

MICHAEL C. LIU AND NIEN-WEI HSIAO FLOWER ARRANGEMENT HONOREES



Saturday Honoree

Val Alexander

Val Alexander is a long-time supporter of the VSO and a friend of Nien-Wei and Michael. After retiring from the nursing profession, she became an amazing community advocate (Friends of Clark County and others) and cultivator of the local organic farm, Coyote Ridge Ranch. Val even supplied Nien-Wei with as much organic produce as possible for much of her cancer journey, which made it hard for her to eat. Val also hosted multiple VSO home party fundraisers in collaboration with Nien-Wei and as a longtime member of the former Friends of the VSO, Maestro Society, and Ron and Laura Croft Legacy Society. We would like to extend an additional thank you to Val for being the driver and friend of the late Paul Christensen up until his passing in late October.



Sunday Honoree

Barbara Choltco

Barbara Choltco is a long-time supporter of the VSO as well as a collaborator and friend of Nien-Wei and Michael. Barbara first became an advocate and fundraiser for the VSO in 2011 during the economic downturn of that time. She was a soprano soloist in multiple fundraising and chamber concerts and a featured soloist in the VSO's April 2012 performance of Mendelssohn's *Incidental Music to A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She continued to host and perform in multiple Party of Notes for the VSO and became the executive director and performer for Opera Quest, an educational outreach program originally founded by Loti and Paul Christensen to bring operatic classical music to the schools. Barbara was also a great friend who loved to collaborate with Nien-Wei on making gourmet food and helped prepare food for Nien-Wei during her cancer journey in collaboration with other friends.

HOLIDAY POPS PROGRAM

featuring vocalist Liz Callaway

Sponsored by the Ken and Dean Kirn Foundation

William Tell

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Cockeyed Optimist from South Pacific*

Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960)

Broadway Baby from Follies*

Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021)

Merrily Bits*

Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021)

Send in the Clowns from A Little Night Music*

Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021)

Defying Gravity from Wicked*

Stephen Schwartz (b.1948)

Memory from Cats*

Andrew Lloyd-Webber (b.1948)

Hunting Polka

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899)

INTERMISSION

The Snow Maiden Suite

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Joy to the World*

William Holford / Lowell Mason (1792-1872)

(continued on back)

What Are You Doing New Year's Eve*

Frank Loesser (1910-1969)

Once Upon a December and Journey to the Past from *Anastasia**

Stephen Flaherty (b.1960) / Lynn Ahrens (b.1948)

Sleigh Ride

Leroy Anderson (1908-1975)

Guest conducted by Gold Baton winner Colleen Duggan

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*

Ryan Nowlin (b.1978) / Hugh Martin (1914-2011) / Ralph Blane (1914-1995)

Radetzky March

Johann Strauss I (1804-1849)

PROGRAM NOTES

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) | *William Tell*

Whether or not there was a real William Tell—Switzerland's greatest folk hero—is uncertain, but by the 15th century, most of his legend was complete: Tell was a 14th-century Swiss crossbowman who was forced to shoot an apple from his son's head as punishment for disrespecting the tyrannical governor. He later led a revolution against the Hapsburgs who had conquered his homeland. Rossini's *William Tell* is based upon an 1804 play by Friedrich Schiller, where the Swiss hero became a more universal Romantic hero and a symbol of freedom from oppression. By the time he completed ***William Tell*** in 1829, **Gioachino Rossini** was, without a doubt, the most popular opera composer in Europe. But for a whole host of reasons—personal, medical, and political—he retired from opera composition after *William Tell*, very nearly his final large-scale work.

Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960) | *Cockeyed Optimist* from *South Pacific*

Then we are joined by Ms. Callaway, for a set of Broadway songs. Though they had each worked with other collaborators on Broadway and in Hollywood, composer **Richard Rodgers** and lyricist **Oscar Hammerstein II** forged one of the greatest partnerships in American musical theater when they teamed for *Oklahoma!* in 1943. In 1949, they adapted parts of James Michener's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Tales of the South Pacific* into a musical. Set on a South Pacific island during World War II, the original production starred Mary Martin and Metropolitan Opera bass Ezio Pinza—Martin played a naïve US Navy nurse, Nellie Forbush, whose opening song *I'm a Cockeyed Optimist* establishes her sunny and upbeat character.

Stephen Sondheim (1895-1960) | *Broadway Baby* from *Follies*, *Merrily Bits*, and *Send in the Clowns* from *A Little Night Music*

Though he built a career while still in his early twenties, Sondheim's "big break" was his collaboration with Bernstein and Robbins on *West Side Story*. His breakthrough was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 1962, and Sondheim went on to write a series of shows that helped to redefine the Broadway musical. This program includes two fine samples. Sondheim's ***Follies*** (1971) centers on the reunion of elderly Broadway performers whose heyday was the 1920s. ***Broadway Baby***, a raucous, shimmying showstopper, is sung by the character Hattie Walker, an aging Broadway belter. In ***A Little Night Music*** (1973) Sondheim adapted the story, about the interlocking lives of several couples, from an Ingmar Bergman film. The biggest hit from the musical, ***Send in the Clowns***, is sung by the character Desirée, an actress who realizes after a lifetime of moving from man to man, that she is about to lose the one man she really loves. The title and lyrics of this wistful song are a reference to an old theatrical tradition: when something goes seriously wrong on stage, you send out clowns to distract the audience.

Stephen Schwartz (b.1948) | *Defying Gravity from Wicked*

Stephen Schwartz wrote the music for the 2003 Broadway hit **Wicked**. The music was an adaptation of Gregory Maguire's 1995 fantasy novel, an imaginative and sometimes dark "prequel" to L. Frank Baum's children's story *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. It centers on the relationship between Elphaba (who becomes the Wicked Witch of the West) and Glinda (Glinda the Good Witch). The sweeping **Defying Gravity** is Elphaba's triumphant conclusion to the first act, as she embraces her own destiny...even if means that she is unfairly labelled "wicked."

Andrew Lloyd Webber (b.1948) | *Memory of Cats*

Andrew Lloyd Webber first became famous in the early 1970s for a pair of Biblical rock musicals, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. After scoring another huge Broadway hit with *Evita* in 1978, he wrote **Cats** in 1981. This was a strange musical in many ways: there is no conventional storyline, and Lloyd Webber drew most of his song texts directly from T.S. Eliot's poetry collection *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. The biggest hit from *Cats* was the song **Memory**, a sad and reflective song by Grizabella, a former "glamour cat" who has fallen on hard times—a role Ms. Callaway played on Broadway for five years!

Johann Strauss II (b.1825-1899) | *Hunting Polka*

In 1875, **Johann Strauss II** premiered his operetta *Cagliastro in Wein*—based upon the life of an 18th-century Italian Count Cagliastro. Shortly after it closed in 1875, Strauss extracted several dance pieces from the operetta to be played by his brother Eduard's Strauss family orchestra, including a patriotic march Hail Austria!, a set of Cagliastro Waltzes, and the Hunter's Polka, Op. 373 (Auf der Jagd - literally "On the Hunt"). The polka is frantically fast, incorporating some hunter's horn calls...and a few surprise gunshots!

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (b.1844-1908) | *The Snow Maiden Suite*

After intermission, we turn to music by **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**. He completed *The Snow Maiden* (Snegorouchka) in 1881—one of innumerable Romantic operas based upon fairy tales. It retells a story from Russian folklore—by way of a popular 1873 play—of the love of the young fairy princess, the Snow Maiden, who has been raised by mortals, for a young man of her village. This kind of fairy tale rarely ends "happily ever after," and this one is no exception: both the Snow Maiden and her lover die in the end. The Introduction opens with music that indicates that this is in fact, a tragedy, but it eventually closes in an optimistic mood.

William Holford / Lowell Mason (1792-1872) | *Joy to the World*

For many years **Joy to the World** was credited to Handel—who almost certainly did *not* write it. One of the first to publish the melody, hymn writer **William Holford**, printed it with Handel's name in the early 1830s, probably because of its close resemblance to a few bits from the ever-familiar Messiah. The great Methodist hymn writer **Lowell Mason** also credited Handel when he revised the tune in 1839 and used it to set the Christmas hymn text Joy to the World by Handel's contemporary Isaac Watts. While Mason usually gets credit for this melody, the composer of the original version remains a mystery.

Frank Loesser (1910-1969) | *What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?*

Frank Loesser wrote the wistful **What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?** in 1947. It was recorded that year by Margaret Whiting, and first hit the pop charts in 1950, with a recording by the early Rhythm & Blues group The Orioles. It was later covered by many other singers.

Stephen Flaherty (b.1960) / Lynn Ahrens (b.1948) | *Once Upon a December* and *Journey to the Past* from *Anastasia*

One of Ms. Callaway's many film credits is her voiceover work on the 1997 animated film **Anastasia**, where she provided the singing voice of the title character. Eight-year-old Princess Anastasia and her grandmother manage to escape the 1917 Russian Revolution that killed the rest of their family, but during the escape, they are separated, and Anastasia suffers a head injury and contracts amnesia. The story takes place ten years later, as the girl, now known only as Anya, embarks on a search to find her forgotten family. She finds her way to Paris, in the company of a conman, Dmitri, who wishes to pass her off as the Princess Anastasia, never suspecting that this is her true identity. Composer **Stephen Flaherty** and lyricist **Lynn Ahrens** wrote several songs for the film, two of which are heard here. In **Once Upon a December**, set as a lilting waltz, Anya tries to capture vague memories of a lavish ball she attended as a child. Anya sings the moving **Journey to the Past** as she resolves to follow Dmitri to Paris.

Leroy Anderson (1908-1975) | *Sleigh Ride*

America's greatest "Pops" composer **Leroy Anderson** created dozens of works that have become staples of the orchestra and band repertoire: *A Trumpeter's Lullaby*, *The Typewriter*, *The Syncopated Clock*, and the holiday standard *A Christmas Festival*, to name just a few. Many of his most popular works were created for Fiedler, including **Sleigh Ride** of 1948. Though the idea for the piece reportedly struck him as he was working outside on a hot July day, *Sleigh Ride* is the perfect picture of an old-fashioned winter journey. In a later interview, Anderson said: "The point of a number like *Sleigh Ride*, that you can call a descriptive piece, or pictorial, is that you have to start with the idea of the rhythm, and whatever it is first. And in this case, it's the rhythm of the sleigh bells, and these sleigh bells go chink-chink-chink..." The journey ends with a horse whinny from the trumpet.

Ryan Nowlin (b.1978) / Hugh Martin (1914-2011) / Ralph Blane (1914-1995) | *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas*

The successful songwriting team of **Hugh Martin** and **Ralph Blane** wrote **Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas** for the successful 1944 MGM movie musical **Meet Me in St. Louis**, where it was introduced by Judy Garland. This highly sentimental movie, about the idealized Smith family from turn-of-the-20th-century St. Louis, was the perfect bit of escapism for war-weary Americans. This rather melancholy song was sung by Garland, whose character Esther Smith has just found that her family is going to have to move away, wrecking all her plans for the future.

Johann Strauss I (1804-1849) | *Radetzky March*

Our program closes with the best-known work of **Johann Strauss I**, the rousing **Radetzky March**. This was composed to honor Austrian Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky, whose army won a victory over Italian revolutionary forces in 1848. It was a hit from the moment it was introduced on August 1, 1848—both as a concert piece, and as a regimental march for Austrian soldiers. It was quickly recognized as a kind of unofficial Austrian national anthem, and among other uses today it is played as a rally song at soccer matches of the Austrian national team. It is also the traditional closing piece of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's annual New Year's concert, where it serves as a boisterous welcome to each new year. Strauss reworked the forceful main theme from a quadrille he had written a few years earlier for his dance orchestra. The jaunty trio was also borrowed from another piece—in this case a lively popular song he had heard Austrian soldiers singing as they returned victoriously to Vienna. The tradition of audience participation along with the march's main theme began at one of its very early performances, when Austrian officers began spontaneously to clap and stomp in time with the music—you'll know when to join in!

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