

L'Arria

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SEATTLE
Opera Guild

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Mission Statement

The Seattle Opera Guild is a non-profit organization that supports and promotes opera. The Guild provides financial support for Seattle Opera, funds vocal scholarships and promotes opera education for all age groups to ensure future opera audiences.

A Word from your President

Suzy Mygatt Wakefield



Your Board of Directors of the Seattle Opera Guild is making great strides, using the concept of synergy.

Synergy is a concept borrowed from physics, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Applied to group efforts, it means that if we pull together and work toward common goals, we will have a greater outcome, get far more done, and have more fun than if we each go into our separate corners and work as hard as we can individually. It requires understanding what the common goals are and being committed to working on them together. Our Board of Directors has used this approach very effectively. We enjoy working together, visiting with each other, problem-solving and helping with joint events. I am so thankful for their energy, ideas and ability to clear hurdles and follow through. It's worth mentioning that we have four Past Presidents on our Board: Gayle Charlesworth, Marilyn Leck, Florence Rose-Thompson, and Christine Szabadi. (How many Boards can say that?)

The Guild has brought you the following innovations and updates since June, 2021:

Our new **Membership Directory**, sent out to all members in mid-June, was designed and assembled by Roberta Lyon, Trustee, and her committee over the past winter months. As Guild members, you all have received copies. *We encourage all of you to renew your membership, if you haven't already.* As Gayle Charlesworth, our VP of Membership has stated, "You are included in the enclosed directory even if your dues are not current. The board made this decision in order to give you time to catch up...the SOG depends on your membership for funding." (Only Guild members may have a copy of the Directory, for security reasons.)

In a further effort to encourage membership, Roberta Lyon has redesigned our **Seattle Opera Guild brochure**, which was mailed out to all members in mid-July. You all should have a copy. (We have lots of extras if you need one.) One member shared that she found the photographs in the brochure so inviting to Guild events, that she decided to renew her membership!

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SOG's 2021 Annual Meeting & Luncheon

Gayle Charlesworth, VP Membership

Our first live meeting and hug-fest since 2019 was most enjoyable and attended by 50 members and guests. Luncheon was served under a tent on the lawn of the Seattle Yacht Club. The Award of Distinction for 2021 was presented to Sally Buckingham, whose long and fabulous tenure with the SOG richly deserved the award, but she was truly surprised. Our beloved Treasurer was moved to tears, and almost speechless! Our business meeting was ably conducted by President Suzy Wakefield, with a few proposed changes in bylaws unanimously passed and a new Board of Trustees elected.

It has been a very challenging year for the Board, and Suzy expressed her appreciation of their hard work and dedication with silver pins for each Board member. After the meeting, we were all invited inside to the Fireside Lounge for our entertainment, blessedly air conditioned, given the heat of the day!

The program, organized by Christine Szabadi, was performed by two of the award winners of the 2020 Singers' Development Awards competition. Lindsay Nakatani, Soprano and Aria Minasian, Mezzo-Soprano, were accompanied by Elisabeth Ellis, pianist. A

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Sally Buckingham, 2021 Winner of Award of Distinction.

Photo by Judi Kalitzki

Meeting

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selection of seven varied pieces was presented which ended with “Flower Duet” from *Lakmé* by Delibes. This particular number was enchanting, and the entire program was well received by an audience ready for live performances again!

It was an enjoyable and well-planned afternoon, for which we thank the committee who worked so hard to make it so: Patricia Pavia, Roberta Lyon, Suzy Mygatt Wakefield, Brenna Pink Pampena, and Christine Szabadi; and Judi Kalitzki for her work on communication, including the timely heads up about the Montlake Bridge being out of commission!



Elizabeth Ellis, Aria Minasian, Christine Szabadi, Lindsey Nakatani



Christina Scheppelmann, Seattle Opera Director, and Suzy Wakefield, SOG Board President

Photos by Judi Kalitzki

Memories of Ernesto Alorda *Judi Kalitzki*

“Ernesto treated everyone like a star,” Jonathan Gerson told me when I interviewed him about his late husband, Ernesto Alorda, long-time Director of Artist and Community Relations for Seattle Opera who died on May 18, 2021. And in turn, it often seemed like everyone in the world of opera, from Seattle to Barcelona, from New York City to Rio de Janeiro, knew and loved Ernesto.

Ernesto Alorda de Cardenas was born in Havana, Cuba in 1940. His mother studied music at the conservatory and was a piano teacher, so music was in Ernesto’s blood. He began going to the symphony and the opera at an early age. When Ernesto was twenty, he and his siblings left Cuba after the communist revolution, and he settled in New York City, where he got involved in the Metropolitan Opera both as a volunteer and as a supernumerary, a non-singing role.

During a stint in the U.S. Army Ernesto was lucky enough to be based in Heidelberg, Germany, giving him the opportunity to attend opera in Europe. In 1976 Ernesto moved to Seattle, where he spent the rest of his life as an integral part of Seattle Opera, first as a volunteer and then on staff. When Speight Jenkins arrived in Seattle as the newly appointed General Director, Ernesto picked him up at the airport, thereby becoming both the first person Jenkins met in Seattle and his first hire, when Jenkins appointed Alorda as SO’s Director of Public Relations.

Ernesto Alorda and Jonathan Gerson met each other in 1990 and quickly became committed life partners, a relationship that gave both men great happiness and which culminated in their marriage in 2013. Jonathan’s profession was caring for elders, and he had become an expert in Alzheimer’s, so when Ernesto was sadly diagnosed with that disease, Jonathan was willing and able to care for him.

Jonathan told me he thinks of opera singers and all the professionals involved in putting on operas as very similar to the guilds of the medieval period who built the cathedrals in Europe. They are like a close-knit family who together create a glorious piece of art. No matter where in the world they are, they immediately sense a kinship with one another. Wherever Ernesto and Jonathan



travelled they always attended opera, and always ran into singers, conductors, or directors they knew. Even outside of the opera house, it seemed like they would frequently bump into friends from the opera world. Jonathan characterized their visits to opera houses around the world as family reunions.

One example of a close relationship Alorda established with a star of the opera world was his friendship with José Carreras. Having become friends through opera, Alorda was able to support Carreras when he had a bone marrow transplant at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle. After Carreras recovered, he continued to visit the Hutch, each time being sure to connect with Ernesto.

For a number of years, Ernesto and Jonathan hosted a preview at their home for the Bellini preview group, and Ernesto told me he plans to continue this tradition. He and Ernesto very much enjoyed their participation with Seattle Opera Guild, cherishing the music and friendships that make the Guild such a special group. And especially at this challenging time, Jonathan told me, he believes Seattle Opera needs the Guild more than ever.

You can enjoy listening to Ernesto Alorda tell his life story by watching an interview done for the Seattle Channel’s Community Stories. Here’s the link: <http://www.seattlechannel.org/CommunityStories?videoid=x21623>

Seattle Opera's Programs & Partnerships

Alejandra Valarino Boyer

“What is Programs and Partnerships?” This is probably the question I am asked most frequently in my role as Director of this program at Seattle Opera. Usually, I boil it down to the simplest terms: learning and community engagement. But the reality is that it is much more and its name reflects the variety of our programming and our focus on establishing deep relationships with the people and audiences we engage along the way.

Our work is rooted in the belief that opera is a resource that can be used to support educational and social-emotional learning, to foster dialogue that brings us to new understandings. Opera provides a creative outlet, for artist or audience, to be entertained or for cathartic release. Not everyone can, or wants, to attend opera performances, and its through Programs and Partnerships that Seattle Opera explores new ways to share our art form. It enables us to engage with diverse communities to create new artistic opportunities, and to build a new future for opera together.

One of the driving themes of our work is “engagement.” Many of you may still be familiar with the term “outreach.” Though a frequently used term in marketing, in community work the language and philosophy has shifted to one that fosters a two-way interaction and creates space for mutual benefit through “engagement.” At Seattle Opera we approach our partnerships by building relationships rooted in understanding. Understanding of needs and values of communities and individuals. Understanding how, and if, our artistic resource can be supportive and is welcomed, especially in spaces that have been historically excluded by our art form. We do not assume that everyone wants and needs opera. Instead, we listen to see if there is perhaps a point of connection on which we can build a pathway for engagement.

Seattle Opera learning programs span ages as young as pre-K to as old as our oldest participant! We believe that building a community of learning not only deepens our knowledge of opera, but opens opportunities to new, creative outlets and ignites conversations that build empathy and understanding.

We place strong emphasis on youth arts education in two programs: in-school and after-school. Our in-school programs focus on schools and communities furthest from arts access, specifically Title 1 schools that serve predominantly low-income families. We engage with students and teachers through singing and storytelling to build literacy skills. Our opera performances, specifically written for young audience, tour schools statewide. These school programs and resources, managed by school programs manager Courtney Clark, are often many students' first experience with opera!

For those students who are looking for more in-depth learning, Seattle Opera offers a suite of after-school classes and camps for ages 7 – 18. Led by youth and family programs manager Sara Litchfield, the budding artists learn to sing, act, and tap into their limitless creativity with Seattle Opera Teaching Artists. Most importantly, throughout all of our programs is the opportunity to build community and make friends with music-loving youth throughout the region.

Our adult patrons are just as curious as our young learners! Pre-opera talks and post-show talk backs have been a staple of performances for audience members. This year, our community engagement manager Alex Minami developed a new series of adult learning courses from writing libretti to the basics of opera. We also host several talks through the year, from our opera-focused Opera Talks to our Community Conversations that connect operatic themes to important current issues affecting our communities.

Our partnerships sometimes take the shape of formal programs like the Veterans Choir, in partnership with Path with Art, which began during our 2019 production of *The Falling and the Rising*. But more frequently our new partnerships emerge in serendipitous occasions like a performance at a community event or supporting a supply drive for a local shelter. It's about showing up for different communities in the way that best supports them.

Seattle Opera is also committed to the future of our art form through the development of artists and arts leaders. The Creation Lab nurtures Washington State composers and librettists, ages 18 – 30, through learning workshops and mentorship, as they work to develop new 20-minute operas. This summer the Seattle Arts Fellowship welcomed three new arts administrators of color for a year-long paid fellowship that provides on-the-job training alongside leadership development, skills training, and mentorship. The fellowship program is a partnership with Seattle Symphony, Pacific Northwest Ballet, King-FM, and Seattle University.

So what is Programs and Partnerships? It is how Seattle Opera engages with the communities around us. It is the place to learn, play, and build community. It's where opera lovers unite in their passion and where newcomers can explore a new art form. We know that not everyone is going to love opera as much as we do. But we are committed to ensuring that we have opened as many doors as possible so that both our long-time audiences and also curious newcomers can enter and find a place that feels like home.

Teen Vocal Studio Participants



Photo by P&P Staff

NEWS FROM THE EDUCATION VP: *We are back!*

Christine Szabadi

For the last 16 months we have all been in forced hibernation. However, we at the Seattle Opera Guild have been far from idle, and even further from thoughts of giving up. Instead, we have been making plans for the end of Covid, looking forward to a brighter future, albeit a different future.

I would like to announce two events which will celebrate the return to “close-to-normal.” The first is the Singers’ Development Award final auditions on Thursday, September 16 at 1:30 pm. Seattle Opera has kindly offered the use of the Tagney-Jones Hall at the Opera Center for no cost. The awards are an extremely important part of SOG’s mission, as it gives such a boost to the careers of aspiring opera singers. The eight finalists selected by the Education Committee, will be accompanied by the magnificent David McDade and the judges will be Lisa Bergman, Regina Thomas and Michael Delos.

The event is free, although donations to the Singers’ Development Fund will be most welcome. For the safety of everyone, seating will be limited, so you will need to register beforehand. Please watch your email for more information.

Looking toward the fall, I am happy to announce, finally, a real in-person Preview! You will notice this is in the singular. It is just one Preview for the whole Opera Guild, as we move toward rebuilding and restructuring our organization in the post-pandemic. Entitled “Welcome Back Preview,” it will be on Sunday, October 10 around 2:00 pm. Some of our wonderful local singers will sing selections from *La Bohème*, which opens the following weekend at Seattle Opera. How we all love those breathtaking arias; how our emotions become caught up in the tragedy of the story; how wonderful we can have this all up close and personal! Please watch for your mailed invitation. Welcome back, opera lovers!



President continued from page 1

In the brochure, there are five photos showing Guild Preview activities, often given in private homes, where Guild members and their guests can watch a preview, sung by two singers, with piano accompaniment, followed by refreshments and appetizers or a full buffet. This personal touch makes learning about an opera very pleasant and easy, so that when you see the SO performance, you will have a firmer understanding of the story and music. Preview Groups are the essence of the Guild: Allegro, Amici Dell’Opera, Bellini, Vivace, Magnolia/Queen Anne, Mercer Island, Parties and Previews, and “At Large.” Each group has its own board and activities. Members are free to choose the preview group of their choice. Feel free to contact any Board member for further information. We want you and your friends to join in.

Our new website www.seattleoperaguild.org came online on the Fourth of July! I encourage you to spend some time with it. This was built by Josh DeLacy, a web designer (www.brandedlook.com) who has maintained our past website. Josh will update the website with photos and information as they come in, so that it is always current! (Judi Kalitzki, our VP of Communications, coordinates what goes onto the website.) You will find links to: Join Us, Donate, About Us (What We Do), Membership Application, Events, News, Issues of *L’Aria*, and applications for our Singers Development Awards. You will also see many photos of young singers whom we want to encourage! We do this for them!

The Singers’ Development Fund is the pride and joy of the Seattle Opera Guild. Christine Szabadi, our VP of Education, is our very capable Director and arranges all of our singing events. **We hold annual auditions, which this year will be held on Thursday, September 16 in the Tagney Jones Hall at the Seattle Opera Center.** Last year we had 8 contestants. The prizes range from first place \$3,000, second place \$2,000, third place \$1,000, and Encouragement Awards of \$500. (In this way, virtually all contestants receive a financial award.) The Singers’ Development Fund is consistent with one of our primary missions: to provide funds for vocal scholarships. In-person attendance will likely be possible; more information will be forthcoming as we get closer to the event.

If I weren’t having so much fun as President, I would surely feel discouraged, just like everyone else in support groups for performing arts organizations right now. But we are persevering, even excelling, due to the remarkable talents of our Board, the loyalty of our members, and by following the principle of synergy!

Singers Development Awards Final Auditions

**Thursday, September 16th
1:30 PM**

Tagney-Jones Hall
at the Opera Center

Seating Limited
Registration Required



*Watch your email for more
information about registration.*

Welcome Back Preview

La Bohème

**Afternoon
Sunday, October 10th**

*Watch for more details and
a mailed invitation!*

Mercer Island Preview Group History

Marilyn Lek

The Seattle Opera Guild (SOG), incorporated in 1956, was integral in bringing Verdi's Aida to the Seattle World's Fair in 1962. Seattle Opera (SO) was founded in 1964 with the support of many Seattle residents. With this growth of live mainstage opera in Seattle, came neighborhood opera study groups. The Mercer Island Preview Group, originally called the Mercer Island Study Group, was founded in 1969 by Aida Hirstel (founding chairman), Barbara Howell (currently a member) and others. The members took the names of SO operas and the composers, researched them, and made a report to the study group four or five times a year. Once a year, an education luncheon was held with the Dell 'Isola Preview Group and invited guests, to fundraise with sales of homemade baked goods and fruit cakes to financially support the Seattle Opera Guild (SOG).

In the mid 1970's the Mercer Island Study Group became the Mercer Island Preview Group (MIPG) and started meeting in the evenings so husbands who were also opera enthusiasts could join in. MIPG members began supporting SOG and SO fundraisers such as Pub Jumps, Home Tours, Garden Tours, Divas & Diamonds Fashion Luncheons, Holiday Soirees, and other grand events.

During the 1980's, MIPG continued the study aspect, complementing each SO mainstage production. At one meeting Mrs. Duncan Ross (wife of SO General Director, Glynn Ross) came and described opera costuming. On another memorable evening, Hans Wolfe (who became General Director, Tacoma Opera) explained the brilliant sextet from Don Carlo, using recordings.

MIPG fundraising added selling Entertainment Books, and social event attendance grew when dinner themes were introduced. Christmas cruises with potluck dinners took place where MIPG members provided entertainment onboard for guests. Many dinner parties were held at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Hall to introduce the greater Mercer Island community to opera and all forms of music. In 1989, the preview group held a one-day-only Joseph Scaylea photographic exhibit fundraiser at the Edgewater Inn, in Seattle, with proceeds exceeding \$7,500!

During the 1990's, MIPG stepped up fundraising by charging members and guests a small fee to attend in home previews as SOG began to routinely offer live previews to each SOG Preview Group. Our annual potluck dinner fundraisers took on an elegant twist, attracting many guests, with live opera entertainment in various Mercer Island residences. Around 2007, a live auction was added to these annual live preview and potluck fundraiser dinners.

During the pandemic, we have held four Zoom Happy Hours with speakers delivering opera entertainment for our members to raise funds for SOG.

MIPG has always supported SOG with fundraiser attendance and volunteering for board positions and committees when asked. MIPG recognizes five past SOG Presidents: Kathleen Brumwell, Norma Rowe, Tavia Crowder, Sandra Dunn, Marilyn Leck, and five Award of Distinction recipients: Tavia Crowder, Sandra Dunn, Barbara Howell, Agi Day, and Marilyn Leck. SOG was fortunate to have Barbara Howell serve as SOG membership chair for two decades, with only 4x6 index information cards!

The following gracious thank you letter to the Guild from the Executive Director of NOISE, Lisa Bergman, also included a list of each and every contribution SOG has contributed from 1985-2021. The grand total is \$55,700!

NORTHWEST OPERA IN SCHOOLS, ET CETERA

Boyd Schlaefer, Michele McBride Artistic Directors NOISE

Lisa Bergman Executive Director

Rhonda Kline General Director Music Director

April 25, 2021

Suzy Mygatt Wakefield, President Seattle Opera Guild

Dear Suzy,

On behalf of the NOISE Board of Directors and cast, THANK YOU for Seattle Opera Guild's contribution of \$1,500.00. We are thrilled! Seattle Opera Guild has been a loyal supporter of our efforts in the schools since we began in 1985. We are PROUD of our collaborative history with you. You are an indispensable partner in our commitment to opera and cultural enrichment. Together we have touched the lives of over 2 million children!! Now that's something to sing about!

We thank you for your support of our tour of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* which has been sadly delayed by the pandemic. As restrictions loosen, we will begin by holding auditions but only as necessary because we have given the artists who were originally cast first right of refusal. They lost 3/4 of their projected income due to mandated school closures. Our hope is that the Office of the Superintendent of Public Education and our governor will open the door for our tour in the Spring of 2022.

The missions of the Seattle Opera Guild and NOISE are powerfully connected in our mutual quest for

- Development of future audiences through education and exposure to opera
- Training and professional experience for young opera singers, many of whom have been graduates of the Seattle Opera Young Artist program!

Your gift has opened doors to a young audience which may never have experienced the joy of a brilliant high note, a fascinating melody, a gripping story, a moment of sheer joy and rapture - all within the security of familiar surroundings. Teachers, too, find moments of fascination and escape through the magic of theater.

I thank you for this most generous contribution and for all your past support. Please share this note of thanks with the entire Seattle Opera Guild Board.

Sincerely yours,

Lisa Bergman Executive Director



Photo by Diane Urbani

SEATTLE Opera Guild

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Find SOG Online!

We're on the web: seattleoperaguild.org

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