Opera in the Ozarks Navigates Covid-19 in Successful Season

Opera in the Ozarks had a successful 2021 summer season despite the ever-present threat of Covid-19. The company asked for vaccination status of all participants about a month before the season started, and found out that all singers, staff members, orchestra members, coaches and all on-site personnel were fully vaccinated for Covid-19. This helped a lot. Everyone quarantined for a week upon arrival and departures from our campus were strictly limited (all of the singers had to deposit their car keys with the OIO office).

Testing was done every few days under the supervision of Dr. Alice Martinson. OIO went through 445 test kits, which were generously donated by the Arkansas Public Health department.

OIO also undertook thorough disinfectant cleaning of all areas of the campus on a regular basis throughout the summer. This involved a substantial investment in air cleaning equipment.

OIO installed UV-C and ionization units inside the air conditioning units, put up UV-C fans in the dining hall and rehearsal hall, and UV-C disinfected all other spaces using portable units.

We are delighted to report that the entire season went smoothly. No infections of Covid-19 were detected and everybody left the campus at the end of the season without any adverse health effects. Not only were no cases of Covid-19 detected, but also the performers experienced a much lower incidence of colds, flus and other illnesses as well.

OIO reduced its summer season to two operas rather than the usual three, plus a family opera which was given only at the OIO site and which did not tour to community centers and schools as is typically the case. Audience members were socially distanced from the singers and orchestra.

Even though the sale of tickets was strictly limited due to social distancing requirements, OIO sold nearly 1,800 tickets for the performances and several performances were sold out.

Thanks to our general director Nancy Preis, our operations director Chris Cathcart, and our artistic director Tom Cockrell for carrying through the complete season with no adverse consequences.

Hopefully next year we will not have to observe these kinds of protocols.

OIO Sets Operas for Summer 2022

Artistic director Tom Cockrell has announced the following operas for the 2022 season of Opera in the Ozarks: La Rondine (The Swallow) by Giacomo Puccini, Cosi fan tutte by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Stephen Sondheim’s A Little Night Music.

La Rondine is a breezy work in the style of Viennese operettas, inspired by the operetta giant Franz Lehar, a friend of Puccini’s. The most light-hearted of Puccini’s operas, it is tuneful and ideal for young voices. Even Puccini fans may not have heard it often, so it will be a special treat.

Cosi fan tutte is one of Mozart’s four great operas, and again is friendly to young voices. It features six excellent leading roles and is a delightful comedy with rich opportunities to showcase the acting talents of our singers.

A Little Night Music is one of the greatest works by Sondheim, a master of the American Broadway stage. Originally designed as a Broadway musical, it is often done by opera houses because of its high level vocal demands and serious content. In addition to the classic tune “Send in the Clowns,” it contains much other delightful and challenging music.
Fall always brings joy as we anticipate the next exciting summer opera season that will be presented for us in just a few months at Opera in the Ozarks. That’s especially true this year since many changes had to be made to even have a season last summer.

In reality though, it was amazing! Faculty, staff and students all worked together to make the necessary changes for everything to work. I am so proud to be a part of the outstanding program at Inspiration Point that Prof Hobart began way back in 1950. Hopefully, we’re nearing the end of the Covid-19 pandemic and next summer will be much easier.

The campus looked great this year as we arrived from St. Louis. Many campus buildings were newly painted to go well with our new rehearsal hall (a little paint really does make a big difference). And, we were excited to be there on three different weekends: July 2-3, the opening night weekend; July 10 -11 when we saw all three productions in two days; and July 20-23 for the chamber music concert and Federation Days.

As I look back to how important OIO was for me when I was there as a university junior, I am amazed to see how important this place still is for the students and young artists of today. If you’ve attended an “Opera Talk” before a performance you’ve heard their stories. Nowhere else can they receive the amazing educational and performance opportunities they receive at OIO. By your support of Opera in the Ozarks you have made a huge difference in their lives. So thank you for that.

Soon you will be hearing more about this year’s Annual Fund Drive for Opera in the Ozarks. I am confident that you realize how important your part in this year’s fund drive is for OIO and for young artists from all across America, but have you thought about how important it is for each of us?

Music heals our souls and reaches us in special ways. So the beautiful music out there on Rock Candy Mountain is not only for today’s young artists, but it is vital for each of us as well.

Carole Langley
Thanks to all who generously donated to the Opera in the Ozarks annual fund last year, and who underwrote operas and sponsored Nights at the Opera this summer. Your donations, along with those of many others, helped us successfully navigate an unusual season for Opera in the Ozarks. We had a great season thanks to you!

This fall brings some more giving opportunities for Opera in the Ozarks as we gear up for our year-end annual fund. The Tuesday after Thanksgiving is the national Day of Giving in which OIO will participate. You will be hearing more about that in the fall.

Our annual fund for the 2022 season will begin late in the year, so please watch your mailboxes for more information. Thanks again for your continuing dedication to making Opera in the Ozarks survive and grow!

Now You Can “Stream” Our Operas!

For the first time performances of Opera in the Ozarks operas are being made available on the OIO web site for streaming to your computer, tablet, phone or other electronic device.

Four videos have been posted, two for each of the operas because each of the operas had two separate casts. You can pick the cast of your choice.

The videos are available for streaming at a cost of $20 each.

OIO will also be selling DVD recordings of the operas. The DVDs will be for sale on the OIO web site when the engineering of the recordings is completed. Visit opera.org and look under the OIO Store tab.

Tech Tips for You

Is your music club, local or state, doing what it can to promote itself and Opera in the Ozarks? There are some important things to remember from the social media standpoint, as Julie Watson of Missouri, the Public Relations Division chair for the National Federation of Music Clubs (NFMC) advised us during Federation Days this summer.

First, be sure to “like” NFMC and your state and local music clubs’ pages on Facebook and other social media platforms. More “likes” help it to show up higher in searches.

You can also “join” private or public groups established by your state and local music clubs. Being a member of these private groups will give you a greater chance of seeing their posts in your newsfeed. Private groups of just your members can help with club communication in a more private environment, as these posts and pictures can’t be shared with non-members.

Do you want to know more about social media options? NFMC has a Technology Tip on this topic, which is found at www.nfmc-music.org - Publications - Public Relations Information - Tech Tip #3.

News of Our Alumni

(continued from page 2)

online at WQXR or through the Metropolitan Opera web site, metopera.org. They also are available as Apple podcasts.

Michelle Jennings (OIO 1997) and her husband Tom, a pianist, have released an album called Viewed From Above, available in CD format as well as streaming from YouTube. She also originated the role of Thjodhild in the world premiere of Freydis and Gudrid, a Viking Opera, which completed filming in January 2021.

The Omaha Opera will produce Bellini’s unusual bel canto opera I Capuleti e I Montecchi (The Capulets and the Montagues) in October. Starring in the trouser role of Romeo will be

(continued on page 4)
mezzo soprano Cecelia Hall (OIO 2004). This summer she appeared with Opera Frankfurt in *Dialogues des Carmelites* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*).

Louis Otey (OIO 1976), a baritone, had his last pre-Covid performances with the Maryland Lyric Opera singing the lead role of the priest Athanael in Massenet's *Thais*.

Over his long career, Otey has performed with the leading opera companies.

(continued on page 5)
Beloved OIO Alum Visits Inspiration Point

Daniel (Dan) Wright, pictured here with former OIO general director Jim Swiggart, attended the Point for seven years running (1953-1959) as a singer, trumpeter, piano accompanist, and director. He attended again in 1963, 1964, and 1967 as director and speech instructor. He went on to take a Master of Music degree from Indiana University in Opera Direction. He was opera director at the university level for 13 years and then a private voice teacher for over 40 years.

The Opera in the Ozarks archival collection at the University of Arkansas already holds his donated scrapbooks from 1953-1956. When Dan attended OIO performances and Federation Days this past July, he brought with him additional items to donate to the archives, including this time his 1957 scrapbook along with letters from Henry Hobart, Isaac Van Grove, and other materials.

On his way back to his home in Texas, Dan stopped at the Lincoln County Museum of Pioneer History in his hometown of Chandler, Oklahoma, to drop off copies for distribution of his new brochure, entitled "Impact of Chandler on Opera in the Ozarks." The brochure includes a list of more than 30 citizens of Chandler who have held various significant performing and administrative roles at the Point over the years.

Tidbits From the OIO Archives

by Janet Parsch

1. One hundred twenty-seven operas, including children’s operas, have been performed at Opera in the Ozarks. These 127 operas have been seen in 353 productions over the years. The most operas performed in a season was 13 in 1959.

2. Which have been the most frequently produced operas at Opera in the Ozarks? The top ten productions are: Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel (15 times), Bizet’s Carmen (9), Mozart’s Così fan tutte (9), Mozart’s Le Nozze di Figaro (9), Van Grove’s Ruth (9), Mozart’s Don Giovanni (8), Puccini’s La Traviata (8), Mozart’s Zauberflöte (7), Verdi’s La Bohème (7) and Puccini’s Madama Butterfly (7).


4. Someone at Federation Days this year asked when the tradition began of singing “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” on the closing night of the season at the Point. The song was written in 1959 and Carroll Freeman said when he and his wife, Kay Paschal, were at the Point in 1975, the tradition was already in place. If you have an idea about this tradition, please contact Janet Parsch at jparsch@uark.edu. She already asked Jim Swiggart and he doesn’t know the answer!

5. We are looking for OIO season programs from 1965 and 1966 that were professionally designed and printed. What we have only found so far are typewritten, mimeographed sheets of individual operas, with minimal information, and not the complete advertisements, biographies, background information, photos, etc., that typically made up programs before and after those years. Contact Janet Parsch if you might have any information or a copy of the program to share.
Ways of Giving to Opera in the Ozarks

How many ways can we give to Opera in the Ozarks? As general director Nancy Preis taught us at Federation Days, there are many. Let us count the ways….

1. You can participate in a monthly giving program. Giving a smaller amount each month may be more comfortable than making one or two major gifts a year. You can find out more about this on the OIO web site, or just contact Nancy at generaldirector@opera.org.

2. If you are a Facebook person, consider having a birthday fundraiser for Opera in the Ozarks. There are directions on Facebook as to how to do this. It’s simple and is an effective way to leverage your own donation with donations from your friends.

3. If you purchase items from Amazon online, it is easy to instruct Amazon to make a donation to OIO as part of each purchase you make. Just go to the Amazon Smile page and make OIO your preferred charity, then be sure to shop on smile.amazon rather than just Amazon from now on. That’s all there is to it!

4. Many OIO supporters have remembered IPFAC in their wills or trusts. Making a charitable donation from your estate may be as simple as just adding a codicil (amendment) to your will or amending your trust agreement, if you have a trust. The exact proper name for your donation would be “Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony” and the address is shown on the back page of this newsletter. This is an important way to help us, and it costs you nothing.

5. Other ways to remember OIO as part of your estate plan is to make IPFAC a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or an IRA upon your death. This is cheaper than pulling money out of your life insurance value or IRA to make a charitable donation, because if you do that you must pay income taxes on the withdrawal. Not so if you make IPFAC a direct beneficiary.

6. Did you know that in your taxes for the year 2021 you can deduct charitable contributions with no limitation? There is no cap for this year. This was a special provision passed by Congress to assist in Covid-19 relief, but it extends to all charitable donations.

7. If your investment portfolio contains stock which has appreciated significantly since you purchased it, this may present a problem when you sell it. You would have to pay a capital gains tax on the entire amount of increase in the stock’s value. However, if you make a charitable donation of that same stock, you can get a current tax deduction and the charity can sell the stock for today’s value without paying any tax. This may work both to your advantage and that of IPFAC, so consider it when you look at your stock portfolio.

Thanks for considering these various ways to help IPFAC and keep Opera in the Ozarks alive and growing!

Julie Watson, the former President of the Missouri Federation of Music Clubs, received the Servant Leadership award at Federation Days this summer. She is shown here with former NFMC President Ouida Keck. Congratulations to Julie!

In addition to the mainstage productions of Cendrillon and Lucia di Lammermoor, the singers at Opera in the Ozarks performed an opera scenes program, where this photo was taken. Thanks to Steve Shogren for the photograph.
Stephen Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music*

*A Little Night Music* is one of the seminal works of the American music theater and represents one of the high points of the versatile career of Stephen Sondheim. It is an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman’s 1955 film *Smiles of a Summer Night.*

Set in Sweden at the turn of the last century, the opera consists of several unhappy love stories involving a middle-aged lawyer, his child bride, his ex-mistress, her new liaison and an ancient grand dame.

This “sweetly cynical operetta,” in the words of Broadway musical writer Kurt Gänzl, is built entirely around ¾ waltz time. This gives it plenty of lilt while offering opportunities for grand and sweeping melodies.

The musical, according to Gänzl, contains “a series of dazzling ensembles, structurally sophisticated, lyrical admirable, and rich and sweeping in their music.”

The score is best known for the ballad “Send in the Clowns” in which the character Desirée reflects on the ironies and disappointments of her life. However, the musical is full of other moving moments as well, which accentuate the dramatic twists and turns of the plot.

Sondheim almost literally grew up in the world of musical theater. When he was just ten years old he formed a close friendship with James Hammerstein, son of lyricist and playwright Oscar Hammerstein II. Later he became good friends with Hal Prince, who became the famed choreographer and director of many Broadway shows.

Sondheim’s own Broadway career started when he helped write the lyrics for Bernstein’s *West Side Story* in 1957 and Jule Styne’s *Gypsy* in 1959. His first score as a composer was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 1962. Future years saw him produce an eclectic mix of music in many different styles, including a pit-band score in *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), Asian influences in *Pacific Overtures* (1976) and a pop score for *Company* (1970).

*A Little Night Music* was composed in 1973 and is Sondheim’s “waltz opera.”

Later Sondheim works include a full-scale operatic-quality drama in the dark and foreboding *Sweeney Todd* (1979) and a surprising juxtaposition of many different traditional fairy tales in *Into the Woods* (1987), which has been performed at Inspiration Point.

Other Sondheim musicals include *Passion* (1984) and *Sunday in the Park With George* (1994), the latter based upon the famous painting by the French pointilist George Seurat.

Of all of Sondheim’s works, it is *A Little Night Music, Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods* which have migrated from the musical stage to the opera house. They require quite capable singers capable of delivering challenging music and also involve somewhat darker scenes which demand performers trained in acting as well as singing. Thus, they are thought by many to be more “operatic” than his lighter musicals.

---

**Alumni Committee Update**

The OIO Alumni Committee is continuing with its work in contacting alumni of the Point and obtaining information about their careers and current status.

Members of the committee have held over 60 interviews with OIO alums which will be made part of the archives of OIO maintained at the University Libraries Special Collections at the University of Arkansas.

OIO operations director Chris Cathcart has excerpted snippets of the interviews and compiled them into several video clips which will be made available to donors and which can be used to educate others about OIO and its rich history.

Those attending Federation Days last summer were able to view several of these videos and found them to be fun and informative.

Cathcart is continuing to edit recent interviews. This will be a long-running project.

We are thankful to all alumni of OIO who have been willing to participate and share their memories with us.

---

Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* was one of the operas at OIO this summer. Photo credit: Steve Shogren.
In lieu of a third mainstage opera at Opera in the Ozarks this summer, the company chose, because of limitations imposed by coronavirus restrictions, to perform a rather elaborate hour-long take-off on Mozart’s classic opera The Magic Flute.

In this version, created by OIO stage director Robert Swedberg, the characters are campers in a park who encounter some unusual difficulties. The young Tamino, out camping with his buddy Papageno, dreams of a monster who is vanquished by three ladies (see above photo by Steve Shogren). Pamina, the daughter of the Queen of the Night, has been kidnapped by the evil Trash Monster. With the help of various characters and devices, they recover the Circle of the Sun and defeat the Trash Monster and all ends happily and in an environmentally suitable manner.