

2016

A Message from the President:

You read the bad news in my report in the last Newsletter; the good news is that we are continuing with a full season of events. We begin with Iain Scott, noted and knowledgeable commentator on topics operatic, on Sunday, September 18, at 2 p.m. in Bishop Cronyn Memorial Church (the venue throughout the coming season). On Sunday, November 6, at 2 p.m., five voice students of the Faculty of Music at the University of Western Ontario will present the annual LOG scholarship winners concert, always one of the highlights of the whole season. Then on a Sunday afternoon in January or February, 2017 (date to be determined) Professor Patricia Green, well-known mezzo-soprano soloist and performer with various opera companies, as well as a renowned voice teacher at the University of Western Ontario, will be talking to us. Finally, on Sunday, April 23, at 2 p.m., opera students from the University of Western Ontario will perform a recital produced and directed by Chad Louwerse. As always, all events of the London Opera Guild are open to all people interested in opera, so please bring a friend and spread the word.

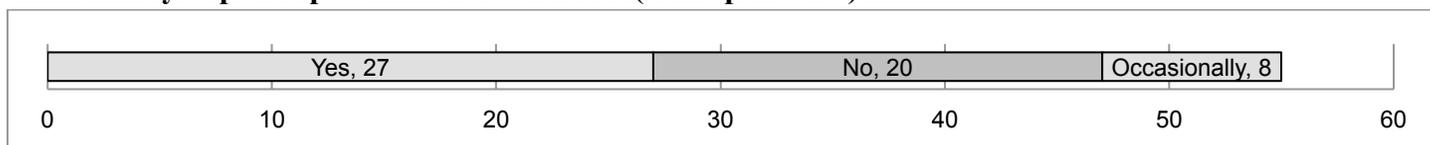
Most of my report deals with the responses from our members to the survey questionnaire we circulated some months ago. I have collated all responses and have written a brief commentary on each of the first five questions. The last two questions asked for written responses and I have included all of them. Mailed responses accounted for about 84% of all responses, while online responses accounted for the rest. For dealing with the latter and especially for his ability to use graphics and to apply them to the whole report, I thank Chad Louwerse, without whose work the statistics would have appeared much more drearily..

London Opera Guild Survey, August, 2016

We received 47 mailed responses to the survey and 8 electronic responses. Given a membership of about 140, this is a return rate of approximately 40%. Not all respondents answered all the questions, so in #4 and #5, I have simply counted the votes in favour or each category in these questions.

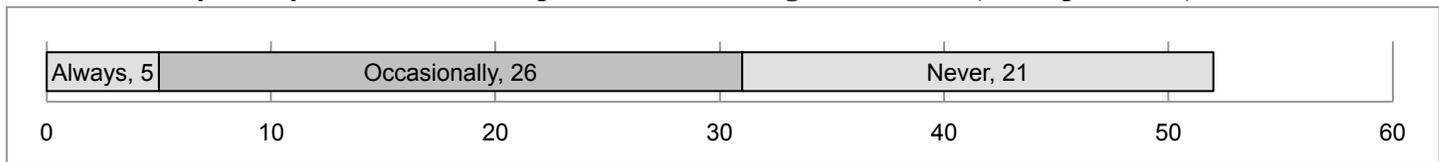
The following statistics are the responses to the questions, priorities and choices. My commentary follows after each section. Please keep in mind that, despite my best efforts, my observations may be biased. As Mark Twain (one of my favourite authors) said: “There are lies, damned lies and statistics.” I have attempted to avoid the first two; but I have also attempted to interpret statistics—and such interpretation is open to all of our members.

1. Do you participate in LOG activities? (55 respondents)



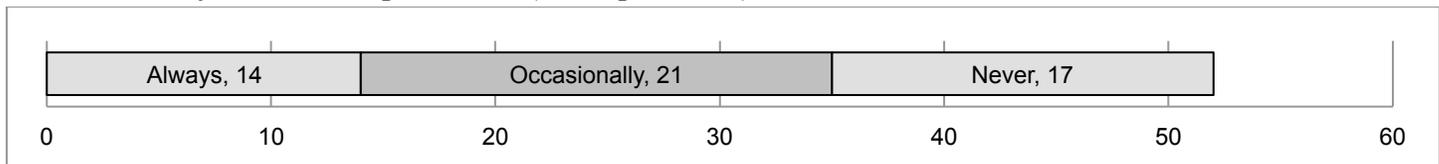
Guild activities, including the annual scholarship winners concert, are attended by a little over half of the respondents. For years, there has been a continuing problem in attracting members to Guild events.

2. Do you buy tickets for COC productions through the LOG? (52 respondents)



Like some other members of the Guild, I have for many years been a subscriber to the COC productions. One of my own reasons for not buying tickets from the Guild is that they are much more expensive than my subscription, without offering obviously better sightlines or hearing. My observation is that the sale of tickets to COC productions seems to be an increasingly precarious source of revenue for the Guild.

3. Do you use the Opera Bus? (52 respondents)



The members of the Guild who use the opera bus for the Sunday matinee performances of COC productions see this as one of the Guild's most important services to its members, but the advancing age of some members has made even this very comfortable way of getting to Toronto and back problematic. The ten- or twelve-hour day on the bus and in the opera house has become too long for some. It appears that the steady decrease in the number of members who use the opera bus is likely to continue.

4. Priorities for the LOG, rated from 1 (high) to 5 (low), weighted where a 1st choice has more weight than a 5th choice:

	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	4 th choice	5 th choice	Total number of votes	Weighted Average out of 5
Scholarships for voice students in the Faculty of Music at UWO.	20	14	8	5	2	49	4.12
	<i>The support for the Guild's scholarship program is also divided. It is a high priority for 34 of the respondents (20+14); not so high for 8 and low for 7 (5+2). It appears that in general there is continuing strong support for this program.</i>						
The Canadian Opera Company.	17	7	5	5	14	48	3.38
	<i>There is an interesting division in the responses among strong supporters of the COC, equally strong negative views of supporting the COC, and the members in the middle. Support of the COC was the original mandate of the Guild, and this mandate is still approved by more than half of the respondents.</i>						
Tickets for high-school students who wish to see operas at UWO.	3	10	19	12	5	49	3.37
	<i>The support for this Guild program is also lukewarm. Over the past few years, the Guild has sponsored between 25 and 40 students each year. About 95% of these students had never been to an opera, but all of them were enthusiastic about the UWOpera productions which they had been encouraged to experience. At \$20/ticket, this has been the most economical and effective way of encouraging young people to learn about opera, and for me it is disheartening to see the lack of strong support among members.</i>						

UWOpera productions.	6	10	14	9	10	49	3.22
	<i>The Guild's direct support for UWOpera productions has for the past ten years amounted to a \$500 donation for the production of surtitles. For some years now, the Faculty of Music has acknowledged the Guild in its printed programs and sometimes in announcements by the Dean before the first performance of an opera, both of which may have helped to publicize the existence of the Guild to audiences with at least a passing acquaintance with opera. There are obviously divided opinions on whether the Guild should continue with this contribution.</i>						
Sponsorship of opera for elementary-school students.	2	9	7	18	14	50	3.06
	<i>Although the Guild has sponsored two COC operas for young people, and despite the vigorous enthusiasm for these productions among the approximately 280 elementary-school students who attended each one, the responses of our members is distinctly negative. Although a few members commented that building a new generation of opera fans is important, about two-thirds of the respondents believe that this should not be a priority for the Guild.</i>						

5. Choices in the near future for the LOG, rated from 1 (high) to 6 (low), weighted where a 1st choice has more weight than a 6th choice:

	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	4 th choice	5 th choice	6 th choice	Total number of votes	Weighted Average out of 6
Sponsor a series of recitals by opera students instead of speakers.	19	11	5	4	2	0	41	5.10
	<i>There is strong support among 30 respondents (19+11) for this change from our current tradition of three speakers/season.</i>							
Continue for a year; then give any remaining money to UWO to establish a voice scholarship	9	13	9	3	1	4	39	4.41
	<i>There appears to be fairly strong support for this option among 22 respondents (9+13). However, 8 respondents expressed doubts or rejection of this choice, and 9 respondents expressed this as their third option.</i>							
Continue until our money runs out.	17	5	3	4	3	9	41	4.20
	<i>Although 22 respondents (17+5) would choose this option, 19 respondents are not enthusiastic about this choice.</i>							
Continue for a year; then give any remaining money to another organization	2	0	6	5	12	12	37	3.00
	<i>Several respondents were specific about whether such money should go, viz., to Orchestra London (which, unfortunately, no longer exists). Most respondents, however, were opposed to this option.</i>							
Continue for a year; then give any remaining money to the Canadian Opera Company	2	4	4	6	2	12	30	2.87
	<i>Giving such money to the COC met with strong resistance from 12 respondents, with another 8 expressing a degree of negative response. Only 6 respondents (2+4) expressed a positive response, while another 4 appeared lukewarm in their support.</i>							
Apply to Revenue Canada for charitable status	2	0	3	3	6	25	39	2.10
	<i>This option met with even more resistance than that to (e): 31 respondents (25+6) strongly rejected this option, and what support there was among respondents (with the exception of 2) was more than weak.</i>							

6. **Please add any comments regarding the statements in Question #5. You may also suggest other courses of action for the Guild.**

- I believe the Guild should continue focusing on young London singers
- I do not think that donating the LOG assets to another organization in the event of its closure, operating until the money runs out, or applying for charitable status are viable options to consider.
- As with followers of classical music, opera fans are often considered snobbish and somewhat unwelcoming. While this in no means applies to all, it does exist. I have felt this myself as I attended Guild events and the 'understanding opera' sessions. I think we need to take a look at what symphonies are doing to attract new people and the younger generations --- HAVE FUN!! My wife and I went to a Phoenix Symphony event last fall and enjoyed the music of Star Wars. They had children and adults attending and many in costume. They had Star Wars characters on the stage entertaining the audience between songs and they also showed some clips from the movies. Just last week our daughter went to a Toronto Symphony and Second City collaboration that was, in her words, spectacular and so much fun for everyone there. Maybe we need to bring back PDQ Bach!
- I would hope that #1 prevails and that the money does not run out. A brainstorming session of members might produce some creative, workable solution. I also would not want to eliminate speakers but alternate them with student performances.
- I was a COC donor and subscriber for many years before I discovered the LOG, hence the reason for my not being very involved with LOG activities.
- Find new ways to connect with the community perhaps by sponsoring artists, concerts or events. If not UWO, perhaps we could set up our own concert series for a few years. The London audience for opera (and just about everything else in the way of "serious music" is ageing, and even with the bus, attending the COC matinee makes for a very long day.
- Silver City now offers Met. Telecasts. . . . And it is a lot easier than getting up early on a winter morning to get on a bus to see something for [the] umpteenth time (as is inevitably sometimes the case).
- The COC makes it much easier to pick and choose tickets through their box office than in the old days. . . . Now the COC offers numerous subscription packages, single tickets can be bought on the internet or by phone, and exchanges done on the phone. In this respect, Guild membership is much less valuable than it was.
- Nowadays more other high-quality companies operate in Toronto, not to mention the opera programs at the U of T and RCM. Opera in the area is thus no longer synonymous with the COC's offerings, but given the voluntary nature of the Guild and its ties to the COC, it's hard to see how it can expand its reach to bring Londoners into contact with these other operations on any regular basis. But this does mean that it looks more like a COC "supporters' club" and less like a London-based organisation that seeks to promote interest in the art-form in general than it once did.
- All in all, it looks to us as if it is indeed time to start thinking about disbanding an organisation whose time has probably come and gone. Give it another year and then decide.
- We are not keen to pass on residual funds to the COC There surely isn't enough there to make any difference Ditto for UWO, especially given the ability to administrators to shift budgets around in ways that make it hard to figure out whether even specifically designated

donations actually make the intended recipients any better funded than they would have been without them. So our vote is free or cheap tickets for high-school students to UWO performances.

- UWOpera activities: my interest has waned as I age. I must say the COC is unable to compete with opera from the Met in local theatres.
- We supported opera [in Vancouver] for 15 years . . . supported Hamilton Opera . . . in the '90s. Operas are having trouble with finances all over, while Met at the movies has increased the popularity and accessibility of opera. I think it has contributed to the present difficulties in "live" opera. Clearly, we have seen an explosion of Canadian opera talent, which is great.
- [We have been] members since the 1980s, [but] not only we but the rest of the members are getting older and the long trip to Toronto and back by bus plus sitting at the opera for hours is just too much for some of us. So we go mostly for the last 10 years to the cinema for the transmitted performances from the Met. [It] is not quite the same, but the second best. So keep supporting the UWOpera production here in London. They are getting better year after year. I enjoy them! Support the Faculty of Music at UWO!
- The COC has a budget of 60 million; our little contribution is or would be only a drop on a hot stone!
- Keep here in London the annual "Gala" or other little concerts like the ones for some last years in the German-Canadian Club Let them sing!
- Disband.
- I have always found the speakers valuable. They have always presented an aspect of opera I had not thought of.
- Perhaps [we should] revert to the original mandate. Offer small subsidy on tickets and bus. It is still VERY EXPENSIVE! The Met in theatres will continue to [have an] impact. What sort of reincarnation could [the] COC get to [illegible] as the Met has done?
- I have been attending COC operas . . . for 9 years. Now I find the days too long and won't be going anymore. I will go [to] Silver City to see opera. I love "live" opera but can't do it anymore. It is unfortunate that younger people don't join to keep LOG going. I wish the organisation all the best.
- I was under the impression at our AGM that there was a move to form a subcommittee to seriously augment the marketing of the LOG. We only seem to "market" to our members rather than to people who don't know about us. Until we try an aggressive marketing approach I don't think we should consider folding. Things that Eleanor K used to do in the past, like submit announcements to the wide # of free tabloids seem to have gone by the wayside. We need someone to champion this process.
- In the past [we used the opera bus, but] not now, not since we've been able to see the broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera at the cinema near us. We know live performance is the best, but seeing it at the cinema is easier.
- A good job thus far. Have used overseas opera tours by DSP.
- I only belong for the bus and so would cut back on student activities first.
- The Guild could reduce programs to operation of the opera bus. The COC might wish to take this over, including it in a subscription office. Stratford Festival offers a bus service from Toronto.

- My choice would be to keep going as long as the money holds out, having speakers as we have been doing. If the choice is to fold after this year, {I} would prefer [that the remaining] money go to COC (1), UWO scholarships (2) [or] some other organization (3). More info would be required before considering application for charitable status.
- Increasing age and cost make it less appealing to attend opera in Toronto. Met Opera in HD [is] far more affordable and convenient.
- As you can tell from my responses, I believe the focus should be on *opera in London*. The COC does not need the guild! *Action* to involve *young people*. Active use of social media. Bulletin Board (online) for local music—opera—events.
- I hear of many people going to the Met’s cinema productions and think that people may be choosing to do that rather than go to Toronto with the Guild or on their own. The HD transmissions are much cheaper, no boring 401, no Toronto traffic or disruption with marathons, construction, etc. While the singing and orchestra are almost always excellent at [the] COC, sometimes the productions are *terrible*—so bad I’ve not been able to sit through several (e.g. *Aida*). (I don’t go to the Met cinema, preferring to wait and buy the DVD for ones I want.)
- If [illegible] do not [illegible] the Guild may fold but that money should be given to UWO or schools in London. Money should *not* be given to [the] COC. Members can give donations individually. Thank you for taking time to compile this questionnaire.
- Have a relationship with “Live out Loud”, London, ON, seeing if any other of their members may be interested in attending opera.
- As a retiree from the Western Music Faculty (and former Chair of Performance), I am aware of the very high priority presently held by the present administration for Opera and the funding support occasioned by this consideration. While not against this, I do not favour our Guild’s financial involvement in Western’s Opera. It should be Western’s support of the Guild by encouraging vocal students to join our trips to [the] COC to receive *world class* opera experiences no local productions, however good, will ever give them.
- The most important function of the guild for me was the provision of bus service on Sundays. Can this at least not be continued by charging enough to *cover* the transportation costs?
- As I have said before, you are an isolated group that is aging and Cineplex is a closer option and less expensive.
- Try to recruit new, younger members at a modest fee increase. Award an Entrance Scholarship to a local student.
- The opera bus has made Toronto operas affordable for many Londoners. It is unfortunate that we cannot find enough opera enthusiasts to maintain this service.
- You are to be commended for keeping the Guild operating. Thank you. I would welcome (as an opera novice) more *opera* [illegible] events (like John Avey’s presentation on Donizetti a few years ago). [Two illegible sentences follow].

7. Historically, our Guild has made money through the margins on the sale of opera tickets and the sale of seats on the opera bus. These sources of income have made it possible for us to contribute about \$7,000 each year to the COC and the scholarship winners in the Faculty of Music at UWO. However, these sources of income are drying up rather precipitously. Can you suggest other methods of raising money for our Guild?

- New and fun recitals to attract new members or even just the general public to get them interested in opera. Consider new approaches to advertising opera events and the existence of the London Guild --- a table at various events at Centennial Hall, Budweiser Gardens, Aeolian Hall, London Music Club, the Market, all of the Victoria Park festivals, Western, Fanshawe and so on. Get young and fun opera students to work them to generate interest. Facebook? Twitter?
- Offer a box supper for the bus trip home. Use the bus trip to 'entertain, educate, comment, involve'.
- Raffles. Perhaps a lottery for a free premium subscription to the COC or free bus transportation for a year. The guild should pursue ways of creating revenue from outside the guild. Perhaps advertising the bus?
- We really did not [know] much about the tickets & bus. Perhaps many other new members also did not know or realize how important it was to our survival as a Guild.
- Give fewer scholarships; support fewer high-school students. This is sad news indeed. Actively fund-raise; request donations from Guild members (the membership fee is very low).
- Would it be counterproductive to raise the cost of membership and the cost of seats on the opera bus?
- LOG garage sales. How much do the free-will offerings bring in for concerts? If we served food at our lecture meetings, would more people come? And could we ask for additional free-will offerings?
- Help Orchestra London to get back on its feet and develop a program. Hopefully, the guild could get a percentage of the proceeds from their concerts. Many members of the opera guild also subscribed to the orchestra, and we think London deserves an orchestra.
- Up member level.
- Continue to provide members with services—lectures, bus and performances. Cut back on scholarships and give fewer [scholarships] and cut back on sponsorship for students.
- How about contributing less or nothing (our preference) to the COC? If other Guild members buy their tickets to the COC operas directly from the COC, as we have always done, you could encourage *all* members to buy them through the Guild. How much more would that cost us?
- Ticket sales to concerts in London. Budget will have to change radically. Perhaps a small bus for those who still wish this service to COC in Toronto. Partnership with Cineplex to sell Met HD tickets?? Happy to help in any way I can!
- Cut this amount [the \$7,000 spent annually by the LOG in contributions to the COC and scholarships] to \$5,000.
- Perhaps another option would be to charge more for Guild membership and more for the opera bus (it's extremely reasonable now).
- Do the bus trips need to be subsidized?
- Can you approach Western music alumni to donate recitals from time to time with paid admissions?

- Invite donations from opera attendees at Silver City to support youth—opera students at UWO, student attendance at Silver City, opera performances by students. Develop an explanatory brochure to put at each seat at Silver City and a unique bowl* to receive donations—including VISA. *e.g. jar shaped like a diva or pose behind a stand—a billboard of opera stars for a gift of \$10 (put in a bag or jacket).
- Raising membership fees. Charging admission fees for concerts and events put on by the Opera Guild.
- Two suggestions: *membership*: could you get permission to set up a table to have membership forms (and promotional information) at the cinema sites when a live broadcast is scheduled. Attendees could meet local members and be encouraged to join [the] LOG. *Fundraising*: I would have LOG membership and [illegible] separate from fundraising for UWO and [the] COC. You should ask for unconditional payment and donations to [the] LOG for [the] LOG. You could, as an option on the membership form, invite a separate donation to UWO or [the] COC (on the basis of a continued mandate to help these two organizations) with a view to collecting the funds and sending them to them. [A model of the proposed form follows.]

The Opera Bus and tickets to COC performances:

The one change from last season is that we have had to raise the price of a return seat to Toronto from \$45 to \$50 because of a decline over the past few years in the number of seats sold. The good news is that the opera bus will continue for this coming season. Here are the dates and the operas:

Fall, 2016:	October 16	<i>Ariodante</i>
	October 23	<i>Norma</i>
Winter, 2017:	January 29	<i>The Magic Flute</i>
	February 5	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>
Spring, 2017:	April 23	<i>Louis Riel</i>
	April 30	<i>Tosca</i>

Bus reservations must be made **two weeks before the date of the performance**. Cheques are payable to The London Opera Guild and sent to:

Joan Mortimer 370 Tecumseh Ave E London N6C 1T3

To avoid confusion, please write the name(s) of the opera you plan to attend on your cheque.

Ensure your name and phone number appear on the cheque or are attached.

To cancel without charge, Joan Mortimer must be notified prior to the two week cut off date.

Otherwise all cheques will be cashed and your place confirmed. You may give your seat to someone else but there will be no refunds after that date.

We prefer not to accept cash at the bus. If there is room we prefer a cheque.

Departures: 9:15 am from the Beal parking area on the west side of William St., between King and York Sts. Parking is FREE.

Patrons in the Ingersoll/Woodstock area are picked up at the car-pool lot on Highway 19, diagonally across from the Elmhurst Inn, at approximately 9:45.

Please mark this request by writing “Ing” on your cheque.

Arrival time in Toronto is about noon, with drop-off either by request at the Royal York or at the Four Seasons Centre.

Return buses to London will depart from the Four Seasons Centre, no later than 15 minutes after the end of the performance. Buses usually arrive back in London about 7:30 pm, depending on the length of the opera.

Tickets for COC performances:

David Stanley-Porter, after many years of diligently looking after the sale of tickets to members of the Guild, has retired, and I have taken over the management of tickets in addition to managing the opera bus (you might call this one-stop shopping). Here are the prices for tickets in various categories:

Orchestra Ring, seats CC155, 156: \$120

Orchestra premium, row J, seats 5, 6, 12, 13: \$188

Ring 3, row A, seats 336, 337, 338, 339: \$146

Ring 3, back two rows (seats to be assigned Sept. 2): \$105

Please contact me for tickets either through e-mail: mortimer4655@rogers.com or by telephone: 519-868-6983 (which is also the contact number for the opera bus).

Joan Mortimer

London Opera Guild Events: As mentioned in the introduction to the President's Report, the London Opera Guild has planned a series of interesting and entertaining events for all members. This fall, on **Sunday, September 18, at 2 p.m.**, our speaker will be **Iain Scott**. As many LOG members can attest, Iain is a very engaging and knowledgeable speaker, as well as the experienced leader of opera tours. Anticipating *Norma* and *Ariodante*, he will be talking about **the *bel canto* tradition in opera**. This talk will be given in **Bishop Cronyn Memorial Church** (at the corner of Queens Avenue and William Street). This will be the venue throughout the coming season.

Future issues of this newsletter will provide details about upcoming events nearer the time of each presentation.

Canadian Opera Company Fall 2016 Productions: Both of the fall operas are new COC productions.

October 16: Handel's *Ariodonte*. One of Handel's most radiantly beautiful scores echoes myriad emotions in this story of love, honour, and deception. Alice Coote and Jane Archibald—two COC favourites—return to head a dream Baroque cast, under the baton of Music Director Johannes Debus. Co-production with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam; and Lyric Opera of Chicago

October 23: Bellini's *Norma*. Bellini and his operas are synonymous with the *bel canto* era when the beauty and virtuosity of the human voice reigned supreme. South African Elza van den Heever performs the title role for our Sunday matinee trip.

LOG Membership News: Welcome back, everyone, from a very hot summer.

Just a reminder that the annual Membership Fees are: \$30 to have the Newsletter mailed to you or \$25.00 to receive it by e-mail. Student fees are \$20.00. The Newsletter provides our members with information about discounted COC tickets and the opera bus service to Toronto. We also support Western's Faculty of Music by providing student scholarships, as well as free COC tickets to referred high school students who perhaps will see a live performance for the first time. Special lectures and local opera performances will also be identified in your Newsletter.

Please mail your cheque made payable to **London Opera Guild** to:

Ronnie Moser, 607-127 Belmont Drive, London, ON N6J 4J7 (phone:519-649-5305)

Ronnie Moser, Membership Secretary

EXPLORING OPERA: A course for opera lovers who want to experience unusual repertoire and exciting new productions of old favourites.

OPERA IN THE 20th Century

Le Coq d'Or Rimsky-Korsakov (1911) from Le Chatelet, Paris (2002)

A doddering old king is seduced by a beautiful exotic princess

Betrothal in a Monastery Prokofiev (1946) from Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg (1998)

A modern lyrical *opera buffa* adapted from Sheridan's *Duenna*

Turandot Puccini (1926) from Palace of the Arts Valencia (2008)

The famous Chinese fable with a fantastic stage production by Chen Kaige, winner of the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or

Assassinio nella Cattedrale Pizzetti (1958) from Basilica di San Nicola, Bari (2007)

T.S.Eliot's famous play about the murder of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral
One of the most powerful of 20th C. Operas The Church versus the State.

Katia Kabanova Janacek (1926) from Royal Theatre, Madrid (2010)

A sensitive young woman being destroyed by an unhappy marriage and a mother-in-law from hell in Robert Carsen's wonderfully atmospheric production

Die Gezeichneten Schrecker (1918) from Salzburg Festival (2005)

This extraordinarily powerful opera "The branded ones" originally banned by the Nazis will undoubtedly be your most challenging work to absorb both musically and Intellectually. "The music is beautiful but extremely unsettling, in a constant state of unrest." I look forward to introducing you to it.

Ten 2 ½ hr. sessions Thursdays at 6.30pm / Saturdays at 9.30am Times are interchangeable.

Dates: September 8/10 through November 24/26: **no classes** October 6/8 and November 17/19

Location: 509 Canterbury Rd.

Fee: \$120 per person payable at the door includes written material

Your cheque is payable to David Stanley-Porter

If you need to take sessions on an individual basis, the cost is \$13 per session taken.

A note regarding delivery of this issue of the newsletter: All 2015-2016 members will receive a printed copy of the September-October 2016 LOG newsletter. In addition, those who chose to receive the newsletter via email will receive an electronic copy of the same issue, principally to ensure that we have the correct email addresses. If you have not received your e-copy of the newsletter by the end of the first week of September, please contact me at ldnoperaguild@gmail.com.