

A man in a vibrant red opera costume, including a red jacket, a red cap, and red plaid trousers, is performing on stage. He is holding a chain in his right hand and has a joyful expression. The background features a stone wall with a circular medallion and a decorative railing. A shadow of the performer is cast on the wall to the right. A red circle is drawn around the performer.

# 2022/23 Annual Report

The  
Florentine  
Opera



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# Year in Review

**Closing out our 89th season, we celebrate great singing, a world premiere, French and Italian romances, and a breakout performance by a Baumgartner Studio Artist in *Barber of Seville*. Prepare for a wild ride through *The Florentine's* escapades of the year!**



*Roméo et Juliette* brought out not just the opera enthusiasts but also folks from the Met, Chicago Lyric, and Houston. Yes, they are stalking our cast like opera paparazzi. You can't blame them with rising stars strutting their stuff on our stage!

Did we mention that we maintained a balanced budget despite all the dramatic shenanigans? Juggling divas and cash reserves all at once — a true performance art in itself! And let's not forget our creative teams, as diverse as the notes on a musical score. We proudly celebrate a season built with 23% people of color and 48% women/nonbinary. It's not just about the art; it's about sharing perspectives, baby!

Now, for the pièce de résistance — our education programs. This year, we impacted a whopping 77,792 students, and that's not a typo. We broke opera down to its bare essentials for Penfield's students — Opera 101 with costumes, singing, movement, art, and more — talk about immersive learning! In our quest to bring opera to Milwaukee's youth, we didn't just stop at school visits. Schools on Stage featured Pathways High School, in costume at center stage.

But wait, there's more! We took a break from singing for a strategic retreat — like the opera version of a corporate getaway, but more drama and fewer trust falls. And guess what? We even refreshed our marketing strategy and introduced flex subscriptions. Because when it comes to opera, we like to keep it flexible, just like our sopranos hitting those high notes.

Last but not least, our ticket accounts saw an influx of 54% newcomers and a 10.4% increase in tickets purchased. We've got a whole army of newbies joining our operatic circus — welcome!

Remember, at The Florentine, we're not just about opera; we're about living life dramatically, with a twist of tongue firmly in cheek. Thank you for being part of our melodramatic family, and here's to another year of opera adventures!

I want to close with a personal thank you to outgoing president Cathy Costantini. Opera is never boring, but we've successfully navigated an exceptional few years with great outcomes. Welcome to president elect David Paris — the adventure continues!

*Maggy Oplinger*

**Maggy Oplinger**  
General Director & CEO



# Season Successes

IN OUR THREE STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS, WE ACCOMPLISHED THE FOLLOWING:

## PURPOSEFUL REFINEMENT

Earlier and more detailed production budgeting: we are now on an extended 18-month season planning cycle, building 24/25 programs. This shift allowed us to program **TWO MULTI-COMPANY PRODUCTIONS INTO THAT SEASON, WHICH IMPROVES OUR QUALITY AND REDUCES COSTS.**

## ENGAGE COMMUNITY

**NEW! A SUMMER OPERA TOUR ADDRESSED A CHALLENGE: HOW TO OFFER IMPACTFUL, FREE COMMUNITY PERFORMANCES** and measure impact by geography, interaction level, and feedback. Florentine Opera appeared in Lake Park, Washington Park, Summerfest and in Delafield this summer.

We streamlined our Community Circle purchasing system, making it easier for underrepresented audiences to participate, based on partner feedback.

**WE WELCOMED 368 COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM 16 ORGANIZATIONS.** Other Community Circle participants included school partners and attendees of Covers Student Night.

We've reinvented our donor benefit structure to focus on experiences and **GETTING CLOSER TO THE ARTISTS.**

Through audience-focused curation, we tested audience appetite with English language reductions of grand opera (*Così fan tutte: REMIX*) and a crossover experience (*Covers with Immortal Girlfriend*), to assess impact. **AUDIENCE REVIEWS AVERAGING 4.8** indicate these are a great fit in our repertoire.

We're building additional on site opera experiences like at the Cooperage; 63% of those buyer accounts were new to file.

*Così* averaged 4.3 in audience surveys. Grand opera "classics with a twist" are inspiring a return to the theater, so we are staying the course while buffeted by dropping national opera sales. We sold 59% to goal, against a national opera average of 50-60% to goal, down from last year. *Barber of Seville* saw 36% new buyers, and 20% returning lapsed buyers.

## STRENGTHEN TEAM

**WE SUCCESSFULLY WELCOMED AND ONBOARDED 7 NEW TEAM MEMBERS!**

The Florentine maintains a **BALANCED BUDGET** with multiple years' of cash reserves- which we are using strategically to sustain us through our complete recovery from Covid's impact. **23/24 TICKET ACCOUNTS INCLUDED 54% NEW TO FILE, A 10.4% INCREASE IN TICKETS SOLD, AND A 4% INCREASE IN TICKET REVENUE. THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY, DEVELOPMENT RAISED \$2.2M.**

Schools on Stage featured **PATHWAYS HIGH SCHOOL ONSTAGE** in *Barber of Seville!* Over the course of the season, Pathways students also got a Shakespeare session with our Education Manager and General Director, and served as lightwalkers and director's assistants. We also welcomed a UWM intern to our stage management team on *Roméo et Juliette*. **OUR COLLECTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS BENEFITED 77,792 STUDENTS THIS YEAR IN 150 SCHOOLS AND 34 ZIP CODES.** With a set designed by Milwaukee artist Rosy Petri, the Baumgartner Studio Artists performed a shortened *Barber of Seville* all over Southeastern Wisconsin for 7,558 students in 35 live performances at 63 schools, plus 4 live streamed performances. We are deepening our relationship with some schools. Breaking opera down into its fundamental components, the Florentine guided Penfield's kids 3-12 and their families through costumes, singing, movement, art, and more.

197 designers, artists, technicians, singers and more worked on our productions this season. **WE CELEBRATE STORIES FROM MANY PERSPECTIVES. THIS SEASON'S CREATIVE TEAMS INCLUDED 23% PEOPLE OF COLOR AND 48% WOMEN/NONBINARY.**

AN OPERA IN FIVE ACTS  
BY CHARLES GOUNOD

LIBRETTO  
by Jules Barbier and  
Michel Carré

BASED ON ROMEO AND JULIET  
by William Shakespeare

CONDUCTOR  
Francesco Milioto

STAGE DIRECTOR  
David Lefkowich

ROMEO  
Duke Kim

JULIET  
Emily Pogorelc

CHORUS MASTER  
Benjamin Rivera

WITH  
Milwaukee Symphony  
Orchestra and Florentine  
Opera Chorus

SPONSORS  
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Mary Ann and Charles LaBahn



# ROMÉO ET JULIETTE

Starting off strong with the timeless tale of love and tragedy in the heartwarming season opener, *Roméo et Juliette*. Milwaukee native Emily Pogorelc delivered a captivating performance as Juliet. 1,106 patrons joined us for this performance - surpassing our seat goal!

Opera met electronica in *Covers*, an exploration of how these so different art forms fit together — to rousing reviews and an exuberant audience. **The Milwaukee Journal included *Covers* as the only classical performance listed as a top 10 concert** in Milwaukee this winter. Featuring Immortal Girlfriend and the Baumgartner Studio Artists. Our thanks to sponsors 88nine and UPAF NextGen! This program received the first Resonate grant and NextGen members joined us for a feedback session following the performance. 63% of attendees were new to the opera.



# COVERS

STAGE DIRECTOR  
Dimonte Henning

CO-CURATED BY  
Immortal Girlfriend

2022/23 BAUMGARTNER  
STUDIO ARTISTS

LAURA MCCAULEY  
Soprano

TZYTL STEINMAN  
Mezzo-soprano

PATRICK BESSENBACHER  
Tenor

ZACHARY CROWLE  
Baritone

EDWARD FORSTMAN  
Piano

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A FRESH TAKE ON  
MOZART AND DA PONTE'S  
COSI FAN TUTTE

BOOK AND LYRICS  
Kelley Rourke

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Nicolas Lell Benavides

PIANIST-CONDUCTOR  
Laurann Gilley

STAGE DIRECTOR  
Jill Anna Ponasik

FEATURING  
The Baumgartner Studio  
Artists and Musicians from  
the Milwaukee Symphony  
Orchestra

SPONSORS  
Production Sponsors —  
Claire and Glen Hackmann



# COSÌ FAN TUTTE: REMIX

As part of World Premiere Wisconsin, we performed *Così fan tutte: Remix*, updating a Mozart favorite to a 1980s and 2000s vibe. Audiences responded to the nostalgia theme, especially a multigenerational slide show of college experiences. The Baumgartner Studio Artists sang the lead roles in this concise, English-language modernization.



In a delightful performance of *The Barber of Seville*, Baumgartner Studio artist Patrick Bessenbacher flawlessly stepped in as Count Almaviva. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel headlined their review saying “Understudy steps up brilliantly in Florentine Opera’s comic ‘*The Barber of Seville*’”. 185 Community Circle tickets sold for the performance.

# IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA



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Lead Sponsors for Rosina—  
Cynthia and Gary Vasques

AN OPERA IN TWO ACTS  
BY GIOACHINO ROSSINI

LIBRETTO  
Cesare Sterbini

CONDUCTOR  
Francesco Milioto

STAGE DIRECTOR  
Christopher Mattaliano

ROSINA  
Katherine Beck

COUNT ALMAVIVA  
Patrick Bessenbacher

FIGARO  
Leroy Davis

CHORUS MASTER  
Benjamin Rivera

WITH  
Milwaukee Symphony  
Orchestra and Florentine  
Opera Chorus

7,558  
students

59  
schools

35  
performances

70,000  
students via  
digital share  
through MPS

## Opera in Schools *The Barber of Seville*

In our return to live in-school performances, Gioachino Rossini’s most famous “opera buffa” toured for thousands of students around Southeast Wisconsin. Nadja Simmonds returned as our school show director. Milwaukee gem, Rosy Petri designed the Barber of Seville for Schools set, working in conjunction with costume designer Amelia Strahan to transport students to colorful Spain.

The video recording of the performance was shared with all of Milwaukee Public Schools!

## SPONSORS

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# Community Engagement

## SCHOOLS ON STAGE

We had our second-annual Schools on Stage program! Students from Pathways High School appeared on stage as supers in our *Barber of Seville* mainstage production.

Students from Pathways High School also assisted as light walkers for our *Romeo and Juliet* production.

## PENFIELD PROJECT

Florentine Opera staff and resident artists led an 8-visit residency at the Penfield Montessori Academy and Penfield Children's Center. Students received an opportunity to learn about the onstage and backstage components of opera including singing, instruments, sets, props, costumes, and movement. We ended our residency with a performance of *Barber of Seville* for Schools. These activities provided families and caregivers an opportunity to re-engage with their students' school.



## OTHER RESIDENCIES

We did multi-visit residencies at 5 additional schools:

- Milwaukee French Immersion School
- Lowell International Elementary
- Sherman Multicultural Arts School
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School
- La Escuela Fratney

## COMMUNITY CIRCLE

We welcomed 338 patrons from greater Milwaukee organizations to experience a mainstage performance for \$10 each (\$85-\$120 ticket value). Organizations included:

- Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design
- Reagan High School
- Pathways High School
- Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra
- First Stage
- Boy Scouts of America
- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
- Riverwest Elders
- CORE EI Centro
- Local Milwaukee Barber Shops
- Penfield Montessori Academy and Children's Center
- Riverwest Elders
- Milwaukee French Immersion School
- Ronald McDonald House Charities
- Teens Grow Greens
- and families from our Opera in Schools partners!

## DIVA GALA

Chaired by the wonderful Ron Jacquart and Gary Van Wert, the Florentine celebrated its most successful Diva Gala to date, raising \$283,474 for our education programs.

# CELEBRATIONS

## PASTA & PUCCINI

This year saw us celebrating our 13th Pasta & Puccini, a gorgeous Italian celebration in Riverwest, hosted by Cathy and Mario Costantini and the Florentine. The event raised \$145,250, and brought together many new Florentine friends to the dinner table.



# 2022/23 Baumgartner Studio Artists

## THE DONALD AND DONNA BAUMGARTNER STUDIO ARTIST PROGRAM

The Donald and Donna Baumgartner Studio Artist Program is a season-long comprehensive artist-in-residence program for singers beginning their professional careers. The program is designed to ensure the future of opera by providing emerging artists from around the country with comprehensive training, advanced instruction, and professional performance opportunities on and off the mainstage.



LAURA MCCAULEY  
SOPRANO



TZYTLE STEINMAN  
MEZZO-SOPRANO



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TENOR



ZACHARY CROWLE  
BARITONE



EDWARD FORSTMAN  
PIANIST

## Our Donors

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# Our Donors

## Anello Society

The Anello Society is named after the Florentine Opera's visionary founder, John David Anello. This group of visionaries have provided a gift to the Florentine Opera in their wills or estate plans. These planned gifts assure that future financial support to the Florentine Opera remains strong.

Anonymous (6)

Clair Anderson

Mr.\* and Mrs. John Anello, Jr.

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The following people and institutions have generously provided bequests and endowment gifts to the Florentine Opera. We commemorate these departed friends and champions who have honored us with their gifts.

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Charles and Dorothy Farina

Edwin and Elfriede Gallun Fund

Dolores Ruetz

Nita Soref

Marie Z. Uihlein

Donald Whitaker

Barbara and Ted Wiley

Jane R. Will

William and Marie Winter

## Igniter Award



### KATE & DON WILSON

When Kate and Don Wilson walk into any room, their presence will always be a memorable and joyful experience. Simply put, they serve missions that make the world a far better place.

As a former board chair and committed Florentine Lifetime Director, Kate led the 'Burn the Note' campaign, beginning a growth period for the Florentine Opera, a testament to her exceptional leadership. Don currently serves as a dedicated member of the Finance committee.

Their shared love for the arts is recognized in the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center completed in 2002, a haven that showcases global talent and nurtures artistic growth for individuals.

With love and boundless affection, we thank you for igniting hearts and minds.



## Cathy Costantini

**BOARD CHAIR: 2021–2023**

**BOARD MEMBER: 2006–present**

It was a Sunday family tradition that began Cathy Costantini's introduction and eventual love affair to the world of opera...a childhood memory that affectionately honors her mother's meal preparation while Cathy's other four siblings were entertained by her father playing beautiful renowned opera arias on their phonograph.

Cathy Costantini's remarkable tenure as the outgoing Board President begins with profound gratitude. Her leadership has steered the organization through challenges and triumphs, embracing its history as her inspiration and compass.

'It's been my great honor to serve our beloved Florentine Opera, since joining the board in 2006.'

Today, her commitment to The Florentine Opera's mission remains steadfast for over seventeen years in her many leadership roles. She will tell you, however, her greatest love story is shared with her husband Mario, three children, three grandchildren, and two black labrador dogs.

Cathy created non profit fund-raising events that continue to thrive with perhaps the most beloved outdoor event, Pasta & Puccini.

Cathy reflects upon her love for the Florentine Opera and when asked what are among her favorite things, she will tell you, 'I love that we've historically been able to share the immense joy of opera music with the broader Milwaukee community, What a gift! But most importantly, the extraordinary people whom Mario and I have met will remain close to us for the rest of our lives.'



# Continuing Legacy

When they were with us, we celebrated their wisdom, sense of humor, and loyalty. Their impact surpasses them.

**Because of them, the Florentine is stronger.**



**BELA MAROTI** shared his remarkable life with the Florentine Family that revealed the strength of a racehorse determined to cross any and all finish lines to realize his dreams. Bela survived as a young boy, escaping from Hungary. Upon receiving a student visa in 1953 he was able to continue his studies in the United States and arrived in the United States on the day President Eisenhower was inaugurated. He continued his graduate studies in theology and was ordained to the Catholic priesthood in 1954. Bela's expertise in the field of the clinical treatment of alcoholism and other addictions was recognized nationally and internationally. Along with founding De Paul Hospital for those in recovery from addiction, he was a board member of the American College of Addiction Treatment Administrators and Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Problems of North America. As a commitment to the Florentine Opera Company, Bela and his wife Julie established an endowment for high school students to be able to attend the opera. He and Julie established an endowment at St. John's to bring the Florentine Opera Company to perform for its residents providing exceptional concerts. As a bastion of the Florentine Opera Club, Bela truly found refuge in opera and remained a passionate audience member throughout his life.



**EUGENIE FISCHER OLSEN**, an avid friend of Milwaukee's museums, zoo, ballet and more, served as president of the Milwaukee Florentine Opera Club. She shared her life with her husband, **COL. RALPH N. OLSEN, M.D.** who would follow her posthumously days later. After earning her B.S. in education in 1954, she joined the U.S. Army Medical Specialist Corps, training in occupational therapy and serving Korean war veterans. As a 1st Lieutenant, she earned her M.A. in speech pathology at the University of Denver. While stationed at Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver, she met Captain Ralph Olsen, M.D. The two wed July 4, 1959 on Governor's Island, Manhattan, then moved to Orléans, France, where Ralph was stationed as chief of pediatrics at the U.S. Army Hospital and Eugenie taught

French to American children on base. After their first child was born, they moved to Elm Grove, Wisconsin. Their daughter, Wendy Olsen asked that gifts be made to the Florentine Opera in their honor. Both were avid sailors in addition to being lifelong opera lovers.

# 22/23 Audited Financials

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	2023	2022
Cash	249,348	1,840,885
Investments & Endowments	7,136,108	4,627,674
Receivables & Prepaid Expenses	427,586	1,106,310
Operating & Finance lease right-of-use assets	468,994	
Property & Equipment, net	25,253	27,659
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>8,307,289</b>	<b>7,602,528</b>

LIABILITIES	2023	2022
Payables & Accrued Expenses	48,087	67,086
Advanced Ticket Sales	102,599	98,875
Operating & Finance lease right-of-use liabilities	462,070	
Other Deferred Revenue	153,000	159,250
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>765,756</b>	<b>325,211</b>

NET ASSETS	2023	2022
Unrestricted Reserves & Restricted Funds	7,541,533	7,277,317

<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>	<b>8,307,289</b>	<b>7,602,528</b>
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## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES — OPERATING FUND

REVENUE	
Ticket Sales, net	249,575
Education & Outreach	40,577
Other	18,844
Annual Donations	1,757,906
UPAF Allocation	645,657
Government	24,957
Non Cash Donations	96,555
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>2,834,071</b>

EXPENSES	
Production	1,985,623
Education & Engagement	326,511
Administration	412,188
Development	302,729
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>3,027,051</b>

<b>NET OPERATING INCOME</b>	<b>(192,980)</b>
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<b>* NET OPERATING INCOME WITH INVESTMENT RETURN</b>	<b>264,202</b>
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# Officers Elect 23/24

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<b>PRESIDENT</b> Dr. David Paris David Paris Dentistry	<b>VP DEVELOPMENT</b> Wendy Burke Burke Properties	<b>VP EDUCATION</b> Sarah Damsgaard Morgan Stanley
<b>PAST PRESIDENT</b> Catherine Costantini La Lune Collection	<b>VP HUMAN RESOURCES</b> Tara Argall Northwestern Mutual	<b>VP GOVERNANCE</b> LaShonda Hill ABM Industries
<b>PRESIDENT ELECT</b> Adam Arndt Catalyst Construction	<b>VP FINANCE AND TREASURER</b> Jan Wade WISN Channel 12 News	<b>CO-CHAIR EDI</b> Mark Cameli Reinhart, Boerner, Van Deuren
<b>SECRETARY</b> Wayne Lueders Foley & Lardner LLP	<b>VP MARKETING &amp; AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT</b> Raechell Thuot Thyme Collective	<b>CO-CHAIR EDI</b> Megan Sheffer-Czuta Symetra

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mark Berry Community Volunteer	Robert Sobczak Community Volunteer
Dr. Gerardo Caballero Community Volunteer	Richard Stasik WEC Energy Group
Dr. Peter Drescher Medical College of Wisconsin	Julie Steinhafel Community Volunteer
Marion Gottschalk Digerati Partners	Maria Vento Bader Foundation
Dr. Richard Grunke Community Volunteer	
Richard Pieper Pieper Electric, Inc.	

## LIFE DIRECTORS

Nancy Anderson
Donald Baumgartner
James Ericson
Claire Hackmann (Proposed)
Glen Hackmann
Louise Hedrick
Angela Jacobi
Mary Ann LaBahn
Marianne Lubar
Clay Nesler
Jane O'Connell
Karen Plunkett
Mary Read
Michael Schmitz
Kate Wilson

# Officers 22/23

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<b>PRESIDENT:</b> Catherine Costantini La Lune Collection	<b>VP DEVELOPMENT:</b> Claire Hackmann Community Volunteer	<b>VP EDUCATION:</b> Julie Steinhafel Community Volunteer
<b>PAST PRESIDENT:</b> Dr. Peter Drescher Medical College of Wisconsin	<b>VP HUMAN RESOURCES:</b> Wendy Burke Burke Properties	<b>VP GOVERNANCE:</b> Adam Arndt Catalyst Construction
<b>PRESIDENT ELECT:</b> Dr. David Paris David Paris Dentistry	<b>VP FINANCE AND TREASURER:</b> Jan Wade WISN Channel 12 News	<b>CO-CHAIR EDI:</b> Mark Cameli Reinhart, Boerner, Van Deuren
<b>SECRETARY:</b> Wayne Lueders Foley & Lardner LLP	<b>VP MARKETING &amp; AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT:</b> Raechell Thuot Thyme Collective	<b>CO-CHAIR EDI:</b> LaShonda Hill ABM Industries

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Aspinwall WEC Energy Group	Ronald Jacquart Attorneys Title and Closing Services Company LLC	Donald Baumgartner
Tara Argall Northwestern Mutual	Richard Pieper Pieper Electric, Inc.	James Ericson
Mark Berry Community Volunteer	Megan Sheffer-Czuta Symetra	Glen Hackmann
Dr. Gerardo Caballero Community Volunteer	Robert Sobczak Community Volunteer	Louise Hedrick
Sarah Damsgaard The Invictus Collective	Richard Stasik WEC Energy Group	Reynolds Honold*
Marion Gottschalk Digerati Partners	Maria Vento Bader Philanthropies	Mary Ann LaBahn
Dr. Richard Grunke Community Volunteer		Marianne Lubar
		A. Bela Maroti*
		Clay Nesler
		Jane O'Connell
		Karen Plunkett
		Mary Read
		Michael Schmitz
		Kate Wilson



# Staff 22/23

**MAGGEY OPLINGER**  
General Director + CEO

**FRANCESCO MILIOTO**  
Artistic Advisor

**GAIL VALENTI**  
Director Of Development

**DAVID KORTES**  
Development Operations Manager

**MORGAN SASS**  
Senior Marketing Manager

**ANALI WARNER**  
Ticket Office + Sales Manager

**ANDREW KELLY**  
Events Manager + Board Liaison

**JOYCE DREWS**  
Finance Manager

**MEGAN HENSCHEL**  
Artistic Administration

**DR. BENJAMIN RIVERA**  
Chorus Master

**CONNIE HAAS**  
Voice Teacher

**RENATA HERRERA**  
Education + Community Engagement Manager

**MARAM SAMAHA**  
Production Manager

**DEBRANNE STEIDL**  
Production Assistant + Props Lead

**ROBERT SHARON**  
Costume Shop Manager

**ERICA CARTLEDGE**  
Resident Wig + Makeup Designer

**LIBBY WINCHESTER SCHULTZ**  
Technical Director

**SKYLAR DELK**  
Head Electrician

**WILLIAM WOGER**  
Head Carpenter

**MARK HARE**  
Properties Manager

**TAMMY JASINSKI**  
Supertitles Prompter

**DYAN YODER**  
Supertitle Translation + Preparation

MAJOR SEASON  
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# OPERA AMERICA







The  
Florentine  
Opera