

BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

October 2025

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>

October 15, 2025 Membership Meeting Palm Aire Country Club

10 AM-Coffee and Conversation
10:30 AM - Business Meeting
11 AM - Opera Singers
11:30 AM Luncheon Served
(Optional)

Choices:

Pan seared Atlantic Salmon with
Champagne Dill Beurre Blanc
Scalloped Sweet Potatoes
Haricots Verts

Vegetarian Choice: Wild Mushroom
Ravioli with Alfredo Sauce

Dessert: Creme Brule (Gluten Free)

Reservations to: Cathy Knobel
787 Benjamin Franklin Drive
Sarasota, FL 34236

or contact Cathy at 941-706-2490 or
knobelwd@aol.com

Reservations Due Friday, October 10

PRICE: \$35.00

Greetings, MOG members and friends,

The new year for MOG is off to an excellent start!

The first 2025-2026 MOG membership meeting on September 17th at Palm Aire Country Club established a high bar for future monthly Guild gatherings. Although we won't hear from singers until October, we enjoyed an outstanding informative and entertaining presentation on Sarasota Youth Opera. Martha Collins, Jesse Martins, and Cameron Maxwell brought us up to date on the overall program and upcoming events, and encouraged our involvement. After the talk, Assistant Treasurer Maryanne Hazen presented the Guild's check for \$6000 that was gratefully accepted by our speakers. Many thanks to **Kathy Knobel** for making the arrangements for the meeting and to **Barbara Quinn** for standing in to handle reservations and menu choices.

Looking forward, I alert you to some October Guild events that you won't want to miss:

- Membership Meeting at Palm Aire – Wednesday, October 15th at 10 a.m.
 - Be sure to make your reservation and bring a friend!
- **Prelude** talk on *Così fan tutte* at Westminster Manor, October 17th at 10 a.m.
 - No reservation is required, but bring a friend!
- Fall opera festival opening night at Sarasota Opera – *Così fan tutte*, October 31st
 - Tickets are available at the Opera House Box Office or online.

It's not too early to get your tickets for 2 special events further along on the calendar:

- Tickets for the annual on-stage party on November 12th (*Une Soirée Française*) at 5:00 p.m. are available by calling the Opera House 941-328-1300 or www.sarasotaopera.org. Thanks to **Syble DiGirolamo** for organizing this event.
- **The Stars of Tomorrow Concert** is Sunday, February 8 at 1 PM at the State College of Florida's Neel Performing Arts Center. Tickets are \$30. [To purchase a ticket, visit this link.](#) Purchase ahead to enjoy a discount! Kudos to **Valerie Giuliani** for making it possible to buy tickets online and by credit card.

See you at the next MOG opera-a-tunity!!

Elizabeth Aversa

Freedom of Entertainment and Censorship of the Performing Arts

The suspension of production of late-night television show *Jimmy Kimmel Live* caused quite a stir for a week last month. The Walt Disney Company and its subsidiary the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) were reportedly pressured to take the program off the air but then, due to public sentiment and subscription cancellations, reversed the suspension and resumed production. Regardless of our position on the matter, our attention has been drawn to the topic of censorship in the performing arts.

Censorship in the arts can take two forms, according to Shannon Steen's research. The UC Berkeley professor points out that direct, or hard, censorship (such as what happened with the Jimmy Kimmel show) simply stops the performance or denies it a permit to "go on." More worrisome in some respects is what Steen calls "soft censorship... when ideas or contents are indirectly curtailed, in effect muting or limiting the circulation of certain stories or ideas." Both kinds of censorship have visited opera houses and music productions through the ages.

Popular music in America suffered under the censor's hand from before the American Revolution. In New York, in 1735, a publisher was taken to court for publishing ballads in which the colonial governor was criticized; the publisher was acquitted. In the 1930s, Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" was banned on radio broadcasts and she was not permitted to perform in some New York venues. The song in question was a poem about lynching set to music; it was considered offensive. In 1956, Elvis Presley's performance of "Hound Dog" on the Ed Sullivan Show caught criticism from parents and adults who believed Elvis to be a threat to American youth. And by the 1960's, the FBI investigated the song "Louie, Louie" by the Kingsmen for what was regarded as "secret content" that was harmful to the country and its young people. Recall that '60s favorite here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKt75jUuKJY>

What about opera? The censors have been at work in our favorite performing art since the very beginning, according to an article by the Welsh National Opera (WNO). Here are a few examples.

French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais suffered from censorship throughout his career. The play *The Marriage of Figaro* was censored as it depicted cunning, smart servants who could outwit their dull-witted masters, a truly revolutionary idea. When Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte adopted the play for an opera in 1786, they, too, came under fire. In a clear case of "soft" censorship, Mozart and Da Ponte could not use Figaro's direct criticism of the aristocracy from the play; instead, an aria, "Aprite un po' quegli occhi," about women's fickleness was substituted. Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTUz3HP5Pqo>

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* also caught the censor's eye, but minor changes allowed the show to go on.

Italian composers were also subject to censorship. The Met's article "Dodging the Censors" tells us "Operas were censored for the same reason that all kinds of theater were: Authorities worried that certain subjects would spread dangerous ideas among the public, undermining the social order of the day."

By the mid-1800s, Verdi was under attack. His *Stiffelio*, heard last season in Sarasota, was censored for its depiction of a man of the cloth dealing with his wife's infidelity. The church of the 1850's considered the content taboo and pushed Verdi to make changes. When the required alterations began to move the opera away from Verdi's intent, he withdrew the opera from circulation. For a century it was lost, but it was rediscovered in the mid-20th century and it was performed again - much to the approval of contemporary opera goers. Here is the opera's beautiful overture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHOTbn6V8jE>

In the 1850s Venetian censors attacked Verdi's *Rigoletto* for its depiction of an immoral French King in an era when the king had to be shown in a favorable light. Verdi had to make several changes, including converting the character of the French King into the Duke of Mantua that we know. Here is a familiar number that reminds us of the duke's loose behavior <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYNEL1emknM>

The setting for *Un ballo in Maschera*, Verdi's opera about the assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden, was forced to be moved from Stockholm to colonial Boston. Along with *Stiffelio*, *Rigoletto*, and *Un ballo in maschera*, other Verdi operas also were altered due to pressure from censors, but fortunately we hear the operas today.

Finally, a discussion of censorship of operas must include the Russian authority's "hard" censorship of two major works.

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsenk District* premiered in 1934 and was a popular piece until Stalin attended the opera in 1936 and declared it "muddle instead of music." Lacking official approval, it was not performed in Russia for years because it portrayed a less than cheerful picture of Russian life, something not allowed by Stalin. Here is a link to part 1 of the opera that involves murder, suicide, and interesting music. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReqfkJTNldU>

Production of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, composed 1941-1943, was cancelled and banned from 1947 until 1959, several years after the composer's death. The reason: the opera was regarded as "lacking heroism."

In summary, we can say that censorship of the performing arts is by no means new in our time. However, we are hearing and seeing wonderful operas that have been subjected to considerable scrutiny and harsh censorship over the centuries. Great music always finds its way to us, although we may need to be patient while we wait to hear it.

Elizabeth Aversa

UPCOMING EVENTS:

October 17, 2025, Prelude. Westminster Manor Auditorium, 1700 21st Avenue, Bradenton 34205, 10:00 AM

Learn about the background and music of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with Elizabeth Aversa leading the discussion. A continental breakfast will be served at 9:30. \$5.00, no reservations needed.



October 31, 2025: 7:30 PM
November 2, 2025: 1:30 PM
November 11, 2025: 7:30 PM
November 13, 2025: 7:30 PM
November 15, 2025: 1:30 PM



November 8, 2025: 5 PM
November 9, 2025: Noon

October 10, 2025 7:00PM
Sarasota Opera House

VIVA VERDI! - Film

VIVA VERDI! – Giuseppe Verdi, the most influential Italian Opera composer of the 19th century, willed his vast fortune to build a retirement home in Milan, Italy for ageing opera singers and musicians, and the young music students who are mentored by and live among them. Many of the residents are living legends, who, because of Verdi, are living the third act of their lives with passion, dignity and purpose. This documentary uncovers the incredible stories of these living treasures found at Casa Verdi today.

Tributes

In fond memory of **Joseph Varady** from Syble and Peter DiGirolamo

In memory of **Joe Varady**. It was a great pleasure knowing him. From Jeanne Yeagle

Wishing **Al McRae** a wonderful 100th Birthday – Syble DiGirolamo

Read All About It :
Operawire Interview with Maestro De Renzi



OperaWire, an international online resource about opera whose mission is “to shine a spotlight on all the amazing people nurturing and developing the artform today,” interviewed our own amazing Maestro Victor De Renzi in the September 30th post. In the interview by editor David Salazar, Maestro reveals his view of the changes in opera over time, the challenges of leading a company, and his view of the “opera industry.” Did you know that Maestro is the longest tenured artistic director (44 years) in the history of opera in America?

For 44 years, Victor DeRenzi has maintained his position at the helm of Sarasota Opera as its Artistic Director. During that time, he has led over 900 opera performances. Among his major accomplishments with the company is a Verdi cycle that he initiated in 1989 and completed in 2016 with the aim to perform all of Verdi’s music. He also started the Masterworks Revival Series to spotlight neglected operas and American Classics Series, which champions 20th century operas by American composers. Moreover, under

his watch, the company has engaged in educational and outreach activities and founded the Apprentice and Studio Artists Program.

Learn more by clicking on the link here: <http://operawire.com/> and then click on **interviews**.

Une Soirée Française, an evening of sophistication, elegance, and musical excellence.

Wednesday, November 12, 2025 from 5 to 8 p.m. Sarasota Opera House

Enjoy a lavish, French-inspired cocktail party followed by

A musical performance, on stage, of works by Mozart, Beethoven and Poulenc.

After party with dessert and champagne.

Tickets: \$75.00 www.sarasotaopera.org

or 941-328-1300





Annual Membership Application

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

New Member ☐ Renewing Member ☐

I (we) can help the Manatee Opera Guild in these ways (please check all appropriate boxes)

Literature design ☐

Event planning ☐

Fundraising ☐

Greeting ☐

Developing membership ☐

Photography ☐

Writing ☐

Hosting parties ☐

Hospitality ☐

Publicity ☐

Refreshments ☐

Serving on the Board ☐

Soliciting advertising and gifts ☐

Telephoning ☐

Editing (newsletters, brochures, letters) ☐

Setting up/cleaning up ☐

Modeling at fashion show ☐

Other talent ☐

Membership Level:

☐ Single Regular Membership \$40

☐ Single Sustaining Membership \$50

☐ Couple Regular Membership \$60

☐ Couple Sustaining Membership \$70

Send application and payment to:

Make checks payable to **Manatee Opera Guild or
MOG**

Send application and payment to:

Babs Noah 4635 Runabout Way Bradenton, FL 34203

2025/26 Manatee Opera Guild Calendar

August 29, 2025

September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025
Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2025, Board Meeting, Aversa Home, 10 a.m.	Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2025, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.	Tuesday, November 11, 2025, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.	Tuesday, December 2, 2025, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.
Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2025 Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m.	Wednesday, October 15, 2025 Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m.	Wednesday, November 12, 2025, On-Stage Concert, Sarasota Opera House, 5:30 – 8 p.m.	Sunday, December 7, 2025, Holiday Party, Hazen Residence, 3 p.m.
	Friday, October 17, 2025, 10 Prelude, 10 a.m. Westminster Manor – Così fan tutte, E. Aversa	Wednesday, November 19, 2025 Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m.	Monday, December 8, 2025, Membership Meeting/Picnic, Sarasota Opera House Courtyard, 10 a.m.
		Friday, November 21, 2025, Prelude, 10 a.m., Westminster Manor, La Bohème, S. Sundine	Friday, December 12, 2025 Prelude, 10 a.m., Westminster Manor, The Merry Widow, R. Martorella

January 2026	February 2026	March 2026	April 2026
Tuesday, January 6, 2026, Opera Movie Special, Westminster Manor, 1:30 p.m.	Sunday, February 8, 2026, Stars of Tomorrow Concert, Neel Auditorium SCF, 1 p.m.	Tuesday, March 10, 2026, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.	Tuesday, April 7, 2026, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.
Wednesday, January 14, 2026, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.	Tuesday, February 10, 2026, Board Meeting, TBD, 10 a.m.	Wednesday, March 18, 2026, Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m. HJD and Youth Opera Award Luncheon	Wednesday, April 15, 2026 Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m. Welcome New Members Luncheon
Wednesday, January 21, 2026, Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m.	Wednesday, February 18, 2026, Membership Meeting, Palm Aire CC, 10 a.m. Sweetheart Luncheon		
Friday, January 23, 2026, Prelude, 10 a.m., Westminster Manor, Susannah, M. Collins	Friday, February 20, 2026, Prelude, 10 a.m., Westminster Manor, Il Trovatore, R. Russell		
	Thursday, February 26, 2026, Fashion Show, 11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m., Lakewood Ranch CC		