THE WOMEN OF PBO

Without women, there would be no Palm Beach Opera as we know it today. From the inception of the company as the Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches to the stories we continue to tell on stage, the strength and determination of women continues to be an ever present theme in Palm Beach Opera's history and legacy.

Palm Beach Opera was founded as The Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches in 1962 through the work of Isabel Chatfield. A student of opera sensation Mary Garden, Chatfield was a former opera singer, performing across the country and abroad before retiring to West Palm Beach, where she became active in social circles and with arts-based causes. During a 1961 meeting of the Music Study Club, a social club for women, Chatfield was asked to produce Manon for a future meeting. It was during that presentation that the idea of forming a local opera company was born.

The women Isabel Chatfield relied on to help fund and organize the inaugural opera quickly became paramount to the success of the newly incorporated Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches, which would later become Palm Beach Opera in the 1980s. Rosita Franks and Charlotte Miller (both of whom would go on to star in the first few seasons with the Civic Opera), Princess Jane Obolensky, Octavia Gould, Albert Grant, and Thelma Miller were the signers of the Charter of Incorporation, effectively becoming the first installed leadership of the organization. The first donation of $100 (about $880 today) came from female philanthropist Alice Tully—the same Alice Tully for whom Alice Tully Hall in New York is named.

It was not just the administrative arm that benefited from the contributions of women. An acclaimed pianist and interpreter of Bach, Winifred Young acted as Associate Conductor for the first few seasons, leading the orchestra in early production of La boheme and Die Fledermaus. Women were often handling many of the production duties as well—stage managers, properties supervisors, wig and make-up staff, costumers, and set painters frequently were represented by women. Beginning in the 1970s, women also took on more artistic roles. Sonia Diaz and Martha del Piro were the first female choreographers (Carmen, 1970), Judith Somogi was the first female conductor (La Traviata, 1983), and Linda Browksky was the first female stage director (Don Pasquale, 1992).
Palm Beach Opera was founded in the summer of 1961 as the Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches by Isabel Chatfield, Charlotte Miller, Rosita Franks, Princess Jane Obolensky, Octavia Could, Alberta Grant and Thelma Miller. On January 29, 1962 at the Palm Beach High School Auditorium, the organization presents its first-ever production – *La traviata* – to a sold-out audience of 1,200 with a live chorus and 26-piece orchestra under the baton of Dr. Paul Csonka, the company’s Artistic Director for the first 22 years. During this decade, the Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches began to attract international stars, including Beverly Sills and Robert Merrill.
After nearly 15 mainstage performances, including productions of *Carmen* and *La bohème*, performances on a boat cruise, and a Puccini festival, the company finds a new home at the West Palm Beach Auditorium. Affectionately known as “The Leaky Teepee,” the West Palm Beach Auditorium will remain the opera’s primary performance venue for the next 20 years. The company’s scholarship program – later known as the Palm Beach Opera Vocal Competition – is established during this decade and the Junior Opera Guild begins presenting educational programming with *Hansel & Gretel*. Notable performances include Italian tenor Giuseppe Campora debuting in *Carmen* in 1970 and Metropolitan Opera star Roberta Peters singing in *The Barber of Seville* in 1972. Other opera stars appearing during this time include Robert Merrill, Norman Treigle, Mary Costa, and Beverly Sills, who was honored at both the 1975 and 1977 galas.
The Civic Opera of the Palm Beaches becomes Palm Beach Opera. During the first few years of the decade, Cristina Deutekom sings Norma. Gian Carlo Menotti directs his own works The Medium and Amelia Goes to the Ball, and James McCracken sings Canio in Pagliacci. In 1983, after more than 20 years, Dr. Paul Csonka steps down and Maestro Anton Guadagno becomes the new Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, bringing a new artistic vision to the company. In 1985, Robert M. Montgomery Jr. becomes Chairman of the Board, a position he will hold until 2005. Together with General Director Herb Benn and Guadagno, Montgomery turns the company into a major arts organization in Palm Beach County. Other notable opera stars during the 80s include James Morris in Faust in 1986, Leona Mitchell’s PBO debut in Aida, and Ghena Dimitrova as Lady Macbeth in 1989.
Palm Beach Opera presents one of the biggest opera stars of all time, Luciano Pavarotti, in a special concert spearheaded by Renée and Arthur Silvester. In 1992, the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts opens and the acoustically refined Dreyfoos Hall becomes Palm Beach Opera’s new home with a spectacular inauguration performance of *Aïda*. The Palm Beach Opera Orchestra is created by the board in 1993 and includes musicians from major professional orchestras across the country and abroad. The 65+ piece orchestra and the PBO Chorus - comprised of 50 local singers - draws increasingly critical acclaim and becomes a cornerstone for future artistic success. Distinguished baritone Sherrill Milnes, who sang the title role of *Don Giovanni* in 1991, returns to sing Scarpia in 1998 opposite Diana Soviero’s Tosca. Other notable opera stars in the decade include Katia Ricciarelli in *Norma* and *Il trovatore*, Ewa Podles in *L’italiana in Algeri*, Fabio Armiliato in *La bohème*, and gala performances by Ghena Dimitrova, June Anderson, Denyce Graves, and Plácido Domingo. Educational programs expand to include performances in South Florida schools and the company enjoys organizational and financial growth at the end of the century.
After Guadagno’s passing in 2002, the performances are led by esteemed resident and guest conductors, including Kamal Khan and Julius Rudel, and opera administrator Plato Karayanis joins Palm Beach Opera as a consultant and interim General Director. In 2004, PBO expands educational programming with its first family-friendly opera *Hansel and Gretel* (later known as Children’s Performance) and introduces new company mascot The Great Poochini, which was created to expose younger audiences to opera. In 2006, Gregory Ritchey – who serves as PBO’s Associate Conductor & Chorus Master today – leads the chorus for the first time in *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. Gala artists during this decade include Kiri Te Kanawa, Angela Gheorghiu, Bryn Terfel, Susan Graham, and Thomas Hampson. Maestro Bruno Aprea becomes Artistic Director and Principal Conductor in 2005 and in 2009 Daniel Biaggi is appointed General Director. Palm Beach Opera prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary with the Golden Jubilee Gala featuring Ruth Ann Swenson, Denyce Graves, Brandon Jovanovich, and guest conductor Julius Rudel. The event was co-hosted by opera legend Sherrill Milnes.
Palm Beach Opera performs in new venues, brings on a new Chief Conductor, and presents its first-ever world premiere. In 2011, PBO holds the 41st and final annual vocal competition, which continued to garner critical acclaim and attention since its inception in 1969. Previous winners of the esteemed competition include Anthony Roth Costanzo, Nadine Sierra, and Irene Roberts, who all returned to perform in principal roles at PBO later in their careers. In 2014, renowned Maestro David Stern debuts in Macbeth and joins PBO as the new Chief Conductor one year later. Palm Beach Opera presents Opera at the Waterfront, the county’s largest outdoor classical music event at the time, for free at West Palm Beach’s Meyer Amphitheatre. One year later, Palm Beach Opera presents its first world-premiere Enemies, A Love Story, based on the 1966 novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer and set in 1948 in New York. The production is praised as “a compelling theatrical experience” and “brilliant” by Palm Beach Daily News. After serving as Managing Director for several successful seasons, David Walker is appointed General & Artistic Director in 2019.

**ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY**

*Music by Ben Moore*

*Libretto by Nahma Sandrow*

*Based on the book Enemies, A Love Story by Isaac Bashevis Singer*

**February 20-22, 2015**

Kravis Center for the Performing Arts
PRODUCTION HISTORY 1961-1998

1997-98 Season
Mozart Così fan tutte
Saint-Saëns Samson et Dalila
Puccini Turandot
Strauss Die Fledermaus

1996-97 Season
Tchaikovsky Eugene Onegin
Verdi Rigoletto
Donizetti L’elisir d’amore
Puccini Madama Butterfly
1997 Gala with Ghena Dimitrova

1996-95 Season
Mozart Don Giovanni
Puccini La bohème
Lehár The Merry Widow

1995-94 Season
Verdi Rigoletto
Verdi La traviata
Lehár The Merry Widow
1996 Gala, An Evening of Splendor with Plácido Domingo

1994-93 Season
Bizet Carmen
Giordano Andrea Chénier

1993-92 Season
Verdi Il trovatore
Rossini Il barbiere di Sesto
Mozart Die Zauberflöte

1992-91 Season
Verdi Aida
Rossini L’italiana in Algeri
Puccini La bohème

1991-90 Season
Verdi Otello
Verdi La traviata
Donizetti Don Pasquale

1989-90 Season
Bellini Norma
Mozart Don Giovanni
Puccini Madama Butterfly

1988-89 Season
Verdi Il trovatore
Rossini La Cenerentola

1987-88 Season
Verdi Aida
Donizetti L’elisir d’amore
Offenbach Les Contes d’Hoffmann

1986-87 Season
Puccini Manon Lescaut
Rossini Il barbiere di Siviglia
Strauss Die Fledermaus
1987 Gala with José Carreras

1985-86 Season
Verdi Nabucco
Gounod Faust
Puccini La bohème

1984-85 Season
Puccini Madama Butterfly
Verdi La traviata
Saint-Saëns Samson et Dalila

1983-84 Season
Puccini Tosca
Verdi II trovatore

1982-83 Season
Leoncavallo Pagliacci
Puccini Tosca
Rossini La Cenerentola

1981-82 Season
Bizet Carmen
Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur
Verdi La forza del destino

1980-81 Season
Verdi Rigoletto
Bellini Norma
Menotti Amelia Goes to the Ball
Menotti The Medium
1981 Gala, Gian Carlo Menotti

1979-1980 Season
Rossini Il barbiere di Siviglia
Puccini La bohème
Mozart Così fan tutte

1978-79 Season
Puccini Turandot
Donizetti Don Pasquale
Verdi Un ballo in maschera

1977-78 Season
Donizetti La Fille du Régiment
Massenet Manon
Mozart Don Giovanni

1976-77 Season
Mascagni Cavalleria rusticana
Leoncavallo Pagliacci
Lehár The Merry Widow
Verdi Aida

1975-76 Season
Verdi La traviata
Strauss Die Fledermaus
Verdi Il trovatore

1974-75 Season
Donizetti I’elisir d’amore
Puccini Turandot
Humperdinck Hansel and Gretel

1973-74 Season
Offenbach Les Contes d’Hoffmann
Puccini Madama Butterfly
Mozart Le nozze di Figaro

1972-73 Season
Puccini La bohème
Gounod Faust

1971-72 Season
Gounod Roméo et Juliette
Rossini Il barbiere di Siviglia

1970-71 Season
Verdi Rigoletto

1969-70 Season
Bizet Carmen
Humperdinck Hansel and Gretel

1968-69 Season
Donizetti Lucia di Lammermoor

1967-68 Season
Verdi La traviata

1966-67 Season
Puccini Madama Butterfly

1965-66 Season
Puccini Tosca

1964-65 Season
Shakespeare Festival
Bizet Carmen
Showboat Cruise on the Paddlewheel Queen

1963-64 Season
Offenbach Les Contes d’Hoffmann

1962-63 Season
Strauss Die Fledermaus
Puccini La bohème
Massenet Manon

1961-62 Season
Verdi La traviata
Puccini Festival
A Night on the Mississippi – Civic Opera Showboat Dinner Cruise