



The Court Jester: Not All Fun and Games

by Lissa Anderson

Our next opera, *Rigoletto*, features a court jester in the title role. Although the opera is set in northern Italy in about 1500, court comedians had been entertaining high-class audiences for centuries before then. Such jokesters were welcome in ancient Egypt, Rome, and Aztec Mexico. In later years, jesters were at the height of their popularity in Medieval and Renaissance England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Poland. Some jesters had disabilities, such as *Rigoletto*'s malformed spine. Jesters with dwarfism were particularly popular in Spain.

Jesters had to be funny, smart, and brave. Many were well educated and, therefore, able to work historical or political topics into their patter. But they had to read their employers well so they wouldn't step over the line, risking punishment or even death. It took courage to tell local rulers what they didn't want to hear, even if the jibe was in the form of a joke. One French jester risked King Phillippe VI's ire when, regarding a French naval defeat, he lamented that the victorious English sailors didn't "even have the guts to jump into the water like our brave French."

Tragedy was inherent in the role of jesters. Often kept practically as pets, tormented for their infirmities, always at risk of offending their keepers—it's no wonder that *Rigoletto* was bitter and primed to seal his own grim fate.



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**AUSTIN
OPERA
GUILD**
presents



VIENNA FANTASIE
Serenata Opera Ball

an evening of wine, dining, and waltz
honoring Elisabeth and Steffen Waltz

Four Seasons Hotel Austin
6 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.
Saturday, February 15, 2020

SERENATA 2020: IMAGINING VIENNA FANTASIE

by Co-Chairs Suzanne Breitbach, Paula Damore, Roger Kahlbau, and Michael Garza

A wondrous evening of earthly delight awaits at the 2020 **Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction** on Saturday, February 15, at the Four Seasons Hotel Austin. Themed with beneficent honorees Elisabeth and Steffen Waltz in mind, **Vienna Fantasie Opera Ball** celebrates their inestimable contribution toward preserving Austin Opera as a shimmering gem that illuminates Austin's cultural landscape just as an exquisitely-faceted Swarovski crystal embellishes a debutante's tiara.

The Grand Ballroom, awhirl with elegant couples romancing the waltz, becomes center stage for an effervescent evening of lavish entertainment, exuberant live and silent auction bidding, and revelry.

Savor a sumptuous epicurean feast, with fine wine pairings selected by Sylvia and David Jabour, and bid to your heart's content on fine wines and embellished experiences curated to bring the rare, the exclusive, the exotic (otherwise unattainable or impossible to access at any price) within fingertip's reach.

Enchanting soprano Gabriella Reyes' glittering tones and musicality captivate as surprises abound throughout a mesmerizing night lush with philanthropic fervor.

It takes a Guild to make our passion-powered fundraiser a spectacular success. Your participation in soliciting and collecting imaginative auction items, preparing invitations for mailing, helping decorate, and assisting at the event is crucial.



Gabriella Reyes

Reserve today and secure a place by calling Rhanda Luna at 737-228-1442 or online at one.bidpal.net/Serenata2020/welcome. The site is highly interactive and user friendly. Share the link with friends everywhere who can become a part of the Guild's major fundraising effort! Stay attuned for enticements and updates to follow.

**Meet Carolyn Hoehle, soprano
Austin Opera's 2019-2020 Spotlight Artist**

How long have you been in Austin, and where did you call home before your move here?

Austin has been home for about 2 years now. Before ATX called, I lived in Denver, CO for several years before and after graduate school and before then, spent time in Fort Worth, TX for my undergraduate degree. Clearly, I can't stay away from Texas, so I like to say I'm a Tex-a-radan!

If you could share the stage with one singer, living or deceased, who would it be and why?

Maria Callas. Hands down. Heck, "sharing the stage" with Ms. Callas wouldn't even need to be in the form of a leading role; count me in as a supernumerary if it means I would have the opportunity to absorb some of her incredible energy and witness first-hand a masterclass on sheer unadulterated acting. (Leontyne Price is a very close second!)



Tell us about your favorite moment you've experienced on stage (so far!).

This is a bit of a silly experience, but it's certainly a memorable one! Early in my career, I spent two summers in upstate New York at Seagle Music Colony (aka Opera Bootcamp). My first summer at SMC, I was cast as Lady Billows in *Albert Herring* which meant my character had several Victorian costumes (which yes, were quite hot) and lots of time spent with a teacup in hand.

Unbeknownst to me, at the final dress rehearsal, our stagehands had filled my teacup with actual liquid, whereas the cup had just been empty during rehearsals prior to that day. So, when I stood up to raise my teacup in a rather dramatic fashion (Lady B is a rather over-the-top character), liquid went flying everywhere including all over myself and colleagues! Sure, it was a nice unexpected splash of cool, but I learned a very valuable lesson that day; always ask your stage manager if there will be actual food or liquid on your plate and/or in your glass before you go on stage!

We have to ask: Tacos or BBQ?

What?! Don't make me choose! I'm going to play the indecisive card and say we're lucky to have the best of both worlds here in Austin, especially in the form of Valentina's Tex Mex BBQ!

Opera Guild Members “Fall Into Fabulous” and Celebrate Austin Opera's 33rd Season By Patrick Landrum

Celebrating the Season Kick-Off of Austin Opera's 33rd Season, members of the Guild enjoyed wine and various tasty sweet and savory treats at the beautiful waterfront home of John and Cornelia Wood the evening of October 19th. Graced by the performance by soprano Julia Taylor, and Austin Opera's Principal Coach and Pianist, Nyle Matsuoka, guests welcomed the 2019- 2020 season in music, good friends, fine wine, and a simply fabulous evening.

Setting the stage for a season of wonderful events and opportunities the kick-off party is the first of many get-togethers sponsored by the Guild for our members. This year the membership committee is renewing our dedication to widening our field of prospects, and gaining more exposure allowing us to share with a wider audience the potential of camaraderie and satisfaction found in supporting an organization that we love, and that brings such joy and passion to so many.

On that note, this year in addition to our Fall, Holiday and Spring Membership parties we are thrilled to announce a collaboration with The Umlauf Sculpture Gardens. On Tuesday November 5, we will be Co-Hosting with The Austin Symphony BATS “Umlauf After Dark” from 6- 8 PM and a Fine Arts Mixer at 5 PM. There will be live music, food and drink, and The Gardens and Gallery will be open.

This collaboration will allow supporters of the Symphony, Umlauf, and Opera to mix and mingle and share why we love each art form- with the hope that we will find much in common ultimately supporting and perhaps becoming mutually supportive members.

If you haven't been to The Umlauf Gardens you are in for a real treat... and if you have, but not after dark - you are in for a real treat! Watch for an email with more information and a special Austin Opera Code for tickets.

Beyond the Opera House: Recommended Reading and Listening

By Michael Solomon

Upon seeing *Rigoletto* in Paris, Victor Hugo himself wrote about the quartet [Bella figlia dell' amore] and its genius of simultaneous characterization, exquisitely combined into the larger picture, “If I could only make four characters in my plays speak at the same time, and have the audience grasp the words and the sentiments, I would obtain the very same effect.”



Giuseppe Verdi called *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo “the greatest subject and perhaps the greatest drama of modern times.” Pick up this play and you will be reading the inspiration for Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

Want to learn more about Verdi's life and the cultural context in which he worked? **William Berger's *Verdi with a Vengeance*** provides this overview in an engaging and accessible way. Berger, the

voice of the Metropolitan Opera's weekly Saturday radio broadcast, twists Verdi's life and his musical outputs into a compelling narrative. He also suggests recommended listening for individual operas.

More of a listener than a reader? Here are some suggested recordings:

Nominated for a **2019 GRAMMY® Award in the Best Opera Recording category** – *Rigoletto* (Delos Record) is the final recording by the late Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorstovsky as the title character. Considered one of the leading interpreters of *Rigoletto* around the world by David Salazar with *OperaWire*, Hvorostovsky passed away shortly after this album was released.

Want more? Then let the recording of **Tito Gobbi as Rigoletto, Maria Callas as Gilda**, and Giuseppe di Stefano as the Duke along with the **La Scala Chorus and Orchestra**, conducted by Tullio Serafin show you why this recording continues to stand the test of time.

Education and Community Engagement

By Bill Wallace

The Education and Community Engagement Committee has been hard at work since mid-August preparing for the upcoming season. After a thorough inventory and sprucing up the Opera Treasure Chests are ready to head out on their journeys to 41 schools.

There, children will begin to learn about the joys of opera. There are story books, recordings, toys and puppets featuring beloved opera characters from Mozart's *Magic Flute*. There's the lovers Tamino and Pamina, the wicked Queen of the Night, the wise Sarastro, the silly bird catcher Papageno and his beloved Pagagena. And of course we have to have the dragon/serpent that tries to eat our hero, Tamino.

If you are interested in attending one of the Opera Treasure Chests LIVE school performances, Debra Erck would be happy to share dates and times.

The older kids will get to see a performance of Austin Opera's production of Verdi's *Rigoletto* at the dress rehearsal on November 7. It is such a joy to see 1,500 students get swept up in the glorious music and drama of opera. They are always so engrossed, attentive and polite and respond with great enthusiasm. I anticipate hearty boos for the dastardly Duke of Mantua.

In preparation for their opera experience, our docents provide in school previews of the opera including audio and video selections. Debra also provides the educators with copious materials to use in introducing the opera to their students.

In a new venture, Debra and I are participating in Family Eldercare: Lifetime Connections without Borders. This is a program that reaches housebound people through the telephone and computer. Our next program will feature selections of truly funny operas by Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti and Offenbach.

Why not join our team? Be a volunteer ambassador at Access Opera or attend one of our docent presentations. It's a great way to help build new audiences for this great art form.



Guild Officers 2019-2020

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Upcoming Events

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Thursday, November 7	ACCESS OPERA: Rigoletto	7:00 PM	Long Center for the Performing Arts
Saturday, November 9	Rigoletto Pre-Opera Dinner & performance	5:30 PM	Long Center
Tuesday, November 12	Guild Board Meeting	11:15 AM	Bucca di Beppo
Thursday, November 14	Rigoletto Performance	7:30 PM	Long Center
Sunday, November 17	Rigoletto Performance (matinee)	2:30 PM	Long Center
Saturday, December 7	Holiday Party	6:30 PM	Home of Cindy Wilson
Wednesday, January 8	Enrichment: <i>Everest</i>	7:00 PM	Home of Sharon & David Sneed

*Wines from Around the World Dinner Party at
David and Sharon Sneed's Home*

Saturday, October 5, 2019, 6:30 PM

What a joy it was for David and I to host a dinner party in our home to support Austin Opera. I would recommend this to anyone who likes to cook and serve. I have been to many fine restaurants in my life, but to have an opportunity to serve great people and the Austin Opera was an exceptional memory for my husband and I. We will treasure it always.

Course One -

Wine cellar white wine tasting with paired fruit, nuts and cheeses
Bacon wrapped Date and Pecan Roll
Terre De Villelongue, Crémant De Limoux, France, 2017
Sea Slopes Fort Ross Winery, Chardonnay Sonoma Coast

Course Two -

Creamy fresh Mushroom Soup with Vermouth, topped with toasted mushroom slices
Homemade herbed yeast rolls with butter
The Eyrie Vineyards, 2015 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon

Course Three -

A light spring greens salad with a Rosemary/Garlic encrusted New Zealand Lollipop Lamb Chop
Stolpman Vineyards, 2016 Estate grown Syrah, Ballard Canyon

Course Four - Fish Course (small plate)

Lemon Dill King Alaskan Salmon
Savory Wild Rice Pilaf
Prosciutto wrapped asparagus with Val'd Aosta cheese
Cheverny, 2018 Rose Loire Wine, Domaine du Sabard, France

Course Five - Beef Course (small plate)

Braised Beef Tenderloin Medallions with a French Shallot and red wine reduction sauce
Yukon Gold Mashers with fresh herbs
Pan seared Pepper Medley
JAX, Cabernet Sauvignon, Kirk Venge Winemaker at JAX Vineyards, 5 Barrel lot, Calistoga California, 2016

Course Six - Dessert

Blueberry Cobbler with Blue Bell Ice Cream or cream (optional)
Royal Tokaji Gold Label, 6 Puttonyos Asxu, Hungarian Dessert Wine, 2013

The Sneed Home Address:
9612 Tavares Cove 78733
cell phone (512) 970-6196

Wine Master for the Evening: Allen Lindig
Wine buyer and expert with H-E-B
(512) 964-8195

Letter from Cathy Collins, Guild President 2019-2020

Dear Guild Members and Opera Lovers:

As your Guild President, I've thought about what to write in this first Libretto edition for Austin Opera's 33rd season. I decided to write from the heart as to what this means to me.

My husband, Hugh, asks me all the time why I do as much as I do. My response is that I enjoy getting involved. It is a great way to meet new people and strengthen the burgeoning friendships that have been made. But also, in my opinion, any organization that one joins should warrant your involvement and commitment. Clubs, organizations, professional groups, you name it all rely on willing people to make things run. We give of our time, financial support, and our talents. Without volunteers, parties, meetings, educational programs, galas, and fundraisers just wouldn't happen. We do it because Austin Opera is worthy of the attention we give it.

The days of Austin being the sleepy home of the Capitol, Armadillo World Headquarters, and The University of Texas with a few pretty good Tex-Mex and Bar-B-Q restaurants thrown in are long gone. Austin is a happening place now and our opera company continues to up their game to stay relevant for our audience. With the help of Austin Opera Guild, we are making that happen. Come, have a glass of wine with us and see what I mean when I say that you will meet some of the most generous and fun women and men in the city.

Fifteen years ago when I bought my first season subscription to the then Austin Lyric Opera, little did I know that one day I would be honored to be chosen to be your Guild President. I am truly honored. My predecessors have led the opera's guild up to this point and my goal is to continue the practice of excellence.

So, come along with me in our 33rd season. Experience the devastation that Rigoletto faces when he ultimately realizes his misguided associations and attempts to shield and hide his daughter result in tragedy. Remember the headline grabbing news in 1996 when 12 climbers froze to death during their attempts to reach the summit on their dangerous quest on Mt. Everest. And finally, who can forget the beautiful aria *Nessun Dorma* in Puccini's last opera, *Turandot*? Love or Amore is what eventually defeats the cruelty that has dominated the reign of Princess Turandot in her kingdom.

The more I learn about Opera the more I want to breathe it all in. On behalf of over 200 women and men who make up the Guild, I say thank you for your membership, commitment, and your generosity. Now... let's enjoy.

All my best,


Cathy Collins

Austin Opera Guild President, Season 33

