



Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction by Suzanne Breitbach

The **Serenata Wine Dinner & Auction**, Austin Opera's signature event of wine, song, and your favorite people dressed to kill, is just around the corner! We honor our dear friends **Mary Ann and Andrew Heller** this year. The Hellers are long-time supporters of the opera and of the arts in the Austin community. Join us in honoring these dear friends at the Four Seasons Hotel Austin on February 16th. Share a glass of wine with friends while bidding on one-of-a-kind auction items, such as a classic Hohner violin-style bass guitar signed by Sir Paul McCartney himself!



Inspired by our spring production of *La Bohème*, the evening theme of *L'Amour Infini* is carried by a sumptuous four-course Parisian dinner with classic wine pairings, enhanced by the performance of baritone Craig Verm, an arrestingly vibrant voice featured in Austin Opera's upcoming production of Puts and Campbell's *Silent Night*. Following dinner is an opportunity to bid on sought-after vintages and world-class experiences in Serenata's live auction. The evening is capped by the live music of the Reunion Band and a dance floor that has seen AO Guild members shaking it until they were made to go home.



Don't hesitate and be too late! Tickets are available online at 501auctions.com/serenata2019/tickets, or by contacting Rhanda Luna by phone at 737.228.1442 or email rluna@austinopera.org.

You can earn donations for Austin Opera when you shop at Amazon.com. Simply go to smile.amazon.com and use your Amazon log-in. Once you log-in, select Austin Opera as the charity you want to support and 0.5% of your total will go to Austin Opera as a donation. There's no difference in shopping at smile.amazon.com versus amazon.com and there is no additional cost to you!

On *Silent Night* by Kelly Rourke

“War is not sustainable when you come to know your enemy as a person.” This simple, profound thought guided librettist Mark Campbell as he worked with composer Kevin Puts to create *Silent Night*, inspired by the true story of a moment in the first “world war” when soldiers across the front did just that.

The film 2005 *Joyeux Noël*, written and directed by Christian Carion, offered a fictionalized account of the truce, telling the intertwined stories of individual French, German and Scottish soldiers. When Dale Johnson, artistic director of Minnesota Opera, saw the film, he was struck by the story’s operatic potential. His instincts were correct; following the premiere of *Silent Night* at Minnesota Opera in 2012, it won the Pulitzer Prize for music; since then it has gone on to stages in Philadelphia, Calgary, Fort Worth, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Montreal, Michigan, Wexford, Atlanta and Cooperstown, among others. The sprawling conflict that became known as World War I involved some 70 million military personnel before it came to an end, one hundred years ago this month. Tallies of casualties vary, but it is estimated that anywhere between 15 to 20 million people (military and civilian) lost their lives in what was supposed to be “the war to end all wars.” A great many of those deaths could be attributed not to combat wounds, but to the miserable conditions in the trenches, which contributed to the severity and spread of diseases like influenza and pneumonia.

Soldiers’ diaries and letters remarked incredulously on the closeness of home – in the space of a day, a soldier on leave might travel from the horrors of the trenches to the comforts of his club in London. As Joseph Brophy wrote, visiting the battlefields nearly a half-century after the war, “What is most disquieting on such a visit is to realize how little space ... separated the line, the soldier’s troglodyte world, the world which might have been another planet, from home, from England, from sanity.”

The almost incomprehensible scale of the war made it easy – perhaps necessary – to see the men across the trenches as an undifferentiated mass of the other, the enemy. At the same time, the intensity of the conditions led the men to forge deep bonds with their fellow soldiers. In that atmosphere, a simple gesture – a candle, a Christmas tree, a shared hymn – was enough to cause soldiers to blink and replace their distorted vision of “the enemy” with a clear vision of another human being enduring hideous conditions.



And, famously, that is exactly what happened along the trenches on Christmas Eve of 1914. In several places the cease-fire was extended to allow soldiers to bury the dead. News of the temporary truces was met with angry reactions by commanding officers on all sides; one of the critics was a young German named Adolf Hitler.

In Flanders Fields by John McCrae, 1872-1918

When some of us were young, the poem *In Flanders Field* was recited each Memorial Day and Armistice Day to honor WWI. Some of us even wore paper poppies because of the poem.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place, and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead; short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Few Silent Nights: Memoirs from World War I* by Lissa Anderson

Silent Night explores the wonder and peace that occurred on Christmas Eve in 1914. But as the opera indicates, those joys were few and far between as the Allied and Central Powers slugged it out in the trenches that clawed their way across northern Europe. The norm was fear, cold, damp, hunger, vermin, noise, and the constant threat of agonizing death.

Many soldiers wrote eloquently of their ordeal in letters home or memoirs. Some of these men later became famous; one was classicist and novelist Robert Graves, who recalled that in the trenches “We had no blankets, greatcoats, or waterproof sheets . . . The rain poured down. Every night we went out to fetch in the dead . . .” Writer H. H. Munro, known as ‘Saki’, noticed many owls at the battlefield feasting on the countless mice. He observed sardonically that, although the owls ate their fill, “. . . there are always sufficient mice left over to populate one’s dug-out and make a parade-ground and race-course of one’s face at night.” The artist Oskar Kokoschka wrote about being wounded in an almost mystical way: “The shadows all round me were growing huger and huger, and I wanted to ask how it was that the sun and moon were both shining at the same time. I wanted to point at the sky, but my arm wouldn’t move. Perhaps I lay there unconscious for several days.”

But one of the most poignant memoirs was written by an English farmhand named Leonard Thompson. Of his days in the trenches he wrote: “We set to work to bury people. We pushed them into the sides of the trench but bits of them kept getting uncovered and sticking out, like people in a badly made bed. Hands were the worst; they would escape from the sand, pointing, begging—even waving! . . . The flies entered the trenches at night and lined them completely with a density which was like moving cloth. . . We were all lousy and . . . We wept, not because we were frightened but because we were so dirty.” — Such was life on the front lines of “The Great War.”

*All quotations are from *Eyewitness to History*, John Carey, ed.; New York, Avon Books, 1987

Original production Director Tomer Zvulun reflects on WNO's production: *Silent Night*

From the first moment I listened to *Silent Night*, I felt that it deeply touched a personal side in me. Kevin Puts's music along with Mark Campbell's libretto uniquely captures the dichotomy of love and war and creates a world that is both specific and universal at once. It captures the humanity of the characters and the comforts that friendship and music bring to the bloodiest of all human experiences—war. As an Israeli, I know war very intimately. It was around ever since I remember myself. From the Lebanon War in my childhood in the 1980s through the Intifada and the suicide bombings in the streets of Tel Aviv in the 1990s to the current endless battle at the Gaza strip, war is a state of being in Israel.

In the early 1990s I entered the most surreal situation possible for a carefree teenager: I served in the Army for three years as a medic in a combat infantry unit. As a young 18-year-old, I learned a thing or two about violence, fear, loss, and the constant brush with death. I learned to shoot, fight, run, hide—not only physically, but also emotionally. I hid the fear of dying young.

What got me through that time and stayed with me forever was the humanity that I found in every situation daily: the strong friendships we formed, the coffee we shared on endless nights, the music we listened to in sentry, and the stories I heard from my comrades about their girlfriends, mothers, loves, lives, homes...Most of all, it was recognizing that we all hid that same fear: the fear that we may never see them again.

That is the most fundamental aspect of being a soldier: missing the ones you love, your family, your home, your innocence, your youth. Those may be lost forever as soon as you put on uniforms and walk out the door.

That's why I found the story of *Silent Night* to be so moving, personal and yet universal at the same time. Each one of the characters is acutely aware of his mortality, fears, and loves. In the midst of this unimaginable time of terror, music, friendship, and humanity emerge to provide a momentary solace from the horrors of war.

Our production was conceived as an entangled nightmare, progressing vertically. The structure of the opera is extremely intricate and complicated. The space is the key to the concept: it allows for the fluidity that the storytelling requires. Frequently, the vertical nature of the set allows for simultaneous action on different levels. War, whether today in Israel or a century ago all over Europe, evokes a chaotic, surreal world. The characters that inhabit this world are completely lost in it. As often is the case in war. **Tomer Zvulun dedicates this production to the memory of his commander, Avi Maimon, killed in Ramallah on duty on September 26, 1996.**



Learning *Silent Night* by Bill Wallace

Opera Guild docents have been preparing to head to Central Texas schools to prepare students and teachers for their visit to the Access Opera dress rehearsal performance of Kevin Puts' and Mark Campbell's opera *Silent Night*.

This process presented unique challenges as this is an Austin premiere production and none of us had seen previous performances. There is not yet a recording of the opera for us to listen too.



Debra Erck, Austin Opera's Director of Education and Community Engagement, mined the internet and found a bonanza of information on YouTube and on Mr. Puts' websites. She also obtained permission from Atlanta Opera for us to view archival footage from their recent production which uses the same stage production as ours.

On December 6, 2018, nine of us gathered at Opera Austin headquarters to submerge ourselves in the opera. After a brief discussion of World War I and the Western Front, we viewed videos of Mr. Puts and Mr. Campbell discussing the generation of their opera and the world premiere production at Minneapolis Opera. An excellent preview from The Wexford festival in Ireland introduced us to the main characters, an important key to understanding and explaining the opera. Another preview, this one from the San Diego Opera, outlined the basic story.

Using the Atlanta video, we watched key musical and dramatic moments from the opera. I can safely say that every one of us gained a deep appreciation of this wonderful opera and we were all touched and moved.

We will have another meeting, where we will go over the Power Point that Debra has created for presentation. We will then be prepared to go forth and introduce this opera to the future opera lovers of Austin.

Support Service by Sharon Sneed

Can you imagine coming to a strange city, living out of a suitcase in a hotel and then being expected to give the performance of your life? I suppose this must be how it feels to be a top opera star. It has been a busy year for me with family duties and work related responsibilities, but my minuscule contribution to welcome bags made me feel like I participated in some small way to help this lovely group of artisans feel adored and appreciated by the city of Austin.

Gift bags are personally important to me when I receive one - someone has considered and taken time to think about what I might need to be more comfortable. So, even though my time is limited, I made a big trip to Costco for healthy snacks and non-perishables, and then created a mini aesthetics swag bag

filled with great skin care products. We were able to do this efficiently and provide them in the beginning of the year to all the performers. So, even if you think you can't work through some of these support services, anything is appreciated by the guild members and by the performers. Teamsmanship means that we all make a contribution and invest in this worthy cause of bringing top shelf opera to the Austin Area.

Volunteer Coordination by Mack Lindsey

Would you like to know a few ways to help Austin Opera? If you're an active member of the Guild, you may have been asked to help with something, but you don't need to wait to be asked! Here are a few things you can do to give valuable assistance:

- Help with an enrichment event (opera preview) by helping transport supplies, assisting with setting up the location, or perhaps offering your own home
- Help welcome visiting artists by contributing to the gift bags we provide them or by giving them rides from the airport to their accommodations
- Volunteer your home for a Guild party
- Find out how you can get free tickets to take friends or relatives to their first Austin Opera performance
- Assist the educational services group that makes presentations about upcoming performances at schools
- Let us know if you have time during the day to help with mailing and clerical chores at the Opera offices
- Help the Wine Dinner and Auction Committee in any of several ways including soliciting or donating auction items (and hurry because it's coming in February!)
- Submit an article to the *Libretto* (the Guild's own news and information publication)
- Any other ideas?

For more information about volunteering send a message to Mack Lindsey at mclindsey75@gmail.com or Patricia Rosen at pmrosen5@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events			
Saturday, January 26	Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner	5:30 PM	Kodosky Lounge, Long Center
	<i>Silent Night</i> Performance	7:30 PM	Long Center
Tuesday, January 29	<i>Silent Night</i> Masterclass	6:30 PM	Austin Opera Offices
Thursday, January 31	<i>Silent Night</i> Performance	7:30 PM	Long Center
Sunday, February 3	<i>Silent Night</i> Performance	2:30 PM	Long Center
Tuesday, February 12	Guild Board Meeting	11:15 AM	Buca di Beppo
Saturday, February 16	Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction	6:00 PM	Four Seasons Hotel Austin
Tuesday, March 12	Guild Board Meeting	11:15 AM	Buca di Beppo
Tuesday, April 9	Guild Board Meeting	11:15 AM	Buca di Beppo
Wednesday, April 17	Guild Enrichment: <i>La bohème</i>	6:30 PM	Home of Diane and Hudson Ingram

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Opera ATX Premiere

David T. Little's *Soldier Songs*

On March 9 Austin Opera will host a joint event with the Texas Military Forces Museum: A Conversation with David T. Little, composer of *Soldier Songs*. This event is free to museum members and \$10 for non-members. Please join us for this event, and again on April 5 & 6, 2019 for the Premiere of Austin Opera's ATX production of *Soldier Songs*!

Visit austinopera.org for more info.



Letter from the President – January 2019

Dear Guild Members and Opera Lovers:

Happy New Year 2019! I am grateful to the Austin Opera Guild volunteers, who help Austin Opera to thrive and to share the excitement of the new operas and the enjoyment of classical operas.

It seems like only yesterday that we were thrilled with the concert presentation of *Otello*. As you all know, the reviews for *Otello* were fantastic! Now the Austin premiere of the Pulitzer Prize winning opera, *Silent Night*, is fast approaching.

Thanks to all the efforts of the Austin Opera Guild, the generosity of Polly and Steve Barbaro who hosted the Guild Kick Off Party, the hospitality of Curby Conoley in hosting the *Otello* Enrichment event, and the graciousness of Cornelia and John Wood in opening their home for the Guild Holiday Party, we are off to a wonderful start to the season.

The next few weeks are filled with many opportunities for Guild members to experience the excellence of Austin Opera. Opening night for *Silent Night* begins with the Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner at 5:30 pm on Saturday, January 26th. The Opera Overture begins at 6:30 pm; with the curtain rising for the performance at 7:30 pm. This will be followed by the Post Show Reception.

The second performance of *Silent Night* will be on Thursday, January 31st at 7:30 pm. This will be preceded by the Opera Overture and UrbanNites both at 6:30 pm. The night will be capped with the Post Show Reception.

Sunday, February 3rd will be the matinee presentation of *Silent Night*. That performance will be preceded by Brunch beginning at 1:00 pm. The Opera Overture is at 1:30 pm. The opera will begin at 2:30 pm, with the Post Show Reception following the performance.

Since *Silent Night* is based on the Christmas Truce of 1914 in World War I, I encourage you to invite family and friends with military service to come with you to the opera. You can use the Guild Mentorship Program to get a free ticket for someone you invite. You can contact Dianne van Hulle at DVanHulle@austinopera.org or you can call the Box Office at 512-472-5992 for more details.

I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming Opera events. Thank you for all that you do.

See you at the Opera!

Rosy Moore
President, Austin Opera Guild

