

2016

Austin Opera Guild - Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction

In 2011, Project Chair and AO Guild Board of Directors member, Marilyn Davis Rabkin, decided to plan and implement a new type of fundraising event to benefit AO. Her goal was to create an exciting new annual fundraising event that the Austin arts community would associate with AO - a signature event - that would bring in significant funds for AO each year. The first event, Austin Opera Wine Dinner and Auction, was held at Barton Creek Country Club and at the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown Austin subsequently. Since its inception the event has included a multi-course dinner with wine pairings; live and silent auctions focused on fine wines, but including other high dollar items (eg, jewelry, art, experiences); and operatic entertainment.

In 2014, Austin Opera in a rebranding process, helped create a new name for the event, Serenata (from the Italian "to serenade") Wine Dinner and Auction. We also added a dance with live band in 2015 that started following the close of the live and silent auctions.

This year's *Serenata in the Garden of Seville* was held on February 20, 2016. The theme for food and décor was Sevillian, corresponding with the final opera of this season *The Barber of Seville*. Renowned Executive Chef Elmar Pramps and the guild committee planned a gourmet 4-course dinner with wine pairings. We honored two area arts philanthropists, Eva and Marvin Womack. Internationally celebrated baritone Michael Chioldi provided entertainment. A new feature of this year's event was use of auction management software provided by Auction Source. Automation of many aspects of the live and silent auctions made those activities run more smoothly and decreased the need for staff assistance at the event, most notably at check-in and check-out.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION: Selection of the date and initiation of the new contract with the Four Seasons began in March immediately after the event. Committee work began in June. There were five subcommittees and 30 members overall. An additional 15-20 volunteers participated in singular tasks (e.g. mailings) or the day of the event function. Opera staff had supportive roles in this event, such as handling ticket sale transactions, bookkeeping/accounting and final budget and contracts approval. The Austin Opera General Director and Board Chair also had input into the program and selection of the auction management software purchase. The staff liaison to the Guild helped with additional functions, such as assisting volunteers with use of the new software. The AO General Manager also helped engage the event entertainer. Many members of the Opera Board of Trustees (all volunteers) supported the Guild's efforts by sponsoring tables, donating or obtaining auction items and spreading the word about the event.

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, we 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.)

The estimated net income was \$279,115 exceeding our goal of \$227,805 by \$51,310 (22.5%).

Marketing efforts included direct mail, marketing through the opera website and social media, emails to AO patrons and Guild members, electronic outreach to wine-related organizations in the community, advertisements in The Long Center and Zachary Scott Theater program, and articles in *The Libretto*, the Guild newsletter.

Attendance of 330 exceeding our goal of 265 by 65 (24.5%)

Opera Muskoka (Formerly Muskoka Festival)

The volunteers of this organization support the community of Muskoka and Bracebridge.

The project type is Artist Support, Audience Development, Education, Fundraising, Organization, and Communication and has been repeated 5 times with the view to support it again this year.

Our ultimate goal is to develop a summer program where young singers come to Muskoka to study with professional coaches and receive accreditation. Thus far we have developed and supported opera interest in the region as well as professional master classes to educate young singers in the area.

Since 2010 we have provided a vocal master class where young singers receive training. We now also include an instrumental master class for young musicians. Students have an opportunity to work with opera professionals in concerts and opera performances during the Festival. Each year our opening night has been a concert or opera presentation. 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.

The planning process begins right after each Festival ends. It starts with five volunteers and can grow to twenty. It takes a year to plan and organize a ten-day Festival. The Canadian Opera Company distributes our flyers at their performances in the spring and on their email blasts. Since 2009 we have used professional coaches, musicians, performers, catering, and marketing and printing specialists. Funding has been provided through grants from the town of Bracebridge, generous donors, and advertising sales for the Festival program. Our costs annually are between \$20,000 and \$25,000. We try to maintain a \$5000 balance to start planning for the upcoming season.