

# Opera Volunteers INTERNATIONAL

*Expanding the future of Opera through development, mentoring and advancement of volunteer service through the Art of Opera.*

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*Opera Volunteers International, with this edition of the Newsletter, is beginning a series of interviews with its Life and long term members. It is with pleasure that we feature Mona Barker in the first interview.*

## MONA BARKER

### Life Member of Opera Volunteers International

By Gerald Elijah, OVI Vice President, Outreach

*M*ona and I are long-term friends and acquaintances through our meetings at OGI/OVI Conferences, so it was a pleasure to chat with her recently about her life as an opera volunteer, and as a Life Member and supporter of OVI. I caught her at her sometime home in Bellingham, WA (where she supports Seattle Opera), but her primary history is with Anchorage Opera Guild in her home town of Anchorage, Alaska.

Mona's parents, she says, were "opera people", so it was natural for her to support Anchorage Opera back in 1975 when the Guild was first formed. "In those days", she said, "they didn't even have a venue for the opera company". In remote Alaska and as a member of a new guild just getting on its feet, she still heard about Opera Guilds International (our former name) from people who had attended one of the conferences. To Mona "It sounded great". She attended her first conference in 1985 and found that OGI had much to offer her as the president of her guild. She has been a consistent face at conferences ever since, and when Life membership was made available in 1994, she committed her support at that level.

I asked Mona, if she could, to tell me the three most valued parts of membership in Opera Volunteers International. She told me that "meeting and talking with other volunteers and leaders from around the country" was probably the most important. Sharing concerns, experiences, and learning how others think and react were valuable, and it has afforded her opportunities to learn about new operas and singers and to visit cities and companies she might not otherwise have seen. In the end, it is always about meeting people and discussing opera, sharing your opera experience with other opera lovers, and sometimes finding that their comments on areas she had not noticed would increase her own enjoyment. Topping it all off, she has made a lot of wonderful new friends.



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Watch for exciting information  
about July 9, 10 & 11, 2009!



We may be only half way through our fiscal and membership year, but Opera Volunteers International deserves a round of applause.

In past years, when much of the music we hear today was written, it was quite acceptable to applaud in the middle. Audiences in concert halls felt free to express their pleasure at the end of a pause, at the finish of a movement.....anytime. In opera houses, grateful audiences showed their admiration and enjoyment by clapping at the end of an aria or even at the end of a phrase. Sometimes they were rewarded with spontaneous encores, always with the appreciation of the singers.

Things changed at the beginning of the 20th century. The end of an aria or a movement was usually greeted with an awkward silence, a bit of shifting, a little coughing. By the late 1950's, houses of music were actually requesting that applause be withheld until a finale or an intermission.

Convention is changing again. Ultimately, it is a matter of personal preference, but anyone who feels the urge to applaud shouldn't and doesn't feel inhibited these days. They are will almost certainly be fulfilling the composer's original intentions and showing the musicians their sincere appreciation. If your instincts tell you to clap: clap!

I feel like clapping. It may be just the middle of the year, but I would like to give OVI and all opera volunteers a big hand!

Fern Grauer  
President



## HIGH DEFINITION AND SURROUND SOUND 'SAVE THE DAY'

by Melody Schubert

Leaving southern California for Maine, we traded freeway traffic, earthquakes and scores of LA Opera performances for one stoplight in town, seasons and snow blowers. Resigned to travel when needing an opera 'fix', we were delighted to discover Maine's PORTopera a short ninety minute drive away. There would be only ONE opera a year and only two or three performances at that, but the first two productions proved to be excellent with young singers, the stars of the future. Not yet ready to go from year round performances in LA to a single July performance in Maine, we began to consider traveling further distances for more opera.

A year later came the announcement in our local newspaper that the second season of MET opera broadcasts in high definition and surround sound at movie theaters around the world would include a theater in Rockland, Maine, twenty minutes from our front door. The newly restored theater has ample free parking and the ticket price of \$22 per person. Though we will admit to preferring live performances, we decided to go to the first telecast. We knew we could always leave at intermission for the short drive home, even in a nor'easter.

Warren and I have now been to our third sold out MET broadcast at the Strand in Rockland. Purists that we are, we admit that it is not like 'being there', in an opera house with the singers live on stage, but it is more engaging than the marvelous MET radio broadcasts or one wonderful PORTopera production a year in Maine. We are even learning the ropes of movie theater going again: locating the best place to park, arriving early to get in line for our favorite seats and buying popcorn to eat as we watch (never would have believed that).

Now we tell all who will listen about the brilliance of this new MET creation reaching out to audiences across the country and around the world. Friends new to opera will be coming to a future performance with us, and we've discovered through our attendance that other new friends are also opera lovers. Our favorite comment was a senior woman saying, "I never thought I would be able to make it to the opera again, let alone the MET and here I am. Isn't it wonderful!"



Those of you reading this newsletter have most likely already discovered your own local theater showing the MET high definition broadcasts, in which case we are preaching to the choir. If not, however, we encourage you to give it a try; we predict you will be hooked. Some of you will still see us on occasion in New York, Chicago, Boston or even LA, but did I mention that we now have tickets for the last five opportunities to see the MET at our local theater? Maybe we'll see you there. If so, do you want your popcorn buttered or plain?

We want to invite all OVI Individual and Support Groups members to join us in Seattle where the temptation will be will be a performance of Strauss's Elektra.

More information will follow in the next Opera Volunteers International newsletter.

## TALES FROM TAMPA

What is satisfying, educational and entertaining (and warming). The answer: a February OVI Board meeting in sunny Tampa, Florida. From landing at one of the country's more pleasant airports on the outskirts of Tampa, to closing good-byes with plans to conduct business again during the fall color season in Seattle, Washington, the weekend was a typical, first-rate OVI Board meeting event.

Most Board members were able to clear their calendars, attend and enjoy. Business was successfully conducted with additional hours of fun included thanks to the arrangements of Board member Gene Cropsey and the support of TBPAC, (Tampa Bay Performing Arts) and OperaTampa. We were royally welcomed and entertained with a host of events:

- A welcome gathering and dinner the evening before the actual Board meeting
- A backstage tour of the Performing Arts Center led by dynamic Kari Goetz, Audience Development Manager, OperaTampa
- A Board meeting and lunch in a elegant room with a view, the Inner Circle Club
- Evening performance options including patio dining on the river: Carmina Burana with the Florida Symphony, Hats, the Broadway play or the musical, Bernadette's Bravo
- A personal guided tour of Plant Hall at the University of Tampa campus led by Jane Cropsey, longtime docent and welcoming wife of Board member Gene Cropsey
- A Cuban lunch at Columbia, the oldest restaurant in Florida located in Ybor City, Tampa's Latin Quarter
- A reception and dinner at Maestro's restaurant at the Center joined by:  
Judy Lisi, General Director, OperaTampa  
Maria Zouves, Associate Director, OperaTampa and Director of the OperaTampa Apprentice Program  
Sherrill Milnes, renowned baritone who now serves as Opera Tampa's Artistic Advisor  
Members of the Executive Committee, OperaTampa
- A recital by Dame Kiri Te Kanawa complete with a "Meet and Greet" backstage reception following the performance where she graciously posed for pictures and signed autographs (We were in such good company: amazingly none of us got blinded by any of the flashing cameras)

As usual, conversations in elevators, on walkways and at agenda breaks were network enhancing and the usual added bonus. For another dose of the same, add the next OVI Focus Meeting to your 2008 calendar during October in Seattle, Washington. This plans to be a true Trick or Treat event. The "trick" will be to repeat such an outstanding gathering prepared for us by Gene Cropsey AND the "treat" will be another satisfying, educational and entertaining event, Seattle style, because such excellence simply a part of what OVI is and what OVI does.



## VP - OUTREACH INTRODUCTION TO THE REGIONAL NEWS REPORTS

By Gerald Elijah

Thank you for working with your Regional Coordinators to follow-up on membership renewals. If you responded, every effort was made to see that you were listed in the Membership Directory, which is now in your hands. Please let your Coordinator know if there is any inaccurate information in your listing - and very importantly, if you should happen to have any changed information as the year progresses. We are planning to do a supplement for everyone's benefit at mid-year, but there are lots of mailings and e-mails you don't want to miss out on.

During December and January two mailings went out, with the request that they be returned to me. The first went to the support groups only, requesting updated information on their Profiles. Please, if you have not as yet returned yours, I would appreciate it if you gave it your urgent consideration. I am always here to help if you have questions. I will be attempting to analyze the returns once I have results tabulated, and plan to post the analysis on the website. The second survey was sent to all members requesting input on our signature (and everyone agrees), great series of Conferences and Meetings. Following presentation of the results to the OVI board at our February meeting, I plan on sharing that with you as well as on a website posting.

### Northeast Region

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Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New Jersey
New York	Pennsylvania	Rhode Island
Vermont		

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Minnesota	Missouri	Nebraska
North Dakota	Oklahoma	South Dakota

#### IOWA

Des Moines Metro Opera's three Guild Chapters (based in Ames, Des Moines and Indianola) are dedicated to supporting the Company, learning more about opera and having fun with other opera lovers.

The Ames Chapter held a meeting on February 12 and WOI radio personality, Hollis Monroe, presented a program entitled "Enter Sneering: In Praise of Villainy in Opera"

The Des Moines Chapter had an evening of music and holiday merriment in December, at the Mansion at Wesley Acres. Wine, hors d'oeuvres, dinner and a musical program were enjoyed by all.

The Indianola Chapter hosted its annual potluck dinner to welcome the OPERA Iowa troupe on January 21 at the home of Julia and Dale Hagen.

#### KANSAS

The Kansas City Lyric Opera Guild celebrated the holiday season in style at the annual patrons' party which was held at the home of Mort and Una Creditor. A record number of Guild members braved the cold temperatures and ice to gather for an enjoyable evening of food, drink and holiday songs. Many thanks to Richard Preis and his committee in making this party such a success. At the event the Guild presented a check for \$30,000 to the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. Now the Guild is gearing up for a series of events which will honor the Golden Anniversary of Lyric Opera. The major event will be the Lyric Opera Golden Anniversary Ball on April 12.

#### MINNESOTA

Longtime Opera Volunteers International contributing member, Mrs. Charles H. (Catherine) Manlove of St. Paul, Minnesota, passed away in November 2007. "Cathy", had been a member of Opera Guilds International, now OVI, since 1985. She will be missed by all.

#### MISSOURI

The Opera Theater of Saint Louis Guild reports a fabulous fundraiser, the "Opera Cabaret", co-chaired by Sally Lefler and Glenn Sheffield, on October 15. The attendees were entertained by baritone Nicholas Pallesen and soprano Michelle Johnson, who were both part of OTSL's ensemble in 2007. It was an elegant evening of delicious food and beautiful music.



## CALIFORNIA

Festival Opera Guild closed 2007 in grand style. One hundred sixty-five guests came together to celebrate Festival Opera Guild's Annual Holiday Gala. The event was black tie optional and the guests rose to the occasion wearing beautiful gowns, handsome suits and tuxes. A silent auction which included forty-three items (all of which sold) was a part of the Gala. In addition Guild Vice-President, Beth Ilog, coordinated a project which invited Bay Area celebrities to decorate ceramic heads anyway they wanted and return them to Festival Opera's office for judging. We invited two local artists to judge the heads, and they chose Tony LaRussa's entry for first place. It sold at auction for \$200. The evenings entertainment was provided by Hope Briggs, Darron Flagg and Baeeka Shebagi-Yaghmai all familiar to Festival Opera attendees. ([www.festivalopera.com](http://www.festivalopera.com))



Festival Guild Founder and current President Barbara Lagrandeur, center with Guild past presidents Patricia Sabin, left and Sonja Orescan, right.



Darron Flagg, Hope Briggs, and Baeeka Shebagi-Yaghmai.

The Opera League of Los Angeles has announced Sunday, April 27 as the date for the annual "Hemmings Memorial Award" event. Each year the Opera League presents this award to selected individuals who have made a significant contribution to opera in the Los Angeles area. The award is named after the Founding General Director of the LA Opera, Peter Hemmings.

Opera Pacific Guild Alliance is gearing up for its annual Founders Gala to be held June 22, 2008. The Gala will be chaired by Betty McClellan and Lucianna Marabella. "All founders and founder's friends are invited to join in the fun", says Guild Alliance Founder, Laila Conlin.

*Opera Volunteers International is your organization and it is growing. The following are our newest members, listed by region. Welcome!*

### NEW INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF OPERA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

#### NORTHEAST REGION

Marian Wright, Weybridge, VT

#### GREAT LAKES REGION

Teresa Franklin, Dayton, OH  
Denny Hayes, Chicago, IL  
Margaret Hommes, Mundelein, IL  
Roselie Jennings, Dayton, OH  
Robert F. Keenan, Chicago, IL  
Richard Lauf, Cincinnati, OH  
Arija Stiver, Toronto, ON (Canada)

#### CENTRAL REGION

Shirley L. Kronemer, St. Louis, MO  
Sally Lefler, St. Louis, MO  
Franklin R. Miller, Tulsa, OK  
Lyndsey Morris, Jenks, OK  
Carolyn Polston, Tulsa, OK  
Sandy Stava, Tulsa, OK  
Mary Susman, St. Louis, MO  
Peggy Symes, St. Louis, MO

#### MOUNTAIN REGION

Paula DaMore, Austin, TX  
Jane Liedtke, Scottsdale, AZ  
Penelope Powell, Austin, TX  
Catherine Wildermuth, Austin, TX

#### PACIFIC RIM REGION

Mary and Harold Scott, Brier, WA

### NEW GROUP MEMBERSHIPS

#### GREAT LAKES REGION

Elgin Opera, Solange Sior, Artistic Director, Elgin, IL

## UNPAID LABOR AT MY OPERA HOUSE? PREPOSTEROUS!

*by Gene Cropsey*

It was unthinkable that anyone would do any work of consequence without being paid for it. This was the attitude of American opera managers and impresarios in the mid-nineteenth century. Since our country was founded, there have been many Americans who performed extraordinary acts of unpaid service. But in the early years, they were considered credible only in the areas of social welfare - certainly not in the cultural life of America. In the arts, especially the performing arts, unpaid laborers, or volunteers, as we more charitably refer to them today, were thought of as untrained "do-gooders", meddlers, and radicals, not fit for the exalted world of opera.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the United States could boast three major opera houses dedicated primarily to that art form: The Academy of Music in New York, Crosby's Opera House in Chicago and the French Opera in New Orleans. Not only were there no volunteers



involved in the support of these institutions, there were no vice presidents of development or professional fund raisers on the scene.

In New York, the opera was supported by a small coterie of very wealthy opera patrons, all of whom were founders of the Academy and/or members of its board of directors. In other words, it was a self-supporting institution with no help from average opera lovers beyond the price of their tickets. The Academy of Music eventually failed when a number of its wealthy patrons bolted for the new Metropolitan Opera House.

Crosby's Opera House in Chicago rivaled New York's Academy in beauty, comfort, and capacity. It was founded, not by a group of wealthy opera lovers, but by one enterprising entrepreneur who lavished on it his entire fortune. Crosby did, however, uniquely augment the income from ticket sales by renting out space in the opera house to three major mercantile firms and a restaurant. But in time, expenses began to outweigh income to such an extent that the house began to founder. There was no board of directors or single wealthy patrons to come to Crosby's rescue. Neither he nor anyone else gave any thought to rallying the regular opera lovers of Chicago to come to his support. The city was growing rapidly on the commercial front, producing a new millionaire almost every week. Although attendance at the opera enhanced the social standing of the elite, they believed all entrepreneurs, including opera impresarios, should stand or fall on their own, without charity, in striving for a successful enterprise.

Effective "Fiends" and other support groups for the arts were virtually nonexistent in the early days. Not until the Great Depression in the 1930s did it become painfully apparent that performing arts organizations could easily collapse for want of support. Individual wealthy patrons had all but disappeared from the scene, and corporate sponsorships had become increasingly unattainable. The formation of the Metropolitan Opera Guild during that period was the first major attempt to save the opera in New York by appealing to ordinary opera lovers. The Guild became a model for other new and existing opera companies around the country. It was soon apparent that regular opera-goers today could indeed play a significant role in shaping the ongoing health of their companies. Although almost all American companies employ professional fund raisers, most have come to depend upon their volunteer support groups to augment their efforts through imaginative fund raising activities, as well as enhancing audience awareness of opera.

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Photo by Margaret Rambo

Jim & Pam Krekeler, Guild President, Mary Susman, & Top Event Benefactor, Dr. Robert Feibel

October 31 was the date of the Guild's first training session for their docents. This meeting is mainly an ice-breaker where volunteers get to know one another. Twenty-five individuals attended and were given a preview of OTSL's 2008 season, and then a chance to express their interest in one or more study or speaking assignments.

Diane McCullough, a retired singer and trainer for "Music! Words! Opera!" (a curriculum used in schools nationally) was the main speaker.



Photo by Margaret Rambo

Co-Chairs Sally Lefler and Glenn Sheffield

**OKLAHOMA**

The Guild of Tulsa Opera, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote opera in the Tulsa community and region. While certainly affiliated with Tulsa Opera, the guild is a separate group of men and women who volunteer their time and talents in many ways. The Guild hosts eighteen Special Events during the Opera Season, giving members and friends the opportunity to donate their time and talents. Many members host these events in their homes, while others work to organize events at various venues throughout the city - some musically oriented while others are designed with a wider interest - and always with gourmet refreshments.

*Great Lakes Region*

For the time being send all updated information to Warren Schubert at [wshubert4@aol.com](mailto:wshubert4@aol.com)

- Eastern Canada
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Michigan
- Ohio
- Wisconsin

**ILLINOIS**

Having completed its 12th season of operation, Lyric Opera of Chicago Chapters' OperaShop has become an integral part of the opera-going experience at the Civic Opera House. Before the performance and during the first interval, volunteers from Lyric's twenty community-based Chapters staff the lobby kiosk selling merchandise reflection the current opera season. The volunteers enjoy the opportunity of interacting with opera patrons and the patrons, in turn, appreciate the personal welcome and knowledgeable information the OperaShop volunteers give.



George Pepper, Chapter volunteer, mans the kiosk

Begun as a short term project to sell overstock from Operathon, the Chapters' primary radio marathon fundraiser, OperaShop now has dozens of volunteer salespersons each season. The Lyric Opera Chapters and their oversight group, the Chapters' Executive Board, are part of the Lyric Opera of Chicago: Close cooperation between the project chair and the company staff make OperaShop work.

*Old West/Mountain/Desert Region*

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- Arizona
- Colorado
- Idaho
- Montana
- New Mexico
- Texas
- Utah
- Wyoming

*Pacific Rim Region*

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- Alaska
- Australia
- Baja California
- California
- Hawaii
- Oregon
- Nevada
- Washington State
- Western Canada

**ALASKA**

The Anchorage Opera Guild "Lunch with the Stars" of Verdi's Il Trovatore on January 20, was held in the Chart Room of the Anchorage Hilton Hotel. The stars performed music of their choice against the beautiful backdrop of the snowy Chugach Mountains and icy Cook Inlet. ([www.aoguild.org](http://www.aoguild.org))



## NEWSLETTER

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## TRAVELS WITH WILMA

A trip to Australia and New Zealand in September of 2006 with the Lyric Opera Guild of Kansas City was the trip of a lifetime. Melbourne and Sydney in Australia and Wellington and Auckland of New Zealand were the destination stars of the tour. OVI award winner and member Lisa Sicola was the trip's leader along with Robert Hazelwood, formerly of New Zealand. Several OVI members from Kansas City Lyric Guild were on that trip: Bob Baughman, Mort and Una Creditor, Don and Pat Dagenais and Joan Wells as well as Ann Carter, OVI member and president of the Festival Opera Guild in Walnut Creek, California.

We attended three operas in the famed Sydney Opera House, grand from the seaside views but a challenge to navigate inside with many stairs and limited elevator facilities. Our first opera was an impressive Turandot with Opera Australia chorus, orchestra and children's chorus. Rigoletto was the next night with tenor Rosario La Spina as the Duke of Mantua, definitely a singer to watch in the years ahead. The third opera was The Pirates of Penzance with David Hobson, a dashing Frederic.

Our fourth opera, Faust, was seen in Wellington where we met up with a Kansas City apprentice and cover tenor, Todd Wilander. As an added treat, I went to a matinee performance of "Let the Good Times Roll," a vaudeville musical.

This excellent tour also inspired numerous CD purchases: one of David Hobson's, tenor and composer who appeared in Pirates of Pinzance, 1995 Metropolitan Opera National Council winner, Amelia Farragua's CD Joie de Vivre and of course my favorite New Zealand Maori Songs by Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

My next personal trip for opera will be July 7 to Savonlinna, Finland to see Aida in the majestic Savonlinna Castle now transformed into a stunning performance venue seating 2,240. I will be arriving from the Granada Music Festival in Spain and plan to meet up with two other Lyric Opera Guild members and a Finland friend in Helsinki.

I invite you to join me on another opera trip in the future.

*Wilma Wilcox is the Regional Coordinator for the Central Region.*

