

BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

February 2023

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>

FEBRUARY 15, 2023

SWEETHEART LUNCHEON

Honoring Angela Korsmo

Meeting 10:30

Sweetheart Celebration 11:00
Singers from Sarasota Opera

Lunch

Interview

Remarks by Angela

**Send Your Reservation by Wednesday,
February 8 to:**

Cathy Knobel

787 Ben Franklin Drive,

Sarasota, FL 34236

Telephone: 941-706-2490

**Menu: Chicken Milanese (Parmesan-
Encrusted Chicken Breast With Olive Oil
and Balsamic Drizzle,**

**Baby Arugula, Tomato, Grilled Lemon
and Wild Rice.**

Dessert: Black Forest Cake

\$35 or \$50/Patron

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thank you to all our members who brought their beautiful accessory items for our Apprentice Artists. Martha Collins writes that the event was *very* popular with the young singers. Perhaps you will be rewarded by seeing your items on display on the stage at the *Stars of Tomorrow Concert* on February 5. That would be an added pleasure to an already very pleasurable event.

Our February Meeting is always devoted to one of our members who has shown outstanding service to our Guild, our "sweetheart." This year's honors go to **Angela Korsmo**, a woman who doesn't seem to know the word "no," at least not where the Guild is concerned. We can count on Angela to pitch in to make each of our events go smoothly, from preparing food, selling tickets, making favors, and giving generously to our events. She is also the Board Secretary and graciously hosts our board meetings each month at her spacious kitchen table. **Please come and show Angela our gratitude.**

The Fashion Show is coming at the end of February, on the 28th. While the women of the Guild particularly love this event, gentlemen are certainly invited. The lunch is always delicious at Lakewood Ranch Country Club, and singer(s) from Sarasota Opera will be there to entertain and amaze. Thanks to Syble DiGirolamo, Barbara Quinn, Sandy Rath and Elizabeth Aversa for organizing the event, and all the helpers whether through selling tickets, organizing and donating to the basket that will be auctioned, doing invitations, taking reservations, programs, and table decorations. And thanks to our models!

And please come to our **Prelude on Thérèse**, held on February 17. See details below. Let's show **Elizabeth Aversa** how much we appreciate all her research on this rare opera.

Prelude: Massenet's *Thérèse* presented by Elizabeth Aversa

Friday February 17 Refreshments at 9:30 a.m. Talk, with musical excerpts, at 10 a.m.

Towers Building, Auditorium, 1533 4th Avenue West, Bradenton 34205

\$ 5 at the door. No reservations required

CELEBRATING AFRICAN AMERICAN OPERA SINGERS

Elizabeth Aversa

Last winter we celebrated Black History Month with a column on African American opera singers, beginning with Marian Anderson. This year we continue that theme by celebrating Denyce Graves, Will Liverman, Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price, and George Shirley. Our singers are listed alphabetically since they are all among the best, and each has special merit. And we should remember, too, that if we were to discuss the many more Black singers that deserve to be covered there would be a column for every month for several years! Here are 2023's Black opera stars for Black History Month.

Denyce Graves



Denyce Graves, renowned mezzo soprano, is known worldwide for her roles as Bizet's *Carmen* and Saint-Saens' *Dalila*. But her reputation and impact are far broader than those signature roles.

Graves, who is 59 years old, is a graduate of Oberlin College and the

New England Conservatory of Music. She holds a faculty appointment as the Rosa Ponselle Distinguished Artist at Peabody Institute of John Hopkins University in Baltimore. She started the Denyse Graves Foundation (DGF) that "seeks to enrich our understanding of American history by celebrating the yet untold legacy of America's 'hidden musical figures.'" Read about the DGF and check out the Hidden Voices program at <https://www.thedenycegravesfoundation.org/> In 2003 Graves was appointed as a US cultural ambassador.

In April 2022, Graves was honored as a recipient of the 17th annual *Opera News* Awards. Recipients of these awards "collectively grace the greatest opera stages around the world and have built renowned careers at the Metropolitan Opera." Read about Graves in the April 2022 issue of *Opera News*. The magazine's archive is at https://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2022/4/April_2022.html

Seasoned by familial issues, depression, and even vocal health concerns over the years, Graves has come through as what *Opera News* calls "the all-American diva." Beyond opera, she has sung at presidential inaugurations, holiday concerts, 9/11 remembrances, and at the memorial service for her long-time personal friend and fan, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Here are two notable Graves performances, as *Carmen* and as friend of Justice Ginsburg. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V9woZuVIO4> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_2l_YFsdIA

Will Liverman

Will Liverman, is a young (34-year-old) operatic baritone whose reputation has been on a decade long upward trajectory. A native Virginian and graduate of Wheaton College and Juilliard, Liverman won a 2019 Richard Tucker Career Grant and the 2020 Marian Anderson Vocal Award. He served as a Glimmerglass Young Artist in 2015 and won the Stella Maris International Vocal Competition the same year.



Although he has sung many roles in the standard repertoire (*Figaro* and *Papageno*, for example) he is best known for contemporary opera. He recently sang Horemhab in Philip Glass' *Akhmaten* and Malcolm Fleet in Muhly's *Marnie*. His most notable role was as Charles in Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at the post pandemic Met Opera season 2021. Kyle MacMillan of the *Chicago Sun Times* said of Liverman's starring role performance there "Baritone Will Liverman rises to the vocal and dramatic challenges of the central role of Charles, capturing both the deep pain and quiet toughness of this character and adroitly handling Blanchard's taut vocal writing."

Liverman is also contributing to opera as one of the writers of a new opera entitled *Factotum* that has been performed in Chicago. This collaborative project, still under development, is set in a Black barber shop. The

music includes gospel, hip-hop, and several other musical genres. We expect that Liverman will continue to innovate both as writer and singer.

Here is Liverman's Charles, from *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R0Ve1aukdA>

Listen to his aria from *Eugene Onegin*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjjTIF7kfvA>

Jessye Norman



Jessye Norman (1945-2019) was a soprano who refused to “stay in her lane” vocally, so she sang roles written for other voices, always to great acclaim. Although she died in 2019 at the age of 74, her recordings will be enjoyed for years and years to come. Here is just one example – “When I am laid in earth” from Purcel’s *Dido and*

Aenaes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOIAi2XwuWo>

Norman was born into a musical family in Augusta, Georgia, in 1945. She studied music at Howard University and after receiving her BA continued her education at The University of Michigan and Baltimore’s Peabody Institute. In 1969, she sang her biggest role up to that time, Elisabeth in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. Although that performance was in Germany, it set a course for her developing career. She was particularly known for her work in Strauss and Wagner.

Norman’s Metropolitan Opera debut did not happen until 1983, after nearly 15 years of success abroad. Her debut was in *Les Troyens*, the lengthy Berlioz opera about the Trojan war. She continued affiliation with the Met until the end of her life, giving more than 80 performances there. Peter Gelb, Met general manager, declared her to be “one of the greatest artists ever to sing on our stage.”

Five Grammys were awarded to Jessye Norman, including one for “Lifetime Achievement.” She has also been celebrated at the Kennedy Center Honors and as a recipient of the National Medal of the Arts

from President Obama in 2009. Norman’s recordings continue to have a following. Her recording of “Four Last Songs of Richard Strauss” has been well received by critics and fans alike. Along with numerous awards for her singing, Norman has received more than 30 honorary doctorates - from her own alma mater Howard University to the New England Conservatory to Ivy League universities such as Yale. Norman said of her Black predecessors in opera, “They have made it possible for me to say I will sing French opera. I will sing German opera instead of being told you will sing *Porgy and Bess*.” Here is an interview on the BBC show “Hardtalk” in which Norman reflects.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keCO9DQE4RI>

Norman started a school in her hometown that continues to enroll students today. At the Jessye Norman School for the Arts, students receive a tuition-free academic education, lessons, and camps for the performing arts. And Augusta has named an interstate interchange along busy I-20 for the popular opera singer.

In this clip, Norman sings the part of Madame Lidoine in Poulenc’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwVa04NIbtQ>

Hear “O hehrstes Wunder!” from Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre* here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vb_g8GXrZPc

Leontyne Price

Leontyne Price is a soprano whose career spanned from 1951 to 1997. She was the first African American singer to win international acclaim and the first to build a long career at the Metropolitan Opera. (Although Marian Anderson sang at the Met, her performances were



few and came near the close of her career.) Price “owned” the Met for many years, and, in fact, in 1966 she starred in Samuel Barber’s *Antony and Cleopatra* that premiered at the opening of the opera house at Lincoln Center. Her performance received rave reviews; the opera, on the other hand, never found

much of a following after mediocre reviews at the opening.

Price was born in Laurel, Mississippi in 1927. Her family sang in church, and she followed in the family tradition. She attended Central State University in Ohio; there she studied music education with an eye to teaching music. Her career took a turn, however, when she won a Julliard scholarship. Her stage debut came in 1952 when she appeared in *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Ira Gershwin heard this and cast her in *Porgy and Bess*. After touring for two years with the opera she appeared on the stage of the San Francisco Opera in Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and later as Aida which became her signature role. The Met debut came in 1961 in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, with Franco Corelli; the ovation for this performance was more than 30 minutes long. From that time until she stopped performing full operas, Price was the world's leading Verdi singer. Her opera career concluded at the Met with *Aida*.

After retirement from opera, Price published a children's book about *Aida* and concertized in many concert venues. Her last concert was in 1997 in Chapel Hill, NC. She is the recipient of many awards, including the 1964 Presidential Medal of Freedom and more than 20 Grammy awards. Read about the singer's 95th birthday that was celebrated on February 22, 2022. <https://slippedisc.com/2022/02/leontyne-price-95-today/>

Here is Price singing Aida. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaV6sqFUTQ4>

And from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saA1rRxUP8>

George Shirley



George Shirley, a tenor, was born in 1934 in Detroit. As with so many African American singers, he began his musical journey singing in church. A star from the beginning, young George won a singing prize at age 5.

Shirley attended Wayne State University and in 1955 became the first Black music teacher in

Detroit. He subsequently joined the Army where he sang with the Army Chorus. This was a first also – he was the first Black member of the chorus. While in the Army he was encouraged to continue singing and to try opera. Shirley won the Metropolitan Opera Auditions and signed with the Met in 1953. There he sang in 26 operas over the next 11 years. His career was global: he sang throughout Europe and performed more than 80 roles during his performing career.

Shirley taught at the University of Maryland College Park beginning in 1980. He was awarded a prestigious award at the University and then, in 1987, he moved back to his hometown where he joined the faculty of the University of Michigan. *Opera Blog* covered Shirley recently and reported that he “dreams of a future for opera where the tragedy of the coronavirus leads to greater and greater innovation. Even though he is officially retired, he has just completed voice lessons with students over Zoom. It makes him dream of a time when singers will be able to project themselves into performing arts spaces, like “that old *Star Trek* thing, ‘Beam me down, Scotty.’”

A personal friend who studied with Shirley at the University of Maryland characterized him as a “good man” in every sense of the word. When a tornado devastated Tuscaloosa, Alabama, my friend received a call from her professor from a quarter of a century earlier: Shirley called to “see if she was okay.” A good man indeed.

Here is George Shirley singing Don Jose in *Carmen in 1962*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UNydZM6b0A>

George Shirley as Ferrando "Un aura amorosa" from *Così fan Tutti* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgHYp4WGbp4>

Hear George Shirley reflect on his life and career: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpDsjsJReUc>

Opera is diverse – representing the stories and music from many cultures and countries, and, happily, we celebrate the contributions of African American singers to our favorite performing art. See you at the opera!

JANUARY MEETING



Maestro Jesse Martins, Elizabeth Novella,
Eric McConnell and Billy Huyler.

We enjoyed the artistry of three Studio Artists at our meeting on January 18. Maestro Jesse Matrins, along with soprano Elizabeth Novella, baritone Billy Huyler, and bass-baritone Eric McConnell entertained with a variety of arias.

Mr. McConnell began the program with “O tu Palermo” from Verdi’s *Vespri Siciliani*. Ms. Novella followed with the aria “Chi il bel sogno de Doretta” from Puccini’s *La Rondine*, always a favorite. Ms. Novella also sang “Depuis le jour” from Charpentier’s *Louise*. Mr. McConnell next sang the delightful “La columnia” from Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*. The last aria was “Votre toast” (the Toreador Song) from Bizet’s *Carmen*. Following their performances, members were given the opportunity to ask questions, leading us into the experiences and motivations of these exciting young performers.

To learn more about these talented artists, visit their websites:

Billy Huyler [Papageno’s Suicide](#).

[Eric McConnell](#)

[Elizabeth Novella](#)

TRIBUTES

A huge “Thank You” to all who donated accessories for the young Apprentice and Studio Artists. They truly appreciated the “additions to their professional performance wardrobe. MOG Members are awesome.

From Syble DiGirolamo

Stars of Tomorrow

Sunday, February 5

1:30 PM

Manatee Performing
Arts Center

502 3rd Avenue West

Bradenton, FL 34205

Tickets: \$20 (available
at the door)

MOG Fashion Show
Celebrating Sarasota Opera’s 2023
Winter Season and
Madama Butterfly

Tuesday February 28
11:30 a.m.

Lakewood Ranch CC
7650 Legacy Boulevard

Fashions by Evelyn & Arthur
1480 Main Street, Sarasota

Entertainment by Sarasota
Opera Artists

Basket Drawing