

OPERA IN THE
OZARKS
AT INSPIRATION POINT

GOOD NEWS LETTER
Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony
16311 Highway 62 West
Eureka Springs, Arkansas 72632

December 2021
Don Dagenais, Editor

2022 Opera in the Ozarks Season is Set

Opera in the Ozarks has chosen its repertoire for the summer 2022 season and it is a delightful mix of operas, some of which you may not have seen before.

The season will contain an American musical, Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*. This show, originally written for Broadway, is considered to be Sondheim's most "operatic" composition and is often done by opera companies. It follows the story of the aging actress Desiree Armfeldt and her affair with a longtime friend, Fredrik Egerman.

The season marks a breezy Viennese-style light opera, *La Rondine (The Swallow)*, written by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. It has not been previously performed at Opera in the Ozarks. Puccini was a fan of Viennese-style musicals and this represents his attempt to create such a work for the Italian stage. It is delightful, funny in parts, and not as

tragic as his pure Italian operas. If you have not seen it before you will enjoy this tuneful and charming work.

The most traditional work of the season is Mozart's delightful comedy *Così fan tutte*, which tells the story of two sets of lovers who become the victims of a comic (and perhaps a bit malicious) wager. All ends well after much beautiful singing.

The season will also feature the return of our family opera, which this year will be *Pinocchio*, based upon the familiar folk tale with music by...you will have to wait to see!

The 2022 OIO season opens on June 24 and closes on July 22.

We hope you plan to join us in the summer of 2022 for these three enjoyable productions.



Singers at Opera in the Ozarks in 2021 had fun with a zany take-off of The Magic Flute, with a Trash Monster whose costume was made of discarded items and a theme centered around environmental concerns. Thanks to Steve Shogren for this and other photos in this issue.

Opera in the Ozarks Hires Carol Wright as Development Director

Carol Wright has been hired as the Development Director for Opera in the Ozarks. A resident of Eureka Springs, Carol comes to us from California State University where she was a manager of planned giving.

Carol previously worked with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and on annual campaigns for the Claire Trevor School of the Arts in California and with Soka University. Her other fund raising experience includes Colorado Mountain College Foundation and the University of Houston. In Northwest Arkansas she worked with the Nature Conservancy which gave her substantial contacts with major donors, foundations and corporations in Arkansas.

A piano and horn player, Carol was a musician and music educator prior to embarking on her fund raising career. She and her husband Cliff, also a French hornist, play in two bands conducted by former OIO General Director Jim Swiggart in Bella Vista and Berryville. They also play in another band in Monett, Missouri, and even drive to Kansas City to perform with the Kansas City Brass.

At OIO Carol will be working with General Director Nancy Preis and Operations Director Chris Cathcart in exploring fund raising opportunities for OIO, particularly among foundations, corporations and major donors in the Northwest Arkansas area as OIO seeks to expand its mission to year-round programming.

Welcome to Opera in the Ozarks, Carol!





News of Our Alumni

Mark Sepulveda (OIO 2019) sang in *Camelot* for Musical Theatre Heritage (MTH Theatre) in Kansas City this fall. He previously performed in *Carousel* for the



company. His other credits include the role of Tamino in Landlocked Opera's *The Magic Flute*, *Carousel* with AMDA Cosmo Theatre of Hollywood and several roles in *Truman and Pendergast*, a musical premiere in Kansas City.

Soprano **Latonia Moore** (OIO 1999) was featured in the Metropolitan Opera's season-opening production of a world premiere, Terrance Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. The opera was simulcast worldwide



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From the General Director

Since our 70th season concluded in July our Operations Director, Chris Cathcart, has been editing film and putting together packages for two new initiatives: the

family opera *The Magic Flute* and the instrumental videos for All-State competitions in four of our surrounding states. These two projects are now available for distribution at *no charge* for schools, libraries, civic organizations, or really, anyone.

The *Magic Flute* production is available either by streaming or on a USB flash drive. The flash drive includes some extra videos designed for additional learning. Robert Swedberg, the stage director and librettist, and Kim Welborn, the costume designer, both recorded some thoughts about their designs and concepts. Kim includes some of her costume sketches, helping the viewer see what the process is like. The drive also includes the libretto.

The learning opportunities are vast. Robert places the opera in its historical context, Kim shows off her drawing skills and imagination

and, of course, the music by Mozart is a feast for the ears.

The second package, aimed at high school instrumentalists, is an aid for learning the music that is required for the All State competitions in the four states: Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Each of our professional orchestra members not only demonstrate the music but also offers up tips on how to best do the fingering or how to phrase the piece. These are pointers that an expert teacher would offer, but we know that not all the budding instrumentalists in our region can afford or even find private instruction on their instrument.

Help us distribute these two resources for learning. Do you know a young instrumentalist who could use some help? Point them to our website where these videos are available for *free*. Tell the teachers you know so they can share these with their students.

We intend to continue these important initiatives in the future. If you would like to sponsor one of these projects, please call me.

Mary Briss

A Message From the President

As the time approaches for Thanksgiving and Christmas I'm really excited to be planning new activities and meetings with friends again.



A small music singing group to which we belong has been getting together again, and we all agree that it's great to be with each other and sing as well as we can.

Meanwhile Opera in the Ozarks needs our help. It is important for all of us to step up to the plate and invite our friends and neighbors to join us as we seek to continue to grow our amazing program.

Soon we will be hearing about our Annual Fund Drive and we all know how important that is! Giving Tuesday is coming up soon--

November 30 -- so be sure to get the word out to your clubs, friends and neighbors about that special opportunity to support OIO.

To donate, just go to Opera.org or send a check to our treasurer (his information is on the last page of this Good News Letter). All those donations - big or small - make a difference!

Then our final important task now is to start making our plans to be at the Point next summer. Nothing is better or more exciting than to be out there on Rock Candy Mountain listening to amazing young singers as they present our exciting new 2022 productions.

So let's start to breathe deeply again, sing a little, and get ourselves out of our "pandemic doldrums." Opera in the Ozarks will be open for business soon and Duane and I simply must be there. We hope we will see you there too!

Carole Langley

A Message From the Artistic Director

As the end-of-the-year holidays approach, I'm gearing up for the large but exciting task of reviewing 250-300 applications and auditions from which to select 45 for our 2022 Company.

Because of continued uncertainties universities hosting us for live auditions and travel (for me and singers) all application and audition processing will be done online using YAP Tracker.com.

I truly enjoy traveling for live auditions where I not only hear applicants voices live in a good acoustic but can engage them in some conversation to ascertain (as much as possible in ten minutes) if they are the next diamond in the rough for Inspiration Point. What I'm not looking forward to is hours of arias viewed from my computer screen or projected to the TV.

We are pleased to announce the artists who will return to Inspiration Point to lead productions this summer. Caleb Harris, who conducted a moving production of *Little Women* in 2019 returns to lead *Così fan tutte*, again joining stage director Robert Swedberg.

Directing *A Little Night Music* and the Studio Artist production of *Pinocchio* will

be JJ Hudson, who directed *Le nozze di Figaro* in 2016 and *Itabarro/Pagliacci* in 2017. I will be the stick jockey for the Sondheim and *La rondine*, also to be directed by Swedberg.

Alumna Catherine Cook (OIO 1984) taught a very inspiring and enthusiastically received online master class last July. She currently serves as the Frederica Von Stade Distinguished Chair at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and returns to the Point (in person) as our Vocal Artist-in Residence for the first weeks of the 2022 season!

You will hear from me next in the spring after I have heard a large slew of online auditions and announce the Artist Company of 2022.

I send wishes for happy and healthy holidays to all.



Thomas Cahill

#GIVING TUESDAY

Giving Tuesday is observed each year on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. This nationwide digital giving event was established in 2012 to follow the famous Black Friday shopping day on the Friday after Thanksgiving, and the Cyber Monday online shopping day on Monday after the weekend is over. The idea is that while you are in the mood to spend money for the holidays, why not include your favorite charities as well?

Last year more than \$180 million was raised online on Giving Tuesday with an average gift of just over \$100.

Opera in the Ozarks encourages you to remember your favorite charities on Giving Tuesday, and of course don't forget OIO! There is no nationwide portal for giving. Just go to opera.org and click on the Donate button and make your donation on that day (or whatever day you like) and we will include your generous gift as part of our annual giving campaign.

Thanks in advance to all of you who support OIO on Giving Tuesday!

Life Members

Did you know that money received as dues for Life Memberships are placed in the Henry and Ellen Hobart Endowment Fund?

Only the earnings may be used from that fund each year for purposes furthering the projects of IPFAC.

Life Members are IPFAC's strongest backers and their membership is greatly appreciated. If you would like to become a Life Member, membership dues are \$1,000 payable one time, and help our young singers at Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony.



News of Our Alumni

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on the Met's Live in HD production on October 23, 2021. Comparing the production to the world premiere St. Louis production a couple of years ago, *The New York Times* wrote, "The role of Billie, Charles' mother, was significantly expanded to create a true leading soprano part, here sung movingly by Latonia Moore." She also plays Serena in *Porgy and Bess* at the Met this season.

Wagnerian tenor **Clay Hilley** (OIO 2004) is set to sing the role of Siegfried in both *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* for the Deutsch Oper Berlin this fall and in January. This



season he also appears at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl as Siegmund in a new production of *Die Walküre*. He performs in excerpts from *Aida* with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra this season and also sings with the Bilbao Symphony

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News of Our Alumni

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Orchestra in excerpts from *Siegfried*. In March of next year he takes the role of Samson in a fully-staged *Samson and Delilah* for the BJU Opera Association at Bob Jones University in Charleston, South Carolina.

Mezzo soprano **Lindsay Ammann** (OIO 2004) appears with the Bayerische Staatsoper in *Die Zauberflöte* (*The*



Magic Flute) in December. Next May through July she is scheduled for the same company's *Les Troyens* (*The Trojans*) by Berlioz. In June and July she appears in Pendercki's rarely performed opera *The Devils of London*.

Annie Gill, a soprano (OIO 2009) kept busy during the pandemic singing a virtual *Messiah* last holiday season with the Symphonette and Landon School and also performing in several virtual holiday concerts. She was the soprano

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Opera in the Ozarks Annual Fund Gets Underway With \$130,000 Goal

The annual fund campaign of Opera in the Ozarks is now underway. Our goal this year is to raise \$130,000 during the annual fund.

You will shortly be receiving a mailing from Opera in the Ozarks asking for your contributions or pledges to the annual fund. All pledges should be paid by May 2022 when our artists begin arriving for the 2022 summer season.

The annual campaign furnishes basic operating funds for Opera in the Ozarks. Our program would not be sustainable without your generous contributions. Your donations help fund scholarships for our singers, staff salaries, the costs of providing food for the singers, salary costs for our artistic and operations personnel, funds for maintenance and upkeep of our facilities, utility costs, insurance, and other basic expenses.



OIO singers last summer got down on their knees to praise the donors who contribute to OIO's Annual Fund. Well, not really, but the photo does fit, don't you agree?

In addition we are trying to continue raising the salaries of our orchestra members, most of whom currently work for very modest payments. This is not much money for the time and talent that these musicians dedicate to Opera in the Ozarks each summer. Please make an extra gift this year so that we can give these musicians a much-deserved raise.

We are pleased to announce that a generous group of donors from the IPFAC Governing Board have offered to match your contributions to this year's annual fund drive "dollar for dollar" up to the amount of \$60,000. By making a gift to OIO in response to their challenge, your gift can be doubled.

One easy way to give to the annual campaign is to make a monthly automatic donation. This way your gift will be easy to afford -- just a bit each month -- and over time your monthly donations can add up and be significant donations for OIO.

If you have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or retirement plan, you are probably aware that you cannot keep retirement funds in your account indefinitely. You must take certain required distributions, generally when you reach age 70½. Directing these distributions to OIO is one easy way to resolve this while benefiting your favorite charity! There is more information about this in the annual fund letter which is on its way to you.

Remember that your donations to our annual fund provide much-needed assistance to our young singers just now embarking on their careers.

Thanks in advance for your generous contributions to the annual fund and please help us continue to make Opera in the Ozarks one of the nation's premiere summer vocal training institutions. Our young singers are counting on you!

Correction

In the last issue we mis-identified one of the people in a photograph of the Life Members of OIO. The person standing between Gloria Grilk and Jean Moffatt was Betty Pierce. Our apologies to Betty.

Magic Flute Video From 2021 Available for Viewing

Last summer, as you know, Opera in the Ozarks could not take its family-friendly opera into the community due to Covid-19 restrictions. Those who attended the opera at

educators and community coordinators to show to their students.

The Magic Flute is a one-hour abridged version of the original that has been reimagined as a tale about the importance of ecology, recycling and protecting our most valuable resource, the Planet Earth.

The opera features the music of Mozart, of course, with a new libretto conceived by director Robert Swedberg. The costumes and sets were made from recycled materials. This production is a “one of a kind” experience.

The video is available via streaming at <https://opera.org/the-magic-flute/>. You can also request a USB flash drive with the video.

The video is being made available at no charge. Be sure to tell any educators or community workers about the availability of this video in case they should want to take advantage of this resource.



Inspiration Point could enjoy it, but there were no other performances before live audiences.

Therefore, OIO has made a video recording of the one-hour abridged opera *The Magic Flute*. The video is being made available to



Did you miss our November 14 recital from Eureka Springs, featuring one of our alumni, baritone Weston Hurt, along

with soprano Alyce Daubenspeck and our masterful pianist Louis Menendez? Well, it is not too late to enjoy the recital. Just go to our web site, opera.org, and click on 2021 Streaming to get access to a video of the recital. You can listen to it at a time of your own choosing.

The dates for Federation Days 2022 have been set. Federation Days will take place next summer from July 20 to July 23 at the Best Western Inn of the Ozarks.

Singers at OIO over the years have come from almost every state in the union, and also from many foreign countries. You can get a good pictorial impression of the spread of our influence by looking at the world map available on our web site, opera.org. Just click on Alumni and scroll down to see the map. We are represented on every

continent except Australia and Antarctica. So if you know of any penguins who like to sing....

As Nancy Preis points out in her column this issue, players in the Opera in the Ozarks orchestra spent part of their time this summer recording a series of instructional videos for high school students preparing for their All-State state instrumental music competitions. The orchestra members chose works that were going to be required for the competitions and performed them, complete with tips on instrumental technique and competition practices.

These were made available without charge to student musicians in the states of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Next year OIO hopes to add Texas to this list.

If your family is looking for gift ideas for you, maybe you can drop a broad hint about the OIO Store! We have many unique gift and apparel items which can be found on the OIO web site, opera.org. Just click on OIO Store and you can see all of the offerings.



News of Our Alumni

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soloist in *Phenomenal Women* with the Baltimore Musicales and sang in *Suor Angelica* last August. She was the soprano soloist in Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* oratorio with the Maryland Choral Society in the spring.

In 2020 soprano **Chelsea Friedlander** (OIO 2011) sang in *Die Fledermaus*



for the Light Opera in New Jersey. She returned to the stage this fall in the same company's gala, and is set to be the soprano soloist in both Bach's *Magnificat* and Vivaldi's *Gloria* in New

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News of Our Alumni

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York City during the holiday season.

Mason Bates' modern opera *The (R)Evolution of Steve Jobs* has the attention of tenor **Bille Bruley** (OIO 2013) who



sings it for both the Atlanta Opera and Lyric Opera of Kansas City this spring. In April he takes a break from the Silicon Valley pioneer to appear in *Così fan tutte* with the Arizona Opera.

The Atlanta Opera kept soprano **Susanne Burgess** (OIO 2016) busy with *The Threepenny Opera* in April and May. In



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OIO Seeking More Alumni to Interview for OIO Archival Purposes

The Alumni Committee of the OIO Governing Board is continuing to work on interviewing as many alumni of OIO as possible.

These video interviews, being conducted with alumni worldwide on Zoom, are being added to the OIO archives maintained at the University of Arkansas and will be available for future viewing by OIO singers, historians and others who may be interested.

The interviews allow OIO alumni to recount memories and stories of their times at OIO and to discuss how their OIO experiences may have impacted their subsequent opportunities and careers.

If you attended (or know of anybody who attended) the Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony/OIO in any capacity please let them know. This would include attendance as a vocalist, member of the artistic staff, orchestra member or

administrative staff.

We are particularly looking at those who were at OIO during any of the years 1962, 1965-1966, 1968-1970 and 1973-1974, although we would also love to hear from those who attended in other years as well.

It would be great to have 100% coverage of all of the years of OIO's history.

Your contact person is board member Don Dagenais, email ddagenais503@gmail.com or telephone (816) 665-8293 (mobile). Thanks!

The Italian composer Giacomo Puccini was a great admirer of Viennese-style operettas which led him, late in his career to write one himself. The result was *La Rondine*, being performed at Opera in the Ozarks next season. This composition offered him an opportunity to travel to Vienna where he met Franz Lehar, the famous composer of *The Merry Widow* and other operettas.

Lehar spoke a bit of Italian but Puccini knew no German. According to Lehar's nephew Anton, however, the two had no trouble communicating, for "already during the meal the two masters were conversing almost exclusively by quoting alternately from their works."

"Singing softly, they indicated the melodies. Then they both sat at the piano and played, Puccini with the right hand and Lehar with the left. The most wonderful harmonies sounded fourth, Puccinisms and Leharisms, one surpassing another in sound effects and original turn of phrase." The two remained fast friends. The tale is but another example of the universal truth that music is a language common to all.



Tom Cockrell, OIO's Artistic Director and conductor, and the cast of Lucia di Lamermoor, posed for this cast photo last summer. The opera was a highlight of the 2021 summer season.

Puccini's Neglected Masterpiece

by Stuart Lewis

What opera comes to mind when you read the following synopsis: A young man from the country arrives in Paris and falls in love with a courtesan, who forsakes her comfortable high-society life to move with him in a villa away from the big city. However, the romance comes to an end when she realizes that she must "sacrifice" her own happiness because she is convinced that her checkered past makes her an inappropriate mate for her lover.

The most obvious answer would be Verdi's *La Traviata*, but Puccini's *La Rondine* (*The Swallow*) would be an equally valid response. In fact, the setting of the first act of *La Rondine*—an afternoon cocktail party—is more in keeping with the play on which *La Traviata* was based than the grand ball which opens Verdi's opera.

In 1917 Puccini was offered a commission to write an operetta in the Viennese style, but realizing that writing set pieces separated by spoken dialogue was not his strong suit, he reserved the right to compose a comic opera instead. Puccini was strongly influenced by the music dramas of Richard Wagner and realized that his greatest talent lay in using recurring melodic motives to create a mood and allow the music to tell a story.

As you watch this opera you will no doubt notice how melodies from the first two acts recur in the third act as if to recall the emotions created in those two acts.

Perhaps the most striking example of Puccini's art can be seen in the aria "Che il bel sogno" which many sopranos like to perform in recitals and on recordings. The melody is first introduced by the tenor Prunier, but when he comes to what would be the high notes, he merely speaks the lyrics as the full melody is heard in the orchestra. Thus when Magda (the heroine) follows with her version, hitting the high notes that Prunier did not attempt, the result is thrilling.

La Rondine does exhibit some features

of operetta. Many of the melodies have a lightness that one associates with that genre, including the use of triple meter.

More than any other Puccini opera, with the possible exception of *La Bohème*, there are passages that you can hum as you leave the theater. Most notably, these are the second-act ensemble "Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso" and the third-act duet that seems to look forward to the songs of Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers.



Giacomo Puccini

The idea of a maid borrowing her mistress's clothing to go out on the town, only to run into her mistress at the same party (and the two pretending not to recognize each other) seems to come directly from Johann Strauss Jr.'s

Die Fledermaus. Also, the comic subplot—the romance between Prunier and the maid Lisette—is a device more associated with operetta and musical comedy than with opera.

So why is *La Rondine* not performed more often? If this is your first encounter with this opera, you may well be asking this question. The general consensus seems to be that the fault lies with the libretto, especially in the third act, where the breakup of the romance seems to be insufficiently motivated. Having come to expect great drama in a Puccini opera, we may be somewhat let down by an opera which literally ends with a sigh.

Therefore we need to approach this opera with open minds, not expecting another *La Bohème* or *Madame Butterfly*, but rather showing a willingness to be swept up in a bittersweet romance. On these terms *La Rondine* has the power to move us as much as Puccini's other masterpieces do.

A final note for opera trivia aficionados: Those of you who know the music of Richard Strauss might enjoy Puccini's in-joke near the end of Act I. Prunier recites a list of the great lovers of the past, concluding with Salome. When he says her name the orchestra plays the five-note theme associated with her in Strauss's opera by that name.

News of Our Alumni

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January she returns to Atlanta for Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Bass baritone **Yazid Pierce-Gray** (OIO 2016), a resident artist for the Pittsburgh Opera, sang in Handel's *Semele* and in

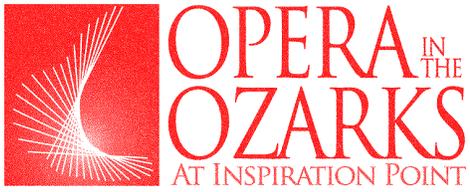


Charlie Parker's Yardbird last spring. In November he is in *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) and he is slotted for *Carmen* in March and April of 2022.

John Pickle (OIO 1995), a tenor, opened the year in a concert with the Dayton Opera called *A New Beginning*. In February he starred in



I Pagliacci with Opera Colorado, and then sang with Opera Delaware in an *Al Fresco Arias Concert* in July.



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GOOD NEWS LETTER



It is a longstanding tradition at Opera in the Ozarks that all of the singers, staff and alumni gather onstage at the end of the final performance to sing "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." The year 2021 was no exception. Shown above among others are Artistic Director Tom Cockrell, General Director Nancy Preis, former General Director Jim Swiggart and prominent OIO alum Dan Wright.

On another historical note: can you identify the person in the photo at the right? This one has been a puzzle for the holders of the OIO archives.



OPERA IN THE OZARKS at INSPIRATION POINT MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Your membership or gift is important to IPFAC Thank you so much!