

THE OPERA VOLUNTEER VOICE

January 2025
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The official newsletter of
*Opera Volunteers
International*

Deadline
2/15/25

Partners in Excellence
Matching Grants
Projects of Special Merit

In this Issue: Registration Details for Opera Conference 2025

Deadline for 2025 Grants and Recognition Awards is Feb. 15

Opera Volunteer Voice strives to capture volunteers' current thoughts and moods as they serve opera. We currently represent 32 opera volunteer groups of all sizes and organizational structures, as well as many loyal individual members dedicated to promoting and preserving the volunteer component in opera. Our newsletter highlights groups' successful efforts to create a climate for continuing growth. Volunteer groups must plan for change as needs and capabilities evolve. The most successful groups are continually evaluating their efforts and effectiveness, and looking for new opportunities to grow.

Though each "guild" or group serves similar functions, each one is unique. Often, survival as a group depends on having a positive relationship with its opera company.

Opera companies that use volunteers to their advantage benefit in many ways from the vital functions they perform such as education and outreach, but also from the way they become ambassadors to the community, and usually dedicated donors.

Opera Power: Strategies for Building Resilient Organizations, will address issues and opportunities facing volunteer groups, and provide opportunities for group discussions. We encourage sharing volunteer ideas and achievements through our **Matching Grants, Partner in Excellence, and Projects of Special Merit Awards**. Bringing you the best of the best helps us all do more. Do you have a successful initiative to share with opera volunteers everywhere? Please send us your stories so that others may benefit from your great ideas.

In upcoming newsletter issues, OVI will focus, individually, on each function of volunteer involvement from our member groups.

This issue highlights two groups that do not have associated "opera companies". **The Erwin H. Johnson Memorial Fund, Inc. for Opera** produces and promotes musical events and outreach in the Buffalo, New York area. The **University of Alabama Opera Guild** raises funds and assists opera productions at the College level.

OVI's upcoming webinar series, *Harnessing Volun-*

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*OVI now has a Bluesky social media account named **operavolunteers***

*Follow and join our LinkedIn group, **Opera Volunteers International***

From the President:



The New Year is a good time to reflect on OVI's successes of the past year and look forward to what is to come.

During the past year, we were able to offer Matching Grants for innovative volunteer projects to seven of our member groups.

Thank you for being an opera volunteer and for your generous support of our organization, and especially for our Matching Grants program. In November, we launched our *Matching Gifts for Matching Grants* campaign on social media and by email, asking that our members and others consider matching the donations we as board members pledged around **World Opera Day** and **Giving Tuesday**. The response to our *Matching Gifts for Matching Grants* initiative has been gratifying for our dedicated board members. Their outreach meant that we exceeded our fundraising goals, thanks to you!

Our mission is to keep you informed so that you will have the support of others who may be facing the challenges of keeping your organization vibrant.

To get acquainted, we'd love to see you at our next online discussion/webinar, *Harnessing Volunteer Power: Strategies for Building Resilient Organizations*, on 3/31/25. More information about the webinar will be coming soon.

Our sessions at Opera Conference 2025 are being prepared to help you build meaningful relationships with like-minded individuals who share your passion for volunteerism in opera. We encourage you to explore our website, operavolunteers.org to learn more about our programs and upcoming events.

Are there volunteer activities in your organization you think would benefit other groups? Contact me at president@operavolunteers.org with your ideas and comments. I would love to hear from you.

Thank you for choosing to be a part of Opera Volunteers International. As volunteers for opera, we can make a real difference.

Mary Svela

Thank You

A special thank you to these donors in 2024.

With their generous contributions, we will provide matching grants for worthy volunteer led projects in our groups.

Jerry Bohannon

Heidi Bohn

William C. and Sandra Bruns

Rhonda Catenzaro

Don Dagenais

Vivian Davis

Frederick Dear

Barbara Dittmar

Ingrid Dubberke

Barbara Eckel

Erika Erich

Rita Horiguchi

Janet Hyne

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Jim Jolly

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Sheila McNeill

Miss Les J. Miller

Anne Prokopovych

Dianne Schemm

Janice and James Schueppert

Colonel Kimberley Smith

David Steiner

Mary Svela

Rhonda Sweeney

Madeleine Workman,

a generous anonymous donor

Donors on Facebook will be recognized when the names become available to us.

OVI launches upcoming webinar series

This spring OVI will begin a series of webinars for our members titled:

Harnessing Volunteer Power: Strategies for Building Resilient Organizations.



- The first webinar of the year will be on **Monday, March 31, 2025.**
- Second session in May, live from the Opera America Conference, will focus on best practices of board governance to maintain leadership continuity
- Third session in late summer
Rhonda Sweeney - on tapping into your full potential and pursuing meaningful contributions outside traditional career roles..

Further details on topics, date, time, and speakers will be forthcoming.

With this series of discussions, OVI aims to provide valuable insights to benefit our members. They have been developed to equip volunteer organizations with actionable strategies for attracting and retaining leaders.

The first session will be a one-hour Zoom webinar scheduled for :

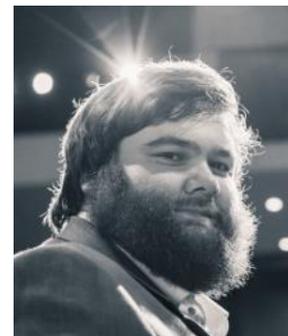
March 31, 2025 at 12:00 pm Eastern, 9:00 am Pacific.

It will highlight building successful partnerships. Zoom link will be sent to members by email.



Dr. Jim Catanzaro

“Volunteers are the heartbeat of every organization. When we harness their passion and dedication, we build not just resilient teams, but thriving communities.”



Tyler McKenzie

Dr. Jim Catanzaro, Executive Director of HERDI South and national webinar speaker, will moderate a discussion with a panel which includes **Tyler McKenzie**, Manager of Volunteer Engagement for Opera Theatre of St. Louis and OVI Board of Directors member.

Over his 38- year career, Jim Catanzaro led four community colleges in four states: California, Ohio, Illinois, and Tennessee. Since 2015 Jim has served as Executive Director of the **Higher Education Research and Development Institute, South.** (HERDI South) brings together companies who want to sell products or services in the higher ed market space with panels of community college leaders from the southern states for candid feedback and networking. Recently, Jim has moderated a series of webinars with the Association of College and University Educators. Jim loves opera and all classical music!

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

Opera Conference 2025



As an opera volunteer and a member of OVI, you are invited to attend Opera Conference 2025 in Memphis, TN May 20-23, 2025 on a special 2-day pass at the reduced early-bird rate of \$350. *Nearly half off the full conference member rate of \$645.* Reserve now. ...Registrations are refundable at 80% through March 31, and at 65% through May 5. Hotel can be cancelled up to 72 hours in advance of stay.

Don't miss out on this chance to engage in thoughtful discussions with other volunteer leaders as well networking opportunities with 650 opera professionals.

Our OVI pass for Wednesday May 21st and Thursday the 22nd includes volunteer roundtables, innovative volunteer projects and practical discussions in addition to access to the opening and closing sessions of the general conference, and the Memphis Opera host reception event.



Conference sessions are scheduled in the famed Peabody Memphis hotel, and attendees are encouraged to use the OPERA America exclusive room rate of \$224 per night (until sold out or 4/18/25) for easy access to conference activities which will take place primarily on the 2nd and 3rd floor of this historic hotel.

Come to our annual Awards Luncheon at the nearby Majestic Grille. We will honor our 2025 Award and Matching Grant recipients. Sign-up will be available soon, and lunch will be complimentary for OVI Members at the Grantor level and one complimentary lunch for awardees.



Enjoy performances from Opera Memphis, as well as by other Tennessee-area opera companies. Attend Memphis' production of *La Calisto* with a toga party to follow, and a presentation of new work.

Sign up today on the Opera Conference 2025 website.

<https://www.operaamerica.org/programs/events/conferences-webinars/opera-conference/>

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



The Opera Guild at University of Alabama was founded 12 years ago with 17 members. Current membership is 100 members and in 2024 the group gifted \$146,516 to the program from their two fundraising efforts: the Gala, and a fundraising letter which is sent out in July. The amount raised last year was more than a sixfold increase from the first year when the Guild raised about \$24,000.

opera.music.ua.edu/ogua/

Laissez les Bons Temps Rouler! *(Let the good times roll)*

The good times will be rolling again in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at 6 p.m. on February 15, 2025, when the **Opera Guild at the University of Alabama** opens the doors to their **11th annual Opera Guild Gala**. The UA Opera Guild Gala is the preeminent social event in central Alabama with guests traveling from all over the southeast to attend.

This season's Gala, entitled ***BRAVO! Celebrate Opera!***, has a Mardi Gras theme, *Laissez les bons temps rouler!* (Let the good times roll!). Opera Guild President, **Leanne Spencer**, Gala Coordinator, **Carolyn Dahl**, and a Gala Steering Committee have been hard at work since last year's successful 10th anniversary celebration.

The Gala, a black tie event, draws about 200 party goers each year who support the University's Opera Theatre Programs. Live and silent auctions, dinner and cocktails, along with a general call to "Fund-a-Need," raise the lion's share of funds for the University of Alabama's Opera Theatre program. These funds enable the Voice department to stage two or three complete operas annually, giving the students a myriad of operatic theatre experiences in addition to vocal training and performances.

Other theatrical learning experiences provided to the students with the funds raised include stage movement, costume design and construction, stage fighting, sword play and fighting, set design and construction, among many other theatrical experiences.

A highlight of the Gala is always hearing singers from the opera program who perform selected operatic and musical theatre pieces for the audience. These singers also sit at the tables so that the patrons get to know them up close and personal.

The Guild charges \$125 per ticket to attend the annual Gala, but the value of attending the gala far exceeds the cost. Attendees get to attend a great party combined with the joy of supporting the opera students as they move toward careers in our favorite performing art!



Grant Report

Education opportunities opera advocacy volunteer/community engagement:

these are just some of the criteria that the Opera Volunteers International's Grant and Award Committee considers when selecting matching grant recipients. Dozens of organizations compete, only ten or less win. This article showcases one of our OVI Grant success stories, a project that started as a far-off dream celebration for an important anniversary that became a reality when the Erwin H. Johnson Memorial Fund, Inc. for Opera earned OVI's Matching Grant.

A Night in Venice: An OVI Grant Success Story

By Danielle Di Stefano, soprano; OVI Northeast - Regional Director;
Erwin H. Johnson Memorial Fund, Inc. for Opera, - Artistic Director

2024 was an important year for **The Erwin H. Johnson Memorial Fund, Inc. For Opera (EHJ)**: not only did we expand the opera education outreach program to include a multimedia opera art exhibit, but we also celebrated 35 years of making a difference in Buffalo/Western New York, all the way to Toronto, Ontario. Eager to mark the occasion with an extra special offering to the community, we sought collaboration with a local Baroque music ensemble, **Tormenta D'amore**, which specializes in rarely performed musical gems as well as favorites from before the 1800s. With vital financial help from the OVI Grant, *A Night in Venice*, EHJ's October 26 concert, became our double celebration, as it was also our annual World Opera Day Concert.

The Tormenta D'Amore Baroque Ensemble consists of seven members: **Ho Eui Holly Bewlay** and **Amy Cochrane**, sopranos; **Margaret Leenhouts** and **Koki Tanaka**, violins; **Pedro Sperb**, lute, theorbo, and baroque guitar; **Bonnie Choi**, harpsichord; and **Katie Weissman**, cello. Their repertoire was a musical tapestry of storytelling, exploring the universal themes of love, betrayal, and fidelity during an afternoon of well-beloved Baroque arias and rarely heard duets by masters like Vivaldi, Handel, Monteverdi, Sance, and others. Also featured was a bubbly violin sonata with multiple movements written as dances, as a celebratory nod to **World Opera Day**, observed worldwide the day prior. This intriguing mix of familiar and new was enthusiastically received by audience members.

Pre and post-concert, and during intermission, the audience was invited to experience the instruments up close. The ensemble introduced each instrument, sharing historical insights and answering questions. The audience truly enjoyed this educational aspect of the performance, many taking pictures with the musicians and their instruments, especially of the harpsichord. The inscription on the inner lid, written in Latin, translates to "if these things [music] touch the people on earth, what joy there will be in Heaven!"



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

Erwin H. Johnson Memorial Fund, Inc. for Opera

The EHJ Memorial Fund, Inc. for Opera, a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, has been supporting and promoting opera in Western New York, extending as far as Toronto, Canada for 35 years.

Their outreach covers an array of delivery systems and facets of the performing and visual arts, including: a traveling art exhibit, educational multimedia classes, coloring books, story books, and more.

They give grants for performances to local opera companies, and gift children tickets to local opera productions. They offer a yearly scholarship to a deserving young singer, and created Singing it Forward, an Opera outreach educational program for children and adults. www.chjfundopera.org/

Another aspect of interest was the lutenist's, cellist's, and harpsichordist's sheet music, which featured historically accurate figured bass-style notation. Instead of the accompaniment being fully written out note by note, like in modern sheet music, figured bass has a single note. A single note! It's up to the musician to improvise the accompaniment, according to the



music's emotions, their personal style, and the desired textures needed. It requires a masterful command of music theory, historical performance practices, and technique. No two performances are the same, lending an undercurrent of spontaneity, uniqueness, and excitement to the gathering.

EHJ's concert was a treasure for the community, and the response from the audience was very exciting. Dr. Anastasia Johnson, our president of EHJ, was still hearing compliments about our concert at another event two weeks later. We sincerely thank OVI for helping us to bring this unique and enriching event to our patrons. We love you!



Click on screen or hover your smart device (Android/iPhone, iPad, etc) with the camera app open over this QR code to enjoy a short video about the concert and hear a snippet of a Handel aria!

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

From our Friends at Opera League of Los Angeles: Regarding the devastating Fires

The catastrophic fires continue to weigh heavily on our collective hearts as we struggle to comprehend the impact on our community. To those who have suffered losses, we express our sincere condolences.

As LA Opera's primary volunteer support organization, we join the company as they spearhead a special fund to help those artists and staff who might need immediate assistance as well as partner with the county and other government leaders to see how to best harness the tremendous resources and volunteer power of our many passionate members.

In their letter to the LA Opera community, Chairman Keith Leonard and President and CEO Christopher Koelsch write:

"So far, we know of at least seven artists and staff who have been adversely impacted by this disaster. We are hoping to raise \$100,000 to create a bridge fund that will enable them to cover the costs they will incur as they await insurance payouts and other relocation costs. In most cases, we see the use of these funds as temporary loans until an insurance payout is received. The distribution of the funds will be closely monitored through a careful review process to ensure that they are used for the intended purposes. We are also confirming the mechanics and tax implications with our attorneys and auditors.

"If you have not already been directly impacted or are not already aiding others during this time, we hope that you will consider contributing \$5,000 to this fund. Any funds that are refunded or not used for direct relief will be directed to community support as approved by the Budget and Finance Committee. If you are able to participate, please reach out directly to LA Opera at (213) 972-7277 or friends@laopera.org. You can also give through [this link](#)."

Sincerely,
Gary W. Murphy
President & CEO

Last Chance to submit a grant or recognition request for this year.

2024-25 grant application and recognition deadline is February 15, 2025.

Grants

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/grants-and-awards/matching-grants-program/>

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/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/grants-and-awards/projects-of-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.