

ISSUE 65  
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# BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

## THROUGH THE OPEN DOORS

By GARY W. MURPHY

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As it celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2024, African Americans for LA Opera, the chapter of the Opera League dedicated to increasing awareness of opera while providing a community for African American opera lovers, is this year's Peter Hemmings Award honoree presented by the Opera League.

Creating a legacy—three generations of AALAO women! Co-founder Delores Kerr (RIGHT) with daughter Karen Kerr (LEFT) and granddaughter Jade James (TOP)

Photo by Steve Cohn



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[operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org)

# From the President



## Our Calendar Runneth Over

Dear Opera League Members and Friends:

2024 has landed, and the Opera League is primed for a year overflowing with operatic programming for members.

As we continue filling up our calendar with fun and educational events for your cultural enrichment, I'd like to offer a sneak-peek to whet your, and my, appetite:

- The annual **Peter Hemmings Award Dinner**, the League's annual flagship fundraising gala, takes place on **Saturday, March 2** at downtown L.A.'s California Club. This year we honor **African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO)**, a chapter of the Opera League, on their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as well as **Dr. W. Allan Edmiston**, the founder of Opera Docs, who will receive the Hemmings Volunteer Award.
- After the success of our debut **Opera League In Conversation** event on January 16, our next installment will feature a sit-down with LAO's Vice President of Artistic Planning, **Rupert Hemmings**, on **Wednesday, February 28**. Among other hot topics, we'll discuss LAO's 2024-25 season, which the company is announcing **Saturday, February 3**.
- On **Thursday, February 1**, our long-running member-favorite annual event series, **Backstage Magic**, returns with a glimpse behind the curtain of LAO's forthcoming double bill of **Highway 1, USA/The Dwarf**. LAO Technical Director, and longtime Backstage Magic favorite, **Jeff Kleeman**, will introduce us to the crew who make the onstage magic happen, as they prepare for the next chapter of LAO Music Director James Conlon's the *Recovered Voices* project.
- As *Recovered Voices* returns to LA Opera, Maestro James Conlon will be the keynote speaker at our seminar on **Wednesday, February 7**, ahead of the company premiere of **Highway 1, USA** by composer William Grant Still, "Dean of African-American Composers," and the revival of little known masterpiece, **The Dwarf**, by Austrian Jewish composer, Alexander Zemlinsky. With live musical accompaniment, you won't want to miss it!
- Two recitals in the **Opera League Family & Friends** series are on the calendar: our annual Black History Month recital on **Sunday, February 4** featuring **Louis Lohrseb** and **Erica Petrocelli** at the Ebell of Los Angeles, produced in collaboration with AALAO; and LAO Young Artist, mezzo-soprano **Sarah Saturnino** on **Thursday, May 23**.
- **Opera America's Conference & World Opera Forum** will take place in Los Angeles **June 3-8** alongside the annual **Opera Volunteers International** gathering. Both events offer no shortage of volunteer opportunities for passionate Leaguers. Mark that week on your calendars now and we'll have more information in the Spring issue of BRAVO.

These are just a few events where our members can gather with like-minded passionate opera lovers and volunteers.

I can't wait to see you there!

Gary W. Murphy  
**PRESIDENT & CEO**

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# THROUGH THE OPEN DOORS

CONTINUED FROM COVER

When the Music Center of Los Angeles opened its doors in December 1964, founder Dorothy Buffum "Buffy" Chandler wanted to ensure those doors were open to all Angelenos. Among her many allies was a young woman named Delores Kerr, a former fashion model, nurse and educator with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

In no time flat, Delores signed up to join Reach Out, the original volunteer Music Center support group, organized and led by Buffy Chandler.

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

Reach Out created a full slate of programming to entice a wide range of audiences including seminars, emerging young artist recitals, backstage tours, artist services and many activities which organizations such as the Opera League carry out to this day.

Fast-forward to 1981, when the Opera League of Los Angeles was born after a group of savvy, passionate opera lovers channeled and paired that passion with a determination to create a permanent home for world-class opera in Los Angeles, eventually leading to the League partnering with the Music Center to found LA Opera in 1986. Delores was there, among the first members of the fledgling League's board of directors.

She was also there in the autumn of 1994, when she and two of her friends, fellow opera lovers and extraordinary women in their own right—Eva Grant and Gwendolyn Wyatt—founded a new chapter of the Opera League called African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO). Its mission: Increase awareness of opera throughout Los Angeles County, and provide a community for African American opera lovers. Now under the leadership of Beverley Clarkson, AALAO strives to bring opera into the community while bringing the community to the Music Center to experience opera onstage at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, thereby fulfilling Delores' commitment to Mrs. Chandler.

As AALAO celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and with the steadfast support from Opera League co-founder and first

president, Alice Coulombe, AALAO continues to offer a variety of events, many presented at the historic Ebell of Los Angeles, including a fall recital, a history seminar with a recital during Black History Month and the annual Father's Day celebration.

During her time as part of the Opera League's leadership team, Alice Coulombe fostered a tradition of presenting music in private homes. The Kerr family, among others, continues to offer home recitals as a legacy-building tool to pass along the love of opera from one generation to the next. "Southern hospitality is part of our family tradition, including encouraging a feeling of inclusiveness," notes Delores. "We also do this to pass on the legacy of African Americans in opera and to help promote new talent. It's something that's really needed."

Delores' granddaughter, and current Opera League board director, Jade James, grew up in a music-filled house. "They would open their Hancock Park home—where I lived as well—for many events, meetings and most memorably, the recitals," Jade says. "Every June, they would host the AALAO Father's Day recital. When I was about four years old, they brought me to the living room stage to welcome everyone. That quickly became a tradition for me, and I would do it every year.

"I have to say that when soprano Angel Blue, [at the time an] LA Opera Young Artist, came to sing at our recital, she just grabbed my attention. Everything about her was magnificent, not just her performance but her entire presence was just so special."

As AALAO continues to evolve, and the next generation of members joins its ranks, the Opera League is honored, thrilled and proud to present it with this year's Peter Hemmings Award at our annual Hemmings Award Gala Dinner on Saturday, March 2.

Indeed, the Hemmings Award is celebrating a round-numbered birthday itself, as it was 20 years ago when the League established this annual event to recognize an individual or group who, over time, has made significant contributions to the development of opera in Los Angeles County. The League named the achievement after Peter Hemmings, LA Opera's original general director (1986-2000) who led LAO to global acclaim while establishing a strong foundation for the company's growth.



"These years of opera experiences have opened many doors in which we can travel," Delores says. "We are excited to be included.... with family, friends and community."

"I can't believe where the years have gone!" marvels AALAO President Beverley Clarkson. "To watch us grow and share with community this wonderful world of opera is just spectacular.... We will continue the journey of involving the community that we love in opera." 🌸

*If you have not yet done so, be sure to book your place at our March 2 Peter Hemmings Award Gala Dinner. Head over to [operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org) for more information and tickets. We can't wait to see you there!*

# OPERA DOC

## W. ALLAN EDMISTON, M.D.

**DR. EDMISTON WILL RECEIVE THE OPERA LEAGUE'S HEMMINGS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN VOLUNTEERING.** By DIANE EISENMAN



Back in 1998, Maestro Plácido Domingo, renowned Spanish tenor and former General Director of LA Opera, suffered an accident while performing onstage at LAO's flagship venue, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion: a painful toe injury that required immediate attention.

No doctor was identified onsite to tend to the wound. At that point in his career, Maestro Domingo had been accustomed to having an on-call doctor at other opera houses, namely the Met, San Francisco and several opera houses in Europe. While Los Angeles County does provide a team of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) to cover the four venues of downtown L.A.'s Music Center, which includes the Dorothy Chandler, no team or individual was on hand for the performers.

After that night, Maestro Domingo requested LAO catch up with the aforementioned venues and be sure that the next performer to suffer an injury mid-performance would be tended to straightaway. Suffice it to say his request was heard loud and clear.

Enter W. Allan Edmiston, M.D. By day, Dr. Edmiston was Chief of Cardiology at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. In his volunteer time, he was, and still is, a very active Opera League member and volunteer.

Indeed, on Saturday, March 2, at the Opera League's annual Peter Hemmings Award Gala Dinner, our flagship fundraising event, we are presenting Dr. Edmiston with the Hemmings Award for significant contributions to opera through volunteering.

At the time of Maestro Domingo's request, Dr. Edmiston was on the Opera League Board of Directors. When he heard what had happened with Domingo, he devised and pitched to the League board a new program called Opera Docs. Like every League program, Opera Docs would be all-volunteer.

Suffice it to say the board accepted his proposal. Opera Docs launched in 1999.

Once Opera Docs was live, Dr. Edmiston recruited other doctors whom he knew from his work at Huntington Memorial, medical professionals who, like him, were passionate about opera. To entice them into joining the ranks of the Opera Docs, he offered two complimentary seats for the doctor and his/her companion for those performances where the doctor's services would be on call. Satisfied with the number of doctors he'd recruited, he pieced together a rotating schedule so that no single doctor would have to attend two consecutive performances.

Scott Pollack, the Music Center's head of security, was designated liaison to communicate incidents to the Doc of the day during performances. The Doc checks in with Scott half an hour before the show to make sure everything is good, then takes a seat along the orchestra's side aisle. The Doc checks back with Scott at the end of the show to close the loop.

The emergency kit, kept with the stage manager during the performances, comes equipped with a blood pressure cuff, stethoscope, bandages, splints, tape, non-prescription drugs, an EpiPen and an inhaler. As a cardiologist, Dr Edmiston has a device that can check the heart rhythm. But as a rule of thumb, the Docs avoid prescribing medication, referring singers to their own doctors.

In 2000, the year after Opera Docs launched, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore was performing in LAO's production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*) when she tripped and injured her ankle. She was in severe pain, but the show, of course, must go on. After that night's designated Doc wrapped the mezzo's ankle to prevent swelling,

Ms. Larmore proceeded to complete the show. An X-ray the next day showed a fracture, so she was given a boot cast to wear offstage. But onstage, the Docs removed the boot and wrapped her ankle. Proceeding onto the stage, she leaned heavily on her leading men, among them all-star baritone Rod Gilfry who, at six feet three inches, provided support whenever possible. Remarkably, Jennifer Larmore did not miss a single performance.

Some singers need reassurance more than anything else. One very pregnant singer had kept her pregnancy secret from LAO until rehearsals. The Docs went on "delivery" alert. Fortunately, she made it through the production with nary a contraction.

Other performers' needs for reassurance have been due to fear of forgetting their lines or fear of passing a kidney stone mid-performance.

Dr. Edmiston points out that in addition to onstage mishaps—like the time a dancer accidentally whacked another dancer in the face with a projected arm, resulting in a concussion—accidents can happen offstage as well. He cites, as an example, an incident when a woman who'd imbibed a glass or two too much slipped and fell down the Dorothy Chandler's grand staircase.

If a true medical emergency happens, the EMTs are called in first, with Opera Docs providing backup support. Dr. Edmiston says

that while he's never had to administer CPR at an LA Opera performance, he did have to resort to it at the Met when an audience member sitting right in front of him slumped over in his seat during a performance of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* opera, *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*).

Today, the Opera Docs consist of a half-dozen medical professionals from Huntington Memorial: a cardiologist, a gastrointestinal specialist, a neurosurgeon, a cancer surgeon and two internists.

Dr. Edmiston serves as a consulting board member for the League and still heads up Opera Docs. If his name rings a bell, that must mean you've attended Opera League seminars, where Dr. Edmiston has served as host, facilitator and speaker since the 2004-05 season.

As the organizer of the Opera Docs, Dr. Edmiston stays in regular contact during the week with LAO's designated Doc liaison, Nicki Harper, Director of Artistic Operations to Rupert Hemmings, LAO's Vice President of Artistic Planning. Nicki has relayed singers' between-performance medical issues, such as a diabetic singer needing an insulin refill, or a singer presenting cold symptoms. If necessary, Dr. Edmiston will arrange appointments with a doctor's office, but that can be a challenge.

When the Mariinsky Ballet troupe from St. Petersburg was staying in L.A. for a couple of months, they all wanted to visit the dentist and requested the Opera Docs to arrange their appointments. Dr. Edmiston says that simply wasn't possible.

"We Docs leave singers to handle their own voice issues," Dr. Edmiston adds. "I avoid treating any throat complaints, since each singer should have their own doctor to call. Vocal cords are the most important part of their singing career, so treatment has to be carefully coordinated with their medical history."

Given how much of Dr. Edmiston's volunteering happens either backstage, in a darkened auditorium or between performances, it is high time for a signature acknowledgment of service like the Hemmings Award to shine a well-deserved spotlight on him. 🌟

**The Opera League's annual Hemmings gala takes place Saturday, March 2 at the California Club in downtown L.A. To RSVP, visit our website, [operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org).**

# MAESTRO ON THE DOUBLE

LA OPERA MUSIC DIRECTOR JAMES CONLON EXPANDS THE *RECOVERED VOICES* INITIATIVE WITH A UNIQUE DOUBLE BILL. By GARY W. MURPHY

Launched in 2007 by LA Opera's then recently arrived music director, Maestro James Conlon, the *Recovered Voices* initiative ensures the power of art triumphs over historical neglect and censorship.

Up to now, *Recovered Voices* has focused on music suppressed by the Nazis and/or created by composers who died in the Holocaust. For its 2023-2024 season, LA Opera has expanded the *Voices'* reach.

From February 24 to March 17, Maestro Conlon will conduct a double bill of Alexander Zemlinsky's *The Dwarf* and William Grant Still's *Highway 1, USA*.

Alexander Zemlinsky was an Austrian Jewish composer who escaped Nazi persecution by fleeing to America. Still was a mid-20th-century African American composer whose long-ignored works are attracting a long-overdue second look.

"My interest is in bringing back neglected music," Conlon says. "Particularly music where we know the composer was, to a greater or lesser extent, neglected because of political or racial prejudice. So, it is an extension of the same concept. Because of prejudice, this music is not as well-known as it deserves to be."

William Grant Still was a trailblazing artist often referred to as "the Dean of African-American Composers." Composed in the 1940s but unperformed for decades, *Highway 1, USA* portrays a hardworking couple (soprano Nicole Heaston and baritone Norman Garrett), determined to build a better life, who discover that their years of sacrifices have been misguided. The new production is staged by director Kaneza Schaal and production designer Christopher Myers, who made last season's impressive LA Opera debut of *Omar*.

*The Dwarf* is a gothic tale of one-sided love in a decadent Spanish court. Tenor Rodrick Dixon stars in the title role opposite audience favorites Erica Petrocelli, soprano, and Kristinn Sigmundsson, bass. Based on the Oscar Wilde short story, "The Birthday of the Infanta," Zemlinsky's lush and romantic *The Dwarf* was previously staged at LA Opera in 2008. Tony-winning director Darko Tresnjak conjures a royally opulent production, with costumes from fellow Tony Award winner Linda Cho. 🌟

**Opera League members won't want to miss our seminar on *The Dwarf* and *Highway 1, USA* featuring Maestro James Conlon as our featured speaker. Join us on Wednesday, February 7 at 6pm.**

**Head to [operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org) for more details and to buy tickets.**



Rodrick Dixon as *The Dwarf*, in a scene from LA Opera's 2008 production of *The Dwarf*.

# MY FIRST OPERA: FERNANDO SANCHEZ

By GARY W. MURPHY

**If you're an Opera League volunteer at our cast dinners, or at programs from LA Opera Connects, LAO's community engagement and education team, you may have spotted a young man who's been popping up at many such recent events.**

**Fernando Sanchez stands out amongst his peers for his passion, not only for the world of opera and classical music, but for deep commitment to service.**

As a senior wealth management associate at Aspiriant, Fernando supports managers and directors of the Exclusive Family Office group. He leads teams in the day-to-day execution of financial plan recommendations, and philanthropic and foundation management for client engagements.

A graduate of UC San Diego (UCSD) and UCLA, Fernando is a strong advocate for a client-first approach to his work and finds great joy in creative problem-solving as he helps his clients connect their wealth to their vision, values and goals through comprehensive financial planning.

**BRAVO: WE ARE ALWAYS HAPPY TO SEE YOUNG PEOPLE AT OPERA PERFORMANCES. WOULD I BE CORRECT IN ASSUMING THAT YOU BEGAN YOUR OPERA ADVENTURES WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT?**

**FERNANDO SANCHEZ:** Actually, I'm a fairly new aficionado of opera. My first opera was *On Gold Mountain*, which LA Opera presented [as part of their *Off Grand* series] at The Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens' Chinese Garden in May 2022.

**BRAVO: THAT SEEMS TO BE AN UNUSUAL CHOICE FOR A PERSON'S INTRODUCTION TO OPERA. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THAT PARTICULAR OPERA?**

**FS:** Several clients mentioned they were going to see *On Gold Mountain*, and they invited me and encouraged me to go with them. The opera was based on writer Lisa See's family history, particularly Fong See, her great-great grandfather, who emigrated to California and became a prominent figure in L.A.'s Chinatown after struggling with adversity, a story that resonated with me. Plus, the Chinese Garden was a special place for my clients.

There was one section of the opera that really impacted me. It was the moment where Fong See sang about regret, about how hard he was with himself, and with his family. It just got to me, and I was deeply moved. I knew right then that opera was going to be my thing. I didn't realize it at the time, but those clients basically changed my life by encouraging me to see the opera and introducing me to a wonderful art form that I now love.

**BRAVO: IT'S SUCH A SHORT SPAN OF TIME FROM THE BEGINNING OF YOUR OPERAGOING LIFE TO BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE OPERA LEAGUE. HOW DID YOU FIND US?**

**FS:** Soon after I attended *On Gold Mountain*, I bought tickets to Verdi's *Aida* [LAO's final mainstage production of the 2021-22 season] and was so impressed by the music, the production, the entire spectacle, that I knew that I had to dig deeper and learn as much as I could about opera. I wanted to be part of the opera world, and that's how I found out about the Opera League and just signed up and became a member.

**BRAVO: I BELIEVE YOU VOLUNTEERED WITH OUR EDUCATION TEAM, WHICH WORKS WITH AND SUPPORTS LA OPERA CONNECTS, LAO'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, CORRECT?**

**FS:** Yes, I'm very impressed with LA Opera Connects and its many different programs. Plus, the League's Opera Prep series is so beautifully designed for students. I was with the high school students who came to see *The Marriage of Figaro* [in February 2023]. I helped to shepherd them into the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, many to see their first opera, and then I sat with them. I was amazed at their reaction. They

were laughing and just enjoying the opera so much that *The Marriage of Figaro* is now my favorite opera. *The Marriage of Figaro's* story of forgiveness is so moving. The Countess Almaviva seems so evolved as she sings the beautiful aria "Dove sono" about how she longs for life's lost moments, yet understands and forgives her husband's transgressions.

I realized that opera has so much to teach us about moral values and humanity, ideas that people often don't want to deal with in their everyday lives. Opera really has the power to move us and teach us along the way.



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***"I realized that opera has so much to teach us about moral values and humanity, ideas that people often don't want to deal with in their everyday lives. Opera really has the power to move us and teaches us along the way."***

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**BRAVO: BEFORE YOU WENT TO UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO [UCSD], YOU GRADUATED FROM THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES' PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM [LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT], NAMELY VENICE HIGH SCHOOL. IS THAT WHERE YOU FIRST BECAME AWARE OF CLASSICAL MUSIC?**

**FS:** I've always loved music and have been a classical music lover since I was 14. At that time, I wanted to play rock and blues. But when I was at Venice High School, my teacher, Mr. Bernstein, loved Baroque music, so we listened to Bach, Vivaldi, Scarlatti, and he encouraged us to play classical guitar. He then introduced us to Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz and then jazz, and basically created a music history class for his students.

He took us to Walt Disney Concert Hall for the LA Philharmonic, and to Royce Hall [at UCLA] for jazz concerts, and all that live music really stuck with me. I then found [radio station] Classical KUSC and started to listen to it while in high school. Mr. Bernstein wasn't that into opera, but I found "Live from the Met" broadcasts on Saturday mornings [on KUSC]. I listened for a while and found it intriguing, but never thought to actually go and see it live.

**BRAVO: DO YOU SEE YOURSELF PERHAPS STEPPING INTO THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, AN OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEER ROLE ON OUR EDUCATION TEAM THAT WORKS WITH LA OPERA CONNECTS TO DELIVER OPERA TALKS AT VENUES AROUND L.A. COUNTY, AND VISIT YOUR VENICE HIGH SCHOOL ALMA MATER AND TALK TO THE STUDENTS ABOUT OPERA?**

**FS:** I hope so. I spoke with *Connects* Director, Andrea Fuentes, who promised to let me know when Venice High School students attend a performance, and I'll shepherd that group into the venue.

I think classical music and opera are such great art and very important to the development of students. The more students are exposed to theatre, dance, music, opera, the better the chance it will stay with them their entire lives. Certainly, it helped me become the person I am today.

**BRAVO: THE OPERA LEAGUE IS A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION. DO YOU FIND PERSONAL FULFILLMENT AS A VOLUNTEER?**

**FS:** I have a servant's heart and love to be of service to others, other communities, and to be helpful. I work in the world of finance and wealth management, and I see that as helping people find clarity with their finances, not so much with complex financial products, but more of a guide or a helper attuned to their needs.

That's how I feel about volunteering with the Opera League. In a short amount of time, I was able to immerse myself in opera, and the League has had a lot to do with that. The League has fueled my love of opera and helped with my own personal growth as well. I love being part of a community that loves and appreciates art and has welcomed me with such grace. 🌸

***For more of our conversation with Fernando Sanchez, please visit our website at [operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org).***

# YAPPING WITH A YAP:

## KATHLEEN O'MARA, SOPRANO VOICING HER CLAIM

By JUDITH HYMAN



**What does it suggest when an incoming first-year LA Opera Young Artist (YAP), within a few months of beginning her immersive LA Opera (LAO) experience, is tapped to play a prominent role in the second opera of the 2023-24 season, Rossini's comedic 1816 masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*?**

Imaan Jahali, Entertainment and Lifestyle editor for *LAexcites*, raved that the up-and-coming soprano and Juilliard alumna, Kathleen O'Mara, "who plays Berta, Bartolo's highly observant and insightful housekeeper, stunningly stakes her claim as a potential headlining soprano to be reckoned with in the years to come."

LA Opera's Young Artist Program and its keen-eyed leadership have once again chosen another rapidly ascendant star. If you missed Kathleen in *Barber*, you'll have another chance to be wowed in *The Dwarf*, the forthcoming one-act opera from Austrian composer Alexander Zemlinsky.

Based on the Oscar Wilde short story "The Birthday of the Infanta," *The Dwarf* is being presented in late February and early March as one half of a double bill with William Grant Still's *Highway 1, USA*. Kathleen will sing First Maid in a trio.

Growing up in the Philadelphia area, Kathleen discovered her voice while participating in the Pennsylvania Girlchoir, a program of Commonwealth Youthchoir, when she was about 13 years old. It was then she realized how much she loved singing, and singing with others. "I thought, 'This is just amazing!'" Not long after came her first exposure to opera, when she sang as part of the choir for Maurice Ravel's one-act fantasy, *L'enfant et les sortilèges (The Child and the Spells)*. She fell in love with the art form.

After that?

"I gained as much musical experience as I possibly could," she says.

In addition to singing with choirs, Kathleen took piano and clarinet lessons, and she began taking private voice lessons. "My voice teacher told me, 'I think you really have some talent here. You should consider going on to college for music performance.' She encouraged me to consider voice as a career... Many other people encouraged me to aim for a performance degree."

Eventually, Kathleen considered becoming a music teacher. Following a trip to Westminster Choir College as part of a girls' choir, she knew that was the place to audition. She made the cut.

During her first year of college, she met voice teacher Laura Brooks Rice. "I studied there for four years covering musical theory, acting lessons, languages and building my technical foundation," Kathleen says. "As an undergrad, I focused on my vocal technique, and when I was ready to get my master's degree, I could focus more on performance and how to be a good musician. So, as you can see, I gained different tools from different

sources. All the while, I was also learning a lot from Miss Rice."

In 2018, after finishing college, Kathleen moved across the country to gain more experience at Music Academy of the West, a summer classical music training program in the Santa Barbara suburb of Montecito. At summer's end, Kathleen jetted back to the Big Apple to begin even more rigorous training at Juilliard.

"They [my whole family] were all so thrilled and so very excited when I got into Juilliard. That was the first time my family recognized, 'Wow, this is serious!' When I went to Juilliard, it kicked the level up another notch. I was working with so many talented musicians. I was learning so much, with so much exposure to a lot more performance experience. Juilliard opened many doors to me: opera, recitals..."

During the pandemic, Kathleen stayed in New York after finishing Juilliard, but it wasn't long before she moved west yet again, this time permanently. She connected with LA Opera's then Young Artist head coach, Nino Sanikidze, who had previously connected with Kathleen at Juilliard as an alumna. To keep her bills paid while she auditioned, Kathleen worked as a nanny. An audition for Palm Beach Opera led to an apprenticeship with renowned voice teacher, Dr. Stephen King. Nino invited Kathleen to audition for LAO's Young Artist Program. This is her first season as a YAP.

In her downtime, Kathleen loves art projects, reading and cooking. She relishes the outdoors with its many hiking trails.

As for dream roles? Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Mimi in *La bohème* and pretty much anything from Strauss or the German repertoire.

Kathleen is grateful to be a YAP, and appreciative of LAO's care for each artist. "I learned so much working with the cast in *Barber of Seville*," she says. "I can't wait for more opportunities like that." 🌸

# FALLEN WOMAN OF THE HISPANOSPHERE

AS *LA TRAVIATA* RETURNS TO LA OPERA IN A NEW PRODUCTION, WE GO ON A GRAN AVENTURA ACROSS THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD TO HIGHLIGHT THE CITIES, VENUES AND VOICES WHO HAVE BROUGHT VERDI'S MASTERPIECE TO LIFE FOR HISPANIC AUDIENCES. By SUSANA HERNÁNDEZ ARAICO

Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece, *La Traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*), based on the novel and subsequent play, *La dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camélias*), both by Alexander Dumas fils (son of *The Three Musketeers* Dumas), was roundly booed at its March 1853 premiere at Venice's Teatro La Fenice, due mainly to the miscast soprano. Revised and recast, the following year it proved a raving success and, when it traveled beyond Italy, its first stop was Spain. Thus began the unending itinerary of Verdi's opera through major theaters in the Spanish-speaking world, with famous international artists as well as renowned Hispanic singers. A brief overview of *La Traviata* productions throughout such national venues, and of some performances by Hispanic artists also applauded on global stages, highlights this opera's historical acclaim within the Spanish-speaking world.

In 1855, *La Traviata* premiered at Madrid's Teatro Real on February 1, and at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu on October 25. From there it crossed the Atlantic to a plethora of theaters in the Spanish-speaking Americas. In Mexico City, *La Traviata* was first staged on December 23, 1856 at the Teatro Nacional. At Buenos Aires's old, no longer-extant Teatro Colón, the first *La Traviata* "sang" in 1857. At the present-day Colón, it was first performed in 1910, followed by various productions through 35 seasons in the twentieth century. *La Traviata* premiered at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes on October 11, 1936. Giuseppe di Stefano performed there in the role of Alfredo in 1948, and Maria Callas sang her first recorded Violetta in 1951.

At Monterrey, Mexico's Teatro María Teresa Montoya in 1961, Plácido Domingo made his operatic debut in a leading role as Alfredo, and in 1973 the Maestro debuted as opera conductor with *La Traviata* at the New York City Opera. One of the most acclaimed Hispanic tenors, his fame as Alfredo spread beyond global operatic audiences through Franco Zeffirelli's 1983 award-winning film adaptation.

In Spain, at Seville's Expo '92, the then new Teatro de la Maestranza featured the La Scala production of *La Traviata*. A few years

later, the *Fallen Woman* heralded the new millennium with Rolando Villazón's 2000 debut in Trieste in the role of Alfredo, with an encore soon after at the Paris Opéra Bastille.

One of the first productions of *La Traviata* in the 21st century took place at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu in 2002. A performance at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes followed in 2005. That August, at the Salzburg Festival, Villazón was catapulted to world renown with his Alfredo reprise, opposite Anna Netrebko. LA Opera regulars may recall LAO's lavish 2006 production wherein he starred opposite the sublime Renee Fleming.

Another Mexican tenor, Ramón Vargas, made history in 2006 at La Scala as Alfredo, while in Chile, Santiago's Teatro Municipal staged *La Traviata* in '09 before it hopped borders northward to Colombia where it opened the 2010 opera season at Bogota's Teatro de Bellas Artes. And two years later, a minimalist-designed production featuring tenor Arturo Chacón Cruz premiered in March at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes.

The bicentennial of Verdi's birth in 2013 was commemorated in Lima, Peru with a Gala *Todo Verdi* that included *La Traviata*. Among other celebrations that year throughout Spain, it was staged in October at the Teatro Campoamor in Oviedo. The following February saw everyone's favorite *Fallen Woman* gracing the proscenium at Las

Palmas' Teatro Pérez Galdós and, opening the season in October, at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu. There the encore staging in July 2015 featured the renowned lyric soprano and Hispanics for LA Opera Domingo Award winner, Ailyn Pérez.

Simultaneous with that Barcelona season, *La Traviata* opened LA Opera's 2014-15 season with Arturo Chacón-Cruz as Alfredo and Maestro Domingo reprising the baritone role of Georgio Germont that he had earlier debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Chacón-Cruz also sang in 2015 at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes. April and May of that year brought *La Traviata* to Madrid's Teatro Real, and in February 2017, Valencia's Palau de les Arts' production starred Chacón-Cruz in the role of Alfredo, as well as Maestro Domingo, making his Spain debut in the baritone role of Alfredo's father.

Among the most popular and widely performed operas today, *La Traviata* has resounded in theaters across the Spanish-speaking world and beyond, with legendary Hispanic voices like Lucrezia Bori, Montserrat Caballé, Alfredo Kraus, Victoria de los Ángeles, Pilar Lorengar and José Carreras. Various recordings, DVDs and YouTube videos have preserved their performances as well as those by artists winning adulation onstage today.

To all and to Verdi, a toast of adulation: "Libiamo ne' lieti calici!" 🌸



A scene from Shawna Lucey's production of *La Traviata*, pictured in a performance at San Francisco Opera.

Photo by Cory Weaver

# SWIMMING THE SILKEN SEAS

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
PUPPET MASTER  
BASIL TWIST By TOM LADY



## Giants! Demons! Great suns!

This April, LA Opera will mount a production of *Book of Mountains and Seas* by Chinese composer-librettist Huang Ruo at the Broad Stage in Santa Monica. Part of LAO's *Off Grand* series, the 75-minute work of vocal-theater is inspired by an ancient Chinese compilation of prehistoric creation myths.

After its world premiere at the Royal Danish Opera House in Copenhagen in November 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* raved: "*Book of Mountains and Seas* is an exquisite masterpiece of suggestion, an immersive tapestry of sound and image that weaves itself into your consciousness and makes its point about the interdependence of humans and their planet without ever saying it outright."

A large part, figuratively and literally, of that "immersive tapestry" comes courtesy of the fantastical beings brought to life through the masterful puppetry of the show's director-production designer, Basil Twist.

Born and raised in San Francisco, the only American to graduate from the prestigious École Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette in France, Basil Twist is a third-generation puppeteer who has racked up awards and recognition in the worlds of theater and opera.

The MacArthur Genius's decades of credits include the award-winning *The Araneidae Show*, spotlighted by the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppetry, and the groundbreaking, multiple award-winning *Symphonie Fantastique*, credited by critics for "transforming American perceptions of puppetry from kids' stuff to high art." And when he arrives at LAO this April, Basil will have come from London where he adapted for the stage *My Neighbor Totoro*, the 1988 Japanese anime masterpiece from Hayao Miyazaki.

Before he got too tangled up in *Book of Mountains'* wonderful world of puppets, Basil sat down with BRAVO for a conversation about his life, work and why silk is a puppeteer's best friend.

**THE NAME JIM HENSON STANDS OUT AFTER JUST A CURSORY GLANCE AT YOUR CREDITS, WHETHER IT'S THE JIM HENSON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF PUPPETRY, OR THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION. WOULD IT BE SAFE TO SAY JIM HENSON'S WORK HAD AN IMPACT ON YOU?**

That would be an understatement! I am of the Sesame Street generation.

I grew up watching all things Jim Henson: *Sesame Street*, *The Muppet Show*, *The Dark Crystal*, *Fraggle Rock*...

The Jim Henson Foundation supports new puppet theater works. It has supported my work, funded my work and has supported a lot of puppetry around the country. I've been engaged with the foundation as an artist as well as a presenter because I run a puppetry foundation in New York.

I also have a relationship with the Jim Henson Company and have worked with them on a few productions.

## AN OPERATIC PUPPETRY QUIZ NO STRINGS ATTACHED

**This issue's interview with Basil Twist got our thoughts cavorting like marionettes with the question of which puppets have dangled over the LA Opera stage. Check out the six photos to the right and, for each one, see if you can remember (or guess!) which opera is pulling the strings.**

1. *Spoiler alert: the baboon doesn't fare well in this sci-fi opera from 2008.*
2. *Verdi gets spooky in this very grand show from 2018.*
3. *This bride (Denyce Graves, in a 2002 staging) is definitely not destined for wedded bliss.*
4. *This opera from 2018 follows a revolutionary real-life moral philosopher.*
5. *From 2004, some castaways offer comic relief.*
6. *In 2006, we heard the monster's side of the story.*

Answers for An Operatic Puppetry Quiz: No Strings Attached at the bottom of page 14

**AS YOU ARE A PRODUCTION DESIGNER AS WELL AS A MASTER PUPPETER, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE SALIENT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A SET DESIGNED TO BE PUPPET FRIENDLY VERSUS A SET FOR A PUPPET-FREE PRODUCTION?**

My definition of puppetry is expansive. Puppetry is performative, it's sculptural, it's design and performance combined.

Having puppeteers brings a host of questions: Are they hidden? Seen? Above stage? Below? What are they wearing?

Every puppet show is different, and there are different puppetry techniques, so a puppet-friendly production depends on the nature of the production.

For example, if a show uses puppets with strings, called marionettes, I need to design the bridge, also called the catwalk, where the puppeteers can pull the strings, and designing that can be part of the puppet-friendly design. Other shows require shadow puppeteers, and that means figuring out the lighting.

With *Book of Mountains and Seas*, I'm creating the whole world, and I have to figure out the relationship between the singers and the visuals, who's animating the visuals, are the puppet costumes singer friendly, can the singers sing and be understood, get in and out of the costumes easily enough.

This is why puppetry is the ultimate multi-disciplinary art form.

**BOOK OF MOUNTAINS AND SEAS MARKS THE 12<sup>TH</sup> COLLABORATION BETWEEN LA OPERA AND THE FUTURE-DRIVING "AGENT OF CHANGE," BETH MORRISON PROJECTS (BMP). WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE SECRET SAUCE THAT YOU AND BMP BRING TOWARD "EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF WHAT AN OPERA COMPANY IS, AND WHO IT'S FOR," TO QUOTE LA OPERA'S MISSION STATEMENT FOR ITS OFF GRAND SERIES, OF WHICH BOOK OF MOUNTAINS AND SEAS IS PART?**

First, keep in mind that [composer-librettist] Huang Ruo conceived of and composed *Book of Mountains* for the twelve voices that make up *Ars Nova*, a vocal ensemble from Copenhagen. When I got involved, I was only working with Huang and the dozen singers.

Soon, however, Beth got involved through BMP. I know Beth from her work with PROTOTYPE, an experimental arts festival in New York. PROTOTYPE partners with the theater I work with, so I've known Beth and BMP for years.

BMP was a natural part of the process because they have a knack for pulling off projects in new and untried ways. *Book of Mountains* is more of a choral piece than a traditional opera, centered on Huang Ruo's world, with the music as the "performer" while the visuals accompany and compliment it. I had to figure that out. How are we doing it?

When it started touring the country, we knew it would be presented in different types of venues. One's a box theater, another was a full-on concert hall.

This means that from the get-go, *Book of Mountains* has to work outside the traditional box in a whole variety of spaces. LA Opera is staging it at the Broad in Santa Monica. I did a show at the Broad when it first opened [in 2008], it was the Igor Stravinsky ballet, *Petrushka*. So I know the Broad and that it's a gorgeous hall and a beautiful space. But it's not traditional at all, it's not a black box.

**WITH YOUR PASSION FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING AND EDUCATION, HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT MENTORING ASPIRING PUPPETEERS?**

Puppetry comes with so many different forms, different ways to do it, with so much variety. When I teach, the students will already have their own view of how they want to execute puppetry, and I meet them where they live and help them with where they're already heading.

I like using silk to teach puppetry. You can take a piece of silk and move it, put it over a fan to make it move, for example. It looks alive, like a ghost or a jellyfish, much more than a wooden marionette that is carved to look like a person.

That informs what and how I teach. Look at how we see spirit in things, where you can see the life in something, that everything has a life to it. That is a very Japanese principal, and a primitive, animist principal, where things have soul and life in them, and you coax that out of something. Whether that's Kermit the Frog or a piece of silk, that's the phenomenon. That's puppetry. 🌀



## IN THE PIT

# DMITRI BOVAIRD, VIOLA MECHANIC IN THE MIDDLE

By DIANE EISENMAN

**Music was the center of life for the Bovaird family. Dmitri's father was a professional flutist, his mother, a violinist. Accordingly, his family mingled in prominent music circles. Yet all the while Dmitri dreamed of growing up to be an auto mechanic, fixing things with his hands, if not making music with them.**

Born in Santa Barbara, raised in the San Fernando Valley's Van Nuys neighborhood, Dmitri began his formal education at Highland Hall, a Waldorf school a few miles away in Northridge that encourages artistic creativity in all areas of the curriculum. It was there Dmitri took up violin, as all students do in grade three, and began his musical endeavors.

When his parents transferred him closer to home to the public schools in Van Nuys, part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), those schools fortunately had strong music programs in which the fourth grader could keep playing.

By junior high, Dmitri and other talented friends traveled every Saturday to the Young Artist Program at CalArts in Santa Clarita.

It was around this time when one of Dmitri's instructors encouraged him to switch from violin to viola.

Being a Cal Arts Young Artist helped Dmitri land no shortage of viola gigs: at parks, churches, orchestras, even though he took no other formal instruction at the time. His viola continued heating up in high school, where Dmitri spent his summers at Boston University's Tanglewood Institute Young Artist Program. His last summer as a high schooler saw Dmitri embark on a four-week European tour through Spain and Germany with the Los Angeles Camerata, a collective that "strives to tell the stories of women and others silenced throughout history."

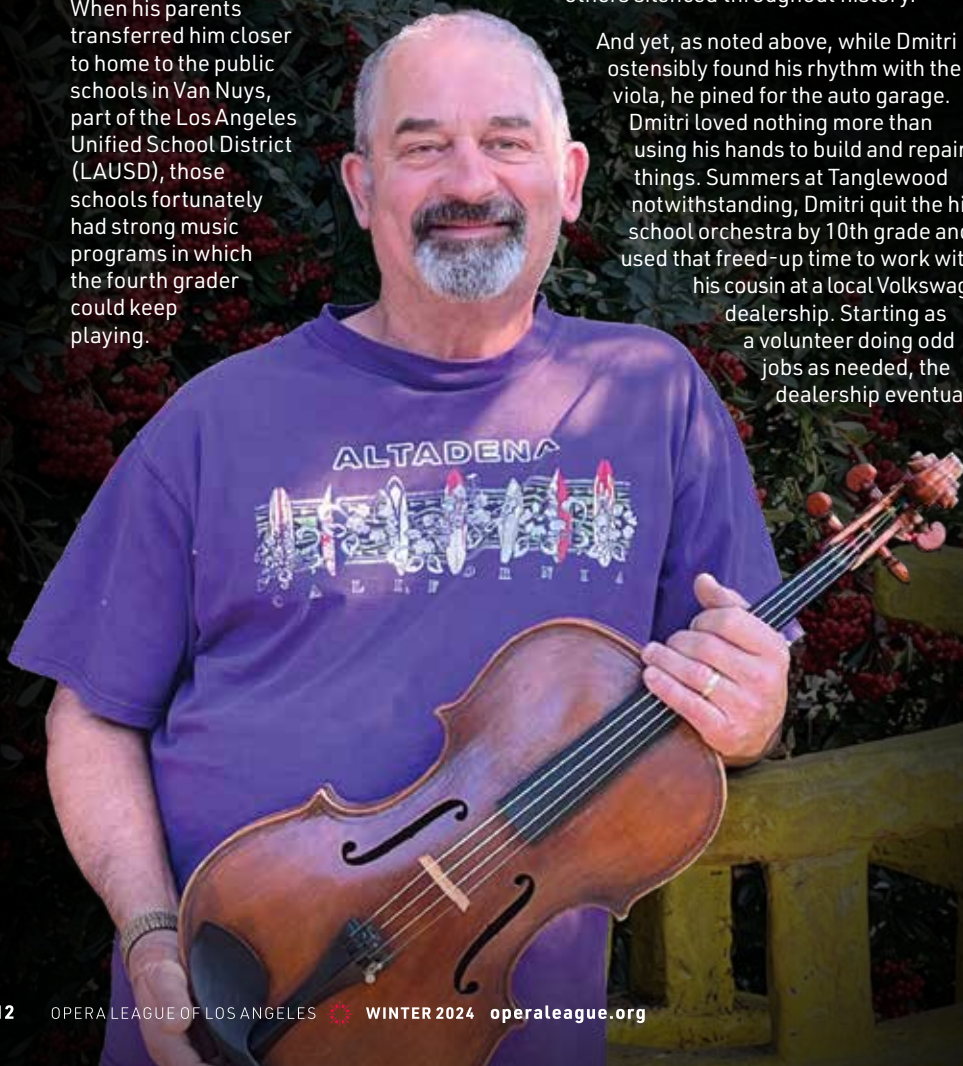
And yet, as noted above, while Dmitri ostensibly found his rhythm with the viola, he pined for the auto garage. Dmitri loved nothing more than using his hands to build and repair things. Summers at Tanglewood notwithstanding, Dmitri quit the high school orchestra by 10th grade and used that freed-up time to work with his cousin at a local Volkswagen dealership. Starting as a volunteer doing odd jobs as needed, the dealership eventually

took him on as part-time mechanic. Dmitri eventually "graduated" to electronic diagnosis, a job he loved and in which he thrived through the rest of high school and all of college.

Dmitri may have quit the high school orchestra, but he never quit the viola. As an undergrad at Cal State Northridge (CSUN), Dmitri kept playing and touring when he wasn't in the shop. It was during his second tour when he met and befriended professional mezzo-soprano and voice teacher Nina Hinson. Recognizing the talent in her midst, Hinson insisted Dmitri get serious about that viola. More than that, Dmitri left home to live with his "second mom" and her husband for the next 20 years, during which time she guided his education and early career. By the time he graduated CSUN, Dmitri decided to pick the viola over the toolbox.

Dmitri's viola breakthrough happened at the University of Southern California (USC), where he auditioned for viola professor Donald McInnes. Professor McInnes took Dmitri on as a private student and guided him into rebuilding his technique from the ground up. Dmitri says Professor McInnes inspired him so much, he practiced his viola, with his brand-new technique, six hours a day. "I was taught to attend to where the bow touches the string," Dmitri says. "I get an adrenaline rush for superfast processing and motor control. It is like car racing. In addition, he [Professor McInnes] encouraged my professional gigs by connecting me with the L.A. [film and television] studios. And I was offered a position with the Pacific Symphony in Orange County."

What Dmitri loves most about the viola is its middle position in the string harmonies. While the violins carry the beautiful melodies, and the cellos supply the bass line, the violas produce that "inner voice" to set the mood for the piece. "We [the violists] add color to the sound," Dmitri explains. "We are the inner voice, sitting in the middle of things, part of the whole soundscape. I don't hear my part in isolation. I hear the harmony, and that is how I perceive what I am doing. My part alone is very unsatisfying, but as part of the whole, violas create the third of a chord, making it major or minor, or all other possibilities."



After 12 years with Pacific Symphony, Dmitri landed his first gig with the LA Opera Orchestra for the world premiere of *Fantastic Mr. Fox* from composer Tobias Picker, adapted from the 1970 children's novel by Roald Dahl. This was the fall of 1998, in LAO's early days—1998-99 was its 13th season—when the LAO Orchestra was a pick-up orchestra, so called because musicians were hired on a temporary basis, or even for just one performance.

After a year of “picking up” with LAO, Dmitri was offered his letter of tenure, and has been with them ever since.

Dmitri says that playing in LAO's pit opened a whole new soundscape to him. Strauss operas, for example, open with lines “most challenging and rewarding,” Dmitri says. Then you have Wagner. “Beautiful and challenging as Wagner is, his music is very often so over-orchestrated that no one notices if you drop out.” Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, a recurring LAO all-ages favorite, is “technically incredibly demanding.”

“The hardest challenge in any music, really, is to play the simplest of accompaniments beautifully,” Dmitri explains. “The most unrewarding experience in opera is to rehearse without the singers, because then the whole of the vertical sound is missing, and we [the violists] are no longer in the middle.”

Outside of LAO, Dmitri plays with the Mt. Lowe Chamber Players, based in Altadena where he lives, as well as the Long Beach Symphony, the Pasadena Symphony and the Los Angeles Master Chorale. Married going on 24 years, his cellist wife freelances and teaches.

As for his passions when he's not in the pit? Based on his background, you can probably guess. “I like fixing cars and tractors, along with building and creating things. We go, on occasion, to my wife's family farm in Sacramento, where I enjoy fixing broken farm equipment and making things. Back home, I enjoyed building a chicken chalet [coop] for our nine chickens.”

In the meantime, Dmitri is enjoying LAO's 2023-24 season, especially the new productions for their ability to help LAO expand its reach. “It is important to find ways to get new audiences to music performances,” he stresses. “We all have to figure out how to make that happen. Making new productions like *Frida and Diego*, *Book of Mountains and Seas* and *Highway 1, USA* [part of the double-bill with *The Dwarf*] are good examples. We need to produce more operas current with the times that the younger generation can actively relate to in their daily lives.” 🌟

# A BUS TO ANOTHER WORLD

“My brother, now retired from teaching, still says the trip to the Music Center [of Los Angeles] for his second-grade class was the most wonderful field trip he experienced in his decades of teaching,” says Laurel Howat, Opera League President Emeritus and longtime volunteer on the Opera League's Education team. “He said it could not have happened if the Opera League Bus Fund had not paid for the buses.”

The Opera League Bus Fund, a key tool in introducing the youth of Los Angeles County to their first fully-immersive cultural experience, has been rechristened the Brita Kohlfürst-Millard Bus Fund, in honor of veteran Opera League volunteer Brita Kohlfürst-Millard, winner of last year's inaugural Hemmings Volunteer Award for her decades of superlative volunteerism for both the League as well as LA Opera.

While we are sad to see Brita retire, as she relocates back to her native Austria to be closer to her two children, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, we are thrilled to honor her legacy of valuable and cherished volunteerism by naming one of our most valuable and cherished Education initiatives after her.

The League's Education team and its army of volunteers works in lock-step with LA Opera *Connects*, the team at LA Opera that oversees the opera company's community engagement and education programs. Every opera season sees the *Connects* team roll out a robust slate of programming that caters to students from pre-K to college and their educators. Many of these programs take place at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, LA Opera's flagship venue at downtown L.A.'s Music Center. Given the vast sprawl of L.A. County, many schools do not have the means of transporting their kids and teachers downtown.

That's where their, and your, friendly neighborhood Opera League swoops in to give them a lift.

“When school districts started tightening their belts, most of them eliminated funding buses to transport students to the Dorothy Chandler,” says veteran volunteer, Bill Green. “The Bus Fund makes it possible for thousands of young students to experience live opera [each year].

## THE INVALUABLE OPERA LEAGUE BUS FUND IS RENAMED IN HONOR OF ONE OF THE LEAGUE'S MOST INVALUABLE VOLUNTEERS.

By TOM LADY

“It is a thrill to watch the buses roll in, and the smiles on the faces of the students as they enter the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion for probably the first time,” he adds.

The Opera League's Education team and the fine folks at LAO *Connects*

all agree that so much of LAO's educational programming would simply not be possible without the Bus Fund.

“In an area as expansive and expensive as Los Angeles, transportation downtown is an access barrier that we address every year at LA Opera,” says Tehvon Fowler-Chapman, Vice President of LA Opera *Connects*. “The Opera League Bus Fund has aided us in breaking down that barrier, allowing *Connects* to provide schools with transportation to dress rehearsals, performances and other programs downtown. Thanks to the Opera League, we can fill a crucial needs gap for teachers and schools that want operatic experiences for their students without the buses or drivers to get them there.”

“Every child should have an opportunity to enjoy the opera,” says Larry Verdugo, longtime head of the League's Education team. “Attending one of LA Opera's elementary student matinees or dress rehearsals is always a good time. It provides these boys and girls with the chance to visit the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, an atmosphere many have never had the chance to experience. The Opera League's commitment to cover the costs of bus trips to the Music Center is one of the most valuable programs we have.”

“The Bus Fund allows children to be transported to another world,” says Education volunteer Tanya Len. “The world of music and fantasy and creativity. One bus probably brings a handful of future opera lovers, but hundreds of them will fill the opera theaters of the future: future musicians, stage directors and, possibly, even one famous maestro.” 🌟



To contribute to the Brita Kohlfürst-Millard Bus Fund, visit [operaleague.org/donate](https://operaleague.org/donate).

# THE MAGIC AND THE SYNERGY

By  
TOM LADY

## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EBELL OF LOS ANGELES' PROGRAMMING DIRECTOR, MEREDYTH DEIGHTON

### Call 2024 the triple-milestone year.

First, as noted in this issue's cover story, this year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO), a chapter of the Opera League founded by a cadre of extraordinary women.

Second, while we're talking birthdays, let's blow out 130 candles for the Ebell of Los Angeles. Founded in 1894 by women, for women, the Ebell is an educational and philanthropic organization that seeks to inspire women and build community through arts, culture, education and volunteerism.

And finally, let's raise a goblet to the admittedly more modest, yet no less impactful, two years of AALAO programming at the Ebell. With their similar missions, their shared dedication to education and volunteerism and their communities of strong, passionate women leaders, the Ebell is a perfect fit for AALAO.

So how did the AALAO-Ebell partnership start?

"It was born pretty organically because of COVID," says Meredyth Deighton who, as the Ebell's director of Membership and Programming, has become a League partner in recital programming. "At the time, the Ebell was starting to do partnership events, and AALAO was struggling to put on events at their usual private residences, and they contacted us about using our space, becoming one of our first partners. And as it happens, most of the ladies who make up the AALAO leadership are themselves longtime Ebell members and volunteers."

The Ebell takes special, well-deserved pride in providing safe spaces for women to amplify their voices, create a community and connect across different ages and demographics. A self-described "music theater fan," Meredyth says her job is to

make sure those connections translate into programs for the public to enjoy. Most of these programs, including the AALAO recitals, are hatched under the auspices of the Ebell's Programs and Events Committee, one of the Ebell's 18 committees that are comprised of staff, volunteers and members. "Before the new season starts, the Programs and Events Committee bats around ideas for what we want to do in the coming year," Meredyth explains.

Meredyth's skills on the operational side of performance arts are matched by her passion for the medium. "My love of production runs deep," the North Miami native explains. "I would say it all started when my mom took me to see *Hair* when I was in third grade." By the time she enrolled in Indiana University, the theater major knew a concentration in stage management would be the perfect fit.

A stage management internship at South Coast Rep brought her out to the West Coast, where she would eventually stay and start her new life.

Meredyth relishes her position at the Ebell for how it lets her witness what she calls the "magic and synergy" happen in putting programs together," she says. "If it's a musical program, like with AALAO, I get to be in the room for rehearsals. It's like getting your own private concert.... It's also magical in a different sort of way when I meet people who are new to L.A. Many of our members are new arrivals. They come here having lost their community. It's gratifying to help people get that back."

When I ask her about the types of plays she prefers, she beams: "I see everything! I'm the person in everybody's life who wants to expose everyone's families to theater. I'm the person who puts together groups of twenty to go out to the theater. I tell everyone that we're all going to see this!"



This begs the question: Does Meredyth attend opera? "I'm playing big-time opera catch-up," she says. "The Opera League has exposed me to many different operas over the years. And I get to see the opera performances in the Ebell's Sun Room on the third floor, a space where I can feel like I'm part of it. I feel like I'm seeing it in a way that not everyone gets to see it, which is magical."

The bonus, as always, is meeting and befriending people like you: eager Leaguers with a passion for the arts and volunteerism.

"Meredyth is just a fabulous person to work with," gushes AALAO President Beverley Clarkson, a longtime Ebell member who has sung on the Ebell choir for over 15 years. "She is on target with every aspect of our work at the Ebell. And she is kind, spirited and always interested. Meredyth makes our recitals a pure pleasure."

"Meredyth is a gift for the Ebell," raves Mary H. Lewis, AALAO board member who has been an Ebell member since 2015. "My family often celebrates special holidays at the Ebell. And many of my retired friends attend the lunches and brunches. Meredyth makes everyone feel special. And as our liaison for AALAO events, we know our wishes be taken care of."

"The Ebell has been and always will be a place where people meet," Meredyth says. "That's why our campus is built like a college campus, to facilitate meeting and education, where women especially can meet and be educated and tell their stories, while helping other communities and bringing people in." 🌸

ANSWERS FOR AN OPERATIC PUPPETRY QUIZ: NO STRINGS ATTACHED ON PAGE 11: 1. *The Fly* by Howard Shore 2. *Don Carlo* by Giuseppe Verdi, 3. *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bela Bartok, 4. *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass, 5. *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss, 6. *Grendel* by Elliot Goldenthal

# OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## WINTER AND SPRING 2024

The most up-to-date details on Opera League events can always be found on the League website, [operaleague.org](http://operaleague.org), and are communicated to League members via email and our social media channels on Facebook and Instagram.

### FEBRUARY

#### GATHERINGS

**Recovered Voices Double Bill: Highway 1, USA and The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)**

**Sunday, February 11 at 10:00am**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in Beverly Hills  
SPEAKER: Steve Moore  
SPONSOR: Beverly Hills Gathering Group  
HOST: Ruth Bachofner

**Recovered Voices Double Bill: Highway 1, USA and The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)**

**Monday, February 12 at 7:00pm**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in the San Gabriel Valley  
SPEAKER: Steve Moore  
SPONSOR: San Gabriel Valley Gathering Group  
HOST: Michael Sholer

**Recovered Voices Double Bill: Highway 1, USA and The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)**

**Monday, February 19 at 7:00pm**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Clarita  
SPEAKER: Steve Moore  
SPONSOR: Santa Clarita Gathering Group  
HOST: Kimberlyn Jones

**From Highway 1, USA in the 20th Century to Opera in the 21st Century and Beyond**

**Tuesday, February 20 at 7:00pm**  
LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)  
SPEAKER: Kevin Batton  
HOST: Michael Sholer, San Gabriel Valley Gathering Group

#### SPECIAL EVENTS

**Backstage Magic with Jeff Kleeman & The Backstage Crew**

**Thursday, February 1 at 4:00pm**  
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Recital in Partnership with African Americans for LA Opera**

**Sunday, February 4 at Noon**  
LOCATION: Ebell of Los Angeles, 743 S Lucerne Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90005

**Opera League Night at Pacific Opera Project: Die Fledermaus**

**Saturday, February 17 at 6:30pm**  
LOCATION: Thorne Hall at Occidental College

**Opera League Afternoon at Pacific Opera Project: Die Fledermaus**

**Sunday, February 18 at 2:30pm**  
LOCATION: Thorne Hall at Occidental College

**Opera League In Conversation: With Rupert Hemmings**

**Wednesday, February 28 at 6:00pm**  
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

#### SEMINAR

**The Dwarf, with Maestro James Conlon**  
**Wednesday, February 7 at 7:00pm**  
(6:00pm RECEPTION)

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 5th Floor

#### VOLUNTEER EVENTS

**Opera Wise: The Dwarf/Highway 1, USA**  
**Tuesday, February 20 at 6:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Opera Prep: The Dwarf/Highway 1, USA**  
**Thursday, February 22 at 6:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### MARCH

#### GATHERINGS

**La Traviata**

**Sunday, March 3 at 10:00am**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in Beverly Hills  
SPEAKER: Mary Johnston  
SPONSOR: Beverly Hills Gathering Group  
HOST: Ruth Bachofner

**La Traviata**

**Monday, March 11 at 7:00pm**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in the San Gabriel Valley  
SPEAKER: Ray Busmann  
SPONSOR: San Gabriel Valley Gathering Group  
HOST: Michael Sholer

#### SEMINAR

**La Traviata with Tiffany Kuo**  
**Saturday, March 30 at Noon**  
(11:30am RECEPTION)

LOCATION: Thayer Hall at the Colburn School

#### SPECIAL EVENT

**Peter Hemmings Award Dinner Honoring African Americans for LA Opera (AALAO)**

**Saturday, March 2 at 6:00pm**  
LOCATION: California Club

#### VOLUNTEER EVENTS

**Elementary Student Matinee**

**Thursday, March 7 at 9:00am**  
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Saturday Morning at the Opera**

**Saturday, March 9 at 8:45am**  
LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### APRIL

#### GATHERINGS

**La Traviata**

**Monday, April 1 at 7:00pm**  
LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Clarita  
SPEAKER: Dr. Kenneth Mays and Guest Vocalists  
SPONSOR: Santa Clarita Gathering Group  
HOST: Kimberlyn Jones

#### Topic TBD

**Tuesday, April 2 at 7:00pm**

LOCATION: Virtual (Zoom)

SPEAKER: Ray Busmann

**Turandot**

**Sunday, April 7 at 10:00am**

LOCATION: Private Residence in Beverly Hills

SPEAKER: Steve Kohn

SPONSOR: Beverly Hills Gathering Group

HOST: Ruth Bachofner

**Turandot**

**Monday, April 29 at 7:00pm**

LOCATION: Private Residence in the San Gabriel Valley

SPEAKER: Ron Streicher

SPONSOR: San Gabriel Valley Gathering Group

HOST: Michael Sholer

#### SPECIAL EVENT

**Premier Member Dinner**

**Sunday, April 28 at 5:00pm**

LOCATION: Private Residence

#### VOLUNTEER EVENTS

**Opera Wise: La Traviata**

**Tuesday, April 2 at 6:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Opera Prep: La Traviata**

**Thursday, April 4 at 11:30am**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Senior Dress Rehearsal: La Traviata**

**Thursday, April 4 at 1:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### MAY

#### GATHERINGS

**Turandot**

**Monday, May 6 at 7:00pm**

LOCATION: Private Residence in Santa Clarita

SPEAKER: Steve Moore

SPONSOR: Santa Clarita Gathering Group

HOST: Kimberlyn Jones

#### SEMINAR

**Turandot with Michael Hackett**

**Sunday, May 5 at Noon**

(11:30am RECEPTION)

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th Floor, Rehearsal Room 4

#### VOLUNTEER EVENTS

**Community Event: Noah's Flood**

**Thursday, May 3 at 5:30pm**

LOCATION: Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels

**Opera Wise: Turandot**

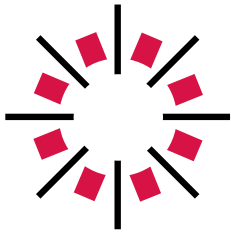
**Monday, May 13 at 6:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

**Opera Prep: Turandot**

**Wednesday, May 15 at 5:00pm**

LOCATION: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion



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# VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Volunteering remains hands-down the best way to get the most value out of Opera League programming. We always encourage League members to find that one activity they feel will take them further behind the curtain while helping spread the love of opera in Los Angeles County. Whether it be **The Shop at the Opera**, a master class, membership recruitment, light walking (yes, that's a thing), any of our myriad educational programs (e.g. seminars, gatherings) and much, much more, the Opera League offers volunteer opportunities for every culture culture.

*Interested? Just shoot us a line at [info@operaleague.org](mailto:info@operaleague.org), or hit up our hotline at 213.972.7220. ☀*