

# Bel Canto

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

February 2026

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>



**Membership Meeting  
Sweetheart Lunch honoring  
Linda Buchhart**  
February 18, 2026  
Coffee and Conversation at 10  
Business Meeting at 10:30  
Singer(s) at 11:00  
Optional Lunch at 11:45

## Menu:

Beef tips bordelaise -- beef tenderloin, pearl onions, english peas, burgundy demi. Over egg noodles

-or-

Winter salad -- chopped kale, pecans, pomegranate, goat cheese over shredded brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, roasted butternut squash with a red wine maple syrup dijon mustard dressing

Dessert Black Forest chocolate cake

Reservations: Cathy Knobel, 787 Benjamin Franklin Drive #8, Sarasota, FL 34236, telephone: 941-706-2490 land 941-666-3253 cell  
Email: [knobelwd@aol.com](mailto:knobelwd@aol.com)

- **Luncheon is \$35.00**
- **Checks made out to MOG**
- **Reservations due by February 13, no exceptions!**
- **Indicate your menu preference when reserving.**

## President's Message

Greetings, MOG members & friends!

So much to share and so little space! Four topics are most important this time.

First, the **Stars of Tomorrow Concert** is coming up at 1:00 p.m. Sunday, February 8<sup>th</sup>. Please urge your family members and friends to attend as it is a wonderful opportunity to hear our Apprentice Singers in a lovely setting. Tickets can be purchased in advance electronically via to MOG website (<https://manateeoperaguild.org/events>) or at the box office at the Neel Performing Arts Center on the day of the concert. The State College of Florida Neel Performing Arts Center is located at 5840 26<sup>th</sup> Street West in Bradenton. There is ample free parking next to the Center.

We're are also getting close to the beginning of the **Winter Opera Festival** at Sarasota Opera, and we have a great schedule upcoming, beginning with a favorite of opera goers everywhere: *La Bohème*. We've had educational **Preludes** for three of the four winter operas (*La Bohème*, *The Merry Widow*, and *Susannah*) and we'll hear from Richard Russell on February 20<sup>th</sup> when he comes to Westminster Manor to tell us about Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. We're inviting our friends from Sarasota Opera Guild to join us for Mr. Russell's talk since a date change caused some members to miss it in Sarasota. I know you will make our visitors welcome if they join us for the last Prelude.

Next, our February regular membership meeting will be on February 18<sup>th</sup>, and it's a special one indeed. At the annual **Sweetheart Luncheon** we will celebrate our MOG Sweetheart, Linda

(Continued on next page)

Buchhart, and enjoy her favorite music and her hand-picked menu! Be sure to get your reservation in on time since you will “go hungry” if you fail to make your reservation and select your meal by the due date.

Please remember, however, that MOG members are always welcome to attend the business meeting, enjoy the social time, and hear our musical program every month even if they cannot stay for lunch. So don’t forget to make your reservation – but if you do forget – come anyway and save time to stop at McDonalds on your way home!

Finally, don’t forget to purchase your tickets or your table for the annual **Fashion Show and Luncheon**, scheduled for Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup> at 11 a.m. at the Lakewood Ranch Country Club. This year’s fashions will be presented by our friends at Evelyn and Arthur on Main Street, Sarasota, and we’ll have good music, fabulous baskets, and time for fun and socializing as we raise funds for Sarasota Opera. Come and bring your friends!

I look forward to seeing you **often** in the coming weeks!

Elizabeth Aversa

### **Tributes:**

From Gary and Meg Weinberg in appreciation of **Elizabeth Aversa** for her educational and very entertaining prelude on the opera *Susannah* at the January 2026 Manatee Opera Guild Prelude. *It was fabulous!*

Enjoy this month’s well-deserved recognition of your many gifts to MOG, **Linda Buchhart**, from a grateful Board of Directors.



## **MOG Fashion Show and Luncheon**

**Get your pearls ready for our annual fashion show.**

Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 11:30 AM

Lakewood Ranch Country Club  
7650 Legacy Boulevard  
Lakewood Ranch, FL 34202

Featuring fashions from Evelyn and Arthur

**Reserve by February 14**

Maria Smith  
3819 Little Country Road  
Parrish, FL 34219  
252-489-3500  
[Mariacsmith930@gmail.com](mailto:Mariacsmith930@gmail.com)

Choose one of the below when making your reservation

1. Pecan Crunch Chicken
2. Asian Salmon
3. Portobello Mushroom Napolean  
\$75 per person; \$100 patron



# Manatee Opera Guild presents Verdi's

## *Il Trovatore*

a prelude to the opera presented by  
Richard Russell

Friday, February 20

Westminster Manor Auditorium  
Snacks at 9:30, multi-media talk at 10

The Manatee Opera Guild will be bringing another free multi-media talk at 10 a.m. on Friday, February 19 in the Manor Auditorium. This month's talk, the last of the season, will be on Verdi's spell-binding opera *Il Trovatore* (*the Troubadour*), given by Sarasota Opera Executive Director **Richard Russell**.

### Keeping up with our opera reading!

**Elizabeth Aversa**

Winterish weather here has some of us staying home in our sweatshirts with a hot beverage on the side table, a pet in our lap, and some good reading. Here are a two opera titles to peruse so you can get an opera "fix" without putting on your coat.

*Opera Wars: Inside the World of Opera and the Battles for its Future* by Caitlin Vincent.

Recommended to me by an opera goer friend, I purchased this one to hear on Audibles.

Vincent's book, published this year by Simon and Schuster, gives her perspective on her love/hate relationship with opera throughout her career in the field. Her historical perspective is bright and enjoyable, and after the first chapter she delves into many aspects of opera and what she believes needs to change to carry the art form into the future.

The author, a former singer, librettist, and director, said in a 2012 interview about The Figaro Project, which she directed for six years, "*I think it is incredibly important for opera companies of all shapes and budget sizes to promote contemporary opera in any way they can. There will always be a place for traditional operas by Puccini and Verdi, but we desperately need works that speak to the context of our time, especially if we hope to continue expanding the audience for opera.*" With the Figaro Project, Vincent was involved in restructuring and repurposing various canonical operas for audiences in Baltimore. (Vincent received her undergraduate education at Harvard and her M.M. from Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, thus the connection.)

The book is informative and interesting, and actually funny in parts. The Goodreads review says this, "Blunt, irreverent, and at times wittily subversive, *Opera Wars* spotlights opera's colorful and sometimes warring personalities, increasingly fierce controversies over content, and the battles being waged for its economic future." I agree with that assessment, but at the same time I also agree with the Kirkus review that called the book "A bit basic for longtime fans, but great for opera newbies." Okay, so it's not an academic treatise on opera, but it is enjoyable, so I'd recommend it to you.

*Falling Up: The Days and Nights of Carlisle Floyd*  
by Thomas Holliday.

This is the (so far) definitive biography of Carlisle Floyd (1926-2021), the composer of *Susannah*, an opera on Sarasota Opera's schedule for 2026. The author of this book, Thomas Holliday, is an opera stage director and writer who has worked in the opera business in New York and at other locations, including Tennessee, the setting of Floyd's opera *Susannah*.

*Tempo, A Quarterly Review of New Music* praised the book as a "story of a truly remarkable individual, told in meticulous detail by an author whose sympathy and understanding derives from his own experience of his subject's field." I have read the book, and found the review to be accurate. It takes us from the composer's birth in South Carolina, through his collegiate years and his time as faculty member and composer at Florida State University and the

University of Houston. It ends with coverage of his later years back in Tallahassee. We learn about the composer's work on his many operas, most notably *Susannah* and *Of Mice and Men*, both of which have been performed here, and also of the many challenges he faced throughout his life.

The book was published in 2013 by Syracuse University Press. (Floyd graduated from Syracuse with bachelor's and master's degrees.) The composer was alive at the time of publication, so a sequel is planned by the author for publication this year, the composer's centennial year. I look forward to it, and do recommend *Falling Up*.

Enjoy your reading, and I'll see you at the opera!

## **How I Came to Love Opera (Second in a Series by Guild Members)**

**By Elizabeth Aversa**

My first memories of opera are from my childhood in Baltimore. I was an "only" child and so I was inclined to enjoy solitary pursuits like reading, listening to music, and playing individual sports. I was also given an array of "lessons:" ballet lessons at Estelle Dennis School of the Dance, piano lessons at Peabody Conservatory's Preparatory program, swimming lessons at the local Y, and confirmation lessons at church. Since both my parents worked outside the home, these activities *always* took place in the evening or on Saturday morning. *Nothing* could interfere with the Texaco-sponsored Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts with Milton Cross as host and moderator.

Before each Saturday afternoon broadcast, my father would tell me the story of that week's opera or he might read from *Complete Stories of the Great Operas* by Milton Cross. A feature of the broadcast was the weekly "Texaco Opera Quiz" which my parents took religiously. I hoped that one day I might do as well on the quiz as they did! When I was 9 or 10 years old, I began going to an occasional performance at the Baltimore Civic Opera with my parents. I remember *La Taviata*, *Il Tovatore*, and *Nabucco*, probably because they were favorites of my folks and we played record sets of the operas often. I also remember the great soprano Rosa

Ponselle, who lived in Baltimore. She was quite old by then, but she was a patron of the Baltimore Civic, and at every opera she was introduced from her box and waved to great appreciation by the audience. (Much later she mentored James Morris, who was in my high school class!)

When I didn't get to go with my parents, I enjoyed their "getting ready." They dressed up and my mom always looked so glamorous and my dad so dashing! So many positive memories are, for me, associated with the opera.

As a pre-teen I was taken, by my parents and an uncle who lived in New York, to the "old" Metropolitan Opera House on 39<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't remember what we heard there, but I do recall the excitement surrounding my first visit to Lincoln Center. In early 1972 Rocco and I (not yet married) went to Lincoln Center to hear Montserrat Caballe and Franco Corelli in *Don Carlo*. We drove in from Long Island. We almost missed the curtain due to a traffic jam, but we jumped out of the car and ran several blocks to the opera house just in time!

Rocco and I have enjoyed opera together ever since that time. He was also raised with opera at home, and we've enjoyed opera in small and large venues over 53 years. He fell in love with Wagner's works long before I "came around," but now I love *The Flying Dutchman*, *The Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal*, too. A bucket list item for us is to attend Bayreuth.

Opera brings back many memories for me. My father had a wonderful bass voice and so when the audience sang "Va pensiero" after *Nabucco*, as they always did in Baltimore, he would sing. The last opera I saw with him was *Nabucco*, and I cannot hear "Va pensiero" without tearing up. But on a funnier note, my mom and I went to the opera one night and there was a lady in the audience with pink foam rollers in her hair. My mother never criticized anyone, but she said of the lady with the curlers in her hair, "Well, I suppose she has a more important engagement after this!" I could not imagine that there could be anything more important than going to the opera!

## Please welcome new members:

### **Jane and Robert Constantine**

5380 Hyland Hills, #2811  
Sarasota, FL 34241  
[Juconst66@icloud.com](mailto:Juconst66@icloud.com)  
716-913-1944

### **Patricia Reinhart**

4843 Lakescene Place  
Sarasota, FL 34243  
[Pat.reinhart1@gmail.com](mailto:Pat.reinhart1@gmail.com)  
941-359-6393; 703-283-9737

### **Marlene Kitchell**

6328 41<sup>st</sup> Ct E  
Sarasota, FL 34243  
[MMKJAP@aol.com](mailto:MMKJAP@aol.com)  
941-321-1454

### **Susan and Arthur Luger**

4239 64<sup>th</sup> Drive East  
Sarasota, FL 34243  
[susan@lugerdude.com](mailto:susan@lugerdude.com)  
917-887-1076

### **Cheryl Morse and Alex Nichols**

1100 Imperial Drive, Unit 506  
Sarasota, FL 34236  
[sherrilmorse@comcast.net](mailto:sherrilmorse@comcast.net)  
941-400-9776

### **Kristine Ryan**

307 Sally Lee Drive  
Ellenton, FL 34222  
[Ryandk307@aol.com](mailto:Ryandk307@aol.com)  
941-545-7218

### **Vicki Petrosky**

6210 Skyward Ct  
Bradenton, FL 34203  
[vspetrosky@gmail.com](mailto:vspetrosky@gmail.com)  
540-533-5979

### **Maria L Ray**

318 N. Washington Dr  
Sarasota, FL 34236  
941-323-1341 (cell)  
[mariaray397@gmail.com](mailto:mariaray397@gmail.com)

## At the Opera



### **Apprentice Artists at Noon**

March 19 and 26  
Peterson Great Room  
\$10

### **Covers at 3**

March 19  
Peterson Great Room  
\$10

### **Salute to the Stars**

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 | 11:30 AM |  
Sarasota Yacht Club  
\$85; \$150 Patron

### **La bohème**

February 14 to March 28

### **The Merry Widow**

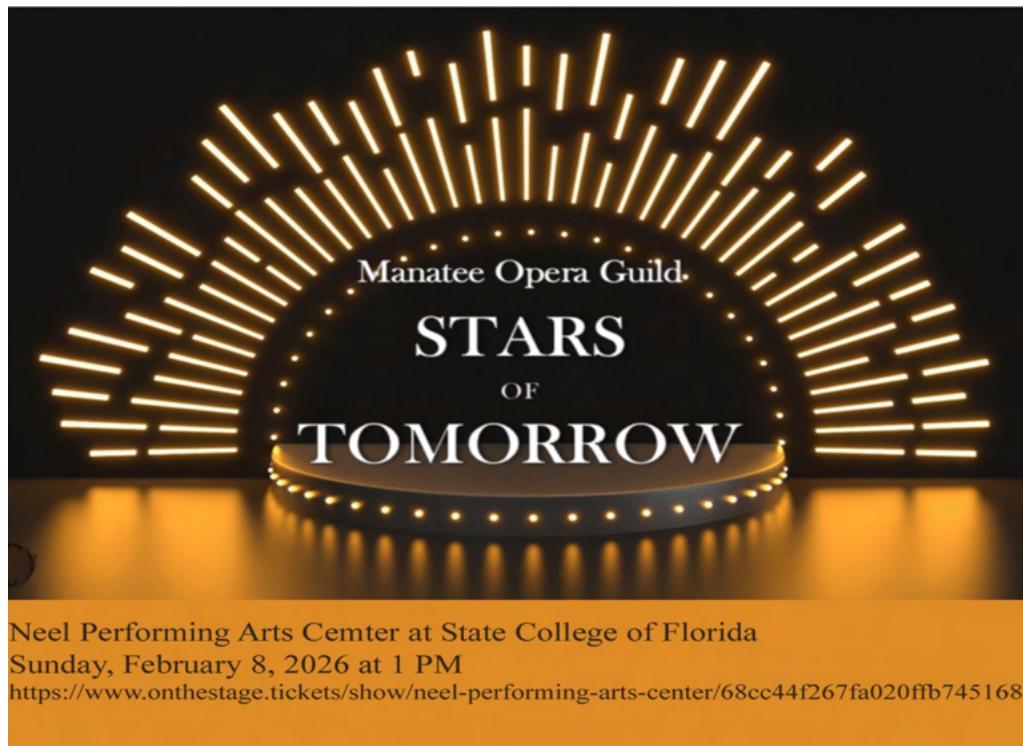
February 21 to March 27

### **Il Trovatore**

March 7 to March 29

### **Susannah**

March 14 to March 28



***The Stars of Tomorrow Concert*** is a dazzling musical offering of 24 singers with enchanting voices. They are the upcoming generation of the finest opera stars. They sparkle from across the globe. As the singers begin their professional operatic careers, they have been carefully chosen from hundreds of candidates to be Apprentice Artists with the world-renowned Sarasota Opera. The brilliant musical experience they will gain from singing at Sarasota Opera will most likely be a launching pad for them for additional national and international opera companies. Even more special is that this is a glowing year for Sarasota Opera. It celebrates 100 years of presenting fine opera to Sarasota and to surrounding communities. The Apprentice Artists appear in the 2025-2026 Sarasota Opera performances.

The Manatee Opera Guild sponsors this event to bring opera to Manatee County in a concert style instead of a fully staged opera. You will be captivated by their voices as they sing solo arias and various ensembles from the operatic repertoire, and the singers will be accompanied by stellar pianists. The concert duration is roughly 60-90 minutes.

We look forward to seeing you at this showcase of award-winning voices. The singers will be available to meet and greet the audience members after the concert in the lobby.

Please, come, wish upon a star, and purchase your tickets now to reserve your spot. You may even consider giving tickets as holiday gifts. We hope to see you there!

**General Admission Tickets: \$30 / Student General Admission: Complimentary @ Box Office with student id.**

The Stars of Tomorrow concert has been generously underwritten by: The ELZER ADVISORY GROUP Merrill Lynch

Tickets:<https://www.onthestage.tickets/show/neel-performing-arts-center/68cc44f267fa020ffb745168/tickets#/select-tickets>