

BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

October 2022

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>

OCTOBER 19 GENERAL MEETING PALM AIRE CC, 10:30 A.M.

Please send your luncheon reservations with a check
(made out to MOG) to:

Jean Roberts
222 12th St West
Apt 302
Bradenton, FL 34205
730-0135
jeanrob222@gmail.com

MENU

Chicken Milanese: Parmesan crusted chicken breast with
sauce (olive oil, balsamic drizzle, baby arugula, tomato and
grilled lemon) served with wild rice

or

Wild Mushroom Ravioli in Creamy Alfredo Sauce

Dessert: Pumpkin Cheesecake in a Gingerbread Crust

Reservation for the Luncheon
October 19, 2022

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Number of reservations at \$30. _____

Menu choice _____

Checks made out to MOG, please.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It was wonderful to see all who attended our September meeting, and to hear the enthusiastic talk about the Sarasota Youth Opera given by Maestro Jesse Martins and Martha Collins. Youth Opera productions are so professionally presented here with each child (sometimes more than 80) on stage doing exactly what he or she has been trained to do. And the audience, filled with moms and dads, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and friends is so energized that the atmosphere is electric. These productions are the result of Martha's stage direction and Jesse's musical training. It was such a pleasure to present the Youth Opera with a check for \$4,000 from our Guild.



Our October 19 meeting will feature artists from Sarasota Opera singing some of our favorite and some less well known pieces. We hope that you all will join us then.

Kudos to **Syble DiGirolamo** whose fund-raising skills netted the Guild \$20,000 in Sponsor and Patron donations to the November 9 On-Stage Concert, *An Evening in Vienna*. Thank you to all MOG members who signed on as Sponsors and Patrons. Your generosity helps us to reach our annual fundraising goal. Now, whether you have donated or not, be sure to sign up to attend the concert, because as Syble says, "It's not a concert without an audience." Please buy your tickets through the Sarasota Opera website <https://tickets.sarasotaopera.org/6044/6045>. This link will take you directly to the correct web page for your purchase. Or call the Opera boxoffice at 941-328-1300.

See you on the 19th!

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO OPERA'S MORTAL SUPERSTARS?

By Elizabeth Aversa

Earlier this year the *Toronto Star* published an opinion piece by Andy Lamey entitled "Good art, terrible people: Is it immoral to enjoy the work of immoral artists?" Although Lamey's column addresses popular culture figures such as Michael Jackson, Roseanne Barr, and Bill Cosby, it led us to consider controversial opera people whose works we know and, at least for a time, even love. Here we examine some of the people, the behaviors that caused concern, and options for our personal ethical response.

Opera Folks Behaving Badly: Some Examples

Among composers, Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is the poster child for terrible people who create beautiful music. A complex, complicated man, Wagner was a control freak, a German nationalist, an antisemite, and a narcissist. Biographers and critics point to the probability that Wagner suffered from a severe personality disorder. It has been said that "This legacy hangs over the music, which for many can never be freed from the taint of Hitler's adoration." The composer was so despised that until the mid-1990's his music was never played in public venues or broadcast in Israel. The Haifa Symphony announced last month that they will play Wagner's music for the first time this fall. It is impossible to deny the beauty of Wagner's work. Here is the Overture of *The Flying Dutchman*, performed by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv0OqRKrmH8>

Professor Robert Greenberg talks about two sopranos who misbehaved in 1727: "A long-running feud between the sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni broke out into open warfare – a screaming, hair-pulling, dress-ripping physical altercation on stage, in London – during a performance of Giovanni Bononcini's opera *Astianatte* (of 1725)." As a result, not only was the remainder of the performance cancelled but George Frederick Handel's Royal Academy of Music opera season went dark, too. The incident is not documented on YouTube; now singers' feuds are less violent. They are just more widely known because of social media and other modern channels of communication.

A rivalry of 60 years ago involved Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. A documentary by Andreas Morell tells the story of the competitive rivalry between the two. (Search on Rivalry in Music: Callas vs Tebaldi, 3-D Produktion, for sources.) Speculation was that the sopranos' admirers and the media manufactured the rivalry. Eventually the two spoke respectfully of one another. Here is a recording of excerpts from Callas and Tebaldi as *Tosca*. Both are beautiful, though vastly different, performances. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGHmGHP1Yvk>

A renowned opera singer who was fired and barred from future performances at the Metropolitan Opera was Kathleen Battle. In 1994 Met general manager Joseph Volpe let the diva go for "unprofessional" and "detrimental" actions at the final rehearsals of *Daughter of the Regiment*. Although Battle made a remarkable comeback at the Met some 22 years later her reputation among some was forever sullied. Here she sings "O mio babbino caro" from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2pc8Tm7sS0>

This spring Anna Netrebko, the Russian soprano, left the Metropolitan Opera at general Manager Peter Gelb's insistence when she refused to renounce Russian president Vladimir Putin for his actions against Ukraine. Netrebko spoke against the war but stopped short of renouncing the president whom she had strongly supported in the past. Several European companies followed suit, although she kept some contracts intact and has since been reinstated at La Scala. This was not Netrebko's first flirtation with controversy.

In 2018 Netrebko was discouraged by Met management from using dark make-up in her role as Aida. Anything akin to blackface was too controversial for the company's comfort, so Netrebko went to a tanning salon instead. She has supported the use of blackface, stating that it is traditional theatrical practice. She wore it for a production in Verona and now Angel Blue, who is Black, cancelled her contract for *La Traviata* at the venue, saying that she "could not in 'good conscience' associate herself with an institution that supports the practice... which is widely viewed as racist and dehumanizing." Regardless of her missteps, Netrebko, at 50, remains a star to many fans. Here, at <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x24asst>, is the duet from Act II of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* with Netrebko (Leonora) and Plácido Domingo (Count di Luna).

Longtime superstar and Three Tenors alum Plácido Domingo also had to answer for unruly behavior. A 2020 investigation revealed that he had sexually harassed more than two dozen women over three decades. He first apologized but later denied having harassed anyone. Regardless, his appearances at the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, and even venues in his native Spain were cancelled. He resigned as general director of the Los Angeles Opera. More recent allegations involve a crime ring in Buenos Aires, but as of last month Domingo's connection to the group remained unclear. Whatever he's done, his musical legacy is well established. Here is Domingo singing "E lucevan le stelle" from Puccini's *Tosca* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-AF1T4OehM>

James Levine, for 47 years the principal conductor at the Metropolitan Opera, and one who directed most of the singers mentioned in this column, ended his storied career with allegations of sexual harassment, abuse, and

improprieties. The late maestro, who died at age 77 last year, conducted over 2500 Met performances and many at other opera houses around the world. His influence on opera, regardless of his personal behavior, was profound. Here James Levine conducts the prelude to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhLVovrrqEs>

Finally, we come to August at Bayreuth. This report was shared by Opera Wire as well as other social media platforms. "The final performance of "Götterdämmerung" at the Bayreuth Festival saw Irene Theorin stick up her middle finger to the audience after boos erupted during her final curtain call." Although booing may be normal at Bayreuth, the singer's response seemed shocking to many. Read more about this and the opera's review at OperaWire.com.

How do we *think* and what do we *do* about these unruly artists?

We have several options as to whether we should enjoy good art by bad people.

First, we might take a hands-off approach and let the entities that monetarily compensate our artists take care of the ethical questions for us. Thus, we would take the position that once the punishment is administered by the Met, the San Francisco Opera, or another company that cancels a contract, that's adequate. We can go on to listen without considering the artist's behavior for which he or she has already been punished.

Second, we might decide that we will continue to listen to, and enjoy, the misbehaving artist's work that was done *prior* to the offense he or she committed. We can still listen to our CDs and records or watch the old videos, but we can choose not to support the artist (or his or her estate) going forward. We can stop purchasing recordings, stop attending performances, and discontinue "following" the artist on social media. This option lets us enjoy good art by artists who were good – or that we didn't yet know were bad – when they created or first performed the work. This option also allows us to send a subtle message of disapproval.

Finally, we might decide that our values will not allow us to support, in any way, an artist who has committed an act that we find truly heinous. We might not be able to enjoy Wagner's music when we know his history – or we might feel strongly that we just cannot support an artist who has harassed women. If the music is overshadowed by the offense of the artist, then we have no choice but to avoid contact with the artist's work and to say, "I can't support an artist who...."

Regardless of the path we choose, we agree with this 1994 statement from Michelle Kristel in the LA Times: "Though opera ennobles and inspires us with grand tales of human suffering and achievement, it is nonetheless disappointing to find that the very Olympians who move us so can be as petty

as we mortals." We can only hope that our favorite stars stay out of trouble!

References:

Hartmann, Christina. "When bad people create good art: the ethical dilemma of consuming art by bad people." <https://medium.com/@cmmhartmann> (March 22, 2018).

Kristel, Michelle. "A diva goes too far and suffers a mere mortal's fate." *Los Angeles Times* (February 24, 1994).

Lamy, Andy. "Good art, terrible people: is it immoral to enjoy the work of immoral artists?" *Toronto Star* (March 6, 2022).

TRIBUTES



In memory for **Marion McClellan** who was an active former member and a lovely, gracious lady. She was one month shy of her 104th birthday. From Jean Roberts

In memory of **Claude Ely**, a former member and board member until health issues forced his withdrawal. From Jean Roberts

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| My gift of \$ _____ is given: |
| _____ In memory of _____ |
| _____ In honor of _____ |
| _____ On the occasion of _____ |
| Please send an acknowledgement card to: |
| _____ |
| _____ |
| From: _____ |
| Checks made out to MOG please. Mail to: Linda Buchart 6350 29 th Avenue West Bradenton, FL 34209 |

An Evening in Vienna

On November 9 "An Evening in Vienna" begins at 5:00 pm with a cocktail party featuring Viennese cuisine in Sarasota Opera House's Selby Lobby. At 6:00 pm, participants will move to the opera stage for a performance by a string quartet created and led by the talented violinist/concertmaster, Daniel Jordan. This exclusively designed evening of chamber music will highlight repertoire by Viennese composers. Following the concert, participants are invited back to the Selby Lobby for a champagne & dessert afterglow reception and an opportunity to meet the performing artists.



GOLD SPONSORS: Judy and Rick Aarnes, Elizabeth and Rocco Aversa, Aline Blanchard and Art Siciliano, Carol and Les Brualdi, Edie and David Chaifetz, Syble & Peter DiGirolamo, Peter Ferentinos, Maryanne & Ray Hazen, Carolle Hunt, Maria Cora Gaffar, Angela Korsmo, Joan Lovell & Wally Kraemer, Sheila & Joe Varady, Rachael & Don Worthington, Mary Zabin

SILVER SPONSORS: Katherine Benoit & John Brooks, Juanita Connell, Sandy Rath & Rich DeGennaro, Maralyn & Raymond Morrissey, Jean Roberts, Clara Steffan, Rebecca & Bill Tompkins, Michal & Jim Wadsworth, Meg & Gary Weinberg, Jeanne Yeagle & Dave Luce

Richard Russell comments on why Sarasota Opera chose the fall opera, *The Secret Marriage* by Domenico Cimarosa...

“Doing less known, but artistically significant pieces, gives us all the opportunity for discovery...The simple reason is that it is a great work that has been somewhat forgotten in the passage of time. Domenico Cimarosa was a contemporary of Mozart (The Secret Marriage premiered one year after Mozart’s death) and an extremely accomplished and prolific composer. The opera is a great example of opera buffa (one of the most successful outside the works of Mozart) and was the occasion of the longest encore in operatic history. At the premiere in Vienna, Emperor Leopold II so enjoyed the performance that he ordered dinner for the entire company, and then commanded the opera to be given again.”



Hanna Brammer, left, stars as Carolina in *The Secret Marriage*.

’Tis the Season...

December 20, 2022: 4:00 p.m.- 6:30 p.m.

Hosted by Syble DiGirolamo and Maryanne Hazen

At the home of Maryanne Hazen, 3637 Wilderness

Boulevard West in Parrish

\$30

Our Holiday Party is back!

Entertainment will be provided by the *GS-Duo* (flutist Angela Galestro & guitarist Jonathan Smith) who are known for their repertoire of classical, jazz, Latin American, and popular music. Our performance will also include some Christmas music and maybe even a sing-along.

Guests are \$30 each *PLUS* - please bring an appetizer or a dessert to add to the “merrymaking.” Make reservations with Jean Roberts at 941-730-0135 or jeanrob222@gmail.com.

**Happy
HOLIDAYS!**