

BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

Early Summer 2021

SARASOTA OPERA 2020-2021 SEASON Announcement Promises Comedy, Drama, Romance and Excitement!

"Having just completed a full season of indoor performances – **something no other company in the country did during the coronavirus pandemic** – leaders of Sarasota Opera are looking forward to a return to something that better resembles normal next year." (Jay Handleman)

Read the entire Herald Tribune article here:
[Sarasota Herald Tribune, June 6, 2021](#)

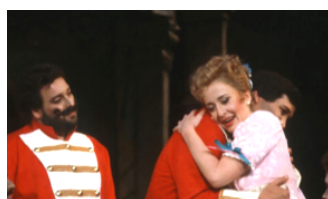
The season...

The Silken Ladder (*La scala di seta*), by Gioacchino Rossini. Dorvil, secretly married to Giulia, climbs the silken ladder each night to reach her bedroom. She devises various schemes to keep her marriage a secret from her guardian. All is well in the end when the marriage is revealed.

Oct. 29-Nov. 13

Tosca, by Giacomo Puccini. The evil Scarpia, Roman chief of police, lusts after Floria Tosca, a popular singer. He arrests her lover, Cavaradossi for helping the escaped prisoner Angelotti.

Feb. 12-March 19



The Daughter of the Regiment (*La fille du régiment*) by Gaetano Donizetti, Marie, an orphan is raised by the 21st Regiment. She falls in love

with Tonie who enlists in the Regiment in order to marry her. But, the Marquise has other plans for Marie!

Feb. 19-March 18, 2021

The Pearl Fishers (*Les pêcheurs de perles*), by Georges Bizet

Zurga and Nadir, newly reunited friends, vow to remain loyal to each other forever, but both fall in love with the priestess Leila.

March 5-19



Attila, by Giuseppe Verdi. Attila has conquered Italy. The captured Odabella pretends loyalty to Attila, all the while plotting revenge for the death of her father.

March 12-22

Tickets are available here:
<https://www.sarasotaopera.org/tickets-events>.

(All photos from previous productions of the operas at Sarasota Opera)

High Definition Movies at Sarasota Opera

All at 1:30 PM

- | | |
|----------|--|
| June 20 | <i>The Ninth Symphony Ballet</i> by Bejart |
| July 11 | <i>La Clemenza di Tito</i> |
| July 25 | <i>Manon Lescaut</i> |
| August 8 | <i>Orphée et Eurydice</i> |

Classic Movies at the Opera House

All at 7:30 PM

- | | |
|----------|------------------------|
| June 19 | <i>Marnie</i> |
| July 10 | <i>West Side Story</i> |
| July 24 | <i>Moonstruck</i> |
| August 7 | <i>Pillow Talk</i> |

Renew Your Manatee Opera Guild Membership. Details next page.

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 literature (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

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

Send application and payment to:

Jeanne Yeagle
1700 3rd Avenue West, Apt 111
Bradenton, FL 34205

MEET JOHN YOUNG
SARASOTA OPERA ACCOUNTANT
(WITH A SERIOUS SIDELINE)

By Syble DiGirolamo

For this issue of the *Bel Canto*, I interviewed John Young, Accounting Manager in Sarasota Opera's Accounting Department. John handles Accounts Receivables and all HR accounting needs such as

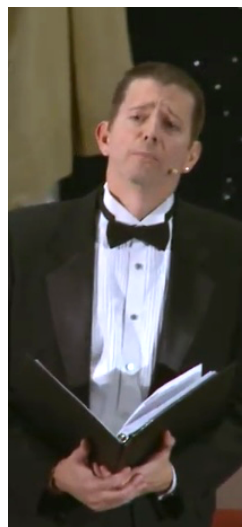


getting new employees set up, payroll and benefits. He enjoys that he gets to know and work with all his colleagues in this capacity.

Early on, as a young singer, John supported himself by working for a temp agency, and taking accounting jobs.

He found it interesting, and wanted to learn more and more. The companies he worked for kept calling him back and expanded his assignments as he became more experienced. He eventually became an Accounts Payable Manager and held the position for 12 years. When Sarasota Opera posted an Accounting position in 2017, his partner and soul-mate Ken Yunker (who is the lighting director at Sarasota Opera) encouraged him to apply. John and Ken had known for a long time that they wanted to retire in Sarasota, and this seemed like the perfect early opportunity to settle in a city they both loved. John loves the weather and being outdoors; he is used to the storms, and he loves the beach. He loves the access to music and other cultural events. He loves long walks. He loves his partner, their home, their pool and their three dogs. And when he says all this, you can just hear the sparkle in his eyes and the joy in his heart. To say the least, I enjoyed the telephone interview. It was uplifting.

John was born in Miami, Florida, and his family moved to Woodstock, Georgia when he was 12. Soon thereafter, his grandparents bought him an old upright piano and he started taking piano lessons. John had found his love of music. In



junior high and high school he joined a band, starting by playing the bass clarinet and working his way through several instruments before eventually landing on the oboe. He attended Georgia Southern University for Oboe Performance with a minor in Piano. After college he started to focus on singing, and took voice lessons. He got into the Atlanta Symphony Chorus in

the tenor section. He also joined The Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus where he became the staff composer and arranger, and would eventually become the assistant conductor. In the early 1990s, John was invited to sing in his first opera with the Atlanta Opera in *Carmen*.. He eventually moved to New York City where he pursued a successful singing career for six years as a freelance singer, traveling the world performing with prestigious organizations such as *The Trinity Wallstreet Choir*, the *Collegiate Chorale* and *The Wooster Group*.

In 2010, he got throat cancer in his nasal cavity. That ended his singing voice. Singing had been his life and happiness, and that was taken from him. The chemo and radiation treatments that he went through to become cancer free were hard, but losing his ability to sing was totally devastating. The turnaround came when he was talking to his former college professor at Georgia Southern. As he had been an oboe major and piano minor, the professor challenged him to write a piece for oboe and piano that represented his journey through cancer—that he, in essence, "write himself." However skeptical John was at the time, when he sat down to give it a try, the music just poured out of him. The experience was life-changing. The result was three movements for oboe and piano which John entitled *The Journey*:

Movement 1 - *Despair*

Movement 2 - *The Unknown*

Movement 3 - *New Life*



And thus, John became a composer. In getting to know John's music, I suggest you start with these three pieces which can be found on his website <https://www.johnyoung-composer.com/hear-my-music.html>. John says, "As a singer, the most important thing to me was making the audience feel the emotions deeply, whether joy, elation,

anger or sadness. To accomplish that is even more important when composing the music." When one listens to his three movements from the link above, it is like taking a walk with him through his emotional journey.

Fast forward to 2018, John reconnected with Alan Olejniczak, a friend that he sang with in the Atlanta Opera. Alan was a playwright who hoped that one day he could break into the opera world as a librettist, but he didn't know many composers at that time. John sent him his 3 movement pieces and soon both concluded that the music would be "just perfect" for the first opera subject Alan had chosen. Their first collaborative opera, *Death of Ivan Ilych*, was born!

Opera Orlando presented the world premiere of *Death of Ilych* on February 19, 2021 in partnership with Thompson Street Opera Company in Chicago, where the work will next be staged, currently scheduled for September. Musicians from Alterity Chamber Orchestra played for Opera Orlando's production of *Death of Ivan Ilych*. under the direction of Deniz Uz. One review of the Opera states: "For literature buffs, there's great joy to see the novella's deliciously vivid opening scene come to life. Young's music, richly orchestrated for string quintet, piano and oboe, keenly highlights the mournful situation and its

awkwardness." Another review notes: "The music of John Young is immediate and emotionally impactful. The lovely melodic lines and heart-wrenching harmonies may remind listeners of the romantic operas of Barber and Menotti. For the composer, who lost his singing voice and nearly his life to cancer, the story and message are deeply personal, and the connection is clear in his musical writing. This opera is a heartfelt ode to authentic living."

Since composing *Death of Ivan Ilych*, John has completed a second opera called *Transgress*. When asked how he begins composing a piece, John replied that "if he hears the music in his head when reading the words then he knows that the libretto is good and he feels like he can compose it."

John is currently composing an opera for young voices called *The Nightingale* which he is very excited about putting out into the world. The first act is finished, but John admits to a composers block in 2020. His objective for the music of *Nightingale* is "light, not at all heavy" and in the negativity/Covid of 2020, he kept running into a wall in creating light music. There is a soundcloud account where you could go and actually listen to some of his music. It is <https://soundcloud.com/user-656303742>.

During this last year of the corona virus pandemic, John and Ken lived in major isolation because John was immune compromised from his cancer history. Sarasota was the perfect place to do that. He says, "I am living my life to the fullest. I have been given a second chance at life, and I am focusing on what makes me happy. I love having the chance to actually write opera, which I love, especially since I can no longer sing it."

I wish John immense success in his composing. I have enjoyed listening to his music and hope the rest of the Guild members do too. I whole heartedly agree that if one had to spend a year or more dealing with a pandemic, the west coast of Florida was a great place to be.

Transgress

A One-Act Chamber Opera

This short chamber opera is based on the true story of Dora Ratjen, a Nazi Olympic athlete and gold medal winner in the woman's high jump, who was later arrested for impersonating a man. This piece examines the life of an intersex individual search for identity. This opera questions why institutions and society reinforce the gender binary when biological variations in sexual anatomy already exist naturally. This opera requires a small orchestra, four soloists and only needs simple staging and a few set-pieces.

Creative Team:

Music by John Young, Libretto by Alan Olejniczak, Dramaturgy by Amanda Clup

Synopsis:

It's 1939 and Dora Ratjen, a celebrated women's Olympic high jumper, is brought to Hohenlychen Sports Sanatorium. She is being detained by Nazi party officials for fear of a public scandal following her arrest for transvestism. Dora is given a humiliating medical examination and the doctor's results prove inconclusive. Dora is intersex and is anatomically neither male nor female. Dora's mother visits her daughter and Dora learns why she was raised as a girl. Later, The Head of the Nazi Sports Commission tries to convince Dora that this scandal will not be tolerated and she must live her life as a woman or face the threat of prison or internment. Corrective surgery (castration) is suggested to help Dora appear more feminine. Dora rejects this procedure and the intimidation from her mother and party officials. Against all, Dora eventually chooses to live her life authentically. Dora will change his name to Heinrich and live as a man.

Duration: 60 Minutes

Style of Music: Contemporary

Language: English

Casting for Four Soloists:

DORA RATJEN *Countertenor*.

MRS. RATJEN *Soprano*.

HANS VON TSCHAMMER *Baritone*

DR. KARL GEBHARDT *Bass Baritone*

Instrumentation for Seven Instruments: Viola, Cello, Bass Clarinet, English Horn, French Horn, Alto Sax, Electric Piano

Current Development: Libretto completed with full vocal and instrumentation to be completed around January 2021

Death of Ivan Ilych

A Full-Length Chamber Opera in One Act

This opera is based on *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, by Leo Tolstoy, written in 1886. It's considered a masterpiece of short fiction, but for the composer, this story is personal. In 2010, John Young was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Once a promising opera tenor, John lost his singing voice from the cancer treatments. The musical themes found in this opera are from a musical suite for piano and oboe, composed when he was facing his own mortality. John was treated successfully and continues to be cancer free. This opera asks: If death is a certainty, how do we want to live our life today?

Creative Team:

John Young: Composer, Alan Olejniczak: Libretto, Amanda Clup: Dramaturgy

Synopsis:

We are at the end. Pyotr Ivanovich has come to pay his respects to the grieving widow, Praskovya Fedorovna. He is uncomfortable and looks forward to leaving the wake. Gerasim, Ivan's loyal manservant, reminds him that death is a fate for us all. We then start at the beginning and meet Ivan Ilych at dinner with his wife and son, Vladimir. Ivan seizes in pain. He fell from a ladder some time ago and hurt his side. His wife insists he visit a physician, but the doctor cannot find the source of his ailment. The pain continues and Ivan is now forced to spend his days in bed, but Gerasim

continues to be his comfort. It eventually becomes clear when Ivan's condition worsens that it's now become terminal. At first, Ivan is resentful, believing he does not deserve his suffering because he lived a good life, so pain and death are senseless. He continues to blame God, but Ivan begins to question his comfortable existence and comes to realize his life was indeed most simple, most ordinary, and therefore the most terrible. Ivan Ilych spent his life working at a job he disliked, fruitlessly seeking social status and appearances, and enduring an unhappy marriage. Ivan realizes his life is of his own making and asks his wife Praskovya for forgiveness. They both reminisce about their courtship and the time they fell in love. She admits she pursued him and loved him first for his dancing. Why did they ever stop? The couple becomes hopeful and they consider their new life together, but the doctor reminds Praskovya that her husband is indeed dying. Ivan begins to understand his artificial life of self-interest masks the true meaning of life and makes one fearful of dying. As death approaches, Ivan asks for forgiveness from his wife and is filled with compassion for his family. He hopes his death will bring a release, and in doing so, terror leaves him. He says good-bye to his son and Ivan Ilych embraces the bright light and finally dies in peace.

Duration: 85 minutes

Style of Music: Neo-Romantic

Language: English

Casting (Five principals with one non-singing role for a child)

IVAN ILYCH, *Lyric Baritone* (forties)

PRASKOVYA FEDOROVNA, *Soprano* (thirties)

GERASIM *Tenor* (twenties)

PYOTR IVANOVICH/ PRIEST *Bass-Baritone* (forties)

DOCTOR *Bass* (older than forty)

VLADIMIR *Non-Singing Role* (boy looks eight-years old)

Instrumentation: Two violins, viola, cello, double bass, piano, and oboe

Current Development: Full score, piano reduction and instrument parts are completed. Preview Performance to be performed by Opera Orlando at the Orlando International Fringe Festival, May 2020.

Tributes

In fond memory of two opera-loving gentlemen, and faithful members of the Manatee Opera Guild, **John C. Leps**, and **Edward Kobee**.

From the Board and Membership of the Guild.

On the happy occasion of the birth of my granddaughter, **Camila Velasco**.

From Angela Korsmo

In fond memory of **John Leps**, a skilled raconteur who enlivened many luncheon conversations.

From Joe and Sheila Varady



Sarasota Opera singers, Helen Jepson Deller winner baritone Alex Boyd, and soprano Hanna Brammer entertain during the pandemic.

ONE FOR THE ARCHIVE: HOW WE ENJOYED OPERA IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

By Elizabeth Aversa

It was well over a year ago, on March 13, 2020, that we received a most unwelcome message from Sarasota Opera's executive director Richard Russell. The message said "Due to changes in the local situation and responding to guidance from City of Sarasota and Sarasota County authorities, we have made the difficult decision to suspend the rest of our season. **The remaining performances and events of Sarasota Opera's 2020 Winter Opera Festival are canceled, effective immediately.**" The same day, Manatee Opera Guild president Jeanne Yeagle wrote "We are so sorry to announce that our March meeting and our annual Awards Luncheon are being cancelled." No doubt, hundreds of similar messages saddened opera lovers all over the world.

The long-term effects of the pandemic on singers and orchestras, opera companies, opera houses, and performing arts budgets have yet to be tallied, but we can note what opera companies and their patrons did to continue enjoying opera. In some respects, we should even celebrate what we've learned about presenting opera through technology, engaging patrons when we can't greet one another face-to-face, expanding opera's reach beyond the opera houses, and realizing the great resilience of the opera community. And our own Sarasota Opera has set the highest of standards: we've managed to continue onward beautifully despite the pandemic. This column highlights some of the ways we engaged with opera and with one another over the past year.

Sarasota's artists, staff, and audiences have been safe throughout the past year due to forward-thinking management who devised innovative plans and procedures for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the opera house darkened, we attended a lecture there and observed that everything we touched — including the railings on the stairs and seats in the lecture room - were immediately sanitized. The staff

began working at home. For our performers, living in a bubble paid off, in that they have been able to perform, albeit under limited conditions, while artists from larger companies were laid off, and unable to work. Soprano Hanna Brammer, who is well known to Sarasota opera goers, posted on Facebook, 6 months into the pandemic, "It has been so incredible to be able to sing and perform safely during this unprecedented time in our country. Sarasota Opera continues to provide hope for the arts by finding innovative ways to bring opera to audiences, from around the world and right down the street!" (Hanna and Executive Director Richard Russell talk more about the Sarasota Opera and the pandemic in a short presentation entitled "The show will go on." Hear it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLgIRMvBY5U>)

For members of Sarasota Opera's audiences who were willing to risk going out — masked, hands washed, and socially distanced - there were occasions for live opera. Fall concerts — one in the opera house, and others outdoors - were held for right-sized audiences, and CDC protocols were observed, including temperature checks, social distancing, and the wearing of face coverings. And on a positive note, those who weren't yet ready to sit just six feet away from people not in their immediate households, or who were not physically in Sarasota, were not left out. The performances were live streamed so they could be enjoyed at home. The price for tickets — in-person and online - were modest. Perhaps we even reached some people who haven't been and might never come to the opera house!

Another way that opera lovers and those new to it shared the joy of opera was through the several 5:00 p.m. "Suddenly Opera" performances in front of the opera house last spring. For one 16-minute example, go to https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=307045560257652&ref=watch_permalink and enjoy! Later, when people were less likely to be out and about, "Suddenly Opera" moved with the performers who made their singing available from a distance through social media. And some of us audience members made it a point to play opera recordings every day from our windows and in our

yards...to remind us of our passion and to share it with our neighbors and passersby during a frightening and gloomy time.

The pandemic didn't stop Sarasota Opera from offering opportunities to hear opera, to learn about opera, and to support opera. Throwback Thursdays allowed us to enjoy online scenes from many of our favorite productions. On alternating Wednesdays we listened to "At Home with Sarasota Opera" on the radio or on the web. WSLR 96.5 FM featured the programs in which Maestro DeRenzi and Richard Russell teamed up to talk about a variety of interesting topics. The series ended as the 2021 Winter-Spring Festival got underway. Executive Director Russell and the Maestro, as well as staff and volunteers, also gave Zoom webinars and talks throughout the pandemic, enabling us to learn about the season's operas and to meet the artists.

Special events and recognitions continued in the life of Sarasota Opera, too. An online gala in April included an auction and performances, and folks at home enjoyed an "evening in" as well an opportunity to score jewelry, trips, and other auction items while supporting our opera. On another evening, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Victor DeRenzi was recognized for his 800th performance with Sarasota Opera. The anniversary performance was Rossini's *L'inganno felice* (*The Happy Deception*). Facebook friends sent online congratulations to the Maestro along with lots of heart, thumbs up, and clapping hands emojis.

Another smart innovation that extended opportunities for patrons and artists alike were the "Covers" matinee performances at noon. These gave the resident artists who "cover" the casts their own chances to perform full operas before appreciative live audiences. I attended and saw people who were enjoying the operas a second time — some of them had been at evening performances as well. Even in a pandemic, we just can't get enough opera!

Finally, Bravissimo to Sarasota Opera for having

the vision, the unprecedented flexibility, and the remarkable talent to change the lineup and perform four beautiful short operas in the winter and spring of 2021. If we came to the opera house — with its upgraded air handling system and safety protocols to keep us healthy — or if we stayed quarantined and enjoyed the enhanced live streaming of the performances, we had opera!

Through technology, social media, and the season just ended we could, and did, have that wonderful performing art that, as our artistic director and executive director said in their message in this Winter's program, provides "solace, comfort, and stimulation as we deal with the uncertainties of our current situation." Now is a time to be grateful for the unexpected and innovative benefits we have enjoyed throughout the past year and to be optimistic about a future of more opera and new ways to enjoy it.

April 13 MOG Get-together at the Opera



Marge Melun and Ky Thompson, Jeanne Yeagle and Clara Steffan.

Cathy Knobel, Jean Roberts, Sheila Varady, Angela Korsmo, and Carol Heckman.



Elizabeth and Rocco Aversa, Rosanna Martorella and Terry Davis.



Ginny and Bill Andersen.

Sarasota Opera Guild Presents

Summer Salons 2021

At the Bird Key Yacht Club, 301 Bird Key Drive, Sarasota

Lovely Luncheons *with* Musical Entertainment

June 16, Wednesday Rich and Stacy Ridenour - Dueling Pianos

Stacy and Rich present a dynamic dueling piano presentation that audiences and critics have hailed as being amazingly versatile, masterfully musical, and wickedly funny. A skilled concert pianist, Stacy holds a master's degree in Arts Management from New York University. Rich has performed with orchestras throughout the United States and beyond. With a lifelong passion for music education, among his many endeavors, Rich founded the Grand Rapids Musicians League serving more than 400 young musicians in after-school programs.

July 13, Tuesday Margot Zarzycka - Violinist

Originally from Poland, Margot was born into a family of professional classical musicians. She made a solo debut at the age of six and is a winner and finalist of many European competitions. She holds the Ida S. Krawitz Chair of the Sarasota Orchestra, where she has been a core member since 2000, and a Performer's Diploma from the Indiana University School of Music. Joining Margot at the piano will be Sarasota favorite Lee Dougherty Ross.

August 25, Wednesday Mary Jeanne Moorman - Piano Performer and Accompanist

Mary Jeanne Moorman was a soloist with the Oklahoma City Symphony, pianist for the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Ballet, and a staff accompanist for Texas Woman's University. She is pianist for Grace United Methodist Church, Venice Chorale, Bay Indies Chorus, Boca Grande Glee and Spark Productions of Boca Grande.

Price for each Salon is **\$45** per person. Doors open at **11:30am**. Luncheon served at **Noon**.

Please make your check payable to **Sarasota Opera Guild** and mail with the form below to:

Sherry Wheeler, 749 Placid Lake Dr., Osprey, FL 34229

For information call Sherry at 966-6351 or email wheshink@gmail.com

Deadline for reservations 5 days prior to each event.

Attendance is limited – be sure to get your reservations in early.

JUNE 16

NAME(S)* _____

JULY 13

NAME(S)* _____

AUG. 25 NAME(S)* _____

Number of Reservations @ \$45 _____ TOTAL amount enclosed \$ _____

If not a member, please include Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

Additional names and dates listed on the back.

Food restrictions listed on the back.

I am unable to attend, but would like to contribute to SOG. \$ _____ check enclosed.