

# THE OPERA VOLUNTEER VOICE

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The official newsletter of  
*Opera Volunteers  
International*

**Deadline 2/1/24**

*Partners in Excellence*

*Matching Grants*

*Projects of Special Merit*

## In this Issue: Registration Details for Opera Conference 2024

### The Role of Volunteers and Volunteer Organization

*How can volunteers be best used in today's opera?*



Don Dagenais, OVI Past President and 40 year volunteer, and Sue Dixon, General Director of Portland Opera, led a recent discussion on this topic.

*This article is excerpted from a November 2023 OVI Zoom Discussion.*



**Don Dagenais** discussed his experience at **Kansas City Opera Guild**, **OVI**, and currently as President of **AMSOV** (American Major Symphony Orchestra Volunteers).

He described volunteers who bring enormous career experience and creativity to complex projects such as fundraising. However, these hypothetical volunteers, capable of leading such projects, would be easily frustrated by being asked by a young staffer to stuff envelopes. Indeed, Board Members are this type of highly qualified volunteers. They are municipal leaders, volunteering their time to benefit the community.

It has happened, where a volunteer group creates a successful volunteer project, only to see it taken over by the company, so, in a way, the volunteer groups become victims of their own success. Once the projects are out of the hands of volunteers, recruiting volunteers becomes more difficult.

**Sue Dixon** agreed that volunteer work assignments must be meaningful to the volunteers.. She came from a family where volunteerism was a part of growing up, and she has seen to it that **Portland Opera** uses a careful process to match the skills of the volunteers to jobs they want to do. Portland Opera currently uses around 300 volunteers who work at all levels, including such jobs as light-walkers, greeters, and, as they prepare for the 60th Anniversary Celebration, volunteers at Portland Opera Guild are organizing historical information for the company archives.

During the Q and A discussion, Don and Sue agreed that staff's interest-in increasing quality volunteer engagement opportunities produces superior results for all. OVI would love to hear about experiences of your opera volunteer group with its company.

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**“Volunteer work assignments must be meaningful to the volunteers”**

**Sue Dixon**  
General Director  
Portland Opera

# From the President: Welcome New Regional Directors



**W**inter offers time for reflection and anticipate what the New Year might bring. This new year seems especially rich with possibility for us at OVI.

I'm excited that our Board of Directors and Officers is complete, with the addition of new (returning) board

member Phyllis Driver as Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, and Esther Blevins as our new North Central Regional Director.

Our all-volunteer board works diligently to advance opera volunteerism through our unique programs of Matching Grants, awards and through sharing resources.

We look forward to meeting with members in-person at Opera Conference 2024 to discuss issues facing volunteers as they engage with their opera organizations.

Our social media accounts have expanded. We seek to include news from your social media sites, too. Together, we can create feedback to increase our opera volunteer reach.

Let us know what resources we might provide for you. Contact me at [president@operavolunteers.org](mailto:president@operavolunteers.org) with your great ideas. Together we can spread the word to volunteers everywhere.

*Mary Sveta*

## Phyllis Driver

will serve as **Mid-Atlantic Regional Director**, replacing Ingrid Kessler who has become Vice President of Administration.

Phyllis has served many years on our board as Secretary, Treasurer, and finally as Mid Atlantic Regional Director in 2020-2021. She left after ten years service to care for her husband Ely, who has since passed away. She is known to many of our members from the Focus Meeting hosted by Knoxville and Phyllis in 2016. Welcome back !



## Esther Berland Blevins

**North Central Region Director**, is an accomplished professional in the realm of arts administration, bringing a wealth of experience and dedication to her current role

as the Associate Institutional Giving Director at Minnesota Opera.

With a Master's degree in Arts Administration from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Esther has cultivated a diverse career path. She previously served as the Senior Manager of Marketing and Development Communications at Knoxville Opera, where her strategic insights significantly contributed to the organization's growth. Esther also holds the distinction of being the Founding Board Chair and Executive Director at the Minnesota Transplant Project, showcasing her commitment to community engagement and impactful initiatives.

Esther is a seasoned nonprofit consultant, offering invaluable expertise in crafting business plans, devising fundraising strategies, and executing impactful marketing campaigns. Her portfolio includes the successful planning of festivals, fundraising events, art competitions, and grant proposals. As a member of the OPERA America Leadership Intensive Program (Class of 2021), Esther has demonstrated her commitment to continuous learning and leadership development. She led Knoxville Opera through the Change Network's Of/By/For All program, showcasing her dedication to fostering inclusive and accessible arts experiences.

She looks forward to meeting members in the North Central Region.

----- Find us on the internet at [www.OperaVolunteers.org](http://www.OperaVolunteers.org) -----

# OVI wants to honor your opera volunteers

**Don't Miss Out! All applications must be received by February 1, 2024**

**New** online applications available at [operavolunteers.org](https://www.operavolunteers.org)

Opera Volunteer International offers three special programs to help your group honor outstanding individual opera volunteers in your own communities.

## Matching Grants

OVI encourages the development and expansion of activities undertaken by our membership that foster the recruitment, development, and training of volunteers for participation in all phases of opera company support. We award matching grants of up to \$2,000 to membership groups for work in areas such as promotion, education, public relations, audience development, production, fundraising and training. Special consideration is given to programs directed at those who have not been traditionally associated with opera multi-cultural communities and disadvantaged or under-served groups.

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/guidelines-for-ovi-grant-applications/>

## Partners in Excellence

Here is a wonderful way to honor an individual or group that has given extraordinary volunteer service to opera in their communities. Any OVI support group or opera company may submit a nomination for this once-in-a-lifetime honor which all of OVI will celebrate through press releases, our website, newsletter, and at Opera conference 2024.

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/partners-in-excellence/>

## Projects of Special Merit

OVI invites members to share projects they have undertaken for their opera company. We want to know of projects that have been entirely created, implemented and successfully accomplished by your volunteer organization for your opera company. Successful endeavors such as audience development, education, fundraising, membership growth, artist services and volunteer training are all eligible for consideration. <https://www.operavolunteers.org/projects-special-merit/>

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**It's not too late to Donate....** [Operavolunteers.org/donate](https://www.operavolunteers.org/donate)

*Head to our website to contribute to OVI.*

*Your contribution will help make the difference for our Matching Grant awardees as they innovate with unique volunteer projects.*

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

# Opera Conference 2024



On behalf of Opera League of Los Angeles and LA Opera, welcome to OVI members coming to this special event. Enjoy opera, the city, our discussions of topics vital to opera volunteerism, all alongside a mini-festival of performances headlined by LA Opera.

Gary Murphy

LA Opera Board Member, CEO and President, Opera League of Los Angeles

## Opera Conference June 5-8, 2024

## World Opera Forum June 3-5

Take advantage of special OVI pricing with the 2-day OVI pass, and enjoy access to the many Conference activities, including the opening reception sponsored by Los Angeles Opera to the Closing Session on Saturday, June 8th.



Register at the Opera Conference 2024 website to meet and discuss the topics shaping opera today. In addition to the four days devoted to opera in the 21st century, the week begins with a separate meeting of the World Opera Forum, a collaboration of OPERA America, Opera Europa, Ópera Latinoamérica, and the Association for Opera in Canada. There is a separate fee for the Forum, so consult the opera conference 2024 website for details for these two different passes.

Find full information here:

<https://www.operaamerica.org/programs/events/conferences-webinars/los-angeles-2024/opera-conference-world-opera-forum/opera-conference-2024/>



## CONFERENCE HOTEL



Omni Hotel -Special Conference Rate listed on Opera Conference website. Opera Conference sessions are within walking distance of Los Angeles Opera's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and walking tours of the area are being planned.

## PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL

Beth Morrison Projects: [Magdalene](#) | June 4, 7, & 8

LA Opera: [Turandot](#) | June 2m, 5, & 8

LA Opera: [Fire and Blue Sky](#) | June 6

Long Beach Opera: [Ipsa Dixit](#) | June 1 & 8

Mission Opera: [The Merry Widow](#) | June 7 & 8

Pacific Opera Project: [Madama Butterfly](#) June 1, 2m, & 7

Synchromy: [Sally Ride](#) | June 1 & 2

Synchromy: [Minute to Midnight](#) | June 2m

Synchromy: [The Double](#) | June 8m

Synchromy: [My Wings Burned Off](#) | June 8m

Additional performances may be announced and details on website.

----- Find us on the internet at [www.OperaVolunteers.org](http://www.OperaVolunteers.org) -----

## WHAT YOU WILL ACCESS WITH YOUR OVI 2-DAY PASS

Your OVI 2-day conference pass (Thursday 6/6 & Friday 6/7) *includes:*

- Entry to the Opera Conference General Opera Conference **Opening session** on **Wednesday** (6/5/24)
- Los Angeles Opera **Host Company Reception** on that **Wednesday evening**, which takes place prior to the Los Angeles Opera performance of Turandot. (Tickets are separate.)

### THURSDAY

will begin with our **OVI Board Meeting**, where all OVI members are welcomed.

Next up will be **Opera America plenary general sessions**,

followed by our **Annual Awards Luncheon** featuring this year's Partners in Excellence, Projects of Special Merit and Matching Grant awardees. (Note: there will be an additional fee, paid to OVI, for the lunch for attendees not receiving an award.)

An afternoon session featuring a **panel discussion of volunteer topics** will be led by **Gary Murphy**, CEO and President of Opera League of Los Angeles. Thursday also features an **afternoon Sponsor Reception**, and an opportunity for networking with OLLA members at our co-marketing table at the Omni-Conference center.

### FRIDAY

morning begins with the **Opera America General Session**, and **breakout sessions** follow. An informal **Volunteer Showcase Lunch** will take place at a **Chandler Pavilion rehearsal** room (cost TBD) where members of the Opera League of Los Angeles will describe some their most successful initiatives, such as seminars, cast dinners, shop at the opera, and more. We return to the last **general session** and a final **roundtable discussion for OVI**.

An informal meet-up will be available for those who want to get together briefly before boarding the buses from the Omni to go to the performance of Madame Butterfly at the Pacific Opera Theater later.

### SATURDAY

Opera Conference **Closing session** will be open to OVI pass holders as well.

*Extras such as walking tours of the area around the conference venue are in the planning stages, and they will be fit into what free time we can find in this packed schedule. Our hotel is within walking distance of the Museum of Contemporary Art, The Broad, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Japanese American National Museum. The Grammy Museum, Echo Park, California Science Center and Natural History Museum are a short ride away.*



There's no denying it! Opera vacations can be expensive.

Flights, Hotels, Meals, ground transportation, plus the opera tickets, and conference registration. The cost could often purchase a cruise or exotic escape. Opera employees usually have their expenses picked up by their opera company, but not the humble volunteer. So why go? What is the attraction.

For me, I find the benefit well worth the cost. I get to travel to parts of the country I would like to experience. I get to know my peers from around the country, see old friends, and meet and hear from inspiring leaders of opera. Seeing performances in other cities is something I really enjoy. The structure of conference fills my schedule with interesting things to do, people to be with, and new ideas to bring home. Every opera guild or volunteer group is different, and it is inspiring to see how the other groups work. I always schedule an extra day or two for sightseeing and, I will admit, sometimes play hooky to partake of local color.

Opera conference is not for everyone, but if you can afford it I recommend you try it at least once. Let us know you will be coming. There will be a new group of opera loving OVI volunteers to welcome you.

*Opera Volunteers International is a nonprofit, volunteer-led service organization and a resource and advocate for the development and advancement of volunteerism in support of opera. OVI is an umbrella organization for opera volunteers, opera volunteer groups, and opera organizations that use volunteers. OVI expands the relevance, reach, and future of opera worldwide by connecting individual opera volunteers, opera volunteer groups, opera producing organizations, educational organizations, and others that support opera in their communities.*

Your Membership is Vital to our Success

## Become an OVI Member Today

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/joinovi/>

Your support allows OVI to celebrate the hard work of volunteers and offers ways to help make more volunteer involvement possible by:

- **Recognizing achievement and creativity**
- **Supporting volunteer projects**
- **Advocating for continued involvement of volunteers in opera.**



Joining at the Grantor level helps fund our Matching Grants program for member projects.

**Volunteering enriches the lives of volunteers, builds bridges to the community, and makes it possible for opera companies to do more.**

Opera Volunteers International is a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to connecting and bringing together volunteers who support opera companies in cities and local communities throughout the United States and Canada.