



SKYLARK OPERA THEATRE YEAR IN REVIEW

Annual Activities Report
Fiscal Year October 2020-September 2021



September 30, 2021

From the Board President

It has been a year of “emerging” for Skylark Opera Theatre. The fiscal year began in the dark shadows of the coronavirus pandemic and the prospect of returning to live-stage performances was a distant dream. Our 40th year celebration plans came to a standstill. Keeping visible and relevant was a challenge we were determined to meet.

In keeping with the public health recommendations to remain home, *Season’s Greetings from Skylark* and *With Love from Skylark* offered seasonal selections from our performers’ homes to our audiences via our Facebook page. In addition, we received funding to create a series of virtual selections, *Skylark Memories*, a special recognition of our 40 years of offering Skylark’s unique brand of opera and music theater. Selections were widely shared on our Facebook page and via Vimeo.

Throughout the summer of 2021, Skylark Opera Theatre performers presented hour-long concerts at senior residences throughout the Twin Cities area. *Skylark for Seniors* concerts first premiered in the Fall of 2020. They were our way of helping to ease the loneliness of seniors especially hard hit by the public health restrictions necessitated due to their risk of contracting COVID. The concerts were well-received and Skylark was invited back for more. It has been an honor and a privilege to continue this series of concerts and share the spectacular musical talents of Skylark Opera Theatre’s performers under the direction of our talented and creative artistic director, Bob Neu. We are proud to announce that *Skylark for Seniors* will continue into the fall of 2021.

Skylark is emerging from the long intermission of COVID. We are now ready to offer a season of live-stage performances to our audiences. This fiscal year has been one of planning for productions at two amazing venues in the Twin Cities. We will be presenting a new family Christmas-time tradition, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, in December on the Andy Boss Thrust Stage in the historic Hamm Building at Park Square Theatre in St. Paul. We will be following it with a Spring 2022 production of *Eugene Onegin* at The Museum of Russian Art in Minneapolis. Our production season will continue with our popular *Skylark for Seniors* performances during the summer and fall of 2022.

What started off as a tentative 41st year has closed with Skylark Opera Theatre ready to move forward. Our board of directors, our artistic director, and our performers are committed to continuing to offer Skylark’s unique brand of opera and music theater for more years to come.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Angeline M. Carlson".

Skylark Spotlight: Skylark Opera Theatre Administration

Our Mission

Skylark Opera Theatre will provide Minnesota audiences with the highest artistic quality, accessible performances of opera and music theater and will develop and highlight the finest local and regional talent.

Our Values

- Opera appreciation spanning multiple generations
 - Local and regional talent
 - Patron accessibility
 - Equity, diversity and inclusion in productions, performers, venues and audiences

Artistic Director: Robert Neu



Bob Neu continues his commitment to Skylark Opera Theatre as our Artistic Director. Bob has served Skylark Opera Theatre in this role since 2016, and directed a number of Skylark productions prior to that. He will be continuing his inspiring and creative direction for the company through our 2021-2022 season and beyond.

SKYLARK OPERA THEATRE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Margaret Blackstone Artz

Daniel Atkins

Matthew Belanger

Angeline Carlson

Penny Gottier Fena

Jill Heins-Nesvold

Jack Neveaux

Ann Morelli Spencer

Executive Committee

Angeline Carlson, President

Jack Neveaux, Vice-president

Penny Fena, Treasurer

Skylark Spotlight: Skylark for Seniors

Skylark for Seniors is a program of concerts presented at senior residential facilities throughout the Twin Cities area. Seniors can enjoy beautiful singing and engage with Skylark's high-quality musical talent in the familiar surroundings of their own senior residences. The concerts first premiered in the Fall of 2020 to entertain seniors who were especially hard hit by the isolation of the coronavirus pandemic. We continued to bring music and its healing powers to senior communities during the Summer of 2021. During these one-hour concerts, the senior audiences and our performers experience a bond like no other.

We have now brought Skylark Opera Theatre's unique brand of opera and music theater to more than 400 seniors in the Twin Cities area. A total of 15 performers and 4 accompanists have participated in this series of opera and music theater selections. Audience members have interacted with our performers after every concert, expressing their delight and appreciation for the vocal talents of Skylark's performers. It has been an honor to be a part of seniors' lives and to offer them a short respite of joyous music. Skylark will continue to offer these performances each summer and fall, with the ongoing goal of bringing seniors joy through these amazing concerts.

The 2021 Summer series was funded by grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB), the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) and the Ebenezer Foundation. The series will continue into the Fall of 2021 through generous community outreach funding from UCare.

SKYLARK FOR SENIORS 2021 SUMMER SERIES

Ebenezer Ridges Campus
(Burnsville)

Martin Luther Care Center
(Bloomington)

Savage at Fen Point
(Savage)

Pillars of Shorewood Landing
(Shorewood)

TowerLight
(St. Louis Park)

Pillars of White Bear Lake
(White Bear Lake)

Cherrywood Pointe of Roseville
(Roseville)

Pillars of Prospect Park
(Minneapolis)



"Thank you so much for bringing such amazing talent to our patio! I've received notes of thanks from residents that listened through their apartment windows as well as from the ones that listened in person on the patio. BRAVO!!!"

Skylark for Seniors performers: Laurel Armstrong ▪ Bergin Baker ▪ Christina Christensen ▪ Paul Coates ▪ Jen Eckes ▪ Daniel Greco ▪ Siena Forest ▪ Justin Spenner ▪ Brian Wallin ▪ KrissAnne Weiss ▪ Luke Williams

Accompanists: Nathan Cicero ▪ Andrew Fleser ▪ Jerry Rubino ▪ Carson Rose Schneider

Artistic Director: Bob Neu

Music Directors: 2020: Jerry Rubino; 2021: Carson Rose Schneider

Skylark Spotlight: Season's Greetings from Skylark and With Love from Skylark

With coronavirus pandemic restrictions still in place at the end of 2020 and continuing into calendar year 2021, Skylark Opera Theatre turned to video technology and social media to maintain its presence in the Twin Cities and beyond. **Season's Greetings from Skylark** featured 18 of Skylark's past performers, who created home-video recordings of seasonal selections beginning the week of November 30, 2020 and continuing through December of 2020 with 12,979 Facebook views.

Jennifer Eckes---Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)

Vicki Fingalson---White Christmas

Andrew Wilkowske—Bring a Torch, Jeannette, Isabella

Tess Altiveros—Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Carmelita Guse—Go, Tell It on the Mountain/
Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow

Christina Christensen—The Christmas Waltz

Norah Long—I'll Be Home for Christmas

Paul Kovakovic—O Tannenbaum

Quinn Shadko—Silver Bells

Adan Varela—La Primera Navidad (The First Noel)

Carson Rose Schneider—Sing We Now of Christmas

Jen Maren—The Twelve Days of (Cow) Christmas

Luke Williams—You're All I Want for Christmas

Matt Williams and Anna Savelsberg—Silent Night

KrisAnne Weiss—Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Kate Beahen—What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?

Siena Forest—Suzy Snowflake

Bill Marshall—Auld Lang Syne

With Love from Skylark featured four performances of love songs on February 14th with 2,638 Facebook views.

Bergen Baker—You are My Sunshine

Kate Beahen—The Strong Woman's Number

Charlie Ohlman—Annie's Song

Cecilia Violetta Lopez—A Little Bit in Love

Skylark Spotlight: Skylark Memories

The shutdown of public events due to the Coronavirus Pandemic dramatically affected Skylark Opera Theatre's plans to celebrate its 40th Anniversary. Funded by grant support from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC), *Skylark Memories* presented 18 short excerpts from memorable performances curated by Skylark Opera Theatre Board of Directors member, Ann Spencer, and narrated by Board of Directors member, Matt Belanger. *Skylark Memories* presented an opportunity to take a stroll through the 72 productions offered to Twin Cities audiences over Skylark's 40 years of performances. The first three *Skylark Memories* were posted to Facebook the week of August 30th and weekly postings continued through the month of September logging more than 12,700 views.

My mind is filled with the memory of Skylark's production of Franz Lehar's **The Merry Widow** starring **Vicki Fingalson** and **Jeff Madison** in 2010. They are a multi-talented and happily-married couple whose outstanding talent is on par with their incredibly strong work ethic. The lead roles of Hanna and Danilo in "The Merry Widow" are difficult roles both musically and dramatically. Hanna and Danilo are a couple at war, who have a long history of an on-again-off-again romance. This is a tall order for any singing actor and I remember over and over again how hard Jeff and Vicki worked to fully explore and develop these complex characters. They had to call on all their acting skills in order to make these characters open, honest, acerbic, witty, funny and ultimately touching. I asked a lot of these two performers and I will always remember how hard they worked and how completely they delivered. This lives in my memory as one of my favorite and most fulfilling Skylark productions. And the next Hanna and Danilo I work with have some big shoes to fill!

Bob Neu, Artistic Director



Vicki Fingalson as Hanna, and Jeff Madison as Danilo in Skylark's 2010 production of Franz Lehar's "The Merry Widow."

Photo Credit: Matt Bellin



Luke Williams and Bergen Baker bring the complex character of Hannah to life in Skylark Opera Theatre's premiere production of AS ONE in 2018.

Photo Credit: Matt Bellin

Opera isn't a museum piece; it touches us in the here and now. In 2018, Skylark produced **As One**, a two-singer opera about a transgender woman's journey from childhood confusion to authentic identity, with tour-de-force performances by baritone **Luke Williams** and soprano **Bergen Baker**. At one of the post-show talkbacks, an audience member stood up and said, "I'm trans. Every word of this opera is true. This is MY story!"

Ann Spencer, Skylark Board Member

Skylark Spotlight: Funding and Donor Support

DONORS OCTOBER 2020-SEPTEMBER 2021

Arlene and Arthur Alm
James Ahrens
deEtt Allen
Linda Aronson
Margaret and Ray Artz
Dan and Jill Atkins
Frederick and Carol Banister
Julie Robbins Baris
Matt Belanger
Matthew and Lori Bellin
Angeline and Robert Carlson
Evelyn Crotty
Joanna Diem
Joel Doering
Erin Duffy
Kevin Duggins
Mary Fena
Penny Fena
Zachary Fena
Gertrude Ffolliott
Patricia Freeburg
Leland and Beverly Gehrke
David Groettum
Gregory and Carol Gross
Joan Oliver Goldsmith/M. Schlessinger
Stephanie Haack
David and Julie Halgren
DJ Hammond
Susan Johnson Hanlon
Rebecca Katz Harwood
Jill Heins-Nesvold
Sally and Robert Horstman
Kathryn Keefer
George and Virginia MacDonald
Vicki Fingalson Madison
Jeffrey Masco
Amy Mino
Joel Mathias
Jason Miller
Robin Moede
Jack Neveaux
Bonnie Palmquist
Leah Reddy
Dorothy Sankey
Jocelyn Sarvady
Noel Schenker
Sylvia Schwarz
Quinn Shadko
Rosemary Soltis
Ann and Eldon Spencer
Stephanie Van D'Elden
D. Clinton and Bettye Ware
Mary Wenger
Maryann Wycoff
Kirsten and Jeffrey Zahler

Grants

Funding of Skylark Opera Theatre's administrative and production costs has continued to be largely due to major grants received during the fiscal year from:

The Harlan Boss Foundation
The Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB)
The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC)
The St. Paul Cultural STAR Program
The Target Foundation

The Board of Directors also received notice of a bequest from the Joan T. Smith Estate during this fiscal year. Ms. Smith was an enthusiastic patron of numerous Twin Cities arts organizations including Skylark Opera Theatre.

Corporate Sponsors

UCare was added as a new corporate sponsor for Skylark Opera Theatre. Funding will support "Skylark for Seniors" performances during the fall of 2021.

Donor connections

Website: Skylark Opera Theatre's website, www.skylarkopera.org, has been refreshed and is updated with new information on a monthly basis.

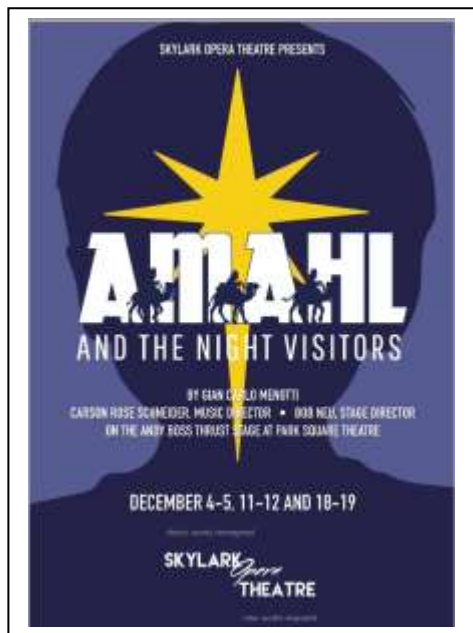
Newsletter: A monthly newsletter, *Happenings at Skylark*, launched in May of 2021. Readers are updated with the latest news from Skylark Opera Theatre and connections to music theater happenings in the Twin Cities. The newsletter is disseminated to Skylark's 1,918 Constant Contact subscribers, on our website, and through direct mailings.

Facebook: Posts to Skylark's Facebook page are made monthly with additional notices of news and events. *Season's Greetings from Skylark*, *With Love from Skylark*, and *Skylark Memories* were all posted on Facebook.

Constant Contact: email connections using Constant Contact numbered 1,918 at the close of the fiscal year. The Constant Contact mailing list is updated with newly subscribing and unsubscribing contacts on a monthly basis. Skylark Opera Theatre has experienced an open rate between 20% and 23% and a click through rate of 1-2%.

Skylark Spotlight: Productions for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

Amahl and the Night Visitors will be presented in the Andy Boss Thrust Stage at Park Square Theatre for nine performances on three successive weekends—December 4th & 5th, 11th & 12th, and 18th & 19th, 2021. This family-oriented, heartwarming story of a boy and his encounter with the three wise men is the perfect addition to the holiday season. The character of Amahl was cast following auditions with the Minnesota Boy Choir; auditions for the remaining cast were held August 22nd and 28th.



Como Lake Partners was selected as the promotions vendor beginning July 1st, with the dual assignment of 1) increasing the visibility and brand-awareness of Skylark Opera Theatre and 2) promoting Skylark's productions of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *Eugene Onegin*.

Announcements of Skylark's return to live-stage productions have been made in donor acknowledgement letters, at *Skylark for Seniors* performances, in the Skylark Happenings newsletter, and on Skylark's website and Facebook landing page.

December 2020's performances will establish *Amahl and the Night Visitors* as a yearly Christmas tradition in the Twin Cities.

Eugene Onegin will be presented at The Museum of Russian Art for six performances March 25th – 27th and April 1st -3rd, 2022. This operatic masterpiece by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, based on the novel in verse-form by Alexander Pushkin, was first introduced in 1879. The three-act opera explores the themes of love and loss within the social conventions of 1820 Russia. It remains one of the most frequently performed operas in the world and Skylark Opera Theatre is proud to bring this production to our audiences at The Museum of Russian Art, a perfect venue for Skylark's production. Additional funding opportunities are being identified.

Skylark for Seniors will continue into the next fiscal year with the generous funding of seven additional performances in 2021 by UCare. Skylark for Seniors performances have been well received and additional funding will be pursued to continue these performances during the summer and fall of 2022.

An additional Fall production will be announced during the performance run of *Eugene Onegin*, returning Skylark Opera Theatre to a two-production performance season. The successful productions of *Skylark for Seniors*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *Eugene Onegin* will provide a solid base on which to create a wider presence in the Twin Cities arts and theater community.



September 30, 2021

From the Artistic Director:

Isn't it funny that the past year already seems to be a blur? The Year of Covid changed all of our lives as it unmoored us from our daily routines, habits and hassles, and taught us new ways to communicate, to connect and to find new means of appreciating the things and the people we love. If it's possible to find a positive element that came out of this pandemic, it's that all of our imaginations were stretched and emboldened as we found new ways to cope and thrive.

And so it was for Skylark Opera Theatre. Deprived of our ability to entertain audiences in a traditional way, we turned to the internet. And we created remote mini-concerts that celebrated not only Christmas, Hanukkah and Valentine's Day, but also celebrated our stellar roster of alumni performers. And lo and behold, the feedback we received from our logged-in audience was overwhelming in volume and large in numbers. Our current internet project, "Skylark Memories," is receiving similar attention and is allowing us to celebrate our 40th anniversary, which was otherwise lost to the pandemic. And again, the imagination has triumphed and seeing video clips of highlights from our illustrious history is a pleasure we likely would not have experienced under more "normal" circumstances.

Personally, I think I'm proudest of our implementation of a series of live concerts for residents in senior living facilities throughout the Twin Cities. I've always felt that this is an underserved audience and the opportunity to share our music with these folks has been a privilege. A valuable secondary result of this program has been that our performers have expressed the fulfillment they feel from seeing their music-making having a touching impact on their audience members. I couldn't be more pleased that our Board has secured additional funding that will enable this program to continue through this coming season.

And barring any additional health surprises, Skylark Opera Theatre will finally be returning live and in person with performances of Menotti's beautiful and moving "Amahl and the Night Visitors" in December. And I'm thrilled that one of my favorite operas, "Eugene Onegin," will be our featured production in the spring. I promise you more than a few surprises in store with that one!

There is no art form more collaborative than opera, and collaboration means thanking people: Our donors, our hard-working Board, our audience members, our performers, our behind-the-scenes personnel - a huge THANK YOU to every one of you for being our devoted and inspiring members of Skylark. We couldn't and we can't do it without you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "R. P. L.", is written at the end of the letter.