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JournalPLUS

OCTOBER 2016

MAGAZINE OF THE CENTRAL COAST



LA BOHÈME

A COUNTYWIDE ARTS COLLABORATION

 RYAN M. ROSS, DDS

*We shall never know
all the good that a
simple smile can do.*

— Mother Teresa



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

This month the non-profit fundraisers go into high-gear and we feature a few inside. We start with our cover story on the Arts Community's collaborative presentation of the Opera, *La Bohème* at the SLO Performing Arts Center. Since Brian Asher Alhadeff began coordinating this group effort, the performances have been second to none. If you have not attended one of these recently, you are in for a treat.



Next, we feature Morro Bay's Surfboard Art Festival. Our local artists turn ordinary surfboards into masterpieces. You will love the photos inside. We move on to the 40th Pismo Jazz Festival. This year looks to be their best with five venues and thirty different bands playing your favorite tunes.

Finally, we profile Morro Bay Artist, Ted Emrick. Emrick gives back to this community in so many ways, including participation in the upcoming Cow Parade. You will enjoy his story and love his art.

Plenty of good reading again this month.

Enjoy the magazine.

Steve Owens

Steve Owens

LA BOHÈME

OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO BRINGS
GREATEST LOVE STORY TO LIFE

By Liz Dodder Hansen



Alhadeff conducts a ballet segment from *Cavalleria Rusticana* with members of Civic Ballet SLO.
Luis Escobar photo

L'AMOUR, LA PASSION, LA tragédie—*La Bohème* is one of the most famous operas of all time. Capturing the human heart and soul, it's understandable why performance excerpts were featured as the moment of true love in the 1987 Hollywood Blockbuster *Moonstruck*. The pop culture craze behind *La Bohème* was also the inspiration

behind the musical *RENT* and the film *Moulin Rouge!* Bringing the artist's struggle to life, *La Bohème* is the ultimate opera—tragic, beautiful and unforgettable. Set in 1840s Paris, audiences are intimately brought into the lives of two young couples fighting a losing battle against fate, accompanied by the beauty of Giacomo Puccini's lush music.

This gorgeous grand theatrical experience is part of the personal and professional mission of Dr. Brian Asher Alhadeff, Artistic Director and Conductor of Opera San Luis Obispo. "I am grateful to be part of an extraordinary team of board of directors and staff focused on producing outstanding theatrical extravaganzas—more specifically, operas in the style, size, and grandeur responsible for making this genre so prolific over several hundred years."

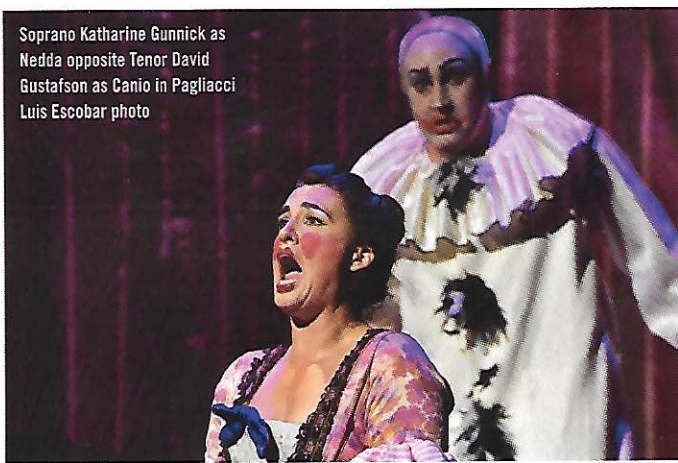
Maestro Alhadeff explains, "Operas have the best chance for success when they are produced the way they were intended to be. When audiences arrive at a magnificent venue like Performance Arts Center San Luis Obispo to see titles the likes of *Carmen*, *Aida*, *Madama Butterfly*, *The Barber of Seville*, and our present *La Bohème*, they come with built-in expectations, and here in San Luis Obispo, we are tremendously fortunate to have a rich artistic climate of talent and support to unify behind a single artistic challenge, and actually exceed beyond those expectations."

To accomplish this, maestro Alhadeff developed the Countywide Arts Collaboration formula weaving several established community arts organizations together in a special relationship of support that ultimately achieves significantly greater impact. This production of *La Bohème* features California



Leading the *La Bohème* Collaborative group is (L-R), Drew Silvaggio, Lisa Deyo, Ryan Beck, Beth Klemm and Brian Asher Alhadeff
Tom Meinhold photo

Soprano Katharine Gunnick as Nedda opposite Tenor David Gustafson as Canio in *Pagliacci*
Luis Escobar photo



Opera Association, Central Coast Children's Choir, Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo, Deyo Dances, Studio @-Ryan's American Dance, the OperaSLO Grand Orchestra and Chorus, brand new two-story sets, opulent costumes and props, and an award winning cast of nationally acclaimed opera singers—it's the whole kit-and-caboodle of San Luis Obispo's performing arts!

Playing Mimi is Katharine Gunnink, an internationally acclaimed soprano. Katharine has quickly made a specialty of some of opera's most demanding roles. Last year, she soared through the challenge of singing both Santuzza and Nedda in Opera San Luis Obispo's double bill *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. Maestro Alhadeff says, "She is one of the most promising singers I've ever worked with in my career. She is a tremendously talented, humble, and an all around wonderful artist to perform with." Originally from San Francisco, Katharine is also a California home-grown success story.

Nathan Granner makes his OperaSLO debut as the leading tenor Rodolfo. Nathan recently performed the roles of Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, and



Alhadeff conducting *Pagliacci*. Luis Escobar photo

Rodolfo in *La Bohème* with Lyric Opera Kansas City, Opera Theater of St. Louis, Tulsa Opera, Wolf Trap and Glimmerglass Opera. An avid supporter of new music, he has also created six new opera roles in three years, including his most interesting role to-date, that of portraying Kanye West.

Soprano Jennie Litster returns to San Luis Obispo in the role of Musetta

after wowing audiences back in 2013 with her riveting portrayal of the Queen of the Night in OperaSLO's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Jennie just completed a term as Resident Artist for Utah Opera's Ensemble Program last year.

Another recent familiar face is that of baritone John Viscardi who plays the role of Marcello. Audiences will remember his lush, milky, seductive voice from OperaSLO's 2015 production of *Pagliacci* when he played the adulterous lover of Nedda, opposite soprano Katharine Gunnink. John was recently a featured soloist in Carmina Burana with Opera Philadelphia.

Baritone Babatunde Akinboboye plays the role of Schaunard and also represents a special success story! Maestro Alhadeff recalls; "He auditioned for me in late 2015, and was wonderful so I brought him to OperaSLO's February 2016 *That's Amore* Valentines themed recital, and audiences loved him instantly. I immediately signed him as a featured soloist with Lompoc Pops Orchestra in the following April, and then again in OperaSLO's July 2016 *Symphony At Sunset Pops* concert at the Vina Robles Amphitheatre—each time he was better and better, thrilling audiences to standing ovations."

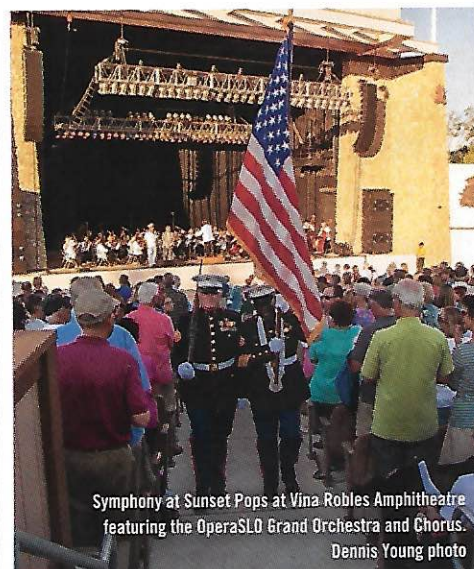
Stage Director Heather Matthews returns after her success directing last year's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. Alhadeff comments; "Heather is a fantastic collaborator: creative, colorful, tremendously talented, and a delightful positive force comfortable working with our large casts." In the realm of dance, Alhadeff continues; "I couldn't imagine a production without the genius of Andrew Silvaggio's choreography and ability to unite SLO's vibrant dance community." This is Silvaggio's fifth consecutive OperaSLO production as Resident Choreographer. Rick Adamson is a new bright star making his OperaSLO debut as Set Designer and Technical Director. "Rick is a tremendously

talented set designer having worked extensively in the great opera houses of the world." He and Alhadeff recently collaborated in California Opera Association's August 2016 production of Donizetti's *Lucia Di Lammermoor*. Alhadeff recalls "it was amazing how Rick turned the Mercedes Edwards Theater in Clovis into a 14th century Scottish castle... I knew instantly he was the one to resurrect early 19th century Paris among the beaches and wine country of San Luis Obispo."

The tremendous machine behind OperaSLO is none other than Executive Director Sharon Dobson. "...my dear partner and *big sis*" Alhadeff affectionately says. "Sharon is a tireless source of energy, organization, and rallying inspiration—she is the rocket fuel propelling OperaSLO." Sharon's introduction to opera was OperaSLO's 1997 production of *La Bohème*—an experience that changed the course of her life steering her destiny alongside OperaSLO.

The OperaSLO team seems cosmically intertwined. Alhadeff remarks; "Yes of course we love it—but more importantly, we share an intricate vision of what Grand Opera should be, and there is a beautiful supporting board of directors and community of patrons that thrills in unleashing us upon the palate of art and creativity that is San Luis Obispo."

Opera San Luis Obispo is one of only four Grand Opera producing companies in the State of California—the others being San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and San Diego Opera. Treat yourself and your family to this delightful and memorable artistic review of the Central Coast. Whether you are experiencing *La Bohème* for the first time, or it's a cherished favorite, you are certain to fall a little in love yourself.



Symphony at Sunset Pops at Vina Robles Amphitheatre featuring the OperaSLO Grand Orchestra and Chorus.
Dennis Young photo