

LOVE STORY

Surprise! Ars Lyrica chairs say 'I do' during gala



Photos by Gary Fountain / Contributor

Darrin Davis, center, performs the wedding ceremony of Stephanie von Stein and Dr. Mark Schusterman at the Ars Lyrica gala.

By Amber Elliott
STAFF WRITER

When Ars Lyrica gala chairs and then-engaged couple **Stephanie von Stein** and **Dr. Mark Schusterman** began hammering out the details of this year's "A Mid-Winter Night's Dream" soiree, they had a thought: Gala planning is an awful lot like wedding planning.

They aren't wrong. Black-tie attire. Ballrooms. A three-course dinner. Drinks. Dancing. Florals. Invitations. The components of chairing a stellar fundraiser and tying the knot are surprisingly similar.

So they entertained an idea: Could they get hitched during Ars Lyrica's gala, and multitask in holy matrimony?

It was the perfect opportunity, they suggested to friend and Ars Lyrica liaison **Darrin Davis**, to celebrate their union with friends and colleagues (who would be conveniently gathered in one setting) and simultaneously introduce a new audience to the organization that presents 17th- and 18th-century music on period instruments.

Davis was unsure at first. He didn't know what the response would be. But the ensemble eagerly green-lighted the nuptials, and Davis ultimately became the one who performed the wedding ceremony, after becoming an ordained minister on universityofministry.com, of course.

And so on Saturday, Feb. 23, the intimate bash downtown at Hotel Alessandra started with a gala program and ended with "I dos."

Harpist **Joanna Whittsett**, mezzo-soprano **Cecilia Duarte**, lutenist **Arash Noori** and percussionist



The wedding party stands up for von Stein and Schusterman at the Ars Lyrica gala.



Von Stein gets a congratulatory hug from son William after she married Schusterman.



Dr. Sippi Khurana performs.

Jesus Pacheco kicked off the festivities on a high note, by playing selections from Henry Purcell in addition to various Spanish baroque composers.

Later, the always impressive **Dr. Sippi Khurana** pulled off a mesmerizing triple feat. She served as the evening's honoree, gave an impromptu performance of Vivaldi's violin concerto movement in a Miles David frock and then changed into a bridesmaid dress by the same designer.

As Davis explained to some 150 awe-stricken

guests that a wedding ceremony was about to take place, the bridal party re-emerged in coordinating "something blue" lace gowns. Schusterman's family joined him at the pop-up altar. And on the arm of her eldest son, the bride made her way down the aisle.

After a little laughter, tears and one binding kiss,

the gala chairs were officially pronounced husband and wife.

Just as the bride and groom predicted, the wedding/gala hybrid meshed seamlessly. Hotel Alessandra's in-house restaurant, Lucienne, catered the affair. A whimsical, wintery flower wall proved the perfect backdrop for dancing and wedding portraits.

And attendees were treated to double the dessert: a whipped cheesecake, chocolate mousse and lemon tarte brûlée plus wedding cake.

As for wedding gifts, Ars Lyrica's artistic director **Matthew Dirst** announced

that \$110,000 had been raised, setting a record for the organization.

Oh, and several attendees gained new family members, too. Cheers to that.

amber.elliott@chron.com



Matthew Dirst speaking at the Ars Lyrica gala.

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