

**OPERA** IN THE  
**OZARKS**  
AT INSPIRATION POINT

**GOOD NEWS LETTER**

Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony

16311 Highway 62 West

Eureka Springs, Arkansas 72632

**April 2020**

Don Dagenais, Editor

## Opera in the Ozarks Postpones 2020 Season

Dear Friends of Opera in the Ozarks,

On April 14 I spoke with members of the IPFAC Governing Board to share the latest information about our 2020 opera season. I'm sure many of them and probably you as well, expected this information would be coming, but now it is my sad duty to share with all of you, both new Opera in the Ozarks fans and those who have loved and supported OIO for years, that this summer's 2020 opera season at Inspiration



Point has been postponed to 2021. That of course, also means we will not get to enjoy our usual Federation Days events or the other very special programs associated with the opera season. In fact, I think this is the first time since our beginning in 1950 that something like this has happened and of course, we are all very disappointed.

However, as you read Nancy Preis' letter (to the right), I'm sure you will understand that much discussion and thought in several meetings with faculty, staff and students made this seem like the best possible decision for us all.

I have spoken with the Governing Board Executive Committee and Trustee Chairman and they all agree that as disappointing as this is, this truly is what we must do.

Please note that there will continue to be OIO expenses as Nancy mentions in her article. I hope you will approve of her suggestions to help that situation and perhaps even think of other ways you might help OIO make up some of the losses that will be experienced from having no performances this summer. All donations for Scholarships, Underwriting or Sponsoring will carry over to 2021.

May I take a moment now to thank you - our patrons and donors who make it possible to bring operas and marvelous educational programs to our stage for our community and region each year. We look forward to the time when we can all meet once again out at that special place on Rock Candy Mountain to share opera that touches our hearts and brings such wonderful music to our lives.

Thank you again for your love and support of OIO, now let's do our best to make 2021 the greatest season for Opera in the Ozarks ever.

*Carole Langley*

### *From the General Director*

April 14, 2020

It is with great disappointment that I write to inform you that the 2020 season for Opera in the Ozarks has been postponed until the summer of 2021. After careful



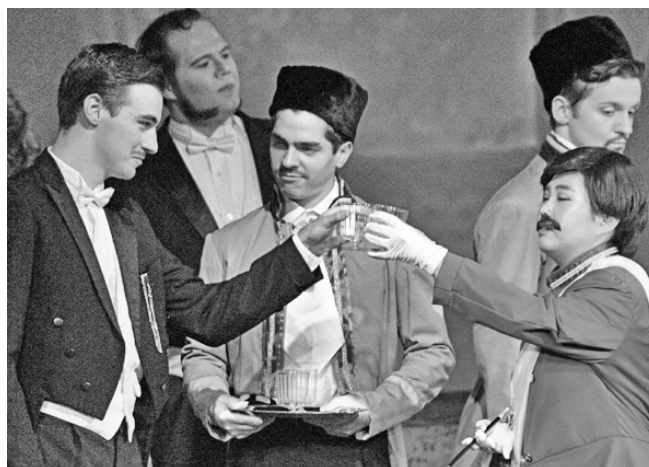
consideration and consultation with artists, staff, the governing board, and community stakeholders, we are forced to acknowledge that it would not be possible to produce our intimately scaled operas and other performances with the specter of COVID-19 threatening.

The 2021 season will open June 25 and run through July 23. We will perform the repertoire originally selected for 2020 in 2021. We hope to have many of the same artists and staff join us at that time. And we hope our patrons and supporters will also share in our summer of music in 2021.

From our housing facilities to the necessity of close contact in a chorus, orchestra pit, on stage or in our audience, we cannot reasonably protect our people. One participant passing through an airport and getting inadvertently exposed could spread the virus among the entire company in a matter of days. We have considered a multitude of options to try to preserve the season, but in the end, we are forced to admit that it would not be responsible.

However, we will not be idle during our forced isolation. Maintenance work on our campus will continue throughout

*(continued on page 2)*



*Scene from a recent production of Die Fledermaus.*

## News of Our Alumni

A review in *Opera News* magazine of a recent recording of Louis Karchin's opera *Jane Eyre* praised two OIO alums for their outstanding performances. According to the reviewer, *Jennifer Zetlan* (OIO



2004), singing the title role, displayed "resplendent tone and dazzlingly clear delivery" and gave "a ceaselessly compelling emotionally complex performance." The reviewer said that "other high points" included the singing of **Katrina Thurman** (OIO 1997) in the role of Blanche. She "leaps



through [her] bouncy aria with enjoyably imperious agility," the reviewer said.

Jennifer Zetlan also won a favorable notice from *Opera News* for her performance of the title role of composer Ricky Ian Gordon's new

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### *From the General Director*

(continued from page 1)

the summer when it can be done safely. We will be in better shape than ever in 2021!

We are developing new programs in conjunction with community partners that will move us forward in our strategy to become a center for lifelong music learning. Some of our new programs will bring our alumni back to Northwest Arkansas which will give us a chance to enjoy their talents once again.

We had not yet opened the ticketing portals, so we have no refunds to process. However, not having our ticket and tuition income will cut about 2/3 of our annual revenue but not 2/3 of our annual expenses. While we are applying for CARES Act assistance, we expect an operating budget shortfall for this fiscal year.

Would you consider making a tax-deductible donation to Opera in the Ozarks in

the amount you would have spent for tickets? As the bulk of our staff are gig workers, we are hoping to join the nearly 200 other arts organizations across the country who are trying to support these hardworking artists by offering partial or full payment for contracted services. You may give online or send your checks to the address shown on page 4.

Many of these highly skilled artists have seen 100% of their income vaporize in the wake of COVID-19. Designated scholarship and sponsorship monies will be applied to our next season.

While this situation is dispiriting, we invite you to recall what Opera in the Ozarks sings at every season closing night, "Climb Every Mountain." It is our unofficial anthem. I can tell you that it is exhilarating to stand on that stage with 40-some cast members and numerous alumni singing at full volume these inspirational words. We will get through this pandemic and we will share our music next summer.

## Interview with 1950s OIO Alumna

by Janet Parsch

OIO General Director Emeritus Jim Swiggart stays in contact with many OIO alumni from over the years. On October 9, 2019, he arranged lunch and an audio interview with one of the very early alumni, Margaret Ann McConnel Singer, from Crescent, Oklahoma.

Ms. Singer attended Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony for six years starting in 1951 when she was 12 years old. At that time the road trip from Crescent, north of Oklahoma City, to the Point took twelve hours!

Ms. Singer recounted that she played oboe and piano at the Point, and that she was the page-turner for renowned pianist Max Werner. She was the accompanist for IPFAC's live production of *Hansel and Gretel* on WKY-TV in Oklahoma City, thought by many to be the first (possibly the second) live television performance of any opera.

During the interview she described how important her experience at the Point was: to be able to work with world-class musical staff, and, as a teenager, to meet people her own age who had similar interests and love of music and who understood the goals that she was developing as a musician.

Ms. Singer's career as solo recitalist, accompanist for vocalists and instrumentalists, conductor, and administrator has taken her to

such cities as London, San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and Salzburg.

Ms. Singer has lived in Germany for the past 30 years. She now lives in Karlsruhe and commutes to Paris to work with the young artists at the Académie of the Paris Opera.

After the audio interview is processed, it will be available online through the University of Arkansas's David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. For more information, contact Janet Parsch at [jparsch@uark.edu](mailto:jparsch@uark.edu), an OIO board member and University of Arkansas Librarian Emeritus.



Shown in this photograph are Margaret Ann McConnel Singer and James Swiggart, the General Director Emeritus of OIO.

## Crescent Hotel History Makes National Magazine

The January 2020 issue of *Smithsonian* magazine contained an article entitled “The Charlatan of the Ozarks Still Looms Over the Haunted Crescent Hotel,” about the historical Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The hotel is now the charming home to Opera in the Ozark’s annual “Taste of Opera” event.

The author of the article, Jeff MacGregor, recounts some of the less favorable history of the Crescent Hotel during earlier days.

“Built in 1886,” MacGregor writes, “the Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas is the grandest resort in the Ozarks.” However, during the Great Depression it sat empty.

In 1937 it became the Baker Hospital, run by a charlatan named Norman Baker who claimed to have a cure for cancer. His mailers referred to the Crescent as the “Switzerland of America” and advertised it as “Where Sick Folks Get Well.”

His patients, MacGregor noted, were “the suckers and the gulls and the true believers.” They were “weak with sickness, desperate, pale.” They came from everywhere and, as the “hospital” required, paid with cash. “Baker promises life, he promises vigor. No surgery. No radiation. Just Formula 5 [Baker’s magical cancer cure potion] and the power of positive thinking.”

Formula 5, as later revealed, contained alcohol, glycerol, carbolic acid, ground watermelon seed, corn silk and clover leaves. “Baker stole the recipe from another con man. It does nothing.”

Baker was arrested for mail fraud in 1939 (the mailing of the false brochures) and after conviction spent years in the Federal prison

at Leavenworth, Kansas. After serving his sentence he moved to Florida and died there in 1958, ironically of cancer.

In the meantime, the Crescent Hotel makes much of the Baker history. It advertises itself as America’s Most Haunted Hotel. On the ghost tour, guides tell stories including those of Theodora, 80 years dead and still looking for her hotel key, and the Nurse, pushing a gurney through eternity on the third floor, and most famously the Girl in the Mist

who will fling herself many evenings from one of the east balconies into the garden below.

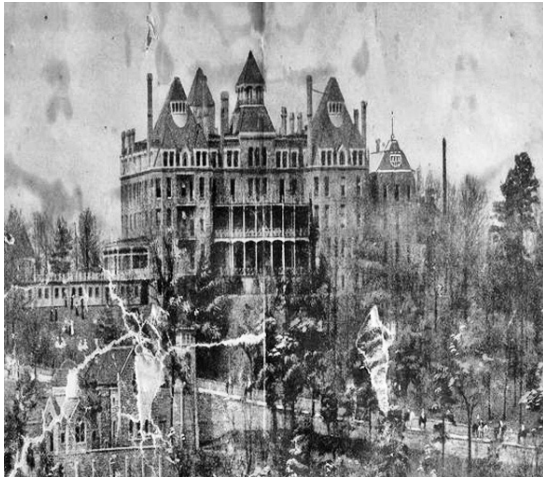
The hotel also has other interesting chapters in its history. From 1908 until 1924 it was a destination boarding school for young American women, advertised as being “famous for healthfulness and the beauty of location.” Among the courses offered

was music.

The fourth floor of the hotel contains a small museum and library about the history of the building.

Now, of course, we know the Crescent Hotel as a charming hotel frequented by many guests who enjoy the charms of Eureka Springs during the summertime and year round. The hotel is a major event location for weddings and parties, among other events.

The Crescent Hotel is a delightful and picturesque location for OIO’s annual “Taste of Opera” event. So far as we know, no attendees have yet seen a ghost. But the next time you go, you might want to check out the museum and learn more about this fascinating old building of Eureka Springs.



*This old postcard from 1886, severely damaged as you can see, shows the Crescent Hotel just after its construction. Photograph courtesy of the Crescent Hotel & Spa.*



## News of Our Alumni

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opera *Ellen West*, about a mentally troubled woman. The magazine called hers as “striking performance” and said “Zetlan embodied Ellen’s vulnerability in moments of vivid introspection, as well as her near-frantic agony.”

Baritone **Weston Hurt** (OIO 1995) added an interesting chapter to his career last year when, while rehearsing



for *Falstaff* at the Portland Opera, he tore his quadriceps and injured an ankle. Undeterred, he sang the role of Ford from a wheelchair.

The Los Angeles Opera production of Mozart’s rare *La Clemenza di Tito* last season was directed and designed by world renowned designer **Thaddeus Strassberger**, who worked at OIO. According to an article in *Opera News* magazine, “Strassberger is known for interpretations of both standard and relatively unfamiliar repertoire that challenge long-held conceptions about how these works should be presented.”



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## GOOD NEWS LETTER



*Landlocked Opera, Inc, an opera company in the Kansas City area, was formed a year and a half ago by Jonathan Ray (OIO 2013) and Christina Casey Ray (OIO 2018). In January the company gave a performance of The Magic Flute featuring several OIO alums. Shown in this photo are (left to right) Carol Sturgis, Christina Casey Ray, Mark Sepulveda (OIO 2019), Don Dagenais (board member of both OIO and the opera company), Jonathan Ray (OIO 2013), Colleen Shogren, Steve Shogren (former OIO board member), Alice Martinson (former OIO board member), Vince Gover (OIO 2018), Ariel Downs and Ira Stecher (OIO 2019), and Linda Brand (former OIO stage director). Not shown is Joan Wells, who is also a member of the OIO board and the board of the new company.*

### OPERA IN THE OZARKS at INSPIRATION POINT MEMBERSHIP FORM

My tax deductible membership and/or contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

Check the Appropriate Box

- ☐ \$500 Patron
- ☐ \$100 Sustaining
- ☐ \$50 Contributing
- ☐ \$25 Active
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Your membership or gift is important to IPFAC. Thank you so much!