



Every voice tells a story.

Overview & General Manual 2024-2025 SEASON

“Music - opera particularly - is a process which is enduring or successful only if it is achieved by people who love to collaborate.”

Sarah Caldwell

San Diego Opera strives to comply with all current and regularly updated COVID safety protocols issued by the CDC, state, county, city, and its collective bargaining units. To meet these guidelines and also those laid out by our performance venues we ask that:

All Ambassadors provide proof of vaccination, and booster vaccination if available.

If you are experiencing any COVID symptoms or feel unwell, please call to let us know, test, and stay home.

SD Opera Ambassadors

SDO Administration/General Information:

Tel: 619-232-7636
Webpage: www.sdopera.org/support/volunteer
Email: ambassadors@sdopera.org

SDO office hours: 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday through Friday

Ambassador Liaisons:

Kate Bower Student Night at the Opera Ushers
Barbara Carlton Performance Greeters / Office Admin Support / Gala / Patron Services Support
/(Backstage Tours) / Photo Opp. / Events
Norman Cullen Artistic Support
Brenda Hines Student Night at the Opera Ushers

Performance Ushering is handled completely by San Diego Theatres. Information below.

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Welcome to the San Diego Opera Ambassadors

Every American arts organization relies on the contributions of volunteers. San Diego Opera Ambassadors are passionate about opera by giving their time, energy and talents to help the art of opera thrive in San Diego.

Ambassadors play many important roles at San Diego Opera. This manual will give you an overview of the opportunities available to you and SDO's expectations of its volunteers.

San Diego Opera is grateful for your participation. We couldn't do what we do without you.

The SDO Ambassadors' Mission

San Diego Opera Ambassadors support the mission of San Diego Opera and its full-time staff, part-time/seasonal staff and artists by working collaboratively on specific assignments.

The SDO mission can be found here on the SDO website: <https://www.sdopera.org/about/mission>

As an Opera Ambassador you represent a company whose work equals that of the finest companies in the U.S. and around the world. We strive to give our audiences the best experience possible and work to build and develop new audiences for the future of opera. As a San Diego Opera Ambassador, you are on the front line of our patrons' experience. You may well be a patron's very first contact with the world of opera. It is therefore essential that you embody professionalism, courtesy, graciousness and enthusiasm at all times.

A Positive and United Front

While you may have your own opinions about the SDO season, performances and programs, when acting as an Ambassador, we ask that you represent SDO in only the most positive light. Always project an attitude of friendly professionalism and refrain from making any comments on sensitive issues in the presence of patrons. Use only positive comments about San Diego Opera programming choices, visiting artists, outreach programs, staff, and management.

Patrons occasionally may express their opinions about performances to you. Thank them for praise and promise to pass it on. For criticisms, please don't judge, just acknowledge. Some possible responses to have at hand for this kind of comment:

"That's a very interesting observation."

"I'm sorry you were disappointed."

"Thank you for your comment."

"I'll certainly pass that information on."

Should you encounter a particularly disgruntled patron, refer them to a nearby SDO staff member if available. You may also suggest they write a letter or email the Company directly. SDO takes feedback seriously and responds accordingly.

The Ambassador Code of Conduct

As an Ambassador, I am here to support San Diego Opera and its patrons. I will:

- Represent San Diego Opera with professionalism, dignity and pride, and always conduct myself with courtesy and appropriate behavior.
- Be reliable, punctual, and prepared for all assignments.
- Be committed to my assignment and always project a positive attitude.
- Display respect and courtesy to staff, program participants, visitors, artists, property and fellow Ambassadors.
- Respect the privacy of artists and personnel of San Diego Opera and hold in confidence any sensitive, private or personal information.
- Keep staff informed of progress, concerns, or problems within the programs in which I participate.
- Perform and complete accepted tasks and duties in a safe manner.
- Adhere to all San Diego Opera policies.
- Report my hours to my Ambassador Liaison.

As an Ambassador, I will not:

- Use vulgar or inappropriate language.
- Request autographs, make audio or video recordings or take photographs.
- Use or be under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol while volunteering.
- Discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, height, weight, physical or mental ability, veteran status, military obligations, or marital status.
- Go backstage, on-stage or into dressing rooms unless authorized.

General Ambassador Policies

Rotation of Assignments

Because of the high level of interest in volunteering at SDO, sometimes we have the fortunate problem of having more volunteers than we need. As a result, we may not always be able to schedule you as often as you may wish. This in no way reflects on the excellent job you're doing but is our attempt to give everyone an opportunity to participate.

Schedules

We always aim to ask you for your availability as early as possible. When we provide you with the dates and times for which we request your help, please check your calendar immediately to ensure that you are still available and then please confirm. Please contact us as soon as possible if your availability changes.

Punctuality

Please arrive on time. We are a team and often Ambassadors are assigned very specific tasks. Please call if you know you will be late so that we can re-assess assignments if necessary.

Cancellations

Life happens. On (we hope) very rare occasions, you may have to cancel your assignment. Please call or email us as soon as you know that you will not be available.

No-Shows

For some tasks, we need a minimum number of volunteers to carry out a project effectively. A last-minute absence is unfair to fellow volunteers. If you are unable to attend, please contact us as soon as possible, so we can try to find a replacement.

Time Keeping

Please keep track of your time spent for each assignment. We'll need this information for our record-keeping.

Eating and Drinking

Your schedule is hectic, and we understand that you may need to bring a packed meal or snack for break periods. We don't want you to starve! However, if you need to have a quick bite, check with an SDO staff member first. Please make certain that you use only appropriate areas, and that you dispose properly of all trash.

Smoking

Please do not ever smoke when representing San Diego Opera in any capacity.

Spontaneity

You have unexpected free time and you'd like to work? Great!

But please contact us first. We'll gladly schedule you if we can but please don't show up to work without having been scheduled. We'd hate you to waste your time if we are unable to make use of your talents.

Bringing guests with you when volunteering

We're delighted when you want to introduce your friends to the Opera. But please don't bring guests when you're scheduled to work. All volunteers must complete the Opera Ambassadors profile form and be officially trained and scheduled. Not only does SDO track the assignments and hours of all volunteers but also works to maintain a coherence in both information and quality.

How long are you expected to stay?

When you sign up to volunteer, we expect that you will help with every phase of the job as outlined by the Ambassador Liaison. This can sometimes include cleaning up after an event. We try to let you know the full shift duration prior to your accepting the assignment. If for any reason you cannot work the full shift, please let us know as often we can adapt to your time limits.

Tickets

We wish we could give all our Ambassadors free tickets to enjoy the performances. Unfortunately, this is not possible. Even SDO staff are required to purchase tickets. We genuinely value your help, and we aim to show our appreciation in other ways. Do ask us about discounts!

Infringement of Policies

San Diego Opera's policies concerning Ambassador conduct are intended to promote professionalism and goodwill. These policies also enhance the enjoyment and sense of pride that all of us want to feel about our work. When an Ambassador refuses to abide by the policies governing conduct his or her future participation will be subject to review and may result in dismissal.

Important Tax Information

Ambassadors' unreimbursed expenses are deductible contributions for itemizers. The IRS has ruled that unreimbursed expenses are deductible if they are directly connected and solely attributable to the rendition of services to a charitable organization. For example, if you pay for parking and the only reason you need to park is to volunteer for SDO, this expense should qualify. In addition, mileage is deductible at the rate of .14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations.

To document these deductions properly you should keep a canceled check or request a receipt for any unreimbursed expenses from SDO. For mileage deduction, you'll also need to keep a log of the miles driven and obtain a verification of participation from SDO for your volunteer activity. We'll answer your money

questions to the best of our ability. We recommend seeking advice from a financial advisor for guidance in deducting expenses related to volunteer work.

Questions/Concerns/Compliments

We do want to hear from you. Your feedback is essential to SDO to maintain and improve procedure and we encourage you to share your thoughts with us. Please remember that the SDO Office is a place of business often faced with deadlines, therefore we appreciate you calling in advance to make an appointment before stopping by.

Have you filled out your Profile Form yet? If not, just ask and we'll email you a copy or you may download it at:

www.sdopera.org/Support/Volunteer

Ambassador Assignments

San Diego Opera offers opportunities for Ambassadors to volunteer in one or more of the following areas:

- Administration/Office Ambassadors
- Performance Day Ambassadors: Backstage Tours, Patron Support, Merchandise Sellers, Greeters, Photo Booth, Ushers
- Special Events Ambassadors
- Student Night Ambassadors: Ushers

Administration/Office Ambassadors:

San Diego Opera staff members sometimes need assistance to prepare patron mailings, stuff envelopes or gift bags, or staff the box office telephone on performance days.

You'll need

- A professional attitude
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Organizational skills
- The ability to maintain confidentiality

Time Commitment

- Sessions are during the day, usually between 9:30am and 3:30pm.
- Please commit to one full shift at a time: shifts are approximately three hours, although they may sometimes be shorter.

Dress Code

- Casual.

Performance Day Ambassadors:

Performance days have multiple roles for Ambassadors. Several of these are timed to work in tandem, so an Ambassador is likely do more than one task:

Backstage Tour Ambassadors:

It is still undetermined whether backstage tours will take place during the 2024-2025 season. We will update this status on a show-by-show basis. Backstage Tour Ambassadors lead backstage tours before performances. Ticket holders may attend on a first-come-first-served basis, though this policy is subject to future evaluation. Groups may also reserve spaces on backstage tours in advance. A backstage tour is often a patron's first opera experience and is our opportunity to build excitement with a behind-the-scenes look at what it really takes to create opera.

You'll need:

- To be comfortable with public speaking, including the ability to engage with patrons and convey information in a vivid and personal way, and the ability to speak loud enough to be heard by a large group, often over ambient noise.
- To be comfortable with steep stairs.
- The ability to keep your group together, moving and safe in the busy backstage work area.
- Fluency in other languages, especially Spanish, is occasionally useful but not a requirement.

Time Commitment

- Up to 2 hours prior to the performance.
- We try to assign one tour per Ambassador per production, but if we run short of volunteers, we may ask if you can do more.

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Sensible CLOSED-TOE shoes are essential, as the stairs are steep. Open-toe shoes or sandals are not permitted backstage.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

Welcome Ambassadors or "Greeters":

Welcome Ambassadors do just that: welcome patrons to the Opera on performance days. They hold signs in strategic locations around the Civic Center Plaza or in the area surrounding the Balboa Theatre (depending on the performance venue) and greet arriving patrons with a smile. They also give basic directions.

You'll need:

- To be comfortable welcoming and speaking to patrons.
- Standing for up to an hour or more outside.
- Fluency in other languages, especially Spanish, is occasionally useful but not a requirement.

Time Commitment

- Up to 2 hours prior to the performance.

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Comfortable shoes for standing.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

Patron Services Support Ambassadors:

Patron Services Support Ambassadors field questions about patrons' ticketing needs and guide patrons to the correct line so that they can be helped as efficiently as possible in the 90 minutes leading up to Mainstage performances at San Diego Civic Theatre.

You'll need:

- To be comfortable speaking to patrons and answering questions.
- Standing for up to 90 minutes or more.
- Fluency in other languages, especially Spanish, is occasionally useful but not a requirement.

Time Commitment

- Up to 90 minutes prior to the performance.

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Comfortable shoes for standing.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

Photo Booth Ambassadors:

For our 2023-24 Season, the Photo Booth may not be operational. This will be decided on the show-by-show basis. Photo Booth Ambassadors work staff the “step-and-repeat” photo booth on the Civic Concourse where patrons may have their photos taken in front of an official SDO-branded backdrop. This is one of the fun activities SDO provides to create a welcoming, VIP-feel for all patrons.

You'll need:

- To be comfortable welcoming and speaking to and engaging with patrons. The photo booth is often the first “fun” part of a patron’s evening and is a great opportunity to set the tone for an amazing experience.
- Comfortable using smart phone camera apps.
- Fluency in other languages, especially Spanish, is occasionally useful but not a requirement.
- Lines can be very long for the photo booth. Ambassadors should be mindful of this, keep the line moving, and the patrons engaged and excited.
- At some performances Photo Booth Ambassadors may be asked to help record soundbites from patrons at the booth about their opera experiences. Recording equipment, suggested script and guidelines and some brief basic training will be provided by SDO as well as support from an SDO staff member.

Time Commitment

- Up to 2 hours prior to the performance.

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Comfortable shoes for standing.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

SDO Merch Ambassadors:

Merch Ambassadors are volunteers who operate sales for the small portable SDO Shop, selling branded items, such as t-shirts, fridge magnets, mugs etc.

You'll need:

- To be comfortable welcoming and speaking to and engaging with patrons.
- Ability to stand for up to 2 hours prior to the performance, and again at intermission
- Be savvy with EPOS (electronic point of sale tools – training provided)

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Dressy “opera” clothes also permitted.
- Comfortable shoes for standing.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

Special Events Ambassadors:

Special Events Ambassadors greet patrons, assist with check-in and guide attendees at a variety of special events, often for donors.

You'll need:

- A professional and courteous manner.
- Good vision to read check-in lists.
- The ability to keep check-in lines moving at high-volume events.
- Grace under pressure - a positive attitude and the ability to keep calm goes a long way when things get hectic.
- To be able to stand for up to an hour or more.

Time Commitment

- Up to 5 hours for each event.
- Events may take place in the morning, late afternoon or evening.

Dress Code

- Slacks, khakis or knee-length or longer skirt and a shirt with a collar, a blouse or dressy sweater.
- Comfortable shoes for standing.
- *Jeans, sneakers and other casual attire are not acceptable.*

Student Night Ambassadors:

Student Night Ambassadors usher for the final dress rehearsal of each production when students from grades 3 – 12 are invited to attend. Student Night at the Opera is often the first opera, or even live-theatre experience this young audience encounters. Ambassadors greet students, assist with seating and help with crowd control. Student Night Ambassadors may need to stand for up to 3 hours.

You'll need:

- To like kids!
- A professional and courteous manner toward both children and adults.
- The ability to engage with patrons of all ages.

- Grace under pressure. A positive attitude and the ability to keep calm goes a long way at these fun and hectic nights.
- The ability to walk up and down multiple flights of stairs.
- Familiarity with the venue's seating layout, in order to be accurate and efficient when directing groups to their seats.

Time Commitment

- Up to 4 hours at each performance.

Dress Code

- All black: Dress pants or skirt with a long-sleeved shirt, blouse or dressy sweater. Black sports jacket or sweater optional.
- Comfortable black dress shoes with socks or hose.
- **Ushers will be issued Ambassador badges upon check-in at the theatre. Please return them before you leave.**

Student Night at the Opera Usher Ambassadors:

Please see separate specific handbook regarding this position.

And please feel free to ask.