

OPERA IN THE
OZARKS
AT INSPIRATION POINT

GOOD NEWS LETTER

Opera in the Ozarks
16311 Highway 62 West
Eureka Springs, Arkansas 72632

February 2024

Don Dagenais, Editor

We Are Topped Off!



On January 11 a "topping off" ceremony was held at the construction site for the new Opera in the Ozarks theater. This is a ceremony traditional in the construction business, where the last girder hoisted into place at the top of the building is signed by people who wish to be commemorated as being there, and then Can you see the tree in the middle of the photo?

A number of Opera in the Ozarks staff members, Board members, civic leaders and others attended the ceremony.

Further photographs appear on page 3 of this issue. This means that our building will soon be enclosed and interior work will begin. The construction is moving along rapidly!

2024 Opera Season Opens on June 21

The summer 2024 Opera in the Ozarks season will open on Friday, June 21 and close on Friday, July 19.

The opening opera will be Verdi's classic *La Traviata*. The next night Robert Ward's dramatic American opera *The Crucible* will see its first performance.

The third opera evening, a double bill of Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortiliges* (*The Child and the Enchantments*) and *Beauty and the Beast*, an opera by American composer Vittorio Giannini, will premiere on Wednesday, June 25.

The season will also include a Broadway Cabaret on Thursday, July 11 at Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and a chamber music concert on Monday, July 15.

A second Broadway Cabaret will be held at the Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs on Tuesday, July 16.

The Sunday matinee performances on June 30 and July 7 and 14 will be Ice Cream Sundae afternoons.

Federation Days, hosted by the South Central Region of the National Federation of Music Clubs, will be July 17 through 19.

The family opera for 2024 will be *Little Red's Most Unusual Day*, with music selected from different operas. John Davies, who has created several of the family operas for Opera in the Ozarks over the years, has created this one as well.

Opera in the Ozarks is Planning for its 75th Anniversary Celebration

Opera in the Ozarks is celebrating its 75th anniversary during the 2024-25 season. Debra Rue of the OIO Board of Directors is chairing a committee to plan for this celebration.

The celebration will begin during Federation Days this summer and continue through the end of the 2025 season. We are working on the possibility of having a special display on OIO's history at the Eureka Springs Historical Museum that hopefully you will be able to see during Federation Days.

Beginning late this spring you will see a temporary one-year 75th anniversary logo being used on Opera in the Ozarks publications and on its web site.

The next issue of this newsletter will be devoted to the 75th anniversary. Then, prior to Federation Days, we plan to print a booklet containing the 75-year history of the organization complete with lots of pictures of OIO over the years.

Our operations director Chris Cathcart is working on a 75th anniversary video which will be made available to all state board presidents and anybody else who wants it, to be played at state conventions and music club meetings and anywhere else you like. This

(continued on page 3)



News of Our Alumni

In October **Ben Gulley**, tenor (OIO 2007) sang Manrico in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* with the Piedmont Opera in North Carolina. In December he crossed the pond to make his role debut in Tristan in Wagner's difficult *Tristan und Isolde* with the Belgian National Orchestra.



This month Gulley sings Romeo in Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* for Opera Idaho. In April he journeys to Florida to sing Edgardo in Opera Orlando's production of the Donizetti classic *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Last summer a reviewer in Chicago stated that "he sang with passion and nuance that I doubt could be equaled anywhere on Earth.... Star tenors are in very short supply. Ben should be on every major opera stage."

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From the General Director

I had a number of reflections on the topping off ceremony that we held at the construction site for our new theater.

Celebrating the installation of the last beam in the framework of the building has a history going back to at least 700 A.D. The topping off marks a milestone in the construction and signifies that the new building is now coming to life.

The placement of an evergreen tree dates back to Scandinavian folklore and is meant to appease the spirit of the trees that were removed to make room for the building. In our case, the brave little tree is an *Arborvitae* and following the ceremony it was brought back down to ground level in the hopes that we can plant it on the grounds when construction is complete.

Signing the last beam is a chance for everyone who worked on the building to this point to have a permanent place in the structure. We added the names of a number of people who had a profound influence on our history.

Of course, right in the center of the beam, we put Henry Hobart's name. Without him, this wonderful program would not have existed. Some of the other names we added: Isaac Van Grove, Mary Prudie Brown, Carolann Martin, Pamela Jones, Constance Eberhardt, Wenonah

Williams, Jeanice and David Hobart, Julius Hegyi and a long list of others.

People who are still with us but unable to attend: Carol and Duane Langley, Don Dagenais, Dan Wright.

I am thrilled to have signed my name as well and consider it an honor to be a part of this building forever.

Thank goodness no one suggested that we copy the topping off ceremony held at a Marriott hotel in Boston some years ago. A conference table was secured to the top of the beam and the directors of an association that was going to hold a convention in the hotel when it was completed, went up top for a meeting, dutifully wearing hard hats!

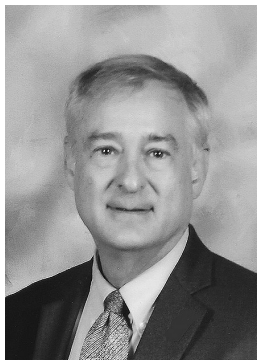
You will enjoy seeing the amazing progress on the construction of our new theater when you visit the Point this summer. We will see you then!



A Message From the President

Welcome to everyone and congratulations for surviving the winter blast of 2024, if you were in one of the areas affected by our frigid weather.

Fortunately the warming of spring brings to mind our upcoming Opera in the Ozarks season, beginning on June 21.



It is an astonishing time to be a follower of Opera in the Ozarks. I hope that all of you join our Board of Directors in relishing these heady days. The construction of our new theater under a generous grant from the Walton Family Foundation is proceeding apace, and now that the building has been "topped off" (see

pages 1 and 3) we see changes happening every day.

You can check it out when you visit Inspiration Point this summer and see the amazing progress which is being made.

The 2024-25 year is our 75th anniversary year, believe it or not.

This remarkable program saw its modest beginnings back in 1950. Who could possibly have foreseen, in those days, that three quarters of a century later would see such remarkable growth and development, and that in 2025 we would be opening a marvelous new theater?

This summer is your last chance to see our old theater and to wave a fond farewell to an old friend. Next year you will be in an entirely new venue as we enter a thrilling new chapter in this company's remarkable development.

Look through this issue to find out about the many intriguing things happening at Opera in the Ozarks. I also hope you enjoy our updates on activities of our alumni that appear on the sides of each page of our newsletter each issue. It is wonderful to reflect upon the impact our alumni are having in the world of music once they leave Opera in the Ozarks, and the terrific use they are making of the talents and skills they honed here.

We will see you in just a few months!



Topping Off Photos

These are additional photos from the topping off ceremony held at our new theater construction site on January 11.



In the upper left photo you can see the final girder (painted white) being signed by people in attendance. Their signatures will be a permanent part of the building.

In the photo above, the girder, with a small evergreen tree attached, is being lifted into place atop the building.

The photo to the left shows a drone view of the entire construction site. The giant construction crane now dominates the view atop the Inspiration Point campus! It has attracted comment from miles around.



Doris Whinery 1931-2024

Doris Ilene Whinery, a former member of the Opera in the Ozarks Board of Directors, passed away on January 13, 2024 at her home in Oklahoma. She was 92 years old.



Doris attended Ottawa University and Kansas City University.

She was married to Leo H. Whinery, who preceded her in death in 2012. They were fixtures at OIO events for many years.

In her working career Doris was a stenographer for the F.B.I., a legal secretary and a medical secretary.

She was a life member of the National Federation of Music Club, held many offices in this organization and received the Lifetime Achievement Award.

OIO will miss Doris and fondly remembers her many years of friendship and service.

75th Anniversary

(continued from page 1)

will be a great opportunity for you to spread the word about Opera in the Ozarks.

During the following twelve months we will have several different events planned. The culmination will be a 75th anniversary celebration concert late next spring featuring prominent OIO alumni and including a dinner, all held at the new theater. For many of you this may be a first opportunity to get into the new house in advance of the summer 2025 performances. It will be an exciting event! The ticket price will be \$75 (had you guessed that already?).

Then, of course, all of the 2025 season will be celebratory, both for reasons of the 75th anniversary and also because of our inauguration of the new hall.

We are planning for a plaque or series of plaques to be installed in one of the public areas of the new theater commemorating some of the great figures of OIOs past, including our founder, our general directors, our artistic directors, key staff and board members and of course many of the great singers who have graced our stage.

We are glad to have you aboard during this exciting time. Year 75, here we come!



News of Our Alumni

(continued from page 2)

The New York Philharmonic is featuring mezzo-soprano **Cecelia Hall** (OIO 2004) in the Mozart *Requiem* in May. In the 2023–24 season she is singing the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* for



Boston Lyric Opera and the title role in a new production of Mozart's early opera *Ascanio in Alba* at Oper Frankfurt. Hall has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Canadian Opera Company, Opera Philadelphia, and Munich's Bavarian Staatsoper. She has also sung at New York's Carnegie Hall and London's Wigmore Hall. She has also soloed with the Opera Orchestra of St. Luke's and has sung at the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York.

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News of Our Alumni

(continued from page 3)

Soprano **Susanne Burgess** (OIO 2015-16) is singing Frasquita in the Metropolitan Opera's new production of *Carmen* this season. It was broadcast worldwide as one of



the Met's High Definition (HD) movie telecasts on January 27. She also appears with the Met as Helena in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in March. Last summer she sang the lead role of Magda in Puccini's *La Rondine* with the Southern Illinois Music Festival. She sang the lead role Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto* with Boheme Opera New Jersey last spring.

Opera de Montreal has featured mezzo-soprano **Sydney Frodsham** (OIO 2015) in several re-

(continued on page 5)

We Thank Annual Fund Donors

Opera in the Ozarks wishes to express its many thanks to those who have generously contributed to our Annual Fund this year. Those who have contributed as of the date of this newsletter's publication are listed below. Our annual fund is still open to contributions, so if your name is missing from this list, it isn't too late to support us! Donations may be sent to the address appearing on the back page of this newsletter, made payable to "Opera in the Ozarks." Or, you can donate online at opera.org (click on Donate in the upper right corner of the home page).

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Raquel King
Donna Kinslow
Cynthia Kresse
Mary Alice Larson
Lorraine Long
Laverne Love
Ken Luebbering
Jill March
Kathy McClure

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From the OIO Archives

by Janet Parsch

This photo from 1952 or 1953 shows the costume sewing area and four stitchers, including Clarita Roach DePaolis on the right.

Clarita Roach DePaolis did double duty during the two years she was at Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony. She oversaw the costume shop, assisted by Mrs. May, Joanne Knott and members of the Eureka Springs Music Club. She also performed as a singer in *Martha*, *Marriage by Lantern Light*, and *Hansel and Gretel*.

The present-day costume shop covers 800 square feet. In contrast, the costume shop in the new Inspiration Point Center for the Arts theater building will cover 1,200 square feet, plus 500 square feet of flex space and 530 square feet of storage. This is another example of the humble beginnings of Opera in the Ozarks / Inspiration Point Fine Arts Colony...

Photo credit: Opera in the Ozarks Papers, MC 1949, Box 35, Folder 5, Image 2220, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.



News of Our Alumni

(continued from page 4)

cent productions, including Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione*



de Poppea (The Coronation of Poppea), Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortiliges* (The Child and the Enchantments). Last summer she was Hippolyte in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Des Moines Metro Opera, and earlier was in Vaughan Williams' *Riders to the Sea* with the Opera A la Carte.

Krista Renee Pape (OIO 2019) won one of the National Fed-



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Honoring Ray Ballew, Longtime OIO Coach

One of the important figures of Opera in the Ozarks in the early 1970s was Ray Ballew. Ballew graduated from Oklahoma City University in 1955. He died in late 2023.

In the midst of a voice teaching career Ballew spent ten years at Opera in the Ozarks.

In an interview a few years ago, Ballew stated that "I taught private lessons for the Fine Arts Colony and performed in operas every season. After I studied and performed in a work at Inspiration Point, I then produced it at U.S. Grant [a high school where he taught] and later at Oklahoma City Southwestern College."

Ballew later taught at a number of other schools and was awarded an

honorary degree from Southwestern Christian University.

Ray's daughter Renee Ballew Pyron was at Inspiration Point herself in 1974 and 1978. She studied at Oklahoma Baptist University and is now a private voice teacher.

The accompanying photos show Ray Ballew performing two roles at Inspiration Point: the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* in 1972 and Schaunard in *La boheme* in 1973. Other operas in which he performed included *Madame Butterfly*, *Falstaff*, *The Other Wise Man* and *Ruth*.

Thanks to Jim Swiggart for bringing this to our attention.



2024 Annual Fund

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Patrick and Peggy Moriarity	Elise Roenigk
New Braunfels Music Study Club	Carol Saari
Carolyn Noorani	Bob Shaw
Northwest District AFMC	Marianne Szydlowski
Charles Olson	Martin Thoma
James Oxyer	Lynda Thompson
Shirley Rash	Jeffrey Timm
Byron Reeves	Nancy Werbitzky
Ellen Roach	Kathy L. Williams
	Michael Woodrum
	Gene Tweraser
	Katie Young
	James M. Zahnd

News of Our Alumni

(continued from page 5)

eration of Music Club's Young Artist Awards in 2023. A graduate of the University of Houston, she made her professional debut as Queen of the Night with Opera North in 2020. Last summer she returned to Opera North to sing Frasquita in *Car-men*.

The San Francisco Opera's production of *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* featured tenor **Billie Bruley** (OIO 2013) as Jobs' business partner Steve Wozniak. A review in



Opera magazine called him a "steady tenor." In 2022 he sang the same role for the Atlanta Opera and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. When not singing onstage, Bruley is an assistant professor of voice at Rutgers University in

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La Traviata Shows the Gentle Side of Italian Opera

When we speak of Italian opera, we usually think of bombastic, vigorous music and lots of full-throated singing. Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece *La Traviata*, however, by and large breaks the mold.

The opera occupies a central place in Verdi's life, both musically and personally. He was particularly sensitive to the tragic story of Violetta, the Parisian courtesan who turns from a life of gaiety to become one of the great tragic figures of the 19th century.

Verdi was married as a young man and he and his wife had two children. But a tragic epidemic of encephalitis took away both of his children and, eventually, his wife as well. Left alone in the world, Verdi was bereft emotionally and physically.

He abandoned all music composition. But eventually he was tempted back into opera composition by the impresario of the La Scala opera house in Milan, Bartolomeo Merelli.

The soprano who starred in several of Verdi's operas at that time was Giuseppina Strepponi, a brilliant singer. She had been involved in several extramarital affairs before meeting Verdi. But before long she became his closest advisor, both musically and in business matters.

The two of them lived for more than 15 years "without the benefit of marriage," as people would have said in that day. This caused quite a scandal.

A few years later Verdi was induced to write an opera based on a novel (and later play) by Alexander Dumas the son, *La Dame aux Camelias* (*The Lady of the Camelias*). The play was based upon the true-life story of Marie Duplessis, a young woman born to a respectable family but who fled her drunken father for Paris. Out of necessity she took up prostitution as a trade and soon, bolstered by her fine education and pleasing manner, became one of the leading courtesans in Paris. She numbered among her "clients" several of the richest men of France.

Sadly, she was afflicted with tuberculosis, a common and deadly disease in those days. She died just a few months after her 23rd birthday. To memorialize this spirited life, Dumas wrote his play, which was a

great hit in Paris at the time. Verdi, inspired by the vague parallels between the lives of Duplessis and his own Giuseppina, was moved to set the play to music.

The title of the opera, *La Traviata*, is difficult to translate and thus is often left in the original. It roughly means "The Lost One" or "One Who is Led Astray." It is sometimes translated as "The Fallen Woman."

Verdi was no stranger to full-throated Italian drama as often seen and heard on Italian opera stages. In fact, at the very same time he was composing *La Traviata* he was also writing *Il Traviatore* (*The Troubadour*), which is so typical of Italian in-your-face melodrama that it was made great fun of by the Marx Brothers in *A Night at the Opera*.

No such bombast for *La Traviata*, however. For this story Verdi sensed that far greater subtlety was required.

To be sure, the opera contains many passionate moments, most notably the stirring aria by the title character, Violetta, near the end of Act I, and moving scenes sung by both her lover Germont and her lover's father, who begs Violetta to leave his son to preserve the family's honor. Also, we have a dramatic gambling scene in

Act III in which the younger

Germont throws away all of his money out of despair in losing his lover.

On the whole, however, the sad tone of this story required a more gentle touch of Verdi, and it is a mark of his genius that he was able to provide it to perfection.

The tender reunion of Violetta and Germont in the final scene, and the desperate regret shown by Germont the elder, finally realizing that he had deprived these young lovers of happiness, is one of utmost pathos. Verdi provides music to match.

In addition to showing us the tender side of this great composer, *La Traviata* serves as reminder that Italian opera can be supremely subtle as well as very dramatic. The opera should be a great showcase for both the singing and acting talents of our young performers at Opera in the Ozarks.



Illustration of Violetta from the Victorian era.

Ravel's Nightmare Fantasy

by Stu Lewis

Those of us who recall the 1960s may remember a song which describes childhood memories as follows: "Oh, to be a child again/Oaks from acorns grew/One and one made two/I believed it all, didn't you?" And perhaps that is the way that many of us may recall our own childhoods—a time of innocence when we were not troubled by the cares of adulthood, when stories always ended with the phrase "Happily ever after."

Yet not everyone remembers childhood that way. Consider the Grimm brothers' versions of the children's fairy tales they collected. We may recall how Hansel and Gretel outsmarted the witch after they got lost in the woods, without realizing that in the original version of the tale the parents deliberately abandoned the children whom they lacked the resources to feed.

Childhood can be a time of fear and uncertainty, when we had little control over our own destinies.

Such is the world depicted in Ravel and Colette's opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, roughly translated as *The Child and the Magic Spells*, in which the protagonist's illusion of invulnerability is destroyed when everything in his environment seems to turn against him.

The plot is the story of a young boy who, in a fit of anger at his mother, throws a temper tantrum and destroys all the inanimate objects he can get his hands on (in addition to injuring his pet squirrel), only to have the objects, along with the animals in the family garden, unite against him.

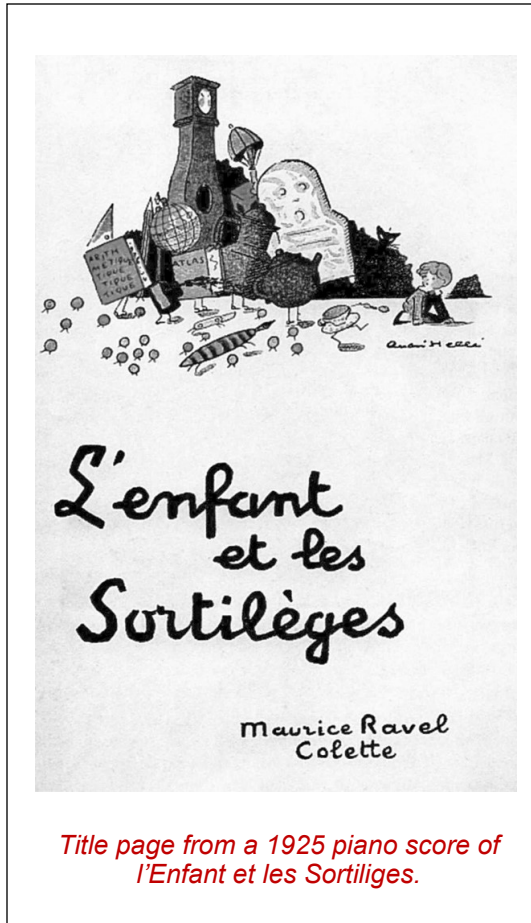
Perhaps we should not focus too much on the darker aspects of the story. In many ways, this is a comic opera, filled with nonsense dialogue (such as "millimeter, centimeter, decimeter... eleven and six, twenty-five") to accompany the absurd plot situation in which the people depicted on the wallpaper come alive.

While the inspiration for this opera appears to have come from the librettist, the well-known poet Colette (who was known by her surname), we know that Ravel himself had significant input into the libretto.

To a great extent the text reflects his own state of mind at the time that he was composing it. Although he never married or had children of his own, he greatly enjoyed the company of children, and at dinner parties he often left the adult table



Drawing of
Maurice Ravel



Title page from a 1925 piano score of
L'Enfant et les Sortilèges.

to converse with the children who were present/ When visiting friends with young children, he took the time to read fairy tales to them.

Two aspects of the libretto also aligned with his temperament at the time when he composed the opera, the early 1920s. He had served in the military during the First World War and was greatly traumatized by the death and destruction that he witnessed first-hand.

On a personal level, Ravel was still mourning the death of his mother, to whom he was greatly attached. He had her portrait on the wall of the room in which he worked on composing the score. While the child's mother (who appears only in the wings) appears initially as a disciplinarian figure, the opera ends with the child crying out "Maman!" While Colette may have written the words, it is difficult not to see this as Ravel's own cry.

Despite its initial pessimism, the opera ends with the hope of redemption. Seeing a squirrel bleeding as a result of the battle his actions have caused, the boy takes the time to apply a bandage and stop the bleeding. His antagonists join their voices in an emotional hymn-like chorus of forgiveness, giving us the happy ending that we so much long for in such stories.



News of Our Alumni

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New Jersey. He was formerly a voice instructor at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Last summer he sang as the Steersman in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* at the Santa Fe Opera. He also recently sang in *Ariadne auf Naxos* for the Arizona Opera.

Katrina Thurman (OIO 1997) has been appointed the



Director of Artistic Administration at Opera Omaha. Last spring she made her Virginia Opera debut in Spears' *Fellow Travelers*.

Baritone **Trevor Martin** (OIO 2010) sang Captain Von Trapp in a 2022-23 world tour of the musical *The Sound of Music*, singing throughout Asia including Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Taiwan.



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GOOD NEWS LETTER



Last summer Opera in the Ozarks performed two comic operas, Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* (above) and Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* (right). Both were major audience favorites.

Look forward to some more zany scenes this summer with Ravel's *l'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (*The Child and the Enchantments*).



OPERA IN THE OZARKS MEMBERSHIP FORM

My tax deductible membership contribution of \$_____ is enclosed.

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Thank you so much!