

Why San Francisco is such a shit-hole city

Just look at the faces and numb arrogance of these people:



Opera Guild President Charlot Malin,
Opera Guild Gala Co-Chair Jane Mudge, SF
Opera General Director David Gockley,
and Gala Co-Chair Karen Kubin.

DAVID GOCKLEY TRIBUTE

Gockley took the helm as the sixth general director of the San Francisco Opera on January 1, 2006, after 35 years with the Houston Grand Opera, where, at 29, he became the youngest person to ever lead an American opera company. When he retires in July 2016, he'll be succeeded by **Matthew Shilvock**, the San Francisco Opera's Associate General Director since 2010.

"For more than four decades, David Gockley's singular determination, constant innovation, and fierce passion have revolutionized opera in America," wrote Meyer Sound, in a tribute. "David has persevered with a twinkle in his eye, a savvy sense of business, and a wicked sense of humor."



San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley, who will retire in 2016, with Linda Kemper.

THE BLUE CARPET PROMENADE

One of the biggest society events in San Francisco, the evening entertainment began as opera devotees arrived in a spectacular

array of stylish gowns and walked the blue carpet at the War Memorial Opera House on Van Ness Avenue. The dazzling turnout establishes this event as San Francisco's answer to the Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Museum Costume Institute gala in New York

As a change of venue from City Hall, the chairs moved this year's Champagne reception to the Opera House Grand Foyer and the dinner to an Opera Ball Pavilion. "It was a real thrill to see the guests' delight as they took in the magic," exclaimed Opera Ball Co-Chair **Jane Mudge**.



The paparazzi were out in full force to capture the fashion parade at what is perhaps San Francisco's most glamorous event of the year.

FASHION HIGHLIGHTS

The fashionable crowd went all out for this grand occasion. In their splendid designer gowns and dramatic baubles, with coiffure and maquillage done to perfection, many were happy to pose for the photographers and television cameras outside the Opera House.

I recognized gowns by international designers. So many featured trains that I overheard, "Sorry, you're stepping on my dress" more than once! For this column, I thought it would be fun to focus on the glamour of the night.



Daniel Girard and Ann Girard, former
Opera Guild President, .in a gown by
Rubin Singer.



Pamela Joyner in Monique Lhullier, Deepa Pakianathan in Rubin Singer, and Tim Wu.



Venture capitalist Gaurav Garg with wife Komal Shah, in Oscar de la Renta.



Local fashion designer Karen Caldwell, in her own design, with Lisa Grotts in Monique Lhuillier.



Shanghai-born Yuan Yuan Tan, principal ballerina for the SF Ballet, will perform with the company in her hometown in October.



Brenda Zarate, Neiman Marcus GM Alan Morrell, and Carolyn Chandler in Reem Akra.



Asim and Dr. Isha Abdullah, owners of French fashion house Ungaro.



Robin Collins with Sallie and Leon
Hunting.



Mark Medearis and Teresa Medearis, who has chaired the opera ball several times.



Sara and Austin Hills sit in the same seats that once belonged to Austin's parents, who attended the Opera House's first opening night in 1932.

GENTLEMAN ATTIRE

“A man should wear tails to the opera opening,” opined the evening’s event stylist **J. Riccardo Benavides**, “as it’s an occasion to up the glamour quotient.” Benavides was happy that Vogue Editor **Anna Wintour** stipulated white tie for this year’s Costume Institute Gala at the Metropolitan Museum in NYC. That means wearing a black tailcoat, waistcoat, wing-collared shirt, and white bow tie.

Many of the gents followed what has been a San Francisco tradition of wearing white tie and tails to the Opera opening night. The group included **David Gockley**, the Honorable **George Shultz**, former Mayor **Willie Brown**, Opera Association President **Keith Geeslin**, Opera Board Chairman **John Gunn**, **Gregory Malin**, **Theodore Brown**, **Bob Friese**, **Mark Medearis**, **Giovanni Matter**, and **Richard Carpeneti**.



Local politicians in attendance included former SF Mayor Willie Brown, in white tie and tails by Brioni, with Sonya Molodetskaya, in a gown by Russian designer Vasily Vein.



Former Secretary of State George Shultz sported white tie, and his wife, SF Protocol Chief Charlotte Shultz, was wearing Monique Lhuillier.



Architect Theodore Brown in white tie and top hat, with Ellie Killebrew Brown.



Debra and Richard Carpeneti.

Other gentlemen opted for evening attire, but a less formal and more individualistic style, including a surprising number of blue dinner jackets.



Keith Wetmore, Greg Lopez in a black and blue Tom Ford dinner jacket, and Andrew Hinek in a bright blue Tom Ford dinner jacket.



David Laudon and Randy Laroche in matching top hats and gold cummerbunds.



Inder Dhillon, Trent Norris, and Jack Calhoun, in a tuxedo by
Banana Republic.



The gentlemanly Alan Malouf in a blue dinner jacket by Brioni, with Elisa Stephens.

OUT-OF-TOWNERS

The annual gala draws guests from everywhere. **John Capizzi**, GM of Bergdorf Goodman, flew in from New York to honor

Gockley, as they became friends when he was manager of Houston's Neiman-Marcus.

Capizzi chatted with **Barbara Brookins-Schneider**, who wore an evening gown by New York-based designer **Bibhu Mohapatra**. The Chinese-inspired YSL she wore to the 2007 Opera opening was included in this year's Metropolitan Museum couture exhibition, *China: Through the Looking Glass*.



John Capizzi, VP and GM of Bergdorf Goodman, with Barbara Brookins-Schneider.



Barbara Brown with Daniel Diaz, who recently relocated from San Francisco to head the Italian Bulgari jewelry boutique in Bal Harbour (Miami), FL.



Justin Fichelson, of Bravo TV's *Million Dollar Listing*, Stephanie Lawrence, Los Angeles-based Rick and Kathy Hilton, and bi-costal Jeanne Lawrence.



New York-based Giovanni Mattera and Denise De Luca, of the de Grisogono Jewelry team, hosted a reception to show their exquisite collection at the private club Villa Taverna.



New Yorkers Jessica Hon and architect Jason Weinbeck. Formerly of Ralph Lauren store development, he is now at D2A Studio in trendy Williamsburg, Brooklyn.



A group who dresses creatively and ethnically to have some fun: Larissa Archer, Afreen Wahab, NY fashion muse Tziporah Salamon, and Jennifer Raiser, just back from Burning Man.

CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION

The “Moonlight and Music” theme created a romantic mood for over 800 opera devotees who enjoyed the evening’s events: a Champagne reception at 5 p.m., dinner at 6, the opera at 8, and a post-performance bash that lasted until the next morning.



Though the Champagne reception started early, guests arrived promptly, not wanting to miss the chance to see and be seen and catch up with friends after the summer lull.

“What fun to see new, fresh faces interested in opera and curious about opening night,” said 2007 opera ball co-chair **Katie**

Jarman. “We need them to sustain this art form in addition to the patrons, who have been coming for years.”



Cindy Anderson, John Wied, and 2007 opera ball co-chair Katie Jarman.



Navid Armstrong, Patricia Ferrin Loucks,
and Diane Carlson.



Nazan Orr, Joel Goodrich, in a glittering Stefano Ricci jacket, and Clara Shayevich, in a gown by Vasily Vein.



Alex Chases with Denise Hale, in a black and white gown by Lily Samii paired with some of the evening's most eye-catching jewels.



James Nicholas, wearing a Ralph Lauren tuxedo, Anna Weinberg, wearing Badgley Mischka, Mary Beth Shimmon, and David Shimmon.



Martin Camsey, Patricia Sprincin, Randy Reynoso, and Charles Sprincin.



Philip Wilson, Linda Zider, and David Gockley.



Annie Calonico Schieding, Braeden Schieding, and Fati Farmanfarmaian.



David Gockley with Opera Ball Great Benefactors Paula and Bandel Carano.



Dr. Carolyn Chang, wearing Andrew Gn,
and Komal Shah, in Oscar de la Renta.



Barbara Fritz, Linda Kemper, Lily Samii,
and Linle Froeb.



Alisa Burgess-Blajwas, Jacqueline Jacoby,
and Belinda Berry, in a gown made of
neckties.



Alex Nazari, Simone Derayeh, Julia Zack, and Kiral Zack.



Mark Rhoades, Beth Townsend, Christopher Freye, and Jerome Molles.



Opera Guild President Charlot Malin, in a floral Carolina Herrera gown, with husband Gregory Malin and sons Benjamin and Sebastian Malin.



US House of Representatives Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and husband Paul Pelosi often fly in from Washington DC in support of the SF's many charitable benefits.



Athena and Timothy Blackburn, newly appointed chairman of the Napa Valley Festival del Sole.



Jim and Stephanie Marver.



Making it a family affair, Roselyne Swig brought granddaughter Madeline Erhlich.



Afsaneh Akhtari, in a lace gown by Pavoni,
with daughter Jazmin Roper.



Jorge Maumer, Daru Kawalkowski, and
Nazan Orr.

DINNER IN THE OPERA PAVILION

Event Stylist J. Riccardo Benavides and the chairs crated a new venue, the Opera Pavilion tent, made possible by blocking off

Grove Street, the side street that separates Symphony Hall and the Opera House.

The women, in particular, commented how much easier it was to walk out the Opera House side doors and directly into the Pavilion for dinner—especially in their long gowns and stiletto heels.



Co-Chair Jane Mudge, in a gown by Marchesa, event stylist J. Riccardo Benavides, and Co-Chair Karen Kubin, in Monique Lhullier, at the entrance of the elaborate Opera Pavilion.



Fashion writer Christine Suppes, in an Alexander McQueen frock, and Lucy Buchanan, in a floral gown by Milly.



Sabrina Baldieri, Giovanni Mattera,
Suzanne Levit, and Allison Speer.



Jeanne Lawrence in Tom Ford, J. Riccardo Benavides, and Stephanie Lawrence.



Rita Simonini, Musical Director Nicola Luisotti, General Director David Gockley, Dede Wilsey, in Oscar de la Renta, and New York's Boaz Mazon of Oscar de la Renta.



On their way into the pavilion: Renata Anderson, Raj Singh, Debbie Muller, David Barber, Karen Richardson, John Rubinstein.

DÉCOR IN A NEW VENUE

The “Moonlight and Music” theme was inspired by the *Luisa Miller* hunting scenes and the Austrian schloss (castle) set in a village in the Tyrol Mountains. Of the space, Opera Guild member Linda Zider exclaimed, “I felt I was being entertained at an elegant private dinner party in a castle with friends, as the atmosphere seemed so intimate.”



Elaborate table settings featured touches of gold and crushed velvet table coverings. The white deer heads mounted on the walls added to the Tyrolean hunting atmosphere.



The gold table settings glowed under the chandeliers and the amber lights that Benavides discovered in England—and so did the female guests!



The lighting was perfection, according to visiting New York architect Jason Weinbeck—and if anyone should know, it's he!



The atmosphere was festive and fun, and the noise level was a lesson to be learned, as guests noted approvingly that they could converse at dinner without shouting over loud music.

DINNER IS SERVED

The dinner from **McCalls Catering** was perfection: artistically presented, masterfully prepared, and accompanied by impeccable service, a remarkable achievement considering the large number of guests.



The first course was roasted nectarine and lobster salad with asparagus, tomatoes, buckwheat, sunflower sprouts, and farmers cheese.



For the entrée, we dined on Tyrolean braised short ribs with spaetzle, roasted apricots, and garden vegetables.



The standout dessert combined Italian and Austrian treats: tiramisu and hazelnut roulade with salted caramel sauce.



Guests enjoyed chardonnay and merlot from Napa Valley winery Grgich Hills Estate, donated by the Austin Hills family.

BACK TO THE WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE

As customary, the evening began with *The Star Spangled Banner*, conducted by Maestro Nicola Luisotti, and a welcome from Opera Association President Keith Geeslin, Opera Board Chairman John Gunn, and General Director David Gockley.

“Opera transports us, moves us, inspires us,” said John Gunn, who added, “This company rivals any in the world.” That the 3,000-seat house was sold out is a testament to opera’s popularity in San Francisco as well as the appeal and excitement of this gala event.



When the ushers played chimes, guests promptly took their seats for the eight o'clock performance.



Gockley welcomed the crowd and talked of some of his most cherished pieces, including *Don Carlos* and *Sweeney Todd*, which was performed the following night.

THE GIFTING PATRONS

San Francisco prides itself on its outstanding civic responsibility and cultural causes. Under Gockley's tenure, the opera received such significant bequests as **John** and **Cynthia Gunn's** gift of over \$40 million. Additionally, the late **Jeannik Mequet Littlefield** bequeathed more than \$35 million, and her daughter **Denise Littlefield-Sobel** continues to provide ongoing support.



Keith Geeslin, President of the SF Opera Association, with Priscilla Geeslin, Cynthia Gunn, and John Gunn, Chairman of the Opera Board.



Roman Gronokowski and Denise Littlefield
Sobel.



Trevor Traina with mother Dede Wilsey, an Opening Weekend Grand Sponsor of 10 years and a sponsor of the free Opera in the Park on Sunday.



Maria Manetti and Jan Shrem founded the Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund and the Conductors Fund, in support of Maestro Nicola Luisotti and other Italian conductors.



Luisa Miller was made possible in part by Dianne and Tad Taube as well as the Koret Foundation.

VERDI'S OPERA *LUISA MILLER*

First performed in 1849, *Luisa Miller* is less well-known than Verdi's *Aida* or *La Traviata*. The plot is classic: boys meets girl,

they fall in love, the parents don't approve, and the ending is tragic.

That didn't dampen the enjoyment of the crowd. People were buzzing about San Francisco's favorite soprano **Leah Crocetto** in the title role, opposite tenor **Michael Fabiano** in a much-anticipated performance as her lover Rodolfo.







Following Fabiano's breathtaking and moving aria "Quando le sere al placido," in which Rodolfo reminisces of happier times with Luisa, whom he believes has betrayed him, the crowd rose in ecstatic applause.





PRESENTATION OF THE OPERA MEDAL TO FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO

Following the final curtain call, General Director David Gockley presented celebrated SF Opera associate **Francesca Zambello** with the coveted San Francisco Opera Medal. Since 1983, Zambello has been involved in more than fifty SF Opera productions, including the current *Luisa Miller* and the 2011 staging of the Wagner "Ring" Cycle.



SF Opera Musical Director Nicola Luisotti,
SF Opera General Director David Gockley,
and *Luisa Miller* Producer Francesca
Zambello.

POST-PERFORMANCE CELEBRATION

After the curtain call, patrons returned to the Opera Ball Pavilion for the after-party, dancing, catching up with friends, and sampling from the buffet laden with risotto, freshly carved charcuterie, cheese, sweets, and more—plus the open bar!



The crowd grazed at stations heaped with tempting nibbles.



New York-based high society band Bob Hardwick Sound played a variety of music for the after-party.



Lenny Eber, Former Opera Guild Ball co-chair (2012) Diane Rubin, and Eugene Kelly.



Keith and Claudia Ross arrive for the after party in the Opera Pavilion.



Maria Pitcairn and Robert Beadle.



Frank and Susan Dunlevy with Sobia and Nadir Shaikh.



Gary Drysdale, Gregory Malin, Janet Lamkin, Paul Holm,
Charlot Malin, Bill Lamkin, Anne Laury, Daniel Laury, and
Afsaneh Akhtari.



Former president and current vice chairman of the SF Opera Association George Hume, Cathie Johnson, Leslie Hume, and Pitch Johnson, former chairman of the SF Opera Board.



David and Inger Golob, with Linle Froeb,
Opera Guild VP of Fundraising, and Jim
Froeb.



Robert Arnold-Kraft, Susan Paganini, and
Ryan Williams.

DANCING UNTIL THE WEE HOURS

Among the revelers filling the dance floor were many young people, a tribute to the chairs' success at attracting a future audience and exciting them about this magnificent art form.



Jennifer MacCready kicks up her heels with dance partner Randy Laroche.



Shanghai-born realtor Olivia Hsu Decker, who is flying to Shanghai to watch the SF Ballet perform and to check in on the Chinese luxury real estate market.