

1946 – 2016

In the late 1940's, something of considerable importance in the cultural life of Fort Worth took place—the birth of Fort Worth Opera. Humble as they were, the outgrowth of these efforts continues to the present day, thereby stamping the organization as the oldest continuous opera company in Texas.



Founder Eloise Snyder

The opening production, *La Traviata*, was performed on November 25, 1946, to a sold-out house at Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium. Eugene Conley, who went on to sing several seasons at the Metropolitan Opera, starred as the lead male role of Alfredo and Walter Herbert of the New Orleans Opera served as the music director for the piece.

Singing the role of Violetta in this opening production was Eloise MacDonal Snyder, one of the three local women who founded the Opera that year. The other visionary women who built this organization were Betty Berry Spain, who sang other roles with Fort Worth Opera later in her career, and Jeanne Axtell Walker, a local pianist.

In 1949, Karl Kristz, a man well connected with the San Francisco Opera, became the company's new music director. Another major achievement during this period was the creation of a newfound partnership with Texas Christian University. Unknown at the time was the importance of one young student from TCU who sang several roles with the early Opera. His name was William Walker -- man who would later help shape the future of the beloved organization.

The year 1955 proved an important turning point for the budding organization. Rudolf Kruger, who had come over a few years earlier from Germany, was appointed music director and conductor. During the next twenty-eight years under his leadership, the local company became a nationally recognized regional opera. In this period of exciting growth, the season was expanded from three to four productions a year with the assistance of Ford Foundation grants, and many singers from the Metropolitan Opera appeared on our stage at Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium.

A memorable performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1962 teamed Lily Pons, brought out of retirement in Dallas to make her final operatic appearance, and a young Plácido Domingo, around twenty at the time and singing his first major role in this country. Later he appeared a half dozen or more times with Fort Worth Opera, as did Beverly Sills, who debuted several of her roles here, including Lucia.



In 1968, Fort Worth Opera opened the new Tarrant County Convention Center Theater with a performance of *La Traviata*.

In December of 1991, William Walker returned to Fort Worth Opera, but this time in the role of general director. Mr. Walker had retired with his family to San Antonio after a nearly twenty-year career as a Metropolitan Opera baritone. With his knowledge and connections in the opera world, he led Fort Worth Opera to a higher precipice, overseeing many successful productions and presiding over the 50th anniversary year in 1996 and the company's move to Bass Performance Hall in June of 1998. In this new hall, judged to be on a par with the leading opera houses in the world, Fort Worth Opera has found its rightful home and has continued to flourish.

After ten wonderful years as general director, William Walker retired from Fort Worth Opera. In July of 2001, Darren K. Woods joined Fort Worth Opera as general director. Mr. Woods has sung throughout the United States and Europe in such houses as New York City Opera, Washington Opera, Carnegie Hall, Seattle Opera, Opera Madrid, and Opera Trieste to name a few. Mr. Woods previously was general director of Shreveport Opera and the Seagle Music Colony, the oldest summer vocal training program in the United States, where he continues in the capacity of artistic director.

In 2007, Fort Worth Opera became the first major American company to make the transition from a fall/spring season to a festival format with all mainstage performances taking place in the spring. The inaugural Fort Worth Opera Festival featured the company's first major world premiere and commercial CD recording, *Frau Margot*, by composer Thomas Pasatieri, followed up the next season with *Angels in America* and *Dead Man Walking* in 2009, the world premiere of *Before Night Falls* (also available on CD) in 2010, and *Hydrogen Jukebox* in 2011. The 2013 Festival marked the launch of the *Frontiers* initiative, giving voice to unpublished 21st century operatic compositions, and the branding of the Opera Unbound series of operatic chamber works. By taking a leadership role in producing contemporary operas, and within only the first five years of establishing the Festival, Fort Worth Opera had gained national attention from critics and audiences alike for its artistic quality and willingness to take risks. Due in large part to the company's progressive moves, it remains as one of the 14 oldest opera companies in the entire nation, and a pinnacle of great art in the Southwest. ●



REPERTORY

1946-1947

La Traviata
Madame Butterfly

1947-1948

Pagliacci
The Old Maid and the Thief
Rigoletto

1948-1949

Carmen
La Bohème
The Bartered Bride
The Texas Mikado

1949-1950

Faust

1950-1951

Rosalinda
The Marriage of Figaro
The Girl of the Golden West

1951-1952

Lucia di Lammermoor
The Merry Widow
Il Trovatore

1952-1953

The Desert Song
Tosca
Cavalleria Rusticana
Gianni Schicchi

1953-1954

Hansel and Gretel
Madame Butterfly

1954-1955

Capriccio (last scene)
Salome
Carmen
Martha

1955-1956

Faust
The Marriage of Figaro
Rosalinda
La Bohème

1956-1957

Madame Butterfly
The Barber of Seville
La Traviata

1957-1958

Don Pasquale
Tosca
Aida

1958-1959

Rigoletto
The Magic Flute
Carmen

1959-1960

Martha
Manon
Il Trovatore

1960-1961

La Bohème
A Masked Ball
Samson and Delilah

1961-1962

Boris Godunov
Madame Butterfly
The Bartered Bride

1962-1963

Lucia di Lammermoor
Cavalleria Rusticana
Turandot

1963-1964

La Traviata
Tosca
The Tales of Hoffmann
Faust

1964-1965

Rigoletto
Pagliacci
The Beautiful Galatea Lakmé
Lohengrin

1965-1966

Carmen
The Abduction from the Seraglio
The Gypsy Baron
La Bohème

1966-1967

Madame Butterfly
Samson and Delilah
The Barber of Seville
Otello

1967-1968

Aida
The Marriage of Figaro
Manon Lescaut
Lucia di Lammermoor

1968-1969

La Traviata
Don Pasquale
Turandot
Romeo and Juliet

1969-1970

Tosca
Die Fledermaus
A Masked Ball
Andrea Chenier

1971-1971

The Ballad of Baby Doe
La Bohème
Don Giovanni
Carmen

1971-1972

Faust
La Rondine
The Barber of Seville
Rigoletto

1972-1973

The Tales of Hoffmann
The Elixir of Love
Madame Butterfly
Il Trovatore

1973-1974

Lucia di Lammermoor
The Marriage of Figaro
Salome
Cavalleria Rusticana
Pagliacci

1974-1975

Hansel and Gretel La Traviata
The Daughter of the Regiment
Il Tabarro
Gianni Schicchi
Samson and Delilah

1975-1976

La Bohème
Susannah
La Perichole
Aida

1976-1977

Carmen
The Mikado Tosca
Der Rosenkavalier

1977-1978

The Old Maid and the Thief
Madame Butterfly
The Magic Flute
Boris Godunov
Die Fledermaus

1978-1979

Signor Deluso
Rigoletto
H.M.S. Pinafore
The Barber of Seville
Manon

1979-1980

Sweet Betsy from Pike
La Bohème
The Merry Widow
Fidelio
Il Trovatore

1980-1981

Chanticleer
La Traviata
The Pirates of Penzance
The Goose Girl
Elektra
Faust

1981-1982

Lucia di Lammermoor
The Seagull
The Telephone
The Flying Dutchman
Carmen

1982-1983

Tosca
The Gondoliers
Don Giovanni
Eugene Onegin

1983-1984

The Pearl Fishers
Madame Butterfly
The Barber of Seville
Verdi Requiem

1984-1985

Die Fledermaus
Manon Lescaut
The Postman Always Rings Twice
Agrippina
Aida

1985-1986

Cavalleria Rusticana
Pagliacci
Hansel and Gretel
La Traviata

1986-1987

The Marriage of Figaro
La Gioconda
La Bohème

1987-1988

Rigoletto
The Mikado
The Magic Flute

1988-1989

Faust
The Barber of Seville
Madame Butterfly

1989-1990

Hansel and Gretel
The Elixir of Love Tosca

1990-1991

Holy Blood and Crescent Moon
The Daughter of the Regiment
Carmen

1991-1992

The Abduction from the Seraglio
H.M.S. Pinafore
Lucia di Lammermoor

1992-1993

La Traviata
Don Pasquale
The Telephone
The Old Maid and the Thief

1993-1994

La Bohème
Don Giovanni
Madame Butterfly

1994-1995

Samson and Delilah
Così fan tutte
Tosca

1995-1996

Il Trovatore
The Barber of Seville
Carmen

1996-1997

Faust
The Elixir of Love
Rigoletto

1997-1998

La Traviata
The Flying Dutchman
La Bohème

1998-1999

Turandot
Don Giovanni
Tosca

1999-2000

Aida
Lucia di Lammermoor
Madame Butterfly

2000-2001

The Marriage of Figaro
Susannah
The Tales of Hoffmann

2001-2002

Candide
Carmen
Norma
Porgy and Bess

2002-2003

The Barber of Seville
Romeo and Juliet
Don Pasquale

2003-2004

Rigoletto
The Turn of the Screw
The Pirates of Penzance
The Italian Girl in Algiers

2004-2005

Salome
Little Women
Tosca

2005-2006

La Traviata
Dialogues of the Carmelites
La Bohème

2007 Festival

Madame Butterfly
Falstaff
Frau Margot (world premiere)

2008 Festival

Turandot
Lucia di Lammermoor
Of Mice and Men
Angels in America

2009 Festival

Carmen
Cinderella (La Cenerentola)
Dead Man Walking

2010 Festival

Don Giovanni
The Elixir of Love
Before Night Falls (world premiere)

2011 Festival

The Mikado
Ill Trovatore
Julius Caesar
Hydrogen Jukebox

2012 Festival

Tosca
The Marriage of Figaro
Lysistrata
Three Decembers

2013 Festival

La Bohème
The Daughter of the Regiment
Ariadne auf Naxos
Glory Denied

2014 Festival

The Pearl Fishers
Così fan tutte
Silent Night
With Blood, With Ink
(professional world premiere)

2015 Festival

La Traviata
Hamlet
Dog Days

2016 Festival

JFK (world premiere)
The Barber of Seville
Buried Alive
Embedded

2017 Festival

Carmen
Cruzar la Cara de la Luna
Voir Dire (world premiere)