

## OPERA

### *Prelude to the Opera*

BY JASMINE RIOS

Everyone should experience the opera at least once. The opera offers a mélange of art forms in a single production that is extraordinary. The San Diego Opera has an ongoing objective to capture the interest of new audiences yet to experience the art form. For those newcomers, the following insights speak directly to you.

The San Diego Opera has established a strong online presence on MySpace, Facebook and YouTube as a means of reaching new audiences, and, thus far, many arts enthusiasts have been pleased to discover such a fun, accessible and friendly way to connect with the opera. The organization has also created a marvelously witty *Aria Serious?* blog with clever insights and anecdotes that will likely continue to generate further intrigue.

New audiences will appreciate knowing that by attending a production of the San Diego Opera, they are partaking in something that is exclusive to San Diego. As a producing company, every aspect of every production is custom made and one of a kind. Singers for every lead role are hand picked from around the world, creating a rare cast never to be duplicated anywhere.



San Diego Opera's *Rigoletto*

Edward K. Wilensky, director of media relations for the San Diego Opera, has a talent for inspiring. "The opera for me is the perfect escape," he says. "You hear the orchestra tuning; for me, there is no greater sound. It does something special for me. The lights go down, the music starts and for three hours I'm transported someplace the composer wanted me to go. Do it once,

and if you're a receptive audience member, you'll get bitten. You'll fall in love. Then it will become something you can never live without."

As an art form of such grandeur that calls for phenomenal costumes and scenery and the highest caliber singers, musicians, dancers and production staff, opera productions are extremely costly. High production cost translates into high ticket prices, especially if you choose to sit in the prime seating areas. There is a false misconception, however, that opera is for the elite. Some have been intimidated by this fallacy, and the San Diego Opera hopes to dispel this notion. There are more affordable alternatives. Rush tickets are available 90 minutes prior to most performance for \$20 each. Balcony seats are also much more reasonably priced compared to other sections.

A perfect introduction to the opera is through attending one or more of San Diego Opera's free public events during the opera season. There are Artists' Roundtables, which are live interviews with the primary opera cast members, backstage tours every Sunday afternoon, and the Opera Insight Series lectures presented weekly. For ticket holders, there are 25-minute pre-opera lectures presented one hour prior to each performance.

Becoming familiar with the opera storyline you are about to see is recommended. The San Diego Opera Web site ([www.sdopera.com](http://www.sdopera.com)) and countless other online sources provide all the information you need. Familiarity with a few key terms prior to attending will also deepen your appreciation when you're there. Knowing the primary vocal types is encouraged. The primary female voice is the soprano, which has the highest voice and is the heroine of the story. The mezzo soprano has a middle-

singing voice type that is lower than the soprano, and the contraltos have deep female voices. The primary male voice is the tenor, which has the highest male voice, and is the hero of the story. The bass has the lowest voice and portrays the villain. The baritone has a medium-voice type between the tenor and the bass.

Being able to distinguish between the various applause expressions is also helpful. The familiar word "bravo" means "well done" in Italian and is used during the applause for a single male voice. The term "brava" is used for a single female voice. Then "bravi" is used during the applause for a group of performers. Those concerned about understanding operas in other languages will appreciate the term "super titles." These are lyric translations that are projected above the stage during all performances.

Parents often wonder what an appropriate age is to introduce their children to the opera. By 11 or 12, some are ready. Operas with recognizable melodies such as this season's "Rigoletto" and "Tosca" are recommended works that will likely hold their attention. During the performance, do try to avoid leaving the theatre for any reason. It is disruptive, and you will be unable to re-enter the theatre until the break.

Dressing for the opera doesn't have to become complicated. Take ease in knowing that there is no official dress code. Formal is common, business casual is the norm and dressing comfortably is recommended.

It's especially important to know that the opera is a sacred place for most. Patrons have common courtesy expectations as they do at all performing arts events — although opera audiences do tend to take proper theatre etiquette a bit more seriously. Distractions such as humming, foot tapping and, believe it or not, conducting are also on the opera list of don'ts. These are common subconscious reactions among opera patrons. If you or someone next to you comes down with any or all of these uncontrollable urges, someone will let you know, politely.

Once you're ready for your first opera, be sure to leave all your baggage behind, meaning put work and everything else aside. "Going to the opera is an experience," Wilensky says. "It's the dinner beforehand, people watching, mingling at intermission and after the opera. Then maybe it's dessert or drinks afterward. Everything around the experience makes it that much better." **SDP**

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*For questions or comments, contact Jasmine Rios via [www.minacommunications.com](http://www.minacommunications.com).*

# OPERA

San Diego Opera's Madama Butterfly



## FOOD BRIEFS

THE CALIFORNIAN

**Beach Grass Bonus:** The Beach Grass Cafe, a longtime Solana Beach favorite, has opened an Encinitas branch at Village Square Plaza, 1476 Encinitas Blvd. The cafe serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, but it's locally famous for its unique breakfasts — such as Upside Down Pineapple Pancakes (\$8.75), Poi Pancakes With Mango Marmalade (\$8.95), Sweet Corn Polenta (with eggs and spicy Louisiana sausage, \$9.50), Risotto Breakfast Brulee (\$5.99) and Fried Pasta With Linguini (scrambled with egg, tomato and basil, \$9.50). You'll find other favorites at breakfast, too, like omelets and scrambles (most are \$8.95), waffles (\$7-\$7.95), pancakes (\$7.95-\$9.50) and even oatmeal (\$5.95). For lunch, you'll

find soups, salads, sandwiches, burgers, wraps and more, like the Ahi Salad Sandwich — ahi, grilled pears and red onion, sweet honey-tomato mayo on focaccia with spinach for \$10.95. Kailua Pork Tacos with smoked mozzarella and lime jalapeno sauce are \$8.95. And then there's dinner: Starters include Spicy Ahi-Noodle Rolls (\$11.95) or Panko Crusted Calamari (\$9.95); entrees range from meat and pork, chicken, seafood to "more meat and pork" and "more seafood." How about Cajun Chicken Fettuccini (\$14.95) or a Flat Iron Steak (\$16.95)? Or the \$25 Beach Grass Clam Bake for seafood lovers? The cafe also offers smoothies and coffee drinks. Happy hour is from 4-7 p.m. daily, and half-price bottles of wine are featured on Mondays and Tuesdays. Call (760) 942-2741.

**Cake decorating shop opens:** North County cakemaker and confectionary arts teacher Rosanne Zinniger has opened Ro Z's Sweet Art Studio at 277 S. Rancho Santa Fe Road, San Marcos. The studio offers cake decorating and arts and crafts classes, sells cake-decorating supplies and offers cake-themed parties for children. Classes begin on Monday with a five-week "more than the basics" decorating class from 6 to 8 p.m. Course fee is \$65 (plus \$30 for supplies). Ro Z's will also host a fall cake competition from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 9. Entry fee is \$10. Call (760) 744-0447.

**Benihana launches loose-change campaign:** The Benihana restaurant chain has joined Best Buddies International to raise money for charity by nickels and dimes. Dining guests will be asked if they'd

like to "round up" their bills to the next dollar, and Benihana will match those contributions up to a total of \$50,000. Proceeds will benefit the Best Buddies charity, which aids people with intellectual disabilities. Visit [benihana.com](http://benihana.com).

**Jai catering debuts:** Jai, Wolfgang Puck's three-month-old Asian restaurant at the La Jolla Playhouse, has opened a catering service. Wolfgang Puck Catering will offer on- and off-site catering for parties of 10 to 10,000. Jai is on the UC San Diego campus in La Jolla. Call (858) 638,7778, Ext. 204.

### Food events

**Downtown Escondido Restaurant Week:** Thirteen downtown Escondido restaurants are taking part in a prix-fixe dinner event running Sundays-Fridays, through Nov. 14. Restau-

rants will offer a three-course dinner for either \$20 or \$30. Participants include 150 Grand, A Delight of France, Bistro 221, El Nopal, Filippi's, Hichizuki, La Tapatia, R. O'Sullivan's, Tango, Taste of Florence, Tabu-Sushi Bar, Vinz Wine Bar and Vincent's. Saturdays are not included. For menus, visit the Downtown Business Association of Escondido Web site at [downtownescondido.com/restaurants.html](http://downtownescondido.com/restaurants.html).

**"A Matter of Good Taste":** Bernardo Winery will host a gourmet sampling benefit to raise money for victims of the Witch Creek Fire from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday at 13330 Paseo Del Verano Norte in Rancho Bernardo. Featuring the culinary talents of: 150 Grand, Bernard'O Restaurant, Cafe Merlot, Capri Blu, Courtyard by Marriott, Elephant Bar &

► BRIEFS, E-2

## ► BRIEFS

Continued from E-1

Restaurant, El Torito, Fleming's Prime Steakhouse, Holi Moli Ravioli, Marie Callender's, Mr Charlie's Fortune Cookie, Olive Garden, Pala Casino Spa Resort, The Barrel Room, The Melting Pot, and Zocalo. Tickets are \$75 in advance or \$85 at the door. Call (858) 592-7785.

**San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival:** Tickets are on sale for the fifth annual festival, scheduled for Wednesday through Nov. 16 in Embarcadero Marina Park North in downtown San Diego. The four-day event, which will feature "Top Chef" judge Ted Allen, includes celebrity chef lunches and dinners, private reserve unveilings, bay cruises, classes and the Grand Tasting on Nov. 15, featuring tastings by 60 area chefs, 160 wine and spirit purveyors, 700 wine and spirit labels, book-signings, a chef competition and more. Grand Tasting Event tickets are \$100 and other events, priced from \$40 to \$75, are sold separately. Visit [www.worldofwineevents.com](http://www.worldofwineevents.com) or call (877) 808-9463.

**Westgate hosts wine dinners:** The Westgate Hotel will host two wine dinners next week. At 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, the hotel's Le Fontainebleau restaurant will offer a four-course pairings dinner with Inspiration Vineyards. Cost is \$89. And at 6 p.m. Nov. 13, the hotel's Grand Cafe will host a dinner pairing classic French country fare with Georges du Boeuf Beaujolais Nouveau. Cost is \$52. The hotel is at 1055 Second Ave., San Diego. Call (619) 557-3655.

**"Taste of Opera" dinner:** Sea Rocket Bistro in San Diego will host a fun, educational theme dinner and discussion at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday. Sponsored by San Diego Opera, the program offers a fun musical lecture on San Diego Opera's upcoming production of "Peter Grimes" with a dinner of sustainable local seafood and beer pairings. Sea Rocket is at 3382 30th St. in North Park. Tickets are \$30. Reserve to (619) 232-7636, Ext. 247.