

2020 Partners in Excellence Awardees

The prestigious Opera Volunteers International Partners in Excellence Award program recognizes individuals who have given extraordinary volunteer service to opera in their communities or groups observing special anniversaries. The awardees of this once-in-a-lifetime honor will be acknowledged at the Opera Volunteers International Awards Brunch held this May at Opera Conference 2022 in Minneapolis, MN.

William Everett

Kansas City Lyric Opera Guild.



William was chosen for nomination for his enthusiastic commitment to the Adult Education Programs of **Kansas City Lyric Opera** over many years. He has brought his skills and experience as a researcher, scholar and teacher at University of Missouri Kansas City to create, develop and present multiple educational programs. He chaired the award winning *At Ease with Opera* program, chaired the Opera Preview Committee, recruiting presenters, as well as being a presenter himself for both. Recently during the pandemic William was the emcee for *Opera in Eight Parts*, an online series featuring opera arias and visual representation of art works from the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art. He is described as a volunteer who brings joy to whatever he does and whoever he meets. If being a partner and bringing excellence are the criteria for receiving the recognition of the Partners

in Excellence award, William is well qualified to be a recipient

Carla M. Thorpe

Lyric Opera of Chicago Chapters Executive Board



Carla has been a long time mainstay of the **Hinsdale Chapter of Lyric Opera of Chicago**. She has served as Membership Chair, Treasurer, VP of Programs, and Past President and now newly re-elected as President. While all of those contributions are noteworthy, this nomination is for her role in organizing the Opera Lovers Lecture Corps after Lyric Opera of Chicago disbanded its Education Corps in 2015. Carla was an organizer of the new Corps and still continues to coordinate its activities. Each year seven or eight lecturers in the Opera Lovers Lecture Corps bring opera to as many as 16 audiences in the various Chapters, at public libraries and senior communities. The lecture programs continued to be offered online during the pandemic. She saw the need for Opera education

outreach and met it for the benefit of the community, **Lyric Opera of Chicago** and its member chapters. Carla has distinguished herself as a successful leader and innovator, both attributes of a valued Partner in Excellence.

Sara Young

Opera Omaha Guild



Sara is celebrating 55 years as an **Opera Omaha Guild** member. As a music teacher, she always included opera as a part of her curriculum, so becoming an active Guild Board member for Omaha Opera was an extension of her vocation. Over the years Sara has enjoyed and supported the many special events of Opera Omaha Guild. She was the first Cotillion Liaison and remained so for 26 years. The Cotillion project for sixth grade children remains a major fundraiser for the Guild. The annual Victorian Tea is another area where Sara has contributed her talents and time for many years. As a member of the nominating committee she has been valuable in keeping the board current and operating. A willingness to volunteer for the opera is part of Sara's personality. Her love for the work

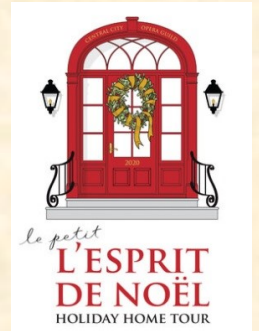
of Opera Omaha and the Guild and what it does for the Omaha Community have made Arts in the entire community valued and appreciated.

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2020 Grant Recipients

Central City Opera Guild Volunteers Maintain a Denver Tradition with Virtual Holiday Home Tour

For the past 45 years, Central City Opera Guild's *L'Esprit de Noel* Holiday Home Tour has served as a major fundraiser and Denver holiday tradition. Utilizing scores of volunteers, this walking tour of lavishly decorated historic Denver homes is a major volunteer effort. The 2021 Virtual Walking Tour will feature the home of Peter Court, brother to Baby Doe Tabor. In 1956, the CCO commissioned the Ballad of Baby Doe, and it is traditionally programmed every ten years. This year will again be a virtual tour of three historic homes, and the live feed will include holiday music from CCO's touring artists. The grant will help support volunteer efforts for the virtual tour, including training on the historic significance of the homes featured as well as recognizing an opera company and Guild with roots deep into the 1930's—the fifth oldest company in the nation. The virtual tour is scheduled to go live Friday, November 19 - midnight December 25, 2021.



Opera Maine

Training Opera Maine Volunteer Ambassadors



Photo credit: Martha Mickles

Opera Maine (OM) plans to use the OVI Matching Grant to help fund training and educational materials for five Opera Maine Volunteer Ambassadors, chosen from the current volunteer cadre and the Opera Maine Teen Program. Ambassadors will be trained to engage in conversation with audiences attending productions of *L'elisir d'amore - The Elixir of Love*—by Gaetano Donizetti and *As One*, by Laura Kaminsky. Opera Maine has not presented a *bel canto* opera in ten years, and the Opera Ambassadors will help introduce the opera-goers to Donizetti, a great master of that style.

OM believes the Opera Ambassadors will play a particularly important role for the production of *As One*, a contemporary chamber opera centered on the coming-of-age of a transgender woman. The *As One* production will present Mainers with a unique opportunity to explore the inclusion and engagement of people of diverse identities and backgrounds. Ambassadors will be prepared to guide audience members to available resources that are specific to both productions, and will be trained to converse about Opera Maine. The use of Teen Ambassadors will help grow future audience members and volunteers.

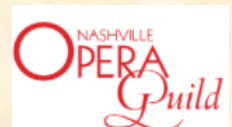
As a former volunteer director in healthcare - I am so deeply grateful for the work you, your team, and OVI do. Volunteers help grow our organization's engagement capacity exponentially and bring diverse skillsets and experiences to our world that only serve to further enrich it. Thank you incredible support of volunteers and organizations engaged in this important cultural work. We are so very grateful.

Yours in service, Beth O'Connor, Opera Maine

Nashville Opera Guild

Launching a Diversity and Inclusion Initiative

The Nashville Opera Guild plans to use the OVI Matching Grant to launch its Diversity and Inclusion Initiative. Nashville Opera Association and Nashville Opera Guild will celebrate the company's 45th anniversary in Season 2025-26. As they move toward that date, they have embarked on an eight month strategic planning process. A major focus is diversity and inclusion to grow audience and volunteer base as well as provide programming to lift up the stories and experiences of a diverse audience. The Nashville Opera Guild's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative has four key focus areas: growing volunteer members; diversity education for the NOG Board; producing a "series for awareness and learning"; and, partnering with the Opera Board on its Advisory Committee for Artistic and Social Impact. The grant will help support funding for training, speakers for "Lunch and Learn", and overall education and materials to train the full Guild Board in Diversity Education. The Guild's current membership of about 180 members must be expanded and diversified to fulfill the goals set by the Guild Board.



2021 Projects of Special Merit

Lyric Opera of Chicago Chapters Executive Board: Virtual Member Engagement

The volunteer Chapters Executive Board (CEB) oversees nine community separate chapter groups representing about 550 members. Each chapter is unique and vary in size from 20 to 150 members. When faced with no opera season or public gatherings our board was faced with a dilemma. With no performances there was seemingly no way or purpose for our group's activities. But we were determined to reach out to our members to keep them engaged and connected to keep our groups intact. To do this we came up with the following strategies:

- We purchased a **Zoom account** and then proceeded to instruct our groups on how to use it so they could have their own chapter board meetings and arrange events.
- The CEB created an array of virtual activities where members in all nine groups could engage with one another.
- A **Zoom member virtual watch party and meet-up** was scheduled to follow each of Lyric Opera's virtual concerts.
- **Virtual Opera Bingo** was created by CEB member, Linda Budzik.
- An **opera Book Club discussion** on *None Shall Sleep* moderated by the author **T'D. Arkenberg**.
- A **virtual 5k run/walk** was a hit. Run/walks were done individually. Lyric Opera logo face masks were mailed.
- Our annual **CEB Holiday Party** was organized as a virtual event.
- We started a **weekly email newsletter** to maintain a connection to Lyric Opera
- We also set up a **private Chapters Facebook Group** to post events and keep in daily contact.

These were all good, but we realized initially that all these virtual events would not address the needs of our non-computer-literate members. Opera support groups provide an important source of belonging and interaction to their members, so phone trees and well-being checks were implemented to stay in touch.



Opera Theater of St Louis Virtual Docent Presentations: Reaching Audiences During Covid Crisis

The goal of this Virtual Docent Presentation Project was to utilize computer technology so that trained docent volunteers could safely present opera talks to the public during the Covid-19 health crisis. The Opera Docent Committee has a long tradition of presenting in-person opera talks to the public. Due to the pandemic, docent presentations were not able to be offered during 2020, after the Festival Season was cancelled. The possibility of resuming opera talks presented itself during the fall of 2020 after the company announced plans for an Outdoor Festival Season during May and June of 2021. After this announcement, the leadership of the Docent Committee, along with the Office of Education and Engagement, began to explore the feasibility of giving virtual opera talks in place of in-person ones. Virtual presentations would allow docents to give talks about the upcoming Outdoor Festival Season while complying with health safety protocols for both presenters and members of the audience.

In September of 2020, the opportunity to transition to virtual presentations was introduced to the Docent Committee during a Zoom meeting. Eight docents agreed to take on the challenge. Over the next six months, docents were trained by the Education and Engagement Coordinator to create PowerPoint presentations that included music and video recordings, and narration. Meanwhile, due to concerns about the safety of the artists and artisans participating in the Outdoor Festival, the opera company had to modify its original programming. While the company made final decisions about the programming, the docent leadership decided to offer themed virtual opera presentations, - ones not linked to the upcoming Outdoor Festival. The following opera talks were scheduled: *Voices Lifted: Two Hundred Years of Black Composers of Opera*, *Flowers and Gardens in Opera*, and *Les Femmes Fatales*. In the end, three components were critical to this project's success: the willingness of the docents to take on this new, demanding challenge; the invaluable technical assistance from the opera company Office of Education and Engagement; and the cooperation from contacts at the various presentation sites.



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2021 Projects of Special Merit

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

We had no idea how many would attend but hoped for at least 100 households.

The event exceeded all our goals.

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.

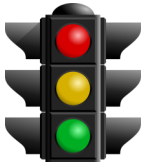
Songstress superseded our expectations. In 15 months, the project has gained an international following of nearly 10,000 viewers over two platforms. It has received positive reviews from readers around the world, especially the educational aspects of this project. Many have commented on how much they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



The Songstress and the Swordsman is a multimedia opera advocacy project written 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.

*The Erwin H. Johnson
Memorial Fund, Inc.*

Regional News Red Light, Green Light—We're Back!



The Art of Reopening, Soft or Hard

Covid's on the rise; the opera house is dark.

Covid's on the wane; opera is back.

No, wait—not really. Not with the delta variant taking over.

Red, stop. Green, go. An adult version of the childhood game? What can we, as opera volunteers, do?

At Friends of Opera San Jose, we know about closing and reopening. Our company's founder, Irene Dalis, the Metropolitan Opera's star mezzo for twenty years, acknowledged the effectiveness of the exciting fundraisers our volunteer group held in the mid-1980s that helped her build Opera San Jose. Though the volunteers disbanded a few years later, our close-knit opera community remembers the original group's contributions, and in 2013, OSJ's board of directors tasked me to build such a group once again. In a little over a year, with the help of many, Friends of Opera San Jose was born. Ever since, we've done galas and campaigns as well as myriad tasks in the office and theater, but in the beginning, we opened and closed. Much later, in 2014, the rebuilt auxiliary opened again. But then came March, 2020 and a national lockdown and, again,

FRIENDS OF OPERA SAN JOSE CLOSED.

No, wait - not really.



Covid-19 shut down opera companies across the country, even the Met. In contrast, at Opera San Jose, we remained open--though in a different way--and we stayed very active. The vision of General Director Khori Dastoor, of OSJ's board, and of Khori's staff, combined with a major donor's generosity, resulted in the creation of Opera San Jose's Heiman Digital Studio. This allows us to develop and stream quality productions. So we continued to produce operas--and hold galas and receptions--but they were virtual. Our theater was dark, but our opera company wasn't. Because we built a state-of-the-art studio, instead of closing, Opera San Jose did a quick pivot. And so did Friends volunteers.

THE SOFT RE-OPEN

Our usual grand opera productions in the theater became an avenue closed, but our digital studio enabled a *soft* reopen. Creating our art in this heretofore unexpected way meant the staff still needed Friends volunteers, but the nature of our work changed. Some well-established volunteer tasks weren't good fits for our solely digital productions of the 2020-21 Season. For example, we didn't need parking attendants for live events, or greeters for pre-performance lectures, or ushers for dress rehearsals in the theater attended by students from local schools.



With administrative staff working largely from home, and rules and regs and extra precautions for artists and staff working physically present at our digital studio, new and unique *soft-open* tasks emerged. Here are some examples.

- **Box office.** Box office staff now worked from home; so did Friends volunteers. For four hours twice a week we manned the phones. Calls were forwarded to volunteers' phones; they answered questions as they could and when they couldn't, they left detailed messages for company staff. A Google document was set up to log calls and for constant communication between box office personnel and volunteers. In this way, follow up was assured.
- **Virtual galas.** During the pandemic, Opera San Jose held several ticketed galas in connection with our digital productions; patrons participated at various levels. For example, for New Year's Eve, our artists created a lively staged production complete with costumes and set, and our vocal artists sang traditionally operatic as well as more contemporary drinking songs. Patrons could buy a basic ticket to view this production and remotely attend the pre-performance New Year's celebration. Pricier ticket options included champagne and dinner from a local gourmet restaurant. Our erstwhile parking volunteers—and others—picked up the meals from the restaurant and delivered them piping hot to patrons' doorsteps along with goody bags volunteers had assembled. Without the work of Friends, it would have been nearly impossible to hold this New Year's artistic and income-producing event in such a festive and personal way.
- **Digital productions.** With the creation of the Heiman Digital Studio, Opera San Jose has an ideal environment to create streaming productions with close ups, panoramas, fade ins, fade outs and all the aspects of cinema and TV, not too unlike the Met's worldwide Live in HD. Though most of our rehearsals were accomplished via social distance, final rehearsals and filming had to be done in person on site. This required strict Covid protocols. A Friends volunteer who had been a hospital medical worker for years took temperatures as artists entered the building, swabbing their noses for instant Covid tests. Other volunteers bought artist-sustaining snacks--packaged at their source--such as meats, cheeses, crackers, fruits, veggies, and yogurt cups, so the cast didn't need to leave to have a healthful nosh. Friends shopped for the items and dropped them off at the digital studio, arranging them attractively--and safely--on lunch room tables.

Our soft re-open led us also to discover that other routine volunteer tasks can be done despite Covid, and that many can even be done from home. For example, hand sewing for the costume department can be done on-site or at volunteers' homes. Volunteers have also stuffed envelopes with thank you notes and small gifts to donors; normally, this would be done at company headquarters, but during Covid a coordinating volunteer assigned mailings to specific volunteers and dropped materials off at their homes. These highly trusted Friends mailed the completed envelopes from their neighborhood post offices.

----- Like us on Facebook to join the conversation! -----

THE HARD RE-OPEN



At Friends of Opera San Jose, we're definitely familiar with the hard re-open. In 2013, when OSJ's board set the goal of creating a volunteer auxiliary, the original one had been disbanded for more than twenty-five years. At a practical level, the resurrected auxiliary was re-built from scratch, in other words, a *hard* re-open. We have found that activities to accomplish that 2014 re-boot are still relevant today. We are now using some of them--or at least, the philosophy behind them--to re-engage volunteers who stayed inactive during Covid. The following provides insights from the 2013-14 re-build and how we are replicating aspects of that process to re-open now.

- **Cocktail parties and other events.** In conjunction with a project to increase subscriptions in 2013, OSJ board members held *Into the Family* cocktail parties, welcoming long-term subscribers into their homes. Our incoming general director, Larry Hancock, informed them of the company's plans for the upcoming season and made a pitch for them to bring people they knew into our subscriber family. It occurred to us that this was also an opportunity to recruit volunteers for the new auxiliary, so I, as the person tasked by OSJ's board, came to the parties, arming myself with signup sheets. Another successful signup event was a pot luck held at the end of the company's annual opera history class, in which we explained the purpose of the new auxiliary and our plans to build it. We made brief pitches, too, sometimes with signup sheets on clipboards, at preview lectures. In like manner, early this summer, before the delta variant became the dominant form of Covid here in Silicon Valley, we held a subscriber event outdoors in a redwood forest. Just like we did at those cocktail parties nine years ago, we pitched our volunteer group. Friends of OSJ board members circulated among the crowd, clipboards at the ready to take the contact information of *potential* volunteers. From an event of 200 or so people, we ended up with twelve new Friends!
- **Immediate asks.** As soon as a new volunteer has been entered into our membership database, their email address goes into the distribution list our volunteer coordinator uses to inform the membership about tasks Opera San Jose asks us to do. Unless there are special requirements or skills needed for a job (in that case, we may ask specific individuals to do the task), all volunteers receive an email. In this way, everyone has the chance to sign up to do what interests them. Volunteers are generally assigned on a first come, first served basis. The important point here is quickly to inform volunteers about tasks they can sign up for. This helps keep them from losing interest if no one were to get in touch.
- **An organic, open philosophy.** In 2013, it became apparent that the most effective way to recruit enough volunteers to build a brand-new organization was to meet potential volunteers exactly where they are in their lives, and to be highly intentional and organized, but "organic" at the same time. We recruited volunteers by attending events large and small, by announcing the emerging group whenever we could, and by meeting potential recruits over tea or coffee, even over intermission champagne in the theater. We started a two-page informal newsletter while the group was still forming, simply to raise awareness that something was happening and to encourage the beginning of a community with growing esprit de corps. Any or all these things, which we used in our hard re-boot, can work for a hard 2021 re-opening, too. The main thing is to be nimble and open to experimentation, creative when the unexpected occurs, and on the lookout for all opportunities, seizing them right away.

Here's an example of seizing an opportunity: a few months ago, we realized we had never held a formal orientation event for new volunteers. As we set out to create such an event, an *aha!* came to us--that we didn't have to limit attendance to new volunteers! We could invite everyone, newbies and long haulers, active volunteers, once-in-a-whiles, dormant volunteers, and anyone in between. Instead of billing it as a *new* volunteer orientation, we now call it *Volunteer Orientation to the 2021-22 Season*. By including all, we hope sufficiently to engage each Friends volunteer so they will commit to active work in support of Opera San José.

CONCLUSION

The full re-launch of a volunteer group at an opera company that has been dark or inactive during the past year and a half may be helped by a hard re-opening effort that reaches out to a broad expanse of patrons as described above. On the other hand, a company which stayed active during the pandemic may simply need a soft retool of volunteer tasks to be in sync with the company's revised approaches to producing its art.

No, wait—not really. Hard and soft re-openings needn't be mutually exclusive.



Our experiences lead us to conclude that the re-opening process is necessarily unique to fit hand-in-glove with your opera company and volunteer group's situation. So, take your pick of approaches or mix them up. Hard and soft can result in the dynamic as they walk side by side.



However you do it, raise a glass to your efforts. Wishing you success with your volunteer re-launch!

by Rita Horiguchi, Friends of Opera San Jose

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**Find us on the internet at
www.OperaVolunteers.org**

OVI helping you:

For membership year 2021-2022 beginning on Oct. 1, OVI has once again waived dues for group members in order to assist them through this challenging transition period.

Individual members may renew their membership at the usual rate by mail or on the OVI website. If you are able, please consider joining at the grantor level which helps fund our matching grants to opera volunteer groups.

2020 grant application and recognition deadlines were extended to May 1, 2021 and new grants and recognition will be available with an application deadline of February 1, 2022.

Grants

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/matching-grants-and-awards/guidelines-for-ovi-grant-applications/>

Now is the time to think about the kinds of projects that can benefit your opera volunteer group or support your Opera Company and reach out to your community. Details and applications are available on OVI's website.

Partner in Excellence:

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/matching-grants-and-awards/partners-in-excellence/>

Is there an individual your group would like to honor or a special anniversary to celebrate.

Nominate an individual or a group for an OVI award.

Project of Special Merit:

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/matching-grants-and-awards/projects-special-merit/>

Did your group create a unique project either before or during the current quarantine shut-down?

Let us know about it so we can recognize you and share your great idea with our other opera volunteer groups.