



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

February, 2020

SJOG Membership (73rd Year)

It is time to sign up for another wonderful year with the San José Opera Guild. Our membership year runs from the 1st of February 2020 until the 31st of January 2021. There are many reasons to be a member.

Membership includes free admission to all San Francisco Opera lectures, as well as the West Bay Opera and San José Opera pre-views. You receive a quarterly newsletter, which includes special events, a calendar of Bay Area performances and detailed updates on the careers of former local performers. And, you get a discount on the famous and fabulous Spring Brunch (June 14, 2020), held at the Saratoga Country Club.

Where does your money go? We pay for the excellent lecturers and provide coffee and treats at the lectures. The Guild contributes to Opera San José's singers and their Outreach Program for grades K-12, San Francisco's Merola Program, West Bay Opera, San José State's Voice Program and Starting Arts. In addition, our guild members sponsor and serve as docents for the San Francisco Opera Guild' à la Carte Program.

Our website (SJOperaGuild.org) is easy to use and full of opera information. You can join SJOG now by filling out a form (last page) or printing one off the website. Just mail in your check or credit card information. We will also send out a mail reminder to all of you. Thank you for your continued membership.

Peggy Heiman, Membership Chairperson

San Francisco Opera and Opera San José announce their 2020-21 Seasons by Steve Zilles

San Francisco Opera announced its 2020-21 Season on January 22nd. They will open on September 11 with a Gala Performance. They will follow on September 12 with Beethoven's *Fidelio* which will have an SJOG Lecture on Wednesday, September 2. The second opera, Verdi's *Rigolletto*, will open on September 13. The third in this sequence of well known operas will be Mozart's *Così fan tutte* opening on October 6. This is the second of the Mozart-de Ponte operas that is set in the same building, although the building will age with each production. This opera, too, will have a SJOG Lecture on Wednesday, September 23. The fourth opera of the fall season will be Ruder's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a relatively new opera that has attracted a lot of attention (and an SJOG Lecture on Wednesday, October 21). It opens on October 29. The final opera of the fall season is Puccini's *La Bohème* which will have a lecture (on Wednesday, November 11) for the first time ever in our lecture series. It opens on November 15.

The spring season will be much earlier in 2021 because the ballet and opera have agreed to shorten their seasons to allow a major re-do of the seats. All the seats in the Orchestra, Grand Tier, and Dress Circle sections of the War Memorial Opera House will be replaced. This will greatly improve the comfort of the seats in these areas. This change will close the opera house for the summer, so the spring season will play April 25–May 16, 2021. The first (of two) operas will be Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, which will open on April 25. The second opera, Zemlinsky's *Der Zwerg* (The Dwarf) is likely to be new

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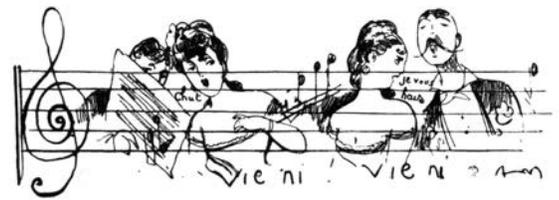
to you, but it was first performed in 1922. It opens two days after the first opera on April 27. Both of these operas will have SJOG Lectures, *Barber* on Wednesday April 14, 2021 and *Der Zwerg* on Wednesday April 21, 2021. More details on the operas and the lectures will come out closer to their openings.

Opera San José announced their 2020-21 season on January 21st. This is a season that has something for everyone. The season opens September 12 with an interesting new production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. The production, directed by Brad Dalton, is set in Colonial India at the time of the Raj with the exoticness and wonderful costumes one would expect. And, instead of a Count we have a Viceroy, a very powerful figure in a foreign land. This is followed by Bizet's *Carmen*, which opens on November 14th. This production is being done in collaboration with the acclaimed Flamenco Society of San Jose, just one of the collaborations that Opera San José has in its plans. 2021 opens with Richard Strauss' *Salome*, a rarely perform work of great intensity, both musically and emotionally. It will be directed by Mathew Ozawa who is directing *Fidelio* for San Francisco Opera. And, finally, the last opera of the season is Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*, a heart wrenching retelling of Romeo and Juliet in the 20th Century. I heard the "Tonight" duet between Maria and Tony, and it was breathtaking. If you want to find out more about these operas, the San José Opera Guild will have a season preview on Friday, March 13 at 10am at the Addison-Penzak JCC, 14855 Oka Rd, Los Gatos, CA 95032. Come and hear excerpts for the Opera San José artists. All this information is also online at <http://operasj.org>.

Spring Brunch
Saratoga Country Club
Sunday, June 14, 2020

* Great Singing * Great food * Great company *
* Great views * and so much more *

Visit our website at www.sjoperaguild.org
Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/sjoperaguild



2020 Season

San Jose Opera Guild
Lectures and Previews
Addison-Penzak JCC
of Silicon Valley

14855 Oka Road, Los Gatos

SJOG & JCC Members: Free

Non-members: \$10

Friday March 13, 10am

Opera San José Season Overview
with singers

Wednesday May 20, 10am

Ernani (Verdi) ~ Kip Cranna

Wednesday June 10 10am

The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs
(Bates) ~ Mark Campbell

Wednesday September 2, 10am

Fidelio (Beethoven) ~ Nicholas Mathew

Wednesday, September 23, 10am

Così fan tutte (Mozart) ~ Rebecca Planck

Friday, TBA

Season Preview West Bay Opera
with singers

Wednesday October 21, 10am

The Handmaid's Tale (Ruders)
~ Lucy Caplan

Wednesday November 11, 10am

La bohème (Puccini)
~ Alexandra Amati-Camperi

February Calendar

by Connie Zilles

Opera Performances

February 15, 16, 20, 23, 28, and March 1, Opera San José presents *Il trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the opera performance.

February 21, Friday, 7pm to 9pm, SJSU presents Christopher Bengochea Faculty Recital in the Concert Hall, Music 176,

March 13, Friday, Opera San José will give a pre-view lecture of the upcoming season. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to learn about the operas coming in 2020 and 2021 and hear arias sung by Opera San José artists. A Shabbat lunch will be available. Information concerning lunch reservations will be forthcoming. Please note that this lecture is on Friday. Lectures are held at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

April 18, 19, 23, 26, and May 1, 3, Opera San José presents *Magic Flute* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, See above for further information.

Merola Event

April 25, Merola Spring Gala, "Celebrating Sheri," honoring Sheri Greenawald, Director of the San Francisco Opera Center and Artistic Director of Merola, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, San Francisco, hors d'oeuvres, silent auction, formal dinner, dancing, black tie suggested. \$600, 415-864-3330



Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD

Showing at Century Oakridge 20, 408 225-7340, Santana Row 6, 408 554-7000, and Valley Fair Showplace ICON, 650 770-8470. Note fairly new venue. Please confirm with theaters to verify that they will be showing a particular opera.

All are Saturday at 9:55am. Encores are generally the following Wednesday evening at 6:30 but may vary. Please check with the theater to verify.

February 1, *Porgy and Bess* by the Gershwins, Encore February 5 and 8

February 29, *Agrippina* by George Frederic Handel, Encore March 4

March 14, *Der Fliegende Hollander* by Richard Wagner, Encore March 18

April 11, *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini, Encore April 15 and 18



Starting Arts Performances

Executive Director Ann Watts

Mary Poppins at the Hammer Theater was an exciting and challenging show for Starting Arts.

Opera Assembly News: We are full steam ahead with *The Daughter of the Regiment* - under the direction of Michael Taylor and his team. With SJOG's generous support and the Applied Materials grant - we will be providing 12 Title 1 schools with this wonderful opera.

For more information about Starting Arts see our website at: <https://www.startingarts.com/>

Starting Arts is another of the organizations that SJOG supports.

Career Updates

by Susan English

Opera News featured several Merolini in both their November and December editions. In November the cover and six pages of text and photographs were devoted to **Nadine Sierra** (Merola 2010.) Ms. Sierra's considerable internet presence was featured. "Sierra's Instagram profile...is somehow accessible and glamorous at the same time, owing to...her openness, enthusiasm and personal charm." "Of course, none of this would matter if Sierra weren't a first-rate singer. When she made her Metropolitan Opera debut... her voice had youthful effervescence. She has matured into her lyric instrument...taking on a dusky, smooth quality." This same edition also spotlighted **Anna Netrebko** (Merola 1996) and **Patricia Racette** (Merola 1988) and reviewed **Ms. Racette's** Santa Fe Opera's production of *Jenůfa*. The review concluded with, "Racette, in a career-capping performance, let us gaze into her soul."

December's *Opera News* featured six pages of photos and text on **Elza Van Den Heever** (Merola 2003, 2004.) The article delved into her past and philosophical development. "She left home at eighteen to study at San Francisco Conservatory and spent ten years in California, earning her bachelor's and Master's degrees, completing two seasons in the Merola program and joining San Francisco Opera for a three-season stint as an Adler Fellow." The conclusion quotes **Ms. Van Den Heever** "For the longest time, I really, really, really didn't believe I belonged here. I believe it now – and it's an extraordinary feeling."

The *San Francisco Chronicle's* Kosman reviewed San Francisco Opera's *Le Nozze Di Figaro* noting the contributions of two Merolini: "The antagonists (calling them villains would go too far) were superbly embodied by Catherine Cook as Marcellina (her signature role, and one that gets better with each outing),...and James Creswell as Dr. Bartolo, whose booming celebration of the joys of revenge was among the best I've heard."

Catherine Cook (Merola 1990) is the Frederica Von Stade Distinguished Chair in Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She will sing Mama in Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk* with Opera Parallele. **James Creswell** (Merola 2000) will be singing Count Walter in *Luisa Miller* with the English National Opera then travel to Santa Fe to sing Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* and Vodnik in *Rusalka*.

The *Chronicle's* Kosman also reviewed San Francisco Opera's production of *Manon Lescaut* calling out several Merolini: "Tenor **Brian Jagde**, to whom the company returns unwaveringly when any Italian repertoire is involved, gave his familiar performance as the impoverished student Des Grieux who loves Manon — vigorous and thrillingly fearless at the role's climactic junctures...Happily, the veteran bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** was on hand to bring a measure of robust and insinuating villainy to the part of the lecherous Geronte, and there were strong contributions from Adler Fellows **Christopher Oglesby**, **Ashley Dixon** and **Zhengyi Bai**." Upcoming performances by Mr. Jagde include Lt. Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* in Vienna in March, at the Met in April, and at the Royal Opera House in London in July.

In November, the San Francisco Symphony featured Merolini **Stuart Skelton** as Siegmund in an excerpt from Wagner's *Ring* that Kosman called "first rate." He went on to consider Mr. Skelton's performance with: "But none of it would have been possible without the first-rate vocal casting, beginning with tenor Stuart Skelton, whose performance as Siegmund was a tour de force of stamina, energy and grace. Skelton, a onetime Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera, gave Symphony audiences a memorable interpretation of the title role in Britten's *Peter Grimes* five years

Continued on next page

ago, but this performance outshone even that landmark...In singing that was by turns intimate and heroic — and sometimes, somehow, both at once — Skelton created a portrait of a man in flight from the travails of the world, yet eager to fight for the rewards of love when they come across his path. The vaulting, piercing phrases of the assignment registered without any sense of strain — always shapely, always beautifully in tune — and he delivered the role's more gently expressive passages with all the directness of a lieder singer." Mr. Skelton will sing Siegmund in *Die Walkure* at Teatro Real in Madrid this month.

Both Opera San José and the San Francisco Opera presented Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* to great reviews. OSJ's production was directed by former resident artist **Layna Chianakas**. She will be directing a double bill with Livermore Opera in March of Zemlinsky's *Eine Florentinische Tragoedie* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. Also featured in OSJ's production was Merolini **Eugene Brancovanu**. He will sing again with OSJ in *Il Trovatore* and *The Magic Flute* this season. The *Chronicle's* Kosman noted of the production: "The San Jose production, directed by Layna Chianakas, is as overtly family-friendly as it can be. There are colorful stage designs drawn right from the world of storybooks, ...the California Theater offers close-up intimacy."

Kosman goes on to consider the San Francisco Opera's production with an article titled "The Kids Come Out on Top..." He considers the contributions of two Merolini with: "mezzo-soprano **Michaela Martens** — last encountered together at the War Memorial Opera House as part of the much more malignant family in Strauss' *Elektra*... sang with unbridled power and presence. The woodland spirits were vividly rendered by **Ashley Dixon** as the Sandman, and **Natalie Image**, in an especially crystalline performance as the Dew Fairy." Janos Gereben also noted their performances in the San Francisco Classical Voice with:

"Adler Fellows Natalie Image and Ashley Dixon contributed well to the performance, as the Dew Fairy and the Sandman, respectively."

Gereben noted the contributions of OSJ former resident artists in another SFCV review of West Bay Opera's *Nabucco*. He commended **Alex Boyer** writing his, "Ismaele showed the spinto tenor advancing near to heldentenor domain." Nicholas Jones (SFCV) considered **Christina Major's** performance as Abigaile with: "It's a great part, and soprano Christina Major, a West Bay Opera regular, nailed it with a plethora of high C's and swooping coloratura scale-work that brought out the contradictions of her character's tormented ambitions and jealousy."



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P.O. Box 33025
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An Invitation to Join or Renew

Membership year: February 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021

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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