

Opera Santa Barbara

Happy Birthday Puccini

By Devon Pettengill / CASA

AT AN EVENT THAT TRANSCENDED NOT ONLY TIME BUT CULTURES, members of the Italian community and local opera lovers came together to celebrate composer Giacomo Puccini's 150th birthday at the Granada on November 15th.

"Puccini is one of the United States' beloved composers, even though he is Italian." Opera Santa Barbara President Peter Bertling shared. "His music elevates the heart, the soul, and the mind. People keep coming back to it again and again."

The event was a dinner hosted by Opera Santa Barbara and the composer's granddaughter Simonetta Puccini, held on the stage of the Granada, which was transformed into an elegant dining hall complete with chandeliers.



Simonetta Puccini and Steve and Chrystal Clifton of Palmina Wines.

Simonetta Puccini came all the way from Lucca, Italy, where she oversees the preservation of her grandfather's lake-side estate, which is now a museum.

"One hundred and fifty years is a long time, but he is still alive and his music is very close to us," Simonetta shared with the guests. "It is because his music goes to the heart. That is one of the secrets of his music."

Another guest of honor from Lucca, Italy was the chef Aurelio Barattini, who with Renato Moiso of Via Maestra 42 on State Street, prepared an authentic feast featuring wild boar stew and polenta made

from Tuscan corn shipped all the way from Italy for the event. Each course was served with a selection of Palmina wines provided by winemakers Steve and Chrystal Clifton.



Gaja Kabaretti and SB Symphony Conductor Nir Kabaretti.



Soprano Michele Bogdanovitz, OSB Vice President Duncan Mellichamp, Suzanne Mellichamp, Soprano Jamie Chamberlin, and Tenor Edgar Ramirez.

After the guests took their seats, Opera Santa Barbara General Manager

Steven Sharpe gratefully acknowledged recent grants bestowed on the organization and the donation by the Hutton Foundation of office space to all the non-profit arts organizations in Santa Barbara, including the Opera.

President Peter Bertling expressed his gratitude to former Opera Santa Barbara President Frederick Sidon, who with his connections in the Italian community, was largely responsible for making the evening possible.

Help in organizing the event also came from the Italian Consulate and the Italian Cultural Institute in Los Angeles.

"The Italian Government helps organize events around the world in celebration of Puccini," shared Italian Consul General Nicola Faganello. "This event is part of the cooperation between the Italian Cultural Institute and Opera Santa Barbara."

The evening's entertainment



Tom Rubbert, Simon Williams, and Euzetta Williams.

was a series of moving arias from Puccini's famous operas, performed by soprano Michele Bogdanovitz, soprano Jamie Chamberlin, and tenor Edgar Ramirez, to the accompaniment of Gerald Sternbach.

"Not only is Puccini's music sustained in the repertoire, but his reputation is actually improving," shared the dinner's Master of Ceremonies Simon Williams, a critic for *Opera News* and a professor at UCSB. "Puccini is a growth industry in opera."



Chefs Aurelio Barattini and Renato Moiso.

Opera Santa Barbara begins its 2009 season in the newly restored Granada in March. For more information, call 898-3890 or visit www.operasb.com.



Former OSB President Frederick Sidon, Simonetta Puccini, and Italian Consul General Nicola Faganello.



Bruce Rickborn and OSB Secretary Ida Rickborn.

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