



High Notes

A Periodic Newsletter for Portland Opera Volunteers April 2019

2019 Opera Season in Full Swing!

Portland Opera’s production of the critically acclaimed opera *As One*, composed by Laura Kaminsky, closed on March 30. It was enthusiastically received and attracted people new to opera. This was the first time Portland Opera has presented an opera composed by a woman.

Portland Opera also teamed up with local award-winning photographer Gia Goodrich to present a gallery exhibit titled “As I Am” in Antoinette Hatfield Hall during the show’s run. The exhibit featured members of our transgender community who shared their stories and participated in talks before and after each show. There was a lot of buzz surrounding this opera, and we’re looking forward to the remainder of the season.



Volunteer OPERAtunities

Volunteers are essential to the successful run of all productions. Please watch your email for the call for volunteers for each show and respond with your choice(s) of light walking, formal greeting, backstage beverage service, or dress rehearsal monitoring. There has been less need for help with mailings recently, but some occasions may come up during the year. The Portland Opera to Go (POGO) performances at the Hampton Opera Center in

December are another chance to help out. Keep your eye out for email requests from Brita Enflo, the staff volunteer liaison, for these and other possible opportunities.

COMING NEXT

BIG NIGHT CONCERT

May 11 (Keller Auditorium)

IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA/ Gioachino Rossini

June 7, 9m, 13, 15 (Keller Auditorium)

LA FINTA GIARDINIERA/

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

July 12, 14m, 18, 20, 24, 27 (Newmark Theatre)

IN THE PENAL COLONY/ Philip Glass

July 26, 28m, 30, Aug 1, 3, 6, 8, 10

Hampton Opera Center

Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon

Portland Opera hosted a luncheon for all active volunteers at Hampton Opera Center on March 10 (postponed from a snowy February 10). As always, it was a fun event where volunteers could catch up with fellow long-time volunteers and meet new ones. Portland Opera General Director Christopher Mattaliano recognized the significant contribution of volunteers, noting that about 140 active volunteers contributed over 5,000 volunteer hours last year. **THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!!!**

Mr. Mattaliano remembered Craig Allen, who lost his battle with cancer last July. Craig was a devoted volunteer who did any job that came up, whether it was light walking, formal greeting, backstage beverage service, mailings, receptionist, or cleaning up after board meetings. He was Portland Opera

volunteer of the year in 2017. During our interview with Craig (see August 2018 newsletter article), we learned that he was a man of many talents, including author of five novels, composer, and woodworker. He is truly missed.

Mr. Mattaliano recognized all previous volunteers of the year and then named Ann Pedersen as the 2018 volunteer of the year. Ann has volunteered with Portland Opera for a number of years. She currently focuses primarily on the backstage beverage service, taking multiple shifts. Unfortunately, Ann was unable to attend the luncheon, but we expect to see her backstage soon. Look for a spotlight on Ann in a future newsletter edition.

A highlight of the luncheon was the performance by soprano Helen Huang, tenor Thomas Cilluffo, and pianist Nicholas Fox. Hearing opera singers in such an intimate setting is so moving and such a treat – it would be enough to entice one to attend even without the food! In addition to being a resident artist, Tom performed in the recent Portland Opera to Go (POGO) version of *Barber of Seville*. He sang an aria from *Barber* in the original Italian, followed by the English adaptation used in the POGO production, illustrating the different approaches used for “grown up” and children’s audiences. Helen sang a Chinese song that was also included in her 2018 recital. Thank you, Portland Opera, for a special afternoon!

Christine Richardson: Telling the Story

Portland Opera’s costume shop is a fascinating place, full of energy and creativity. So is Christine Richardson, Portland Opera’s costume director since 2015. Christine oversees all costume-related projects, including the season productions, Portland Opera to Go (POGO), galas, and displays. She is in charge of building new costumes and working with other opera companies if costumes are rented. Because the season’s shows overlap, considerable coordination and organization are needed. “Being a creative problem solver/mastermind is at the heart of it,” Christine says, “whether it is for opera, film, television, dance, or theatre.” Christine’s diverse professional experience has encompassed almost all of these performing arts fields.

Originally from Vancouver, Washington, Christine grew up sewing, making things, and doing art

projects. In college, she studied fashion and art history to learn the technical aspects of design. Because she also loves history and storytelling, she thought that fashion/couture would be a good career fit for her.



Christine’s entry into the performing arts was serendipitous. It started when she made custom pillows, did upholstery work, and worked in the art department for a movie being filmed in Portland. This led to her introduction to wardrobe staff and subsequent free-lance work as a set costumer and wardrobe supervisor for movies and television, including the classic series *Northern Exposure*. This work involved considerable travel, and after seven years, she was ready to stay in one place. Portland Center Stage employed her as a stitcher and design assistant from 1993-97, and she also worked in Portland Opera’s costume shop during this period.

Christine next worked as wardrobe supervisor for the Portland production of the long-running hit show, *Tony and Tina’s Wedding*. This eventually led her to move to Minneapolis, where she oversaw productions of the show in six cities. This was followed by a 10-year stint as the costume workroom manager for the Guthrie Theater. During this time, she designed costumes for 12 productions at the Guthrie, as well as costumes for Stages Theatre Company’s productions for children.

In 2015, Christine moved back home to take on her current position at Portland Opera, following the retirement of Frances Britt.

If you saw Portland Opera’s gorgeous *La Traviata* last November, you have seen Christine’s fabulous design work. She designed the entire production: 82 costumes comprising 475 costume pieces. Her design process involved considerable historical research, images, fabric swatches, drawings, and three-dimensional layouts over many months. Costume shop staff brought her concepts to life. The resulting creations were crucial to setting the style and mood of each scene in the opera. “Costumes are a huge part of telling the story,” Christine says.



After spending so much time in other cities, Christine is happy to be back. She has family in Vancouver and spends a lot of her free time with them. She owns a house there and, unsurprisingly, does her own plumbing, dry-walling, and other maintenance. She loves hiking and the outdoors. But asked about hobbies, Christine does not hesitate. “I see my design work as my hobby. We’re all creative, and I get to live my creativity every day.”

Clothing is a connection, and people feel an affinity for it. I see myself as an ambassador to the arts in general. Anyone who wants to come into the costume shop and see what we do here is most welcome.

Learn more about Christine, as well as Portland Opera’s Laura Hassell, in an *Artslandia* magazine interview: <https://artslandia.com/evolving-arias-laura-hassell-christine-richardson/>. You can also see Christine’s other design work at www.christineArichardson.com

Helen Huang Continues to Shine

Soprano Helen Zhibing Huang, a second-year resident artist, and Nicholas Fox, pianist, held their recital February 19. It was a woman-themed evening, with most of the music composed by a woman or set to a woman’s poetry. Helen brings a bright light to the stage with her radiant smile, emotion, and singing clarity.

Helen started with *La sol, fa, mi, re, do* by Barbara Strozzi—light and uplifting music—followed by *Two Poems of Aguedo Pizarro*, composed by Joseph Schwantner and written for soprano Lucy Shelton. These dramatic songs require a strong voice and piano, and the second one has a distinctive haunting quality. The next set of songs was written by Lili Boulanger. Nick Fox finished the first half of the recital by playing four Suleika songs composed by Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, Hugo Wolf, and Franz Schubert. (These four pieces are composed to poems included in the *Book of Suleika*, part of a poetry collection published by Goethe. Three, and possibly all four, of them were written by Marianne von Willemer.)

The second half of Helen’s program started with a duet with Sophie Baird-Daniel, an accomplished harpist and personal friend. They performed *Il Pleut* by Kaija Saariaho, a strong and beautiful song. Helen and Nick followed this with a set by Francis Poulenc written for female voice, using poems by Louise de Vilmorin. These pieces were especially emotional and elegant. Helen finished the program with two Chinese songs; one is a lullaby her mother used to sing to her. Her encore was a light and fun song about a canary. Helen displayed a variety of emotions and singing versatility during this program. Wow!



We strongly recommend that you come out and enjoy these entertaining evenings of song! All recitals take place in the Whitsell Auditorium at the Portland Art Museum and begin at 7 pm. They are free, with a suggested donation of \$20 to help support the resident artist program.

UPCOMING PORA RECITALS
(with pianist Nicholas Fox)

- **Geoffrey Schellenberg:** *Tuesday, May 14*
- **Camille Sherman:** *Tuesday, June 25*

Camille Sherman's Many Roles

Camille Sherman stepped on stage as a Portland Resident Artist in last November's production of *La Traviata*, singing the role of Flora. Fortunately, we have a number of additional opportunities to hear this versatile mezzo soprano in a variety of performances throughout the spring and summer.



Camille was born into a musical family in Petaluma, California; her father is a jazz bass player, and her mother sings jazz, cabaret, and musical theatre. Her parents met in a fittingly theatrical setting, when they were both performing on a cruise ship. Camille's twin sister, Emily, plays reed instruments and studied at the Berklee School of Music in Boston. Emily now works in music production and engineering in Los Angeles.

With this background, Camille has no clear memory of the first time she sang; it was just always part of her life. She took voice lessons in high school and community college and also studied piano and flute. During this time, she was involved in all kinds of music—except opera, which she came to only later. It was after she was accepted into the voice program at Boston Conservatory of Music that she became very serious about her singing and became immersed in opera. She earned a bachelor's degree in vocal performance and then a master's in vocal performance from San Francisco Conservatory of

Music. During graduate school, she went on her first big audition tour. In an entirely different role, she also worked part time as a “technical expert” for mobile devices at an Apple genius bar. After completing her degree, she was an artist in residence at Pensacola Opera during their 2016-17 season. She returned to Pensacola Opera in 2019 to make her role debut as Stéphanie in *Roméo and Juliette*.

After singing Flora in *La Traviata* for Portland Opera, Camille covered the role of Hannah (after) in *As One*. She will cover Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* and will sing Ramiro (a pants role) in *La Finta Giardiniera*. “This is a dream season,” she says. “I have four great assignments.” She will also appear in the Big Night concert and will give a recital on Tuesday, June 25. As if this weren't enough, she was in New York in March as a semifinalist in the 2019 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Camille is a huge sports fan. She watches baseball, basketball, and football and enjoys doing it together with her family when possible. She loves to read, and she boxes to keep fit (using heavy bags rather than sparring).

What would she be if not an opera singer? “It's hard to picture not being in music,” Camille says. “Maybe journalism. In the times we're living in now, there is so much to write about.”

Her long-range plan, though, is to stay with the music. When her singing career is done, she would like to be an artistic director of a company. But that is a long time off. In the meantime, we look forward to hearing her do more of what she does best!

Camille notes that auditions, competition—and yes, rejection—have to be accepted as part of an opera singer's life. “It takes a long time to learn to appreciate your voice. Your voice is not a pizza—not everyone is going to love it. You just have to be yourself.” She also makes the best of the situation by maintaining a “rejection fund,” contributing \$10 for each rejection and ensuring at least some sort of payoff.

Join the Conversation!

You can find out more about the subjects in these articles, as well as much more, at:

- Portland Opera website: www.portlandopera.org
- Volunteer information: www.portlandopera.org/volunteer
- Brita Enflo (staff volunteer liaison): benflo@portlandopera.org

You can also share your thoughts with other opera lovers on our Facebook page:

[Facebook.com/PortlandOperaAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/PortlandOperaAssociation) and follow us on [Twitter@PortlandOpera](https://twitter.com/PortlandOpera). Join the conversation and share your own posts!

High Notes editors: Marilyn Crilley and Nancy Jerrick

Portland Opera's Mission

Portland Opera exists to inspire, challenge and uplift our audiences by creating productions of high artistic quality that celebrate the beauty and breadth of opera.

