

BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

April 2026

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>

APRIL MEETING

“WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!”

Palm Aire Country Club

Wednesday, April 15, 2025

10:00: coffee and conversation

10:30: meeting, followed by

**A conversation between Maestro DeRenzi and
Richard Russell**

11:45: optional lunch

Menu:

Choices: Chicken Blanquette - Sauteed Chicken Breast
with Sherry Mushroom Cream Sauce, Herbed Wild Rice,
Roasted Seasonal Vegetable Medley

Vegetarian - Wild Mushroom Ravioli with Marinara

Dessert: Flourless Chocolate Torte - Gluten-Free

Name(s): _____

Phone Number: _____

Number of Reservations @\$35 per person: _____

Mail check (made out to MOG) and Reservation Form
to:

Cathy Knobel

787 Benjamin Franklin Drive Sarasota,
FL 34236

or contact Cathy at 941-706-2490 or

knobelwd@aol.com

Reservations Due Friday, April 10

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE AND SUMMARY REPORT FOR 2025-2026

As we wind down at the end of the 2026 Winter Opera Festival, it's time to look back at what the Manatee Opera Guild (MOG) has accomplished and look forward to next year. It's been a great year, and we want to continue the momentum into the 2026-2027 season. Please share this newsletter with your friends and neighbors who might be interested in joining us next year.

For continuing members, April is the time to renew your MOG membership, so please, go online to Manatee Opera Guild (<https://manateeoperaguild.org/>), download the membership form, fill it out and send it in! Regular membership dues are \$40 for an individual and \$60 for a couple; Sustaining memberships are \$50 for an individual and \$70 for a couple. Whichever way you choose to join or renew, you are in for a full year of having fun, making friends, learning, and supporting our favorite performing art: OPERA. Read below about MOG's 2025-2026 activities to see how membership in the Manatee Opera Guild enhances members' lives.

On the strictly social calendar, MOG members enjoyed the annual members' Holiday Party at Maryanne Hazen's home. Excellent food and beverages were provided by Maryanne and members while lively operatic and holiday music, arranged by Syble DiGirolamo and Valerie Giuliani entertained the group. Members and significant others enjoyed visiting without doing Guild business! The screening of the movie *Moonstruck* at Westminster Manor provided another opportunity to socialize, thanks to Clara Steffan's efforts and Syble's contribution of the DVD. Upcoming on the social scene will be "occasional luncheons" to be arranged for summer 2026.

While a good time has been had on the social front, we ALSO accomplished some important goals for the Guild. As of March, we are close to our membership goal of 100; current members number over 90 thanks to efforts by Jeannie Scacchetti, Babs Noah, Jeanne Yeagle,

and the active recruiters who have brought new members to the Guild. We met and surpassed our fundraising objective of \$40,000 through events designed to support Sarasota Opera, thanks to able leadership and an army of cooks, decorators, ticket sellers, and event organizers. The fall fund raiser – the Parisian-themed on-stage party at the Opera House – surpassed expectations in terms of the entertainment, the food, and the company. The Stars of Tomorrow Concert was a lovely event organized by Valerie and a committee of more than a dozen members. From the greeters to the music and the luncheon for the singers and staff, attention to detail reigned. And finally, the annual fashion show, featuring fashions from Evelyn and Arthur, was sold out thanks to Syble, Sandy Rath, and the member models. Beautiful table decorations, a delicious luncheon, and an entertaining presentation of fashions made for an enjoyable (and profitable) afternoon.

Monthly membership meetings were held from September through March, with the April meeting upcoming. Cathy Knobel's efforts were Herculean - arranging the luncheons and seeing that each member's dietary preferences and requirements were met. Highlights from the monthly meetings included the December (indoor) courtyard picnic; the Sweetheart Luncheon at which Linda Buchhart was honored for her hard work for the Guild; and the annual Awards Luncheon at which an apprentice artist and a youth opera member received scholarships from the Guild. Monthly meetings often have singers or speakers, and they always include a time for coffee and conversation before the formal programs begin.

The Guild's activities don't start and end with fun and fund raising, however. Prelude lectures, scheduled prior to each opera on the fall and winter schedules, afford members the opportunity to learn about each opera, especially those with which they may be unfamiliar. In 2025-2026, presentations were arranged and orchestrated by Rich DeGennaro, who chaired the education committee. Members learned from stage directors, opera administrators, and fellow-fans, about the five operas heard this year at the opera house: *Così fan tutte*, *La Bohème*, *The Merry Widow*, *Susannah*, and *Il Trovatore*.

In summary, there is something for every interest and taste in the Manatee Opera Guild. Take the time to renew your membership and to share information about the Guild with friends, neighbors, and colleague who might new friends and new foci by joining.

This is the final president's message for 2025-2026. Look for your Bel Canto in September, and have a great summer in the meantime.

Elizabeth Aversa, President

Manatee Opera Guild



Models and escorts at the Fashion Show



Studio Artist Meeting Singers



Sweetheart Linda Buchhart surrounded by Studio Artist Serenaders

TOP SIX REASONS TO RENEW YOUR MOG MEMBERSHIP

Remember David Letterman's "Top Ten" lists? Well, here is an important reminder and a top six list of our own!

It's time to renew memberships in the Manatee Opera Guild (MOG). If you need convincing, read on!

- **MOG IS SOCIAL!** From monthly membership meetings and luncheons to special events like the annual MOG fashion show, members mix and mingle with fellow opera-goers. Connect with long-time friends in the Guild and with the ones you haven't yet met. Renew now!
- **MOG IS ENTERTAINING!** During the fall and winter opera seasons, singers will be on hand to entertain members with arias, duets, trios, and more – all from the performing art we love – Opera! Renew now so you don't miss a note!
- **MOG IS EDUCATIONAL!** Learn about opera from experts – stage directors, musicologists, and opera leaders – and from fellow fans. Prelude programs and special lectures enhance the opera house experience. Renew now to become an opera aficionado!
- **MOG PROVIDES VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!** If you want to do something "for the good of the order," renew your membership and sign up to volunteer for the Guild. From taking a little time to bring a favorite dish to a reception to taking more time to serve as an officer or committee chair, there's a job for you in MOG. Your job will be as demanding as you want it to be, so renew now and get to work!
- **MOG GIVES BIG VALUE FOR YOUR DUES!** Dues are affordable, and MOG provides a lot of fun for each member's investment. Throughout the opera season and even in the summer, MOG members work, play, and enjoy one another. Renew now so you don't miss the fun!
- **MOG SERVES A WORTHY PURPOSE!** The overarching mission of MOG is to support Sarasota Opera. MOG contributes to this mission in a wide variety of ways that reflect members' individual talents and means. MOG needs members who can provide time, talent, or financial support, but no one has to contribute all three! Renew to support Sarasota Opera!

Membership Form is on last page.



Studio Artist Riley Findley, winner of the Helen Jepson Deller Award, accepts a check for \$3,000 from the Guild.

Thanks to Syble DiGirolamo and Elizabeth Aversa for the pictures included in this issue.



2026 MOG Sweetheart Linda Buchhart presents a \$5,000 check to Sarasota Opera Artistic Administrator Arthur Bosarge.

HOW I CAME TO LOVE OPERA

By Syble DiGirolamo

I grew up in Sulligent, a small town in Northwest Alabama. If I ever heard the word Opera growing up, I don't remember it. However, Tupelo, Mississippi (Elvis Presley's hometown) was only 45 miles away, and there were dance places where we could swing and twist to our hearts' content. And we did. That was my music. That and the juke box in our restaurant.

My college years were at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. No opera there either at that time. In addition to classes, I worked in the campus computer center and did projects for NASA in Huntsville. One of those projects led to a job in Bell Laboratories in New Jersey to finish up the project.

With New York just a short train ride away, I immediately started attending as many Broadway musicals as I could afford. Then, at the age of 28, a friend gifted me a ticket to the Metropolitan Opera to see *Lucia Di Lammermoor* (with Roberta Peters). What an absolutely awesome performance. It was so totally absorbing that I didn't think about a single item for my "office to-do list." I walked out hooked on Opera. Lucia is still my personal favorite Opera — its music is masterful. However, I don't tend to recommend it as a "first" opera for others. (My recommendation for a first opera is either *Rigoletto* or *La bohème*)

The year after that first performance in 1976, I purchased a Met subscription for 7 operas and continued that subscription (and added a few specials that weren't on my subscription) until 2004 when I retired and moved to Sarasota. (The move came after researching Opera Companies across the warm southern states). My subscriptions to Sarasota Opera started in 2005 which is also the year that I joined the Manatee Opera Guild. Or rather I should say - that is the year that I attempted to join the Manatee Opera Guild in September only to find that Joey Frye (an energetic and stylish neighbor, Guild member and SOA board member) had already signed me up in August - the day after I met her).

I went to Opening nights with Joey and her sister Jeanne for 3 years. In year 4, I started buying 2 subscriptions for Tuesday nights and gifting them individually to neighbors as their first opera. I wanted friends with me for the hour-long drive to Sarasota. (Only one gift, and then they needed to buy their own tickets). After a few years, there were ten of us and we became the

foundation of SOA's TOWN group that meets on Tuesday nights and now has 50+ members.



Deane Allyn Award winner for a Manatee County Youth Opera member, **Chidinma (Chi Chi) Smarty**, is all smiles as she receives a \$1000 scholarship check. Chi Chi is pictured with her very proud sister and brother.



Chi Chi Smarty and Valerie Giuliani prepare to lead Guild members in a rousing "Happy Birthday" to Richard DeGennaro and to Rocco Aversa.



SO Artistic Administrator Arthur Bosarge enjoys receiving a \$5000 check from MOG to Sarasota Opera.

MEMBER NEWS

Please welcome the following new MOG member

Kathleen Smith

5305 7th Ave Dr. W.
Bradenton, FL 34205
941-725-7299 (cell)

Kathleenheinicke@gmail.com

Mary Collins-Sanborn

290 Depew Ave
Buffalo, NY 14214
Cell: 716-949-9349

Email: mary@mcollins.com

Please note new email for Jack Gobetti:

jgobetti@umich.edu

Many thanks to Lewis Wasserman for his generous end-of-year gift to MOG!

Please plan to attend our meeting on April 15th to welcome our newest members:

Jane and Robert Constantine

Nini and Jack Gobetti

David Goldrich

Marlene Kitchell

Susan and Arthur Luger

Don Miller

Sherril Morse and Alex Nichols

Vicki Petrosky

Rega M. Powers

Maria L. Ray

Patricia Reinhart

Kristine Ryan

Mary Collins Sanborn

June E. Seaton

Valerie Shah

Liz and Fred Smith

Kathleen Smith

Maria Smith

OPERA AT THE BAY

Sarasota Opera and The Bay partner again to present a FREE series of recorded opera screenings from Sarasota Opera's 2026 Winter Festival.

For a limited time only, these exclusive in-park screenings on the stadium-quality LED screen will feature professionally recorded versions of each opera performed inside the historic Sarasota Opera House during the recently-completed season.

So, bring your friends and family to the park to watch the excitement and vibrance of opera within the beauty of this “One Park for All” along Sarasota Bay. Use this as an opportunity to introduce your friends, kids and grandkids to this captivating genre of performing artistry.

Opera at The Bay: *La bohème*

[The Oval at The Bay Sarasota, FL](#)

1055 Blvd of the Arts

Sarasota, FL 34236

Saturday, Apr 18 from 7 pm to 8:45 pm

Come as you are... no experience required.

About *La bohème*

Poetry, poverty, and passion in 1830s Bohemian Paris.

Puccini's most beloved opera explores poetry, poverty, and passion in 1830s Paris. The story follows the poor embroideress Mimì and the poet Rodolfo as they navigate love, friendship, and heartbreak in the Latin Quarter. One of the most performed operas in the

repertoire, *La bohème* is a timeless portrait of youthful hope and tragic romance.

[Click here for a digital guide about this famous opera](#)

Special Notes You'll Want to Know:

- This screening will be preceded by special live performance by the [Sarasota Youth Opera](#), who performed on the main stage as part of the chorus in *La bohème*.
- **Arrive by 6:50 PM for a fast, 5-minute Opera "Primer"** led by a member of the Sarasota Opera team—an essential preview of the plot, characters, and standout arias, plus insider tips and fun facts to enhance your screening experience.

Register for and attend this event to be entered into a raffle to win a set of free tickets to an upcoming opera performance during the 2026/27 Opera Festival.

Other Opera at The Bay Events (click on each to learn more)

- Sat, April 25 | [The Merry Widow](#), 3PM
- Sat, May 2 | [Il trovatore](#), 2 PM

Buon appetito!

Come Hungry and Thirsty! Enjoy watching opera with delicious food and beverage (including Italian wine!) at [The Nest Café](#).

About [Sarasota Opera](#)

Sarasota Opera produces impassioned opera performances true to the vision of the composer, to entertain, enrich, educate, and inspire a life-long love of opera in our diverse and growing communities.

This is Sarasota Opera's 67th Season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast.

Tips for an enjoyable visit:

PLEASE BRING YOUR LAWN CHAIR TO ENSURE A COMFORTABLE SEAT.

- The Bay Park address is 1055 Blvd of the Arts, Sarasota FL 34236
- Free parking is located around the site and **all parking lots remain open** — along Blvd of the Arts and in front of the Van Wezel, Municipal Auditorium and Blue Pagoda. Please avoid parking in designated Sarasota Orchestra parking areas.
- Construction of the new Town Square (located between the Municipal Auditorium and Art Center) is underway and affects pedestrian routes between the parking lot along N. Tamiami Trail and venues west of Van Wezel Way (incl. The Bay Park, Van Wezel, and Holley Hall). Signs are posted to direct you between these locations. Please allow extra time to walk from and to your vehicle. [Click here](#) to view recommended pedestrian routes. [Click here](#) to learn more about Phase 2 of The Bay.
- Some events attract large crowds: Arrive early, be kind, and please be patient.
- All pets must be non-aggressive and on a leash at all times. Owners are expected to pick up after their pets.
-



Annual Membership Application

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

Event planning

Fundraising

Greeting

Developing membership

Photography

Writing

Hosting parties

Hospitality

Publicity

Refreshments

Serving on the Board

Soliciting advertising and gifts

Telephoning

Editing (newsletters, brochures, letters)

Setting up/cleaning up

Modeling at fashion show

Other talent

Membership Level:

- Single Regular Membership \$40
- Single Sustaining Membership \$50
- Couple Regular Membership \$60
- Couple Sustaining Membership \$70

Send application and payment to:
 Make checks payable to **Manatee Opera Guild or MOG**

Rich DeGennaro
 4932 Mahogany Run
 Sarasota, FL 34241
 215-740-9017
 richdege@me.com