

## A Conversation with James Conlon

By Bob Bernard, Artist Services Chair

**H**ow is this for the start of a career as a conductor? —

He makes his professional debut in 1971, where many young artists do, at Charleston's Spoleto Festival, conducting *Boris Godunov*. A year later, while still a student at Juilliard, he helps out, rehearsing the orchestra, while the school looks about for a replacement for Thomas Schippers, who has pulled out of a production of *La Bobème*.

After a bit, a visiting professor who has been leading a few Master Classes recommends him for the job. Juilliard, respectful of the visiting professor's opinion of his rehearsal technique, accedes to it and a career is well begun. Oh, who was that visiting professor?... Maria Callas.

The career of Maestro James Conlon, Los Angeles Opera's new Music Director, took off from there, and its progress has never slowed down. Primarily based in Europe for the past three decades since leaving Juilliard, Maestro Conlon has been cherished by the arts communities wherever he has been Music Director: Rotterdam, Cologne, and Paris. Working both sides of the Atlantic, he has accumulated over 250 performances as a guest conductor at the MET and has been the Music Director of Cincinnati's May Festival (our country's major celebration of choral music) for twenty-seven years.

The crown jewel of his many awards is, perhaps, the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest distinction, awarded him in 2002 by Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic.

Maestro Conlon's signing of a three-year contract with Los Angeles Opera has been abetted by the circumstance of the Conlon family having

two daughters, the older being now only a year away from beginning her university education.

He, while wishing his children to retain their bi-lingual training (French/English), has decided that their higher education will come at American universities. So, beginning with his taking on the position of Music Director of Chicago's Ravinia Summer Festival one year ago, Maestro began the re-apportionment between his European and American commitments.

Now, everything is set: The commitment to LAO; the Music Directorships at Ravinia and the May Festival shall continue; Maestro will guest conduct in Europe for a few months each year; and, Maestro being a native of Queens, NYC will continue to be the Conlon's primary home (they have an apartment right above Marilyn Horne's).

This all being established, and this summer's Ravinia Festival having ended, Maestro Conlon arrived here on August 21, and, at the time of this interview, had put our opera orchestra through several days of intense rehearsal. Maestro, having worked with returning Concertmaster Stuart Canin many years ago with the San Francisco Symphony, is most comfortable with Mr. Canin continuing in that capacity and has expressed great satisfaction with the orchestra's state of readiness for the coming season.

Among the subjects touched upon in our conversation was that of stage direction. Maestro emphasizes that he is pro innovation, "upon the condition that this does not deform the essence of the dramatic vision of the composer." He continued, "There is a flaw exhibited by some stage directors to use the work as a vehicle. The stage director should [instead] surrender his/her own ego into the work."

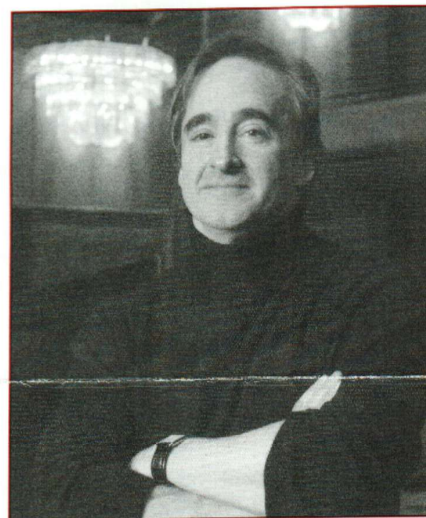


Photo: Bob Millard

New LA Opera Music Director, James Conlon

Maestro succinctly advises us in the audience,

"TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS."  
"Inhibiting and alienating audiences from their instincts is the single greatest [artistic] blunder of our time."

Finally, Maestro Conlon was moved to enunciate what amounts to a Declaration of Principle:

"I will address these instincts directly from the podium and will elicit an emotional, visceral response from the audience. Having done this, I, therefore, shall respect their reactions."

In other words, recalling the line given to Betty Davis, playing the role of aging actress Margo Channing in the film *All About Eve*:

When Maestro Conlon is on the podium, "Fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy night!"

## a word from our president

The Opera League is in exceptional shape with increasing new and renewal memberships, exciting social events, informative educational programs and a strong financial position. Let me share the reasons with you.

Membership growth includes both new members and a substantial number of "upgrades" among renewals, who are receiving additional benefits for their higher donations. An added membership feature this year includes personal contact from a board member with each new member shortly after joining. Hopefully, this will explain and encourage newcomers to participate in League events. Directors also will call those who have not renewed to answer questions and solicit feedback.

Membership dues provide the funding to publish *Bravo*, other mailings and web site communications. Communications, particularly our website [www.operaleague.org](http://www.operaleague.org) have been significantly upgraded over the last several months (see page 7). Dues also pay for administrative and operating expenses to support the cast dinners, welcome visiting artist, educational programs, volunteers and other membership benefits. Opera League has no paid employees and all service hours from directors and volunteers are donated.

Social events with opera themes continue to draw large audiences. The summer Barcelona "Hamlet" Film Party was a huge success, as measured by audience attendance and positive feedback. This fall we have a "Demons, Devils and Divas" Halloween Musicales (see invitation page 5) in the San Fernando Valley. In addition, plans are underway for an insightful master class, innovative opera



**Rebecca Bowne, President**

talks at local restaurants and book shops, and creative twists at Regional Gatherings. Dues and donations also cover expenses for the "Insider Preview" refreshments and opera artists. This event is free for members. Watch your mail in December for your invitation to the mid-January "Insider Preview" when Maestros Domingo and Conlon announce their 2007-08 opera season.

Weekend opera seminars are the cornerstone of League educational programs. Opera experts from all over the United States provide insights into the composer, history, musicology and artistry of LA Opera's upcoming performances (see invitation page 5). Another League-supported educational program, "Opera Overtures," reaches thousands of opera patrons before each performance, and is co-sponsored with the Flora L. Thornton Foundation. League members introduce the speaker at each performance.

The financial success of the Opera Boutique, film parties, along with generous donations from members and endowment interest, help to fund the League's donation to LA Opera. In October, the League will present a major donation to LA Opera of \$75,000 to support community educational programs and another \$40,000 for the pre-performance opera talks. We couldn't do all of this without your help, so on behalf of your board, I send you heartfelt thanks of appreciation. See you at the opera!



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24-hour League Message Line: 213-972-7220

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## The Growth of Gatherings

By Dorothy Wait, Communications Chair

In the early '90s when the Opera League was changing from a smallish organization to one that was spreading out in southern California, the idea of Gatherings was born. The goals then were the same as they are today, but what a difference a decade and a few years make. The Gatherings, literally a coming together of people, are intended to provide a forum where members and potential new members can learn more about the current operas presented by LA Opera in a congenial setting (thanks to our generous hosts) and to provide an opportunity where folks can get to know each other and talk opera talk to their hearts' content. Of course refreshments brought by the attendees add a lovely note.

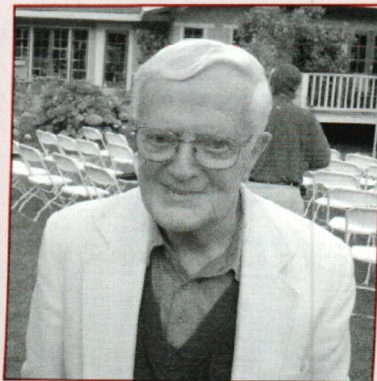
There are now nine regions, ranging from a new beginning in Claremont to a very large group on the Westside. Enough good can't be said about our very special Regional Heads. Unless you have provided that leadership, it is difficult to understand the effort and leadership it takes to make this work. And we don't intend to stop there. If you live in an area not represented, have a love of opera, and would like to explore the possibility of starting a Gathering in your area, please call the hot line (listed on page 2) and someone will be in touch with you.

Please feel free to attend any of the Gatherings, not just one in your immediate vicinity. Take note of the listings on this page and call the contact person to make a reservation.

### Westside Retirement

Having recently retired from medical practice as an internist in 1996, Dr. Jim Schumacher was looking for a new challenge. Fortunately for the Opera League, he found one by becoming the Regional Head for Westside Gatherings. And now 10 years later he has again retired. Among his many attributes: organization, with attention to every detail, was the hallmark of his leadership. He developed a list of dates, locations and speakers at the beginning of each year to distribute at the Gatherings. And he carted folding chairs to houses that needed extra seating as the attendance grew.

Monika Whitaker will continue as co-chair along with new leaders Chuck and Alice Bragg. They have big shoes to fill, but are eminently qualified to carry-on as the Westside Heads.



Dr. James Schumacher, stepping down

Photo: Monika Whitaker

### *Hansel and Gretel and L'Incoronazione di Poppea* Gathering Schedule

#### San Fernando Valley

Sunday, Oct. 22, 3:00 – 5:30 pm  
11615 Canton Pl., Studio City  
Jackie Johns 818.980.5743

#### Westside

Monday, Oct. 30, 7:15 – 9:30 pm  
350 S. Bristol Ave., Los Angeles  
Chuck Bragg 310.454.9662  
Monika Whitaker 310.826.4743

#### Heart of LA

Saturday, Nov. 4, 1:00 – 3:30 pm  
1821 Westmoreland Blvd., Los Angeles  
Sandra Kohn 323.935.9943

#### Antelope Valley

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2:00 – 4:30 pm  
43422 25<sup>th</sup> St. W., Lancaster  
Harald Krueger 661.728.0671

#### Claremont

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2:00 – 5:00 pm  
150 N. Mountain Ave., Claremont  
Patricia O'Donnell 909.447.5038

#### Orange County

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2:00 – 4:30 pm  
815 W. Broadway, Anaheim  
Claire Chambless 714.533.4186

#### Santa Clarita

Thursday, Nov. 9, 7:00 – 9:30 pm  
28201 River Trail Lane, Valencia  
Olga Joseau 661.297.3086

#### Ventura County

Sunday, Nov. 12, 2:00 – 5:00 pm  
2291 Brookhill Dr., Camarillo  
Dorothy Wait 805.578.0246

#### San Gabriel Valley

Tuesday, Nov. 14, 7:00 – 9:30 pm  
5278 La Canada Blvd., La Canada  
Carmen Paz 818.765.2293  
Mike Sholer 818.502.1988

# calendar

## october

### Opera Talks at Julienne's

October 2 (Monday) 7 pm  
2649 Mission, San Marino  
\$10 cash - beverages & nibbles  
Additional \$10 cash - light "box supper"

### Volunteer Workshop

October 14 (Saturday) 10 am - 12 pm  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion  
Contact: Gerald Elijah  
gelijah@msn.com

### Volunteer Workshop

October 16 (Monday) 7-9 pm  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion  
Contact: Gerald Elijah  
gelijah@msn.com

### Education Program\*

October 21 (Saturday) 8 am - 4 pm  
Opera for Educators - *Poppea*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Musicale

October 22 (Sunday) 6-9 pm  
"Demons, Devils & Divas"  
Lovely home in Sherman Oaks  
\$35/voucher members, \$45 guests  
Invitation on p. 5

### Education Program\*

October 28 (Saturday) 8 am - 5 pm  
Opera 101  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion



## november

### Education Program\*

November 4 (Saturday) 8 am - 4 pm  
Opera for Educators - *Hansel and Gretel*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### African Americans for LA Opera

November 4 (Saturday) 10:30 am - 1:30 pm  
Brunch and Recital  
Omni Hotel  
Invitations will be mailed  
Contact: Eva Grant 323-663-9735

### Opera Talks at Julienne's

November 6 (Monday) 7 pm  
2649 Mission, San Marino  
\$10 cash - beverages & nibbles  
Additional \$10 cash - light "box supper"

### Seminar

November 11 (Saturday) 10 am - 1 pm  
Desiree Mays on *Hansel and Gretel*  
Michael Hackett on *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*  
Wilshire Grand Hotel  
730 Wilshire Blvd.  
\$25 or voucher/members  
\$35/non-members or at the door

### Cast Dinner\*\*

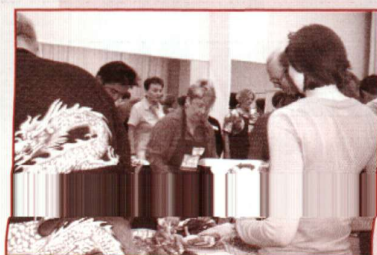
November 20 (Monday) 4:30 - 7:30 pm  
*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Cast Dinner\*\*

November 21 (Tuesday) 4:30 - 7:30 pm  
*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Cast Dinner\*\*

November 22 (Wednesday) 4:30-7:30 pm  
*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion



## december

### Education Program\*

December 4 (Monday) 8:30 am - 1 pm  
Student Matinee - *Hansel and Gretel*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Opera Talks at Julienne's

December 4 (Monday) 7 pm  
2649 Mission, San Marino  
\$10 cash - beverages & nibbles  
Additional \$10 cash - light "box supper"

### Education Program\*

December 9 (Saturday) 8 am - 5 pm  
Opera 101  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Education Program\*

December 11 (Monday) 8:30 am to 1 pm  
Student Matinee - *Hansel and Gretel*  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

### Education Programs\*

Contact: Edward Lieb  
edwardlieb@sbcglobal.net

### Cast Dinners\*\*

Contact: Monica Gutierrez Roper  
monylamony@yahoo.com

24-hour message line  
213-972-7220



League volunteers  
cooked and served  
nearly 200 cast  
members and crew of  
Don Carlo three times!

# invitations

Please note that this is the **ONLY** invitation you will receive for these events.

## San Fernando Valley Musicale

*In a beautiful Sherman Oaks home*

**Sunday, October 22, 2006 from 6 pm to 9 pm**

***Demons, Devils & Divas – First Costumed Musicale***

Members \$35 or 1 Flexible Voucher, Non-members \$45, Student Club Members \$10

Seating is limited

## ***Hansel and Gretel and L'Incoronazione di Poppea Seminar***

**Saturday, November 11, 2006 from 10 am to 1 pm**

**The Wilshire Grand Hotel**

930 Wilshire Boulevard, just off the 110 Harbor Freeway

**Speakers:**

**Desiree Mays • Michael Hackett, Ph. D**

Dr. Allan Edmiston, Moderator

\$25 or 1 flexible voucher for Members, \$35 for Non-members and at door, \$10 Student Club Members

Valet parking is available through garage on Francisco St. for \$8.00

Self-parking in the Ernst and Young garage for \$8.00; enter on 7th St.

### ORDER FORM

Musicale reservations must be received by October 15th and Seminar requests by November 4th

SFV Musicale October 22	_____	x Member tickets or vouchers @ \$35	\$ _____
	_____	x Non-member tickets @ \$45	\$ _____
	_____	x Student Club Members @ \$10	\$ _____
Seminar November 11	_____	x Member tickets or Vouchers @ \$25	\$ _____
	_____	x Non-member tickets @ \$35	\$ _____
	_____	x Student Club Members @ \$10	\$ _____
		Total	\$ _____

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Guests \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Enclose your check or voucher(s) to the Opera League, together with a self-addressed stamped envelope and Seminar tickets and/or Musicale directions will be mailed to you. **No refunds.** Mail to: The Opera League of Los Angeles, P.O. Box 1006, Montrose CA 91021-1006. Questions? Call the Opera League 24 Hour message line at 213.972.7220.

## getting together

### *Claudio and Engelbert*

#### The Second Seminar's Odd Couple

**S**panning about 250 years of operatic composition, the second Opera League's Seminar of the season on Saturday, November 11, 2006 from 10 am to 1 pm will take on one of the earliest operas, Claudio Monteverdi's, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* first presented in 1641, and also Engelbert Humperdinck's fairy-tale opera, *Hansel and Gretel* from 1894.

Many of you are familiar with our esteemed speakers. Santa Fe Opera educator, Desiree Mays, will enlighten us on the German masterpiece, *Hansel and Gretel*, and Dr. Michael Hackett, Professor of Directing and Theater History at UCLA will challenge us with the monumental *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, completed two years before Monteverdi's demise.

The Wilshire Grand Hotel, (see invitation on page 5 for details) will be the setting with Dr. Allen Edmiston moderating. And to be sure, there will be coffee, tea and pastries at the morning break. We would be happy to have you join us.

#### LINDA WATSON TRIBUTE

The Wagner Society of Southern California will host American soprano Linda Watson with a special tribute on October 19 at 7 pm in the Colburn School Zipper Auditorium. Dr. Sherwin Sloan will interview Ms. Watson and discuss her numerous opera roles, accompanied with film clips.

Ms. Watson recently performed Brünnhilde in *Ring Cycles* at Bayreuth Festival, Paris and Washington National Opera. Opera League members will receive an invitation from The Wagner Society to order tickets for \$20.



Photo: Ed Lieb

League members enjoyed tapas and Cava at the wonderful residence of Linda and Dick Patton before the "Hamlet" opera film at the Barcelona film party. Marcia McCormack chaired the event.

## October Musicale in the San Fernando Valley

By Anne Russell Sullivan. Musicales Chair

Who among us has a favorite Opera Character they long to be?

Now is your chance to channel Mimi, Carmen, Parsifal, or Canio. Join us and our gracious hostess Lucille Kerhulas on Sunday evening October 22 from 6:00pm to 9:00pm for our first ever Costumed Musicales at Lucille's beautiful Sherman Oaks home just off the 405 Freeway. In the spirit of the holiday Vicki Kirsch will accompany soprano Kathleen Roland-Silverstein and bass-baritone Cedric Berry in her wickedly scrumptious program "*Demons, Devils, and Divas*." Expect a bevy of witches and evils ones as these gifted performers entertain us with selections from Verdi's *Macbeth*, Gounod's *Faust*, Boito's *Mephistofele*, and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*; peppered with songs by Schubert, Schumann, Bolcom and Leher. For the not so faint at heart we may even offer the Witches' Scene from *Macbeth*, but only if we agree to join in...

So don't be shy and don't tell us who you are. For those who don't want to dress up, we need your opera expertise to help us guess who is whom. For our courageous costumed compatriots, if we can guess who you are, and love your look, you might even win a prize! Come hungry to feast on our delicious potions and delicacies once our singers have sung. You will need the secret password to cross the threshold – seating is limited so send in your reservation as soon as possible. See page 5 for details.

## behind the scenes

### Visit Us At Our Revised Website

By Marcia McCormick, Website Chair

If you enjoy going online for information and entertainment, we have exciting news for you! Our revised website contains the latest information on upcoming League events, as well as reports, color photographs and video clips of recent activities.

Your journey begins at our homepage at [www.operaleague.org](http://www.operaleague.org).

Click on the LEARN link and see announcements, reports and photos about seminars, gatherings, Master Classes and Overtures (pre-performance previews). Click on the HELP link and see some of the exciting volunteer opportunities that are waiting for you. The SHARE link describes the most recent Musicales and Special Events and the CALENDAR link provides you with event dates, prices and locations on one convenient page. INSIDE OPERA is an

informative, entertaining newsletter written by Bob Bernard; all of last season's editions plus this season's first offerings are waiting for you online. If you know somebody who shares your passion for opera, you can refer them to our MEMBERSHIP page, which contains information on membership benefits plus a membership form they can print, fill out and send in.

Each page on our website includes an e-mail link to our new e-mail address at [operaleaguella@sbcglobal.net](mailto:operaleaguella@sbcglobal.net). Website Chair Marcia McCormick will make sure your question or comment is forwarded to the appropriate Board Director. We promise many exciting additions to come in the months ahead, so do visit [www.operaleague.org](http://www.operaleague.org) today... and return often.

### Leaving a Legacy with the League

The Opera League remembers Beren Harris each October, his birth month. Happy Birthday Beren! A former dedicated League board member who had many close friends among the membership, Beren Harris left his estate to the Opera League of Los Angeles in a restricted endowment. Each year, 85 per cent of the annual investment proceeds are used for projects designated by the current board. This year's funds helped to meet our annual grant to LA Opera to support the Community and Education Programs.

Recent bequests include the Gray Phillips' estate, naming Opera League, with three other major arts organizations in LA, as beneficiary. Mr. Phillips was a long-term donor to the League's Luxury Drawing. The executor of the estate of Dorothy Thiele sent a contribution to Opera League on behalf of one of our members, who assisted Dorothy over her last years. Member Jerry Farris, former director and long-term volunteer, donated a portion of his inheritance to provide financial stability to the Opera League. Often current members provide a donation honoring a deceased Opera League member, such as those recently honoring Wendy Darby and Chris Montgomery. These welcomed donations assist The Opera League with expanding opera educational programs, as well as increasing donations in support of LA Opera, and are fully tax deductible, as provided by law.

### Welcome to LA!

Aren Der Hacopian, Assistant to the Domingo-Thornton Young Artist Program Director Karen Ashley, wondered if anyone could possibly help the out-of-town artists relocating to LA find "affordable housing." Following Aren's phone call, League President Rebecca Bowne contacted several generous League members, several of whom opened their homes to welcome the arriving young artists.

Toni Bird, former League President and current board member, is hosting soprano Rena Harms, 22, as well as accompanist/vocal coach Yulia Levin, 25, a Russian/Canadian. Rosalie Kornblau is hosting tenor David Lomeli, 25, from Mexico. David will be traveling to Spain to participate in *Operalia* this October. Kanya Bugreyev, who speaks Russian, is hosting soprano Ania Alkhimova, 26, also from Russia. Artist Services committee

members Fred Manaster, Peter Lambert, Bob Bernard and Ed Schaff met these artists upon their arrival at LAX, with special care to greet arriving artists in their native language.

Other League members who have opened their homes to visiting LA Opera artists include Alma Guzman, Anne Mosser, Nick and Janet Ciriello, Anne Combs and Lynne Mitchell. Generally, visiting artists need a quiet, private bedroom and bath; additionally, access to a piano, sitting room and/or swimming pool is a welcomed treat.

The Domingo-Thornton Young Artists reside in LA for one to three years. The program concentrates on enhancing vocal and dramatic artistry with specialized coaching. Future articles in *Bravo's*, "Inside Opera" and League programs will feature these artists.



Photo: Bob Holmes

**Gathering Heads meet and welcome new Gathering Chair, Stella Leonstini**

Row 1: Teresita Gardner, SC, Olga Joseau, SC, Stella Leonstini, Jackie Johns, SFV, Claire Chambless, OC.  
Row 2: Sandra Kohn, HLA, Patricia O'Donnell, CL, Mary Ramano, HLA, Mike Sholer, SGV, Regi Merwin, SFV, Carmen Paz, SGV,  
Row 3: Arlene Saretsky, SC, Chuck and Alice Bragg, WS, Monika Whitaker WS. Not available for photo: Dr. Harald and Irene Krueger, AV.  
Dorothy Wait, Acting Head for VC, chaired the meeting.

Legend: AV = Antelope Valley; CL = Claremont; HLA = Heart of LA; OC = Orange County; SC = Santa Clarita; SFV = San Fernando Valley; SGV = San Gabriel Valley; VC = Ventura County; WS = Westside.



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**INVITATIONS ARE INCLUDED**  
✦ SFV Musicale October 22  
✦ Second Seminar November 11