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AIDA

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**Anthony Freud**  
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# Welcome to your Lyric

# A special message from the Chair

Welcome to the Lyric Opera House!

A Lyric production of *Aida*, one of the truly great classics of the repertoire, is a cause for celebration. You cannot help but love its stirring music, its tragic love story, and its awesome spectacle. And this *Aida* has special significance for Lyric. It is not only the first fully staged performance of the work for Music Director Enrique Mazzola, but it also becomes the 100th opera title in his repertoire. And there's another way this production is very poignant—it marks the last opera in the remarkable tenure of General Director, President & CEO Anthony Freud, who will retire this summer.

Anthony arrived to take Lyric's helm 13 years ago, the fourth general director in our history. He has led a period of innovation and excellence at Lyric, featuring important debuts of singers, conductors, directors, and opera talents of every kind. He brought fresh perspectives to the historic repertoire. He re-energized Lyric's commitment to producing rarely-performed repertoire, including a number of Lyric premieres, including *Les Troyens*, *The Passenger*, *Ariodante*, *Le Comte Ory*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, and *Champion*. Also, he was responsible for commissioning several new works, such as last season's world premieres of *Proximity* and *The Factotum*. During his tenure, our world premiere of *Bel Canto* and our new production of *Orphée et Eurydice* were televised nationwide on PBS's *Great Performances*.

Anthony's strong commitment to diversity in all its facets—onstage, in the audience, and throughout the company—has established Lyric as the model of a 21st century opera company. He created Lyric Unlimited, our learning and civic engagement program that is reaching many thousands of students and actively retooling opera's presence and impact throughout our city. He expanded the programs of the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center. He brought Maestro Mazzola to Chicago to much critical acclaim, and the renowned Joffrey Ballet to reside in our beautiful opera house, and championed the reseating of our theater, among other audience-friendly improvements.

He has been my partner and friend these past several years, including steering Lyric through the pandemic. The heartbreak of canceling the season including our own new production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* did not discourage Anthony—rather this period was one of enormous artistic creativity, including a wide-ranging online program of outstanding performances enjoyed by a global audience. He has successfully positioned Lyric as the leading American opera company for the future. His influence will be ever present in Lyric's fabric.

Anthony and his husband, dramaturg Colin Ure, will be heading back to the United Kingdom. Please join me in wishing them a happy retirement, with heartfelt thanks.



*Sylvia Neil*

**SYLVIA NEIL**  
Chair



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# A Generous Force

Dr. Arthur J. Atkinson, Jr. has been making waves in Chicago since he arrived. Now, his significant gift to Lyric will help the company bring an epic Verdi masterpiece back to the Lyric stage.

*By David Zivan*



Mary Jo and Dr. Arthur J. Atkinson, Jr. are aficionados of both sailing and opera.

**Editor's note:** We are sad to share the news that, after this program went to press, Dr. Atkinson passed away at his home in Florida on Feb. 23. The Lyric family extends its heartfelt condolences to all who knew him.

**On the afternoon of March 21, 1938,** Dr. Arthur J. Atkinson and his wife, Inez, were in their Glencoe home, confident in her obstetrician's assessment that their baby's arrival remained a fortnight away. That evening, it became apparent that the doctor had been mistaken. The couple jumped into their car, heading for what was then known as Passavant Hospital (today the site of the Northwestern Memorial complex), where Dr. Atkinson worked, but somewhere on Lakeshore Drive they realized they were not going to make it. Arthur flagged down a passing police car to serve as escort, in hopes of speeding up the trip.

Nevertheless, Arthur J. Atkinson Jr. was born in his parents' car, near the Oak Street exit, close to the Drake Hotel. No one bothered to note an address. The *Chicago Daily Times* reported on the event (on a page featuring a glowing review of an Andrews Sisters appearance on WBBM radio and a chat with Boris Karloff), and the *Chicago Tribune* weighed in as well, with a brief headlined, "Stork Can't Get to the Hospital and Vice Versa."

The lake would continue to exert its influence. Atkinson's mother and father were longtime members of the Chicago Yacht Club, and champion competitive sailors. He himself became a highly skilled racer as well, in varied classes, and crewed in the Mackinac race 27 times—once on a winning boat. Though he's now retired (he was a professor at the Northwestern University medical school for 24 years), his textbook, *Atkinson's Principles of Clinical Pharmacology*, is currently in its 4th edition.

His parents passed down at least one other notable passion—for grand opera. They were among Lyric's very first subscribers and donors, and when Atkinson returned to Chicago after his medical training, he joined them (for decades) in attending the opera. In seeking a way to honor his family's deep connection, Art and his wife, Mary Jo, came up with a rather novel (and personal) way to give to the company. Recently, he made a substantial financial gift to Lyric, specifically designated to support a future production of Giuseppe Verdi's *La forza del destino*.

"We love *La traviata* and *Rigoletto* and *Aida*," Atkinson says. "But *La forza* is my favorite. I initially thought that these funds—really money that my parents passed down—would be given after I passed away. But it has been years since that opera was seen here, and we're fortunate to have a Verdi specialist as music director. The timing

feels right, and I feel sure my parents would totally approve of this use."

"Many opera lovers are also lovers of Verdi, of course," says Anthony Freud, Lyric's General Director, President and CEO. "But few have turned that passion into such an extraordinary gift. All of us at Lyric are enormously grateful for the generous support of the Atkinsons that will enable us to bring back to Lyric in a future season one of Verdi's greatest masterpieces."

***La forza del destino*** was the first work Verdi composed after several years of inactivity. A large commission from the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia seems to have been irresistible, and with a libretto from Francesco Maria Piave (his collaborator on *Ernani*, *Rigoletto*, and *La traviata*, among others), Verdi set to work at the end of 1860. A year later, the composer and his wife traveled to St. Petersburg for the premiere (an event ultimately delayed until November 1862). A revised version of the



Giuseppe Verdi in St. Petersburg, 1861.





Arthur Atkinson's mother, Inez (foreground), seen crewing for him in a Belmont Harbor race in the late 1970s, was one of Lyric's first subscribers.

opera, completed in 1869—and now considered the authoritative edition—premiered at La Scala with Teresa Stolz as the tragic heroine, Leonora; two years later, she would take the title role in the Italian premiere of *Aida*.

Lyric has produced the work three times, first under the baton of Sir George Solti in 1956 (the inaugural year of company founder Carol Fox's tenure as sole General Director). Playing Don Alvaro, half of the doomed central couple, was renowned tenor Richard Tucker. His love interest was the legendary Renata Tebaldi, with Ettore Bastianini, Giulietta Simionato, and Nicola Rossi-Lemeni in the other leading roles. To play Curra, Leonora's maid, Lyric cast a young mezzo-soprano named Ardis Krainik.

Tenor Carlo Bergonzi, who had made his U.S. debut at Lyric in 1955, played Don Alvaro in the company's 1961 production, in a cast that also included Eileen Farrell, Boris Christoff, and Christa Ludwig. The work wasn't staged again until the 1987/88 season, when it was presented under the baton of James Conlon, with Susan Dunn, Giuseppe Giacomini, and Leo Nucci in the cast.

**The 1987/88 production** of *La forza* was the first that Atkinson and his wife, Mary Jo, saw performed live. But it's nearly certain that Atkinson first heard *La forza*'s stirring music—and, really, a great deal of the standard repertoire—on his parents' phonograph, as he drifted off in his bedroom in the family's Astor Street home (in that

era of gas rationing, they had moved to be closer to the hospital). Atkinson's parents were opera fans at a time when the city had no established company—but as fortune would have it, they shared a mutual acquaintance with Carol Fox.

"When they heard that Ms. Fox was going to restart opera in Chicago, they just thought that was wonderful and they wanted to be part of it," Atkinson remembers. And indeed they were; their front row seats are still in the family. Over the decades, attending the company's performances and events was a major component of the family's life—and after Art's father passed away, Lyric provided his mother's main social engagements.

Art and Mary Jo met through sailing connections in the early 80s, and they married in 1984. Opera became part of her life, too. "The first opera I ever attended was with Art," she says. "And I didn't think I was going to like it, but I did. It's hard to be with the Atkinsons and not like opera. They made it come to life, and that was beautiful. That was what we did for fun."

They fell in love with *La forza* itself during that 1987/88 production. "I think the second scene of act two, in the monastery, with the beautiful monk's chorus, and then the abbot coming in, and then the soprano coming in over the top – I think these are the best 40 minutes in opera. I mean, just gorgeous. We are happy to play a part in sharing it with others." ■

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Opera at its grandest! While *Aida* delights audiences with its visual splendor, it also captivates them with a score ranging from exquisitely intimate arias to deeply dramatic duets and trios, and the most thrilling choruses Verdi ever composed. The five principal artists in this production boast not only sumptuously beautiful voices, but also the charismatic presence to bring the love triangle and the complications of war vividly to life. Conducting Francesca Zambello's striking production will be Music Director Enrique Mazzola, acknowledged internationally as an exceptionally authoritative Verdian.



Edward Willensky / San Diego Opera

Michelle Bradley in a San Diego Opera production of *Aida*.

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# Aida



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# Aida

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Music by **Giuseppe Verdi** | Opera in four acts in Italian

Libretto by **Antonio Ghislanzoni**

March 9, 13m, 17m, 20, 23, 26, 29, and April 1, 4m, 7m, 2024

### CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Ramfis  
Radamès  
Amneris  
Aida  
King  
Messenger  
Priestess  
Amonasro

**Önay Köse+**  
**Russell Thomas**  
**Jamie Barton**  
**Michelle Bradley**  
**Wm. Clay Thompson+**  
**Alejandro Luévanos+**  
**Kathryn Henry+**  
**Reginald Smith, Jr.**

Dancers: **Chase Buntrock, Sam Crouch, Carl Ponce Cubero, Marian Faustino, Lester Gonzalez+, Vernon Gooden, Marcus Hardy, Andrew Harper, Johnathan Hart+, Anne O'Donnell Passero+, Malachi Squires**

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First performed by Khedivial Opera House, Cairo, Egypt on December 24, 1871.  
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on November 1, 1955.

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# Synopsis

TIME | **The past**

## ACT I

Radamès, an army officer, hopes to be chosen to lead his country to victory. If he can win the war, he believes he will be allowed to marry Aida who is a captive from the enemy. Princess Amneris, who loves Radamès, notices that he has feelings for Aida, which incites her jealousy. The King arrives with his army and ministers. A messenger brings news of an imminent invasion. Radamès is announced as the chosen commander. The crowd expresses hope for his victorious return. Aida, too, is caught up in the battle cry; but then she berates herself for having called for the defeat of her own people. Divided between loyalty to her country and her love for Radamès, she asks the gods for strength.

## ACT II

Radamès and his troops have won the war. Amneris, still tormented by doubt and jealousy, resolves to question Aida. She manages to trick Aida into revealing her love for Radamès; furious, Amneris tells Aida to give up all hope of being with him. The people celebrate the return of the victorious army. Radamès asks that the prisoners of war be brought in; among them, Aida recognizes her father, Amonasro. Hiding his identity as king of his nation, he pleads for the lives of his people. Radamès asks that the prisoners be freed. The high priest Ramfis, warning of the consequences, succeeds in having Aida and her father retained as hostages. Amneris's father, the King, rewards Radamès with her hand in marriage.

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Projected titles design by Kelley Rourke  
originally for The Glimmerglass Festival.

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### APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

**This production will be performed  
with one intermission.**

Acts I & II	1 hour 20 minutes
Intermission	30 minutes
Acts III & IV	1 hour 10 minutes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3 hours</b>

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# Synopsis

continued

## **ACT III**

Preparing for her wedding to Radamès, Amneris retires to the temple to worship with Ramfis. Outside the temple, Aida waits in hiding for Radamès. She longs for the happiness she knew as a child in her homeland. Her father finds her and raises her hopes for a happy life at the side of her beloved in their homeland. Hoping to exploit Aida's love for Radamès, Amonasro demands she find out from Radamès the route his armies will take. Amonasro conceals himself nearby, where he can overhear the plan. Radamès affirms his love for Aida and hopes another victory will allow him to win her once and for all. Aida instead encourages him to flee the country with her. As they start to leave, Aida asks which route his troops will take. Radamès answers her, whereupon Amonasro appears and Radamès realizes he has revealed an important military secret. He then sees he has been overheard by Ramfis and Amneris as they leave the temple. Radamès surrenders to the High Priest, ready to accept the consequences of treason.

## **ACT IV**

Torn between love and jealousy, Amneris hopes to save Radamès from the priests and win him for herself. She urges him to defend himself, but he rejects her. The priests assemble and allow Radamès a chance to present his defense, but he remains silent. They sentence him to be buried alive. Amneris pleads with the priests to revoke the sentence, and when they ignore her, she curses them. Sealed inside a tomb, Radamès discovers Aida, who had hidden there. While the priests chant their hymns, the two lovers die, united at last. Above their tomb, Amneris prays for peace. 

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# Aida: War, Enemy of Love

Often viewed as simply a clash between nations, Verdi's great war tragedy derives its power from profoundly personal interactions

by Martha C. Nussbaum



Left: Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy, where *Aida* received its Italian premiere.

Below: An 1886 portrait of Giuseppe Verdi by Giovanni Boldini.



***Aida* (1871), the last opera** of Giuseppe Verdi's late middle period—with a long gap before his two dazzling final collaborations with Arrigo Boito, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893)—is among his most beloved. Its sheer number of performances puts it at or near the very top of all operas, worldwide, despite the special difficulties of staging a work requiring such large human (and sometimes animal!) forces. *Aida* is universally admired for the daring and passion of its music, and it is loved, too, for its dazzling spectacle. Most of all, however, it

draws us through its tragic human drama.

Today we find two common misconceptions about *Aida*. The first is that it is primarily a pageant, an outward-facing, grand spectacle. True, Verdi loved spectacle, and the opera certainly has some—but spectacle is the least of the work's achievements. Its famous triumph scene is relatively static and therefore hard to connect to the heart of the drama. At its core, *Aida* is a very private work. Much of it consists in intimate exchanges among three people, and great

portions are soliloquies. Even in the intimate scenes, much is communicated through asides, inner reflections of thought and emotion.

The second misconception is that *Aida* is a drama of colonial oppression and enslavement, with the Ethiopian Aida standing for the long colonial subjugation of Black Africans. Modern casting often follows this idea, and the opera has given welcome and long overdue opportunities to some great Black singers. Actually, however, as we'll see, the drama concerns not colonial domination but an ongoing and seemingly endless sequence of retributive wars between two powerful independent kingdoms. War is the culprit, the destroyer of love.

War was also the opera's immediate context. No sooner had the Austro-Prussian War ended in 1866 (well for Italy, which achieved unification and nationhood), than it was followed by the Franco-Prussian War, July 1870-January 1871. This war included a siege of Paris, whose destruction Verdi greatly feared, and resulted in the unification of Germany, which filled him with alarm. Moreover, because the Germans took over Alsace and Lorraine, the seeds of future conflict were sown; that war is now seen as a direct precursor of World War I. Let us follow the history of the opera's composition at this ominous time.

In the mid-19th century, Egypt was a relatively autonomous kingdom within the Ottoman Empire, under the governance of a Viceroy, or Khedive, who at this time was Isma'il Pasha. For the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869, the Khedive, through an emissary, implored Verdi to write something; Verdi declined, and the task was undertaken by Temistocle Solera, an old collaborator of Verdi's and author of the libretti for five early Verdi operas, including *Nabucco* (1841) (whose plot is remarkably similar to that of *Aida*, with a similar romantic triangle). He and Verdi were no longer on speaking terms, because Solera had left town with the libretto of *Attila* (1846) still unfinished. By 1869, Solera had become a minor functionary of the Italian government. The Khedive offered him a post in Egypt, putting him in charge of the Suez ceremonies. (By 1871 he was back in Italy, running an antique shop in Florence.)

By early 1870, Verdi's position had softened, and he let it be known that he might write something for the opening of the Khedival Opera House if a suitable historical plot on an Egyptian theme could be found. Soon thereafter, a scenario for such an opera appeared, and was sent to Verdi by the Khedive through the impresario Camille Du Locle, with whom Verdi often worked. Auguste Mariette, a French Egyptologist residing in Cairo, was apparently the author. Mariette clearly wanted credit for the piece, and authority to add

further "local color." But he coyly said several different things about its provenance: sometimes that he had created the entire thing, sometimes that he and the Khedive wrote it together, sometimes that "an important person" was the author. When Verdi read the scenario, he liked it very much, but he did not believe that a scholar was the author. It was too dramatically adept, and must be the work of "a very expert hand, one who knows the theater very well." Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, a Verdi biographer, argues that the author was probably Solera, at that time an important person in the Khedival art-world, but unable to work with Verdi under his own name because of their prior rupture.

Whatever the solution to the enigma, Verdi was excited by the scenario, and began his own study of ancient Egyptian history, reading both Heliodorus of Emesa's novel *Aithiopika*, the scenario's source, and the Greek historian Herodotus's account of ancient Egypt. He agreed to a contract to deliver the opera for presentation at the end of 1870. At this point, Mariette disappears from the scene. Verdi engaged Antonio Ghislanzoni, a librettist with whom he had recently worked on the revised version of *La forza del destino*.

Many letters from Verdi to his librettist survive. They show him in charge of every line and phrase, insisting on fidelity to situation and fidelity to character. Again and again, he asks Ghislanzoni to dispense with poetic flourishes in favor of straightforward speech with dramatic meaning; the phrase *la parola scenica* ("dramatic speech") appears repeatedly. Eventually the work was completed, but war had broken out, and Paris was under siege. The costumes and sets were stuck there, and the premiere had to be postponed. *Rigoletto* was performed instead on the planned date. After the war ended, *Aida* was performed to great acclaim on December 24, 1871—but not with the singers Verdi preferred, so he always counted the Milan premiere of February 8, 1872, at which the title role was played by his favorite soprano, Teresa Stolz, and Amneris was sung by Maria Waldmann, a mezzo whom Verdi much admired, as its real debut.

**But what is *Aida* about?** Let's now return to the issue of colonialism. Starting in the 17th century, colonial conquest by the great European powers subdued many parts of Asia, Africa, and the Americas, often for centuries. Sometimes there was a war of subjugation, usually against totally unequal forces. Sometimes, as in North America, the colonizers pretended the land was unsettled, and that they were developing a previously unowned space. Typically the colonized people possessed little or no political voice, even though most



Teresa Stolz, Verdi's preferred soprano, in costume as Aida.

of them had been autonomous kingdoms before that. The usual purpose was profit. In many cases, the subjugated people worked the land, extracting produce or minerals that were then sent back to Europe. In other cases, the work was done by slaves imported from elsewhere. Always subjugated, sometimes the people of a colony were literally enslaved as well.

Seen in this framework, *Aida* would be the story of an enslaved person rounded up and sold as property to the Egyptians—standing, in the story, for a European power. This power has conquered Ethiopia and enslaved its inhabitants, not as prisoners of war, but as possessions.

This reading simply does not fit the libretto we have. First of all, the era is wrong. The libretto is based on the *Aethiopika* of Heliodorus of Emesa (200–300 CE), set in the Old Kingdom of Egypt, whose usual dates are 2700–2200 BCE—thus predating by some 3,500 years the era of colonial slavery. Nor is ancient Egypt a European power; it is an African kingdom.

This is not decisive, however, since Verdi could have introduced issues belonging to his own time into the remote ancient setting. But in examining the libretto, we are presented not with a great power oppressing a weak subjugated people, but rather with two roughly equal great kingdoms who have been making aggressive and retributive war against one another, back and forth, again and again. In the opera's very first sentence, Ramfis says: "Yes, reports say that the Ethiopians dare to try once again (*"ancora"*), and to menace the valley of the Nile and Thebes." The invaders are said to have burned crops and laid waste to the fields, and the Egyptians fear death and captivity for their own people. Later Amonasro tells Aida that the Egyptians have done the very same thing: "they have desecrated our houses, our temples, our altars, carried our maidens off in chains, slain mothers, the aged, the young." The only reason the Ethiopians have not done the same this time is that their invasion is not successful.

The motive for these reciprocal wars is primarily, on both sides, vengeance for

prior invasions and insults. In the tremendous choral scene that begins with the King's "*Su! del Nilo al sacro lido accorrete, Egiptii eroi*" ("Up! Run to the sacred banks of the Nile, Egyptian heroes")—far more stirring musically, in my view, than the static triumph scene—we see a people galvanized to retributive violence by the thought of both past and present wrongs to their own country. Even the gods are later described as "avengers" ("*vindice*") of the wrongs done to Egypt by the enemy. The people are in pain, and their cry is "*Guerra! Guerra! Guerra guerra guerra!*" ("War!") and death to the foreigner ("*e morte allo stranier*"). So it goes, on and on. If there is any moral high ground here, it belongs to the somewhat naive Egyptians, who, after their triumph, free all the Ethiopian prisoners, believing Amonasro's lie that their king has been slain. Only Amonasro (known only as Aida's father, not as that same king) is kept behind as a hostage, and, as we shortly see, he is free enough to organize his troops and plan a second campaign.

Nor is there any hint of anything like the slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries. The enslaved are prisoners of war. Aida must have been captured in a prior invasion, long enough ago that they have forgotten that she is the king's daughter; and the Ethiopian captives would no doubt have been selectively enslaved too, had Radamès's plea for mercy not led to their release. The two nations have a visceral hatred of one another: the Egyptians call the Ethiopians "*barbari*," and Amonasro calls Egyptians a "hated race ("*razza*"), deadly to us." So far as we can tell, this hatred is based on past ill treatment, not on physiognomy or color.

Retributive and more or less unending war, then, is Verdi's theme, not asymmetrical colonial domination. This war scenario is timeless—great powers have behaved this way for millennia, and they were behaving this way still in Verdi's time, as he saw, and keenly felt. Verdi's letters show deep grief and fear about the 1870 war and the future of Europe.

**Within this scenario** of perpetual back-and-forth war, two themes are of primary interest to Verdi. First is the pain inflicted on captive people by separation from their own country—a theme dear to Verdi's heart always, as in the famous chorus of the Jews in *Nabucco*, "*Va pensiero*" ("Go thoughts"), one of his most memorable creations, and in the similar lament, "*Patria oppressa*," sung by the Scottish refugees in *Macbeth*. Here in *Aida*, however, he gives the longing for a lost fatherland not a choral but a deeply personal form—Aida's hauntingly beautiful aria "*O patria mia*" (O my fatherland), as, in solitude, her voice in dialogue with a delicate oboe solo, she conjures in her mind the image of her beautiful lost land.

The second theme, which one might call *Aida's* master theme, since it structures the destinies of all the main characters, is that of the tragic conflict of loyalties that war so often causes, if one happens to care about a person or people on the other side. Greek tragedy, as Verdi would have known well, dwells obsessively on these conflicts of "right with right," in which there is no course of action that is not fraught with horror and betrayal. And *Aida* is, at its heart, a Greek tragedy. Aida and Radamès both face painful conflicts between love and national loyalty, and on both sides of these conflicts loom terrible wrongdoing. Amneris's conflict is less obvious, but by the final act her genuine love for Radamès pits her against the Priests, harsh arbiters of his fate, leading her into a kind of betrayal of her national cause, since Radamès really is a traitor, albeit an accidental one.

These conflicts pervade and shape the entire opera, and Verdi, writing with unparalleled daring, gives them unforgettable musical shape. Aida's long first-act aria "*Ritorna vincitor*" ("Return a victor") searingly depicts the pain of realizing, suddenly, that your heart and mind are torn in two and that you are forced to betray someone you love whatever you do or say. Aida hears the wish for Radamès's victory pass her lips—almost against her intentions—and then says, "the impious words came out of my mouth." Realizing that she is wishing for the defeat of her father and her brothers, she then asks the gods to take away her horrible words and bring about the destruction of her enemies of her people. And hearing herself say that, she recoils again: "Unhappy woman, what did I just say?"

Recalling the beauty of her love, she realizes that she cannot wish death upon the man she loves so deeply. As a sense of moral panic grips her tight, the music, more and more hysterical, expresses her terrible torment: "The sacred names 'father,' 'lover,' I cannot mention or recall. Confused, trembling, for the one, for the other, I would weep, I would pray. But my prayers turn to curses, weeping is a crime, and sighs are guilty..."

This is what war does to people who love. And this is the real theme of *Aida*. For the hideous predicaments created for decent people by this cycle of retributive wars there is but one remedy, and it is named by Amneris at the opera's end, as she addresses the god Isis: "Peace, I implore you, peace, peace, peace." Great nations have yet to find this solution. ■

*Martha C. Nussbaum is Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, appointed in the Law School and the Philosophy Department. Her The Tenderness of Silent Minds: Britten and his War Requiem will appear from Oxford next fall.*



# Director's note

## *Aida*, the chamber opera

by Francesca Zambello



**As an opera lover, *Aida*** is part of the fabric of my being. Like so many others, I first experienced it with huge forces, but as I have come to work on it many times as a director, I have realized it is a chamber piece with a huge triumphal scene parked in the middle of the powerful story about love and war. War is central to this piece, but it could be any two countries who relentlessly exert power over each other. Verdi set the opera in a distant time and place, but the heartbreak of war is never far away from us now. It is easy to dehumanize others with generic words like “foreigners,” and in setting the work in a more abstracted location, I am intending to make a strong connection between our current vocabulary and this ancient story.

As a director, I know you need some spectacle, but what is crucial to me in this opera is to dig into the intimate scenes where the conflict of the four main characters drive the drama forward: Aida, the foreign slave in captivity; her father, Amonasro, the king of a neighboring country and a prisoner of war; Amneris, daughter of the King of Egypt; and Radamès, Egyptian warrior. All are caught in a love triangle and a bitter war between two neighboring countries. They each suffer a battle of their duty versus their desires.

The most famous scene of the opera, the triumphal scene following a battle, is where we think of the hordes and the elephants, but what is more powerful is to focus on the four individual dramas. There are very few moments when the characters of *Aida* sing solo pieces, but when they do we feel a struggle inside each of their introspective moments. With so few

arias we are always experiencing the grand emotions of love and war through duets and trios. The story brilliantly sets the individuals and their passions against the context of a society out of their control. I call this the “duty versus desire” problem, something most people are always confronting. Here, though, the stakes are very high.

When we went to work on the designs we chose to collaborate with Marquis Lewis (aka RETNA). His work is inspired by calligraphy and hieroglyphics, using bold colors and shapes to evoke a mythic past with a contemporary edge. RETNA created a series of structural works, paintings, and images which set designer Micheal Yeagan turned into the theatrical spaces. With costume designer Anita Yavich we tried to compliment the power of RETNA’s work with a rich color palette and costumes which felt derived from another time and yet in other ways seemed very current. The movement of the dance uses the language of war and religious ritual.

As I write this in the middle of the rehearsal process, I am still convinced *Aida* is a chamber opera. The protagonists and their complex and heart-rending personal traumas, set against the background of war and religious absolutism, make for a passionate Verdi score and drama. This opera lives in a world of emotions, of individuals faced with love, duty, jealousy, and hatred, individuals caught up in emotions they cannot master and that lead ultimately to a tragic conclusion. The ending, akin to Wagner’s “Liebestod,” joins Aida and Radamès in an ethereal death—the almost unbearably high cost of individuals trapped in a theater of war. **L**



# Designer's note

An unexpected foray into the world of opera

by RETNA



**I was in Miami one afternoon** with a longtime art dealer of mine, Marsea Goldberg. She had just gotten off the phone with Francesca Zambello. Marsea was very excited and told me that the artistic director of the Washington National Opera had expressed interest in meeting with me about a possible collaboration for the opera *Aida*.

All of a sudden, the images of ancient Egypt coming to life onstage enveloped my mind. My past influences that I had seen in books, museums, and in my mind started to unravel visually. The honor and bewilderment that I felt knowing that my symbols had communicated the past and that I was now being asked to participate in *Aida* were just beyond me.

We ventured to Washington, D.C., to meet this ambassador of the arts, Francesca Zambello. I had no experience with opera, but I recalled moments in my childhood when I starred in a few plays and my excitement grew as I realized I was never far off my mark.

Having my artwork, much of which is based on the structure of Egyptian hieroglyphics, used for *Aida* turned my entire concept of my career full circle, marking a milestone in my career and artistic and spiritual development. **L**



Scott Suchman / Washington National Opera

# Artist profiles



## MICHELLE BRADLEY AIDA

**Previously at Lyric:** Floria Tosca/*Tosca* (2021/22).

Recent highlights for the American soprano include the title role in *Aida* and *Liù/Turandot* at the Metropolitan Opera, *Madame Lidoine/Dialogues des carmélites* at San Francisco Opera, title roles in *Tosca* and in *Aida* at San Diego Opera, and the soprano solo in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with the San Francisco Symphony. In 2019, she debuted with the Vienna State Opera as *Leonora/Il trovatore* (role debut), while also returning to the Metropolitan Opera for their New Year's Eve Gala as *Liù/Turandot* (Act Two). She also appeared in solo recitals at the Kennedy Center and in San Diego and Philadelphia, and performed Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with the New World Symphony and at Rice University. Future projects include a debut at the Houston Grand Opera. Other notable debuts have included *Oper Frankfurt (Leonora/La forza del destino, new production)*, the *Opéra national de Lorraine* and *Theater Erfurt* (both in *Aida*), and the *Deutsche Oper Berlin (Verdi Requiem, staged performance)*. *Michelle Bradley is sponsored by Robin Angly & Miles Smith.*



## JAMIE BARTON AMNERIS

**Previously at Lyric:** Six roles since 2011/12, most recently *Azucena/Il trovatore* (2018/19) and *Giovanna/Anna Bolena* (2014/15).

The American mezzo-soprano was named *BBC Music Magazine's* 2020 Personality of the Year, following her iconic performance at the Last Night of the Proms. Career highlights include leading roles at the Met, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Teatro Real Madrid, Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, San Francisco Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bayerische Staatsoper, Santa Fe Opera, and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, among other houses. At Lyric, she sang *Magdalene/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (2012/13) and *Dryade/Ariadne auf Naxos* (2011/12). Barton has appeared in concert with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Rotterdam Philharmonic, as well as the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Iceland, London, Prague, Czech Republic, Oulu, Pittsburgh, Toronto, and Valencia, Spain. She is the winner of the International Opera Awards Readers' Award, Beverly Sills Artist Award, Richard Tucker Award, and both Main and Song Prizes at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. Her solo albums are *All Who Wander*, which received the 2018 *BBC Music Magazine* Vocal Award, and *Unexpected Shadows*, nominated for a 2022 Grammy for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album.



## RUSSELL THOMAS RADAMÈS

**Previously at Lyric:** Six roles since 2016/17, most recently *Ernani/Ernani* (2022/23) and *Mario Cavaradossi/Tosca* (2021/22).

The celebrated American tenor recently made his role debut as *Parsifal* with Houston Grand Opera, sang his first *Don Carlos* (five-act version in French) with the Staatsoper Hamburg, debuted at the Opéra national de Paris as *Don Alvaro/La forza del destino*, sang his first *Calaf/Turandot* with the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, sang *Otello* at Los Angeles Opera, and sang *Canio/Pagliacci* in Lyric's 2020/21 award-winning film version. The 2019/20 season included *Radamès/Aida* (Houston Grand Opera), and his return to the title role/*Otello* (Washington National Opera). He also starred in *Il trovatore* (Bayerische Staatsoper), *Idomeneo* (Salzburg Festival, in a new Peter Sellars production), *Roberto Devereux* (San Francisco Opera), and *La clemenza di Tito* (Metropolitan Opera, LA Opera). Thomas has previously enjoyed success as Beethoven's *Florestan* (San Francisco); Bellini's *Pollione* (Lyric, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto, Valencia); Verdi's *Stiffelio* (Frankfurt); *Don Carlo* (Met, Washington, Berlin); *Gabriele Adorno* (London); and *Puccini's Rodolfo* (Met). He has been featured with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and Dallas Symphony Orchestra. *Russell Thomas is sponsored by the Guild Board of Directors.*



## REGINALD SMITH, JR. AMONASRO

**Previously at Lyric:** *Emile Griffith/Champion* (2023/24) and *Uncle Paul/Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

The Grammy- and Emmy-winning baritone made his Santa Fe Opera debut in summer 2023 as *Scarpia* in *Tosca*, and this season returns to Houston Grand Opera for the title role in *Falstaff*, and appears in concert with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and at Temple University. Other recent highlights include a return to Houston Grand Opera, debuts with Fort Worth Opera, Opera Hong Kong, and Dallas Opera, and appearances with various orchestras including the San Francisco Symphony and the New Jersey Symphony. He also took part in a *United in Song* concert with the American Pops Orchestra, televised nationally on PBS, and performed in recitals at Mercer University and the Richard Tucker Music Foundation's annual gala. Smith is a Grand Finals winner of the 2015 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and a graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio.



## ÖNAY KÖSE RAMFIS

### Lyric debut

The Turkish bass is a former member of Berlin's Komische Oper, where he performed a variety of roles including Prince Gremin/*Eugene Onegin* and Sarastro/*Die Zauberflöte*. Current projects include Oroveso/*Norma* with Strasbourg and the Boston Youth Symphony. Recent highlights include his return to the Canadian Opera Company as Banquo/*Macbeth*, and debuts in Dijon and Strasbourg as Jorg/*Stiffelio*, and with Opéra national de Lorraine and the Grand-Théâtre de Luxembourg as Sparafucile/*Rigoletto*. He also appeared with the Teatre Principal in Palma de Mallorca as Sarastro. Köse sang Timur/*Turandot*, Lodovico/*Otello*, and Colline/*La bohème* with the Canadian Opera Company, and debuted with Oper Köln as Timur and at the Teatro Municipal in Santiago, Chile as Oroveso. In concert, Köse sang Lodovico and the Herald/*Otello* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl, and performed in recital at Bard's Summerscape festival in various Russian pieces. He also sang the bass solo in Verdi's *Requiem* with the Cäcilienchor in Frankfurt. Prior to that, Köse made his debut with Oper Frankfurt as Sparafucile in a new production of *Rigoletto*.



## WM. CLAY THOMPSON KING

**Previously at Lyric:** Zuniga/*Carmen* and Second Courtier/*Le Comte Ory* (both 2022/23).

The American bass is a second-year Ryan Opera Center member and a two-time District winner of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. He debuted at Arizona Opera (Zuniga/*Carmen*) and the Metropolitan Opera (Octet Singer/Brett Dean's *Hamlet*). Thompson is a former participant in the Santa Fe Opera and Wolf Trap Opera young-artist programs. From 2017 to 2019, he was a Resident Artist at Minnesota Opera, performing in operas of Mozart, Verdi, Massenet, Puccini, Jake Heggie, Kevin Puts, and Joel Puckett (*The Fix*, a world premiere). Among other companies, Thompson has been featured at the Château de Versailles Spectacles (Suleyman Pasha/*The Ghosts of Versailles*), The Glimmerglass Festival (*The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Silent Night*, *West Side Story*, *Noye's Fludde*, *The Ghosts of Versailles*, and *La traviata*), and Fort Worth Opera (Zuniga/*Carmen* and Raymond Buck/David T. Little's *JFK*, in a world premiere). *Wm. Clay Thompson is sponsored by the J. Thomas Hurvis Endowment.*



## KATHRYN HENRY PRIESTESS

**Previously at Lyric:** Title role/*Jenůfa* (2023/24) and Passenger 1/*Proximity* (2022/23).

The soprano is a second-year Ryan Opera Center member. In the summer of 2021, she portrayed Lucy Harker/John Corigliano's *The Lord of Cries* (world premiere) at the Santa Fe Opera, a role she has since recorded that received a 2024 Grammy nomination for Best Opera Recording. A former

Baumgartner Studio Artist at Milwaukee's Florentine Opera, she appeared there as Barbarina/*The Marriage of Figaro*, Micaëla/*La tragédie de Carmen*, and the title role/Pauline Viardot's *Cendrillon*. As a Toulmin Foundation Scholar at the Juilliard School of Music, Henry portrayed Arminda/*La finta giardiniera*. A native of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the soprano has appeared at the Harris Theater's *Beyond the Aria* series as well as with the National Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, and Civic Orchestra of Chicago. She was invited to participate in Carnegie Hall's 2022 SongStudio with Renée Fleming and Ravinia's 2020 Steans Music Institute. Henry was a finalist in the 2015 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and the 2018 Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition, among others. *Kathryn Henry is sponsored by Lead Sponsor The C.G. Pinnell Family and cosponsors Patricia A. Kenney and Gregory J. O'Leary.*



## ALEJANDRO LUÉVANOS MESSENGER

**Previously at Lyric:** Four roles, most recently Passenger 6/*Proximity* and Lillas Pastia/*Carmen* (both 2022/23).

Born in Durango, Mexico, the second-year member of the Ryan Opera Center Ensemble made his debut last season as Riccardo/*Ernani*. His appearances in Mexico include Don José/*Carmen* (Toluca Philharmonic Orchestra); Borsa/*Rigoletto*, Count Almaviva/*The Barber of Seville*, and scenes from *Il trovatore* (Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México); and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and *Petite Messe Solennelle*, as well as an opera gala with Ramón Vargas (all at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes). Luévanos was previously a two-year member of the Opera Studio at the Bellas Artes, where he is scheduled to return to appear in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. A former participant in the International Summer Program in Sankt Goar, Germany, he is also a 2021 and 2022 winner of the Mexico District in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. *Alejandro Luévanos is sponsored by an Anonymous Lead Donor.*



## CHASE BUNTROCK DANCER

**Previously at Lyric:** *Jenůfa* (2023/24) and *Carmen* (2022/23).

After attending Chicago Academy for the Arts, Buntrock received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from The Juilliard School. He then joined Ballet BC under the direction of Emily Molnar in Vancouver, BC. He has performed works on international stages by Crystal Pite, Sharon Eyal, Merce Cunningham, Roy Assaf, and more. He has collaborated with the PARA.MAR Dance Theatre, Ballare Carmel located in Carmel-by-the-Sea, and the Bay Area's Post:Ballet. Buntrock recently assisted movement direction for the Wiederhoeft fashion show at NYFW, and debuted a work commissioned by Montréal based circus performer Madi Ward for her digital art gallery Amphibious Duality.



**SAM CROUCH  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Jenůfa* (2023/24) and *The Pearl Fishers* (2017/18).

Crouch received his BFA from Western Michigan University in 2016, where he performed in works by Lew Christensen, Antony Tudor, Gerald Arpino, and many other choreographers. Since moving to Chicago, he has danced with *The Queens Ball: A Bridgerton Experience*, Dance in the Parks, South Chicago Dance Theater, Hot Crowd, Aerial Dance Chicago, and Same Planet Performance Project. He has also worked with Zikr Dance Ensemble in Colorado as company dancer and rehearsal director, *The Queens Ball: A Bridgerton Experience* in Minnesota, the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Quixotic Fusion in Missouri, and Wellspring Cori Terry and Dancers in Michigan. He has recently done choreography work for Dance in the Parks, Momenta, and Hot Crowd.



**CARL PONCE CUBERO  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Fiddler on the Roof* (2022/23).

Currently based in New York City, Cubero (they/them/siya) received a BFA in Dance Performance with a minor in Anthropology from the University of California, Irvine. They performed domestically and internationally with Ailey II from 2018 to 2020. The Filipinx American dancer was also a guest artist with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Spring 2022. Cubero has danced works by Donald McKayle, Alvin Ailey, Aszure Barton, Lar Lubovitch, Andrea Miller, Rena Butler, and David Parsons.



**MARIAN FAUSTINO  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *The Pearl Fishers* (2017/18).

Faustino began her career in the Philippines, with the country's two premiere dance organizations, Ballet Manila and Ballet Philippines. While there, she danced principal roles in *Don Quixote* (Kitri), *La Bayadere* (Gamzatti), and *The Nutcracker* (Sugar Plum Fairy), among others. She was also Philippine representative to major ballet competitions in Moscow and Nagoya, where she earned semi-finalist and finalist certificates, respectively. In 2011, Faustino became a founding member of the contemporary ballet company, Wonderbound, in Denver, where she danced for five seasons. Other highlights include performances with San Francisco Opera (*Orfeo and Eurydice*, 2022), Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Dance Aspen, Owen Cox Dance Group, and Boulder Ballet.



**LESTER GONZALEZ  
DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Gonzalez graduated from the National Ballet School of Havana, Cuba. In 2011, he joined Ballet Laura Alonso as a company dancer, and later emigrated to the

United States. He has performed diverse roles from the classical and contemporary repertoire, including lead roles in Septime Webre's *The Great Gatsby* and *Fluctuating Hemlines*. With Ballet San Antonio, he performed as Romeo in Edwaard Liang's *Romeo and Juliet*. He has been featured in productions with the San Diego Opera, Arizona Opera, and Los Angeles Opera. A former company dancer with the Dayton Ballet, in 2023 he made his musical theater debut in the North American tour of *Anastasia*, and was recently one of 16 dancers to be selected for the National Choreographers Initiative program.



**VERNON GOODEN  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *The Daughter of the Regiment* (2023/24) and *Carmen* (2022/23).

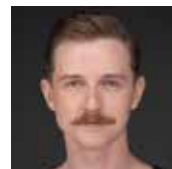
The Chicago-based choreographer, performer, and teacher is a graduate of the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and in 2001 was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. Gooden later trained at The Juilliard School, and has performed with the Paul Taylor 2 Dance Company, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Theatre, Joel Hall Dancers, Deeply Rooted Dance Theatre, Winifred Haun & Dancers, and Chicago Repertory Ballet. He has performed works by Paul Taylor, Katherine Dunham, Donald McKayle, Bill T. Jones, Milton Myers, Cleo Parker Robinson, Nai-Ni Chen, Adam Houghland, Jessica Lang, Christopher Huggins, Kevin Lega Jeff, Winifred Haun, and Wade Schaaf, among others.



**MARCUS HARDY  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** Four productions since 2021/22, most recently *Champion* and *The Daughter of the Regiment* (both 2023/24).

After receiving his BFA in Dance Performance from East Carolina University, Hardy joined the Inaside Chicago Dance company, where he spent five years. He has performed as a guest artist with SueMo Dance Company, Waterstreet Dance Company, and Chicago Dance Crash, and appeared at Lyric in *Fiddler on the Roof* (2022/23) and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).



**ANDREW HARPER  
DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *La traviata* (2018/19).

The dancer, choreographer, filmmaker, visual artist, and video creator is based in Atlanta. His choreographic work for stage and camera has appeared at the American Dance Festival's *Movies by Movers*, Lincoln Center, and Austin Opera. He has had work commissioned by Columbia Ballet Collaborative, Exit 12 Dance Company, and the UNC School of the Arts, and has been awarded fellowships at Jacob's Pillow, UNCSA Choreographic Institute, and Lincoln Center Education. He has performed with the Washington National Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Theatre du Capitole, Opera National de Bordeaux, the Merce Cunningham Trust, The Ashley Boudier Project, Ben Munisteri Dance Projects, and many others.





## JOHNATHAN HART DANCER

### Lyric debut

The Chicago native began his training at The Chicago High School for the Arts, where he studied multiple styles of dance, including ballet, hip hop, modern, and various contemporary works. Hart spent two years at the San Francisco Ballet School, then joined Ballet Met from 2020 to 2023. While there, he also toured with Lil' Kim in 2021. In 2022, Hart was named one of "25 to Watch" by *Dance Magazine*.



## ANNE O'DONNELL PASSERO DANCER

### Lyric debut

During a decade with the Martha Graham Dance Company as a soloist, O'Donnell Passero toured internationally performing Graham's principal roles as well as original works by Mats Ek, Hofesh Shechter, Bobbi Jene Smith, Pam Tanowitz, Lar Lubovitch, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and Sonya Tayeh, among others. O'Donnell Passero studied on full scholarship at The Ailey School and was invited into Ailey II under the direction of Sylvia Waters. She dances for Buglisi Dance Theatre and was accepted into the Jacob's Pillow Contemporary Program, Glimmerglass Festival, and Springboard Danse Montreal. She is currently on faculty at The Joffrey Academy.



## MALACHI SQUIRES DANCER

**Previously at Lyric:** *The Daughter of the Regiment* (2023/24) and *La clemenza di Tito* (2013/14).

Squires recently appeared in *Day of the Gypsy* by Gordon Pierce Schmidt at the Harris Theater, *Brigadoon* with the Goodman Theatre, and RPM Productions' *Le Journée Des Tziganes* and *An American Portrait*. He has danced extensively with Les Ballets Grandiva in numerous works with Fort Worth Dallas Ballet, and also with Paul Sanasardo, EZ Credit Dance Theater, and Lawrence Pech Dance Company. Guest engagements have included Madison Ballet, Ballet Quad Cities, Chicago Civic Ballet, Hilton Head Dance Theater, Rochester Dance Company, and Marin Dance Theater. He has choreographed for Mesopotamia Night Chicago, Dance in the Parks Chicago, Bitterroot Dance Academy, Dance Drama Collaborative, 12 Min. Max Dance Festival, and the Houston Artist of the Year Awards.



## ENRIQUE MAZZOLA CONDUCTOR

Lyric's Music Director—only the third in the company's history—is renowned as an expert interpreter and champion of *bel canto* opera and Verdi repertoire, and as a specialist in French repertoire. Lyric audiences first experienced the Italian conductor's artistry in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2016/17, and subsequently in Bellini's *I puritani* in 2017/18. During 2019/20, he led Verdi's *Luisa*

*Miller* to launch the company's *Early Verdi Series*. Mazzola's first opera as Lyric's music director, Sir David McVicar's new production of Verdi's *Macbeth*, opened the 2021/22 season, followed by Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* as well as *Verdi Voices* and *Rising Stars in Concert*. Mazzola is Principal Guest Conductor at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and, since 2022, the first ever Conductor-in-Residence at the Bregenz Festival. He served as Artistic and Music Director of the Orchestre National d'Île de France from 2012 to 2019. Symphonic guest work has included the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, Orchestre National de France, and Oslo Philharmonic. He has conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Paris's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the major houses of Florence, Berlin, Zurich, Moscow, and Tokyo, in addition to a historic Meyerbeer cycle for Deutsche Oper Berlin. Past major European festivals have included Glyndebourne (including DVD releases of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Poliuto*, and *Don Pasquale*), new productions in 2019 for Bregenz (*Rigoletto* and *Madama Butterfly*) and Salzburg (*Orphée aux Enfers*), Pesaro (Rossini Opera Festival), Venice, and Aix-en-Provence. Mazzola was born in Barcelona, Spain, into a musical family, and grew up in Milan, where he studied violin and piano, earning diplomas in composition and orchestral conducting at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan. *Enrique Mazzola is supported by the John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols Endowed Chair.*



## FRANCESCO MILIOTO CONDUCTOR (4/4 and 4/7)

Milioto currently serves as Music Director of OPERA San Antonio, The Florentine Opera, and Holy City Arts & Lyric Opera.

Recent highlights include acclaimed performances at The Atlanta Opera, Tulsa Opera, and Arizona Opera. He is currently in his eleventh season on the music staff at Lyric, where he has worked on numerous productions, including most recently *Jenůfa* and *Hansel and Gretel*. Recent highlights include successful productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Barber of Seville* at The Florentine Opera, and in San Antonio, *Hansel and Gretel* and Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. This winter he continued his work with Ballet San Antonio conducting several performances of *The Nutcracker* in collaboration with the Classical Music Institute Orchestra. He is currently a member of the music staff at the Santa Fe Opera, and has worked with both the Canadian Opera Company and The Dallas Opera. For more than a decade, Milioto worked at the Ravinia Festival as an assistant conductor, prompter, pianist, and vocal coach. He has served as Music Director to the New Millennium Orchestra, the Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra, the Highland Park Strings, Access Contemporary Music, and the Chicago Cultural Center Summer Opera, and as guest conductor in critically acclaimed productions with Chicago Opera Theater.



## FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO DIRECTOR

**Previously at Lyric:** Seven productions since 1999/00, most recently *West Side Story* (2022/23) and *Florença en el Amazonas* (2021/22).

The internationally recognized director of opera and theater has served as the Artistic Director of Washington National Opera at the Kennedy



Center since 2013. She is also the Artistic & General Director of the Glimmerglass Festival, Emerita. She served as the Artistic Advisor to the San Francisco Opera from 2005 to 2011 and as the Artistic Director of the Skylight Theatre from 1987 to 1992. Zambello's U.S. directing debut took place at Houston Grand Opera with a production of *Fidelio*. She debuted in Europe at Teatro la Fenice in Venice with *Beatrice di Tenda* and has since staged new productions at major theaters and opera houses in Europe, Asia, Australia, Russia, and the U.S. She has worked at more than 50 international opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Paris Opera, Bolshoi, Munich State Opera, Covent Garden, and Opera Australia. She has been named a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government, a Knight with the Order of the Star of Italy and received the Russian Federation's Arts Medal, all for her service to culture. Other honors include three Olivier Awards from the London Society of Theatres and two Evening Standard Awards, and she has twice received the French Grand Prix des Critiques for her work at the Paris Opera. She also received the Medallion Society Award from San Francisco Opera, recognizing 30 years' work for the company.



**RETNA**  
**ARTISTIC DESIGNER**  
*Lyric debut*

The Los Angeles-based artist made his operatic debut with this production of *Aida* at San Francisco Opera. His work has been exhibited at institutions and galleries in Los Angeles (including the façade of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's Grand Avenue location for their 2013 gala celebrating the exhibition *Art in the Streets*), Miami, London, New York (including the public exhibition space of the Houston-Bowery Wall), and Hong Kong. RETNA has created exclusive collaborations with brands such as VistaJet, Nike, Louis Vuitton, and Chanel.



**MICHAEL YEARGAN**  
**SET DESIGNER**

**Previously at Lyric:** 11 productions since 1991/92, most recently *Le comte Ory* (2022/23) and *Luisa Miller* (2019/20).

Yeargan has created sets (and sometimes costumes) for many major American companies, among them the Metropolitan Opera (12 productions to date) and the San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, Seattle, and Washington opera companies, as well as The Glimmerglass Festival, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera, Frankfurt Opera, and Opera Australia. At Lyric, he designed *Rigoletto* (2017/18) as well as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Nabucco* (both 2015/16). Since 1990/91 he has designed for London's Royal Opera. Yeargan recently designed the Metropolitan Opera's new *Porgy and Bess*, and his work appeared also at the Berlin State Opera (*Rigoletto*) and Tulsa Opera (*Madama Butterfly*). He has designed many Broadway productions, winning Tony Awards for *The Light in the Piazza* (2005) and *South Pacific* (2008). Yeargan has also designed numerous productions off-Broadway and for regional U.S. theaters. He is resident set designer at the Yale Repertory Theatre and Professor of Stage Design at the Yale School of Drama.



**ANITA YAVICH**  
**COSTUME DESIGNER**  
*Lyric debut*

Yavich was costume designer for Opera Australia's 2020 *Ring* cycle. Other opera credits include *Aida* at San Francisco Opera; *Cyrano de Bergerac* at La Scala, Metropolitan Opera, and Royal Opera House Covent Garden; *Les Troyens* at Metropolitan Opera; *Facing Goya* at Spoleto Festival and Singapore Festival; *La Hija de Rappaccini* with Gotham Chamber Opera; *The Rape of Lucretia* at Houston Grand Opera; *Ainadamar* at Tanglewood; *The Gambler* at Opera Zuid (Holland); Steve Reich's *Three Tales* international tour; *Salome*, *Fidelio*, *Die Walkure*, and *Das Rheingold* at Washington National Opera; *Arshak II* at San Francisco Opera; *Madame Butterfly* at Houston Grand Opera and Grand Théâtre de Genève; and *The Silver River* at Spoleto and Lincoln Center Festival. Her Broadway credits include *Fool for Love*, *Venus in Fur*, *Chinglish*, and *Anna in the Tropics*. She has also received Obie, Lucille Lortel, Drama Desk, Ovation, and Irene Sharaff Young Master Awards. *Costume Designers are supported by the Richard P. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer endowment.*



**MARK McCULLOUGH**  
**LIGHTING DESIGNER**

**Previously at Lyric:** Seven productions since 2008, most recently *West Side Story* (2022/23) and *Florencia en el Amazonas* (2021/22).

Among the designer's most notable achievements are productions at the Metropolitan Opera (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Vienna Staatsoper (*Macbeth*), Bolshoi Theatre (*La traviata*), Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*), La Scala (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), Madrid's Teatro Real (*Luisa Miller*), and London's Royal Opera (*The Queen of Spades*); the major companies of Washington, Boston, Miami, Seattle, Dallas, San Diego, and St. Louis; and Bard College's Fisher Center and the Glimmerglass Festival. At Lyric he provided lighting design for *West Side Story* (2022/23, 2018/19), *Porgy and Bess* (2014/15, 2008/09), and *Show Boat* (2011/12). Among McCullough's extensive theater credits internationally are the revival of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Broadway and U.K. tour); *Whistle Down the Wind* (Aldwych Theatre, London); *The White Devil* and *Don Carlos* (Royal Shakespeare Company); *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (Ronacher Theatre, Vienna); *Artus* (St. Gallen, Switzerland) and *Rebecca* (St. Gallen, Stuttgart's Palladium Theater); and numerous off-Broadway productions. *Lighting designers are supported by the Mary-Louise and James S. Aagaard endowment in honor of Duane Schuler.*



**PETER W. MITCHELL**  
**ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER**  
*Lyric debut*

Mitchell is a lighting designer for opera, theatre, dance, live events, and architecture. He designed *Scalia/Ginsburg*, *Trouble in Tahiti*, and the world premiere productions of *Odyssey*, *Robin Hood*, and *Wilde Tales* (all directed by Francesca Zambello) at the Glimmerglass Festival. As an Associate Lighting Designer, he has worked with Zambello and Lighting Designer Mark McCullough on *Aida* at Washington National Opera,

Seattle Opera, and Los Angeles Opera; *West Side Story* at Houston Grand Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival; and *Porgy & Bess* at Cincinnati Opera and Fort Worth Opera. Additionally, he works in architectural lighting design at Schuler Shook.



### MICHAEL BLACK CHORUS DIRECTOR

The Australian Chorus Director is in his 11th season at Lyric, having held this position at Opera Australia in Sydney from 2001 to 2013.

Black has served in this capacity for such distinguished organizations as the Edinburgh International Festival, Opera Holland Park (London), the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and, in Australia, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Choir, Motet Choir, the Cantillation chamber choir, and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Other activities include preparing *The Damnation of Faust* chorus and Haydn's *Creation* at the Grant Park Music Festival, where he has worked for five seasons. He has served as chorus director for close to 140 different operas on four continents, and his work has been recorded and/or aired on ABC, BBC, PBS, for many HD productions in movie theaters, and on television. *Michael Black is supported by the Howard A. Stotler Chorus Director Endowed Chair.*



### JESSICA LANG CHOREOGRAPHER

*Lyric debut*

Since 1999, the American director and choreographer has created more than 100 original works on companies worldwide including American Ballet Theatre, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Pacific Northwest Ballet, The Royal Ballet, and her eponymous company Jessica Lang Dance. Lang is Artist in Residence at Sarasota Ballet. She directed and choreographed Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* at the Glimmerglass Festival that was presented at Lincoln Center's White Light Festival in 2017, and was Artistic Director of Jessica Lang Dance from 2011-2019. The company was presented by major venues around the world including Lincoln Center, Los Angeles Music Center, The Kennedy Center, The Harris Theater, NY City Center, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and BAM Fisher. She is the recipient of the Martha Hill Mid-Career Award, the Arison Award, and a Bessie Award. She was a fellow of New York City Center, The Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU, and in 2019, named a Caroline Hearst Choreographer-in-Residence at Princeton University. A graduate of The Juilliard School, Lang is a former member of Twyla Tharp's company, THARP! *Jessica Lang's work at Lyric is funded by Elizabeth B. Yntema and Mark Ferguson in support of female creative leadership in the performing arts.*



### CLAUDIA McDONALD ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER

*Lyric debut*

McDonald was a founding member of Jessica Lang Dance, both as dancer and rehearsal director. She has assisted Lang at the Glimmerglass Festival and the National Ballet of Japan, and restaged her work at Seattle Opera, LA Opera, Point Park University, and Marymount Manhattan

College, among other venues. McDonald has performed with the Mark Morris Dance Group in *The Hard Nut*, *Romeo & Juliet: On Motifs of Shakespeare*, and *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, as well as in Mr. Morris' production of *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Metropolitan Opera. McDonald holds a B.F.A. in Dance from Fordham University/The Ailey School.



### AUGUST TYE BALLET MISTRESS

The American dancer, choreographer, and ballet mistress has worked on nearly 50 productions at Lyric since 1993/94. She

remounted the choreography of Lyric's *Iphigène en Tauride* at San Francisco Opera and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden. She has presented a 20-year retrospective of her work at Chicago's Vittum Theater and Ruth Page Dance Center, as well as in her hometown of Kalamazoo, Michigan. A graduate of Western Michigan University, Tye performed with the Kalamazoo Ballet, dancing leading roles in *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *The Nutcracker*. In addition to Lyric and Joel Hall Dancers, she has performed in Chicago with Salt Creek Ballet, Second City Ballet, and Chicago Folks Operetta. Tye is Artistic Director at the Hyde Park School of Dance, which she founded in 1993. Four years later she founded Tyego Dance Project, which has performed at Steppenwolf, the Athenaeum, and throughout America in a revival of Spike Jones's *Nutcracker*.



### SARAH HATTEN WIGMASTER & MAKEUP DESIGNER

Lyric's wigmaster and makeup designer has worked in a wide repertoire at Des Moines Metro Opera, Detroit Opera (formerly

Michigan Opera Theatre), Columbus Opera, Toledo Opera, the Cabrillo Music Festival, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She has also worked at the Glimmerglass Festival and the major opera companies of Los Angeles, Omaha, Cleveland, Sarasota, and Central City, as well as Wisconsin's American Players Theatre and, in Los Angeles, the Pantages Theatre and the Geffen Playhouse. *Sarah Hatten is supported by the Marlys A. Beider Wigmaster and Makeup Designer Endowed Chair.*



### KATRINA BACHUS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Bachus has worked at Lyric Opera of Chicago since the 2016/17 Season, serving in various roles for productions such as *Dead Man*

*Walking* (2019/20), *Luisa Miller* (2019/20), and *Siegfried* (2018/19), as well as numerous others. Since 2013, she has worked as both Associate and Assistant Director for many opera companies around the country including The Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Los Angeles Opera. Favorite projects include Houston Grand Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago's productions of Wagner's *The Ring Cycle* (directed by Carlus Padrissa and Sir David Pountney, respectively) and Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2021 production of *Florença en el Amazonas* (directed by Francesca Zambello). [L](#)

# Orchestra & Chorus

## MUSIC STAFF

Kedrick Armstrong  
Michael Banwarth  
William C. Billingham  
Tiffany Chang  
Patrick Furrer  
Susan Miller Hult  
Donald Lee III<sup>^^</sup>  
Keun-A Lee  
Noah Lindquist  
Francesco Milioto  
Jerad Mosbey  
Stefano Sarzani  
Eric Weimer  
Dean Whiteside<sup>^</sup>

## ORCHESTRA

### Violin I

Robert Hanford, *Concertmaster*,  
*Mrs. R. Robert Funderburg*  
*Endowed Chair*  
Emily Nebel,  
*Assistant Concertmaster*  
Alexander Belavsky  
Kathleen Brauer  
Laura Miller  
Liba Shacht  
Heather Wittles  
Bing Jing Yu

### Violin II

Yin Shen, *Principal*  
John Macfarlane, *Assistant*  
*Principal*  
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson  
Ann Palen  
Irene Radetzky  
John D. Robinson  
David Volfe

### Viola

Carol Cook, *Principal*  
Terri Van Valkinburgh,  
*Assistant Principal*  
Patrick Brennan  
Amy Hess  
Melissa Trier Kirk

### Cello

Calum Cook, *Principal*  
Ana Kim, *Assistant Principal*  
Mark Brandfonbrener  
William H. Cernota  
Walter Preucil

### String Bass

Ian Hallas\*, *Principal*  
Samuel Shuhan,  
*Acting Principal*  
Andrew L. W. Anderson,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*  
Gregory Sarchet  
Collins R. Trier

### Flute

Marie Tachouet, *Principal*  
Dionne Jackson, *Assistant*  
*Principal*  
Alyce Johnson

### Piccolo

Alyce Johnson

### Oboe

Paul Lueders, *Principal*  
Judith Zunamon Lewis,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*

### English Horn

Judith Zunamon Lewis

### Clarinet

Heesoo Kim, *Principal*  
Susan Warner\*,  
*Assistant Principal*  
Trevor O'Riordan\*\*,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*

### Bass Clarinet

Trevor O'Riordan\*\*

### Bassoon

Preman Tilson, *Principal*  
Lewis Kirk, *Assistant Principal*

### Contrabassoon

Lewis Kirk

### Horn

Jonathan Boen, *Principal*  
Fritz Foss, *Assistant Principal/*  
*Utility*  
Robert E. Johnson, *Third Horn*  
Samuel Hamzem  
Neil Kimel

### Trumpet

William Denton, *Principal*  
Rebecca Oliverio,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*

### Trombone

Jeremy Moeller, *Principal*  
Mark Fisher, *Assistant Principal*  
Mark Fry\*\*

### Bass Trombone

Mark Fry\*\*

### Tuba

Andrew Smith, *Principal*

### Timpani

Edward Harrison, *Principal*

### Percussion

Douglas Waddell,  
*Acting Principal*  
Eric Millstein,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*

### Harp

Lynn Williams, *Principal*

### Librarian

John Rosenkrans, *Principal*

### Stage Band Contractor

Christine Janicki

## EXTRA MUSICIANS

Eleanor Bartsch, *violin*  
Cristina Bučiu, *violin*  
Jennifer Cappelli, *violin*  
Sheila Hanford, *violin*  
Rika Seko, *violin*  
Laura Chen, *violin*  
Injoo Choi, *violin*  
Renée Gauthier, *violin*  
Janis Sakai, *violin*  
Karl Davies, *viola*  
Josef Fischer, *viola*  
Rebecca Swan, *viola*  
Bruno Vaz da Silva, *viola*  
Kerena Fox, *cello*  
Mara McClain, *cello*  
Isidora Nojkovic, *cello*  
Jeremy Attanaseo, *bass*  
Kit Polen, *bass*  
Adèle-Marie Buis, *oboe*  
Theresa Zick, *clarinet*  
Josh Jones, *percussion*

## STAGE BAND

Angela Bilger, *horn*  
Renée Vogen, *horn*  
Gail Williams, *horn*  
Matt Baker, *trumpet*  
Ross Beacraft, *trumpet*  
Mike Brozick, *trumpet*  
Sarah Carrillo, *trumpet*  
David Gauger, *trumpet*  
Dave Inmon, *trumpet*  
Diana Lopez, *trumpet*  
Bryant Millet, *trumpet*  
Jordan Olive, *trumpet*  
Reed Capshaw, *trombone*  
Sean Keenan, *trombone*  
David Becker, *bass trombone*  
Alex Ertl, *euphonium*  
Matthew Gaunt, *tuba*  
Rich Janicki, *percussion*  
Alison Attar, *harp*  
Lauran Hayes, *harp*

\* On leave, 2023/24 Season

\*\* Season Substitute

<sup>^</sup> Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency

<sup>^^</sup> Ryan Opera Center Conductor/Pianist

The Lyric Opera Orchestra string sections utilize revolving seating. Players behind the front desk change seats systematically and are listed alphabetically in the roster above.

**CHORUS DIRECTOR  
AND HEAD OF MUSIC**

Michael Black

*The Howard A. Stotler  
Endowed Chair***REGULAR CHORUS****Soprano**Sharon Garvey Cohen  
Cathleen Dunn  
Desirée Hassler  
Rachael Holzhausen  
Lauren Janeczek-Wysocki  
Kimberly McCord  
Heidi Spoor  
Stephani Springer  
Sherry Watkins**Mezzo-Soprano**Marianna Kulikova  
Yvette Smith  
Marie Sokolova  
Emma Sorenson  
Maia Surace  
Corinne Wallace-Crane  
Pamela Williams  
Michelle K. Wrighte**Tenor**Geoffrey Agpalo  
Timothy Bradley  
Hoss Brock  
William M. Combs  
John J. Concepcion  
Kenneth Donovan  
Jared V. Esguerra  
Joseph A. Fosselman  
Cullen Gandy  
Cameo T. Humes  
Tyler Samuel Lee  
Thomas L. Potter  
Joe Shadday**Bass**David DuBois  
Robert Morrissey  
Rafael W. Porto  
Craig Springer  
Vince Wallace  
Nicholas Ward  
Ronald Watkins  
Nikolas Wenzel  
Max Wier  
Jonathan Wilson**CORE SUPPLEMENTARY  
CHORUS****Soprano**Carla Janzen  
Joelle Lamarre  
Emily Mwila  
Tara Wheeler**Mezzo-Soprano**Christina G. Adams  
Cara Collins**Tenor**Joshua Benevento  
Klaus Georg**Bass**Christopher Filipowicz  
David Govertsen  
Nicolai Janitzky  
Dan Richardson**SUPPLEMENTARY  
CHORUS****Soprano**Nicole Besa  
Regina Ceragioli  
Anna Donnelly  
Cassandra Douglas  
Makeda D. Hampton  
Elise Hurwitz  
Kimberly Jones  
Katelyn Lee  
Rosalind Lee  
Amanda Payne  
Diana Stoic  
Kelsea Webb**Mezzo-Soprano**La'Shelle Allen  
Daveda Browne  
Leah Dexter  
Christina Ebeling  
Elizabeth Frey  
Rachel Ann Girty  
Morgan Middleton  
Emily Price  
Ola Rafalo  
Emlynn Shoemaker  
Marissa Simmons**Tenor**Damon Cole  
Kevin Courtemanche  
Matthew Daniel  
Bradyn Debysingh  
Ace Gangoso  
Alex Guerrero  
Darell Haynes  
Jianghai Ho  
Ernest C. Jackson Jr  
Taiwan Norris  
Nathan Oakes  
Steven Michael Patrick  
Brett Potts  
Christopher Sierra  
Brian Skoog  
Ryan Townsend Strand**Bass**Evan Bravos  
Michael Cavaliere  
Samuel Dewese  
Chris DiMarco  
Dimitri German  
Kirk Greiner  
David Guzmán  
Earl Hazell  
Stephen Hobe  
Brian Hupp  
Jawan Jenkins  
Ashton Jones  
Joseph Lodato  
Jeremy Osborne  
Douglas Peters  
William Powell III  
Ian R. Prichard  
Atticus Rego  
Rodney Sharp  
Aaron Wardell**CHILD  
SUPERNUMERARIES**Jeffrey Edwards+  
Vikram Konkimalla  
Tyler Rice+  
Drake Wunderlich**ADULT  
SUPERNUMERARIES**James Edward Dauphin  
Steffen Diem Garcia  
Ed Gericke  
Mark Heller  
Gabriel Kohlbeck+  
Michael Lieberman  
Henry Lombardo  
Henry "Hank" Mandziara  
Michael DePriest Reed  
William "Doc" Syverson  
Christopher Vaughn

+ Lyric debut



*With the generous support of individuals and organizations, Lyric is leading the advancement of opera in America—continually advancing artistic excellence, increasing relevance and reach for both traditional and new audiences, engaging our diverse communities through signature learning and exploration initiatives, and expanding our role as a cultural cornerstone in Chicago. You are our partners in this important shared enterprise—and we sincerely thank you.*





*Lyric*

**Thank you for  
your support**

# Bravissimi

We gratefully acknowledge the members of the Lyric family who have contributed a total of \$1 million+ throughout the history of the company. Lyric thrives due to the incredible generosity of these individuals, foundations, and corporations.

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The Facilities Fund of Lyric Opera of Chicago and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, John H. Bryan°, James W. Cozad°, H. Laurance Fuller°, and Patrick G. Ryan

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Nancy W. Knowles°

## **\$15,000,000+**

Patrick G. & Shirley Welsh Ryan

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and the Caerus Foundation  
Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust  
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Earl & Brenda Shapiro Foundation  
Lisbeth Stiffel  
Mr.° & Mrs. William C. Vance

## **\$2,500,000+**

Anonymous (3)  
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Aon  
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Randy L. & Melvin R.° Berlin  
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Carolyn S. Bucksbaum  
The Butler Family Foundation  
Challenge III Fund – Government  
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and Special Events  
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Sandra Moore  
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*To keep opera a must-see, must-hear experience, the art form needs outstanding artists who can convey through singing and acting the emotional range and engaging storytelling that are opera's hallmarks. Lyric, through The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, identifies exceptionally talented emerging artists from around the world and provides them with comprehensive training and performance opportunities. On the world's stages, the Center's impressive roster of alumni continually proves the value of training at Lyric.*



Back L-R: Ryan Capozzo, Ian Rucker, Lucy Baker, Ron Dukes, Travon D. Walker, Christopher Humbert, Jr., Donald Lee III, Michael Banwarth, Alejandro Luévanos  
Front L-R: Sophia Maekawa, Laureano Quant, Kathryn Henry, Lindsey Reynolds, Tess Naval, Wm. Clay Thompson, Luther H. Lewis III

*Lyric*

# Ryan Opera Center

## The 2023/24 Ryan Opera Center Ensemble

### **Sopranos**

Kathryn Henry  
Lindsey Reynolds

### **Mezzo-sopranos**

Lucy Baker  
Sophia Mækawa

### **Tenors**

Ryan Capozzo  
Alejandro Luévanos  
Travon D. Walker

### **Barítones**

Laureano Quant  
Ian Rucker

### **Bass-baritone**

Christopher Humbert, Jr.

### **Basses**

Ron Dukes  
Wm. Clay Thompson

### **Conductor/Pianist**

Donald Lee III

### **Pianist**

Michael Banwarth

### **Stage Director**

Luther H. Lewis III

### **Stage Manager**

Tess Naval

# Ryan Opera Center alumni around the world

## MEREDITH ARWADY (2005-2008)

**Appearances this season:** Kathy Hagen/*Champion*, Lyric Opera of Chicago; *The Nightingale and Other Fables*, Adelaide Festival (Australia).

“During my three years in the Ryan Opera Center (2005-2008), we were treated as professionals, yet still given the space to learn and grow—we were protected but also actively participated and made to feel vital to the success of the company. I performed nearly 100 times during my three Lyric seasons, in everything from bit parts sung off-stage to leading roles, from recitals to gala concerts. The entire Lyric family—administration, faculty, and our wonderful sponsors—contributed in providing us with incredible preparation for careers in this business, and I will always be proud of, and grateful for, my time in the Ryan Opera Center.”



Evan Zimmerman/The Glimmerglass Festival

Meredith Arwady (at left) as Old Lady, with Katrina Gulka as Cunegonde, in the 2023 Glimmerglass Festival production of *Candide*.

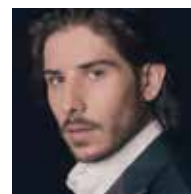
## THIS SEASON



**David Weigel (2018-2021)**  
*Carmen*  
Sarasota Opera



**Nicole Cabell (2002-2005)**  
*Don Giovanni*  
Royal Swedish Opera (Stockholm)



**Mario Rojas (2017-2020)**  
*La Rondine*  
Teatro Regio di Torino

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Susanna McNatt  
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Lise Davidsen  
Kathryn Henry  
Alexandra Loutsion  
Audra McDonald  
Amber Monroe  
Whitney Morrison  
Lisette Oropesa  
Lindsey Reynolds  
Alexandria Shiner  
Nina Stemme  
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Kara Shay Thomson  
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Katherine Beck  
Vasilisa Berzhanskaya  
Catherine Cook  
Marianne Cornetti  
Katherine DeYoung  
Kathleen Felty  
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Bille Bruley  
Ryan Capozzo  
Pavel Černoch

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Paul Groves  
Alejandro Luévanos  
Joshua Sanders  
Richard Trey Smagur  
Robert Stahley  
Jack Swanson  
Russell Thomas  
Travon D. Walker  
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Alessandro Corbelli  
Leroy Davis  
Thomas Hall  
Sankara Harouna  
Joshua Hopkins  
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Ian Rucker  
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Nicholas Newton  
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*Beyond the stage, and beyond the boundaries that often define opera companies, Lyric is igniting creativity across Chicago. Through innovative learning opportunities, creative exploration, and artistic creation and collaboration, Lyric, with your support, encourages students, educators, families, audiences, and Chicagoans from neighborhoods across the city to share their voices and embrace the power and relevance of opera as a catalyst for growth and change.*



Students find their groove during a visit from one of Lyric Unlimited's teaching artists.



*Lyric*

# Beyond the stage

# Cultivating voices

Lyric Unlimited’s High School Choir Residencies give students consistent vocal instruction and guidance throughout the school year—and provide choir teachers insights and community

by Casey Bowman

**The 2023/24 Season** marked the eighth year of Lyric’s High School Choir Residency, a program from Lyric Unlimited, the company’s Learning and Civic Engagement department, that enables students to learn more about opera and the wonders of the human voice through year-round visits from a Lyric teaching artist. Lessons can range from warmups, technique building activities, and sectional work to master classes, demonstrations, and preparations for future auditions. Not only are students regularly exposed to ongoing musical support, but they also get the chance to interact with experienced guest artists and even watch a dress rehearsal at Lyric. The residency encourages teachers to form long-lasting collaborative relationships with Lyric teaching artists,

in the hopes of inspiring and educating their students about choir and opera as art forms. It’s a true partnership between two sets of experts—Lyric’s visiting artists and the in-classroom educators.

“The relationships built between the high school choir teachers and Lyric’s teaching artists are based on the needs of the classroom, the choir director, and the school,” explains Elise LaBarge, Learning Programs Manager at Lyric. “We talk to the teachers and the teaching artists and try to make a match made in heaven.” Each teaching artist and teacher has a unique skill set and personality, and each choir program has different needs. In the 2023/24 Season, Lyric has partnered with five schools and twelve choirs, serving 360 students.



Elise LaBarge, Learning Programs Manager with Lyric Unlimited, helps facilitate a professional development workshop for teachers.



As part of *Opera Discovery Project*, students from McNair School of Excellence attended the dress rehearsal for *Daughter of the Regiment*.

Da'Sean Wilson, band director at Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts, and Taylor Ott, a Lyric teaching artist with extensive experience in musical education, are just one example of the dynamic working relationships created through the program. Wilson, who also recently took on the role of choir director, planned a curriculum for the school year focusing on exposure to different types of music. Together, he and Ott guide the students through the wide-ranging exploration of musical topics like foreign language, musical theater, and body percussion. "Da'Sean is building a culture that is constantly progressing," says Ott. "He's big on student choice—he's aware of what they do or don't want to take on." The coursework hits all the necessary pedagogical milestones, while also incorporating contemporary themes that keep the students interested and engaged. Students are encouraged to test their limits and empowered to be active contributors to their vocal education.

The choir director's growth, too, has been tangible. "I feel like I have a much better understanding of the human voice and singing because of this program," says Wilson. "Last year, when I first started taking over the choir program, it felt like a shot in the dark. With Taylor's guidance, I can now make better and more informed decisions in regards to picking out music, determining potential struggles, and molding the program that I want here at the school."

The Lyric teaching artist agrees with the sentiment. "It's good for the kids to hear us give notes—even if we're saying the same things, we're saying them differently," remarks Ott. The presence of multiple professionals with different experiences allows for the material to be catered to different learning styles.

The High School Choir Residency isn't just confined to the classroom. The program also includes *Opera Discovery Project*, which provides a chance for each class

to watch a dress rehearsal at Lyric. The choir teacher gets to determine which production the students will attend. Wilson chose to investigate the compelling narrative of Terence Blanchard's *Champion*. "I'm very excited that the group got to experience *Champion* and see people who look like them perform in an art form like opera," he elaborates. "I want my students to understand that opera, singing... things like that are for Black people, too." Since the performance, Wilson's students have been working to complete a song based on some of the elements they witnessed on stage.

**And the students aren't the only ones learning.** The High School Choir Residency program is accompanied by a professional development workshop for teachers and teaching artists. The workshop allows for teachers to share ideas and learn from one another. The 2023 Fall workshop was lengthened to a full day, after requests from participating teachers and artists. "The workshops really foster a sense of community between the choral teachers," Wilson says. "I like being able to connect with other teachers and build camaraderie."

"It's great to hear the perspectives of experienced choir teachers and teachers who have been in the program for a while," Ott notes. "Hearing the questions they have and seeing what they're working on is really cool—it helps me understand where I'm headed."

Wilson encourages students who may be interested in music, choir, or opera to pursue their curiosity. "This year, I've realized that there's always a spot for students as long as they're willing to try," says the choir director. Now, through the High School Choir Residency program, his students are willing to try a lot more.

"Everyone has something to say," Ott adds. "There is room for so many different types of voices, and that is what makes really good art." 

# People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



Kyle Flubocker

## Achilles Bezanis VIP Ticketing Associate

**Hometown:** I grew up in the Hinsdale area, in the western suburbs of Chicago.

### When did you start at Lyric?

In 2018, when I had just finished my master's in Voice and Literature at the Eastman School of Music. I was auditioning for different productions and jobs, and Lyric provided a lot of flexibility (which it still does) for part-time roles in the ticketing department.

**First opera:** I think it was *La traviata*, at the Met—of course a classic. I saw it on a school choir trip. I was a sophomore in high school, and was literally in the last row, but I still remember James Valenti. I only remember the tenor, but it was amazing.

**What was your path to working at Lyric?** I was interested in music from a very young age and visited Lyric a handful of times. I also studied at the Merit School of Music, in their voice and opera program, and I was part of the collaboration with Lyric and Renée Fleming. That gave me the opportunity to come see performances, so Lyric was always kind of the gold standard for me. When I moved back to Chicago after my master's, Lyric was an easy choice.

### What is the most fun about your role at Lyric?

My favorite part of the job is getting to interact with every department. I find myself walking down to the stage door, talking to company management, visiting the general director's office, popping down to the box office. Ticketing is very much a people-facing role where having and building relationships helps support our ultimate goal.

### What do you like about working in the arts?

The people: It's nice to be surrounded by a community of artists who may not be directly on the stage producing or creating the art, but who may have backgrounds in performing, and they bring that creativity to their behind-the-scenes jobs. I'm also a huge opera nerd and buff. That's what I went to school to study.

**A favorite moment at Lyric?** One performance sticks out. One of the first operas I saw here was *Rigoletto*, one of my favorite operas, with the tenor Giuseppe Filianoti as the Duke. If I remember correctly, he was a bit sick, but he still went on and sounded amazing. I'm a tenor, so I was really inspired by that. Albina Shagimuratova was the Gilda, and she sang the famous aria, "*Caro nome*," laying on a bed upside down and just crushed it. We create a lot of magic in this theater, and those moments make me proud to work here.

### Beyond opera, what are your other passions?

Running is a big one. I'm planning to run my first full marathon this year. And I play a good amount of basketball and golf (my new obsession). One of my biggest hobbies, coming from a big Greek family, is cooking. I'm kind of a pizza fanatic. I recently bought a pizza oven and make pizza dough. It's a weekly hobby that I'm trying to perfect.

**Favorite opera character?** This is maybe a little controversial, but the Duke in *Rigoletto*. As a young student, that was my favorite opera, because the music is very intense and passionate. I think it would be an interesting, fun role to sing because it's such a departure: He is this villain, but he's a tenor, which doesn't happen often.

**Favorite performer?** Right now, Benjamin Bernheim, a French tenor. I really like what he's been doing with his career and the sensitivity in his voice. Jonas Kaufmann is an all-time favorite for me, of course. Some Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center alums, like Christian Van Horn—I regularly listen to his podcast and draw inspiration from him.

**Favorite opera?** I don't know if I can choose one favorite opera. It kind of changes a lot—but *Romeo and Juliet*, the Gounod version, is one of them. I've been in it multiple times, and I just love the music and the story. A close second would probably be *Werther*. I saw a production of that at the Met, which was one of the best operas I've ever seen, cast and production and everything. I'm a sucker for the classic romantic ones. 