Modern audiences are accustomed to theater companies staging dramas that are edgy, controversial and political. The recent furor over a staging of *Julius Caesar* that cast a look-alike of a certain White House occupant in the title role is merely the latest instance. And even opera, to the dismay of traditionalists, often employs the devices of *regietheater* to make bold and, at times, uncomfortable statements about contemporary society and current events.

But that’s our crazy 21st-century manner, right? Surely in the days of Verdi, Wagner and the other greats of vintage opera history, things were different. Composers surely only cared about creating beautiful Art.

Guess again.

Verdi, if you didn’t know, wrote operas that frequently carried barely-disguised subtexts of revolution and protest (see: *Nabucco*), as well as drawing the attention of government censors (see: *Un Ballo in Maschera*). With the passing of decades, once-controversial topics fade into barely-remembered history, and we’re left with great music that no longer offends anyone.

Continued on page 2

MEET THE ARTIST

**Court Watson**

By POWERS PETERSON

To date, Court Watson is most proud of his design for costumes and sets for last year’s Halloween production of *Hänsel and Gretel* in Salzburg, Austria. Performed in a 2500-seat open-air amphitheater built into the side of a mountain – where *The Sound of Music* with Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer was actually filmed – Court served what he calls “the director’s vision” with aplomb. What that means to Court is that he communicates the director’s concepts directly and visually with the audience. Collaborating to bring someone else’s ideas to fruition is challenging, but the ability to do so is the hallmark of a talented set and costume designer.

A Chesapeake native and a graduate of the Governor’s School for the Arts, Court is no stranger to the Hampton Roads area. He attended his first opera, *L’Elisir d’Amore*, in 1997 at the Harrison Opera House. He performed at Chrysler Hall as a member of the national touring company of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 1993 and played the Tin

Continued on page 4
Believe it or not, Camille Saint-Saëns’ *Samson and Delilah* is another example of this phenomenon. To us, the opera evokes Sunday-school lessons of childhood; to the France of the mid-1800’s it appeared as the spark that could rekindle political fires.

The work depicts the Hebrews as an enslaved people who rise up in revolt against their oppressors in Act 1. In 1867, when Saint-Saëns began work on the piece, France had barely recovered from two revolutions of its own working class.

Charles X had been forced to abdicate the throne during a revolt known as the “Three Glorious Days” in 1830. Charles had abolished the free press, taken away voting rights from most of the populace, and dissolved Parliament. He was replaced by Louis-Philippe I, who enjoyed brief popularity until his government transferred too much power to bankers, financiers and others of the so-called “financial aristocracy.” This fomented the civil unrest depicted in Victor Hugo’s novel *Les Misérables* and the musical it spawned.

By 1848, another major revolution took place in France. Violence erupted in the streets of Paris, causing Louis-Philippe to abdicate and flee in fear for his life.

An opera about downtrodden people revolting against those in power, therefore, was still an incendiary subject as Saint-Saëns attempted to introduce *Samson and Delilah*, with the memories of bloody rebellions still vivid and discontent among workers still simmering.

This, in part, helps to explain why it took so long for *Samson and Delilah* to be accepted in France. The opera houses of Paris initially rejected the work; its first performances were in Germany, nine years after the composer began work in 1867. It was not until 1890, when perhaps memories of unrest had sufficiently dimmed, that the work at last was heard in Paris. With its “hot-potato” notoriety rapidly fading, it has become the only opera of Saint-Saëns to remain in the standard repertoire.

It’s another new year, another “First of Firsts” production, and another issue of *Coloratura*. Can you believe it’s the third year for *Coloratura*?

What’s on tap for this season? Old favorites are returning. “A Winters’ Tale” examines each particular opera with penetrating parallels to contemporary culture and history. “Meet the Artist” introduces you to someone critical to each performance. “Behind the Scenes” looks at things you quite literally probably won’t ever get to see at Harrison Opera House but wonder nonetheless, “how do they do that?” You’ll read updates from Guild Chair Mark Board in every issue and learn about the very interesting, capable people who serve on the Guild’s Board of Directors. There will be articles detailing Guild events, both fun and fundraising.

And it’s not too early to think about what you’re squirreling away that you can donate to the Guild’s Merchants of Venice rummage sale next April. There’s always new information about our Virginia Opera. The “Met in HD” calendar keeps you advised of more opportunities to see and hear stunning performances of great operas. And I guarantee *Coloratura* will have a few surprises this season, but you’ll have to wait and see.... Keep reading!

*Coloratura* wouldn’t be what it is without the support of some very special people. Although I cannot mention everyone by name, I am indebted to Russell Allen, President and CEO of Virginia Opera, and Mark Board, Chair of the Guild, for their unwavering commitment to this endeavor. I thank Glenn Winters for his erudite and entertaining musings. And to all of the employees of Virginia Opera who are such valuable resources — Maestro Adam Turner, the directors, the supervisors, the technicians, and (yes!) the in-house artisans — I send my appreciation and my thanks. And I look forward to our collaborations that continue to advance Virginia Opera.
Chairman’s Corner
By MARK E. BOARD

The exciting 2017-2018 Season is about to begin! I hope you enjoyed the summer edition of Coloratura. I want to thank Powers Peterson for her outstanding efforts in continuing to edit and (mostly) write our professional and informative newsletter.

As of early September, the Guild membership stands at 172 for this coming season. We ended last season with 218 members. We aim to exceed that number this year with renewing and especially new members to the Guild. Two people-friendly opportunities at which many renewed their membership were our kick-off party “Sunset on the River” on August 26th and our hospitality tent at “Opera in the Park” on September 9th.

Another important way for you to support Virginia Opera is to purchase or renew a season ticket! Our goal is to have 75% or more of the Guild members as season subscribers. A season ticket starts at just $71 for four productions. If you are interested in a season subscription, I encourage you to visit vaopera.org – wait till you see their new website! (article on p. 7) – or call the box office at 866-673-7282. And remember, friends bring friends! We would love to have you involved in one or more of our committees. You can help the Guild help our Opera Company. Call me at 757-303-6418 or email me at meboard@cox.net.

The Guild is pleased to welcome two new employees to Virginia Opera. Joseph DeSota is the new Director of Education and Outreach. Joseph has significant experience in arts education and has strong music/opera credentials. He is an accomplished administrator and is dedicated to arts education. And David Williams is the new Executive/Artistic Coordinator, replacing Anne-Carolyn Bird. Some of you may remember David as an Emerging Artist with Virginia Opera in the 2012-2013 Season. We wish both great success in their new positions.

Looking forward to seeing each and every one of you at Sampson and Delilah!

VIRGINIA OPERA EVENT

Opera in the Park 2017

Virginia Opera, in partnership with Norfolk Festevents, presented its 9th Annual Opera in the Park concert on Saturday evening, September 9, 2017, at downtown Norfolk’s Town Point Park overlooking the scenic Elizabeth River.

The Virginia Opera Guild sponsored a tent for its members and their guests. The 75 attendees enjoyed foods and desserts catered by Farm Fresh and a selection of beverages. The tent was an even better way to enjoy opera’s greatest hits and Broadway standards, sung under the stars by VO’s leading performers and the Virginia Opera chorus. VO’s own Glenn Winters introduced the program. Adam Turner, Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of Virginia Opera, conducted the Virginia Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to enjoying the tent, Guild members assisted VO staff in checking in attendees, distributing programs, and assisting at the ticketing, raffle and education tents.
Man in the Hurrah Players’ 1998 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. He’s back now to help bring *Samson and Delilah* to life.

How does one create costumes and settings that do that? Court’s approach is multifactorial. His MFA degree (New York University Tisch School of the Arts) and his reading knowledge of French factor in mightily. He begins by reading both the original libretto in French and the English translation. Court’s knowledge allows him to understand what the original librettist, Ferdinand Lemaire, intended. His research focuses on obtaining historical images that are appropriate for the time in which the opera is set and for every character on stage.

For instance, Delilah describes her apparel in Lemaire’s text; so, Court adapts his original design to reflect that. Court’s drawing of Delilah’s costume for her entrance scene is on page 1. The flowers she wears in her ebony hair mirror the textual reality of what she is singing in French. A sexy temptress who uses her sexuality as a power play, she’s a combination of Mae West (the comic version) and Jean Harlow (dramatic version).

Court shares his preliminary pencil sketches of the dress with the entire artistic team—the director— in this case the creative giant Paul Curran, the Artistic Director, the Production Manager, the lighting designer, the choreographer and the draper and first hand. Next, Court paints his design into Photoshop. Using that rendering, a draper creates a polyester mock-up “in the style of Jean Harlow” that is fitted to the singer. It’s “a one-of-a-kind dress that’s never existed before, but one based on intense research.” This is followed by selecting fabrics appropriate to the design, the singer, and the particulars of the action in the scene. Since this dress had to be “sexy, drapey, and luxurious with a sense of movement to allow Delilah to dance easily,” Court scoured the garment district in New York City. His choices: amethyst four-ply silk crepe with an over-layer of crinkled (washed) chiffon. A darker colored layer underneath will “veer toward magenta and the lighter top layer veers toward fuchsia.” The singer’s movements create “an ebb and flow of colors blending in front of your eyes.” Using the science of optics, Court creates a dress such that Delilah steals the scene at her initial entry.

Court has a guiding principle: the stage is “incredibly magical.” His work must transport the audience to that magical world he and the others on the design team create. He credits his teachers at NYU with introducing him to the concept and building his skill sets. Many of those professors had and still have what is euphemistically called “connections.” Court learned from artists who created the masterful settings for the operas *Rosalinda*, *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, *Rosenkavalier*, and *Falstaff* at The Metropolitan Opera and for *Wicked* on Broadway. He is thrilled to be able to share his work with the company that first introduced him to opera.
BEHIND THE SCENES

An Illuminating Experience

By POWERS PETERSON

For every singer or other performer on stage, there are three people working with the lights in support of the performance. The stage manager, the person in charge of the production during the performance, works from her previously prepared prompt script containing the lighting cues. She sits at a computer backstage, watching the performance in real time. One lighting technician sits in a booth behind the last row in the balcony, working the previously programmed light board. The third person, the lighting supervisor, is behind the stage, making sure the lighting runs as planned from a technical point of view.

Two terms in lighting require explanation. A light board is a computer with a sophisticated software program for lighting cues and the positions of the lights. Virginia Opera uses the ETC Ion®. (ETC stands for Electronic Theater Controls, a company that makes control boards and lighting units.) The light plot is the lighting designer's blueprint. The design is specific to the particular venue, the particular show, and the venue's available equipment and electrical power. The designer has to incorporate any electrical requirements, the number and type of lights available, and the fit around set pieces.

With the exception of the largest opera companies like the Metropolitan Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, most companies generally have to rent most of their lighting units for a production. Not so with Virginia Opera. The company owns over 250 lighting units of all sizes and types, of which almost 200 will be used in this production. Size refers to the degree of spread of the light inside the housing; the spread is 19, 26, or 36 degrees. The types of lighting units include pars, ellipsoidal or leko, medium flood, wide flood, and strip. Specialty units include moving units and LED units. And then each lighting unit has a specific wattage. That just about covers white light. Colored light requires using gel filters, of which VO owns two filing cabinets of cut and 20 drawer-shelves of full sheets. The size of the filter is geared to the size of the lighting unit. Similar to cans of paint, the filters are named according to the manufacturer and the manufacturer's number for the particular color. In addition to color filters there are templates that add an image to the light in order to create texture on the stage. Like the gels, the templates also have names and numbers.

Before the first production in September each lighting unit has to be cleaned and dusted. Ken Steadman, the lighting supervisor, is in charge of that as well as in charge of the lighting for every performance. He works closely with the lighting designers and with Lee-Marc Molnar, the Director of Production. Ken has been with Virginia Opera for almost two-thirds of his professional career in the theater. Lucia di Lammermoor (1996) was the first production he worked on. As opposed to a commercial electrician's more rote work, Ken says an entertainment electrician works “more creatively.” The overarching idea is “not to allow the art of lighting to get swallowed by the technology of lighting.”

Driscoll Otto is the lighting designer for Samson and Delilah. His light plot arrived at VO on August 21st. Ken programmed the light board according to the light plot. After that was completed, he and his crew began the “hang” on September 11th. “Hang” is the technical term for the installation of the designated lights in the designated places and in the appropriate positions. Ten days before opening night the “focus” process begins. The lighting designer works with Ken to point every light exactly where he wants it. “Level setting” follows, a process to adjust how the lighting looks on stage and with the set in place. This usually takes four full working days with a rehearsal in the evening. The light board software is adjusted as needed. Everything is fine-tuned at the technical rehearsal six days before opening. The dress rehearsal is the last chance to adjust the lighting before Friday's opening night.

During a performance Ken is backstage, making sure everything works as planned. If all goes well, you are certain to have an illuminating experience.
The Virginia Opera Guild (VOG) hosted its annual kickoff celebration on Saturday, August 26, 2017, at the Norfolk home of Jim Deming. His beautiful home offered a spectacular view of the Lafayette River, and the weather that evening was perfect.

Seventy-five Guild members and their guests enjoyed the food and festivities. Also in attendance were several Virginia Opera luminaries: Russell Allen, President and CEO; Maestro Adam Turner, Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor; Shelby Rhoades, Principal Coach & Director of Emerging Artists; and Lisa Sands, Director of Development for the Hampton Roads area.

Mezzo-soprano Emily Russell entertained the audience. Ms. Rhoades was the accompanist. Selections included “Voce Di Donna” from La Gioconda by Ponchielli and “Someone to Watch over Me” by Gershwin. Farm Fresh catered the refreshments, including lamb chops, chicken skewers with bourbon sauce, and sushi – plus desserts. The Guild thanks Mr. Deming for his gracious hospitality and Ms. Madeline Smith for her efforts as the Norfolk catering manager.

Membership Chair Jim Graham signed up several new members at this party. As Chair of the Guild's Events Committee, I’d like to thank all those who contributed to making this event the success it was. And if you'd like to join the Events committee, please call me, Amber T. Reeves, at 757-354-5658.
Looking for a unique way to support Virginia Opera? Consider opening your home to one of our many talented singers as part of the “Virginia Opera Family” Housing Program. Participation in the Housing Program is a significant financial help to Virginia Opera; but more importantly, our hosts help our out-of-town guests feel welcome in the community. You provide the artist with a private bedroom and bathroom and access to the kitchen. For your generous hospitality, we offer two complimentary tickets to your artist’s production, and their stay also qualifies for a tax deduction. For more information contact Katie Ritter at 757-627-9545 or katie.ritter@vaopera.org.

Open Your Home to an Opera Star!

A user-friendly, informative, and modern gateway was recently unveiled as Virginia Opera strives to secure the youngest opera audience in the United States by 2025. In the preliminary reveal of what promises to be an exciting and ever-evolving project, the Opera is prepared to welcome and introduce audiences to its extensive program lineup via every personal computer and mobile telephone device. The site was redesigned to provide for easy navigation and effortless ticket purchasing while at home or on the go. Be among the first to scan its pages by visiting vaopera.org. See you at the opera.

Contact Information

Are you intrigued about the Guild? Do you want to join us to support the Virginia Opera Association? Perhaps you would enjoy volunteering for a committee or for one of our activities.

Here’s how to contact us:

Write us Virginia Opera Guild
   P.O. Box 11572, Norfolk VA 23517

Call us RSVP: 757-627-9545, ext. 3584

Email us vaopera.guild@vaopera.org

Like us on Facebook: Virginia Opera Guild
It should come as no surprise that Gwendolyn Brown is a music enthusiast. She plays piano and harmonica. She loves opera as much as she loves jazz, swing, choral and symphonic music. Her favorite symphony is Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in C minor. She thinks of music as “the companion of joy and the medicine of sorrow,” citing how pervasive music is to our everyday lives. We experience music at weddings and funerals, at ceremonies and concerts, at schools and at work. She discounts “elevator music,” however.

Gwendolyn is a native of New York. She moved to New Orleans in early adulthood and began her professional life at NASA/Lockheed Martin there. She later moved to Norfolk to raise her two daughters in “an enriched school system.” One daughter is now a veterinarian, the other an ophthalmologist; and Gwendolyn is equally proud of both. She returned to school at Old Dominion University from which she obtained her Nurse Practitioner degree. She now works as a diabetes patient educator at Eastern Virginia Medical School.

She sees her service on the Virginia Opera Guild Board of Directors as one way to communicate and share her love of this “beautiful art form.” Her first opera memory is seeing Carmen at the Old Opera House on Bourbon Street in New Orleans. She recalls the gorgeous score, the glorious voices, and the compelling story. Asked if that’s her favorite opera, she hesitates. She cites two others for the three-way tie: Porgy and Bess for its romanticism and, although it’s musical theater, Phantom of the Opera for its dramatic and mysterious qualities.

As a member of the Membership Committee, Gwendolyn’s may be the voice you hear when she phones to check on renewing your Guild membership. An outgoing ambassador for the opera, Gwendolyn loves meeting and talking to people. She’s lived in Sweden, Ireland, and Italy. She’s travelled to the Caribbean Islands and to Honduras. And she frequently goes to Washington, DC, to visit her daughters. Her best friend is concert singer Eudora Price, also a New York native. Ms. Price lives in Austria and she and Gwendolyn Skype regularly. Austria is on Gwendolyn’s bucket list in 2018.

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**Virginia Opera Guild 2017 Calendar**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 23</td>
<td>12:00 noon</td>
<td>“Ribtoberfest” fundraiser, 12:00 noon, Town Point Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 24</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Artist Dinner for Samson and Delilah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 29</td>
<td>8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Samson and Delilah, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Samson and Delilah, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Samson and Delilah, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Board meeting, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 5</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Artist Dinner for The Girl of the Golden West</td>
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<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>The Girl of the Golden West, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 12</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>The Girl of the Golden West, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 14</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>The Girl of the Golden West, HOH</td>
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**The Met Live in HD**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Opera / Composer</th>
<th>Conductor / Singers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 7</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Norma / Bellini</td>
<td>Rizzi / Radovanovsky, DiDonato, Calleja, Rose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 14</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Die Zauberflote / Mozart</td>
<td>Levine / Schultz, Lewek, Castronovo, Werba, Van Horn, Pape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 18</td>
<td>12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>The Exterminating Angel / Thomas Adès</td>
<td>Adès / a cast of fifteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 9</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Hansel and Gretel / Humperdinck</td>
<td>HD holiday encore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 27</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Tosca / Puccini</td>
<td>Levine / Yoncheva, Grigolo, Terfel, Carfizzi</td>
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