
HIGH NOTES

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

2024/2025 SEASON



From left to right: Alexa Frankian, Angel Gomez, Alex Mathews, Cole McIlquham, and Raúl Velazco in *L'amico Fritz*

Photo credit: Morgan Horell

AVA

ACADEMY OF
VOCAL ARTS

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ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

The mission of the **Academy of Vocal Arts** is to be the world’s premier institution for training young artists as international opera soloists. With its rigorous instruction and coaching, as well as performance opportunities in concerts, recitals, and fully staged operas, the Academy trains the most promising young singers from around the world, while also contributing to the performing arts community in the greater Philadelphia region.

Founded in 1934, the Academy of Vocal Arts is the only tuition-free institution dedicated exclusively to the study of voice. When Resident Artists graduate from AVA, they are prepared to share their gifts with audiences around the world, fulfilling not only their own hopes and dreams, but those of AVA’s wise and generous founder, Helen Corning Warden.

Gifted singers come to Philadelphia from all over the world to seek the exceptional guidance and training that the Academy of Vocal Arts offers. Admission to the tuition-free program is determined yearly by competitive auditions. While hundreds of hopeful singers apply, only 8-10 are accepted into the four-year program each year.

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* in memoriam

WELCOME



Dear Friends,

It is a privilege to share *High Notes*, the annual report of the Academy of Vocal Arts. This edition reflects on a season that embodies AVA’s enduring mission and forward momentum—from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025—a year defined by artistic excellence, institutional strength, and the boundless promise of our Resident Artists.

Our Opera Theatre season opened with Gounod’s *Faust*, conducted by Maestro Steven White and directed by Chas Rader-Shieber in his AVA debut, followed by a radiant production of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, led by José Maria Condemi, who also made his debut with AVA this season. We continued the year with our cherished *Jubilate!* concert and the ever-inspiring Giargiari Bel Canto Competition, both celebrating the remarkable artistry and growth of our singers.

The season concluded with Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz*, conducted by Maestro Joseph Colaneri and directed by Jeffrey Buchman—a fitting finale that reflected the lyric beauty and emotional depth at the heart of our work.

We closed the year with the annual Farewell Recital, featuring graduates Angel Gomez, Lydia Grindatto, and Luke Norvell. While it is always bittersweet to see our artists take their next steps, we do so with immense pride and confidence in the careers that await them on the world’s stages.

AVA’s commitment to expanding its community of supporters and deepening its global connections took our leadership and Resident Artists beyond Philadelphia. In Aiken, South Carolina, AVA hosted a series of fundraising events that brought together new friends and longtime patrons for performances and conversations celebrating the power of opera and the promise of emerging talent. Later in the season, members of the AVA community journeyed across Germany to attend performances featuring AVA alumni in some of the country’s most renowned opera houses. Witnessing our graduates excel on international stages was both inspiring and affirming—powerful proof of AVA’s lasting influence and the reach of its exceptional training.

As we look to the future, I remain deeply honored to lead this extraordinary institution and to uphold AVA’s singular mission: to provide the finest tuition-free training to the next generation of great opera singers. Thank you for your continued partnership and belief in our work. I look forward to sharing another season of inspiration and achievement with you.

Warmly,

Scott Guzielek

President and Artistic Director

THE 2024-2025 OPERA THEATER SEASON



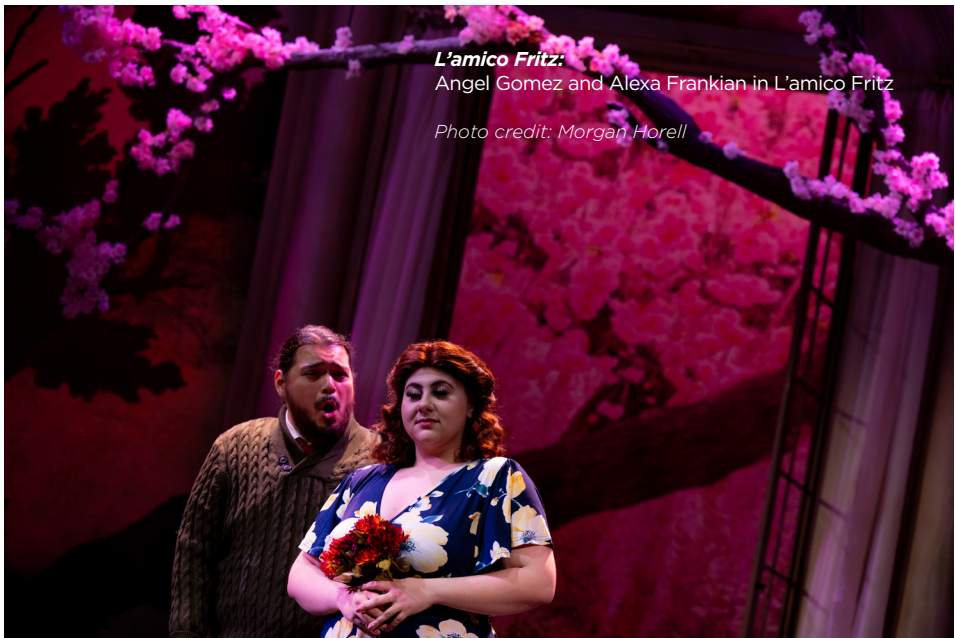
Faust:
Raúl Velazco and Katherine Dobbs in *Faust*
Photo credit: Morgan Horell

The Academy of Vocal Arts inaugurated its 90th Anniversary Opera Theatre season with a black-tie Opening Night Celebration that embodied the institution’s enduring tradition of excellence and its forward-looking artistic vision. The evening featured a commanding performance of Charles Gounod’s *Faust*, conducted by Maestro Steven White and directed by Chas Rader-Shieber. Guests enjoyed an elegant evening of cocktails, dinner by Catering by Design, and a post-performance champagne toast honoring our Resident Artists. Performances of *Faust*—generously underwritten by Judith Broudy—continued at AVA before an additional presentation at Centennial Hall at The Haverford School extended the production’s reach. AVA’s Young Professionals gathered for their own special evening, featuring the opera and a post-performance champagne reception with the Resident Artists, graciously underwritten by Charlotte H. Watts.

The winter brought the brilliance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s

Così fan tutte, a production that delighted audiences with its wit and warmth. Directed by José Maria Condemi and conducted by Robert Kahn, the performances in the Helen Corning Warden Theater reaffirmed AVA’s dedication to presenting opera of the highest caliber while nurturing the next generation of exceptional vocal talent.

The season concluded with Pietro Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz*, performed



L’amico Fritz:
Angel Gomez and Alexa Frankian in *L’amico Fritz*
Photo credit: Morgan Horell

at AVA’s Helen Corning Warden Theater, Centennial Hall, and Delaware Valley University’s Life Sciences Building. Under the baton of Maestro Joseph Colaneri and stage direction by Jeffrey Buchman, this production embodied AVA’s commitment to musical excellence and artistic authenticity. Once again, our Young Professionals were welcomed for a dedicated performance and champagne reception with the Resident Artists, generously underwritten by Charlotte H. Watts.

The annual Giargiari Bel Canto Competition—held at the Perelman Theater on the Kimmel Cultural Campus—showcased the extraordinary artistry and potential of AVA’s Resident Artists. Bass Raúl Velazco earned First Prize for his commanding performances of “Ecco il mondo” from Boito’s *Mefistofele* and “O tu, Palermo” from Verdi’s *I vespri Siciliani*. The Second Prize was awarded to bass Cumhur Görgün, and tenor Luke Norvell captured the Audience Choice Prize. All Resident Artists were accompanied by Master Vocal



Così fan tutte:
Left to right: Ariana Maubach and Daniela Machado in *Così fan tutte*



Jubilate:
Left to right: Julianna Smith, Katherine Dobbs, Manli Deng, and Beautiful Sheriff with the AVA Opera Orchestra in *Jubilate! A Concert of Sacred Music*
Photo credit: Morgan Horell

Coach and Music Director Danielle Orlando, underscoring the depth of mentorship and musical excellence that define AVA’s training.

Our annual *Jubilate! A Concert of Sacred Music* uplifted audiences at The Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr and The Church of the Holy Trinity in Rittenhouse Square. This beloved tradition brought together sacred vocal works from across cultures and centuries, performed by the Resident Artists under the leadership of Master Vocal Coach Richard A. Raub. The AVA Opera Orchestra—generously sponsored by the David A. and Helen P. Horn Charitable Trust—joined in presenting works by Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, Mendelssohn, Debussy, Barber, Vaughan Williams, Hughes, Musto, Gounod, Schubert, and

Goodall.

The Academy’s milestone 90th Anniversary was celebrated with *BrAVA Philadelphia!*, a gala concert at the Kimmel Center’s Marian Anderson Hall that paid tribute to nine decades of excellence, artistry, and legacy. The performance featured distinguished alumni including Burak Bilgili (’04), Piotr Buszewski (’19), Dominick Chenes (’16), Alice Chung (’22), Nancy Herrera (’95), Luis Ledesma (’98), Latonia Moore (’04), Musa Ngqungwana (’14), Richard Troxell (’92), and Vanessa Vasquez (’18), joined by faculty member Wendy Bryn Harmer as guest soloist. Conductors Steven White, Richard A. Raub, and Robert Kahn led the AVA Opera Orchestra, sponsored by Barbara A. Teichert. This landmark



BrAVA:
Left to right: Burak Bilgili (’04) and Luis Ledesma (’98) at *BrAVA Philadelphia! 90th Anniversary Celebration and Gala*
Photo credit: Morgan Horell

celebration—supported by generous patrons and sponsors—stood as a powerful testament to AVA’s impact on the global operatic stage and its enduring mission to shape the future of the art form.

The season concluded with the annual Farewell Recital at The Church of the Holy Trinity in Rittenhouse Square, featuring performances by graduating Resident Artists Angel Gomez (tenor), Lydia Grindatto (soprano), and Luke Norvell (tenor), under the direction of José Meléndez. This moving occasion celebrated not only their artistic achievement but also AVA’s ongoing commitment to nurturing exceptional voices destined for the world’s stages.

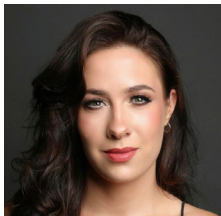
CLASS OF 2023

AVA bid a fond farewell to three Resident Artists this year. Our graduates sang at the annual Graduation Recital, which took place at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Rittenhouse Square. We will miss these talented singers, and we look forward to following their promising careers around the world.



ANGEL GOMEZ, TENOR

Memorable AVA roles: Triquet, *Eugene Onegin*; Gastone de Letorières, *La traviata*; Ernesto, *Don Pasquale*; Don Ottavio, *Don Giovanni*; Riccardo Percy (Richard Percy), *Anna Bolena*; Count Almaviva, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; Faust, *Faust*



LYDIA GRINDATTO, SOPRANO

Memorable AVA roles: Tatiana, *Eugene Onegin*; Violetta Valéry, *La traviata*; Donna Anna, *Don Giovanni*; Anna Bolena (Anne Boleyn), *Anna Bolena*; Marguerite, *Faust*



LUKE NORVELL, TENOR

Memorable AVA roles: Lensky, *Eugene Onegin*; Alfredo Germont, *La traviata*; Male Chorus, *The Rape of Lucretia*; Notary, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; Faust, *Faust*



Collage photo credit: Morgan Horell

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS



AVA Young Professionals is a community of young opera enthusiasts under the age of 45 based in the Greater Philadelphia area who celebrate a mutual love of music through networking and social gatherings, exclusive receptions, and cultural events. Young Professionals receive invitations to all Young Professional events, including exclusive cocktail parties, previews, receptions, opportunities to meet and mingle with AVA's Resident Artists, and get email updates and reminders about opera productions and additional events. Supporting AVA's Young Professionals shows our ongoing effort to introduce new audiences to opera and to make this art form more accessible.

Special events for Young Professionals this year included performances of *Faust* and *L'amico Fritz*, which offered special pricing and an after-performance champagne reception with the Resident Artists.

REBECCA CARR ('90) OPERA OUTREACH PROGRAM

In 2024-2025, Opera Outreach reached 1,028 students from 20 public, private, and charter schools, along with 2 home school groups from across the Greater Philadelphia region. Participants range from loyal, long-time attendees of a decade or more, with nearly half being new to our program since the pandemic.

Student-length matinee performances of *Faust* and *L'amico Fritz* were presented at The Haverford School's Centennial Hall. A Study Guide for each opera offered an opportunity for teachers and students to prepare for what they would see and hear. Question & Answer Sessions followed the performances where Resident Artists answered students' questions about how they began singing, how to learn and memorize a role, what it's like singing in foreign languages, and the daily life of an opera singer, among many others.

What Teachers are Saying:

"The program provides our students an opportunity to open a door to the world of the arts! One that they wouldn't have known or imagined otherwise. Thanks to this exposure students gain a sense of belonging to the arts, they form a memory that now will act as their access pass to more cultural and artistic experiences and will lead to more things to come...I'm always amazed by how quickly they are taken by the opera, it's truly heartwarming to see them so captured, on the edge of their seats, and at the end all on their feet clapping with true intent at your fantastic performers. All thanks to this experience and the people behind it that make it possible. BRAVI!!!!"

"I now have HS seniors who first went to the opera as freshmen (thanks to AVA) and have come to love the genre. They are now able to have intelligent conversations about the operas and compare/contrast among the performances they've seen."

"Many students would never get to attend an actual production if it weren't for this outreach. They wouldn't get the exposure to the wide variety of musical styles and cultures that opera showcases."

"The AVA productions are a perfect introduction to opera. The abridged versions are *just long enough* to give them a taste of the genre without them losing interest."

"THANK YOU so much for the wonderful event, my students and I had a great time! The Q&A session was a highlight for us because it gave us deeper context for the performers and made everything more personal. We are grateful for all of the work you put into opera outreach!"

All photos:

Young Professionals enjoying a post-performance reception after their performance of *Faust*.

Photo credit: Morgan Horell

OUR AVA FAMILY

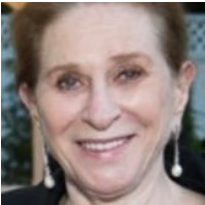
Please join us in welcoming our new Board, Faculty, and Staff Members!

NEW AVA BOARD MEMBERS



STEPHEN PARAHUS is an actuary and consultant in New York City, where he has spent his career working with large, complex employers across industries and geographies designing and evaluating the health benefits they provide to their employees and retirees. While Lincoln Center is Stephen's home base for opera and chamber music, he enjoys traveling to see performances at opera houses and concert halls large and small, around the country and the world.

Stephen lives in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he enjoys restoring his century-old home, entertaining friends, and spending time with his three Rhodesian Ridgebacks. He has a BS in Mathematics from Lafayette College. In addition to his service on the AVA board, Stephen also serves on the board of the Brooklyn Art Song Society.



MERLE RAAB has worked in retail and apparel manufacturing. She opened a franchised Villager store in Seattle. After she returned to the Greater Philadelphia region, she became involved in the birth of a major apparel company, J. G. Hook. When the business was sold, she and her husband, Max L. Raab, followed a new path and became involved in the production of several independent films.

NEW AVA STAFF AND FACULTY

PRODUCTION & FACILITIES MANAGER



TROY A. MARTIN-O'SHIA was the Production Coordinator and interim Production Manager for the American Music Theater Festival (The Prince) for 4 years. Troy was also the Venue Manager for the Philadelphia Arts Bank Theater as well as Adjunct Professor and Production Electrician for the Ira Brind School of Theater Arts at The University of the Arts, where he dedicated 20 years of service. In addition to his role at AVA, Troy is a freelance lighting designer (USA829#613) and a founding member of Hase & Associates, LTD. With over 400 projects to his credit, Troy has designed lighting and managed a diverse range of productions, including theater, opera, dance, film, and industrial events. His architectural lighting designs are prominently featured at Boathouse Row and the Cira Centre at Amtrak 30th Street Station, in Philadelphia. Troy's work has garnered significant recognition, including one Best of Philadelphia award and two nominations for the Philadelphia Barrymore Awards. Additionally, six of his productions have received nominations for Broadway World Awards, winning four times.

VOICE INSTRUCTOR



The Seattle Times heralded **WENDY BRYN HARMER** as “a standout Senta with a big, radiant voice” in her first performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* with Seattle Opera. In the 2025-26 season, she returns Leonore in *Fidelio* with Utah Opera and Boston Baroque to debut Elettra in *Idomeneo* in addition to singing Vaughan William's *Sea Symphony* with the Oregon Symphony. She also returns to the Metropolitan Opera roster for its production of *Turandot*. She previously joined Seattle Opera as well as the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Detroit Opera, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the Tanglewood Music Festival for operas that comprise Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. A graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, she has returned to the company's famed stage countless times; her performances in *Die Zauberflöte*, as well as the *Ring Cycle*, have been released on DVD by Deutsche Grammophon following the company's Live in HD broadcasts.

IN MEMORIAM



Together we remember those who greatly supported AVA, its Resident Artists, and the future of opera.

- LANDO BARTOLINI ('74)**
- DR. AMELIA BATASTINI**
- PETER A. BENOLIEL**
- ALLEN D. BLACK, ESQ.**
- REBECCA CARR ('90)**
- VALENTINA SWIERCZYNSKI KOZLOWSKI ('53)**
- WALLY LOEB**
- JIM MCCLELLAND**
- MARY EMMA MCCONAUGHEY ('57)**
- THERESA MORONE**
- FRANCES PALAMARA**
- RICHARD 'DICK' STEPHENSON**
- P. JEFFREY WARDEN**

PLANNED GIVING THROUGH THE HELEN CORNING WARDEN SOCIETY

The Helen Corning Warden Society recognizes the patrons who have made a bequest or other deferred planned gift arrangement for AVA in their estate planning. Gifts can be made in a variety of ways and allow donors to make meaningful gifts that they might not otherwise be able to commit to currently. In addition to bequests, AVA accepts charitable remainder trusts, charitable lead trusts, charitable gift annuities, life insurance, and retirement plan designations. The AVA Development department will work with you to identify the best Planned Giving option for your needs.



SUPPORTING AVA



AVA’S 2024-2025 ANNUAL FUND

The Annual Fund provides AVA with the working capital to support the daily functions of the institution and helps us meet the expenses of our operating budget. By investing in AVA’s mission through annual gifts, you nurture and launch the world’s most promising vocal artists. A gift to AVA through the Annual Fund makes an immediate and powerful impact.

FELLOWSHIPS

AVA is the only tuition-free school in the world devoted exclusively to operatic training. While the program has always been tuition-free, AVA offers fellowships to assist Resident Artists with the costs of living in Philadelphia and tuition support during their training at AVA. Fellowships start at a contribution of \$350,000 or more.

Support from donors like you is critical to the continued success of the Academy of Vocal Arts’ mission. A gift to the Academy is a wonderful way to invest in the future of the operatic art form and the gifted singers who are its future. Your contribution also helps to underwrite the costs of producing AVA’s highly acclaimed operas and concerts.

There are several ways that you can make an impact by supporting the AVA Resident Artists and the future of opera.

Photo credit: Don Valentino

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

Many visibility opportunities are available to corporations through AVA opera and concert sponsorships, and through sponsorship of the annual gala, Viva la Voce! The AVA Development department can tailor your sponsorship package to meet the unique philanthropic and marketing objectives of your business.

MATCHING GIFTS

Your employer may match your gift to AVA, either entirely or in some portion. In some instances, this may double or even triple the benefit of your gift to the Academy of Vocal Arts and its Resident Artists! Please check with your employer’s benefits office to determine their matching gift requirements.

THE UNITED WAY

AVA’s Opera Outreach program is eligible to receive individual contributions made through the United Way Specific Care Program. All you need to do is complete the top portion of your United Way form, and then find the line for SPECIFIC CARE and enter AVA’s code #3164, the amount of your gift, and the eligible agency name: Academy of Vocal Arts Opera Outreach.



Right: BrAVA Philadelphia! 90th Anniversary Gala and Concert.



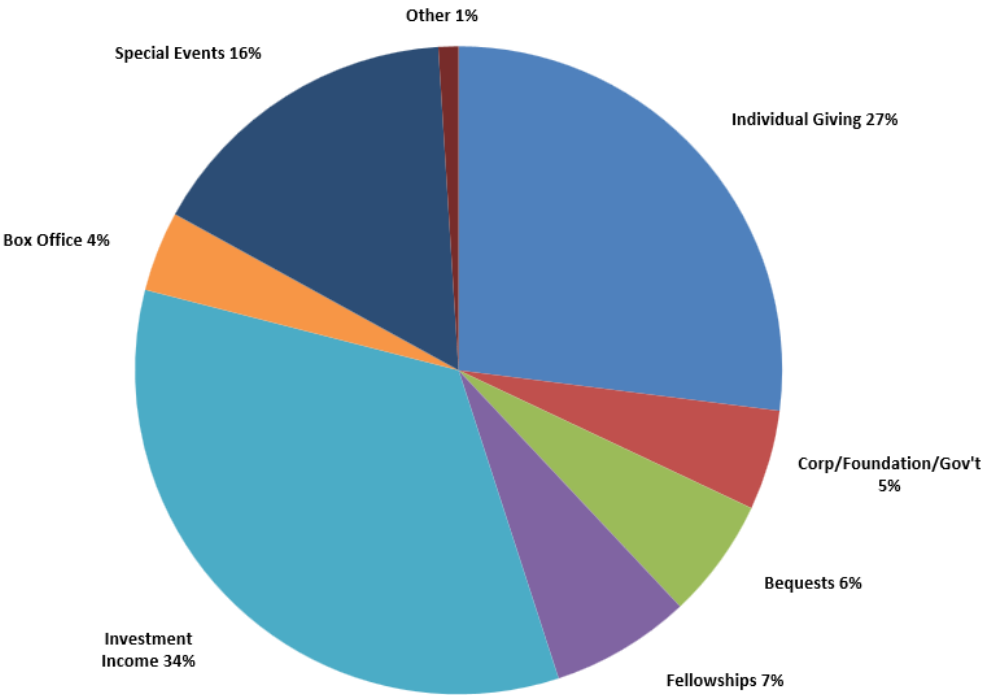
Above: Maestro Steven White addressing the attendees of the Opening Night Gala
Right: 2024 Holiday Party at the College of Physicians

Photo credit: Morgan Horell

FINANCIALS

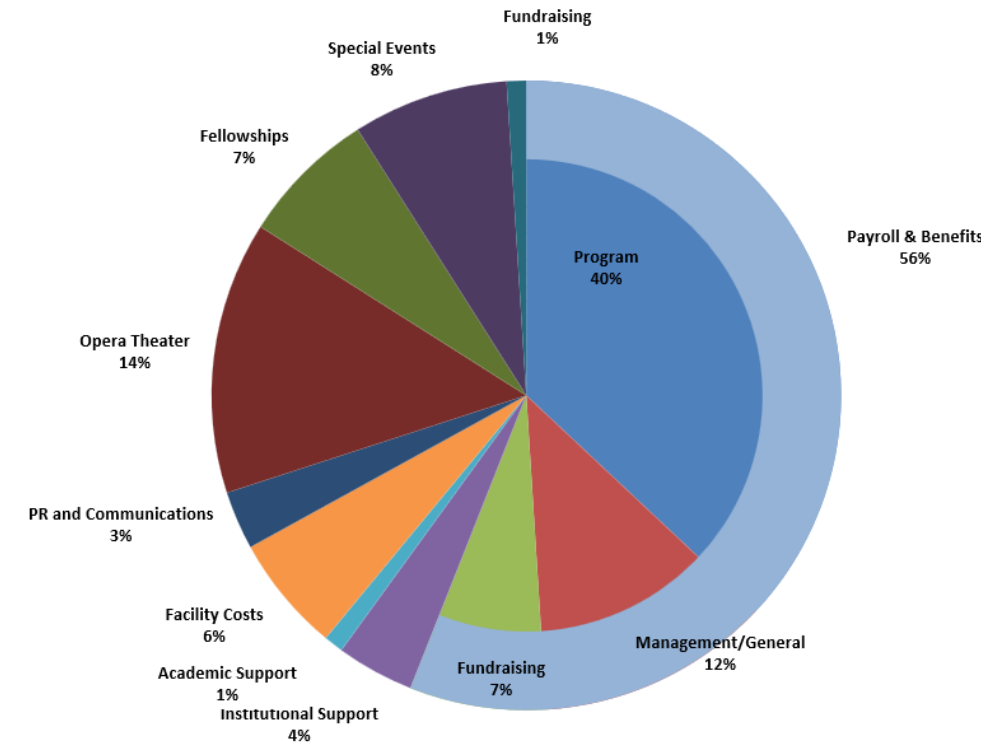
OPERATING INCOME
\$4,727,435

Operating income consists of revenue from a variety of sources. Like many schools, the largest single revenue source for AVA is the investment income from its endowment. Unlike other schools or conservatories, AVA receives no income from tuition and therefore must rely on support from our loyal patrons. Individual and foundation contributions, ticket sales, and special events, including the annual Gala, provide most of the remainder of our budget. In recent years, planned gifts and bequests have been an increasingly significant source of revenue support. Thank you to all who share our love for opera and want to help us train the voices for opera’s future!



UNRESTRICTED
OPERATING EXPENSES
\$4,577,838

The two largest expenditures in AVA’s budget, program payroll and benefits, along with opera theatre expenses, are directly related to the training program. Other costs are associated with recitals, concerts, and piano productions.



A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We would like to extend our thanks to all our donors and contributors. No matter the size of your donation, you are doing your part to ensure the future of opera by donating to the Academy of Vocal Arts and supporting talented Resident Artists. We would like to extend a special thank you to our generous 2024-2025 leading supporters.

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PITCAIRN



**in memoriam*



Photo credit: Morgan Horell