

THE VOICE OF



AUSTIN
OPERA
GUILD

THE AUSTIN OPERA GUILD

Serenata 2019

By Suzanne Breitbach



Serenata Chairs: Roger Kahlbau, Suzanne Breitbach, Michael Garza

Theme of the evening: l'Amour Infini, inspired by *La Bohème*. The 2019 Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction transported you to Paris in the early 1840's the moment you arrived downstairs at the Four Seasons.

Starting with our own French artist sitting at a cafe, then down a French boulevard and into an open market filled with flowers and silent auction items. Each table in the ballroom displayed articles from Mimi's dressing table and one-of-a-kind hats inspired by Roger Kahlbau.



Suzanne Breitbach with French painter

Our honorees were Mary Ann & Andrew Heller who have given so much to Austin Opera.

After a four course French dinner with wine pairing from Twin Liquors, a performance by Baritone Craig Verm, we enjoyed a spirited Live Auction and completed our evening with music of Reunion. All of our committee want to send a very special thank you to Sue Hoke, for her tireless dedication to Austin Opera!

Don't miss next year!



Serenata wall panels evoke streets of Paris

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!

Austin Opera's Principal Coach Has All the Right Moves

By Michael Solomon

Mack Brown is not a Wagnerian, and Darrell Royal couldn't tell you the difference between Verdi and Puccini.

Luckily, Austin Opera has Nyle Matsuoka.

Nyle's official title is Austin Opera's Principal Coach and Pianist. What does that mean, I ask him? He laughs and says "Everything. I am the jack of all musical trades, and I wouldn't want it any other way."

Nyle, 34, is originally from Twin Falls, a small town in southern Idaho, but one with a strong musical community. Piano lessons started at age 10, and by the time he was 12 he had declared to his very supportive parents and grandparents that he was going to be a concert pianist.

Soon, though, he developed a diverting flirtation with the oboe, and he balanced his passion for both instruments through the beginning of college at Utah State University, where he finally settled on the major of piano performance.

"Even though I eventually chose the piano, I wouldn't be where I am today without the oboe," he explains. "The oboe was my conduit to the vocal repertoire. It's such an incredibly vocal instrument, and it really helped me understand my way around the voice, and how best to support it."

Nyle also admits that he wasn't always the biggest fan of a certain type of vocal music called (well, this is a bit awkward) opera. "When I was younger, I couldn't stand opera. I thought it was this ridiculous, absurd, nonsensical thing," he admits.

But halfway through college, as he was walking past the campus concert hall, he was stopped in his tracks by a trumpeter playing "Der Hölle Rache," the Queen of the Night's famous aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. "I thought, wow, using a body to make this kind of music is fascinating," he remembers. Sensing his world was about to change, he did what any young music student would do, "I got home, went on YouTube, and started listening to a million different versions of that aria, and that was the beginning of the end for me."



Nyle Matsuoka

Nyle came to Austin in 2009 to begin work on a master's degree in the new collaborative piano program at what is now the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas, under the tutelage of Anne Epperson. It was here in Austin that Nyle's love of the human voice intensified, and he began exploring the rest of the operatic repertoire.

"Listening to different instruments and different voices gives me more imagination at the piano as to what kinds of sounds and colors I can create," he says. "It's a fun challenge to figure out how to let the music breathe. Pianists can breathe all the time, singers don't have that luxury. But working together, we can make thrilling music."

Nyle saw his first Austin Opera productions while he was in graduate school. Prior to leaving Austin to do young artist residencies at Wolf Trap Opera and Arizona Opera, Nyle became well acquainted with the company's principal coach, Elden Little. After Elden took a faculty position at Michigan State University, Nyle eventually auditioned to replace him, and the rest is Austin Opera history.



Another organization that has been key to Nyle's decade in Austin is the Health Alliance for Austin Musicians (HAAM). In a city so well known for its live music scene, HAAM is an advocacy organization that ensures Austin's creative class has affordable access to health care resources. In late 2017, Nyle injured his left collarbone and was unable to play the piano for several months. HAAM stepped in to make the situation easier. "HAAM has been life altering. It's so important for Austin, where music is such a part of the fabric of the city, to have their help."



Nyle Matsuoka, Kitty Garza, and artist Austin Siebert

Once Austin Opera begins rehearsal for its mainstage productions, Nyle might play piano in rehearsal for nine hours a day, six days a week. In his "spare" time, he plays outreach events like the popular evenings at Chez Zee, plus recitals and master classes. He also has a busy schedule of private coachings for the company's principal singers, in addition to the regular students in his coaching studio.

But Nyle enjoys these intense bouts of music when he can immerse himself fully in a piece and work closely with Austin Opera's world-class conductors on crafting an opera's musical landscape. This season, he has worked with such luminaries as Steven White, Timothy Myers, and Peter Bay.

The project on his music stand now – Puccini’s classic *La bohème* – has proved to be a gratifying assignment. “*Bohème* is such a fun score to play in rehearsal,” he notes. “Puccini’s orchestrations always offer so many interesting colors and options at the keyboard.” So as the stirring notes of Puccini’s masterpiece linger with you after the performance, know that it was Nyle Matsuoka, the MVP of Austin Opera’s music staff and its principal coach and pianist, who helped organize the musical line of scrimmage.

The Paris of *La bohème*, circa 1840

by Chris DuVal and Lissa Anderson

Paris was the center for art, literature, and progressive thought. Great wealth and abject poverty were locked within a rigid social system that allowed little upward mobility. Only those of the merchant class wealthy enough to buy titles could advance their positions. The poor of France were considered the “wild, unsafe” class and deserving of poverty due to their laziness and bad character. Paris was a cramped, filthy city with narrow winding streets flowing with raw sewage. Diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis were rampant, especially among the destitute. Impoverished men survived as beggars or unskilled day laborers while women worked as servants or seamstresses. Desperate men, women, and children also engaged in prostitution to supplement their meager wages, as many among the moneyed classes believed sexual favors were their due. Like so many other Parisians, our poor *bohèmes* lived in squalor with inadequate food, sanitation, or medical care.

La bohème is inspired by the novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henry Murger, who based his



Paris panorama, 1846

work on real people and places. The Café Momus did exist and was one of many taverns where artists and gentry gathered for raucous entertainment and conversation. Puccini introduces us to four poverty-stricken friends: Rodolfo, a poet/playwright; Marcello, a painter; Colline, a philosopher, and Schaunard, a musician. Mimi, Rodolfo’s lover, is a seamstress. Later in the opera, Mimi has had to become a courtesan, like her friend Musetta. But since she was ill with TB, Mimi probably would not have been supported by the highest class of men. Musetta was in better circumstances but still had to depend on the indulgence of rich gentlemen. Marcello loves Musetta and is jealous of her occupation but is too poor to change their circumstances.

This is the Paris where we meet our six friends. *La bohème* is not only a romance but also a story of friendship, laughter, struggle, and death in the presence of entrenched social inequity and hopelessness.

Just do it - get involved with the actual casts of our spectacular Austin Opera!

by Sharon Sneed

Here are some tangible solutions for what you might do to accomplish this noble venture:

1. Sign up to shuttle out of town performers from the airport to their hotel. Along the way, find out the details, like "where are you from?", as a starter. "Do you have a family? What do they do when you are out of town and on the road? What is your greatest challenge when living out of a suitcase?"
2. Make a resolution for next season that you are going to attend the enrichment parties (which are always fantastic) and personally get to know three cast members. They are totally approachable. All performers have a natural bent toward getting to know their audience. They want to meet you, because if it were not for you, they would be singing to each other.
3. Write down their names so that when the performance goes live, YOU will be engaged. YOU will know a person on the big stage.
4. Go to the cast party and compliment them on their opening night performance.
5. Go home feeling good about yourself and the encouragement that you bring to others!

Call for Volunteers

by Bill Wallace

The Education and Community Engagement Committee is seeking volunteers for the 2019-2020 season. Our education program is growing rapidly and we need your help.

- It's Fun
- It's Important for the future of opera
- It's easy
- It can fit into your schedule

We provide:

- Two training sessions: one to learn the opera, the second to go over the audio visual power point
- A tech partner for each presentation
- Support and camaraderie
- You provide any of the following:
 - Enthusiasm about opera and our company
 - Presentation or tech assistance at Central Texas schools – usually about 45 minutes long

- Attend Access Opera (final dress rehearsal) to serve as ambassadors and to assist with activities (i.e. photo booth, concierge table, etc.) in the lobbies before the show and during intermission.
- Attend a Masterclass and assist with greeting, seating and a small reception at the conclusion of the event.
- Support our Opera Treasure Chest program by doing inventory and/or repairs of the materials sent out to schools during the school year.
- Write “thank you” notes to teachers and administrators at schools that participate in our programs.

The Reward:

- Introducing future audiences to the joy of this great art form
- Preparing them for their experience at Access Opera performance at our dress rehearsal

Contact Chris Duval at duvalchristine2@gmail.com or Bill Wallace at wkwtnt@att.net

Austin Opera awards Lisa Roebuck Opera Educator of the Year 2019

by Debra Erck

In our continued efforts to support and celebrate Fine Arts education in Central Texas, Austin Opera is excited to inaugurate a special award – the Austin Opera Educator of the Year Award. This award recognizes outstanding educators who creatively motivate and inspire students and colleagues through the arts disciplines.

We are thrilled to announce that our first recipient of the Austin Opera Educator of the Year Award for 2019 is Lisa Weinheimer Roebuck. Ms. Roebuck taught general music at the elementary level and choral music at the secondary level for 21 years. She currently serves as the Director of Fine Arts for Round Rock ISD. Round Rock ISD serves approximately 48,500 students that attend the district’s 55 campuses. She holds a Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Texas at Austin, Kodály Music Certification from Texas State University and a Masters in Educational Leadership from Lamar University.



Debra Erck, Austin Opera's Director of Education with winner Lisa Roebuck

Since becoming a full-time arts administrator in 2006, Lisa has been a champion for all teachers in the arts, creating district-wide curriculum, along with integrated and innovative professional development to support and empower teachers’ work in the classrooms. She has expanded opportunities for community arts partners, such as Austin Opera, to partner with teachers to provide meaningful and engaging programs to elevate the quality of their arts instruction on campuses across the district.

Lisa has served as the Elementary Music Region 26 Chair for the Texas Music Educators Association, and President of the Kodály Educators of Texas. She has also served on "The Vision Committee for Curriculum and Assessments in the Arts" with the Texas Music Administration Conference/Texas Music Educators Association and was selected by the State Board of Education to serve on the Fine Arts TEKS Revision Committee.

Thanks to Lisa's leadership and vision, 1000's of students in the Round Rock School district are experiencing opera through our Opera Treasure Chest and Access Opera educational programs.

Opera and Food Go Together

by Bill Wallace

Nellie Melba (1861-1931) was considered one of the greatest singers of the late 19th and early 20th century. She did a great deal to bring *La Boheme* into the operatic repertoire by insisting that it be included in the program almost everywhere she sang. She studied the role with Puccini and often partnered in it with Enrico Caruso.

Dame Nellie also enjoyed the pleasures of the table. The great chef Auguste Escoffier, who presided over the kitchens at London's Savoy Hotel, created a number of dishes in her honor. My favorite of these is Peche Melba which I make every year when peaches are at their height of ripeness.

Peach Melba

For the Peaches:

3 cups sugar

3 cups water

½ vanilla bean split lengthwise (optional)

6 ripe but firm peaches (preferably white peaches)

Combine the sugar and water in a small saucepan. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Add the vanilla bean. Bring to a boil over medium high heat, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat.



Bring a small pot of water to a boil. The water should be deep enough to cover the peaches. Dip the peaches into the water, in batches if necessary, for about 30 to 45 seconds. Carefully remove with a slotted spoon. Gently remove the skin from the peaches and then halve the peaches.

Bring the syrup back to a simmer. Add the peach halves, in batches in necessary. Cook for about 4 to 5 minutes, or until peaches are soft but still firm enough to hold their shape. As they are done remove them with a slotted spoon to a plate.

The syrup can be kept in the refrigerator and used again.

For the sauce:

2 pints of fresh raspberries or two cups frozen raspberries

Sugar as needed

Lemon juice as needed

Puree the raspberries in a food processor. Add sugar and lemon juice to taste. You may pass the raspberries through a sieve if you want to remove the seeds.

Set the sauce aside.

Everything to this point may be prepared in advance.

For Crème Chantilly:

2 cups of heavy whipping cream, well chilled

¼ cup of powdered sugar, or to taste

1 1/2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract

Chill a bowl and beaters in the freezer. Add the cream to the bowl and whip until blade traces form. Gradually add the sugar as you continue beating, add the vanilla while finishing the beating.

Set aside in the refrigerator.

To Serve:

6 cold bowls

6 large balls of best quality premium vanilla ice cream.

Place the ice cream in the bowls. Arrange 2 peach halves on each ice cream ball. Coat the peaches with a generous amount of the raspberry sauce. Top with the crème Chantilly. Serve immediately.

Serves 6

La bohème: Climbing the Verdant Slope of Youth

By Kelley Rourke

“Today, as of old, every man who enters on an artistic career, without any other means of livelihood than his art itself, will be forced to walk in the paths of Bohemia. The greatest number of our contemporaries who display the noblest blazonry of art have been Bohemians, and amidst their calm and prosperous glory they often recall, perhaps with regret, the time when, climbing the verdant slope of youth, they had no other fortune in the sunshine of their twenty years than courage, which is the virtue of the young, and hope, which is the wealth of the poor.”

—Henry Murger, *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*

Despite economic challenges, the artistic life continues to draw aspiring artists to walk in Murger’s “paths of Bohemia.” According to data compiled by the National Endowment for the Arts, there are more than two million artists in the U.S. workforce, and just over one-third of them are self-employed.



photo of La bohème set

Stage director Alison Moritz has encountered *La bohème* many times in her career, but this is her first opportunity to direct the show. Regardless of the period in which a production is set, she feels the opera remains fresh and relevant: “Everyone has a first love,” says Moritz. “Whether that is a creative passion or a romantic passion, everyone has had that experience of being molded by the crucible of feeling so passionately about someone or something.”

The Italian composer Giacomo Puccini had only one real hit to his name when he wrote *La bohème* (1896). His first opera, *Le Villi*, was written for an 1883 competition for new one-act operas. Although it did not win, it was later staged and enjoyed modest success at its premiere; however, it was not published until 1887, making it difficult for other opera companies to produce it. *Edgar* (1889), Puccini’s next opera, was not a success; part of the blame was placed on the librettist. But with *Manon Lescaut* (1893), Puccini had his first triumph. After his experience with *Edgar*, he was determined to write his own libretto, but he eventually ended up working with the writers Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, who crafted the story and verses, respectively. Following the success of their first collaborative effort, *Manon Lescaut*, Puccini continued to work with Illica and Giacosa for *La bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madame Butterfly* (1904), his most enduring operas.

Henri Murger drew from his own experiences as a fledgling writer to write *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*, a series of loosely connected portraits of young artists. Puccini and his librettists used some of Murger's events and characters as a starting point for their opera, which was also colored by their own experiences. Puccini later commented, "I lived that Bohème, when there wasn't yet any thought stirring in my brain of seeking the theme of an opera."



Director, Alison Moritz

Moritz points out that the adventures of the young bohemians speak to a universal human experience: "There is a transitional period in every young person's life, where you begin to create a family outside of your biological family," she says. "These are the people who forge your tastes and predilections and the kind of adult you're going to become. We've all had that group of friends, those people who imprint on you so strongly."

"I'm interested in exploring art as a lifestyle with these characters," continues Moritz, pointing out that many artists working today put as much energy into curating a social media persona as they put into creating work in another medium. "In the opera, you get a strong sense of the men as artists and women as simply girlfriends. But what they all share is a kind of genius for living, for creating a certain kind of beautiful life, and that feels incredibly relevant to today."

Moritz believes Rodolfo has to be changed forever by the experience of loving and losing Mimì. "I always wonder what he is going to do next. Is he going to create a work of great genius, or is he going to give up this life and go work for his rich uncle? As soon as you've made one decision, you become nostalgic for other iterations of what your life might have been. That's what makes *Bohème* so palpably, viscerally engaging."

Although *La bohème* received mixed reviews at its opening, it was quickly taken up by opera companies across the world—by 1900, the four-year-old opera had been given in Paris, Buenos Aires, Alexandria, Lisbon, Moscow, London, Los Angeles, Berlin and Prague—and endures as one of the most popular pieces in the repertory.

"Their mind is kept ever on the alert by their ambition, which sounds a charge in front and urges them to the assault of the future," wrote Murger. "Incessantly at war with necessity, their invention always marching with lighted match blows up the obstacle almost before it incommodes them."

—Henry Murger, *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*

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Upcoming Events

Friday, April 19	*Kendra Scott Fundraiser for Austin Opera	6:00 PM	Kendra Scott – Domain Location
Monday, April 22	*Moulin Rouge Movie Party	7:00 PM	Alamo Drafthouse: Mueller
Thursday, April 25	ACCESS OPERA: <i>La bohème</i>	7:00 PM	Long Center for the Performing Arts
Saturday, April 27	<i>La bohème</i> Performance	7:30 PM	Long Center
Tuesday, April 30	<i>La bohème</i> Master Class	6:30 PM	Austin Opera Office
Thursday, May 2	<i>La bohème</i> Performance	7:30 PM	Long Center
Sunday, May 5	<i>La bohème</i> Performance	2:30 PM	Long Center
Tuesday, May 14	Guild Board Meeting	11:15 AM	Bucca di Beppo
Wednesday, May 15	Staff Appreciation Lunch	11:30 AM	Austin Opera Office
Sunday, May 19	Spring Awards Party	4:00 PM	Home of Annie Burridge

*denotes Austin Opera partnership events

Letter from Rosy Moore, Guild President 2018-2019**April 8, 2019**

Dear Guild Members and Opera Lovers:

I can't believe that the 32nd Austin Opera Season is almost over. It's been an exciting opera season with classical operas, festive concerts, and innovative works. We have a vibrant city filled with music enthusiasts, and Austin Opera is making headlines nationwide for the best opera performances.

In January and February, we were treated to the Austin premiere of the Pulitzer Prize winning opera, *Silent Night*, which was a huge success. In addition, the community was thrilled with special events leading up to the opera as well. This included a showing of the movie, *Joyeux Noël*, at the Alamo Drafthouse, as well as the opportunity to take in the sights of the Texas Military Forces Museum at Camp Mabry.



Thanks to the efforts of the Austin Opera Guild, the Serenata Wine Dinner and Auction was a dazzling extravaganza. Special recognition goes to the Chairs Suzanne Breitbach, Roger Kahlbau, and Michael Garza. The amazing French theme of *La Bohème* was a great visual treat. It is amazing what it takes for the Guild to plan and execute this event, which raised about \$200,000 for Austin Opera. The efforts led by Marcia Toprac and Jim Green for the live and silent auctions turned into hundreds of volunteer hours to obtain the items for the auctions. Thanks to the leadership team and all the volunteers for all the hard work in ensuring that the gala was a huge accomplishment.

Last weekend's Opera ATX's innovative production of David T. Little's *Soldier Songs* was the realization of a dream to expand the opera audience by combining elements of theatre, opera, rock-infused concert music and animation. Next year's Opera ATX production will be Schubert's *Winterreise*. Stay tuned.

We are closing the 32nd opera season with the beloved Puccini's *La Bohème*, the story of the struggle to fulfill dreams and to find true love.

The Austin Opera Guild recently lost one of the most beloved benefactors and supporters of Austin Opera. Steve Barbaro will be dearly missed.

I am deeply grateful to the Austin Opera Guild, who have helped me this season to share the excitement of the opera.

See you at the Opera!

Rosy Moore

President, Austin Opera Guild