

OPERA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

Projects of Special Merit Awards- 2014-2023

The Projects of Special Merit program gives support groups a way to celebrate a successful project, to share it with the opera volunteer community and receive recognition for an idea well-conceived and executed. OVI invites application for annual review of projects that were volunteer-created and implemented in support of their opera companies. Entries have described successful endeavors in a variety of areas including education, audience development, fundraising, membership, volunteer training and artist support services.

2023 Project of Special Merit Award

TOLEDO OPERA AND TOLEDO OPERA GUILD - Opera on Wheels



Toledo Opera Guild presented *Opera on Wheels* with a performance of *The Pirates of Penzance* titled “*Pizza and Pirates*,” Each year Toledo Opera’s Resident Artists serve as touring artists for the Opera on Wheels program which travels extensively, bringing live opera to the Toledo area. Annually, the program is performed for 20,000 students. This season, the traveling production is a newly adapted children’s opera, of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance*. **Joshua Borths** of Virginia Opera adapted the score and wrote the libretto. Toledo Opera’s **James Norman**, directed.

Founded in 1962, Toledo Opera Guild has played an active role in supporting Toledo Opera’s performances, education, and community outreach programs. It is the mission of the Toledo Opera Guild to promote opera awareness, education, company service, and financial support for Toledo Opera. In the past decade, Toledo Opera Guild has directly contributed over \$350,000. This is in addition support such as cast rehearsal dinners (approximately \$1,000) along with countless hours of volunteer expertise and help with various tasks.

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2022 Project of Special Merit Award

CINCINNATI OPERA GUILD - *Artist Hospitality Welcome Bags*



The Cincinnati Opera Guild has a signature event called the Meet and Greet, where artists of season productions mingle and enjoy treats and drinks with the Guild, staff and invited board members. Due to safety regulations and artists' union stipulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Meet and Greets have been cancelled for the past two years. As Cincinnati Opera returns to indoor performances, 60 members of the Guild will create hospitality bags to welcome the artists. Included will be a personal handwritten note of welcome, gift cards, local restaurant cards, and a signed copy of Rick Pender's book, "100 Things to do in Cincinnati Before you Die." Donated tickets to attractions will be made available, and social media posts will be made to market the welcoming theme.

2021 Project of Special Merit Award

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD LIFE CHANGING: *An Evening with Frederica von Stade and Jake Heggie*

Life.Changing: An Evening with Frederica von Stade and Jake Heggie, was a virtual event, presented free to the community in April 2021. It showcased our students along with mezzo soprano Frederica von Stade (Flicka) and American composer Jake Heggie. The main program was one hour long and included performances by our students and by Flicka and Jake, testimonials from students and educators, and then a short Q&A.

This was not structured as a fundraising event. Tickets were free to all. However, we did offer event sponsorships at levels from \$500 to \$5,000. Sponsors were invited to attend a half-hour reception with Flicka and Jake immediately preceding the main event. Sponsors also received a hand-delivered gift box with a French theme that included a bottle of Roederer sparkling wine, Chambord liquor and a lemon, to make a Kir Royal; plus macarons and a French beret.

Preparation for the event began in the Fall of 2020, with a re-branding to:

- Refresh our message, making it less formal and more accessible
- Engage a wider audience of educators, parents, students, potential donors, corporate supporters
- Position the Guild as a leader in the field of music education, and a passionate ally that is keeping music alive



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Registered: 522. Attended: 270 (per vimeo stats). Views: 666 (per vimeo stats)

ERWIN H. JOHNSON MEMORIAL FUND, INC. *The Songstress and the Swordsman*

The Songstress and the Swordsman's goal is to bring opera and classical music to the world of gaming through the mediums of fanfiction, music, and visual art. By offering opera advocacy in a fun, educational format to the world of gaming, this work has been found to kindle a curiosity and interest for classical music and opera in our readership. Our goal is to have OV and Opera America find this a valuable and innovative way to promote our beloved art form and make mention of this work on your websites and publications. This particular project is a per gratis community service, we do not make a profit or sell it.

The project is currently publicized on several social media platforms including Reddit, Tumblr, and Discord. A blog on Tumblr artist and writing blog features excerpts and artwork from Songstress. The work is promoted on five Discord servers which include art streams and music appreciation classes on Discord.

Songstress follows a modern-day opera singer, Rana El-Khoury, who finds herself stranded and injured in the 6th century fantasy world of Thedas, the setting of the novel, comic, and game series Dragon Age. When an elven swordsman rescues her, she creates a life and singing career amidst the Thedosian nobility. But as she gets more and more involved in the political coup her rescuer is organizing, Rana must navigate a turbulent, glittering sea of court intrigue, deception, romance, and music.

Songstress superseded our expectations. In 15 months, the project has gained an international following of nearly 10,000 viewers over two platforms. It has received positive reviews from readers around the world, especially the educational aspects of this project. Many have commented on how much they appreciate the pieces featured in the story and the educational history notes at the end of each chapter.

The Songstress and the Swordsman was a multimedia opera advocacy project writ-ten to bring opera and classical music to the world of gaming. It is comprised of a written novel, artwork/illustrations, and a Spotify playlist developed by the concert coordinator, creator, and presenter of the organization outreach program. It is edited and beta-read by the organization's Vice-President.

2020 Project of Special Merit Award

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD - Opera Guild Portal

The goal of this project was to create a more effective and efficient way to communicate information among all of the board of directors and to provide a repository for important documents.

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This directors' portal was created by the Guild VP of Development who found she needed to contact the Guild office to get information necessary for her to do her job and she found it to be inefficient. As an employee of a tech company she was accustomed to sharing information across teams through Google Docs and she was interested in providing the same platform for the Guild board. Her goal was to provide a password-protected repository of information and documents available and accessible to directors and committees whenever they needed them without having to rely on staff.

Information, calendars, agendas, locations of meetings, notes, events, reminders, deadlines, voting, etc. are now organized on the portal. The creation of the portal was done by one person and the documents were populated by the Executive Committee of 15 people and office staff. Initial creation took about a week, but the uploading of documents took a couple of months longer. Keeping the portal current requires continuous updates.

(2019 No Project of Special Merit Nominations)

2018 - Projects of Special Merit Awards

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA Convention Center Guides

After Hurricane Harvey shut down the Wortham Theater for extensive repairs, guild members leapt forward to make Houston Opera ticket holders' introduction to a totally new temporary performance location as seamless and painless as possible. The volunteers were positioned at strategic stations throughout the venue to instruct people how to navigate the totally automated parking payment kiosk, meet people coming from the parking garage, instruct them on how to find the box office and their seats in the performance hall. Twenty volunteers in total worked on this project designed to communicate with and to assist ticket holders for the seven productions with a total of 56 performances during this season.

OPERA NOVA *Development of the Senior Audience*

The goal is to expand the senior audience (55 and over) and thereby enhance their quality of life. Seniors are offered tickets to performing arts opportunities at affordable prices. In 2015 a narrated, slightly condensed version of *Così fan tutte* was performed to a packed house. Among the attendees were nursing home residents and able bodied seniors from ages 55 to 95. Many of them had never seen an opera. Several Senior Special Concerts were performed throughout 2016-2017. June of 2018 will see *La Cenerentola* with narration for the senior population. Many considerations like handicap accessibility ensure that this initiative is a success.



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KANSAS CITY LYRIC OPERA GUILD *Opera Guild Trips*

This fundraising and recruitment activity of this guild includes four trips per year for guild members and others to experience opera in other cities. A committee of five selects from 20-25 possible destinations. Each member of the trip committee becomes a trip leader for one of the four trips. The fifth member of the committee serves as treasurer. Each trip leader plans an exact itinerary and maps out the timeline and the expenses that include the cost of the leader's trip. The final cost always includes a donation amount to the guild, typically \$300 per traveler for a domestic trip and \$500 for international. The trip leader publishes and distributes a brochure five to six months prior to the trip and oversees all planning, contact and follow-up. Trips typically need 12 or 13 participants to be viable. This is the primary fundraiser for the guild and usually garners between \$25,000 and \$30,000 annually for the guild.

2017 - Projects of Special Merit Awards

CINCINNATI OPERA GUILD - Guild meet and Greet

Guild Meet and Greet marks its 15th anniversary this year. **Cincinnati Opera** performs three opera productions each season. *Opera Meet and Greet* is a breakfast, lovingly prepared and hosted by the Guild on the first rehearsal of each production. The first goal is to provide a warm inclusive welcome for the artists, production staff and Opera Company staff. The second goal is to showcase the Guild's support of the season's productions. Guild members welcome guests as they arrive, providing name tags and introductions. The event includes mingle-time, introductions, and background material about the upcoming production. The meet and greet ends when the director rings a bell signaling that it is time for guests to leave and serious rehearsal time to begin. These events, which are not open to the general public, are a volunteer opportunity for guild members. A wonderful way to kick off each show, they really set the tone in a special tradition that helps define the character and camaraderie of Cincinnati Opera.



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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD Opera Scouts

Opera Scouts, an innovative program for students age 12 to 18, was launched by San Francisco Opera Guild in 2016. Celebrating individual achievement in a supportive ensemble, *Opera Scouts* provides a social, developmental, career and service home for arts-minded youth. Scouts meet weekly for training, rehearsals, and trips to local performances. An annual membership fee and attendance requirement covers costs and helps assure commitment. Workshops, training, projects and lecture series that advance them to the next level.

Activities include:

- ☐ GUEST SPEAKERS AND MASTER CLASSES.
- ☐ MERIT BADGES.
- ☐ OPERA AND THEATER TRIPS.
- ☐ AUDITIONS.
- ☐ PERFORMANCE.
- ☐ LEADERSHIP.
- ☐ CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

Scouts are trained in skills promoting better communication, confidence, integrity and conflict management. As they advance through the program, they become eligible to be student conflict mediators at their schools.

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2016 - Projects of Special Merit Awards

AUSTIN OPERA GUILD *Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction*

Successful events don't just happen. They begin with a great idea and then develop detail by detail. They take effort, coordination, and many volunteers as we all know. In 2011 *Serenata*, (from the Italian "to serenade") was conceived by **Marilyn Davis Rabkin** as a "signature event" an exciting new annual fundraiser that the Austin arts community would associate with **Austin Opera**. Since its inception the event has included operatic entertainment, a multi-course dinner with wine pairings; and live and silent auctions.

Serenata In the Garden of Seville was held on February 20, 2016 with themed food and décor corresponding with the opera *The Barber of Seville*. Renowned Executive **Chef Elmar Pramps** and the guild committee planned a gourmet four-course dinner with wine pairings. Two area arts philanthropists, **Eva and Marvin Womack** were honored. Internationally Celebrated baritone **Michael Chioldi** provided entertainment.

As the event has grown bigger and more successful, the Guild has opted to use more professional service to raise the quality of some aspects of the event. This year, they used the catering services of the Four Seasons, professional auctioneer (in-kind), professional photographer/videographer, professional entertainment (opera singer and dance band), and some marketing assistance (invitation design, focal image for collaterals.)

Result for 2016 was fabulous glamorous evening with net profit of \$279,115. If you are interested in creating a distinctive annual event for your opera company that will produce revenue and publicity you should get in touch with the **Austin Opera Guild**.

OPERA MUSKOKA (Ontario) Formerly Muskoka Festival

Note: Opera Muskoka's Eugene Onegin project is a 2016 OVI grant recipient.

In it's seventh year of operation **Opera Muskoka** established a summer program where young singers and musicians study with professional coaches and attend master classes. The goal was that in the future students will be able to receive accreditation. In 2014 other arts groups were interested in working with the Festival and the **ChautauquaFest** was born. In 2015, there were ten days of concerts and master classes including six ticketed events.

Immediately following each season, five volunteers begin planning the next. Twenty more volunteers join the committee to plan and execute the festival. Professional coaches, musicians, performers, catering, and marketing and printing specialists are used. The Canadian Opera Company assists in publicity. Annual production costs are about \$25,000 which is funded primarily from the town of Bracebridge, generous donors and festival program sales.

This year's opening event is a production of *Eugene Onegin* in Russian. A training program will utilize singers from the University of Toronto.

2015 - Projects of Special Merit Awards

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2014 - Projects of Special Merit Awards

BRAVO, Amarillo Opera support group Cast Care

Each season Amarillo Opera brings in guest artists, directors, stage managers, and conductors for both the fall and spring opera productions. Cast Care volunteers greet out of town guests with a welcome party on the day of their arrival which allows the cast to meet one another, the opera sponsors, and members of the Board of Trustees and the Guild in an informal setting. In addition volunteers provide lodging for some guests and serve meals to the whole cast and crew the last four rehearsal nights prior to the performance. The project lasts from three weeks before the beginning of the rehearsals to the last dress rehearsal twice a year.

SHREVEPORT-BOSSIER OPERA GUILD *Les Boutiques de Noel*

In its 39th year Shreveport-Bossier Opera Guild fundraiser has delighted savvy shoppers with this annual one-stop shopping extravaganza. Guild members and volunteers handle many duties. Over 150 booths offer an array of items from jewelry to toys to clothes to food. This year they raised \$130,000.

Performing Arts League of Chattanooga TN High School Vocal Competition

The Vocal Competition project, in its 19th year, awards and fosters the study of vocal performance and encourages young people to pursue classical singing as a career by providing them with an opportunity to compete with their peers, perform in front of a live audience, be judged and critiqued by a panel of unbiased professionals, and further their education in order to help launch their careers. One junior or senior student, male or female, from each high school or home school association in the area is eligible for the competition. Each must be recommended by his or her high school music teacher or private vocal instructor for at-large students. There is one winner and a first and second runner up, each receiving a monetary award. All contestants have opportunity to speak to the judges after the competition, which is open to the public

Up to 30 volunteers serve on committees ranging from administrative to fundraising. The project has awarded over \$30,000 since its inception.



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