



SEATTLE OPERA NEWS  
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

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**Opera Training for Puppies:  
Guide Dogs for the Blind and Seattle Opera Join Forces  
Puppies to Attend Rehearsal of *Florenzia*—  
“A Good Opera for Beginners”**



Seattle—Opera spokeswoman Tina Ryker announced today that **Seattle Opera** and **Guide Dogs for the Blind** plan to form an informal partnership by having puppies in training with the **For Your Eyes Only** program attend the Opera’s Wednesday night dress rehearsals with their pups’ trainers.

Given access to the opera house, the puppies in training will have an opportunity to be in a situation simulating an actual performance: a good number of people will be in the auditorium, the house will be dark, there will be a full orchestra, and the opera onstage, with a full cast, will proceed like an actual performance.

**The opera-house training for the puppies begins Wednesday, February 23, at 7:00 p.m., at McCaw Hall.** The rehearsal is of Daniel Catán’s *Florenzia en el Amazonas*, an excellent opera for beginners: it is relatively short (just over two hours), easy on the ears with its lyrical music, and offers an array of stunning visual effects.

Explaining her group’s interest in attending the opera, Robynn Coulter, a puppy raiser and the treasurer of **For Your Eyes Only**, says: “As a puppy raiser, I need to teach the dog proper behavior and develop his social skills so that when he is returned to **Guide Dogs for the Blind**, he will have experienced a wide variety of situations and have an understanding of the world around him. This allows him to focus on learning the guide work he must master to lead a blind person.”

**The puppies attending the opera are 9 to 13 months old. They are all Labrador Retrievers.** Among the handler-and-pup duos attending the *Florenzia* rehearsal are Brandon Jones and Boise, Hannah Zorn and Spence, Carolyn Marck and Sparkle, Jackie Stowe and Sheila, Eero Jones and Festive, and Robynn Coulter and Palmer.

**Coulter notes that most of the handlers in her group are involved in 4H programs:** “In our region, guide dog puppy clubs operate in conjunction with Washington 4H programs to provide educational opportunities for both the teenagers and the dogs.”

**Dogs in the opera house?**

“It’s a natural,” says Ryker, “most opera people are dog people. They readily understand how important guide dogs are in giving those who might not otherwise be able to attend the opera an opportunity to attend. We’re eager to help with training the puppies by opening the doors to our dress rehearsals.”

Seattle Opera’s General Director Speight Jenkins is not worried about how the dogs will react in the opera house: “My dogs have heard opera since they were puppies and always seem to enjoy it. Jasper, who has been in an opera and is particularly positive, always tunes in to sopranos. I think our experiment here with For Your Eyes Only should be a big success.”

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**For Your Eyes Only** is a Bellevue-based group that raises and socializes puppies for Guide Dogs for the Blind. After their puppy training, the pups will return to Guide Dogs for the Blind to learn the work of guiding a blind person. More information on puppy raising and Guide Dogs for the Blind can be found at their Web site, [www.guidedogs.com](http://www.guidedogs.com).

**For the record:** Speight Jenkins' immediate family includes a Wheaton Terrier (Jaspar) and two mixed breeds—both part chow, part shepherd, and "Lord knows what else." Tina Ryker's immediate family includes a Samoyed, a Collie, and an American Eskimo. Administrative Director Kelly Tweeddale's family has a cat.

**Seattle Opera will have puppy rehearsal photos taken by Bill Mohn available for the press by Thursday afternoon, February 24. Please contact Monte Jacobson at [monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org](mailto:monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org).**

**Seattle Opera's performances of *Florencia en el Amazonas* run February 26 through March 12.** All performances in Marion Oliver McCaw Hall.

**Ticket Information**

Ticket Prices: \$40 - \$123

Ticket Office: 206-389-7676/800-426-1619

Credit Cards Accepted: American Express, VISA, MasterCard

Online Orders: [www.seattleopera.org](http://www.seattleopera.org)



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Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera has developed into one of the leading opera companies in the United States. The company is recognized internationally for its theatrically compelling and musically accomplished performances, especially the Opera's interpretations of the works of Richard Wagner.

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