COUNTING DOWN TO SERENATA 2018 by Diana Ferguson and Paula Damore

Our annual Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction takes place on Saturday, February 17 in the Grand Ballroom of the JW Marriott Austin. This year’s theme is Libiamo, a nod to the famous drinking song from Austin Opera’s spring production of La traviata. For those of you new to the Guild, Serenata is our major fundraiser, bringing in more than $200K annually to Austin Opera.

What does our Wine Dinner Committee have planned for the more than 300 guests expected to attend? An evening to remember!

This year we pay special tribute to Wendi and Brian Kushner, who have been tireless supporters of Austin Opera. Wendi recently completed her term as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Austin Opera.

The evening, which will be emceed by Ron Oliveira, begins at 6:00 with a champagne reception and viewing of the Silent Auction. An elegant seated dinner follows at 7:00, with wine pairings specially selected for each course by Twin Liquors. Issachah Savage, our Radamès from Aida two seasons ago, will serenade us during dinner.

In addition to exclusive wines, more than 130 items will be available in our Live and Silent Auctions. One of this year’s featured items is tickets for 2 couples to the four-day Bregenz Festival held in the Austrian Alps, a donation made by Board Chairman Elisabeth Waltz and her husband Steffen.

Following the bidding, guests will hit the dance floor to music of Reunion, a band headed by our Board President, Stephen Jeffrey.

For those of you who have not yet purchased tickets we invite you to support Austin Opera by attending! You can go to 501Auctions.com/Serenata2018 to register online, or call Angie Bonnici at 512-610-7668 to make your reservations by phone.

Once you’ve made your reservations, you may review the items up for bid online. New this year, bidding will be done using 501Auction mobile bidding, so please be sure to bring your smartphones. Volunteers will also be on hand with iPads to help bidders.

We look forward to seeing you at Serenata on February 17!
To all Guild members: A donation is needed to buy wines for the Guild Wine Basket to be included the Live Auction at Serenata.

Please send any donation to Guild President Marcy Melanson at 901 W 9th Street, #201, Austin, Texas 78703.

**ARIADE AUF NAXOS DIRECTOR’S NOTE** by Jennifer Williams

What do opera and pop culture have in common? More than you might think. Francesca Zambello’s vibrant production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (ARE-EE-ODD-NAY OWF KNOCK-SOSE) brings into focus the culture clash that unexpectedly yields a story about the transformative power of love.

Updated to our present day, the story takes place at a dude ranch – not unlike Rancho Cortez. The conflict is between classical musicians from the elite conservatory of UT and a garish rock band. Their worlds collide when their patron demands they perform their radically different pieces simultaneously. Chaos ensues as the unlikely collaborators try to find a common language. Sheltered by her slick agent, the young, fiery Composer desperately attempts to protect the debut of her brilliant – though esoteric – masterwork. She discovers that her nemesis – the flashy dancer, Zerbinetta – may actually be her soulmate. In the performance of “Ariadne auf Naxos” that follows, the mythical Ariadne’s trajectory mirrors that of the Composer: she chooses to cast aside her fear of the unknown and embrace the thrilling, and terrifying, transformative power of love.

Troy Hourie’s dazzling set evokes the posh world of a luxury ranch. Mirroring the story, we watch it transform poetically from a literal space into a figurative one. Erik Teague’s steampunk-inspired costumes bring all the story’s vibrant personalities to life: the glamorous Primadonna, the narcissistic Tenor, the flamboyant Zerbinetta and her colorful boy band, the chic young Composer; the snarky Ranch-hand; and many more. The clash of languages in Kelley Rourke’s witty adaptation brings to the foreground the clash of values between the classical musicians (who sing in German) and the rock band (who interrupt them in English). The audience has the great joy of watching these characters seek compromise despite speaking different languages – literally and figuratively. Andrew Harper’s choreography brings an unexpected element to the Austin Opera stage: Zerbinetta and her band’s wild dance numbers just might steal the show!

This unforgettable production reminds us why we come to the opera: to witness the transformation of the human spirit – and to have a great time!

The 2017-2018 season is dedicated to Jeanette & Ferris Nassour in gratitude for their transformational estate gift to Austin Opera
ALEKS ROMANO, MEZZO METEOR ON THE RISE by Michael Solomon

After a rare turn in a dress, rising star mezzo-soprano Aleks Romano is happily back in pants. Sort of.

In Austin Opera’s production of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, originally produced by The Glimmerglass Festival, the character of the Composer is reimagined as a woman. So it’s not the conventional “pants” role usually foisted upon mezzos.

This is good news for Austin Opera audiences, since Aleks Romano is not a conventional singer. She is making her Austin Opera debut right as she’s entering a peak period in her young career. She recently made a very well-received role debut as Carmen at Madison Opera, a landmark role for any mezzo and one that will figure prominently in her career, if future engagements are any measure. “*Carmen* has always been my favorite opera, so it was a real dream-coming-true experience to finally sing it on stage!” she tells *The Libretto*. “Working so closely with the director, E. Loren Meeker, I discovered so much more about the depth of my character. She’s endlessly fascinating. Getting to know her is going to be a lifelong journey for me.”

Prior to her triumph as Carmen, Aleks spent the summer at Glimmerglass, making her role debut alongside Leah Crocetto in Donizetti’s rarely performed *The Siege of Calais*, where she shone in the role of Aurelio, a real showcase for a mezzo (in pants, of course). Previously, Aleks was a Young Artist for two seasons at Glimmerglass, and also completed two seasons in Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program. After completing the Washington program, she was invited back to sing on the mainstage in perhaps the ultimate pants role, Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

And now, in her season of role debuts, she takes on Strauss’s beleaguered but ultimately lovebound Composer for the first time. “Strauss’s music is so joyous, and I am enjoying delving into all of its intricacies,” she says. “Singing the line ‘Music is a gift from the gods’ is an honor for any singer lucky enough to sing this role.”

Aleks also feels lucky to be in our fair city. “This is also my first time in Austin, and while I’m really enjoying rehearsal, I can’t wait to go out and explore this city. And eat. And go shopping. I can’t leave town without a new pair of boots!”

And, one hopes, a new pair of pants, too.

### Guild Calendar 2018

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<td>Saturday 1/27</td>
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WINTER MEMBERSHIP PARTY by Cathy Collins

More than 100 Guild members and their guests celebrated the beginning of the holiday season on December 2nd at the festively decorated home of Mary Ellen and Roger Borgelt.

The party began with our ever-loyal volunteers greeting party-goers with their name tags, accepting their yummy treats, and, of course, filling their glasses with wine or sparkling wine. The Austin Opera community cannot thank Twin Liquors enough for their ongoing and very generous support to help make all parties a success.

After the party was well underway, Guild President Marcy Melanson welcomed the guests and thanked our hosts for opening their home. She then introduced our esteemed maestro, Richard Buckley, who reiterated his thanks for all the Guild does to make Austin Opera the world-class organization that it is. His remarks generated a round of applause as each person present knows this to be true. All Guild members who donate their time, money, and efforts do so with a giving attitude, and we do it because we receive so much in return.

The evening continued with a short note from our new-no-longer General Director, Annie Burridge. She has been with us one year now, and look how far we have come! She introduced Austin’s own Julia Taylor, who sang the part of Frasquita in the most recent production of Carmen. Ms. Taylor performed several beautiful arias, beginning with a mesmerizing “Ave Maria” and ending with a holiday singalong. Nyle Matsuoka, Austin Opera’s Principal Coach and Pianist, accompanied her on the Borgelt’s beautiful grand piano.

When it was time to say good-bye, our very important volunteer clean-up crew sprang into action. The Membership Committee thanks you for quickly putting the house back into the pre-party condition. If you have not volunteered for any party job, please consider doing so; it’s a wonderful way to get to know people.

On behalf of the Guild membership, we wish you and your family a healthy and prosperous New Year.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE GUILD by Mack Lindsey

Looking to volunteer? That’s what the Guild is here for, and we value your help in many different ways! Do you have expertise, creativity, or just a little time? We have needs that involve activity with groups, at home, at the Opera office, in the community, and at events, even opera performances. And we need your help in several different functional areas. For these, check out austinopera.org/guild/volunteer.

To learn more about any of these opportunities, or to find out about upcoming needs, contact Lorie Imken at la.imken@gmail.com or Mack Lindsey at mclindsey75@gmail.com.

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!
**CARMEN SUCCEEDS IN WOWING STUDENTS** by Diana Ferguson and Paula Damore

More than 1,200 Opera Access students poured into the Long Center to see the dress rehearsal of *Carmen*. When the curtain came down two hours later, the roar from the students sounded more like the cheers for a much-needed football touchdown. It’s this kind of success that builds audiences for the future – the goal of the Education and Community Engagement Committee (ECE).

Fall is always a slow time due to school activities, and *Carmen* is well known, so just 3 presentations were made. Thanks go to Diane Ingram, Lissa Anderson and Bill Wallace for making those presentations to groups that ranged from elementary/middle schools to retirees at The Conservatory.

With 10 members now on our Docent/Assistants team, we’re busy establishing a process that prepares our members to give the most effective presentations possible.

In addition to Access Opera and docent work, committee members served as ambassadors for various community events related to *Carmen*, which were arranged by Austin Opera Director of Education, Debra Erck.

If you would like to participate in our work of introducing people to opera and helping guests feel welcome at events, please contact either Diana Ferguson or Paula Damore. There’s a spot for everyone on Education and Community Engagement!

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**AUSTIN OPERA CONGRATULATES TWIN LIQUORS ON THEIR 80TH ANNIVERSARY AND THE OPENING OF THEIR NEW TWIN LIQUORS MARKETPLACE ON SOUTH LAMAR**

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Austin’s Cap10K run is coming up April 8, 2018 – be sure to join Austin Opera Runner’s Group! Participate with us and check this off your “Austin Bucket List.” Austin Opera would love to have a group of 25 or more runners (or walkers!) so we can have an Austin Opera tent at the finish line. For your $40 registration fee, you will receive an official Cap10K t-shirt, a finisher’s medal, and an Austin Opera t-shirt. For more information, contact Brenda Wendel at brenda.wendel@goosehead.com.
DINING WITH THE GUILD – JEANETTE NASSOUR OPENING NIGHT DINNERS by Lissa Anderson

Wine and bubbly generously provided by Twin Liquors! Appetizers to tease your tongue! A menu worthy of Austin’s best restaurants! Glamorous table settings and surroundings! Schmoozing with friends old and new! What’s not to love about the Austin Opera Guild’s Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner Series?

Opera fans have long enjoyed the elegant dinner in the Long Center’s Kodosky Lounge that precedes the curtain on opening night. But how does the event take shape? What plans must be made to ensure a successful evening? The answers require input regarding the opera’s setting, budget limits, previous hits and misses, and what the caterer can manage under challenging circumstances. That last item is particularly tricky, because the Long Center does not have a full kitchen. Therefore, the caterer—the excellent Sterling Events—must work miracles within strict food preparation guidelines and safety laws. Sterling’s President Larry Kille and Director of Sales Lily White do a remarkable job of guiding their talented chefs to perform the difficult feat of delivering a stellar meal. Sterling’s Floral / Décor / Event Planner, Elena Valdes, enhances the evening with beautiful tablescapes and lighting.

For some dinners, determining the theme is easier than others. If the opera is set in a specific country at a certain time, the menu and decorations follow smoothly. But what if the early 20th-century opera contains elements of ancient Greek myth, the German language, a rock band, and a ranch in Texas? Such is the case with Ariadne auf Naxos. The solution? Call a meeting! Committee members Lissa Anderson, Marcia Toprac, Anne Clark, Christine Duval, Mary Ellen Borgelt, and Judy Walling met to wrangle the possibilities... So, send in your reservation as soon as you receive the invitation, and you will be assured of a delicious meal and a memorable evening.

NEW MEMBER PARTY by Marcy Melanson

The annual New Member party was held at the Nokonah Condo party room on October 8th.

There were 23 attendees - 12 new members and 8 Guild board members. Also, we were graced to have Angie Bonnici, Sharon Sparlin and Molly Anderson join us as the luminaries from Austin Opera.

Everyone introduced themselves and each committee gave a presentation on their duties and answered any questions.

As with all Guild functions, we ate and drank and a lovely time was had by all!
AUSTIN OPERA GUILD SUPPORT SERVICES by Laurence Bjorkman and Stacy Brunson

Austin Opera Guild Support Services “meets and greets” artists coming to perform at Austin Opera. We coordinate airport-to-lodging transportation for singers arriving in Austin, and provide a hefty bag of goodies to greet each one.

The Production Coordinator Rebecca Graham-Forbis at the Opera office communicates the flight schedules of cast members to Support Services approximately three weeks before rehearsals begin. Members of the cast arrive on different flights over the span of a few days, and Support Services creates a schedule to ensure that each artist is met by an Opera Guild volunteer, and then transported to a rental car facility outside of the airport [where less expensive rates are available,] or to his or her lodging. Artists who arrive the afternoon or evening before rehearsals begin are typically not interested in dining or socializing, but most appreciate a side trip to a grocery store on the way to their lodging.

Support Services provides the driver volunteers who pick up the cast members. Volunteers have “Welcome” gift baskets for the cast members, from Austin Opera Guild members and local business donations, stocked with snacks, water, gift certificates to local restaurants, Austin Opera memorabilia, local magazines, books, and other articles that are heavily Austin-themed. The bags also contain each artist’s rehearsal schedule.

Please consider donating goods or gift certificates to these baskets!

CARMEN’S ENRICHMENT PARTY by Evelyn S. Meditz

Wine flowed amid delectable heavy hors d’oeuvres at Carmen’s October Enrichment party. Hosted at the gorgeous home of past Guild president Curby Conoley, the event featured Opera’s own speaker, Katharine Shields, and a return of talented director Michael Cavanagh (also known from his work on Austin Opera's Tosca in 2014).
Letter from Marcy Melanson, Guild President 2017-2018

Hello again!
Hope everyone had a lovely holiday!

We have started the season with lots of vigor and activity including the New Members Party at the Nokonah, Kick-off Party held at Cornelia and John Wood’s beautiful home, and the Education and Community Engagement Committee gave presentations to schools and retirement communities.

I hope everyone had chance to see the wildly successful presentation of Bizet’s Carmen. The Guild’s many activities surrounding the opera went beautifully:

- The singers were chauffeured from the airport and were supplied with welcome baskets
- Education and Community Engagement Committee gave presentations to schools and retirement communities
- Kick-off Party at Cornelia and John Wood’s home
- Enrichment event – Curby Conoley’s home
- Jeanette Nassour Opening Night Dinner Series
- Ambassadors welcomed guests to the Long Center at each performance

Continuing the events the Winter Members Party was held at Mary Ellen and Roger Borgelt’s beautiful Georgian home and members promoted the opera at the Armadillo Christmas Bazaar.

We now look forward to our many activities for Strauss’s Ariadne auf Naxos and the jewel of our Guild Activities:

The Serenata Wine Dinner & Auction on Saturday, February 17
at the JW Marriott Austin
Honoring Wendi and Brian Kushner for all they have done to ensure Austin Opera’s survival and continued growth. Thank you to both!
It is a beautiful evening, featuring a four-course wine paired dinner with entertainment and Live and Silent Auctions of rare wines, trips, jewelry, art, and much more.

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