

Naples Opera Society



# 10 Years of Opera

The Naples Opera Society is proud to celebrate its first decade of opera, community service, and scholarship. What a great time it has been witnessing an impressive growth in membership and support, providing a training ground for young singers, offering a warm community audience to local artists and guest performers, and serving as a musical community resource to our local residents and visiting friends from around the nation and internationally.

The Naples Opera Society has been led by a strong Mission: *To promote opera performance and attendance in the greater Naples area through education and outreach programs for young people and adults, both as audience and performers.*

On the occasion of this significant 10th anniversary of our recognition as a non-profit organization, by official IRS documentation dated May 4, 2000, the Naples Opera Society is proud to share briefly our history and our future goals for the next golden decades. We hope this includes you!

The Naples Opera Buffs as an organization was founded in 1996 at the downtown Naples library, with Phil Magee named as chairman. On March 8, 1997, the Buffs got on board the bus for the Sarasota Opera for Verdi's ERNANI.



Eugene and Joann Buffo prepare to launch the first bus trip to the grand opera! Get on board!



Many of the photos included in this document were donated by Bernadette La Paglia, and we appreciate her promotion and support over the years!

In December 1997, Vic Dina was elected the first president. After attending an opera lecture by Ron Bowman at International College (1999), he encouraged the Society to ask Dr. Bowman to present his lecture "TENORS" ..it lead to a new board member and future NOS president.



Patty Fairweather, VP and Editor of the NOS newsletter and Vic Dina, first NOS president.

In 1998, an opera road trip to the Florida Grand Opera to see Puccini's TURANDOT launched an annual tradition, led by **Eugene Buffo**. In December 1998, Gene Buffo was elected President. He worked diligently arranging popular trips to Sarasota and Miami.

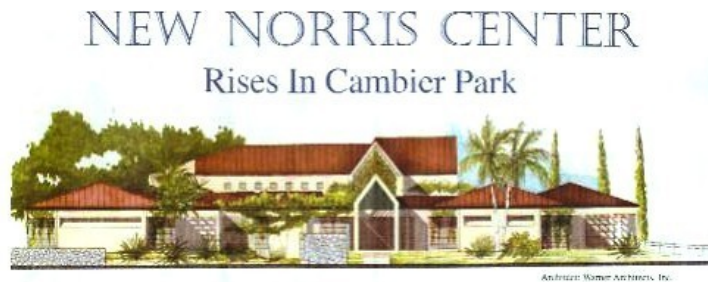
April 14, 1999, was a significant first meeting of the Society at the Norris Center in Cambier Park. Our long time members remember the first version of the Center, shaped similar to a large Tiki Hut. The original structure was donated to the City by the Norris Family, and then they replaced it when the older building was used to its capacity. The Norris Center became a home for the NOS and a continued popular site for theatre and music concerts.



**Justin Moss,**  
Voice of FGO



**Gene Buffo and**  
**Ron Bowman**



Pictured are **Lavern Norris Gaynor** sharing her pride in the new \$2,000,000 facility with Ron Bowman and her daughter, **Dee Dee Gaynor**. The Naples Opera Society was very proud and fortunate to present the first concert in the new Norris Center on March 10, 2004, with a new Bechstein piano presented by **Gunter and Gisela Manchen** from the Euro Grand Piano Gallery, also celebrating its 10th Anniversary in Naples. The Vocal Studio of **Charles Smith** presented a program at the Euro Grand Piano Gallery on March 23, 2003.



"Miss Abigail" performed  
by **Jo Ann Pottorff**  
(2002) at the original  
Norris Center.

On January 4, 2000, Naples Opera Society was incorporated, replacing the "Buffs." On May 4, 2000, the official paper work from the IRS, presented our Employer Identification Number, and we became a non-profit organization. President Buffo and the Board of Directors were very pleased and prepared for growth. Our status was extended to include a scholarship program in March 2005.



**Rick Borman**, past VP  
of Board of Directors,  
happily receives a  
grant check from the  
United Arts Council  
of Collier County

In March 2003, Ron Bowman was elected president replacing Gene Buffo who took the role of treasurer, currently holding the same position. Minutes were taken by **Myrna Noble**, who served for many years as our secretary. Dr. Bowman presented the Board with a long range planning document, and happily many of the ideas have been realized, including new performing space; important affiliations with the Naples Music Club and the United Arts Council of Collier County; newsletter refinement, and a website presence. We were still wondering what was the Internet?! The Board has faithfully served the members, and we appreciate every Board member's time, energy, and contributions. They are too expansive to detail in this small memory passage.

Opera production became alive in Naples in 2005. The Capital Opera of Moorings Presbyterian (COMP) presented Menotti's Amahl and the Night Visitors on the original sets from the television debut in January. Then in the summer of 2005, at the Naples Opera Society, Steffanie Pearce made an official announcement: " Appearing almost ministerial in a gown of flowing red



**Matthew Carroll** in recital  
(Feb. 2003) Student of  
**Charles Smith**

Chiffon, Naples opera diva **Steffanie Pearce** stood solo at the Norris Community Theatre...to announce what promises to be the biggest undertaking of her entire career: the launching of a new, self-producing opera company, Opera Naples (ON)" written by **Bernadette LaPaglia** for *Naples Sun Times*. We are happy to have played a part in the history of Opera Naples, and we are proud of their 5th Season of opera success. Bravo ON!

Summer 2006 was a sizzler! Naples Opera Society staged Mozart's opera from childhood, *Bastien and Bastienne*, with **Lora Lee Gayor** and **Livio Ferrari** as the innocent lovers and **Ron Bowman**, as the meddling bass. We called it "Mozart at the Beach."

The Opera Naples Summer Performance Workshop, under the leadership of **Steffanie Pearce** and **Dr. Ron Doiron**, presented twenty-three singers in opera scenes and arias. The idea of the summer program continues with opera performances by local young people, lead by ON.

We also presented that summer Menotti's fun opera about a young lady who cannot stop talking on the telephone long enough to get engaged, *The TELEPHONE*. It featured **Meg Ozaki** as Lucy and **Ron Bowman** as Ben. In addition, we presented the Mountain Laurel Trio with their new composition "Mountain Laurel Suite" by James Stephenson, III.

In 2006, we invited **Constance Fee**, mezzo soprano, and **Steven Tompkins**, tenor, with **Dr. Michael Landrum** for a special concert held at the Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church. They came back to visit us in 2009.

In October 2006, we started our special Halloween programs, with many manifestations of spooky characters and frightening yet fun music.



**Livio Ferrari** with **Meg Ozaki**, **Steffanie Pearce**, **Jennifer Mathews**, and **Lora Lee Gayor**



A scene from *Mozart at the Beach*, 2005



**Meg Ozaki** and **Ron Bowman**, 2005, Accompanied by **Julie Shaffer**



We have enjoyed many guest artists, and **Dr. Iwao Asakura** presented a great evening of bass-baritone arias. (Pictured with **Dr. Jeanie Darnell**, soprano and NOS Board member, and **Julie Bearden**, pianist.)



**Karen Gudknect**, Soprano



**Steve Tompkins** and **Constance Fee** in recital. The red flower is very Carmen!



Naples Opera Society has certainly enjoyed its share of lovely young sopranos and talented young men. Pictured to the left is a memory of our first NOS Scholarship competition, winners, applicants, and judges. **Laura Mixter, Stephanie Christiano, and Nick Bodino** were our winners, in this order.

In 2010, the Board of Directors decided to shift our scholarship program to the Naples Music Club to facilitate. In April and May, they decided on our first NOS Encouragement awards, and we anticipate a High School Senior vocal award for next year.



**Dr. Ron Doiron and the Doironettes!**

It is certainly impossible to document in this short profile a complete list of our many talented performers and concert themes. Here are just a few of our frequent singers: **Beth Winiger, Valarie Milazzo, Lindsey Graham, Karen Gudknecht, Janet Ortenzo, Ellie VanderMeuse, and Livio Ferrari.** We enjoyed **Kyle and Sarah Hancock** in performance with **Sergei Lugovskoy.** The Bower School of Music FGCU added a fine group of young vocalists, thank you Dr. Darnell. We enjoyed the **Bach Ensemble** under the direction of **Dr. Ron Doiron** also!



**Megan Ardizoni, Lora Lee Gayor**



**Kellie Cullinan**

A very fun evening of operetta was shared with the Manhattan Lyric Opera by their performance of *The Merry Widow*. We hope to have them back in the future!

We thank **Patty Fairweather** for arranging our refreshments so many evenings and for much more. Thank you to **Dr. Micki Erickson** for working the door like no one else!

Although the story of the Naples Opera Society could continue with amusing and dramatic detail, we must start thinking forward now. Memorable tales of the opera play an important part in its legendary status as the world's greatest entertainment. We all love the story of the *Tosca* who re-appeared after her tragic jump... yet the most wonderful moments that stick with us for a lifetime are the moments that we personally witness in a live entertainment. It is the same for the Naples Opera Society. It would be great fun to relive many evenings shared, but you just had to be there! We hope that you will be there with us for the future recitals, socials, and opera performances. Ten years is not long enough!



Scholarship winner, **Kayley Bishop**, soprano, with Charles Smith (right) and Dr. Jeanie Darnell

(Dr. Ron Bowman, president)