

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 TD 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.

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 of each chapter.

The Songstress and the Swordsman is 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