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BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

GOT VOLUNTEERS?

THE OPERA LEAGUE'S PASSIONATE CADRE OF TIRELESS VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LYNCHPIN TO MAKING LA OPERA'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING POSSIBLE.

By BILL GREEN

On a bright, crisp morning last November, nigh on 1,000 culture-hungry secondary school students from all over Los Angeles County disembarked from a fleet of school busses, then raced up the Music Center Plaza stairs and inside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, escorted both by their teachers as well as Opera League volunteers, and took their seats to watch a full LA Opera dress rehearsal of Puccini's *Tosca*.



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From the President



Photo by Stephanie Girard



Volunteering Connects

Few things are more inspiring than to hear the enthusiastic, full-throated ovation of a student audience.

The fall of 2022 at LA Opera saw the welcome return of in-person student attendance at the final rehearsals of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Omar* and *Tosca*. Everyone was raving, about the operas themselves, yes, but also about the cheers that erupted from the captivated youngsters when *Tosca* exacted her revenge on *Scarpia*.

We at the Opera League of Los Angeles were delighted that we could once again fund the buses that transport literally hundreds of students to the Music Center, where Opera League volunteers are waiting to greet and usher the kids into the opera house, helping to foster and nurture the next generation of opera buffs.

Speaking of volunteering, the 2022-23 season has also been an exciting chance to offer our members increased opportunities to do just that. Volunteering is a key component of the League's mission and values as part of our support for LA Opera and opera in Southern California. Volunteer roles include assisting at education and community engagement programs put on by LA Opera *Connects*, chaperoning students, standing in for performers during lighting rehearsals, providing speakers for the pre-performance lectures, artist airport pickups and serving boxed meals to cast and crew at rehearsal dinners.

The Opera League's Shop at the Opera in the lobby of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion is back in full swing and doing healthy business. Staffed and managed by an all-volunteer team at every performance, we direct all proceeds back to LA Opera. One of the more recent episodes of BRAVO Live!, a video series companion to this magazine, showcases members of our Shop's veteran volunteers. Like all BRAVO Live! episodes, you can find the episode on our website and YouTube channel.

You can find even more volunteering opportunities at our Opera League Membership table, located out on the Music Center Plaza during performances. Our Membership table offers a fun chance to chat up audience members about the benefits of League membership, upcoming events and volunteer opportunities.



(LEFT TO RIGHT) Ryan McKinny, Todd Calvin and Tanya McKinny

Of course, the League's fall activities were not limited to volunteering. We presented educational and social activities as well, including: a season kickoff party at Vespaio; a seminar on composer Gaetano Donizetti and his masterpiece, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which featured a performance by soprano Liv Redpath; and the inaugural Michael Melton Memorial Recital presented by African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League. In November, we hosted our first in-person Master Class since 2020, featuring bass-baritone Ryan McKinny (*Scarpia* himself!) as he coached members of LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist program.

Speaking of heralded returns, the League's beloved neighborhood gatherings have resumed in the homes of member hosts, where we learn about upcoming LA Opera productions over shared food and drink. The gatherings have always been such a popular and vital means of keeping our members connected that we also offer them virtually. Every season, our trained Community Educators deliver interactive multimedia presentations, both across Southern California and online.

As we kick off the New Year and the second half of the 2022-23 season, I hope you will join us at some of the aforementioned fun. Our programming affords countless opportunities to meet fellow opera lovers while also supporting LA Opera and opera throughout the community.

See you at the opera!

Todd Calvin
PRESIDENT

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BAROQUE FOR A KING

BAROQUE MASTER HARRY BICKET AND THE ENGLISH CONCERT RETURN FOR ANOTHER SPECIAL NIGHT WITH THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

BY GARY W. MURPHY

ABOVE (L TO R): Nino Sanikidze, Maestro Harry Bicket, Gary Murphy and Todd Calvin

In what is becoming an annual tradition, Maestro Harry Bicket returns to LA Opera with The English Concert for yet another Baroque masterpiece, George Frideric Handel's *Solomon*. And once again, as with Bicket and The English Concert presenting Handel's *Alcina* at LA Opera in November 2021, the Opera League will host a private wine reception for members and guests during both intermissions.

The performance takes place on Friday, March 10 at 7:30 pm.

LA Opera offers League members a very special 40% off tickets to all sections for this one-night-only performance, and the fee for the receptions is just \$25. It's the perfect way to spend an early spring night at the opera in downtown Los Angeles.

Opera League members who attended the *Alcina* performance in November

2021 discovered The English Concert to be an internationally acclaimed period-instrument orchestra as they performed the glorious music of Handel. Now we get the opportunity to do so again with *Solomon*, Handel's 1749 English-language oratorio.

A magnificent song of celebration, *Solomon* paints a portrait of the wise and just titular king through a cornucopia of musical delights, filled with dazzling arias, ravishing duets and thrilling choruses.

Yes, this promises to be another special night for the Opera League.

For more information and to reserve tickets, head on over to our website, operaleague.org, and click the *Solomon* image on the homepage banner.

The discount code to get the 40% off is LEAGUE40. 🌟

GOT VOLUNTEERS?

CONTINUED FROM COVER

VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE WORLD GO 'ROUND

This student program, called Opera Prep, is one of many programs designed to introduce students of all ages to the art form of opera. These programs are produced by LA Opera *Connects*, LAO's community engagement and learning department comprised of a dedicated team led by *Connects* Vice President Tehvon Fowler-Chapman and Program Director Andrea Fuentes. This team plans, schedules and coordinates a veritable smorgasbord of student programming throughout the season.

The lynchpin that guarantees the success of such an ambitious schedule? Our Opera League volunteers. Opera Prep is one of the main LAO *Connects* programs, and it is the program that requires the most volunteers from the League. With hundreds, sometimes north of a thousand, students converging upon Music Center Plaza to beef up their opera smarts, there would simply be no way to execute such programs, from a coordination and logistical perspective,

without a small army of eager Leaguers to greet and guide the students into and through the palace of mid-century modernism that is the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. More than greeters and guides, Opera Leaguers are also opera ambassadors, carrying and conveying a passion for opera and music that is warmly infectious.

GETTING "PREPPED"

If a school wishes to participate in an LA Opera *Connects* program like Opera Prep, they simply fill out a *Connects* application available at laopera.org. In the days leading up to the trip to downtown L.A., selected schools will host a talk delivered by one of the Opera League's volunteer LAO-trained Community Educators. The talks usually include the history of opera as an art form, as well as background of the specific opera the kids will be seeing.

"I especially enjoy watching teens at the lectures," says Opera League volunteer and Community Educator Tanya Len. "Many of them don't realize that an opera production is such a large undertaking,

and there are way more vocations they can choose than just sing on stage or play in the orchestra."

To compliment the students' experience, their teachers receive teaching aids prepared by LA Opera *Connects* and are afforded the opportunity to earn service points by attending LA Opera *Connects*' Opera for Educators programs on Saturday mornings, also staffed by Opera League volunteers, where LAO staff, singers, conductors and local educators provide extensive background and information on upcoming operas.

Andrea partners with the League's education team leader and veteran volunteer, Larry Verdugo, who administers and manages hundreds of Opera League volunteer hours across the League's education team, ensuring the LAO *Connects* team gets the support they need. Together, they determine the number of volunteers required for each event, and the roles and responsibilities for which those volunteers would be responsible. And then Larry reaches out to volunteers to see who is available.



LA OPERA

Connects

PERFORMANCE DAY

With all the buildup, combined with the fact that many of the students and even some of their teachers have never attended a live opera, the day of the performance is something special, a day these opera neophytes will remember and tell stories about for the rest of their lives.

"The joy of working in the educational programs has taught me that people may forget what I might have said or will forget what I might have done, but they will never forget how I made them feel," says League volunteer Mary Riggs. "One young boy looked up at me at a student matinee and said, 'This is the happiest day of my life.'"

Schools that do not have the resources for bus transportation for students to get to and from the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion can request support from the *Connects* bus fund that is sustained and replenished by the Opera League.

Ask any Opera League volunteer who's helped staff these events, and they will tell you that the look on the kids' faces as they take in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion for the first time never gets old. "I love the looks on their faces when they enter the lobby and see the size, the crystal chandeliers and all the gold on the walls," says League volunteer Marion Joy. "You can feel their excitement and anticipation."

Mary Riggs adds, "It is impossible to know the value of our participation, but how thrilling it is for us to see their smiles and the smiles on the faces of their parents at the family events."

As for how the students react to the operas themselves? Going by the deafening applause and full-throated cheering at last November's Opera Prep for *Tosca*, well, a reaction like that says it all.

"The most exciting moment I witnessed?" muses Larry. "Watching two thousand students cheering the finale of *Candide*. My fellow volunteer Alma Guzman turned to me and commented that the performers would never have a better audience." 🌟



MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

LA Opera *Connects* is committed to sharing the wonder and promise of opera with students of all ages, neighborhoods and communities. As they say in their mission statement: "We know our connections enrich all our lives."

As always, the Opera League remains equally committed to providing the volunteer support critical to bringing that "wonder and promise" to fruition.

LAO *Connects* programs supported by the League include:

ELEMENTARY STUDENT MATINEES

Hour-long special performances, presented at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, with themes such as "Who Wants To Be an Opera Singer" and "Puccini (or Verdi) Tales."

SATURDAY MORNING AT THE OPERA

A high-energy event designed for young children and their families to participate in arts and crafts projects, dance and other musical activities. A special hour-long performance follows.

OPERA WISE

A program for college students to watch a technical rehearsal of a current production.

THE CATHEDRAL PROJECT

Volunteers collaborate with members of the local community to perform original or commissioned works designed to be performed at The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. This year's opera, *Moses*, will be performed on Saturday, March 11, with two performances, 1pm and 5pm.

OPERA PREP

A program for secondary school students designed to increase awareness of career opportunities in the arts. Students attend the dress rehearsal of a current production following a special discussion that includes performers from that production. 🌟

WELCOME BACK, MAESTRO!



By GARY W. MURPHY

JAMES CONLON, LA OPERA'S RICHARD SEAVER MUSIC DIRECTOR, RETURNS TO THE DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION PODIUM IN FEBRUARY TO OPEN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 2022/23 SEASON WITH BACK-TO-BACK PRODUCTIONS, BOTH NEW TO LA OPERA.



First up will be Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* in a classical interpretation by the noted LA film director James Gray (*The Immigrant*, *The Lost City of Z*, *Ad Astra* and most recently *Armageddon Time*) making his operatic debut. This co-production with Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris features a lineup of LA Opera favorites—Janai Brugger, Craig Colclough, Ana María Martínez and Lucas Meacham. Designed by Santo Loquasto, this *Marriage* has one more star partner—French fashion icon Christian Lacroix, who designed the costumes.

In March, Maestro Conlon takes on the achingly beautiful *Pelléas & Mélisande*, French composer Claude Debussy's only completed opera. Originally scheduled for 2020, this David McVicar production marks the opera's first time onstage at LA Opera since 1995.

Although the majority of operagoers may not be too familiar with *Pelléas & Mélisande*, Maestro Conlon says, "It is one of the five or six greatest works in any musical repertoire. It is one of those works that can be counted on the fingers of one hand, for which there is no substitute. If it has possessed you, as it has me from the time of my adolescence, you are always possessed. When you are caught in its spell, no other music exists. Its magic is so irreplaceable, its embrace so personal, almost private, that words are inadequate."

Debussy's sensual, exquisitely nuanced score casts a hypnotic spell, capturing an enigmatic dream world where forbidden love blossoms. This fascinating lyric masterpiece stars two riveting young performers, soprano Sydney Mancasola and baritone Will Liverman, as the doomed lovers,

THE OPERA LEAGUE SHOWS ITS “RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE” WHEN IT JOINS LA OPERA FOR A SPECIAL NIGHT AT THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO ON FEBRUARY 23.

With the Respect for Marriage Act now the law of the land, passed by Congress and signed by President Biden in December, the Opera League invites members of the LGBTQ+ community to join supporters of the Santa Monica-based public radio station KCRW for the celebration of another marriage, *The Marriage of Figaro*, on Thursday, February 23, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

The League will join forces with LA Opera as they host KCRW Night at the Opera with a pre-performance live music reception on the Plaza. At the same performance, the Opera League will host an intermission reception for members of the LGBTQ+ community. LAO will provide a special ticket discount that starts at just \$16! For more information, contact Opera League board member Clayton Morell at clayton.morell@gmail.com

The Marriage of Figaro sparkles with disguises, wit, trickery and humanity, all under the masterful baton of Music Director James Conlon. This new production is directed by acclaimed filmmaker James Gray (*Armageddon Time*, *Ad Astra*, *Lost City of Z*), with costumes designed by celebrated fashion designer Christian Lacroix. A brilliant cast of company favorites brings the leading couples to life: bass-baritone Craig Colclough and soprano Janai Brugger as the ever-resourceful Figaro and Susanna, with baritone Lucas Meachem and soprano Ana María Martínez as the Count and Countess.

*Tickets for the Opera League's LGBTQ+ Night at The Marriage of Figaro are available at www.laopera.org. Promo code **League20**.* 🌟



and Kyle Ketelsen as the jealous prince. The magnificent Susan Graham makes her role debut as Geneviève, mother of the two rival brothers, and the legendary bass Ferruccio Furlanetto returns as King Arkel, the family patriarch unable to grasp the tragedy unfolding before him.

Composed by two musical masters more than a century apart, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Pelléas*

& *Mélisande* give contemporary opera lovers a rare opportunity to experience two masterpieces side-by-side this spring, and both conducted by another master, James Conlon. As a special bonus, the Maestro will once again take the Eva and Marc Stern Grand Hall stage prior to each performance for the always sold-out Opera League lecture. They, like all of James Conlon's performances, are not to be missed. Welcome back, Maestro! 🌟



GATHER 'ROUND, GATHER 'ROUND!

IN-PERSON GATHERINGS ARE BACK **By TOM LADY**

“For me, the San Gabriel Valley gathering felt like going home. A family reunion, if you will. Familiar place, familiar faces, a shared love of opera and good food and wine. It was a notable night, and we cherished it.”

Carol Sholer and her husband Michael are longtime co-hosts of the San Gabriel Valley gathering group, and her above sentiment captures nicely why you might have noticed a lightness in the gait and a skip in the step of your fellow Opera League members in the past few months.

Of all the programs that make up the Opera League slate, few go as far back, or are as more cherished, as that of the neighborhood gathering.

Perhaps because they are free to attend and open to League members and nonmembers alike, and provide opera-philes and neophytes the low-stress environment of someone's home, where nibbles and wine are

usually served, also for free, are gatherings held in such high regard.

That is why it was a moment to be celebrated last fall when the League brought back in-person gatherings for the first time since the fall of 2019.

For those of you who may never have had the pleasure, Opera League gatherings are organized by specific groups or chapters specific to certain areas of Los Angeles County, such as downtown Los Angeles, Westside Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, the San Fernando Valley, the San Gabriel Valley and Santa Clarita. League members and their nonmember friends and relatives who reside in that region, and those who may not if they don't mind the drive, meet at a private residence to listen to one or two talks delivered by LA Opera-trained Opera League volunteers called Community Educators. The talks typically center on a current or forthcoming LA Opera production.

Last October and November the League put on five in-person gatherings, one in October for LA Opera's debut of *Omar*, plus four more in November for LAO's new production of *Tosca*.

“[Community Educator] Mary Johnston gave an engaging talk on *Tosca* to an excited group of Opera League enthusiasts,” raves Ruth Bachofner, who helps manage the Beverly Hills gathering group and hosted a gathering for that group in mid-November. She goes on to say, “This was the first

in-person gathering in over three years and also included a number of League board members in attendance. We listened attentively while eating loads of goodies.”

When the pandemic shut the world down in early 2020, the League moved gatherings online, where we typically attracted larger audiences of folks who would otherwise be unable to make the drive to a private residence. In large part for that reason, the League has continued to produce online gatherings even while the world has opened back up. At the same time, online gatherings have only made veteran gatherers appreciate the in-person variety all the more, for the camaraderie, the collegial vibe and the opportunity to catch up and reconnect.

“My experience with in-person gatherings was just a strange sense that it was unusual to be speaking in front of human beings, rather than a moving picture box,” says Community Educator Steve Kohn.

To keep up to date with the gathering schedule and all the other Opera League programming, just head over to our website, operaleague.org, and click **CALENDAR** in the navigation menu along the top. And of course, if you have any questions, never hesitate to reach out to us at info@operaleague.org.

See you at the next gathering! 🌟



1. Carol Ann Bennett, Julie Levtow, Judith Anderson and Michael Kwan 2. Elise with Jessica Buonocore Catering 3. Opera League Members at the home of Steven and Emily Johnson 4. Ruth Bachofner and Emily Johnson 5. Opera League Guest 6. Laurel and Jim Howat 7. Steve Kohn 8. Karen Kohn, Paula Correia and Opera League Guest 9. Steven Johnson 10. The Johnson home in Santa Monica 11. Julie Levtow and Opera League Guest

IN THE PIT

X. HELEN ALTENBACH, CELLO

STRING THERAPY
By TOM LADY

“The cello was not an attraction, but a way of survival in a turbulent time in Chinese history.”



A tenured member of the LA Opera Orchestra since 2010, Xiaodan Helen Altenbach hails from a family from the northeast of China that includes no less than eight professional cellists: from her father, uncle and several cousins down to her 13-year-old half-sister, who just joined her first professional orchestra for a five-month tour.

The “turbulent time” she refers to would be China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the final decade of Mao Zedong’s rule. As Mao insisted on getting rid of all Western influences and ideas, the farming class rose up against the intellectuals, which led to brutal upheaval and mandatory relocation of the youth to rural areas to learn Communist ideals through hard physical labor.

Helen’s uncle, a skilled amateur violinist who taught his kid brother, Helen’s father, how to find his way around a cello, saw a solution for the brothers to continue playing music by joining one of Madam Mao’s theater troupes that propagated socialist values through music and storytelling.

“Having this tie to a special skill, my father and his brother were able to avoid being sent away indefinitely and continued to build on their natural talents.”

She adds, “My mother’s father was an educated man from a family of some privilege. My mother, a teenager at the time, picked up a Chinese traditional instrument, the Pipa, in an attempt to show loyalty to her culture and in hopes of shielding her family from harm. She taught herself well enough to be accepted to one of the theater troupes as well.”

Helen reflected, “I think this single act of service to her family empowered the rest of her life and lit up a path of self-advocacy and resilience for me.”

After Mao died in 1976, musicians like Helen’s parents were staffed in arts and culture organizations all over China based on skill. And as the years passed, Helen explains, “Subsequent generations in my family began passing down this free music education as a family inheritance, in addition to gaining advanced training.”

Helen was nine when her family immigrated to Russia, where she studied both cello and piano at the Moscow State Conservatory’s pre-college program. Arriving in New York City in 1998, the 14-year-old Xiaodan (as she was known at the time) hit the proverbial ground running by being accepted to both the Juilliard School Pre-College Division and LaGuardia High School for Music & Arts and Performing Arts.

College brought her out to Los Angeles. In the decade following her graduation from USC, Helen became the appointed principal cellist of the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, a member of the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Long Beach Symphony, Santa Barbara Symphony, New West Symphony (Thousand Oaks, CA), San Diego Chamber Orchestra and the L.A. Virtuosi Orchestra.

After settling into her LAO position in 2010, Helen gradually let go of the other orchestral engagements to make time to freelance as a Hollywood soundtrack recording musician. She can be heard on recent series like *The Handmaid’s Tale* on Hulu and *The Mandalorian* on Disney Plus, with recent film credits including *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile* and this year’s *The Super Mario Brothers Movie* and *Shazam!: Fury of the Gods*, to name a few.

When the pandemic shut the world down, Helen earned an online master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT). Today she balances her music career with a newly launched second career in relational psychotherapy with a focus on multicultural family dynamics and individual identity development. As a Registered Associate MFT, Helen offers therapy in English, Russian and Mandarin Chinese.

When I asked how she views these two seemingly disparate careers, Helen explains, "Practicing psychotherapy requires one to hold multiple sets of 'truths' and find ways to make sense of and live with the uncertainties of life. Being a cellist requires that I cope with the uncertainty of my field daily while looking for ways to advocate for a better future for all musicians."

Helen's past experience as a contract negotiation committee member for the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra inspired her to enroll in a Ph.D. program in Organizational Leadership at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Helen elaborates, "Organizational development focuses on people's relationships to work and to each other at the workplace, all in the context of global culture and economy. I look forward to consulting with organizations and using research findings to inform stakeholders to help ensure the survival of the arts *and* the artists."

During what downtime she can create between pursuing three careers, Helen and her Swiss-born spouse who, coincidentally, is a longtime subscriber of LA Opera, enjoy spending time in nature. Back home, they have three affectionate kitties to keep them company: Marshy, Peanut and Pepper. On weekends, Helen loves a good hike and a podcast to go with it.

In the meantime, as the second half of LAO's 2022-23 season gets set to kick off with Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* in February, I marvel that Helen would have any downtime at all.

Smiling, she says, "I'll share a little secret. Sometimes, when I'm in a 'performance flow' state, maybe during the last act of an opera, I might just be wondering, 'How to build a more sustainable art culture in the U.S.?' I enjoy creative rumination, and I don't mind having an operatic soundtrack to go with it." 🎭

L'HEURE DU QUIZ: IMPOSSIBLE N'EST PAS FRANÇAIS

LA Opera's first mainstage production of 2023 is a new production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, a Mozart opera based on the French play, *La Folle Journée*, ou *Le Mariage de Figaro*, by the revolutionary Pierre Beaumarchais.

In the previous BRAVO's quiz (Fall 2022), Mark Lyons, LA Opera's Associate Director of Communications and Publications, strained your brain with operas inspired by literature from the Romantic era.

This time around, *juste pour le fun*, Mark is serving up operas like *Figaro*: operas based on French literature...but not sung *en français*. So you can scratch out *Carmen*, *Manon* and even the Philip Glass version of *La Belle et la Bête*.

À vos marques, prêts, partez!

1: Verdi's 1853 heartbreaker *La Traviata* features a leading lady with a floral name: Violetta. What was the opera's source material, which references a different bloom?

- A: *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) by Alexandre Dumas fils
- B: *Notre-Dame-des-Flleurs* (Our Lady of the Flowers) by Jean Genet
- C: *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti
- D: *Le Rosier de Madame Husson* (Madame Husson's Rosebush) by Guy de Maupassant

2: Henri Murger's 1851 story collection *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter) was the basis for everyone's favorite Puccini opera about starving young artists in Paris. (It inspired the musical *Rent* too.) Another famous composer of the era tackled the same subject, but his *La Bohème*, which came three years after Puccini's, is almost never performed.

- A: Franco Alfano (best known for completing Puccini's *Turandot*)
- B: Umberto Giordano (composer of *Andrea Chénier* and *Fedora*)
- C: Ruggero Leoncavallo (composer of *Pagliacci*)
- D: Pietro Mascagni (composer of *Cavalleria Rusticana*)

3: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry beloved 1943 novella *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince) has been adapted widely for film, television, anime, ballet, musical theater and (several times) opera. One of those premiered in 2003 at Houston Grand Opera, directed by Francesca Zambello. Subsequently performed by numerous companies throughout North America, it is one of the most successful operas written by a female composer. Name her.

- A: Libby Larsen
- B: Rachel Portman
- C: Kaija Saariaho
- D: Jeanine Tesori

4: Based on a 1759 novella by Voltaire, Leonard Bernstein's 1956 Broadway flop *Candide* is now a hit in opera houses around the world. Who was the original leading lady, creating the role of Cunegonde and originating the song "Glitter and be Gay"? (It all turned out fine in the end; she moved on to greater success.)

- A: Julie Andrews
- B: Barbara Cook
- C: Shirley Jones
- D: Madeline Kahn

5: An opera by Richard Strauss exists in two different versions. The first version incorporated speaking roles for stage actors in an adaptation of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (The Middle-Class Aristocrat). It didn't go over well, so Strauss created a second version that dumped Molière. (Fortunately, Strauss's incidental music for the play was recycled into a delightful orchestral suite.) Name that opera.

- A: *Ariadne auf Naxos*
- B: *Capriccio*
- C: *Intermezzo*
- D: *Die schweigsame Frau* (The Silent Woman)

6: A kékszakállú herceg vára is the original title of what opera based on a folktale first published in a story collection by French author Charles Perrault?

- A: *The Bartered Bride* by Czech composer Bedřich Smetana
- B: *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* by Hungarian composer Béla Bartók
- C: *Little Red Riding Hood* by Russian composer César Cui
- D: *Rusalka* by Czech composer Antonín Dvořák



YAPPING WITH A YAP: ALAYSHA FOX, SOPRANO

SWIMMING
WITH THE
GRACE NOTES

By JUDITH HYMAN

Alaysha Fox will be the featured vocalist at our Black History Month recital on Sunday, February 19.

It was during LA Opera's 2019-20 season, Alaysha Fox's first year as a member of LAO's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program (YAP), when I had the privilege of taking in her astounding, powerful soprano voice.

Later, sipping coffee on the Music Center Plaza, just outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, I found myself standing next to LAO CEO Christopher Koelsch. "In LAO's Young Artist Program," I asked, "how does a magnificent, rich voice like hers get any better?" We both smiled and agreed that the Young Artists Program had an amazing soprano in Alaysha Fox, and that she would only grow and flourish in the hands of LAO's peerless YAP team.

In November 2020, early in her second year as a YAP, Alaysha sang the role of Dorothée in LAO's virtual production of *The Anonymous Lover*, the 1780 chamber opera by Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, a pioneering Black composer who was a contemporary of Mozart. In the spring of 2022, toward the end of her third YAP season, Alaysha sang the role of Priestess in Verdi's *Aida*.

Now in her fourth and final year as a YAP, Alaysha is blooming all over. She just sang the Female Chorus role in *The Rape of Lucretia* at the Colburn School on January 20th. In February she will be the featured vocalist at our annual Black History Month recital, produced by African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League. It will take place at the Ebell of Los Angeles on Sunday, February 19 at noon. You can buy your tickets at our website, operaleague.org.

Growing up in New York City, this gifted young artist had never heard of opera.

"In LAO's Young Artist Program, how does a magnificent, rich voice like hers [Alaysha Fox] get any better?" – JUDITH HYMAN

That is, if you don't count Bugs Bunny's immortal "What's Opera, Doc?"

"I remember I always loved singing along," Alaysha recalls, "not realizing what this art form was all about, until I was urged to attend art school at LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts." Alaysha had always sung gospel, and fortunately, a discerning teacher early on perceived her exceptional voice and urged Alaysha to attend LaGuardia. "It saved my life," Alaysha says. "My early years were tough, as I was from a broken family, and I finally found a way of pouring all my emotions into music and making use of them."

After LaGuardia, Alaysha earned her bachelor and master degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, and then completed the young artist programs at Chautauqua Opera in Western New York and Opera Saratoga. Among her accolades are winning the Palm Springs Opera Guild Vocal Competition and Taub Ades Vocal Competition, the Lotte Lenya Emerging Artist Award, and advancing to finalist in the Loren L. Zachary Society for the Performing Arts, Houston Grand Opera Concert of Arias and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Even with a "broken family," Alaysha has no less than 37 "dysfunctional but loveable" cousins and claims to be close to all of them. Although none of them had been acquainted with opera before Alaysha took it up, she has persuaded them to be present for some of her roles, like that of the High Priestess in last season's *Aida*. "They are becoming fans," she says.

To stay in shape, Alaysha maintains a robust exercise regimen. For cardio and flexibility training, she practices the kettle ball swing, moving the cast iron ball in a pendulum-type motion from between her knees to fully overhead. She also maintains membership in a mermaid pod, or mer pod for short. Alaysha's mer pod is comprised of a group of experienced swimmers who swim while sporting fins (yes, mermaid fins), becoming powerful little fishies in either the junior-size Olympic pool in Alaysha's complex or out in the ocean. A trip to Catalina is in this mer pod's near future. A powerful and self-taught swimmer since childhood, Alaysha has found herself to be a natural mermaid. And as it happens, her mer pod includes a fellow LAO YAP, mezzo-soprano Sarah Saturnino, a Northern California native who just joined the Young Artist Program this season. Rounding it all out with yoga, Alaysha is committed to these disciplines to increase her stamina as much as her lung capacity.

As she heads into home stretch of her fourth and final year as an LAO YAP, Alaysha remains grateful for her training and support. She refers to Nino Sanikidze, the YAPs' head coach, as Studio Mom, her source of light and hope, while Stephen King, head of vocal instruction for the YAPs, "keeps me on the right path to thrive as an artist." 🌟

The annual Black History Month recital produced by African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League, will take place Sunday, February 19 at noon at the Ebell of Los Angeles. Tickets are available at our website, operaleague.org.

SETTLING THE SCORES

A TOUR OF LA OPERA'S NEWLY REFURBISHED MUSIC LIBRARY

BY GARY W. MURPHY

BRAVO: I WOULD IMAGINE THAT MOST FOLKS DON'T EVEN KNOW THE LA OPERA MUSIC LIBRARY EXISTS, AS YOU ARE TUCKED AWAY IN A COZY LITTLE CORNER OF THE MUSIC CENTER.

MELISANDRA DUNKER: Yes, we're located on the ground floor of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion behind the security desk and next to the Music Center's electrical room just inside the Artists Entrance. When the pandemic shut down operations, the Music Center took the opportunity to upgrade some of the building's 60-year-old electrical structure and installed a rather large ATS (Automatic Transfer Switch) system that quickly transfers the power supply from its primary source to a backup during a power outage. That ATS machinery needed to go where we were located so we now have a completely new Music Library complete with an 18" wall between the ATS system and us!

BRAVO: WELL, I'M SURE THIS WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR LA OPERA TO MAKE ITS OWN UPGRADES TO THE MUSIC LIBRARY.

MD: We got a complete makeover for sure. The former Music Library was comprised of three different rooms—one room for storing large musical instruments, another was used as the Production office's design lab and we had the third room towards the back of the building. The renovation has allowed us to modernize the Music Library and create a more functional space. We deal mostly with physical pieces of music but have been leaning more into technology to be more efficient and create less waste.



(L TO R) FRONT ROW: KT Somero, Ignazio Terrasi, Miah Im, Sam Gelber, Niino Sanikidze, James Conlon, Milena Gligić, Louis Lohraseb BACK ROW: Jeremy Frank, Brady Steel and Carolina Angulo

LA Opera's little known but vital Music Library recently reopened after a two-year renovation.

Music librarian Melisandra Dunker took some time out before the upcoming LA Opera rehearsals to give BRAVO a tour.

One of our key tasks is to keep track of the various scores and parts that are provided to musicians, stage management, staff and chorus members as we prepare for a production. Principal singers will typically bring their own scores so we don't always provide music for them. Building scores and parts is an enjoyable task, and we have the tools to do that in-house. We edit and adjust the scores and parts with any new or additional music, cuts that are made to a score or any word changes that may occur in the libretto that may occur during the rehearsal process.

BRAVO: THAT HELPS ANSWER THE BASIC QUESTION: WHY WOULD LA OPERA HAVE A MUSIC LIBRARY?

MD: We are responsible for all the music in the company. We also act as the company's archive. If someone needs information about a production we did 20 years ago, they will come to us first, and we can provide them with information.

BRAVO: DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL TO BE A MUSIC LIBRARIAN?

MD: Actually, there is currently no degree available for a performance music librarian. You can get a degree as an academic music librarian, but that degree does not completely transfer into what is needed for this role. Many performance librarians actually have their degrees in performance, composition and/or musicology. When I started at LA Opera, I was working on a double masters in horn performance and musicology from Cal State Long Beach. My horn teacher for my undergrad and some grad work is the fourth French horn player in the LA Opera Orchestra. He and his wife, who had also played bass with the opera, mentioned me to the former librarian who needed a new assistant. After a test and interview, I was offered the job!

BRAVO: DOES THE MUSIC LIBRARY HAVE RECORDINGS ON VINYL AND CDS?

MD: Those recordings are an important component to the Music Library, and we are in the process of transferring them all to digital. The entire collection is offsite at the moment as we decide what gets moved into this new space and what stays in storage. We recently had a donation of a vinyl collection which can be burdensome as we simply don't have the space to house it all. That said, I love vinyl recordings, and I value them as treasures because so many did not make it to a digital format. Additionally, vinyl recordings come with booklets that include essays, bios and artwork—so much information that is largely lost.

BRAVO: LA OPERA ALSO PRESENTS NEW WORK, SUCH AS THE RECENT PRODUCTION OF RHIANNON GIDDENS AND MICHAEL ABELS' OPERA OMAR ONSTAGE THIS PAST FALL. DID YOU HELP BUILD THAT SCORE?

MD: *Omar* received its premier at the Spoleto Festival so we didn't create the scores. Moving to the much larger Dorothy Chandler Pavilion required



a larger orchestra, particularly the string section. Music elements that may have been removed from the Spoleto performances were put back in for Los Angeles. It was my job to figure out what exactly the composers wanted—what to leave in and what to take out before rehearsals began. Fine-tuning happened during rehearsals, and then

afterwards the library staff met with the composer and his team to go over any possible issues or changes we, and our orchestra members, encountered. Mr. Abels went through all of our notes and has just sent them to the publisher for the final edition. I love working on new operas for this very reason as we get to actively help the composer, his

publisher and ultimately our colleagues at other opera companies who will produce *Omar* in the future. 🌸

Visit operaleague.org to read the rest of the interview and to take a virtual tour of the Music Library with Melisandra Dunker and the Opera League's Larry Verdugo at BRAVO Live!

OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER AND SPRING 2023

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

For Education events, all volunteer slots have been filled as of press time, but if you would like to join the volunteer wait list, or have any other questions about the Education programming, please contact Larry Verdugo at (626) 590-5697 or larryverdugo@icloud.com.

FEBRUARY EDUCATION

Opera Prep: *The Marriage of Figaro*
Thursday, February 2 from 1:00pm-6:00pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Opera for Educators:
Opera in the Classroom**
Saturday, February 11 from 8:00am-Noon
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor

GATHERINGS
Introduction to Opera
Sunday, February 5 at 12:30pm
LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)
SPEAKER: Steve Moore

Opera in the 21st Century
Monday, February 6 at 7:00pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in La Cañada
SPEAKER: Mary Johnston

Intimacy of Grand Opera
Saturday, February 11 at 1:30pm
LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)
SPEAKER: Larry Verdugo

The Marriage of Figaro
Sunday, February 12 at 10:00am
LOCATION: Private Residence in Beverly Hills
SPEAKER: Steve Kohn

The Opera Detective
Monday, February 27 at 7:00pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Clarita
SPEAKER: Steve Moore

RECITAL
**African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO)
Presents: Black History Month Recital
with Soprano Alaysha Fox**
Sunday, February 19 at 12:00pm
LOCATION: Ebell Club of Los Angeles,
Third Floor, President's Tea Room
VOCALIST: Alaysha Fox, Soprano

**MARCH
CAST DINNERS**
Pelléas et Mélisande
Saturday, March 18 at 3:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor

Pelléas et Mélisande
Monday, March 20 at 4:00pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor

EDUCATION
Opera for Educators: *Pelléas et Mélisande*
Saturday, March 4 from 8am-12pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor

The Cathedral Project: *Moses*
Saturday, March 11 from 1pm-4:30pm
Saturday, March 11 from 5pm-9:30pm
LOCATION: The Cathedral of Our Lady
of the Angels

OperaWise: *Pelléas et Mélisande*
Monday, March 20 from 6:15pm-10:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

Opera Prep: *Pelléas et Mélisande*
Wednesday, March 22 from 6:00pm-10:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

SEMINAR
Pelléas et Mélisande
Tuesday, March 7 at 7:00pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 5th Floor
SPEAKER: James Conlon

APRIL
Day Trip to San Diego Opera: *Tosca*
Sunday, April 2
LOCATION: San Diego Civic Theatre, San Diego
RSVP: Brita Kohlfuerst-Millard
(310) 877.6285 OR bmillard_99@yahoo.com

**MAY
CAST DINNERS**
Otello
Saturday, May 6 at 3:30pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion,
4th Floor

Otello
Monday, May 8 at 4:00pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion,
4th Floor

EDUCATION
Opera for Educators: *Otello*
Saturday, May 6 from 8:00am-Noon
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion,
4th Floor

Opera Prep: *Otello*
Wednesday, May 10 from 4:45pm-10:00pm
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

SEMINAR
Otello
Sunday, May 7 at Noon
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion,
5th Floor
SPEAKER: Michael Hackett

GATHERINGS
Shakespeare and Opera
Saturday, May 6 from 4:00pm-6:00pm
LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Monica
SPEAKER: TBD

SPECIAL EVENT
**Peter Hemmings Award Dinner
Honoring Robert Ronus and
Brita Kohlfürst-Millard**
Sunday, May 21 at 5:00pm
LOCATION: Jonathan Club



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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Maybe that striking eight-foot-tall vertical Opera League banner, blazing scarlet with the white sunburst insignia, drew your culture-culture's eye.

Either way, the next time you're stretching your legs outside during intermission, or if you're one of those folks who arrives early for their night at the opera, by all means pop on by the Opera League Membership table and bid us, "Buongiorno!"

If you're already a member, we can catch up, give you a sneak peek at some upcoming programs and events, including those that may not yet be formally publicized.

But if, by chance, you are not a member of the Opera League, or you're at the opera with one of the League-less, then you should definitely make that proverbial beeline for the red and white and collegial

all over. One of the two or three of the volunteers staffing the table—or, heck, maybe all of them—will gleefully share the benefits of League membership with you. And perhaps some dates for upcoming cast dinners and dress rehearsals.

Oh yeah, membership in the League means you get dibs on the exclusive dress rehearsal tickets to select productions.

And if you'd like to volunteer to help, say, the Membership Table? You'd be eligible for a special \$25 ticket to the performance for which you'd be staffing the table.

Regardless of your Opera League membership status, or lack thereof, we will never let you walk away without a copy of a certain handsome publication. We'll give you a hint: It starts with B and ends with R-A-V-O. 🌟

Have you ever noticed a certain table on the Music Center Plaza, steps from the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion's front doors? Staffed by volunteers, ready with a smile and a brochure to match that twinkle?

By JUDITH HYMAN and TOM LADY



[LEFT TO RIGHT] Judith Hyman, Cathy Foldvary and Gary Murphy