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BRAVO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OPERA LEAGUE OF LOS ANGELES

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From the Co-Presidents



Moving On...

As we approach the conclusion of our term as Co-Presidents of the Opera League, we do so with gratitude and optimism for all that the League has contributed to the opera community—and all that it will continue to offer in the years ahead. This season marked both reflection and renewal: We celebrated

Maestro James Conlon's extraordinary tenure as Music Director of Los Angeles Opera while looking forward to the arrival of Maestro Domingo Hindoyan next season. We also welcomed a new website, dynamic programming, and an incoming slate of officers and board members who will bring fresh energy and ideas to the League's future.

It feels especially meaningful that LA County's Arts and Wellness Week in June coincides with LA Opera's production of *The Magic Flute*. Whether savoring the elegance of Mozart, the brilliance of Verdi, the creativity of Philip Glass, or the emotional sweep of Puccini and Leonard Bernstein, all featured this season, we are reminded of opera's unique ability to unite music, theater, and visual artistry.

Music enriches not only the mind but also the sense of community we share through the Opera League. Our members come from many walks of life, united by volunteerism, friendship, and a shared passion for opera. Together, we experience opera as a living art form that inspires both heart and mind.

While this month brings a fitting close to a year filled with engaging Opera League events, we aren't done yet. Upcoming highlights include: the African Americans for LA Opera Father's Day recital, our Hollywood Bowl Opening Night picnic featuring *Best of Broadway*, an elegant Premier dinner for higher-level members, and an LGBTQ reception following *The Magic Flute*. These events complement our earlier season-opening Welcome Cocktail Reception and our upcoming end-of-season Santa Fe Opera trip.

We are equally proud of the League's continued volunteer efforts, such as supporting the Shop at the Opera, publishing *BRAVO* magazine, collaborating with LA Opera on cast dinners during rehearsals, and volunteering at rehearsals and community performances (including *Noah's Flood*). This season we also featured performances by current and former LA Opera Young Artists at our events, a backyard barbecue honoring Maestro Conlon, a Volunteer Appreciation evening with special guest Susan Graham, and a master class with Anthony León that we presented with Opera Buffs.

Additional programming included opera-themed day trips to San Diego and Santa Barbara, a winter musical salon, a seminar on *West Side Story*, presentations by our Opera League Community Educators, gatherings hosted by League members throughout Southern California, and a memorable seminar on *Falstaff* presented by Maestro Conlon.

The Opera League also continued funding transportation for about 3,000 students to attend performances this year, while contributing additional support for LA Opera educational initiatives, including Opera Camp. These experiences often provide students with their first opportunity to experience opera—or even to step inside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion—creating memories that can last a lifetime.

As we conclude both this Season and our Co-Presidency, we extend our heartfelt thanks for your volunteerism, loyalty, patience during the rollout of our new website, and continued enthusiasm for the League and its mission. Together, we continue to foster joy, community, and a lasting appreciation for opera throughout Los Angeles.

We invite you to join, renew, upgrade your membership, or make a donation to the Opera League of Los Angeles. To learn more, please visit Opera League of Los Angeles—and consider giving the gift of membership to a friend, loved one, or colleague.

Sincerely,

Gayle Kirschbaum & Todd Calvin
CO-PRESIDENTS



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A SUMMER'S EVE FAREWELL AND THANK YOU TO JAMES CONLON

Nearly 100 Opera League friends and family gathered to honor James Conlon and celebrate his tenure as LA Opera's music director. The casual barbecue-style afternoon, held in the backyard of longtime Opera League member and LA Opera board member Janet Ciriello at her Hancock Park home, provided the perfect setting for the occasion.

Sergei Kasimoff welcomed guests with piano music on Henry Mancini's favorite upright piano, courtesy of the Kasimoff Piano Company.

Event Chair Diane Gray led a team of League volunteers who created an idyllic, relaxed atmosphere with delicious picnic style food and wine.

Outgoing Co-President Gayle Kirshbaum and current Chairman Gary W. Murphy each shared a few words, and Diane then offered a toast as everyone raised a glass to the Maestro.

The program concluded with a beautifully chosen selection of songs by tenor Anthony León and pianist Peter Walsh, including the unforgettable "Non ti scordar di me." Anthony's self-accompaniment on tenor saxophone brought many guests to tears of joy and remembrance. 🌸



1. Diane Gray and James Conlon 2. Anthony León, Maria Aramburu and Jennifer Conlon 3. Anne Russell Sullivan and Gayle Kirshbaum 4. Jessica Gonzalez-Rodriguez, Banke Balogun, Gary W. Murphy and Simon Russell 5. Marlene Chavez and Scott Baskin 6. Alma Guzman, Peter Gray and Susan Stamberger 7. James Conlon and Gary W. Murphy 8. Kimberlynn Jones and Regina Merwin 9. Mirjana Mahnovski, Esther Lebovich and Natasha Mahnovski 10. James Conlon and Katharine Holland 11. Anthony León

BUILDING NOAH'S FLOOD

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Just as Noah's Ark, in Biblical times, was filled to capacity with pairs of every animal, this year, on May 8 and 9, the stage of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels in Los Angeles was overflowing with close to 475 performers of all ages and multiple backgrounds paying tribute to Benjamin Britten's *Noah's Flood* with Maestro James Conlon conducting.

Was it unusual to pick a church for the performance? Actually, opera began around churches. Early miracle plays would become oratorios, which after a circuitous path, became opera. Every year in his introductory speech for the LA Opera *Connects* Cathedral Project, Conlon reminded us of this fact. So when he became Music Director 20 years ago, he wanted to bring the opera back to the church, and not just any opera, specifically Britten's *Noah's Flood*—a one act spectacle that utilizes a whole community of professional musicians, singers, dancers, and children to tell the biblical tale of Noah's Ark. It is an empowering story of unwavering faith that recounts how one family (along with a boat of animals)

comes together to brave a storm that changes the world forever.

So which L.A. church did the Maestro settle on? He picked the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels, built in 2002 to replace the St. Vibiana Cathedral, which was heavily damaged in the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. Thanks to the Cathedral's liturgical music team, known for bringing great enthusiasm to community projects, it was the perfect partner for this collaboration. Since 2007, LA Opera *Connects* (formerly, LA Opera Community and Education Department), has performed an opera almost every year at the Cathedral, initially rotating between *Noah's Flood* and the early music piece

The Festival Play of Daniel, and now also including three new commissions (*Jonah and the Whale*, *Moses*, and *The Three Women of Jerusalem*).

TWO BIG CHALLENGES TO MOUNT THE SHOW

Fittingly, for his last year as Music Director, Maestro Conlon returned to the piece that began it all, *Noah's Flood*—making it the eighth time it has been performed at the Cathedral, and as always, a daunting task for all those involved with the production. Here, two big challenges stand out.

First, coping with the sheer number of people required. Britten wrote this piece for a professional string quintet, trumpeter, recorder player, and percussionist, along with an unspecified number of student orchestral members—which can involve nearly 80 students in addition to the 10 members of the LA Opera Orchestra.

Add to that nearly 300 choristers assembled from church and school groups from across the Southland; about 85 community performers, including dozens of children playing animals on Noah's Ark; two dozen community performers



executing choreography; and the named characters Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives, where the adult roles are portrayed by artists from LA Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist program. The professional vocal soloists include baritone Hyungjin Son as Noah and mezzo soprano Peabody Southwell as Mrs. Noah. For the narrative role of the Voice of God, actor Jamieson Price does the heavy-lifting. Thus, without blinking an eye, we are close to 200 people on stage, not to mention their conductors, technical theatrical staff, church staff, and Opera League Volunteers (who are crucial in herding some of these disparate groups).

Further complicating matters, each of these groups prepares independently. The community performers rehearse on Saturdays for two months (including this repertoire in their cycles). The professional orchestra meet with Maestro Conlon for a single read/sitzprobe; and the named characters have an intensive week of staging rehearsals with long-standing resident stage director, Eli Villanueva.

Second, staging an opera in a cathedral.

The biggest hurdle is the limited theatrical infrastructure in the Cathedral. Although it has an internal sound and video system for

mass, none of that equipment is suitable for our needs as an opera company, and the scale of productions that we present far outstrips the internal capabilities of what exists there. So we have to bring *everything* that we will need to put on a show. This means that the set, sound, lighting, (some years) projection, costumes, and props all have to be brought in from our LA Opera stock or rented.

For starters, we have to build a set carefully around the Cathedral's main altar, and as the Cathedral has no mechanisms to fly sets or lighting directly above the stage area, everything has to be built from the ground up. This applies not only to the set but also the lighting rigs, with multiple crank lift towers brought in to mount lights to, along with a pair of platforms for speaker towers (see Box).

How long does our set up take? For a normal opera that we produce, we have a full week to load in our set and lighting. But at the Cathedral, we just have a single day (after the noon time Mass), and we often have to be ready for a staging rehearsal by 6pm. As the staging in the Cathedral utilizes much of the existing architecture of the church, for example, this is a key moment for the performers

to learn how to enter from all around the audience. Next, there is one day of staging rehearsal with piano, followed by two evenings with full orchestra and chorus before our first public performance. And after two shows we pack it up and start planning for next year's project.

Personally, I have been working on our annual Cathedral project since 2010, and although exhausting, it remains one of the most rewarding projects that I get to work on at LA Opera. As James Conlon transitions to his new role as Conductor Laureate, this was his last time conducting *Noah's Flood* at the Cathedral, but the spirit of the project will continue in the future as a major part of his legacy. 🌟

USING LIGHTING AND SOUND TO SPUR THE IMAGINATION

Noah's Flood uses a minimalist set to feature an ark (built by the young performers on stage); a violent storm and flood (lasting 40 days and 40 nights); and, eventually, sunlight and a glorious rainbow. Thus, much is left to the imagination of the audience, aided by sound and lighting.

On the sound front, speakers, due to the acoustic of the Cathedral, must be amplified so the audience can hear definition, rather than an amorphous din created by the very reverberant space. This means that key characters must have a microphone dedicated to each musical part of the piece, and I have to mix all of that together into something resembling music. And as many of the musicians have great distances between them, they all have to see the Maestro in real time to keep together—necessitating the need for a small video camera on him and video monitors of that feed littered around the space.

Perhaps it also helps that the audience joins in on the opening and closing hymns, ensuring that everyone is a participant.



WELCOMING THE LEAGUE'S NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

With a shared passion for opera and a commitment to volunteer service, the Opera League welcomes its newest Board members. Their professional skills and diverse backgrounds help support the continued success of both the League and LA Opera. Please join us in welcoming them.



DR. PHYLLIS KLEIN

was born in the Bronx and attended New York City public schools. As a child, she was introduced to classical music through school trips to the New York Philharmonic's

children's concerts, led by Leonard Bernstein, and through visits to Carnegie Hall with her mother. Her father also took her to the old Metropolitan Opera, where she heard her first performance of *Carmen*. Although she initially treasured the time with her father more than the opera itself, those early experiences left a lasting impression and helped foster her lifelong appreciation for the art form. She attended Hunter College High School, earned her undergraduate degree from Barnard College, and received her medical degree from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She completed her hematology training at UCSF and her oncology fellowship at UCLA Harbor General. While practicing hematology and oncology in Oakland, California, Dr. Klein frequently attended the San Francisco Opera. After moving to Los Angeles for a professional opportunity and establishing her own practice, she became a devoted supporter of LA Opera. She has been a subscriber since its second season and believes she has seen every production since then. Now retired, she looks forward to playing an active role in the LA Opera League.



LISA ROWLEY is a Financial Consultant Manager at Anthem Blue Cross, where she audits telecommunications operations. She oversees more than \$45 million

in annual billing and helps reduce telecommunications expenses by \$1 million to \$5 million each year through careful vendor and inventory management. She holds a degree in accounting and previously worked in the fashion industry as a Production Pattern Maker after graduating from FIDM. Lisa served as co-treasurer of the Opera League for six years, managing expenses, completing monthly reconciliations, paying artists, and supporting event coordinators with income and expense planning and reporting. She also helped create events and was an integral member of the Hemmings team throughout her tenure as co-treasurer. In addition to her leadership service, Lisa volunteers regularly as a Light Walker and assists with Cast Dinners.



KATHARINE HOLLAND is eager to bring her expertise and perspective to the Opera League Board of Directors. A former top-producing

residential real estate broker in San Francisco, she spent more than 20 years managing complex transactions. Her professional experience also includes serving as an Adjunct Professor of Real Estate at City College of San Francisco and writing as a published author on Victorian architecture. Katharine is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and has twice appeared as a guest on the television show *House Hunters*. Her wide-ranging interests and adventurous spirit have taken her around the world, from volunteering at a refugee camp in Greece to co-founding a competitive sailing team for the Gay Games in Sydney. She often

plans her international travels around opera seasons, although some of her favorite performances are right here in Los Angeles. Now a resident of Laguna Woods, she is an active member of the local Saddle Club, Yacht Club, and Rainbow Club. She looks forward to supporting the League's mission and future growth through her deep love of opera.



SUSANA HERNÁNDEZ ARAICO

was born and raised in Ensenada, Baja California. She earned her B.A. from Mount St. Mary's University and her M.A. in Spanish-American literature

and Ph.D. in Spanish Renaissance and Baroque literature from UCLA, where she is a Research Associate with the Center for 17th & 18th Century Studies and the Center for Early Global Studies. She is Professor Emerita of Spanish and Latin American Literatures at Cal Poly Pomona. Susana has published books on Calderón de la Barca and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. She co-founded AITENSO, where she served as Vice President for Spanish America and Oceania. In Los Angeles, she has volunteered with the LA Conservancy, served on the board of the Latin American Cinemateca of Los Angeles, and remains active in the Women's Sailing Association of Santa Monica Bay. She also served as historian for Hispanics for LA Opera and as dramaturg and literary adviser to the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts, which produces Hispanic Classical Theater as well as contemporary Spanish, Latin American, and USA Latin@ Theater. She is an enthusiastic lover of opera and classical music and has been an active member of the Los Angeles Opera League in recent years.



MIRJANA MAHNOVSKI was surrounded by opera from an early age. Her mother, a coloratura soprano at the Croatian National Theater in Rijeka,

Croatia, filled their home with singing and piano music, inspiring Mirjana's love of classical music. She studied piano in high school in Rijeka and later earned a J.D. from the University of Belgrade School of Law. Mirjana joined the Opera League in 2003 as a Shop at the Opera volunteer. Since then, she has served on the League Board and supported activities including membership mailings, Overtures scheduling, seminar planning, Hemmings Awards Dinner invitations, and League Night picnics at the Hollywood Bowl. For the past eight years, she has been the merchandise buyer for the Shop at the Opera, which generates income for LA Opera. She also serves as one of the shop's managers and is a member of the MET Committee Western Region-Laffont Competition.

Professionally, Mirjana worked in Los Angeles as an account executive with Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines, then as Coordinator for Airline Marine Contracts at Princess Cruise Lines before retiring in 2013. She remains active as a registered interpreter with the Judicial Council of California, providing Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian interpretation for depositions, courts, and medical offices.



RATNA JONES was born and raised in a musical home in Calcutta, India and grew up immersed in classical traditions. Although she never learned an instrument, like many girls in Bengal, she learned

to sing songs by Rabindranath Tagore. She earned a master's degree in Comparative Literature in Calcutta before moving to the United States to begin a career in banking and finance. Ratna built a long career with the City of Los Angeles, spending nearly 30 years in administration and operations across departments, including Public Works, Community Development, and Transportation. She finished her public service career with the

LAPD, where she spent her final 17 years as a Senior Management Analyst before retiring. A longtime supporter of the arts and community, Ratna has volunteered with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Public Library, and Pasadena Playhouse. She has also long been a member of both the LA Phil and Los Angeles Opera. For the past four years, she has served on the board of COPW (Committee of Professional Women), an LA Phil affiliate, and currently serves as its president.



KEVIN BATTON is an educator and nonprofit fundraising professional in Los Angeles. He has taught high school Latin and English and served as an education consultant at the Getty Villa museum. Kevin

joined the Opera League in 2019 and, as a community educator, has given dozens of talks at public venues and Opera League gatherings—on subjects ranging from operas such as Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* to broader topics such as "Opera and Greek Tragedy" and "Opera in the Twenty-First Century." 🌸

SOPRANO ALANNAH GARNIER RETURNS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS FOR LA OPERA'S BEN OLIVER KERR MEMORIAL FATHER'S DAY RECITAL ON SUNDAY, JUNE 21 AT NOON



For more than a decade, Opera League members have enjoyed hearing Alannah Garnier perform in African Americans for LA Opera recitals. On Sunday, June 21, she returns to the Wilshire Ebell Theatre with pianist Charlie Kim for the annual Father's Day Recital, recently renamed in memory of Ben Oliver Kerr, a devoted supporter of AALAO. Her program will include selections from Franz Schubert, Tommaso and Giuseppe Giordani, Manuel de Falla, and songs from three Black American composers, H.T. Burleigh, Moses Hogan, and Margaret Bonds.

Raised in a musical family in Minneapolis, Alannah is a versatile artist who began formal violin training at age five and started voice lessons at sixteen.

An alumna from Cal State Long Beach, she holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Missouri. LA audiences

recognize Alannah as a longtime member of both the LA Opera Chorus and the LA Master Chorale, where she made her Walt Disney Concert Hall solo debut in the world premiere of Ellen Reid's *Dreams of the New World*. Her concert and oratorio experience includes Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Handel's *Messiah*, *Elijah* by Mendelssohn, Mozart's *Requiem*, and *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff, as well as many joint and solo recitals. Alannah has also worked in studio sessions involving writing songs and singing demo vocals for indie recording artists. And she has lent her voice as a chorister on film soundtracks, most notably *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *A Wrinkle in Time*.

To purchase \$25 tickets for the Ben Oliver Kerr Father's Day Recital on Sunday, June 21 at noon at the Wilshire Ebell of Los Angeles, please visit operaleague.org or contact Jacque Lyne Wallace at 424.227.7254. 🌸

MY FIRST OPERA By GARY W. MURPHY WITH SIMON RUSSELL

Simon Russell, the Opera League's incoming President and CEO, is a passionate supporter of the arts, with a particular love for theater and opera. Professionally, he serves as an Assistant Vice President at Cooperative of American Physicians (CAP), a leading provider of medical malpractice coverage for California physicians, where he has worked since 2007. Before joining CAP, he worked as a management consultant. He holds a bachelor's degree in international studies, with a minor in anthropology, from the University of California, Irvine. Simon also serves as Vice President of the Southern California Medical Group Management Association.



BRAVO: CONGRATULATIONS ON BECOMING THE NEW OPERA LEAGUE PRESIDENT. IT FEELS LIKE A FULL-CIRCLE MOMENT, ESPECIALLY SINCE YOUR FIRST OPERA EXPERIENCE WAS AT LA OPERA, CORRECT?

SIMON RUSSELL: Thank you! Yes—my first opera experience was as a teenager. A family friend, Elizabeth Weber, had recently moved back to Los Angeles and started attending LA Opera. Around that time, I had just read *Cinderella & Company: Backstage at the Opera with Cecilia Bartoli*, so when she bought me a ticket to Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, I was immediately hooked.

BRAVO: THAT BOOK OFFERS A WICKEDLY FUNNY BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE WORLD OF OPERA—BUT IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT CINDERELLA AT ALL.

SR: Exactly—and that was what captivated me.

It introduced me to the idea of opera as a complete art form, with music, sets, costumes, and all the glamour—and the gossip—that comes with it. After that first experience, I started making the trip from Irvine to attend performances regularly. Looking back, that was quite a commitment for a teenager still in high school.

BRAVO: DID YOU CONTINUE ATTENDING OPERA WHEN YOU BEGAN COLLEGE?

SR: Yes. At that point, Elizabeth

had joined the LA Opera Board of Directors and would invite me to attend not just performances but rehearsals, talks and more. If discount tickets became available, she would send them to me and encourage me to invite friends which I started to do all the time.

BRAVO: I BELIEVE YOUR OPERA EVANGELICAL PRACTICE REMAINS ONGOING AS I SAW YOU AT THE AKHNATEN PERFORMANCES EARLIER THIS SEASON WITH SEVERAL FRIENDS.

SR: Phelim McDermott's production of Philip Glass's opera was brilliant. I brought a friend who was attending his first opera, and he was completely amazed by it. I had to tell him that not every opera features jugglers, but he was captivated by the art form. For me, *Akhnaten* was about much more than the music. What fascinates me now is the full scope of opera—the set design, the costumes, the staging, and everything that happens behind the scenes. The more I learn about what goes into mounting a production, the more amazed I am that we continue to create opera on this scale. Unlike a long-running Broadway show or a touring production, an opera often has a short rehearsal period and only a limited number of performances. That makes the scale of each opera production even more remarkable.

BRAVO: DO YOU ENJOY SEEING OPERA IN OTHER CITIES?

SR: At this point, I've seen opera several times at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, as well as in San Francisco. I also saw *Manon Lescaut* at the magnificent Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. I'd love to explore more European opera houses, especially in Berlin, where the productions tend to be especially bold and cutting-edge.

BRAVO: HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE OPERA LEAGUE?

SR: You were actually the person who introduced me to the League. I started attending events, then became more involved over time, and eventually I was invited to join the Board of Directors.

BRAVO: WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF OPERA FANS AND ENERGETIC SUPPORTERS WHO CAN HELP LEAD THE OPERA LEAGUE. WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE LEAGUE GO IN THE COMING YEARS?

SR: I believe redesigning our online presence is essential to the League's future growth. We recently completed a website update that makes the site easier to use for both newcomers and longtime members. As Chair of the League's Membership Committee, I know firsthand that change can be challenging for longtime members. At the same time, I want to make sure we continue to welcome new members while serving our established community well. We still have more work to do, but I believe we're moving in the right direction.

BRAVO: IN ADDITION TO SERVING AS MEMBERSHIP CHAIR, YOU ALSO CO-CHAIR THE UPCOMING LA OPERA COLLABORATIVE LGBTQIA+ NIGHT AT THE OPERA. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE THAT COMMUNITY?

SR: The more we collaborate with different communities across greater Los Angeles, the more opportunities we create to bring new people to both LA Opera and the League. The LGBTQIA+ community has long had a strong connection to the performing arts, and opera in particular. It's a community that values the arts deeply, and once people experience opera, many of them are eager to come back. Pride Night at the Opera is also simply a wonderful evening out—music, friends, and celebration. This will be our third event, and it has grown each year; more than 200 people attended the last one. I hope we can continue building on that momentum. More broadly, our events—whether neighborhood gatherings, the Hollywood Bowl Picnic, our season-opening launch at Vespaio, or our opera seminars—are ideal opportunities to introduce people both to opera and to others who love it. I look forward to every one of them. 🌟

I LOST MY OPERA LEAGUE VOLUNTEER BADGE!

By DIANE EISENMAN

PALISADES FIRE VICTIM DIANA HIATT-MICHAEL REDISCOVERS HER OPERA LEAGUE BADGE OF HONOR

It's a simple item, slipped in an envelope, and mailed. But when my friend Diana recently opened the envelope and saw the Opera League replacement badge—her previous one now in ashes—she immediately felt less disconnected from her pre-Palisade's fire community and remembered how important community is to her and to her recovery.

For Diana, the Palisade fire literally struck home last year on January 7 when she and her husband were watching a brush fire approach. Suddenly their cell phones beeped. It was an evacuation notice, followed five minutes later by an emergency evacuation one. They grabbed a suitcase, carry on, and computer and headed to Chatsworth, having no idea that they would not be returning. Remembering that they had survived two previous fires that had ringed around their home, they were confident that the two huge nearby reservoirs would provide the water needed to put out the flames.

In the end, their house was turned to rubble; only a fireplace survived. They asked themselves: "Where are the insurance papers, our checkbook, and all the things that made up our lives?"

In the following months, helpful people appeared. "They took us out to dinner, brought gift cards, and took us to Target to fill carts with little things we didn't even realize that we needed. And surprise orders from Amazon were delivered to our temporary accommodations. It was especially appreciated when people volunteered to take us to medical appointments, for that gave us time to talk and feel the impact of the moment. We missed business records, pictures, memorabilia, books. A friend replaced one book that was burned, and we sorted through rubble to find precious pieces of porcelain and blue tiles. We most missed the memorabilia

and what recalled my life of family and love. I longed for something I could hold."

Recently, when Diana and I were speaking on the phone, she opened her mail, and there was her new opera volunteer badge. "I've just been reunited with my favorite club, the beautiful LA Opera!" she said, gratified to be able to wear it, touch it, and feel it.

Since the fire, life has been so disruptive—it is hard to plan ahead. But Diana, a teacher of children at heart, has continued to volunteer for the Opera League at school performances, despite the long drive, and host groups of children. She recalls one group of second graders dressed up in their finest. One boy, wearing a little bow tie, asked, "What is intermission?"—and upon being told, commented that "This recess is very long." She also looks forward to possibly hosting Opera League evenings in her new living room! 🌟



REMEMBERING BOB BERNARD

Bob Bernard was a steadfast volunteer with the Opera League, attending events large and small—from seminars at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion to intimate gatherings in members' homes. After retiring from Hughes Aircraft, where he worked as an engineer, he devoted himself to his lifelong love of opera and music and became a valued member of the Opera League of Los Angeles.

As the League's Artist Services Chair, Bob coordinated volunteer efforts that supported visiting singers, conductors, and designers, including

airport pickups and other hospitality arrangements. He was also the sole author of *Bob Bernard's Corner*, a longtime column on the Opera League website that offered members thoughtful opera insights, production reviews, and interviews with singers. Beyond his writing, he served for many years as a community educator in the South Bay and helped organize volunteers, gatherings, and other opera-related events.

Bob passed away in May at his home in Rancho Palos Verdes. He was remembered at a memorial held on June 9.



REMEMBERING MIMI ROTTER

For LA Opera patrons, a visit to the Shop at the Opera was an essential part of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion experience. On many evenings, Mimi Rotter—an Opera League volunteer for over 15 years—was there to welcome them. Though petite in stature, she had an outsized personality and such a remarkable gift for sales that she could have sold you the jacket you were already wearing.

Mimi was a beloved figure in the Opera League, known for her seemingly ever-present role at League events and at performances throughout LA Opera, LA Phil, and the Colburn School. At the Colburn, she was affectionately known as the "honorary grandmother,"

a title that reflected the joy she found in watching young musicians learn and grow and the pride she took in their accomplishments.

She seemed to have known everyone at The Music Center, and just as many people seemed to know her. Her many hours of volunteering made her a familiar and cherished presence across the community.

As Mimi once said, "In the beginning, I didn't have a lot of money, so I gave my time. You have to give something when you are getting so much, and that's why I became so involved in volunteering."

Mimi passed away in early May of this year.

OPERA LEAGUE CALENDAR OF EVENTS SUMMER 2026

The most up-to-date information on Opera League events can always be found on the League website calendar, at operaleague.org. Event details will be broadcast via operaleague.org with supporting eBlasts.

JUNE

SPECIAL EVENT

**Hollywood Bowl Opening
Night: Best of Broadway**
Saturday, June 20
(PICNIC AT 5:30PM, SHOW AT 8:30PM)
LOCATION: Hollywood Bowl

RECITALS

**African Americans for
LA Opera (AALAO) Ben Kerr
Father's Day Recital**
Sunday, June 21 at 12pm
LOCATION: The Ebell of Los Angeles
VOCALIST: Alannah Garnier, Soprano

Wagner's Birthday Celebration with Jennifer Wilson:

Co-Presented with the Wagner Society
of Southern California
Sunday, June 27 at 4pm
LOCATION: The Colburn School
VOCALIST: Jennifer Wilson, Soprano

AUGUST

SPECIAL EVENT

**The League Goes to
Santa Fe Opera!**
Sunday, August 9–Monday, August 17
*Madame Butterfly, Eugene Onegin, Rodelinda,
The Magic Flute, and world premiere of Lili Elbe*

OCTOBER

SPECIAL EVENT

**LA Opera Season
Opening Night: *Carmen***
Saturday, October 17 at 6pm
New Production; conducted by
new LA Opera Music Director
Domingo Hindoyan

THE OPERA LEAGUE GOES TO SANTA FE OPERA! AUGUST 9-17, 2026

For more information, contact Gary W. Murphy at GMurphy@operaleague.org

Madame Butterfly

Lili Elbe

Eugene Onegin

Rodelinda

The Magic Flute

Lucas Meachem in Recital

And more.





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Serena Malifi, Cinderella
(2021). Photo: Eliza Logan

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