



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

May, 2019

Spring/Summer Lecture Series

By Steve Zilles, Lecture Chair

We have an exciting program of presentations, lectures and interviews beginning in May and continuing into July this year. Our first program is a presentation of the Opera San José 2019-20 Season by Larry Hancock on Friday, May 17 at 10am at the Addison-Penzak JCC in Los Gatos. Next year Opera San José will be doing *Die Fledermaus* (The Bat) by Johann Strauss II (September 14 to 29), *Hansel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck (November 16 to December 1), *Il trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi (February 15 to March 1), and *The Magic Flute* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (April 18 to May 3). *Die Fledermaus* is the lighthearted story of revenge for a joke played by Gabriel Eisenstein on his friend Falke. As the story unrolls, we see fidelity and infidelity, impersonation and, of course humor and wonderful music. You probably know the *Hansel and Gretel* fairytale by the Brothers Grimm. The opera is admired for its folk music-inspired themes that set to music songs written with Humperdinck's sister Adelheid Wette who adapted the fairytale for her children. This is a wonderful opera for people of all ages. *Il trovatore* is a much darker story. Partly a contest for the love of Leonora, a lady-in-waiting to a princess, partly a tale of revenge for a tragic burning. Only late in the story do we learn the relationship between the Count di Luna and his rival Manrico, a fact that the Count learns all too late. The season finale is the wonderful opera *The Magic Flute*. This singspiel is at one level a power struggle between two autocrats, one a bit unstable and the other rather serene,

The Board of Directors of the San José Opera Guild

invites you to an afternoon of delightful music,
a gourmet Champagne Brunch,
silent auction and raffle.

Saratoga Country Club

21990 Prospect Road Saratoga, CA

Sunday, June 9, 2019

11:30 am

Please check out our facebook page:
www.facebook.com/sjoperaguild or website:
www.sjoporaguild.org for event menu, a listing
of raffle/silent auction items and more
information about the brunch and the
benefits of becoming a member of SJOG

and a budding love relationship between the hero and the princess. There are evil elements, scary trials and, eventually, a peaceful happy ending, even for the hero's rather inept "helper" Papageno. Larry will give an overview of the season and then, after a break, we will have performances by a number of Opera San José's Resident Singers. The monthly Shabbat Lunch at the Addison-Penzak JCC will follow and all attendees are invited to partake at the member rate of \$6 with a reservation (or \$10 at the door). RSVP to cherie@apjcc.org.

We have a change of venue for the next two lectures on June 5 and June 12. Because the Addison-Penzak JCC will have begun its Summer Camp which uses the same auditorium that we use, we have arranged to have these lectures in the Social Hall

of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos which is located at 16575 Shannon Road, between Los Gatos Boulevard and Cherry Blossom Lane. The first lecture, at 10am on June 5 will present Bruce Lamott lecturing on George Frederick Handel's opera *Orlando*. This is a Baroque opera which means that the plot, though interesting, is of less importance than the musical opportunities for the major characters to vocally display a different emotion each time they sing. What drives these emotions? Why it is love, both requited and unrequited, in the form of several triangular attachments (a.k.a "love triangles"). Come learn about this opera and the vocally expressive style that the Baroque engendered.

Our second lecture at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos at 10am on June 12 presents Antonín Dvořák's opera *Rusalka* in a lecture by Derek Katz. *Rusalka* is a Czech version of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid* story. Here the young woman who falls in love with the Prince is a water nymph, and, in one of the most beautiful arias in opera, she confides to the moon her desire for the Prince. With a little black magic that has a high price tag, she is transformed into a beautiful girl, a girl who grabs the attention of the Prince. But, *Rusalka* has given up her voice in the bargain. Without being able to talk to the prince, she loses out to a scheming foreign Princess, for a while. The prince realizes what he has lost, but it is too late for both of them and he dies in her arms by his own choice. It may sound dark (and it is), but the music is so moving that you will agree that the prince is right in his choice.

This summer we have a special extra treat, a conversation between Kip Cranna and Gene Scheer (the librettist) about the creation of Jake Heggie's new opera *If I Were You*. This opera was commissioned by the Merola Opera Program and will receive its World Premiere on August 1 to 6 (performances on 8/1, 8/3, 8/4 and 8/6). This conversation will take place at 7:30pm (Note the different time) at the Addison-Penzak JCC on Monday, July 22. *If I Were You* is a Faustian tale, but one with a very interesting twist. The pro-

tagonist Fabian is frustrated with where he is in life and thinks "if only he could be someone else." The devil, Brittomara, a shape-shifting woman in this story, hears his request and offers him a magic spell that allows him to transfer his soul into another person's body. Does this capability solve his problem? You will have to come to the conversation to find out more (and you probably will have to go to the opera to find out all). If you want to go to the opera, there will be a certificate for two tickets to any one of the last three performances (8/3, 8/4 and 8/6) available at the San José Opera Guild Brunch on June 9 as part of the Silent Auction/Raffle.

With four events, two (the first on May 17 and the last on July 22) at the Addison-Penzak JCC and two (the middle two on June 5 and 12) at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos we have a very full Spring/Summer program. Recall that the address for the Addison-Penzak JCC is 14855 Oka Road in Los Gatos and the address for the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos is 16575 Shannon Road and the Social Hall is immediately behind the Worship Hall which is on Shannon. Hope to see you there. As always there will be coffee and snacks before the event begins and at the midway break.

SJOG Newsletter

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**President: Steve Zilles
Editor: Joan Shomler
Calendar: Connie Zilles
Career Updates: Susan English
Publicity: Jan Eurich 408-243-9793**

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www.sjoperaguild.org**

May Calendar

by Connie Zilles

May 10, 7pm, & 12, 2pm, Leonard Bernstein's MASS, SJSU, Hammer Theater, \$20.00, a limited number of complimentary tickets for this event are available, email fred.cohen@sjsu.edu to reserve.

Friday, May 17, 10am, San José Opera Guild lecture, Opera San José Season Overview with Larry Hancock and singers at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10. Shabbat Lunch to follow.

May 24, 26, June 1, 2, 8pm Friday, Saturday, 2pm Sunday. *Falstaff* by Verdi, West Bay Opera, tickets 650-424-9999 or via www.WBOpera.org. Student, senior, and group discounts.

Wednesday, June 5, 10am, San José Opera Guild lecture, Bruce Lamott will speak on *Orlando* by Handel, Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, Shannon Road. Members free, non-members \$10.00.

Sunday, June 9, 11:30am, San José Opera Guild's Champagne Brunch, Saratoga Country Club.

Wednesday, June 12, 10am, San José Opera Guild lecture, Derek Katz will speak on *Rusalka* by Dvořák, at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, Shannon Road, Members free, non-members \$10.00.

Monday, July 22, 7:30pm, San José Opera Guild lecture, Kip Cranna and Gene Scheer will speak on the world premiere of *If I Were You* by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer. This is a Merola Opera commission. JCC of Silicon Valley. See May 17 above for address.

Summer Merola Events

Thursday July 11, 7:30pm, Saturday June 13, 2:00pm, Schwabacher Summer Concert, Merola artists perform scenes from *Lucia*, *Faust*, *La Rondine*, and more. SF Conservatory of Music. \$55/\$35, To order tickets call S.F. Opera Box Office (415) 864-3330 or order online at www.sfopera.com,

Met HD Simulcasts

Shown at the Century 20 Oakridge and Santana Row 6. For more information; www.metopera.org Please check with the theaters concerning times.

May 11, 9am, *Dialogues des Carmelites* by Poulenc, Encore May 15, 1PM and 6:30 PM.

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OPERA À LA CARTE

What is Opera à la Carte?

Colette A. Siegel

Opera à la Carte “brings the sights and sound” of opera to our schools with an assembly featuring the local school’s students alongside professional singers.

It was founded by the San Francisco Opera Guild’s outreach program in the late 1980s under the excellent guidance of Ellen Kerrigan, former opera singer and a San Francisco Opera Guild member as well as an Opera à la Carte producer.

Ellen has been condensing great operas. All the characters and all the arias are there!

The program is offered to schools in nine bay area counties.

Student actors (4 to 8 grade) have supporting, speaking and acting roles, The singing roles are left to professional singers. Schools can also include a chorus.

Seven great operas have been selected by Ellen Kerrigan and one of the seven operas is chosen and offered to the participating schools each year.

Last year it was Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, with a big participation of the San Jose area schools.

The San José Opera Guild is helpful, providing docents and facilitating communication with the participating San Jose area schools.

The San José Opera Guild is very proud to be a part of this wonderful program in helping young children to learn, love and appreciate opera.

This is our goal!

Career Updates

by Susan English

The Schwabacher Debut Recital Series was established in 1983 by James Schwabacher. He was a tenor, vocal coach, teacher and radio and TV host who co-founded the Merola Opera Program and San Francisco Performances. His endowment supports the recital series in perpetuity. Over the years this series has marked the debuts of many well-known artists including: baritone **Thomas Hampson**, bass **John Relyea**, tenor **Michael Schade**, mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham**, and sopranos **Anna Netrebko**, and **Deborah Voight**. This year's recitals have already begun with Korean Merolini, **Woo Young Yoon** and **Seok Jong Baek**. Janos Gereben (SFCV) noted of Yoon's Merola finale: "the first to score big was Tenor, WooYoung Yoon, with eight pure and glorious high C's in Tonio's aria, "Ah, mes amis!" from the *Daughter of the Regiment*. Unlike famous performers of this knotty aria, which brought Luciano Pavarotti to the world's attention, Yoon didn't rush into the climaxing ninth high C. He paused, took a big breath with a sigh, bringing friendly laughter from the audience, and then hit the rafters and held the note right into the inevitable ovation." Mr. Baek will sing with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City this season in *Madama Butterfly*, Barber's *A Hand of Bridge*, and *The Old Maid and the Thief*.

The second Recital was on February 27, featuring **David Pershall**. Opera News wrote of Mr. Pershall in a previous recital: David Pershall dispatches his smooth, evenly produced lyric baritone with elegance and style, but there's something else underneath it — a certain bite and gravitas that pull in the listener immediately. It's a combination that makes him ideal for French repertoire, as he demonstrated at the 2011 winners concert of the Gerda Lissner Foundation International Vocal Competition. His masterly performance of Hamlet's "O vin, dissipe la tristesse" was one of the evening's highlights."

The remaining recitals were reviewed by Janos Gereben in San Francisco Classical Voice: "The series continues on April 3 with soprano **Mary**

Evelyn Hangley (Merola 2016; first-year Adler Fellow) and tenor **Christopher Oglesby** (Merola 2018; first-year Adler Fellow), with pianist and S.F. Opera Center Director of Musical Studies **Mark Morash** (Merola 1987). The program includes works by Schubert (*Auf dem Strom*), Britten (*Canticle III: Still Falls the Rain*), R. Strauss (Sechs Lieder, Op. 19), Dvořák (*Cigánské Melodie*), songs by Charles Ives and Gabriel Fauré, and duets by Italian composers. Martin Katz, called "dean of collaborative pianists," leads a quartet of 2019 S.F. Opera Adler Fellows — soprano **Mary Evelyn Hangley** (Merola 2016, first-year Adler Fellow), mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon** (2015 and 2017 Merola, second-year Adler Fellow), tenor **Zhen-gyi Bai** (Merola 2018, first-year Adler Fellow), and bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** (Merola 2017, second-year Adler Fellow) — in the final recital of the series on April 24. On the program: Samuel Barber's *Hermit Songs* and selections from Hugo Wolf's *Mörrike Lieder*, and Brahms's *Deutsche Volkslieder*."

E.M. Forster's *Howards End* has been made into an opera and was staged at Z Space by Earplay in partnership with RealOpera. This new work is by composer Allen Shearer and librettist Claudia Stevens and opened a three-performance world premiere production on Friday, February 22. The production included alumni from both Opera San José's Resident Artist Program and from Merola. As reviewed by Joshua Kosman, "**Philip Skinner** (Merola 1985) was announced as ill, but he sang the role of Henry with all the robust vigor and tonal authority he brings to every assignment. **Nikki Einfeld** (Merola 2003) and Sara Duchovnay sounded crisp and alluring as the Margaret and Helen, respectively; Duchovnay delivered not one but two stretches of wordless melody with bright, piercing beauty...**Michael Dailey's** (OSJ) Leonard was a compelling blend of dignity and pathos, and Candace Johnson as Jacky struck just the right note of impish danger. Erin Neff sang tenderly as the dying Ruth, and **Daniel Cilli** (OSJ) shone as Henry's glowering, entitled son Charles."

The San Francisco Classical Voice also reviewed this premiere, commenting on the performances on these alumni with, “Tenor Michael Dailey’s creamy sound and humble, steely presence fit the part perfectly. As played by Candace Johnson, Leonard’s wife Jacky was a vivacious singer with a full, ringing sound and great scatting skills. With such energy and voice, it was hard to credit that her character was a washed-up failure. Nikki Einfeld sang steadily and smoothly as the earnest Margaret Schlegel, and Sara Duchovnay sparkled as her flighty sister Helen. Playing Henry Wilcox, Philip Skinner was announced as ill, but the occasional strain in his crackling voice didn’t detract from his commanding presence. Daniel Cilli’s Charles dispensed bile in a rumbling baritone.” Ilana Walder-Biesanz

For those who are new to Earplay, their web site announces their mission as: “Earplay nurtures the finest new chamber music of our time, linking audiences, performers, and composers through concerts, commissions, and recordings.” They go on to explain the origin and recent history with: “Founded in 1985 by a consortium of composers and musicians, Earplay is dedicated to the performance of new chamber music. Earplay offers audiences a unique opportunity to hear eloquent, vivid performances of some of today’s finest chamber music. Earplay has performed over 600 works by more than 300 composers in its 34-year history, including 150 world premieres and 86 new works commissioned by the ensemble. Visit the Earplay archives to learn more about Earplay’s rich history.”

This March, West Bay Opera presented the rarely performed Verdi opera *I due Foscari* featuring former OSJ Resident Artist, **Christina Major**. The SFCV considers her prior performances with “Major has been a welcome presence on Bay Area stages for years now, but I can’t recall hearing her sing with the kind of expressive verve and technical command she displayed here. ... Again and again she unleashed powerful, perfectly placed high notes and athletic passagework that underscored the vitality of the vocal writing. She

brought beauty and pathos to Lucrezia’s Act 1 aria “Tu al cui sguardo onnipossente” — a formalized aria type known as a “preghiera” or prayer — and railed against her father-in-law with unbridled ferocity that never wavered in pitch or rhythm.” Her bio on West Bay’s web site: “She made her company debut as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* during the 2011-2012 Season. Her most recent company appearance was in the title role in *Norma* during the 2017-2018 Season. She reprised that challenging role in December 2018 at the Teatro Colon Opera House in Buenos Aires, to critical acclaim.”

March also brought Merolini to Livermore Opera’s production of Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*. Figaro, the clever barber, was sung by baritone **Alex DeSocio** (Merola 2013 & 2015) while Count Almaviva was sung by **Thomas Glenn** (Adler 2004-2005). **Shirin Eskandani** (Merola 2014) sang Rosina.

The March edition of Opera News focused on several Merolini, including South Korean baritone, **Joo Won Kang**. Their Sound Bite article focused on upcoming performances including his role debut of Papageno with the Utah Opera. In May he will sing Giorgio Germont, one of his favorite roles, with Minnesota Opera. According to Opera News, his wish list includes singing *Rigoletto*. They quote him: “I have covered *Rigoletto* several times, but I have never sung it professionally. *Rigoletto* is complex – a real human being, the best Verdi role for baritone. And I have children now – as a father, *Rigoletto* speaks to me in a special way. Singing him is my dream.”

In April, Opera News called Merolini **Ailyn Perez** “one of the brightest stars of her generation.” Henry Stewart goes on the say of her talent, “Ailyn Perez creamy soprano elevates all the roles she sings.” Her upcoming schedule includes singing Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with the Houston Grand Opera in late April and early May. On May 14, she will sing with Placido Domingo in a sold-out concert on the Broad Stage in Los Angeles, and June will take her to Munich to sing Violetta in *La Traviata* at the Bayerische Staatsoper.

OPERA IS ALIVE AND THRIVING IN SAN JOSE

BY JESSICA HARO

The Opera San José experience begins the moment the audience enters the California Theatre. This once-abandoned vaudeville and movie house was renovated in 2001 through a collaboration between the city of San Jose and the Packard Humanities Institute.

"You walk into the beautiful lobby and every detail takes you back to this moment in time when people enjoyed this art deco space, from the gorgeous marquee on the outside to the hand-painted sunburst over the proscenium. It's a real landmark in the Bay Area," says Opera San José's Artistic Planning Director **Khori Dastoor**.

The 1,100-seat theater has only 20 rows in the orchestra section, five in the grand tier and six in the mezzanine, making it similar in size to a traditional European regional theater, "which to me is the way Mozart intended, the way Verdi intended," Dastoor explains, "that you share a collective experience in a hall that's appropriate to the human voice."

Dastoor's vision of an ideal opera-going experience is informed by her successful career as an operatic soprano, singing such great roles as the title character in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Her mentors include Opera San José's founder Irene Dalis — herself a former opera diva.

When Dalis died in 2014, she left behind a legacy at Opera San José that included not only the thriving company she founded in 1984, but the successful

careers of the many emerging professionals she mentored through the opera's resident company.

"Irene Dalis was a diva of international proportion," says **Aaron Nicholson**, Opera San José's director of marketing and development. Dalis was a principal performer with New York's Metropolitan Opera for 20 years and performed in many of Europe's storied opera houses, including Berlin, Naples and London's Covent Garden.

When she retired from performing in 1977, Dalis returned to her hometown of San Jose and began teaching at San Jose State University. She quickly realized that the United States lacked opportunities for young opera singers to develop a repertoire of lead roles that allow them to succeed as principals in large opera companies.

"They hire people who have performed the lead roles many, many times," Nicholson says. "You've got this piece in your blood — it's in your skin, it's in the fiber of who you are."

General Director **Larry Hancock** agrees, acknowledging that aspiring opera singers in the U.S. have few chances to make the jump from student to principal. "University training

is not enough," he says. "It takes repeated performances to really learn to perform a role."

In founding Opera San José, Dalis created the country's only yearlong professional resident company, using the model she experienced in her formative years performing in Germany.

According to Dastoor, herself a former resident, the company's practice of supporting emerging professionals through a rigorous rehearsal process makes their productions stand out. "In San Jose you might see a talent about to happen, and a moment of awakening, and be in the room for a night where something special happens for the first time," Dastoor says.

With its practice of providing a space for emerging talent to create something new and exciting, Opera San José is the perfect fit for Silicon Valley.

"Part of what makes Opera San José special is the unique environment," says Music Director and Principal Conductor **Joseph Marcheso**. The company's location also means its audience has adventurous taste. "That sensibility is being reflected more and more in not only the titles that we select but also the way that we present them."

For example, the recent production of *The Flying Dutchman* used video projection to set the nautical scenes against a background of rippling water.

"I feel a burden to represent our world today," Dastoor says. This means not only presenting new works, including several world premieres, but keeping beloved classics relevant by viewing them through a modern lens.

Whatever the production, Opera San José strives to stay true to the intent of the composer and librettist. Opera "doesn't have to be edgy for the sake of being different," explains Dastoor. "Sometimes the simplest thing is the most revolutionary."

Whatever approach Opera San José takes, the audience is always in for a treat.

"The production value at this opera company is as high as I've done anywhere else," gushes Opera San José Technical Director **John Draginoff**. "Our sets and our props and our costumes and our lighting are top notch. It's a credit completely to our staff. They put a lot of heart into it that you don't see in a lot of companies."

The proximity of the audience in the California Theatre means attention to detail is a must, for costumes in particular. "You see everything," Hancock explains, "which means we can't really make costumes. We have to make historic replicas of clothes."

Costume Director **Alyssa**

Oania and her staff often fit more than 100 costumes per show, all while making sure the performers can breathe and move in period costumes.

"The biggest challenge in the Bay Area is that not everybody can make \$150,000 a year, and we are losing technical theater people. Stitchers, cutters, right hands, painters, carpenters, stagehands, stage managers ... it's affecting everything," says Hancock.

San Jose is not just losing artists — it's losing entire companies. The American Musical Theatre of San Jose closed in 2008, San Jose Repertory Theatre closed in 2014, and Silicon Valley Ballet closed in 2016.

Dastoor is adamant that Opera San José will not be part of that trend. She is passionate about the ability of the performing arts to bring people together: Instead of sitting alone with smartphones, people converge as an audience to share an experience.

"Opera San José will endure," she insists. "Opera and culture are the underpinning of democratic society and we deserve it as human beings. ... We have to stand up for a society that believes in collective experience and values art." One way Opera San José works to support such a society is by making itself accessible to the next generation of operagoers. Through its educational programs, OSJ sends its local artists to perform one-act operas at local elementary schools, invites middle and high

school students to attend dress rehearsals for each of the main-stage productions, and offers student tickets to anyone under 25 with a valid student ID.

"It's really disheartening to see how the gradual decrease in emphasis in arts education in the schools has just slowly but surely affected attendance at all major arts groups," laments **Lettie Smith**, Opera San José's former K-12 education coordinator.

Conductor Marcheso finds hope in the rising popularity of orchestral concerts featuring movie sound tracks. "I wonder if there's a problem with overthinking what opera means," he posits. "Opera San José is a perfect place to test out what it's like to see a live story with a living soundtrack."

Many of the operas it produces are modern, and even in English. Whatever the age or language of the opera, Hancock believes audiences will find the stories culturally relevant.

"Opera teaches you empathy," he explains. "That's what it sets out to do. Think of all the great operas that are still in the rep — what are they about? They're about letting you see a side of life you've never seen and points of view you've never heard. That's what it's for — and my god, we need some, don't we? We need some empathy." NHG

Opera San José's production of Moby-Dick [ran] Feb. 9 to 24

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An Invitation to Join

Established in 1947, the San José Opera Guild was formed to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the operatic arts and to provide both volunteer and financial support to opera.

The Guild incorporated in September 1958 as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California. The original purpose of the Guild has not changed over the years since its founding. The Guild sponsors singers each year at Opera San José, the Merola Opera Program, San Jose State Opera Workshop and supports Starting Arts.

Throughout the year, the Guild sponsors lectures and previews to coincide with the San Francisco Opera, West Bay Opera and Opera San José seasons.

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