

# BRAVO!

Lexington Opera Society Newsletter Vol. 7 No. 4 Summer 2008



UK Opera Theatre  
presents *La Bohème*  
Oct. 17-18, Oct. 25-26  
7:30 p.m.  
Lexington Opera House

Nov. 8, 7:30  
Owensboro's  
RiverPark Center

## *Grand Night Draws Crowds, Revenue*

Dr. Everett McCorvey has declared the 2008 edition of *It's a Grand Night for Singing* a success. Approximately 6,000 people attended the six shows at Singletary Center in June. A similar number attended last year. Revenue increased 8 percent over last year's \$115,000.

"We are pleased about this, especially in a year with skyrocketing gas prices and economic challenges," said McCorvey, director of UK Opera Theatre and the *Grand Night* executive producer. "We were ecstatic about the ticket sales and the response from the audience."

McCorvey also said he was pleased with the show's length, cohesiveness, and quality of the sound.

The show's theme was "The Great American Songbook, from Billboard to Broadway." Popular numbers included an adaptation of Ike and Tina Turner's "Proud Mary" and "Mr. Bojangles."

Next year's theme has not been decided but McCorvey said he and his colleagues have started to brainstorm. "We will continue to work on developing a high-energy show for our wonderful audiences in the Bluegrass," he said.

*It's a Grand Night for Singing* made its debut in 1993 and has become a fixture of the Lexington cultural calendar.

## *An Intimate View of Grand Night from Backstage*

Everyone who has been in the audience of *It's a Grand Night for Singing* remembers the joyous impact of this extraordinary show. I had the privilege of watching a performance from backstage, where the behind-the-scenes activities and perspective constitute yet another amazing event.

*Grand Night's* success is the result of a collaborative effort over a long period of time. The 11 members of the creative team started work at the beginning of spring semester. The new stage set, designed by Bob Pickering, and the effective lighting, designed by Tanya Harper, were very impressive. A cast of 59 singers and dancers (80 percent from UK and 20 percent from the community) rehearsed daily for six weeks, with only two days off during the Memorial Day weekend. Almost all of the arrangements and



Top, Dr. Everett McCorvey harmonizes with the cast; above, Louise Shouse interviews Maestro Rob Baldwin.

orchestrations were done in-house by Johnie Dean and Tedrin Blair Lindsay. The 33 members of the UK Orchestra learned the music prior to rehearsal, and the final decision on which numbers to keep and which to cut was made two days before opening night.

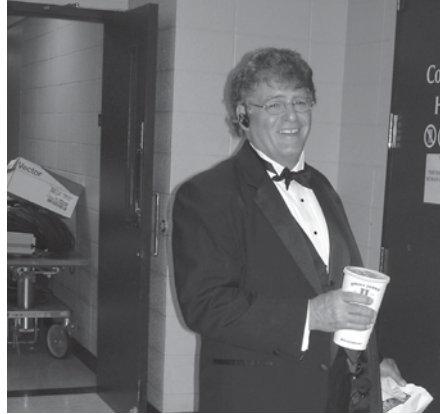
For the June 14 show, the performers arrived early for vocal warm-ups with Dr. Everett McCorvey, the show's executive producer and musical director, at the piano. Production supervisor Marc Schlackman, in his tuxedo, addressed everyone as "ladies and gentlemen," reinforcing the professionalism of the performance. Indeed, I was struck by the respect performers showed each other and the unspoken formality of the entire production.

Dr. McCorvey read from his notes: "The last show went well because you gave lots of energy and received it back. It is really important to do it again. Don't

*cont'd from page 1*

let your guard down; lots of people haven't seen the show, and almost 1,400 tickets have been sold for tonight." He encouraged the cast to "perform with energy and lots of smiles; have a great show!"

The cast rehearsed a few numbers, singing softly but dancing and acting without restraint. James Grino, Whit Whitaker, and Luther Lewis practiced their opening routine before taking time out for a rest. Three television monitors were positioned at the front of the stage so the performers always had Maestro Rob Baldwin in view. I complimented Maestro Baldwin on the seamless transition between acts, and he said that he "rides the wave of the applause." If he starts the next number too soon, the audience can't hear the opening notes; if he starts too late, the show becomes too slow. The rhythm is different for every performance. Three backstage audio technicians tested and fitted the individual microphones on the performers for the opening act. Once the show started, the audio table was busy and crowded as the audio technicians changed and adjusted the mikes in the small amount of time between acts. Each mike was taped to a performer's face and connected to a wire running down the performer's back to a battery tucked into the back of his or her shirt, dress or waistband. In addition, there was a standing microphone on each side of backstage, where several singers gathered to enhance the ensemble and company vocal numbers. About 20 minutes before the show started Schlackman announced that Singletary Center was filling up. Backstage became very dark, with the costumed performers quietly milling around, talking, singing, and dancing. The energy buildup was contagious; when Maestro Baldwin approached, applause broke out backstage. James Grino danced, whirled and jumped; then he and Whit Whitaker hugged each other before bounding onto the stage for "Let the Good Times Roll."



*Top, Mark Schlackman; middle, a view from stage right; above, performers outfitted in costumes from the Lion King*

Teamwork among the performers facilitated the many costume changes. SCAPA loaned the animal masks for "I Can't Wait to be King," the choir robes were borrowed from First Presbyterian and Wesley United Methodist Churches, and Gino's provided the tuxedos for a nominal fee. The cast members were individually responsible for bringing all of their other costumes. The close-up view of Tedrin Blair Lindsay's upper body dancing on the piano bench was an act unto itself, as was the tenderness between Alicia and Everett McCorvey as they prepared for "Stranger in Paradise." Rodgers' rendition of "Mr. Bojangles" brought the backstage to a reverent silence. Nan McSwain and Rob Baldwin were singing out during "Walk Him Up the Stairs." Peggy Stamps, Kurtis Brown, and Chapree Weathers gave their own backstage show as they danced during "Proud Mary." The respect and camaraderie among the performers underscored the support the cast members gave each other in the short, hectic moments between acts. Despite the close timing, there were no near misses. Maestro Baldwin frequently turned his face over his left shoulder. He was watching the performance with peripheral vision and positioning his ear toward an amplifier at his feet. Not only does the conductor have a restricted view of the singers and dancers, but the sound of the orchestra is frequently drowned out by the pianos and the drums.

Soon after intermission I became aware that something more magical than the individual acts was taking place. The energy from the audience had become transforming, and a profound communication was happening. The audience empowered the performers

just as the performers inspired the audience. When the orchestra struck up the closing number, *It's a Grand Night for Singing*, the audience level of participation matched the singing throughout the show. A cast of 1,500 performed the final act because there was no longer a dividing line between the performers and the audience. This is the grandeur of the performing arts.

*by Louise Shouse  
photos by Mary Powell*

**BRAVO!**

# Tedrin's Recording Corner

by Tedrin Blair Lindsay



Since I began writing this column three years ago, I have recommended recordings for five Puccini operas, far more than for any other composer, and yet I still have not covered his beloved *Madama Butterfly*. I will now redress that omission with a couple of outstanding traversals of this work.

In the past I have resisted this opera because I dislike both the callous hero and codependent heroine, but over the years the gorgeous music, tinged with exotic Japanese flavor, and the remarkably detailed dramatic construction and portraiture of all the characters have won my admiration. I now enjoy *Madama Butterfly* as a cautionary tale against unequal partnership in romantic relationships and against American imperialism — and again, Puccini masterfully realized the luscious music, both vocally and orchestrally.

Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi were brilliant Butterflies in their day and recorded their interpretations of the role, both still available. However, I am more taken with two other divas of the subsequent generation who brought unique qualities to their characterizations, which are tied for first place in my estimation.

First, the title role has never been more beautifully sung than by Mirella Freni in her 1974 recording for the London label, limpid and lovely and heart wrenching. For that matter, Luciano Pavarotti makes

the cad Pinkerton as sympathetic as possible with stunning vocalism of his own, and the Vienna Philharmonic led by Herbert von Karajan plays the opera with passion and perfection. Add the luxurious casting of Christa Ludwig as Butterfly's servant Suzuki, and it is easy to dub this a definitive recording.

Nevertheless, I also cannot imagine the legacy of recorded opera without the broken-hearted, impassioned Butterfly of Renata Scotto, possibly her greatest characterization. Her voice has nowhere near the plushness of Freni's, but her total command of the verismo style and her total commitment to the dramatic journey of the story achieve the pinnacle of operatic art. Aply partnered by the great Carlo Bergonzi, with Sir John Barbirolli conducting the Rome Opera forces, Scotto made this 1966 product by the Angel/EMI label an instant classic, securing her name as one of the legendary Butterflies of all time.

*Madama Butterfly* (Freni/Pavarotti/von Karajan) – London 417 577-2  
*Madama Butterfly* (Scotto/Bergonzi/Barbirolli) – EMI D214865



*Prelude! A Grand Night for Wine, Food and Song* brought in approximately \$69,700 in revenues, including ticket sales and live and silent auction items. The net cash flow of \$49,000 was on par with the previous year.

Several hundred opera supporters mingled in Singletary Center and enjoyed a wide range of wines provided by loyal sponsor Liquor Barn and delicious hors d'oeuvres from Annette's Catering.

Bidding went briskly for some of the coveted live auction offerings, including a John Tuska ceramic relief, an instant wine cellar, a week for two in a St. Maarten condo owned by Brian Tremain and Phil Dunn, and a wine party for 10 hosted by Liquor Barn's Roger Leasor and UK Opera's Dr. Everett McCorvey.

Photos, clockwise from top left: *Prelude* guests check out the silent auction items; Dr. Everett McCorvey and singers give a preview of *Grand Night*; LOS president Pam Miller encourages bidders.

# Dressed for Success — Lexington Stage Costumes

In opera “clothes make the man,” and providing beautiful and appropriate costumes is always a major expense for any opera company.

In 2004, the Lexington Opera Society received a grant from the Lucille Little Foundation to purchase a large stock of theatrical costumes from local costumer Marie Henderson, primarily for use free of charge by UKOT to help subsidize production costs. Mary Powell was recruited



Top, from left, Wayne Sullivan, Mona Hagyard, and Sylvia Davis; above, Brandy Lynn Hawkins and Amelia Groetsch, who appeared in *Carmen*

to be wardrobe mistress for this LOS project, called Lexington Stage Costumes, because of her experience as a museum curator who organized large collections and her interest in backstage work with UKOT. Over the past three years, Powell and a dedicated group of LOS board members (Wayne Sullivan, Sylvia Davis, and Mona Hagyard) and Bravo Guild volunteers (Linde Couch, Georgie Strickland, Wilma Sulka, Sonja Mather, and Anne Wilson)

have cataloged more than 2,200 costume items, and the information is now stored in a computerized database.

UKOT has just added a full-time costume designer, Susan Dudley Wigglesworth, to its production staff, with partial financial support by LOS. Wigglesworth’s wonderful costume designs are already familiar to Lexington audiences from UKOT’s recent productions of *Carmen* and *Hansel and Gretel*. The principal roles in both of those operas were double-cast, so *Hansel and Gretel* featured not one but two fabulous costumes for the witch. Approximately 80 percent of the costumes in both shows came from the original LSC stock, saving UKOT more than \$12,000 in rental costs.

*BRAVO!*

Sometimes costumes made for earlier UKOT productions reappear in later ones. For example, the gorgeous silk kimono worn as a disguise by Tallulah in *Hotel Casablanca* is from the set of authentic Japanese costumes made by Dr. Robert Haven and his students in the UK Department of Theatre for UKOT’s *Madama Butterfly* in 2006. LSC costumes are also featured in the UK Vocal Music Program opera workshop “scenes” performances, UKOT’s LOOP (the Schmidt Opera Outreach Program), *It’s a Grand Night for Singing*, and Broadway Bound, the new summertime Performing Arts Camp for primary and middle-school students offered by UKOT and the Kentucky Classical Theatre Conservatory.



Top, Mark A. Kano, who appeared in *Hansel and Gretel*, with Mary Powell; middle, Amanda Balltrip in a *Hotel Casablanca* costume; above, a UK Opera workshop

The costume company is in Suite 311A at Victorian Square in downtown Lexington, just across the street from the Lexington Opera House, where UKOT mounts two productions each year. Costumes are available for rental to local and regional theatre and opera production companies, including schools. To learn more, visit [www.lexingtonopera.com](http://www.lexingtonopera.com) and click the link “Costume Company” for contact and rental information.

*Story and photos by Mary Powell*

# A View from Backstage

Susan Dudley Wigglesworth is a familiar name to many Lexington operagoers. She was the costumer for UKOT's production of *Carmen* in 2007 and several Schmidt Opera Outreach Program shows and has designed costumes in recent years for both the Lexington Ballet and the Kentucky Ballet Theater. Fortunately for all of us, she has agreed to accept a position as costumer for UKOT, beginning with the upcoming season.

Recently we interviewed Susan to find out more about her background and her plans for the immediate future at UKOT. Not surprisingly, theater has been a lifelong passion of hers. "I knew that I would be going into theater as soon as I saw a stage at the age of 8 or 9," she said. It wasn't long before she was participating "in front of the curtain" with a professional career on the radio at the age of 10; she did her first stage show at 12 in Washington, D.C. Susan eventually got her bachelor's degree from Tufts University and did postgraduate work at the London Academy of Dramatic Arts. She sewed her own clothes throughout high school and college and also honed those skills as she sewed for others to support herself. For some time she pursued an acting career, mostly doing Shakespeare, and became increasingly interested in how period costumes were made. Finally, at 30, she decided to settle down and have children, concluding that "costuming is much more family friendly than acting."

Susan began her own costuming and gown business in Los Angeles, where she designed recital and Oscar gowns before moving to Frankfort, Ky., to raise her children. Because they were involved in dance and theater, she became the "costume mom," learning all about costuming ballet dancers, which was very different from the work she had done previously (think tutus).

Susan loves the art of costuming because it "gives you something tangible and is an accomplishment that you can see at the end of the day or the end of the project." She is thrilled to be making Lexington her primary work home, exclaiming, "I love the city and the artistic community that is here. I'm also very excited to help build this program because Everett seems to attract kind, dedicated, and talented people, a combination that is not always evident in a program."

Susan has strong praise for members of the Bravo Guild who have worked alongside her on past productions. "The Bravo Guild has really helped to build a strong foundation for a costume shop with skilled and talented workers and helpers."

Susan is impressed by the professional quality of

UKOT's student performers. "Students here are always giving their best and that makes a huge difference to the value of the production. If students are willing to work that hard, it makes me work even harder."

## *Looking forward to La Bobème in October at the Opera House ...*

Director Michael Ehrman is setting this popular opera in the 1920s in Paris, a decision Susan applauds. "I've always loved (and worn) vintage clothing ... and I've read a great deal about the artists of the time — F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein — all people I want to portray in *Bohème's* second act, having the characters in the opera interact with other real artists of the time. This opera really lends itself well to the type of enthusiasm that was present in Paris in the '20s. There is a sense of freedom and excess of the time that is also evident in the characterizations of Musetta and even Rodolfo and his immediate passion for Mimi. Also, Mimi is a seamstress, which was an important profession in the time period. The styles were constantly changing and people had their own seamstresses and it makes perfect sense that a character would do this type of work."

Susan faces challenges in designing this show: "I have to make two of everything. Singers are never the same size and even if they are close, we want to make the characters look as great as possible in their own costumes. Also, the large second act chorus scene is a particular challenge. In this opera, the chorus is made up of characters and individuals. There are solo lines and a variety of people, so there has to be more discrepancy in the chorus costumes. Luckily the '20s costuming is forgiving and we don't have to worry about long trains and skirts backstage, which can be very dangerous. Hats are also a challenge in this time period because the styles come down on the forehead and cover the face, which is not what we want on stage and very difficult to light, so I'll have to come up with some modifications that will still be recognizable as being stylized in the '20s."

There are thus many reasons to look forward to *La Bobème*, and certainly to the arrival of Susan Dudley Wigglesworth as the newest member of the UKOT creative team. Welcome, Susan!

*by Amelia Groetsch and Meriah Kruse*

(Groetsch is a master's degree student in vocal performance at UK and a valued member of the arts administration team. Kruse is UKOT's program coordinator and a lifelong multi-disciplinary arts enthusiast and practitioner.

## *K-House Renovations a Boon to Opera Program*

The headquarters for UK Opera Theatre, the building on Rose Street known as K-House, will undergo much-needed renovations beginning in late fall. Groundbreaking ceremonies will take place Oct. 24 at noon. Dr. Everett McCorvey, the program's director, talked recently about what the renovations to the Koinonia House will mean for UK Opera Theatre.

**McCorvey:** This is the big renovation. Because of a generous gift of \$500,000 from William and Casiana Schmidt and a match from the Research Challenge Trust Fund, we will be able to renovate the main office space for UK Opera Theatre. We will change the name of the office/rehearsal (Koinonia House) complex to the William E. and Casiana Schmidt Vocal Arts Center. Housed in the Schmidt Center will be more rehearsal rooms, voice studios, and offices for the voice teachers and staff in the UK Opera Theatre Program. There will be a very large (35 x 50 foot) rehearsal hall space upstairs, six new voice studios, a one-bedroom apartment, a voice laboratory, and a kitchenette. Downstairs, we will add four new office spaces for our staff and two new practice rooms for students.

**LOS:** What will the renovations mean from a production standpoint?

**McCorvey:** This will make it possible for us to have greater coordination between all of the areas. It will also give us more teaching and rehearsal space. We currently do not have enough space in the building to house our staff and teach our students. It will be great having all of our classroom space, office space, and studio teaching space in the same building. It will give us many more options for the type of classes that we can teach and for rehearsals. We will also have a voice laboratory for our vocal pedagogy classes. Currently, we take our students over to the UK Medical Center for some of our vocal pedagogy classes. In the Koinonia House we only have one large rehearsal space now. We desperately need a movement studio with mirrors and a sprung floor (the type of floor used by dancers and basketball

players so that we can protect the knees and bodies of our singers when they are dancing). We need teaching spaces for our classes; we need studio spaces to teach students in our growing program and we need office space for our staff.

**LOS:** What are some of the challenges now encountered that the renovations will help ease?

**McCorvey:** This will give us a lot more flexibility for offering different classes and for holding multiple rehearsals at the same time. At the moment, we can only hold one rehearsal for a production at a time. With the expansion of the facility, we will be able to have multiple rehearsals going on at the same time. Take our *It's a Grand Night for Singing* production, for instance. If we had had more spaces to rehearse, we could have rehearsed musical numbers downstairs while rehearsing dance numbers upstairs. We could even rehearse small group numbers at the same time in one of the studio spaces. Now, we can only do this if we go to another building which we don't always have access to. For this year's production of *Grand Night*, when the theatre movement studio was not available, we had to hold our rehearsals downtown at Arts Place because of the need for a sprung floor for dancing.

**LOS:** How will operagoers benefit from the renovations?

**McCorvey:** The quality of our productions will continue to rise as a result. It will also be less stressful on the directors of the different areas of our productions because they will have spaces in which to direct and teachers will have spaces in which to teach. I might add that we are offering naming opportunities for each of the spaces in our newly renovated facility. There are 16 potential spaces which will be available for naming opportunities. If our opera supporters are interested in a naming opportunity for one of the studio spaces or rehearsal halls in the newly renovated William E. and Casiana Schmidt Vocal Arts Center, please contact Dr. Everett McCorvey at (859) 257-9331 or by e-mail at mcorvey@uky.edu.

## *What's New at UKOT*

For the second consecutive summer, young children have brought their special brand of enthusiasm for musical theater to the halls of the K-House. During the first three weeks of June, more than 80 young singers, dancers, and actors from Central Kentucky schools joined us for Broadway Bound, a series of three weeklong musical theater camps held on the UK campus. Each week culminated in a different original Broadway revue, performed with full costuming.

Under the direction of talented local artists, these future stars had the opportunities to learn music from various musical theater productions, to work with experienced professionals, gain confidence and skill in artistic expression, become a valuable part of a performing team, and make new friends in the context of an

encouraging and noncompetitive environment.

In an evaluation of last year's program, one student wrote, "This camp taught me what it would be like to be on Broadway and to put together a real Broadway show. It was a lot of hard work, but it was a lot of fun!"

Since its inception last summer, Broadway Bound has almost doubled in size both in participants and audience members. Vocal coach and artistic director Mary Joy Nelson believes it will only continue to grow. "I think this program will expand every year not only because word is getting out into the community, but because of the talent and enthusiasm of the students. They bring such joy and energy to the stage and it's really evident in their performances," she said.

*by Amelia Groetsch*

## Lexington Opera Society Lecture Series

Tedrin Blair Lindsay, Instructor

### Fall 2008 Class Schedule

Location: Niles Gallery of the Lucille Caudill Little Fine Arts Library, UK Campus

September 20	In Depth with Verdi's <i>Un ballo in maschera</i> (A Masked Ball) (1859)
September 27	In Depth with Mozart's <i>Don Giovanni</i> (1787), Act 1
October 4	In Depth with Mozart's <i>Don Giovanni</i> , Act 2
October 11	In Depth with Boito's <i>Mefistofele</i> (1868)
October 18	In Depth with Stravinsky's <i>The Rake's Progress</i> (1951)
October 25	No Class – Please attend the Schmidt Vocal Competition
November 1	In Depth with Strauss' <i>Salome</i> (1905)
November 8	In Depth with Strauss' <i>Elektra</i> (1909)
November 15	In Depth with Massenet's <i>Werther</i> (1892)

## Tedrin's Commentary on the Fall 2008 Class Topics

We begin the new academic year with a class devoted to one of Verdi's middle period masterpieces, *Un ballo in maschera*. Because of the many beautiful melodies and rich characterization, this has always been one of Verdi's most popular operas. The genesis of the opera and its early production history are also of unusually colorful interest — can you say “censorship?”

We will spend two weeks studying one of the greatest artistic achievements in the history of human civilization: *Don Giovanni* by Mozart and the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. Because of this opera's brilliance and complexity, I decided that we could only do it justice by surveying it one act at a time. I will focus especially on Mozart's keen observation and portrayal of human nature with all its contradictions and vagaries as dramatized in his music.

With Halloween on the way, the two class sessions in mid-October will scare you with two spine-tingling operatic portrayals of the devil in action. Arrigo Boito is best remembered for having penned some of Verdi's best libretti, but as a composer in his own right his *Mefistofele* is regarded as one of the most outstanding examples of Italian grand opera in the period of Verdi's dominance. The prologue of this opera, set in heaven before the very throne of God, is one of the most transcendent choral scenes ever written — I guarantee you cold chills all over! Nick Shadow represents an altogether more modern Satan in Stravinsky's 20th-century masterpiece, *The Rake's Progress*. After the sinister card game in the graveyard, none of us will ever want to gamble again. Hint: Evil is vanquished, but virtue

goes insane in the process! These are two of my favorite operas, and I know you will really appreciate them, too!

There will be no class Oct. 25 in order to accommodate the all-day schedule of the Schmidt Vocal Arts Competition. Then for the first two weeks of November we will celebrate two of the earliest and most powerful works of German Expressionism, Richard Strauss' full-length one-act dramas, *Salome* (a Biblical story of sexual depravity) and *Elektra* (a Greek myth of vengeful bloodlust). These operas, both way over the top despite their relative brevity, are fascinating in their unflinching portrayal of these archetypally psychotic characters, and together mark a watershed moment in the history of opera, when popular and esoteric branches of the art form diverged once and for all, with Strauss himself backing away from the abyss he had broached with these amazing works.

We will end the semester on a sweeter note, with Massenet's portrayal of the artistic temperament, *Werther*. Beside the loveliness of the music, this opera is a convincing character study of the role of the artist in society, ever desired yet misunderstood by others, always an “outsider” in his own estimation. Plus, the charming Christmas song sung by children at the beginning and end of this opera will put us in the perfect mood for the upcoming holidays, which will begin in earnest after the Metropolitan Opera District Council Auditions on Nov. 22.

Classes are 10 a.m. to noon in the Niles Gallery. Cost is \$25 each, or \$175 for eight. Student cost per class is \$5.



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*Masthead photos by Tim Collins, collage by Pat Trotter*

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