


# BEL CANTO

Newsletter of the Manatee Opera Guild

December 2025

<https://manateeoperaguild.org>



Our MOG December Meeting will be on Monday, December 8  
in the Opera House Courtyard  
(indoors if we experience inclement weather)

10:00 A.M. COFFEE, DECAF, TEA SERVICE BY THE SARASOTA OPERA

10:30 A.M. MEETING

11:00 A.M. SINGER

11:30 A.M. BEVERAGES PROVIDED BY SARASOTA OPERA

Please choose your lunch:

CHOICES: UPTOWN TURKEY - or - PRESSED VEGGIE

served WITH POTATO SALAD, CHIPS AND A BAKERY TREAT

PRICE: \$20

IMPORTANT: PLEASE LET CATHY KNOBEL KNOW OF YOUR RESERVATION VIA  
EMAIL OR CELL PHONE -- EMAIL [KNOBELWD@AOL.COM](mailto:KNOBELWD@AOL.COM) OR CELL 941-666-  
3253.

SO YOUR ORDER NEEDS TO BE RECEIVED BY HER No Later Than THURSDAY,  
DECEMBER 4, 2025.

THANK YOU

As we move from the Fall Opera Festival to the Winter, we should take a quick look back and then set up our calendars for this month and beyond.

Looking back, kudos to all for the great success of the sold-out On-Stage Concert *Une Soiree Francaise*. Twenty- six MOG members (almost a third of our total membership) planned, diced, sliced, baked, cooked, and plated the appetizers and desserts for the event, and 35 opera aficionados contributed sponsorships. As our Special Events VP Syble DiGirolamo often says, “It takes a village;” the correlation between participation and success was surely evident in the resounding success of this year’s On-Stage event.

On the future side, we have much to look forward to in December. Be sure the following events are on your calendar so you don’t miss a thing.

- **Prelude – *La Boheme***, December 5, with Stephanie Sundine – 9:30 a.m. coffee, lecture at 10 a.m. at Westminster Manor
- **Holiday Party** – December 7 – 3:00 p.m. at the home of Maryanne Hazen (Guild members only)
- **Courtyard Picnic** – Membership meeting with singers, December 8 - 10:00 a.m. at the Opera House
- **Prelude – *The Merry Widow***, December 12, with Rosanne Martorella – 9:30 a.m. coffee, 10:00 a.m. lecture at Westminster Manor

The next MOG special event will be the Stars of Tomorrow Concert on February 8, 2026 - 1:00 p.m. at the SCF Neel Performing Arts Center. It is not too soon to purchase your tickets online at <https://www.onthestage.tickets/show/neel-performing-arts-center/68cc44f267fa020ffb745168>; tickets are \$30 general admission and complimentary for students with valid student ID. Here is a great opportunity for easy holiday shopping: purchase tickets for your family, friends, and colleagues who “have everything” or who appreciate experiences over things! And how about tucking a ticket or two in the holiday envelope you give to your dog walker, landscaper, nail technician, or mail carrier? Now is the time to talk it up and alert neighbors and friends about this special concert. These efforts will pay off in making new friends for the Sarasota Opera and ensuring a good audience for our singers. VP Valerie Giuliani is your contact for more information about this important MOG fund-raising event.

Finally, as you set up your new 2026 calendar, mark February 26 for the Fashion Show and Luncheon at Lakewood Ranch Country Club. More details will come your way in the next *Bel Canto*.

I hope you will enjoy the upcoming holidays however you celebrate them, and that 2026 will be filled with good health, great music, and lots of love!

Elizabeth Aversa

## Funnier and Frothier than Opera: Operetta

Elizabeth Aversa

As we consider the upcoming Winter Opera Festival in Sarasota, Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* catches our attention. *The Merry Widow* has been dubbed a "typical and genuine operetta" by Paul Henry Lang in his informative book *The Experience of Opera*. The inclusion of the Lehár and MOG's upcoming Prelude on the work (December 12<sup>th</sup> with Rosanne Martorella) impel us to take a look at the definitions and common misconceptions about opera's closest cousin – the operetta.

The "-etta" at the end of the word operetta suggests the simplest definition – a "little" opera, but that is not all we need to know. Granted, most operettas' run times are somewhat shorter than the average opera with two or more acts, but we do have very short operas and longer operettas. So, length isn't everything.

A second distinction is the nature of the story. Operettas are often less serious and deliver more sentimental than universal messages. Lang put it this way, "[The operetta's] aim is to refrain from touching upon life's real problems; it takes nourishment not from genuine human passions but from manufactured, counterfeit passions whose sole aim is to create amusing or sentimental situations." The content is "light," and the music follows suit.

Leslie Orrey and Rodney Milnes, in their concise history of opera, tell us that operetta was a combination of a sentimental or romantic story told in spoken dialogue, music, and dance. By the late 1800s, operetta routinely had spoken dialogue but opera was sung throughout. A further difference between opera and this new art form was that it "aimed to divert rather than to edify."

Serious authors on the subject of operetta agree on several points. First, the operetta should be classified as a totally different performing art from opera. It is a different entity, although the differences are sometimes subtle. Second, all agree that it derived from the French opéra -comique. Third, operetta is lighter than serious opera, or even comic opera, and the music enhances, rather than makes, the story and the characters. Lang goes so far as to say of operetta characters, "they owe their personality to the play; their character is only enhanced or colored by the music... they do not become

characters through music" as they do in the operas of Verdi and the like.

The most frequently discussed composers/librettists associated with operetta are Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), Franz Lehár (1870-1948), and W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900). Enjoy this selection from their works.

Listen first to the overtures from Offenbach operettas that date between 1865 and 1867. The link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRiBke19IQ0> While you are listening, study the list of operettas in the "timestamp" entry. The recording is just over 40 minutes long, but you will enjoy it.

For Lehár, we have two well-known pieces from *The Merry Widow*. We will hear more at the December 12 Prelude!

The Vilja song (in English) is here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_e8g4LhAOA&t=57s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_e8g4LhAOA&t=57s). And here is the very familiar Merry Widow Waltz. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBKwsQKGpKY&list=RDyBKwsQKGpKY&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBKwsQKGpKY&list=RDyBKwsQKGpKY&start_radio=1)

Finally, operetta cannot be discussed without a mention of the British pair W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. Two popular songs illustrate the light nature of the music and the stories. "Three little maids from school" is from *The Mikado*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyEJZ9yODB8>

Finally, here is the Major General song from *Pirates of Penzance*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs3dPaz9nAo&t=2s>

As the holidays approach and as we prepare for the Winter Opera Festival, enjoy the lighthearted, cheerful, and entertaining music of the operetta. Full recordings of the works mentioned here are available on YouTube, and will provide entertainment for the whole family.

## December Preludes

Westminster Manor Auditorium

1700 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue W, Bradenton, FL 34205

Plenty of parking (please don't park in reserved spots)

\$5 at the door – no reservations needed.



*Manatee Opera Guild Presents*  
*Friday, December 12, 2025 at 10 AM*  
*Continental Breakfast at 9:30*  
*a talk with music and film on*  
*Franz Lehar's The Merry Widow*  
*Westminster Manor Auditorium*



MANATEE OPERA GUILD PRESENTS A PRELUDE ON  
PUCCINI'S ROMANTIC OPERA LA BOHÈME  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5 AT 10 A.M.,  
COFFEE AND PASTRIES AT 9:30  
WESTMINSTER MANOR, 1700 21<sup>ST</sup> AVE, BRADETON  
34205  
FEATURING THE DIRECTOR OF THE OPERA AT  
SARASOTA OPERA  
STEPHANIE SUNDINE  
FORMER SOPRANO WITH THE  
METROPOLITAN OPERA, NY





## Sign Up Now for our spectacular **MOG** **Holiday Party**

Sunday, December 7, 2025  
Maryanne Hazen Residence  
3637 Wilderness Blvd West  
Parrish, FL  
3 p.m.

Send your reservation to Cathy Knobel  
787 Ben Franklin DR, #8  
Sarasota FL, 34236  
941-666-3253  
knobelwd@aol.com

Cost: \$30 plus a dish to share

There will be good times, good food, drinks and entertainment.





## Tributes

**To everyone in the Manatee Opera Guild** “A Very Happy and Joyous Holiday, and thank you all for being a member.” From Linda Buchhart

Thank you to **Lewis Wasserman** and **Kristine Ryan** for your generous donations.

Happy Birthday to **Carol Ann Heckman** from Jeanne Yeagle