO AND A HALF YEARS NOW, RIGHT? HOW DO YOU LIKE IT OUT HERE?

ASHLEY FABIAN: I love it! I just love the whole laid-back atmosphere in L.A., how chill everyone is. Having grown up in Charleston, I was already used to winters without any snow. But out here there's much less humidity. And there's a ton of opportunity in this city, L.A. is brimming with opportunity. That was the most attractive thing for me.

BRAVO: SORRY, BUT I HAVE TO ASK: ANY CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS?

AF: My first one was at a house party when I saw, or thought I saw, the actor who played Pedro in *Napoleon Dynamite* [Efrén Ramírez]. But it turned out to be his twin brother! [laughs]. Besides that, when I was working at a bar just after the pandemic, Arnold Schwarzenegger would come in a lot. I also saw Michael Keaton there, Ted Danson, the Property Brothers...

BRAVO: HOW DID YOU GET INTO MUSIC?

AF: Growing up in Charleston, I had a very musical family. My whole family are fantastic, naturally gifted singers. My dad was a music pastor at our church, and I grew up singing in that church. I had my first solo when I was two, when my dad picked me up, and I sang "Jesus Loves Me" in front of the whole congregation. But I didn't enroll in any sort of formal training until I was fourteen.

VALHALLA IN A BOWL

By GEORGE SOLOMON and TOM LADY

While it always begins with "Ride of the Valkyries" and ends with "Magic Fire," it does not always include Valhalla rendered as a computerized landscape via greenscreen technology, complete with the gods zooming around on light cycles ala the 1982 Disney film, *Tron*.

Yet that is exactly the divine treat that Opera League members and friends, and thousands of others, were treated to on a sultry summer Sunday evening in July when the LA Phil's Gustavo Dudamel conducted a Yuval Sharon-directed performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* Act III.

After a three-year hiatus, the Opera League was thrilled to welcome members and friends to this year's Hollywood Bowl summer picnic and opera concert to eat, drink, mingle and bask in the Bowl for an evening of opera.

Our reserved picnic area along Highland Avenue at the foot of the Bowl featured verdant landscaping with walking paths backdropped to the west by a rough-hewn stone wall draped in ivy. Thanks to League volunteer handiwork, the picnic tables themselves sported bows of red netting and terra cotta pots of large, soldier-straight marigolds as exclamation points of color amidst the greenage. While we enjoyed wine and water kept on ice, our Panera delivery driver delivered the wonderful boxed meals right on time.

League members and their plus ones spent a couple hours eating and drinking while bonding, making new friends and reminiscing, person to person, taking full

advantage of those special moments that we may have taken for granted in the past.

The picnic took a fun turn when we were inundated by a group of over a hundred curious high school students from 21 states participating in the Thomas Aquinas College Summer Program. Enjoying their own pre-show picnic on an adjacent picnic area, at some point their curiosity got the better of them, and they came over to get to know more about the Opera League and opera in general. It translated into an hour's worth of gratifying, illuminating, refreshing, musical genre-driven conversation that spanned generations.

Given that this generation of young adults has been dubbed digital natives, they must have been thrilled at the way director Yuval Sharon used greenscreen to render Valhalla for the evening's performance of *Die Walküre* Act III. For those who have seen the film *Tron*, celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the aesthetic of Valhalla's digitized landscape

BRAVO: WHEN DID YOU BECOME AWARE OF OPERA? DO YOU HAVE ANY OPERA SINGERS YOU ADMIRE?

AF: Well, my parents are both classically trained singers, so I've always been aware of opera. But I would say I really started to get into opera when I started formal training at fourteen. Two sopranos who really inspired me would be [fellow CCM alumna] Kathleen Battle, and Sumi Jo. My voice teacher would play recordings of them a lot.

BRAVO: FIRST LIVE OPERA EXPERIENCE?

AF: *The Pirates of Penzance*. And I was in it! I was 16 at the time. In terms of watching a live opera, my first one was *Cinderella* when I was a senior in high school. It was at the Spoleto Festival, which happens every year in Charleston.

BRAVO: YOU COULD PERFORM WITH ANY OPERA SINGER, ALIVE OR DEAD, WHO WOULD IT BE? AND IN WHICH OPERA?

AF: Definitely Pavarotti. I just want to experience his voice live, in a hall. I've heard stories of people who got to hear him live. As for which opera? I would say *Rigoletto*, and I would get to sing the role of Gilda. I've never sung that role, that would be a dream for me.

BRAVO: LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS BLOG YOU'VE GOT ON THE SIDE, FAB ON A DIME. WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT?

AF: I started Fab on a Dime to share my journey as a frugal diva

on a budget. When you're in music school, they don't teach you anything about finance and budgeting. And that's important because singing is such an expensive career. Unless you come from money or have the backing of a rich family or benefactor, it adds up. I've known people who quit this business because it was just too expensive. I went through phases where I was literally working four jobs. So with Fab on a Dime, I wanted to share my journey, share my lessons and experiences so as to help other people who are in my situation.

BRAVO: YOU SEEM QUITE BUSY, WHAT WITH THE OPERA, THE FILM WORK, COMMERCIALS, MUSIC VIDEOS... YOU EVER FIND THE TIME TO GO BACK TO CHARLESTON?

AF: Oh I go back as much as possible. A friend of mine, Dimitri Pittas, and his wife Leah founded an opera company in Charleston called Holy City Arts and Lyric Opera, or HALO, for short. During their inaugural season, I got to play *Cinderella* in *Into the Woods*. If you want to check it out, their website is holycityarts.org. Fun fact about Charleston: the very first opera production in North America was in Charleston! It was a ballad opera called *Flora*, performed in Charleston in 1735. That's what Dimitri and Leah mean on the website when they say the vision for HALO is "reclaiming Charleston's legacy as the birthplace of opera in North America." Cool, right? 🌟

ANGEL IN YOUR HEART

ANNOUNCING THE MICHAEL MELTON MEMORIAL RECITAL

By TOM LADY

African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League, has rechristened their annual fall recital the Michael Melton Memorial Recital in honor of the late and legendary William Michael Melton (1946-2019).

Michael Melton was a giant of scholarship, education and outreach who dedicated much of his life and passion to shepherding the art form of opera to the African American community of Los Angeles. As a longtime member and leader of AALAO, Michael served on the board for many years and volunteered countless, untold hours reaching out to L.A.'s underserved communities to preach the beauty and importance of opera. And he was one heck of a membership driver. Michael single-handedly helped grow membership in AALAO, starting in our early years up to his passing. Indeed, many of AALAO's current leaders owe their association with AALAO to Michael.

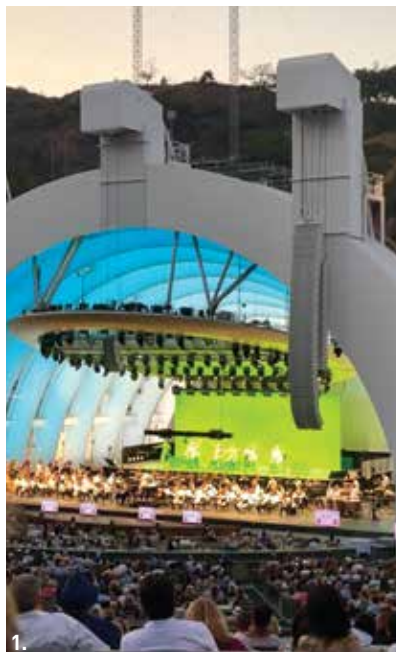
AALAO is but one example of the increase of interest in opera in the African American community due in no small measure to Michael's steadfast dedication.

The inaugural Michael Melton Memorial Recital, featuring soprano Ashley Fabian, takes place on Sunday, October 16 at noon at the Ebell of Los Angeles. For tickets, please go to the Opera League website, operaleague.org. 🌟

was instantly recognizable. Indeed, in starting off with "Ride of the Valkyries," Brünnhilde and her sisters are riding not on steeds, but on those very same light cycles that Jeff Bridges' Kevin Flynn had to master in taking on Master Control.

Boasting all-star singers, and LA Opera favorites, Christine Goerke, Matthias Goerne, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Ronnita Miller and Taylor Raven, we were treated to a "ride" through Valhalla that we will never forget.

Once again, the event exemplified the critical importance of the tireless efforts of our enthusiastic Opera League volunteers, who can design, develop and deliver events and make magic in seemingly minutes even though it takes weeks. And with no light cycles! 🌟



- 1. & 5. *Die Walküre* at the Bowl
- 2. Sue Correnti and Judith Anderson
- 3. Christine Goerke as Brünnhilde
- 4. Julie Leftow with Earl Adams





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OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FALL 2022

Event details will be broadcast via operaleague.org with supporting eBlasts.

For Education events, please contact Larry Verdugo at (626) 590-5697 or larryverdugo@icloud.com.

SEPTEMBER

EDUCATION

OperaWise: Lucia di Lammermoor

Monday, September 12 from 6:45pm-10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Opera Prep: Lucia di Lammermoor

Wednesday, September 14 from 6pm-10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

GATHERING

Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor

Sunday, September 11 at 1:30pm

LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)

SPEAKER: Larry Verdugo

SEMINAR

**Music, Madness and Myth
in Lucia di Lammermoor**

Sunday, September 4 at 12:00pm

LOCATION: Thayer Hall at the Colburn School

SPEAKERS: Kristi Brown-Montesano, PhD

and Jeremy Frank

VOCALIST: Liv Redpath

SPECIAL EVENT

Season Opening Shindig

Saturday, September 10 at 6:00pm

LOCATION: Vespaio

OCTOBER

EDUCATION

Opera for Educators: Omar

Saturday, October 8 from 8am-12pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 3

OperaWise: Omar

Tuesday, October 18 from 6:45pm-10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 6

Opera Prep: Omar

Thursday, October 20 from 4:45pm-10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 12

Opera for Educators: Tosca

Saturday, October 29, 2022 from 8:00am-12:00pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 3

RECITAL

African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO)

Presents: Michael Melton Memorial Recital

Sunday, October 16 at 12:00pm

LOCATION: Ebell Club of Los Angeles,

Third Floor, President's Tea Room

VOCALIST: Ashley Fabian

NOVEMBER

EDUCATION

OperaWise: Tosca

Tuesday, November 15 from 6:45pm-10:30pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 6

Opera Prep: Tosca

Thursday, November 17 from 8:15am-3:00pm

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: 20

GATHERING

Tosca and Puccini

Saturday, November 5 at 3pm

LOCATION: Private Residence in Sunset Park,
Santa Monica

SPEAKER: TBA

VOCALIST: TBA