

# BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

March 2022

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>

## SPRING FLING BRUNCH RESERVATIONS MARCH 16, PALM AIRE CC, 10:00 A.M.

Please send your reservations with a check (made out to MOG) to:

Jean Roberts  
222 12<sup>th</sup> St West  
Apt 302  
Bradenton, FL 34205  
730-0135  
[jeanrob222@gmail.com](mailto:jeanrob222@gmail.com)

### Menu

House Cured & Smoked Ham, Applewood Smoked Bacon & Sausage, Corned Beef Hash, Homemade Sausage Gravy & Freshly Baked Biscuits, Cheddar Grits, Eggs Benedict, Scrambled Eggs, Baked Blueberry French Toast, Fresh Fruit, Greek Yogurt & Granola Parfaits, Smoked Salmon Lox with Crostinis, Chilled Asparagus in Dijonnaise Dressing, Mozzarella Caprese, Freshly Baked Scones & Cinnamon Rolls, Raisin Brioche Bread Pudding with Caramel Sauce, Orange Juice & Coffee

### Reservations due by March 11.

Reservation for the Spring Fling Brunch  
March 16, 2022

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Reservations: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Regular Reservations \$40.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Patron Reservations \$50.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Checks made out to MOG, please.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

As I write this on February 25, your board of directors just learned that there has been an outbreak of Covid among the artists at Sarasota Opera. We know very little about the case or cases, but we have heard that some shows will be postponed. This has been a very topsy-turvy year as we all try to regain our sense of "normal." We here, and staff at the opera, are trying our best to bring a proper season to our members and patrons. So, now, we are unsure of whether or not there will be a Helen Jepson Deller winner or a Deane Allyn Youth Opera winner at our brunch on the 16<sup>th</sup>.



For our newcomers, Helen Jepson was a soprano at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in the 1930's. She was a beautiful blond lady whose voice and looks were showcased in a Hollywood movie, *The Goldwyn Follies of 1938*. She also sang in the first recording of *Porgy and Bess*, directed by George Gershwin himself. But most importantly to us, she was a founding

member of our own Manatee Opera Guild. She died here in Bradenton in 1997. When I first arrived in 2001, there were many members of the Guild who had known her personally, and they all described her as gracious and vivacious. So, it is in her honor that our guild rewards an outstanding Studio artist each year with a fellowship award of \$3,000. That money comes from an endowment at the Opera given by a former MOG member upon her death, Mildred Vlcek.

Deane Allyn was a member of the MOG and also the Executive Director of Sarasota Opera for fourteen years, ending in 1999. Under her guidance, Sarasota Opera purchased the Edwards Theater, restored it, and renamed it the Sarasota Opera House. Also, it was she who began the Sarasota Youth Opera. She left an endowment to our guild to be used to encourage a Manatee County Youth Opera participant in a music career. So, in her honor, each year, we give the Deane Allyn Award to a youthful singer.



These awards are given annually at our Spring Fling. This year's is on March 16, and will be a full brunch instead of a luncheon. We hope that we will be able to have our award winners present as in previous years, but Covid has ruined many a plan these past two years. Your board will continue to work with the staff of Sarasota Opera to ensure that we make lemonade with these lemons!

So, please sign up for our Spring Fling. Let's hope for the best!

# CELEBRATING AFRICAN AMERICAN OPERA SINGERS

By Elizabeth Aversa

## Part 1

Throughout the US Black History is celebrated during the month of February. For Black History Month, we discuss the enormous contributions of African American opera singers to our favorite performing art. This column and next month's highlight ten notable Black opera singers – their lives, their careers, and, most importantly, their music.

### Marian Anderson



It is fitting that in the alphabetical array of singers covered here Marian Anderson, the magnificent contralto who achieved so many firsts, is first. Born in 1897 in Philadelphia, Anderson sang in church and studied locally until 1925 when she won a contest for which the prize was to sing with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. She won the

contest and sang, but, due to the limited opportunities for African American singers in the US at the time, she went to Europe to study and perform until she was over 40 years old. She was an unqualified success everywhere she sang, but when she returned to the US and attempted to schedule a concert at Constitution Hall in Washington in 1939, The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), owners of the venue, would not permit her to book the hall. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, among others, resigned membership in the DAR in protest. A concert was held instead at the Lincoln Memorial before an integrated audience of more than 75,000 people.

In 1955, when Anderson was 58 years old, she was invited by Rudolf Bing to perform with the Metropolitan Opera. She sang Ulrica in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* to a standing ovation. Anderson was the first Black singer to perform at the White House as well as the first to be signed at the Met. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963, the same year in which she sang at the March on Washington. She sang at the inaugurations of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy and served as an official US good will ambassador. She won a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1991 and was awarded two dozen honorary degrees over the years. She enjoyed her retirement at her home in Danbury, CT, where she attempted to live as a "regular citizen." She died in 1993.

Listen to Marian Anderson's singing at the Lincoln Memorial in April 1955. From the PBS Documentary on Marian Anderson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwPqu4xTuU0>

### Kathleen Battle

Kathleen Battle is a 73 year-old soprano who was born in Ohio in 1948. She was once described as "the best lyric coloratura in the world."

Battle studied music in Cincinnati and while taking voice lessons, she earned a degree in music education. She was teaching elementary school music when



conductor Thomas Schippers discovered her at an audition. He encouraged her to perform and arranged several opportunities for her overseas. He also introduced her to Met conductor James Levine who became a lifelong friend and colleague of Battle. From 1972 until the 1990s Battle sang all over the world, in both concerts and operas, earning positive feedback here and abroad.

Her Metropolitan Opera debut was in 1977 when she performed in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. She went on to sing Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, and Despina in *Così fan tutte* and roles from composers other than Mozart as well. Battle received five Grammy awards and an Emmy for a televised performance.

Although she had collaborated with a wide range of musicians – Itzhak Perlman and Wynton Marsalis being just two of them – by the 1990s she developed a reputation for being "demanding" and "difficult." Met General Manager Joseph Volpe dismissed her for "unprofessional" and "detrimental" behavior at rehearsals of *La fille du regiment*. Although she did not often appear on the opera stage again, she did concertize and record after leaving the Met. Here is a recording worth hearing although it is 45 minutes long. Enjoy as Kathleen Battle sings Mozart arias. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSr7AWtry60>

### Angel Blue



What more can she do? At age 37, California native Angel Blue has worked as a model, won beauty pageants (including Miss Hollywood!), and sung at the Metropolitan Opera. She is also an accomplished musician on three instruments – bass guitar, sax, and piano – not including her best instrument - her own soprano voice.

Blue studied music from an early age. She attended the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts where she focused on piano and voice, and then went on to the University of Redlands where she earned a BA in music. She earned a Masters in Opera Performance from UCLA. She was selected to be a member of the Los Angeles Opera young artists' program where she was noticed and began her mentorship from Plácido Domingo. It is said that Domingo has called her "the next Leontyne Price."

Blue has sung across the globe in roles as young women in the most popular operas: Mimi and Musetta in *La Bohème*, Macaella in *Carmen*, Manon, Liu in *Turandot*, and Violetta in *La Traviata*, to name a few. Her Metropolitan Opera success as Bess in the 2019-2020 production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is notable. James Jordan, in *The Observer*, said that Blue "carried opening night," and wrote "It's impossible to decide which aspect of Blue's performance was the most enchanting: her radiant voice with its seemingly effortless (and endless) top notes; her joyous stage presence; or her nuanced take on the contradictory character of Bess as party girl, faithful sweetheart and substance/sex addict." The whole world got to see Blue as Bess in theatres on the Met's HD presentation.

Angel Blue's personality shines in the video called "Kids meet an opera singer." Click here to watch this engaging clip.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95RLviccrQc>

Hear Blue singing one of her best in Rehearsal for Mimi in *La Bohème* in Toronto, Canada.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRgumSh54LA>

### Lawrence Brownlee

Lawrence Brownlee's voice was dubbed by NPR Music as "perfectly suited to the nineteenth century operas of Rossini and Donizetti." He is a 49-year old tenor from Ohio, where he began his career.

Brownlee is well known for his roles in *The Barber of Seville*, *La Cenerentola*, *La Favorite*, and *I Puritani*. His upcoming season includes *I Puritani* (Rome), *L'Italiana en Algeri* (Zurich), and numerous recitals and concerts from Paris to Seattle to Cleveland.

Not only a performer on the opera stage, Brownlee is an activist for diversity and inclusion in opera who has mastered social media. His Facebook Live program "The Sitdown," for which many episodes are available at Brownlee's website, features the singer interviewing leading Black opera personalities. At <https://www.lawrencebrownlee.com/> readers will find engaging interviews with Florence Quivar, Simon Estes, Martina Arroyo, Denyce Graves and many others opera greats.

Brownlee has recently joined the faculty of the Julliard School as Distinguished Visiting Professor in Voice. Along with numerous awards he notes the honor he felt when he sang at the funeral of Jessye Norman in 2019.

Joyce DiDonato praised Brownlee's vocal abilities saying "His natural instrument is just incredibly beautiful. The word 'honey' comes to mind."

Hear Brownlee and DiDonato sing the duet from *La Donna del Lago* in a final rehearsal in 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STK9qpTnPLw>

The video tribute to Brownlee shows him singing some of his best roles. Go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P\\_IWZYFNUc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P_IWZYFNUc) to access the video.

### Grace Bumbry

Grace Bumbry was born in 1937. Although she began her career as a mezzo soprano, she sang soprano roles throughout her mid-career in the 1970s and 1980s. She later returned to mezzo soprano roles and now critics consider her to be one of the greatest mezzo sopranos of her generation.



At age 17, Bumbry won a singing competition in St. Louis. One of the prizes was a scholarship to St. Louis Institute of Music, but the school would not accept her because she was Black. The contest manager arranged for her to sing on radio, where she did an aria from Verdi's *Don Carlos*. This successful broadcast opened opportunities to study in Boston and Chicago, and her career began to take off. In 1958, at age 21, she won a Met audition, and in 1960 made her opera debut in Paris as Amneris in Verdi's *Aida*. At 24 she was cast as Venus in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* at Bayreuth,

despite some objections due to her race. Her performance was so outstanding that she received more than 40 curtain calls and instantly became an international star. Within three years she appeared in productions at London's Royal Opera, La Scala, and the Metropolitan Opera. Bumbry sang at the 1983 Met Opera Centennial Gala and also at James Levine's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the Met in 1996. She has appeared as recently as 2010 as the Countess in Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*.

Bumbry has also been active in promoting diversity and inclusion in music performance. In the 1990s she founded the Grace Bumbry Black Music Heritage Ensemble to preserve performance of Negro spirituals. The 26-member troupe performed at Carnegie Hall, at the Salzburg Festival, and many other important venues.

Bumbry has lived abroad since about 1980 and now resides in Austria.

Grace Bumbry sings *Carmen* in the film version of Bizet's opera. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs0E2CufQ7c>

Next month's Bel Canto column will cover African American opera singers (Part 2): Denyce Graves, Will Liverman, Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price and George Shirley

## MANATEE OPERA GUILD CALENDAR 2021-2022

### Meetings

At Palm Aire Country Club  
5601 Country Club Way, Sarasota, FL 34243

### Dates

March 16 (Spring Fling Brunch includes the Helen Jepson Dellera and Deane Allyn Awards) 10:00 a.m.

April 20, 10:30 a.m.

**Note:** If you need assistance at Palm Aire getting from the parking lot to the main entrance, please let Jean Roberts know beforehand. She will contact Palm Aire to let them know that you will be coming.

Then, when you arrive, drive up to the golf cart area, just to the right of the main entrance. Make the employee there aware that you are going into the parking lot. The employee will follow you in the cart, and bring you back right up to the front door.

### Fashion Show

Lakewood Ranch Country Club

Date: March 2, 11:30 a.m.

Fashions from Evelyn and Arthur, Main Street, Sarasota

**Board Meetings** (All members are invited to attend)  
At the home of Angela Korsmo. 319 36<sup>th</sup> Street NE

Second Tuesday

10 a.m.

March 8

April 12



## TRIBUTES:

From Maryanne Hazen — “Thank you to all who made the Sweetheart Luncheon so special. To Syble and her helpers for the lovely table decorations, Jean Roberts for the luncheon arrangements, Jeanne Yeagle for the programs and to all the attendees/patrons who made the day memorable for me. The singers were exquisite.”

From Dorothy Mae Erikson — In Memory of **Sally Roth**, my sister-in-law.

From Jeanne Yeagle and David Luce — Thank you to our splendid Prelude speakers: Martha Collins, Phyliss Lowitt and Dr. Peter Shimkin.

From Jeanne Yeagle and David Luce — Thank you, Maryanne Hazen, for all that you do for MOG.

## Tributes

Tributes are a note of kindness and acknowledgement. As your own lives unfold this year and events of meaning arise, consider recognizing these with a MOG tribute. Fill out this form, and send to Syble DiGirolamo, 3509 Little Country Road, Parrish, 34219

My gift of \$_____ is given:
____ In memory of _____
____ In honor of _____
____ On the occasion of _____
Please send an acknowledgement card to:
_____
_____
From: _____
_____
Checks made out to MOG please

## Please welcome new members:

**Agen, Dorothy**  
4729 Independence Drive  
Bradenton, FL 34210  
201-5179  
djagen@gmail.com

**Raub, Charlene**  
3863 Little Country Road  
Parrish, FL 34219  
776-9636  
(941) 545-1209  
[craub@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:craub@tampabay.rr.com)

Thank you for joining the Manatee Opera Guild.

## MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew your membership in the Manatee Opera Guild. Each of our members is special to us, and we thank you for continuing your association with us. The rewards of membership are great: monthly meetings with fantastic singers from Sarasota Opera, our Prelude Series where upcoming operas are discussed, and our special events. We provide the space to make long-lasting friendships with people who share our interests.

And, we fulfill our mission to bring opera to Manatee County, to assist young singers in their careers, and to support Sarasota Opera and Sarasota Youth Opera.

So, please join us for another great year of opera! We have intentionally kept our dues low so that everyone can be a part of our Guild. Please bring dues, and this form, to the March meeting, or mail to:

Jeanne Yeagle, 1700 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue W, Apt. 111, Bradenton, FL, 34205

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member ☐ \_\_\_\_\_Renewing Member ☐

**I (we) can help the Manatee Opera Guild in these ways  
(please check all appropriate boxes)**

Literature design ☐

Publicity ☐

Event planning ☐

Refreshments ☐

Fundraising ☐

Serving on the Board ☐

Greeting ☐

Soliciting advertising and gifts ☐

Developing membership ☐

Telephoning ☐

Photography ☐

Editing literature (newsletters, brochures, letters) ☐

Writing ☐

Setting up/cleaning up ☐

Hosting parties ☐

Modeling at fashion show ☐

Hospitality ☐

Other talent ☐

## Membership Level:

☐ Single Regular - \$40

☐ Single Sustaining - \$50

☐ Couple Regular - \$60

☐ Couple Sustaining - \$70