

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!"

