



Alexandra Armantrading and Marnie Breckenridge



Brian Staufenbiel, Alan Olejniczak and Nicole Paiement

RAISING FUNDS AND VOICES

“You can’t have a rainbow without rain,” noted **Michael Tate** in his opening remarks as the emcee for Opera Parallèle’s benefit celebration, *Over the Rainbow*. The rain didn’t keep 200+ supporters of the San Francisco contemporary opera company from coming together at Saint Joseph’s Arts Society on April 14. Tate praised OP for “connecting people who are creative, who lean in, who want to amplify diverse voices, who want to make opera accessible and fun and challenging and moving for as many people as possible.”

Throughout the evening — chaired by **Alan Olejniczak** with lead artist sponsor **Bernice Lindstrom** — guests noshed on savory and sweet bites by Hugh Groman Group while sipping cocktails featuring St. George Spirits and wines from Medlock Ames. All eyes and ears were on the converted church’s stage — lit up in a spectrum of hues — as OP’s board president **Deb Stallings**, general and artistic director **Nicole Paiement**, and creative director **Brian Staufenbiel** addressed the gathering.

Interspersed with their speeches, counter-tenor **John Holiday**, accompanied by pianist **Kevin Korth**, wowed the crowd. Audience participation was encouraged for “This Little Light of Mine,” while “Misty” recalled Holiday’s time on NBC’s *The Voice*. Renowned mezzo-soprano and OP honorary board chair **Frederica von Stade** later joined Korth and Holiday for a duet of “Send in the Clowns.” “I’m not sure we’re supposed to have this much fun in church,” quipped Stallings, who also announced the launch of the Rainbow Chorus, a LGBTQ+ Ally social network for which she and **Paul Woolford** serve as cochairs.

By the time attendees filed out of Saint Joseph’s — still humming “Over the Rainbow,” Holiday’s finale — about \$130,000 had been raised. “When we started Opera Parallèle, we were filling a niche in San Francisco,” said Paiement. “We decided to embark in contemporary opera, which is not necessarily embarking in selling ice cream. It’s more like selling ... vitamins. But for us, it was like ice cream. And it still is. ... Opera is the perfect vehicle for telling stories.” **NHC**

— Anh-Minh Le



Frederica von Stade, John Holiday and Kevin Korth



Alice Morison and Dagmar Dolby



Jonathan Smucker, Jimmy Kansau, Jeffrey Jordan, Bradley Kynard, Zachary Cordin and Michael Mohammed



Deb Stallings and Ruth Nott

STUDENT SERVICES

The sold-out Benefit Luncheon for Mission Dolores Academy, held on April 29 in the Julia Morgan Ballroom, needs a rebrand. Something like: The Gagan Gourmet GoFundUs. The biggest bids amid a lively auction were epicurean-themed: a 52-bottle wine collection from MDA board members; a home-cooked feast for 20 by chef **Charles Phan** (\$21K); two Villa Taverna dinners with rare French wines, courtesy of **Lisa and Todd Zabelle** (\$9K each); and a “heavenly” dinner with MDA cofounder Fr. **Charles Gagan**, S.J., which sold twice (\$8K each).

While Gagan, an EssEff native and former pastor of St. Ignatius Church, is a noted connoisseur of fine dining and primo vino, he is even more devoted to the student body of this K-8 faith-based, academically excellent school that provides full scholarships to a majority of its underserved students. Often the first in their families to attend high school,



Fr. Charles Gagan, Paula Williams and Bob Lalanne

almost 100 percent of MDA students matriculate into top San Francisco high schools.

The afternoon also honored supersupporter **Paula Williams**, who previously gave a generous donation to enhance the school’s Wellness Program, led by **Karla Iniguez-Zarate**. Williams was an active bidder at the luncheon, pledging \$10K with a shout-out, “That’s for Karla,” to bolster the understaffed program that provides students with mental health

support, speech-language therapy, social-emotional learning and nutrition.

Led by event chairs **Kendel Qvale Duford** and **Michelle Curtis Harris**, with MDA trustee **Bob Lalanne**, the afternoon included a surprise video tribute to Gagan. “He is an amazing educator,” enthused **Jerome Williams**. “I’ve watched Charlie fight for kids to get in the school and challenge them to do better. He’s also so much fun, sometimes you forget he’s a priest.” **NHC**



Kendel Qvale Duford and Michelle Curtis Harris



Eighth grader Lyric is bound for Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory High School.