



COVID-19: What is Austin Opera doing?

From the Austin Opera Staff

Despite the changes in our season brought on by Covid-19, Austin Opera is doing well. Though we had to cancel *Turandot*, we made the easy decision to pay our artists a portion of their contracted fee to assist them through these difficult months. A few even chose to donate that back to Austin Opera!

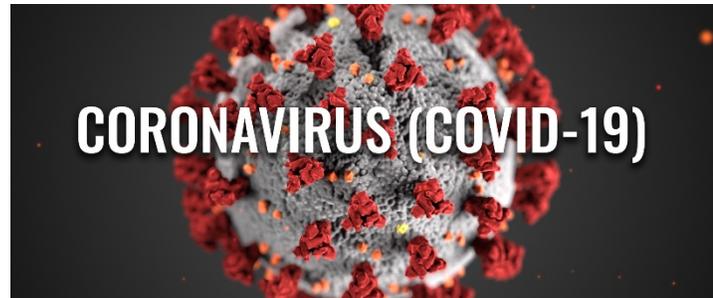


Image from <https://www.furman.edu/covid-19/>

Your Austin Opera staff is working diligently on several fronts to make lemonade from lemons, and to be sure that not only does Austin Opera remain a vital and stable part of our community, it continues to reach out to its patrons and opera lovers with great performances by great artists! We are working to transform *Winter Journey* from a canceled performance into a film project that can be viewed around the world! One of our most successful programs is *Live from Indy Terrace*, a weekly webcast of a premier artist bringing you beautiful music; this new series has already been viewed by more than 5,000 people, which is more than attended *Everest*! If you haven't heard them live, here are all the links to the various places you can watch *Live from Indy Terrace*:

<https://austinopera.org/inside-indy-terrace>

<https://vimeo.com/austinopera>

<https://www.youtube.com/austinopera>

<https://www.facebook.com/AustinOpera>

On the financial front, staff and board are ensuring that we have applications in for funds available from government and non-profits intended to stabilize organizations such as ours through these troubled times. Beyond that, we are asking everyone who can to donate their current season tickets back to the opera, and to renew their season subscriptions as soon as possible. Also, if you had planned a gift to Austin Opera this year, now is a great time to make it. If that is something you are able to do, please reach out to the staff or contact Rhanda Luna rluna@austinopera.org.

Austin Opera is strong, and moving forward through difficult times. Thank you for your patronage and continuous support, and please reach out with any questions or concerns about Austin Opera's response to the Covid-19 crisis.

AUSTIN
OPERA
GUILD
presents



VIENNA FANTASIE

Serenata Opera Ball

SERENATA 2020 VIENNA FANTASIE OPERA BALL: When Fantasy Became Reality

By Paula Damore, Suzanne Breitbach, Michael Garza, and Roger Kahlbau

Fantasy was brought to life when elegantly gowned and tuxedoed attendees in their finest attire gathered at the Four Seasons Ballroom and Foyer to toast honorees Elisabeth and Steffen Waltz and ultimately raise a record-breaking \$250,000 to fund the future of Austin Opera's artistic excellence and truly innovative educational programs. Heartfelt thanks go out to each and every person who generously contributed to the fabulous success of our joint effort. We are most grateful to Serenata sponsors, auction donors, attendees, bidders, event volunteers, staff...most especially the indefatigable members of the Serenata 2020 Auction Committee. **PLEASE SAVE THE DATE of SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021.** We eagerly anticipate seeing you at the Four Seasons for next year's Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction!



Live from Indy Terrace

As Austin Opera follows shelter in place orders, Inside Indy Terrace is not coming from our physical rehearsal hall but from the spirit it embodies. As everyone settles into home offices and gets accustomed to new ways to communicate and collaborate, Austin Opera is working hard to continue to bring opera to Austin.

Despite the inherent challenges of these unprecedented times, the opportunity for ingenuity is abundant. It's a great pleasure to bring you our new Live from Indy Terrace series, broadcast each Friday at 3:00 p.m. and we hope you've enjoyed watching the episodes as much as we have enjoyed creating them. It allows us to continue our mission and connection to you through the medium of opera.



Austin Opera staff member Laura Carrisosa stands behind the camera as Claudia Chapa records her episode of Live from Indy Terrace, with Maimy Fong at the piano.

As the need for physical distancing continues, we hope you find respite and community in the digital world. We send thoughts of gratitude for you, our Opera Family, and for the beauty of the art form we cherish and love. Take care, and we'll "see" you this Friday at 3:00 p.m. for the next episode of Live from Indy Terrace.

We are not alone. OPERA America recently compiled a useful resource of digital offerings and we'd like to share it with you. This list is not exhaustive, but a terrific launching point for exploring the streamed operatic (and classical) landscape. See OPERA America's Schedule of Virtual Opera Performances [Here](#).

As the need for physical distancing continues, we

For more on what we are doing, visit us online: <https://austinopera.org/inside-indy-terrace/>

Turandot: Many Sources, One Great Opera

By Lissa Anderson

Like the plot of so many operas, the story that inspired Puccini's *Turandot* took a long and winding path from its origin to the operatic stage. Moreover, the story wandered through several lands, besides the China of the imagination, on its way to La Scala in Milan, Italy.

The original story comes from a 12th-century epic, *Haft Peykar*, by Persian poet Nizami. But the icy princess, called Turandokht, or "daughter of Turan," is identified in the first line as Russian, not Persian. In the Nizami tale, the princess first requires "a good name and good deeds," and then poses her three riddles. Next the story appeared in *Les Mille et un jours* (*The Thousand and One Days*, 1710–1712) by François Pétil de la Croix. A source for this work indicates that the princess was a Mongol. An Italian count, Carlo Gozzi, found the tale in *Les Mille et un jours* and turned it into a *commedia dell'arte* play. Gozzi's work inspired many other writers, translators, composers, and theatre directors, from Bertolt Brecht to Carl Maria von Weber, to take a turn at the story. Puccini first read the Gozzi play in a translation of a version by Friedrich Schiller.

Puccini's glorious music also traveled an interesting path. Those un-Italian melodies that meander through the score came from a music box. A former diplomat to China gave the toy, which played Chinese melodies, to Puccini, who employed three of the tunes in the opera. Perhaps most notable is the folk melody *Mo Li Hua* ("Jasmine Flower") that is first sung by a children's chorus in Act 1 and then becomes a theme for *Turandot*.



Education and Community Engagement Program

By Cathy Collins

What does a music educator in Hong Kong have in common with music educators in the schools in Austin, Texas? They both have used Austin Opera's Online Education Resources to introduce students to Opera. More about that later.

Austin Opera Guild Board members, Bill Wallace and Chris Duval, chair the guild's Education and Community Engagement program. In the course of one year, over 15,000 school kids participate in Austin Opera's educational programs. For younger kids, there is an Opera Treasure Chest which allows the kids to play with puppets, become a king or queen for the afternoon, and listen to music to expand their minds to the story of opera. All of the materials (books, puppets, props, etc.) travel from school to school in large trunks. Guild members assist monthly with Opera Treasure Chest inventory, clean-up, and repairs so every time a chest visits a new school, it is well organized and ready to go.

With older students, trained docents share multi-media PowerPoint presentations in the schools to prepare students to attend a live opera performance. Guild members are actively involved in the creation of our multi-media presentations. Guild docents attend two training sessions prior to each new production. The first is a deep dive into the opera itself and involves background information on the creation of the opera along with careful analysis of the story and the music. The second session focuses on the PowerPoint presentation and how we best connect with students of all ages. Guild docents provide presentations for a variety of groups beyond schools, including home school co-ops and library programs. Free tickets are provided for students to attend the final dress rehearsal of the opera. This event, our Access Opera program, is a big hit and tickets go quickly. For schools with limited resources, Austin Opera pays fees associated with bus transportation as well. Even the local Girl Scout Troops have jumped on the opera bandwagon. An Austin Opera merit badge can now be earned for opera performances and enrichment.

Now, getting back to Hong Kong and Austin. In January 2020, as the Coronavirus was impacting China and schools were closing, a savvy music teacher was looking online for resources to help her students learn while quarantined at home. Using a Google search, she came upon Austin Opera's Access Opera Units, multi-media units with approachable lesson plans and Animated Listening

ONLINE OPERA LEARNING

<https://austinopera.org/education/online-opera-learning/>

Maps. Being impressed with what she saw and wanting to gain access to the PowerPoints, this educator contacted Debra Erck, Austin Opera's Director of Education. She provided the required password to download the requested materials in addition to sharing other resources Austin Opera has for teaching opera to students of all ages. Since then, educators in the United Kingdom and Ireland have also requested further guidance. Check out Austin Opera, we are now a global entity.

Great Interpreters of Turandot

by Bill Wallace

As soon as *Turandot* had its premiere at Milan's Teatro alla Scala on April 25, 1926 it was recognized that the title role was extremely difficult to sing. This is due to the tessitura of the role, the volume needed to ride over the dense orchestration, the expressiveness needed to convey the violence of the character, and the placement of key phrases in the *passaggio*. Callas cited the "nervousness" of the singing as being difficult.

Both Toscanini and Puccini agreed that the fine Polish soprano Rosa Raisa would be ideal choice for the premiere. The role did not remain in repertoire for long and is sometimes thought to be the reason she lost her vocal abilities at an early age.

The first truly great *Turandot* first appeared in Brescia shortly after the premiere. She was the great Lancaster, England born soprano, Eva Turner. She immediately became the reigning *Turandot* in Italy, Great Britain and South America. It is said that she had a voice that was born to sing the role. Many connoisseurs of singing still consider her to be the greatest *Turandot*. After retiring from singing she taught at the university of Oklahoma.



Toscanini and Puccini

The glamorous Maria Jeritza introduced *Turandot* to the Metropolitan Opera in November of 1926. She performed the role 16 times after which the opera was not repeated at the Met until Brigit Nilsson took it up in the 1950's.

Nilsson had a great success with the role especially when she was paired with the Calaf of Franco Corelli. They famously dueled over who could hold their high c's the longest. Nilsson said she would rather sing three *Isolde* rather than one *Turandot*. She also quipped that *Isolde* made her famous and *Turandot* made her rich.

Other famous exponents of the role include Maria Nemeth, Maria Callas, and Gwyneth Jones. Gina Cinga was the first to record the complete opera. Most recently Lisa Lindstrom, who sang the role with Austin Opera during the 2011-2012 season, has become the leading *Turandot*. The opera world is anxiously awaiting Anna Netrebko's debut in the role.

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!

THE ART OF EMOTIONS

Josep Rota

Drama, music, poetry, visual art and dance combine to articulate life with all its nuance. Opera uses the best instrument of all in the choice to recreate on stage the range of human passions using the power of the voice with its unparalleled ability to move us.

Life, love, lust, loss, passion, joy, anger, fidelity and betrayal, excitement and fear, victory or death, the sweet soprano with angel sounds portrays our collective experience; the tenor lends his power to reflect on who we are, with soaring sounds and mellow appeals, rippling notes speak of how we relate to others, how we navigate between emotions and duty, and what it means to be human, to be alive.

Opera, the art of emotions, binds us together in a community that shares a love for one of the most exalted forms of artistic expression created by humans, a mirror also of our reality, our dreams, fears, anxieties, fantasies and aspirations. Each of us has climbed our own Everest, faced a Duke of Mantua and empathized with Gilda, singing Caro Nome with our voice or recalling the voices of Callas or Fleming.

We have surely also had to endure trials that remind us of Calaf because in our youth we coveted a throne in an imagined palace blind to the foolishness of the riddles that our Princess Turandot was forcing on us. The hardships we witness in opera are an invitation to step out of our own fears and into love with our own life; they allow our dreams to blossom. Opera is a reservoir of enduring teachings, tenuous as light diffused through rice paper or dazzling as the iridescent glow of gems but made unforgettable by the music.

Opera at its best instills in us the unfaltering belief that there is always room to grow, that alternative possibilities exist, admitting change and treasuring the vicissitudes of life. A reminder as well of forgotten dreams, opera becomes the palimpsest of memory. Music is ephemeral but the feelings it evokes live on in our hearts. The arias we remember are like dew drops rinsing away melancholy not only when they are romantic but also when they make us feel the rage of Iago's rant or the evil intent of Scarpia's Te Deum.

Opera invites us to remove peripheral noise and dwell in the present where we are free to recreate our past and reimagine our future.

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A message from our partners at Freestyle



Austinites interested in building proficiency in Spanish, French, and Italian - join FLC for an info session! Learn more about our interactive classes for adults (proven to take students from complete beginner to advanced), culturally-rich curriculum, and dynamic events to practice speaking in relevant contexts.

PLUS: Austin Opera community members enjoy 10% off the cost of the core course! Use code opera10

Link to RSVP to this FREE information session April 25th:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/238235893897478/>

Letter from Cathy Collins, Guild President 2019-2020

Hello Opera Lovers,

As I write this last letter as your Opera Guild President, I am practicing my enforced social distancing and staying away from everyone. What a different world we now live in. What will become our new normal? Fortunately, we have the ability to reach out with all our smart devices; so we continue to be connected albeit in a much different form. We fortunately have a wonderful Opera Company which will come back stronger next season and we will once again attend the world class performances we have come to enjoy.



I think there will be a few caveats that occur this fall when we open our new season. The music will be richer and more enduring, the voices will resonate with deeper emotion than previously heard, the scenery and costumes will be more vivid and lush than we remember, and the greetings we give to one another will be more genuine in their nature. Social distancing will give way to social interaction. Something to look forward to.

Our fabulous wine dinner, auction, and gala, Serenata, was held on 15 February and the Opera Guild was delighted to honor dear friends Elisabeth and Steffen Waltz. It was a lovely evening in Vienna by way of the Four Seasons in Austin, Texas. Serenata raised approximately \$250,000. Many thanks to everyone who helped make the evening such a splendid success. Please put on your calendars, Saturday, 27 February 2021 when the Opera Guild honors Sarah and Ernest Butler and their incredible generosity.

Over the past year as president, I have come to know many more people within our organization. I see and much more appreciate all the work that goes into running a company like ours. I knew the Opera staff was a class act but in working with them more intimately, I found that they are really great people you want to be around. The work they do is innovative and important. Who used that *Everest* app to capture the sound and the peril that those climbers faced? How awesome was that?? The board of Trustees is a group of people who are very busy in their own professional careers yet give of themselves to make the decisions that are needed to run this dynamic Opera Company. The guild board does really important volunteer work as well. This includes the Membership and Enrichment Parties that are offered as a perk for our members, our communications group which provides pictures and this great libretto, our education and community engagement group which provides opera education to local schools, the support services and volunteer operations which help make things go smoothly with our visiting artists and all the mail outs the opera office sends out. Please consider volunteering for any of these worthwhile committees, you will be glad you did.

I now say my farewell to you. I hope my term as President provided continued leadership for our guild and I'm sure the new President will continue the same legacy that all Presidents have pursued.

All the best,

Cathy Collins
Cathy Collins