

THE VOICE OF



THE AUSTIN OPERA GUILD



**Serenata 2018 – Wine Dinner nets nearly \$200K** by Diana Ferguson

Once again, the Guild has scored a huge win for Austin Opera! Our annual gala netted our company nearly **\$200,000**, one of the largest contributions to come into the company this year! Driving through to such a win, despite the challenge of a last-minute venue change, makes this feat worthy of a standing ovation.

All of us in the Guild owe a huge “Thank you!” to veteran co-chairs **Marilyn Davis** and **Carol Logan**, and their **small army of volunteers**, for pushing this project through to success despite challenges never anticipated. Well done, indeed!

Likewise, we raise a glass to **Twin Liquors** for their generous, ongoing support and to **our donors and guests** who made our silent and live auctions such winners.

For those of you newer to the Guild, our Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction Committee commits to a year’s worth of planning and labor to make this major fundraising event a success. They spend hundreds of hours laying plans for the upcoming event and then getting down to the nitty gritty of decorating, menu and entertainment planning, soliciting and gathering a myriad of auction items, hiring technical staff for auction and entertainment, and securing volunteers to work the event.

But, it’s been worth the ongoing effort! Since the Wine Dinner’s inception several years ago, this single event has netted our company well in excess of \$1.5 million in funds, which adds significantly to what our company can do each year.

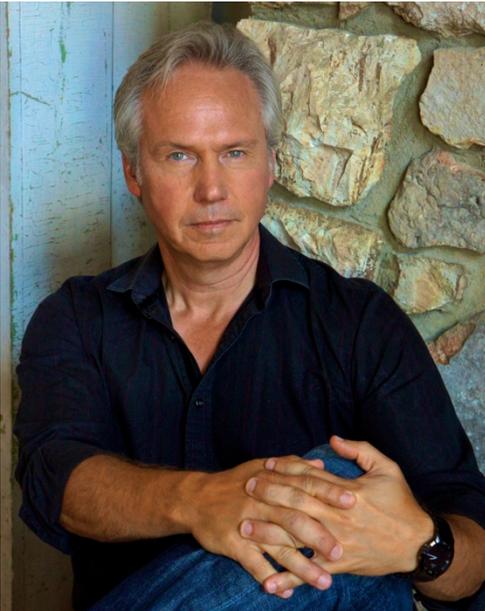
Annie Burrige, our company’s General Director & CEO, summed up most eloquently how the company feels about this achievement: “I am beyond grateful for the extraordinary amount of work that went into making this year’s Serenata a success. The generosity of the Guild—in terms of your time, great talent, and generosity in bidding on so many things yourselves—is unprecedented for a nonprofit. To execute such an elegant affair despite the last-minute venue change is nothing short of heroic!” It was our pleasure, Annie!

Next year’s gala is already scheduled for **February 16, 2019** at the **Four Seasons Hotel Austin**. If you’d like to be part of next year’s Committee, please let our new **Guild liaison Rhanda Luna** (see page 5!) know, or watch for announcements in the fall. We want and need your active support!



Co-chairs Marilyn Davis and Carol Logan

## Conductor Steven White Proclaims: Viva Verdi! by Michael Solomon



Steven White

favorite Violetta, however, may just be the one he also calls his wife, acclaimed coloratura soprano Elizabeth Futral.)

Maestro Steven White, who makes his Austin Opera debut conducting *La traviata*, grew up loving classical music. Both of his parents were classical musicians, and he fell hard for the family business. But *La traviata* was never a work that spoke to him.

“I always loved Verdi’s lush music, but I never understood how Violetta could leave Alfredo by the persuasion of his father,” he tells *The Libretto*. “I didn’t understand the cultural imperatives that came into play in that scene. But once I gained some life experience...wow, it’s just such a powerful piece.”

White has since made *La traviata* a central part of his career. It was the occasion of his dazzling Metropolitan Opera debut in 2010, and at the Met he worked with such stars as Natalie Dessay, Hei-Kyung Hong, Plácido Domingo, Thomas Hampson, Matthew Polenzani, and the late Dmitri Hvorostovsky. (His

“Verdi put such care into every note of this piece, not just in the vocal writing, but in the entire score,” he says. “It’s so humbling to work on Verdi’s music, and Austin Opera has assembled such a world-class cast.”

White is eager to get to know Austin; he is well aware of our city’s reputation as a marvelous town for culture of all kinds. He says he has been so warmly welcomed by everyone at the company and also bombarded with suggestions of places to go to best experience what makes Austin so unique. As much as he enjoys the rehearsal period and the performances, “I can’t wait to get out and explore. There is so much to see and do!”

Looking ahead to Austin Opera’s next season opener, he muses about the deepening of Verdi’s mastery over time. “There are more than 30 years between *La traviata* and *Otello*, and you can see so much progression in Verdi’s already brilliant composition skills,” he says. “The care with which he treats his characters is palpable. He reveres Desdemona like he does Violetta. He’s a master at creating mood – the mood he paints orchestrally is spine-tingling in both operas. Austin audiences are in for such a treat – a year of Verdian genius!”

You can earn donations for Austin Opera when you shop at Amazon.com. Simply go to [smile.amazon.com](https://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](https://smile.amazon.com) versus amazon.com and there is no additional cost to you!

---

**La traviata At a Glance** by Debra ErckOpera Background

- The opera *La traviata* (The Fallen Woman) was based on a play *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias), which was adapted by the French writer Dumas from his novel of the same name.
- Because the contemporary storyline was about tragic romance and the divides of class in society – not mythology or ancient history—Verdi’s opera shocked audiences and made for a risky premiere.
- The first performance of *La traviata* (Venice, March 6, 1853) was a complete failure, due to many issues, including government-censored costuming and the hoarse singing from the tenor (Alfredo). A year later (May 6, 1854) Verdi made a few revisions and revived the production in a different theater with much success.
- The Prelude to this opera is unusual in that it presents themes that depict important happenings in Violetta’s life, but in reverse order (the “Dying” theme followed by the “Love” theme).

What Happens

- *La traviata* begins with a big party in the home of Violetta. Alfredo comes to the party and expresses to Violetta that he has adored her from afar for a long time.
- Violetta is confused by Alfredo’s pure devotion, having believed that she could never feel true love, because of her occupation as a courtesan. She decides, however, to leave high society and move out to the suburbs of Paris to live with him.
- Giorgio, Alfredo’s father, makes an unexpected visit, pressuring Violetta to break up with his son so as not to shame Alfredo and his family. She leaves, and Alfredo gets angry with her, not knowing that his father encouraged her decision.
- Violetta jumps back into the Paris party scene, where Alfredo pursues her and makes accusations about her in front of the other guests.
- A few months later, Violetta is close to death. Alfredo rushes to her, after his father shares the true account of her earlier choices. Alfredo asks for her forgiveness, as Violetta breathes her last breath in his arms, remembering the time they spent together, and dies!

## Making *Ariadne* Relevant by Paula Damore and Diana Ferguson



What do *Ariadne* and a *Saturday Night Live* skit have in common? Well, kids attending docent presentations learned that biting satire didn't originate with today's generation. And, it's the art of making an opera relevant to the world our kids live in that draws them in and makes them want to learn more. Suddenly, opera comes alive.

Helping kids make sense of *Ariadne*—an opera within an opera—posed unique challenges. It is a very sophisticated skewering of arts-ignorant patrons who commission artistic works and then demand changes that show their ignorance. Thus, the *SNL*-esque skewering of the “Ranch Owner” who demanded the simultaneous performance by an opera company and a comedic troupe so that fireworks could begin on time.

Could the jab at such ignorance have been any more direct? On top of the satire, *Ariadne* presents a clash of values: the mash-up of mythical/mundane and the exploration of one love/many loves. Equally important,

Strauss went all out to pen a sophisticated musical score that showcased his brilliant talent. To help kids relate to Strauss, docents pointed out he is father of sorts to today's film composers such as John Williams. Ears perked up when students heard the opening music to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and learned it had been written by Strauss. Another link made!

Education and Community Engagement Committee members spent hours of study to be up for this assignment! Thanks to Debra Erck's hard work in growing Access Opera, docent teams gave 11 presentations to students ranging from elementary to high school level during the two weeks prior to the final dress rehearsal. Seeing the excitement on the faces of students when they “got it” made our efforts worthwhile. It was a thrill to hear them exclaim, “We understand it!” or “I want to see this!”



## The Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner for *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Marcia Toprac

When planning our Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinners we generally choose a theme that guides food, wine, and décor selections, but finding one for *Ariadne auf Naxos* was a challenge. Set at a rural Texas ranch, the production included an *opera seria* ensemble performing a mythic Greek tragedy in German and dueling it out in English with a punky troop of comedians...a theme was less than obvious! So, we went for eclectic with a modern German flare.

As usual, the Sterling Events team prepared a menu of delectable cuisine. In addition to the three-course dinner menu, other offerings included German meatballs in caper sauce, bacon cookies topped with beer cheese, cucumber rounds topped with beet salad and fried sage, as well as a selection of German wines provided by our friends at Twin Liquors. The décor was burgundy and gold with centerpieces composed of dramatic and comedic masks adorned with colorful ribbons that evoked the culture clash of the two performance troops.

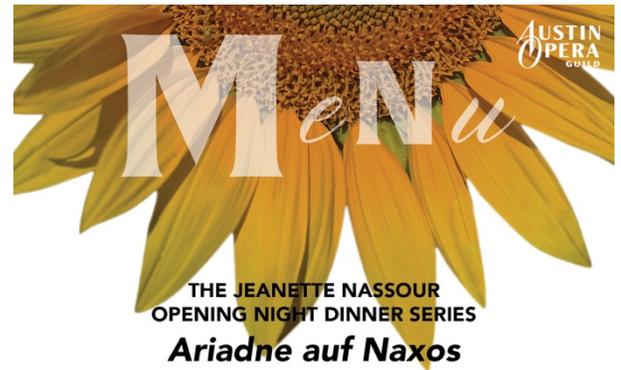
All of the above is meant to entice you to join us for future events in the Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner Series. Make your opera evening a complete experience. Start with hors d'oeuvres and wine at our cocktail hour and then move into the Kodosky Lounge for a grand three-course dinner and socializing with old and new friends. After the opera, return to conclude your evening with more wine, desserts, and mingling with production artists. Shouldn't be missed!

## Introducing Rhanda Luna – Director of Strategic Partnerships and the NEW Guild Liason!



Rhanda Luna

Rhanda Luna is Director of Strategic Partnerships at Austin Opera. She joined the company in March 2018, coming from the Opera San Antonio. Rhanda earned a Bachelor of Music Business from West Texas A&M University and is currently pursuing a Master of Nonprofit Management at Our Lady of the Lake University. She is an alum of OPERA America's Leadership Intensive program and an active member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Rhanda and her husband, Michael, have been married 12 years and enjoy spending any spare time with their 1.5-year old son, Adam.



### THE JEANETTE NASSOUR OPENING NIGHT DINNER SERIES

## *Ariadne auf Naxos*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2018

#### Course One

Winter Green Salad  
with roasted cauliflower, pickled celery,  
teardrop tomatoes & pickled red onions  
Caramelized Shallot Vinaigrette

#### Course Two

Beef Wellington  
served with sweet potato puree, broccoli,  
and sautéed exotic mushrooms with demi glace

#### Course Three

Trio of Desserts  
German Chocolate Bavarian Profiterole,  
mini orange "Bee Sting" cake, and caramel apple pot von creme



### Getting to Know Austin Opera's Visiting Artists by Lissa Anderson

You read in the previous *Libretto* about the Guild's efforts to make visiting artists feel welcome. But what is it like to meet these folks at the airport? Are they haughty or condescending? Do they take the rides for granted? Do they sing in the car? I can provide a full-throated NO for the first two questions. But, if any of the artists have belted out their favorite aria while coming into town on US 71, I haven't heard about it.

What I can report is that our visitors are some of the nicest, most down-to-earth people you'll ever meet. They deeply appreciate Guild members' help and have cited our courtesies as a reason why they enjoy coming to Austin. Those of us who have often made the airport trek have some fun stories, too. Here's just one: I was scheduled to pick up the young tenor who was about to star in *The Magic Flute*. I had looked him up online so I could recognize him, and I'd sent him my contact information. As I held my little Austin Opera sign and scanned the escalator for him, I heard "Hey, Lissa!" Hailing me was what appeared to be a stubbly, scruffy, baseball-capped teenager—a far cry from the glamorous international sensation I'd seen on his website. Getting into the car, he asked for forgiveness if he didn't talk much, since he'd just completed a tour across China and was exhausted. No problem, of course. But he chatted animatedly the whole way! Then his ebullient discovery of unfamiliar ingredients at Central Market was a delight to witness. That young man was a charmer, and seeing him on stage was extra enjoyable because I'd gotten to know him.

So, if you'd like to join the airport pick-up crew, contact the Guild's Volunteer Operations VPs, Stacy Brunson or Larry Bjorkman. You may end up providing a much-needed coffee maker to a grateful singer whose Airbnb was lacking, hearing about when the trick knife didn't retract (ouch!), or learning how a choreographer adapts his ideas to the available nonprofessional dancers. Or you'll just make a new friend.



### *Ariadne auf Naxos* Enrichment Dinner by Evelyn S. Meditz



Despite freezing temperatures, *Ariadne's* January Enrichment dinner was well attended. Hosted at the spacious home of Guild Board members Hugh and Cathy Schuler Collins, the event featured Guild member Katharine Shields who interviewed stage director Jennifer Williams. If you missed this event, don't worry—be sure to catch *La traviata's* Enrichment event on April 18! Send a message to [evelynmeditz@gmail.com](mailto:evelynmeditz@gmail.com) to have your name placed on the RSVP list.

***Have you renewed your Guild Membership?*** by Marcy Melanson

Spring means renewal time for the Austin Opera Guild!

When you received your season ticket renewal materials from Austin Opera you may have noticed the Guild membership was not included this year. This year you should have received a separate letter in the mail about Guild renewal.

Austin Opera Guild provides an opportunity to meet new people and socialize with friends, enhance your knowledge of opera, go behind-the-scenes at special events, and to volunteer.

Here is a list of active committees:

- Communications
- Enrichment
- Membership
- Support Services
- Ambassador Program
- Volunteer Operations
- Educational and Community Engagement
- Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner Series
- Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction

Guild Membership Levels:

- Student (full-time) - \$25
- Active\*, Individual - \$85
- Active\*, Couple - \$115
- Associate, Individual - \$145
- Associate, Couple - \$225

*\*Active members serve on Austin Opera Guild Committees and/or volunteer at events or functions.*

You can renew your Guild membership by calling the Austin Opera office at (512) 472-5992 or online at <https://austinopera.org/guild/#join>.

**Membership Renewal is due by June 19, 2018!**

Thank you for your incredible volunteerism and support this season. Please join us for the 2018-2019 Season, as we look forward to a very bright future for Austin Opera.

Upcoming Events		
<b>Wednesday 4/18</b>	<i>La traviata</i> Enrichment Event	Home of Polly & Steve Barbaro
<b>Saturday 4/28</b>	Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner for <i>La traviata</i>	Kodosky Lounge, The Long Center
<b>Sunday 5/20</b>	Spring Awards Party	Home of Paula & Stuart Damore

---

**Letter from Marcy Melanson, Guild President 2017-2018**

Dear wonderful Guild members,

What a lovely year of opera! *Carmen* updated by a century, a delightful romp with *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and our upcoming classic, *La traviata*!

We have been blessed with an outstanding Board this season, and the amount of volunteerism among the entire Guild has been remarkable. It is gratifying to see so many of our new members stepping up to get involved.

This year we have enjoyed:

- Three enrichments—a wonderful dialogue with the director of the upcoming opera
- Three wonderful parties—for fellowship with opera entertainment
- Education and community engagement—education for schools and the community regarding the upcoming opera
- Beautiful Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinners in the Kodosky Lounge
- Wonderful newsletter, *The Libretto*
- Helping the office staff when needed
- Ambassadors to welcome people to the opera
- Chauffeuring artists from the airport
- Presenting welcome baskets to the artists
- Serenata—our wonderful gala and wine auction

Many thanks to the multitude of volunteers who make Serenata the great success it is every year! This year was no exception thanks to Marilyn Davis and Carol Logan and their fabulous committee of volunteers for their unwavering commitment to make it a success. It was a beautiful affair!

Many thanks to our 225 members for their enthusiasm, vigor, and passion which has led to a very successful and delightful season.

Please keep volunteering, attending, and loving our Austin Opera.

Thank you,  
Marcy Melanson

