

# New England Opera Club



*New England Opera Club Newsletter*

*Logo by Barbara Winston*

## September 2016 Program

**Date:** September 18, 2016  
**Time:** 2:00 PM

**Place:** Watertown Free Public Library  
Speaker: Lew Schneider  
123 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472 (617) 972-6431

### *BEL CANTO AND VICTORIAN OPERA RARITIES*



Lew Schneider will share with us about 20 selections from the bel canto and Victorian opera repertoire. Here are the criteria he used to choose from the hundreds of opera performances in his collection:

- It should be a selection that most if not all of you have never heard-- and after today are not likely to hear again.
- It should be exciting either in its beauty, difficulty, orchestration, and presentation or any combination of the four.

He will be reverting to the traditional presentation form -- CDs rather than DVDs. Thus the audience will be able to concentrate on bel canto--beautiful singing--rather than be distracted by the whims of today's stage directors.

The composers will include Rossini, Donizetti, Balfe, Pacini, Bellini, Wallace, Persiani, and a surprise.

The operas are: *Aureliano in Palmyra*, *Elisabetta*, *Falstaff*, *Mary Tudor*, *Imelda di Lambertazzi*, *Il Paria*, *Hermione*, *La Straniera*, *Maid of Artois*, *Hildagonde*, *Lurline* and *Ines de Castro*.

We hope you will enjoy another of Lew's journeys into the 19th century world of beautiful music.

### *Directions and parking:*

**From the West:** Take Route 20 East (Main Street) to Watertown Square.

**From the East:** Take Rte. 16 (Mt. Auburn St.) west. Turn right on Main Street.

**Public Transportation:** The library is accessible via MBTA Bus routes Express 502, Express 504, 52, 57, 59, 70, 70A, and 71. It is less than a five minute walk to the library from the buses that arrive at Watertown Yard.

**Parking:** There are plenty of metered (free on Sunday) parking spaces at the rear of the Library, from which you can access the Library through the back door. Drive in on the passage just before the Fire House.

*The Library is fully handicap-accessible.*

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Jack Fiddler  
Charlotte Wolfe

**2016 NEOC Programs**

(listings are subject to change)

**October 23**, Watertown Public Library:

**Sources of Ring of the Nibelung**

Erika Reitshamer, speaker

**November 13**, Watertown Public

Library: **Tribute to Jonas Kaufmann**

Meredith Palmer, speaker

**December 11**: Jack Jarzavek, speaker

**Letters or Articles to the Editor:**

NEOC

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**Annual Membership Dues:**

\$35 Single, \$40 Double  
(Two persons at the same address)

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**To contact NEOC**  
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**Jacopo Peri Award**

Each year the NEOC honors  
a person who has made a  
significant contribution to the  
local opera scene.

- 1982 Eunice Alberts
- 1983 Schuyler Chapin
- 1984 Boris Goldovsky
- 1985 Phyllis Curtin
- 1986 Donald Gramm
- 1987 Eleanor Steber
- 1988 John Moriarty
- 1989 Ernest Triplett
- 1990 Ron Della Chiesa
- 1991 Patricia Craig and  
Richard Cassilly
- 1992 John Balme
- 1993 Richard Conrad
- 1994 Susan Stone
- 1995 Robert Honeysucker
- 1996 Scott Brumit
- 1997 William Miranda
- 1998 Norman Kelley
- 1999 D'Anna Fortunato
- 2000 Jan Curtis
- 2001 Roland Hayes  
(*Posthumously*)
- 2002 Bradley Pennington
- 2003 Sharon Daniels
- 2004 Sarah Caldwell
- 2005 Jeffrey Rink
- 2006 Stephen Lord
- 2007 Randolph J. Fuller
- 2008 Janice Mancini Del  
Sesto
- 2009 John M. Tischio
- 2010 Carole Charnow
- 2011 Federico Cortese
- 2012 Martin Pearlman
- 2014 Esther Nelson

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**August meeting:** Once again, we were thrilled to have Bill Cotten return to NEOC in August with a new presentation on *Opera Icons of the Past*. Bill is not only a tenor himself, but on the faculty of Boston Conservatory as director of the voice division. This time, he took us on a fabulous audio/video journey from Enrico Caruso to Maria Callas to Beverly Sills, with additional arias sung by Rosa Ponselle, Joseph Schmidt, Renata Tebaldi, Franco Corelli, Nicolai Gedda, Joan Sutherland and Birgit Nilsson. What a delightful and nostalgic 2-hour ride into a former "golden age" of opera it was! Thank you, Bill! Please come back next year!

- Erika Reitshamer

## Book Review

### 'Florence! Foster!! Jenkins!!!': The opera singer who succeeded by hitting all the wrong notes

July 31, 2016 by Robert Croan / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"That voice! Words can't describe how terrible it was," wrote violinist Mozelle Bennet Sawyer, after playing violin obbligato at a singing lesson of Florence Foster Jenkins. You can hear it for yourself on YouTube. Tone quality, pitch, rhythm, diction — none of these elements of music have anything to do with what this self-proclaimed diva produced. One critic is quoted as having correctly observed that "most of her notes were promissory."

But whether it was Mozart's Queen of the Night aria, Delibes' "Bell Song," or a simple ballad composed for her by her long-suffering but very accomplished accompanist Cosmo McMoon, the indomitable Ms. Jenkins inevitably sang to sold-out houses, and, although most of her concerts were self-sponsored, they brought in large amounts of money from her adoring audiences. With her flamboyant outfits and over-the-top persona, she defined "camp" long before the word acquired its modern-day meaning.



A month before her death in November 1944, at the age of 76, Ms. Jenkins sang her first and only concert in New York's Carnegie Hall, to a capacity audience that included, among others, composer Cole Porter, soprano Lily Pons and actress Tallulah Bankhead. Had she lived today, this charismatic figure could well have vied with the 90-year-old woman who earned a golden buzzer for her striptease act on "America's Got Talent."

She has been the subject of Stephen Temperley's 2004 off-Broadway play *Souvenir* (which played in Pittsburgh in 2014), and Peter Quilter's *Glorious* (a hit in London's West End in 2005). But these will surely be overshadowed when Meryl Streep takes on the title role of *Florence Foster Jenkins* in Stephen Frear's film, due for American release in August.

Darryl W. Bullock, the author of *The World's Worst Records*, has taken on Ms. Jenkins for his latest work in the world's worst genre, and the new book is indeed a howl. It is also a carefully researched, lucid account of this singular woman's life and thoughts. Mr. Bullock skims over the question of whether the singer was deluding herself, or whether she knew how bad she was, took the money and laughed all the way to the bank. He mentions this in his introduction, adding that "those who knew her ... were adamant that she was absolutely sincere ... and that this dizzy diva was innocently unaware of her distinct lack of talent." Ms. Sawyer says, "She heard the laughter, but she only thought she was bringing happiness to her audiences, and she laughed with them."

Later, however, the author quotes biographer Gregor Benko's assertion that, "the fiction that Jenkins was a batty but lovable old lady was created by Francis Robinson [an assistant manager at the Met] at the time RCA Victor issued the first LP release of her recordings [because] ... not many would have wanted to read a liner note about how awful Jenkins was as a person." Most fictional accounts, however, have emphasized the performer's sympathetic side, as does Mr. Bullock, for the most part.

Mr. Bullock leaves no question as to Ms. Jenkins' avaricious side. She left her home when her wealthy father refused to subsidize her musical aspirations to marry an affluent older physician, Francis Thornton Jenkins — who did provide the financial means, but soon deserted her. Curiously, when her father (who may have disinherited her) died, his will had disappeared from the safe in his office, so his considerable estate went to Florence and her mother. Now a wealthy heiress on her own in New York, she took up with a much younger British actor, St. Clair Bayfield, who stayed with her for the rest of her life but also took up with a younger woman. Even more curiously, when Florence died, her will was also nowhere to be found, so Mr. Bayfield never received any of the fortune he had helped his common-law wife amass.

Mr. Bullock's book is an entertaining, easy read, a timely plug for the upcoming movie. Florence Foster Jenkins gets the last laugh, when she says, most cogently, "Some may say that I couldn't sing, but no one can say that I didn't sing."

- Robert Croan is a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette senior editor.

--review provided by Jack Sauer

## Opera Diary

Local Opera and Classical Music, September 2016

**Boston Lyric Opera** | *40 Days of Opera*, concluding with the launch of a new Opera Portal Website

**40 DAYS OF OPERA PARTNERS:** ArtsBoston, ArtsEmerson, Beth Morrison Projects, Boston By Foot, Boston Center for Adult Education, Boston Conservatory, Boston Early Music Festival, Boston Midsummer Opera, Boston Opera Collaborative, Boston Opera House, Boston Public Library, Boston Public Schools Arts Office, Celebrity Series of Boston, Emmanuel Music, Friends of Madam White Snake, Guerilla Opera, Handel + Haydn Society, Henry Purcell Society of Boston, MetroWest Opera, NEMPAC Opera Project, Odyssey Opera, Opera on Tap, OperaHub, Opus Affair, Somerville Theatre, The Boston Opera Guy |  
More: [40days.blo.org/](http://40days.blo.org/)

September 4, 7:00 PM

**WHRB Sunday Night at the Opera** | *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner

September 10, 3 pm

**Boston Singers' Resource** | audition workshop with René de la Garza, artistic director of Opera Providence, and Angela Jajko, audition coach and Associate Executive Director of New England Light Opera | Church of Our Saviour, 25 Monmouth Street, Brookline, MA | More: <https://www.bostonsingersresource.org/programs-and-events/workshops-and-masterclasses/>

September 10-17, 11 am- 9:30 pm

**ArtsEmerson** | *Ouroboros Trilogy: Naga, Madame White Snake, Gilgamesh* | Cerise Lim Jacobs  
Cutler Majestic Theater, 120 Boylston St, Boston, MA | More: 617.824.8400, <https://artsemerson.org/>

September 11 9 PM

**WCRB Sunday Night Opera** | *Rusalka*, Dvořák

September 15, 2-3:30 pm

**Weston Public Library** | *A Voice Fest: Great Operatic Divas* - Erika Reitshamer, lecturer  
87 School Street, Weston, MA | More: 781-786-6150

September 16, 7:30 PM [*One night only!*]

**Odyssey Opera, NEC's Jordan Hall** | *Dimitrij*, Dvořák | Libretto by Marie Červinková-Riegrová | Sung in Czech with projected English translations | More: tickets at the New England Conservatory box office, or 617-585-1260, or [www.odysseyopera.org/](http://www.odysseyopera.org/)

September 18, 2-6 pm

**Boston Singers Resource** | Select (Invitational) Audition | Damien Francoeur-Krzyzek, house pianist  
Payson Park Church, Belmont, MA

September 18, 8 PM

**WHRB Sunday Night at the Opera**

September 18 9 PM

**WCRB Sunday Night Opera** | *La Clemenza di Tito*, Mozart

September 23, 7 pm; 25, 3 pm; 30, 7:30 pm

**Boston Lyric Opera** | *Carmen*, Bizet | More: <https://blo.org/carmen/>

September 29, October 1, 7 pm

**Boston Symphony Orchestra** - *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss | Final scene in concert, featuring Renee Fleming |  
More: <https://www.bso.org/brands/bso/features/2016-17-bso-season/sep-29-oct-1-strauss-der-rosenkavalier.asp>

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