

FOR THE LOVE OF OPERA:



Christopher Tidmore enjoys promoting the historical musical art form

By Dean M. Shapiro,
Senior Editor

PHOTO BY DEAN M. SHAPIRO

As a 16-year-old junior at St. Martin's Academy in Metairie in the early 1990s, Christopher Tidmore began regularly attending operas presented by the New Orleans Opera Association and performed at the Mahalia Jackson Theatre for the Performing Arts.

"When I was at St. Martin's I was always in speech tournaments," Christopher began. "They would have their awards ceremonies around 5:30 to 6:00 and then I would rush over to the theater and go to an opera performance. I went to the opera throughout high school by myself. It was one of my passions."

At an age when most of his peers were into the more popular genres of music and opera was the music of choice for those of his parents' and grandparents' generations, Christopher was an exception to the norm. "Here I was," he said. "Sixteen years old, driving myself to the opera and sitting there alone. But opera had an indelible impact on me and I loved it."

Today, 35 years later, that former 16-year-old student and opera aficionado is the Director of External Affairs for the New Orleans Opera Association. Given his family background and a longtime love for opera, his current position is a perfect fit.

A descendent of the Villere family, with New Orleans roots dating back more than 300 years, some of Christopher's ancestors were opera patrons in the 19th century and

throughout much of the 20th century. His grandmother, Elisabeth Wolfe Villere, was an opera singer and one of the founders of the present-day New Orleans Opera Association in 1943. His mother, Elisabeth LouLou Villere Tidmore, designed many of the early opera program covers. Both of his parents were season ticketholders.

"I grew up going to the opera," Christopher explained. "I went to my first one with my grandmother when I was about 10 and I really enjoyed it. Back then, opera audiences were a who's who of New Orleans. It was the thing to do in those days."

In his current capacity with NOOA, Christopher's responsibilities include promoting upcoming opera productions and other special events, scheduling media coverage, acting as a liaison between the opera management and the public and performing other related duties for which his background and experience qualifies him. He was hired in August 2024 by Lila Palmer shortly after she began her tenure as the company's new Executive and Artistic Director.

With one final production scheduled before the end of the current season, Christopher is busy promoting a modernized version of Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti's two-act comic opera, "Elixir of Love." Sung in its original Italian language with English translations projected above the stage, the original 1831 composition will undergo a contemporary transformation into a Cajun cowboy scenario set in west Louisiana with the cast members attired in Western-style boots and outerwear.

Lindsey Reynolds, a native New Orleans soprano, will be making her local main-stage debut in the lead female role.

Discussing the company's rationale behind changing the scenario of the opera from an Italian village to Louisiana's Acadiana Region, Christopher explained that it is being done in an effort to attract more young people to the world of opera. Noting that, in recent years, opera



Christopher outside the Garden District Book Shop.

PHOTO BY DEAN M. SHAPIRO



Christopher at a press conference announcing the New Orleans Opera's 2025-2026 season on February 12, 2025.

PHOTO BY BILL ALLERTON

attendance has been declining, he said, "Lila and I had been discussing this and we talked about ways we could make opera a destination, a party, and a fun event."

The company took a step in that direction this past fall with the season-opening production of “Tosca” being preceded by an Italian-themed party on opening night.

“We were advertising two tickets for a hundred dollars and a party. We did it and our sales went up 25 percent among young people,” Christopher said. “We hit on this concept that we had to become an event and attract people who would normally never think of going to an opera. It worked and that’s what we’re doing with ‘Elixir.’ We’re encouraging people to come in jeans, cowboy boots and fringe.”

The production will run on Friday, April 4 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, April 6 at 2:30 p.m. After the Friday performance there will be a Cajun fais do do with music performed by local fiddler Amanda Shaw. Preceding the Sunday performance, at 12:30 p.m., there will be a Cajun cookout by the fountains in front of the theater. Both of these special add-ons will be available to patrons for an extra price.

Looking beyond the current season, plans have been announced for NOOA’s 2025-2026 season with a full slate of performances, including the first-ever New



Christopher at Arches National Park in Utah.

Orleans Opera Festival scheduled from March 24 through April 4, 2026. Despite being a year away, Christopher is already working closely with Palmer, assisting her in planning the event and promoting it, along with the other productions of the coming season.

“Lila is someone who is a rare talent as both a General Director and a librettist,” Christopher said. “She is incredibly innovative and she has a passionate love for opera and history. We are very lucky to have her here in New Orleans.”

In the years prior to working with New Orleans Opera, Christopher experienced an event-filled career in the local media. On a number of occasions he found himself on the front lines of news stories that made national and even international headlines. As a radio talk show host and an associate editor for the Louisiana Weekly newspaper, he helped break the story of former Congressman David Vitter’s extra-marital affair with a prostitute that torpedoed Vitter’s political career.

During the controversy, Christopher appeared on the ABC Network’s “Nightline” show and was written up in the New York Times.

Also, along with his former radio co-host, Jeff Crouere, Christopher broke the story about former Louisiana governor Mike Foster’s \$150,000 purchase of a mailing list from former KKK leader, David Duke, during Foster’s 1995 gubernatorial campaign.

As Christopher recalled, “We had him (Duke) on the show and I and I asked him, on the air live, ‘Where do you pay taxes on a list like that?’ and he said, ‘I don’t think we ever paid taxes on it.’”

Continuing, Christopher said, “The next day, a relatively young Assistant U.S. Attorney named Jim Letten, called Jeff and asked if he could have the tape. And that’s what he used to get the warrants to search Duke’s house.”

In the years that followed, Christopher went on to host other talk shows on both TV and radio, including a Sunday morning

show titled “Politically Speaking Louisiana Style” that aired on WNOL Channel 38. He also became a political consultant and managed several successful campaigns. He even ran for a seat in the Louisiana State House of Representatives against Cameron Henry in 2007, finishing a close race with 47 percent of the vote

“It taught me a lot,” Christopher said, reflecting on the experience. “Even though I’d been writing about politics at that point for almost twenty years, you don’t really understand politics until you run for office yourself. I had managed political campaigns but actually running for office is a different world. A candidate’s IQ drops by about 20 points by election day. You get very little sleep.”

And, today, no longer directly involved in electoral politics, Christopher has taken on the role of an entrepreneur. Four years ago, he and his wife, Barkley, purchased the Garden District Book Shop. Partnering with Carroll Gelderman, they opened the adjoining bistro, The Chicory House & Bar Epilogue, in The Rink on Prytania Street. Barkley and Carroll co-manage the bookstore and bistro.

Summing up his eventful life and various careers, Christopher had this to say: “After visiting 53 countries and spending 30 years as an award-winning journalist, I am proud to bring my experience into the promotion of opera, New Orleans’ oldest performing art form.”



Christopher Tidmore can be heard as a co-host of “The Founders’ Show, *The Insider’s View of Louisiana Politics*” every Sunday 8-9 a.m. on WRNO 99.5 FM and MWF 8-9 a.m. on WSLA 93.9 FM and 1560 AM.

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