

TERENCE BLANCHARD  
MICHAEL CRISTOFER

*Lyric*

# CHAMPION



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Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

A scene from the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Champion*. | pp. 18-39

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**On the cover:** Justin Austin, photographed by Todd Rosenberg

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# Welcome to your Lyric

# From the Chair and the General Director

Welcome to the Lyric Opera of Chicago!

Our 2023/24 Season has been full of exciting performances, but this production is one of the most anticipated events of the year. Less than two years ago, we presented Terence Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*—his second opera—and now we are thrilled to bring you his first, *Champion*.

The planning for this production came when Blanchard was with us in Chicago, during the run of *Fire*, when the tremendous response from audiences clearly signaled a desire to experience more of his work. He calls *Champion* “an opera in jazz,” and indeed it is a masterful blending of musical genres. Just as important, the work tells a powerful story about race, sexuality, and self-discovery. This is a show for our times, with a compelling libretto by playwright Michael Cristofer, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and Tony awards.

On the podium is Lyric’s Music Director, Enrique Mazzola. It has been a season of firsts for our maestro. He opened the season with his first Wagner opera at Lyric, and he will finish the year with his first-ever full production of Verdi’s *Aida*—also the 100th opera of his lauded international career. In a final “first” of the 2023/24 Season, he will conduct Mozart’s *Requiem*, his first work by that composer for Lyric audiences. And *Champion* is Mazzola’s first contemporary work on our stage, an occasion that has him as excited as we are, as you can read about on page 12.

*Champion* is directed by James Robinson and features choreography by Camille A. Brown, the team who brought *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* to Lyric. The opera’s central character of Emile Griffith is portrayed by three singers: Reginald Smith, Jr. as Older Emile, Justin Austin as Younger Emile, and Naya Rosalie James as Little Emile. Also in the wonderful cast, playing Emile’s mother, is the luminous Whitney Morrison, an alumna of our Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, and Lyric’s first Artist-in-Residence through Lyric Unlimited, our Learning and Creative Engagement division.

We are grateful for the presence of these enormous talents in our opera house, and we are grateful to you, our audience, as well. Your continued generous support makes innovative and important productions like *Champion* possible.



*Sylvia Neil*

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# The Sound of Today

From commissioning five-minute pieces for solo clarinet to conducting *Champion*, a wide-ranging conversation with Music Director Enrique Mazzola



Jean-Baptiste Millot

**In considering the career** of Lyric's Music Director Enrique Mazzola, one might be forgiven for thinking first of bel canto—and, of course, of early Verdi and French repertoire. But Mazzola enjoys similar international recognition as a commissioner and supporter of new work for symphony halls, opera houses, and beyond. As he takes the podium for *Champion*—his first 21st-century piece at Lyric—we spoke with him about the importance of music that speaks to our contemporary world.

**I believe you commissioned a great deal of new music earlier in your career.**

That's true. Really it's in my DNA. I spent five years as Artistic and Music Director of the Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte in Montepulciano, a festival created in the '70s by the famous and extremely innovative German composer Hans Werner Henze. Being Henze's festival meant that it was really a showcase of what contemporary music could offer. So when I arrived in 1999, Henze asked me to continue in this vein.

**What sort of works came out of that time?**

We believed that commissions should be given to great composers, but should also speak to a wide range of ages and backgrounds. This made the commissions very varied and very interesting—from five-minute pieces for solo clarinet to full-scale operas—maybe 15-20 new pieces for every festival.

**And then came a very productive time in Paris.**

I think one of the reasons that I landed at the Orchestre national d'Île de France was my multifaceted background, because they wanted to start commissioning again. We commissioned large-scale works for orchestra. We had composers in residence—Dai Fujikura, Anna Clyne, and Alberto Colla. And above all I am proud of having created a composition competition with our orchestra.

**How was that competition structured?**

It was unique. Rather than playing the pieces and making someone a winner, the competition would select a small number of finalists so that they could work directly with the orchestra on their scores. The composers could check things: *This note in the viola—sorry we can't play that. This trumpet part is too high—maybe you could revise it.* Ultimately, the orchestra and the audience would vote on the winner. The whole process felt very alive and the experience was very formative for me. This is one of the reasons I say that contemporary, current music is part of my musical DNA and a key part of my larger aspirations for my work at Lyric.

**How do you place Terence Blanchard's music in this regard?**

I have to say that what is really unique in Terence is that he has found a modern, contemporary blend of styles.

And this makes his music very attractive to me. It's not only jazz, it's not only opera, but it's a modern mix.

**He calls *Champion* "an opera in jazz."**

I completely understand his point of view. It's not a jazz opera—it's really a new combination.

**Do you see more of this kind of work, and more commissions, in the future?**

We're still planning future seasons, so it's not quite the moment to share exact plans, but part of our mission is to create new pieces that represent the diversity and the community of our city. To be fair, this mission began before I arrived, but I have embraced it with a passion. It's a stream in which I feel absolutely comfortable, an area in which I can participate and actually help reinforce.

**It's interesting from a strategic point of view that many companies believe the newer works will bolster our audiences.**

We are still in the opera world, and we are still very connected with the past. A vast part of our community thinks that opera is something of the past. But that means forgetting that it was vital for every opera house in the 18th and 19th centuries to have new titles, new controversies, new engagements—curiosity for discovering new young composers. It's true that probably half of them have gone to the room of forgotten items. But probably a third of them are still in the repertoire. We cannot live only with the past. We cannot live only with old repertoire. I think that Lyric and other international companies are leading a vital new wave of commissions.

**We sometimes seem to overlook the great commissioning tradition in opera.**

There's a phrase that I often use—that every piece was once a contemporary piece. It is so compelling to consider. Every piece in some way challenged the times, challenged audiences, challenged the political winds of the place where it was performed. For an audience, experiencing a piece like *Champion* is exactly what the audience in 1853 was experiencing with *La traviata*—the surprise, the controversy, the fact that it was on the edge of what was politically acceptable at the time in Italy. All this has never changed. That's why we make new music today. It's a way to keep our souls alert to what is around us. **L**



Jean-Baptiste Milot



# Taking a Solo

To compose *Champion*, Terence Blanchard knew he'd have to rely on his own individual sensibilities

By Louise T. Guinther

**Terence Blanchard grew up** with the sound of opera in his ears—his father was an amateur baritone—but he gravitated toward jazz early on. “Obviously, [opera] became a part of my musical DNA without me even knowing it,” he says.

Blanchard’s storied jazz career has brought him seven Grammy awards and two Oscar nominations and has placed him at the pinnacle in that genre for decades. Now his operatic credentials are catching up. His surging, pulsing, dynamic score for *Champion* has won fans from St. Louis to San Francisco to New York. His second effort, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, which opened the Metropolitan Opera’s season in 2021 and arrived at Lyric in 2022, was hailed by *The New York Times* as “bold and affecting” and roundly praised by audiences. The composer of these two instant classics seems as surprised as anyone by their success.

“When Jim Robinson from Opera Theatre of Saint Louis contacted me and told me they were thinking about asking me to do an opera, man, I thought he was nuts,” he chuckles. “But they stepped me through the process. It was a beautiful experience.”

Blanchard has been overwhelmed by the response to his work. “I thought I might be run out of town,” he says, laughing. “The world of opera can be very intimidating. I was very prepared to have my excuse of, ‘Well, I’m just a jazz musician.’ I’m listening to all these classic operas, going, ‘How did he do that? That’s not me.’ My composition teacher, Roger Dickerson, kept saying, ‘Don’t think about writing opera—just tell a story.’ Once he told me that, I thought, ‘I’ve got to have a don’t-care attitude and just do what I feel is right. If it works, it works, and if it doesn’t, I still have my career.’”



Librettist Kasi Lemmons and composer Terence Blanchard take their bows at the Metropolitan Opera’s opening-night curtain call for *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, September 27, 2021.

Rose Callahan



Aubrey Allicock took the lead role in *Champion* with the Washington National Opera.

Scott Suchman - Washington National Opera

“When I became a jazz musician,” he adds, “I wanted to be Miles Davis. I’d try to play like him, and when I got a cold, I just loved that my voice was hoarse. But once I met Miles Davis, I realized that’s why his music sounds like it does. So what does that mean for me? That started me on the search to try to find out what it is that I like. You have to be comfortable with who you are as a musician.”

Blanchard’s operas share a common theme of central characters struggling to come to terms with their identity in a hostile world. “When you think about intolerance and bigotry, it’s a similar thing,” he says. “Everybody’s trying to just be loved and be respected. It’s always amazing to me that we can have people who consider themselves Christian but don’t do Christlike things. It’s not necessarily about being gay—it’s more about injustice and intolerance. That’s one of the reasons why I kept saying, ‘I can’t be a token; I have to be a turnkey.’ Because there are so many other stories, so many different cultures, so many different ethnic groups that have been underrepresented in the operatic world, and we have to open ourselves up to all of those possibilities.”

The Met premiere of *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* marked the first time an opera by a Black composer was performed at that storied house. (At Lyric, it was just the second.) “There were mixed emotions,” says Blanchard of his opening-night curtain call. “I posted some photos on my Instagram of my teacher Roger Dickerson, with his teacher, Howard Swanson, and one of his colleagues, Hale Smith—three great Black composers that nobody

knows. Prior to going to the Met, I heard *Highway One*, by William Grant Still, down in Saint Louis. Didn’t know it was William Grant Still and kept thinking, ‘Whose music is this? This is good!’ Next thing, I’m at the Met—I think I was doing an interview for CBS—and they brought out a ledger that showed all the operas by Black composers who had been refused or rejected, and William Grant Still’s name was in there *three times*. It blew me away. It’s an amazing thing to be the first, but the thing I always say is I was never the first who qualified. There were many composers who were much more qualified than me but just didn’t get the opportunity.”

Blanchard is thrilled to be back at Lyric Opera. “Oh man, I love that place!” he says. “I love the *sound* of the hall. I love everything about it. I just wish they would do my productions in summertime, you know?” he adds with a laugh. “It’s *cold*, man. I’m a Southern guy.”

Blanchard is a strong believer in the power of art to move souls. He also believes in the power of new work to create new audiences. “I think what’s been interesting about what’s happened to me is that I’ve been bringing new people in,” he says. “That’s been something exciting to see. I remember when we did *Fire* in Chicago, there were a lot of people who would come up to me and tell me it was the first time they had gone to Lyric to see an opera. Hopefully it opened up possibilities of seeing other productions.”

*Louise T. Guinther, longtime senior editor at Opera News magazine, is an arts writer based in New York.*

*Lyric*

Based on a true story, *Champion* unfolds in what composer Terence Blanchard calls “an opera in jazz.” Welterweight boxer Emile Griffith is tortured by the complex realities of his life: decades-long guilt from defeating a challenger in the ring, who died from Griffith’s blows; and desperately conflicted feelings regarding his own sexuality. James Robinson’s production arrives in Chicago with a remarkable cast. Joining Lyric favorites Reginald Smith, Jr., Whitney Morrison, and Paul Groves is Justin Austin, a brilliant new star who triumphed in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, with Music Director Enrique Mazzola leading the Lyric Opera Orchestra and Chorus.



Ken Howard - Opera Theatre of Saint Louis

A scene from *Champion* at Opera Theatre of St. Louis.

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## Lyric Premiere

Music by **Terence Blanchard** | Opera in two acts in English

Libretto by **Michael Cristofer**

January 27, 31m and February 3, 6, 9, 11m, 2024

### CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Emile Griffith  
Emelda Griffith  
Benny “Kid” Paret  
Howie Albert  
Luis Rodrigo Griffith  
Ring Announcer  
Young Emile Griffith  
Kathy Hagen  
Man in Bar  
Cousin Blanche  
Little Emile  
Lucia Paret  
Mano Alfaró  
Sadie Donastorg Griffith  
Benny Paret, Jr.

**Reginald Smith, Jr.**  
**Whitney Morrison**<sup>••</sup>  
**Leroy Davis**<sup>••</sup>  
**Paul Groves**  
**Martin Luther Clark**<sup>••</sup>  
**Larry Yando**<sup>+</sup>  
**Justin Austin**  
**Meredith Arwady**<sup>••</sup>  
**Ian Rucker**<sup>•</sup>  
**Krysty Swann**  
**Naya Rosalie James**<sup>+</sup>  
**Emily Mwila**  
**Cameo Humes**  
**Meroë Khalia AdeeB**  
**Leroy Davis**<sup>••</sup>

Dancers: **Uria Bennett**<sup>+</sup>, **Benjamin Freedman**<sup>+</sup>,  
**Dedrick D. Banks Gray**<sup>+</sup>, **Marcus Hardy**, **Lauryn Hayes**<sup>+</sup>, **Morgan Reed McDaniel**, **Olivier Medus**,  
**Martin Ortiz Tapia**, **Jude M. Perry-Evans**,  
**Martell Ruffin**<sup>+</sup>, **Dymon Samara**<sup>+</sup>, **Babou Sanneh**<sup>+</sup>,  
**Brian Selcik**<sup>+</sup>, **Whitney Wandland**

Actors: **Miles Borchard**, **Bryan Nicholas Carter**<sup>+</sup>,  
**Keith Dutton**, **Joshua L. Green**<sup>+</sup>, **Royce Jade**, **Henry Lunn**, **Julie Matolo**<sup>+</sup>, **Joshua Moaney**, **Darren Patin**<sup>+</sup>,  
**Bob Romay**, **Michael Saubert, Jr.**, **Philip Soulides**,  
**Niki Southern**, **Symonne Still**<sup>+</sup>, **Claudia Urbano**,  
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**Michael Banwarth**<sup>•</sup>  
**William C. Billingham**  
**Donald Lee III**<sup>•</sup>  
**Noah Lindquist**  
**Imogen Smith**  
**David Ortiz, Jr.**  
**Chuck Coyl**  
**Jyreika Guest**  
**Paul Cremo**

First performed at Loretto-Hilton Center for the Performing Arts, St. Louis, on June 15, 2013.

First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on January 27, 2024.

<sup>+</sup> Lyric debut

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# Synopsis

## ACT I

In his apartment in Hempstead, Long Island, in the early 2000s, Emile Griffith is struggling to get dressed. Suffering from dementia, he is confused and haunted by his past. Luis, his adopted son and caretaker, reminds him to be ready for an important meeting with Benny Paret, Jr.

In the late 1950s, Emile is a young man in St. Thomas. He yearns to find his mother, Emelda, and make it big in America as a singer, a baseball player, and a designer of hats. Emile moves to New York. When he finds his mother, she is confused, not sure which of her seven abandoned children he is, but overjoyed. Hoping to find Emile a job, she takes him to meet Howie Albert, a hat manufacturer who gave up on his own dreams of being a boxing coach—dreams that are rekindled when Howie notices Emile’s impressively muscular build.

Howie determines that Emile is meant to be a boxer, not a hat maker, and starts training Emile for the ring. Giving up his other dreams, Emile quickly develops into a talented boxer. Lonely and confused by his success, Emile finds his way to a gay bar in Manhattan. Kathy Hagen, the owner, welcomes Emile to a world that frightens and attracts him. Emile confides in Kathy and an attentive young man, revealing some demons from his past. As a boy, left in the care of his cruel fundamentalist cousin Blanche, he was beaten and forced to hold cinder blocks above his head as punishment for having the devil inside him, a punishment that made him into a man of great physical strength.

In 1962, Emile encounters Benny “Kid” Paret at a weigh-in for their upcoming fight. Paret taunts the charismatic Emile, calling him “maricón,” a disparaging Spanish word for a homosexual. Alone with Howie, Emile tries to talk to him frankly about why this word hurt him so deeply, but for Howie this is something that no one in the fight business wants to hear about. Howie leaves him, and Emile wonders what it means to be a man. Emile and Paret prepare for the big fight. During the bout, Paret continues to taunt Emile, who ultimately corners his opponent and delivers 17 blows in less than seven seconds, knocking Paret into a coma.

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*Champion* is a co-production of Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera. Commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. Originally commissioned by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, co-commissioned by Jazz St. Louis.

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## APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

This production will be performed with one intermission.

Act I	1 hour 10 minutes
Intermission	25 minutes
Act II	1 hour 10 minutes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 hours 45 minutes</b>

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# Synopsis

continued

## **ACT II**

Back in Emile's bedroom in the present, Emile is haunted by the ghost of Benny Paret, who still taunts his old opponent.

In the late 1960s, Emile is enjoying a winning streak all over the world. Titles, trophies, and money roll in, but he remains disturbed by the death of Paret. He tries living it up, and, denying his own identity, he takes a young bride, Sadie, although everyone including his mother, who remembers her own childhood back in the islands, warns him against it.

By the early 1970s, after the wedding, Emile's luck seems to have changed. He's now on a long losing streak and starting to display signs of "boxer's brain," or trauma-related dementia. Howie realizes that Emile's days as a fighter are numbered and tries to caution him, as do his mother and his wife, but Emile rejects them all. Instead, he looks for comfort back at Kathy's bar, where he makes a connection with a sympathetic young man. Outside in the street, a group of thugs taunts him. They beat him violently, exacerbating his brain injuries.

Back in the present, Emile relives the nightmare of the attack. Luis tries to comfort him. In a New York City park, Emile asks for forgiveness from Benny, Jr. Luis tells Benny that since that terrible evening, Emile has struggled to find peace with what he's done and who he truly is. Back at home, the painful memories subside, and Emile finds a moment of peace, having finally forgiven himself. He can now take life one day at a time.

*Synopsis reprinted courtesy of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.* 



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Todd Rosenberg

Justin Austin plays the lead role in *Champion at Lyric*.



# Making a Man

In its multilayered portrait of Emile Griffith, *Champion* illuminates complex aspects of Black fame and identity

By Naomi André

**Born in the U.S. Virgin Islands**, boxer Emile Griffith (1938-2013) made it to the “big time” in a generation when Black people garnered the most praise in the mainstream press as either athletes or entertainers. He gained popularity in the thick of the Jim Crow era—a time of inequitable application of the G.I. Bill for Black soldiers returning after WWII, increased red lining against Black home buyers, and Sundown Towns, among innumerable other indignities. With *Champion*, composer Terence Blanchard and librettist Michael Cristofer have devised a work that weaves together the contrasting realities of the hope and disappointment that surrounded Griffith’s career. The work presents a portrait of his public persona juxtaposed with his inner private life. In *Champion* we see how Blackness, boxing, and manhood can unexpectedly, and eloquently, be expressed in the expansive genre of opera.

Blanchard and Cristofer showcase the arena of the boxing ring as a microcosm for the brutality and sensitivity, anticipation and hope in Griffith’s story. The narrative centerpiece is the time before and leading up to his third and final fight with Afro-Cuban Benny “Kid” Paret (1937-1962), which led to harrowing results as Paret was knocked out, went into a coma, and then died 10 days later. Yet the action also encompasses years before, and decades after, the fight. In an innovative operatic technique achieved through layered staging and musical textures, we get a multi-tiered presentation of this story all at once. Through a trio of singers, we see Griffith at three stages of his life: Little Emile (as a young boy), Young Emile (in his major years as a boxer), and an older Emile (nearing the end of his life). As the three Emiles overlap with each other, we take in a story that feels at once tragically timeless and intimately present.

Near the midpoint of the opera, just before the depiction of the fight that would shade his career, Emile reflects on the slur that Paret has just whispered to him regarding his sexuality. Alone on stage, Emile ruminates as he queries “What Makes a Man a Man?” In an undulating line that starts high, dips down, and then keeps reaching up to recover, Emile hunts for the answer. He looks inside and outside of who he is, “the skin he wears,” “the color of his voice,” “the walk he walks,” and the way he talks. Through such soul searching we share this private pivotal moment and see Emile both as a man, and a boxer—a person who encompasses aching vulnerability and a competitor who participates in an aggressive dangerous sport.

In the next scene, the finale of Act 1, we see the big fight. Highly anticipated when it took place in Madison Square Garden on March 24, 1962, it was meant to be the decisive match between Griffith and Paret. Each had previously beaten the other, and a central question was whether Griffith could win back the welterweight title he had taken from Paret in their first bout, a belt that Paret had then won back in their second encounter.

The whole cast is at the fight—Paret, his opponent; Howie Albert, his trainer; Emelda Griffith, his mother; the Ring Announcer; and the chorus of Reporters and Photographers. Additionally, we have Kathy Hagen, the bar owner, and several Drag Queens who patronize Hagen’s gay bar. Also at the fight, as though coming from inside the fighter’s head as a projection of his future self, we have older Emile punctuating the scene, guiding the audience through the bifurcated vision of what is happening. Both in the present for boxer Emile, and in the past of older Emile’s memory, this seminal bout becomes a twofold dramaturgical moment in time



NY Daily News via Getty Images

Emile Griffith and Benny Paret battle during the decisive and tragic 1962 bout.

for the opera house audience. As we enter the world of the opera, we watch the present collide with the past in a charged sensibility. We return to a moment more than 60 years prior that haunted Emile Griffith to the end of his life, and became indelible in the larger history of boxing.

In the bookends of the opera—the opening and closing scenes—we see older Emile, the boxing champion who at various points in his career held world welterweight and middleweight titles. He is suffering from pugilistic dementia and the effects of a severe beating outside a gay nightclub in 1992. As a metaphor for the double vision of our perceptions of heroes and champions, older Emile sings about a single shoe, left without its match, wondering where it belongs.

In its unlikely pairing of the arts and sport, *Champion* gives us a glimpse of the stories of Griffith and Paret and their professional and familial communities. We begin to feel some of the fame, horror, accomplishment, and

violence that surrounded them both inside the ring and out. Their names are part of the history of Black honor and celebrity. Even today, most people can more easily list five Black athletes and entertainers before naming even one or two Black Nobel laureates, CEOs, professors, doctors, members of congress, or judges. We need all of these names in the pantheon. In showing the contours of what made some of these historic figures both human and real—and literally multi-dimensional—*Champion* provides its own kind of revelatory reckoning. **L**

*Naomi André is the David G. Frey Distinguished Professor in the Department of Music at UNC-Chapel Hill and Professor Emerita at the University of Michigan. Her publications include the books Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement and Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera.*



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PHOTO: SCOTT SUCHMAN/WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

# Artist profiles



## REGINALD SMITH, JR. EMILE GRIFFITH

**Previously at Lyric:** 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 in concert with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and at Temple University. Later this season, he will sing Amonasro in *Aida* at Lyric. Other recent highlights include a return to the Houston Grand Opera, debuts with Fort Worth Opera, Opera Hong Kong, and the 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.



## JUSTIN AUSTIN YOUNG EMILE GRIFFITH

**Previously at Lyric:** Charles/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

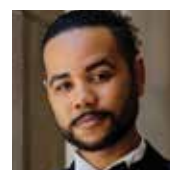
The baritone, a 2023 Marian Anderson Vocal Award recipient, returns to the Metropolitan Opera this season as Motorcycle Cop in the company's premiere of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*. He will present a solo recital at the Park Avenue Armory with pianist Howard Watkins, with whom he also gives recitals at Carnegie Hall's Weill Hall, the Longy School of Music with Celebrity Series of Boston, University of Delaware with Delaware's Master Players Concert Series, and Atlanta's Spivey Hall. In 2021/22 he starred as George Armstrong in Lynn Nottage's and Ricky Ian Gordon's *Intimate Apparel* at Lincoln Center, for which he was nominated for a Drama Desk Award, and joined Des Moines Metro Opera as Thomas McKeller in Damien Geter and Lila Palmer's *American Apollo*. In the 2020/21 season, he starred as Captain Macheath in a film adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* produced by City Lyric Opera, and debuted at the Bard SummerScape Festival as Mordred in Chausson's *Le roi Arthus*. A former resident artist at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (2017/18 season), Austin has performed at the Glimmerglass Festival and with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Bayerische Staatsoper. The baritone has an expansive repertoire, and has collaborated with groups and artists such as Aretha Franklin, The Boys Choir of Harlem, Mary J. Blige, Elton John, Lauryn Hill, The Roots, 30 Seconds to Mars, John Cale, and jazz legends Reggie Workman, Hugh Masekela, and Wynton Marsalis.



## WHITNEY MORRISON EMELDA GRIFFITH

**Previously at Lyric:** Six roles since 2017/18, most recently Yasmine Miller/*Proximity* (2022/23) and Billie/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

The soprano, a Chicago native and a Ryan Opera Center alumna, received a 2023 Grammy nomination for Boston Modern Orchestra Project's recording of *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, in which she sang the role of Louise/Betty. In 2022, she made her debut with Detroit Opera in the same role and reprised it with Opera Omaha and Odyssey Opera, before going on to record it with BMOP. Recent highlights include performances with Chicago Opera Theater as Lady Billows in *Albert Herring*, and a debut at the Bavarian State Opera in the world premiere of Marina Abramovic's *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* as Floria Tosca. Her appearances at Lyric include *Sister Rose/Dead Man Walking* (2019/20) and *First Cretan Woman/Idomeneo* (2018/19). Other recent highlights include the Harris Theater's *Beyond the Aria* series; *Miss Pinkerton/The Old Maid and the Thief* at the Grant Park Music Festival; an appearance at the Rochester Institute of Technology's celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy; a debut at Rochester's Kodak Hall with the Eastman Wind Ensemble; and *Donna Anna/Don Giovanni* with Chicago's Floating Opera Company. A graduate of Alabama's Oakwood University, Morrison completed her training at the Eastman School of Music (master's degree), Germany's Neil Semer Vocal Institute, and Italy's Georg Solti Accademia di Bel Canto.



## MARTIN LUTHER CLARK LUIS RODRIGO GRIFFITH

**Previously at Lyric:** CJ/*The Factotum* (2022/23), Adult William and Chicken Plucker/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

This season, the Ryan Opera Center alum will make debuts with Houston Grand Opera and Portland Opera, alongside performances of the title role of *Candide* with Madison Opera and Handel's *Messiah* with the Florida Orchestra and the South Dakota Symphony. Among Clark's notable roles are the *Orderly/The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Dallas Opera), and *Vaudemont/Iolanta* and *King Charles/The Maid of Orleans* (both with Russian Opera Workshop). He was also heard as a Central City Opera Apprentice Artist and as tenor soloist at the Library of Congress, where he sang both published and unpublished works of Leonard Bernstein for the centennial celebration of the composer's birth. Other appearances include Lyric Opera of Kansas City (Resident Artist), University of North Texas Opera (numerous roles and galas), Charlottesville Opera, Opera in Concert, Opera North, and Wolf Trap Opera. Originally from Marshall, Texas,



Clark earned a master's degree in opera from the Curtis Institute of Music, where he performed as First Sailor/*Dido and Aeneas*, Tobias Ragg/*Sweeney Todd*, and Don Ottavio/*Don Giovanni*. Clark holds a Bachelors of Music degree and Graduate Artist Certificate from the University of North Texas.



**PAUL GROVES  
HOWIE ALBERT**

**Previously at Lyric:** Five roles since 1997, most recently Parsifal/*Parsifal* (2013/14) and Faust/*La damnation de Faust* (2009/10).

Recent highlights for the American tenor include Dame Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* (Houston Grand Opera) and the role of Howie Albert in Terence Blanchard's *Champion* (Metropolitan Opera), where he also recently sang Chekalinsky in *The Queen of Spades* and Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, among numerous other roles over nearly 30 seasons. Concert highlights include *La damnation de Faust* with the Shanghai and Beijing symphonies, Stravinsky's *Perséphone* with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Bruckner's *Te Deum* with Krzysztof Urbanski and the Indianapolis Symphony, and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with Donald Runnicles and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Additional highlights of recent seasons include a rare role debut singing Alessandro Cesare in Cavalli's *Eliogabalo* with the Opéra national de Paris, appearances as Admète in Gluck's *Alceste* with Madrid's Teatro Real, Nicias in Massenet's *Thais* with LA Opera, and Pylade in *Iphigénie en Aulide* with Theater an der Wien. He has also performed with Dallas Opera, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Opéra de Lyon, Rochester Philharmonic, the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, and Prague Philharmonia, among numerous others.



**LEROY DAVIS  
BENNY "KID" PARET/  
BENNY PARET, JR.**

**Previously at Lyric:** Jailer/*Tosca* and Pastor, Kaboom and Chester/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (all 2021/22).

In 2023, the Ryan Opera Center alumnus returned to Florentine Opera for his first Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, sang the Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance* with Nashville Opera, starred in the Canadian premiere of Laura Kaminsky's *February* with Opera on the Avalon. This season he will make his debut at the Spoleto Festival in the world premiere of *Ruinous Gods* as Blue Dove and Doctor Undertow. Recent highlights include a role and company debut with Opera on the Avalon as Charlie in *Three Decembers*, Marcello in *La bohème* with Kentucky Opera, and Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly* with Atlanta Opera. Davis made his Lincoln Center debut in the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon and Bartlett Sher's *Intimate Apparel*, and sang in a concert with New York Festival of Song and in the world premiere of *Completing the Picture* by Michael Ching with Opera Company of Middlebury. He has appeared as Leporello in *Don Giovanni* with Boston Opera Collaborative, Forrester in *Cunning Little Vixen*, and Joe St. George in *Dolores Claiborne*. As a Gerdine Young Artist at Opera Theatre

of Saint Louis, he appeared in *Rigoletto* and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. He debuted at the Phoenicia Festival as Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore* and at Odyssey Opera as Ernesto Malcom in *Maria, Regina d'Inghilterra*. In 2018, Leroy was a resident studio artist with Florentine Opera where he sang Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas*, Adonis in *Venus and Adonis*, and Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.



**MEREDITH ARWADY  
KATHY HAGEN**

**Previously at Lyric:** Mistress Quickly/*Falstaff* and Pasqualita/*Doctor Atomic* (both 2007/08).

Arwady began this season with a debut at the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra as Lucia in concert performances of *Cavalleria rusticana*. Other season highlights for the Ryan Opera Center alumna include her debut with the Adelaide Festival in Australia as Death/*The Nightingale and Other Fables* and a return to Madison Opera as Old Lady/*Candide*. Last season, she returned to the Metropolitan Opera for Kathy Hagen/*Champion*, a role she created at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and has subsequently performed with Detroit Opera and Washington National Opera. She recently debuted with the Glimmerglass Festival as Old Lady/*Candide* and Gertrude/*Roméo et Juliette*. Other recent highlights include First Maid/*Elektra* with Washington National Opera, Ruth/*The Pirates of Penzance* with Utah Opera, Martha/*Sky on Swings* with Opera Saratoga, Third Lady/*The Magic Flute* with Washington National Opera, and Filipievna/*Eugene Onegin* with Seattle Opera, Atlanta Opera, and Dallas Opera. She appeared in Menotti's *The Medium* in a new production at Oper Frankfurt in 2019, and has recently been seen at the Santa Fe Opera as Amelfa in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Le coq d'or* and Pasqualita in a new Peter Sellars production of *Doctor Atomic*. She is a 2012 Grammy award winner for Best Opera Recording (*Doctor Atomic*).



**MEROE KHALIA ADEEB  
SADIE DONASTORG GRIFFITH**

**Previously at Lyric:** Chief's Daughter #1 and Very Loud Girl/*Proximity* (2022/23).

Recent highlights include *Violetta/La traviata* and *Mimi/La bohème* at Tri-Cities Opera, *Clara/Porgy and Bess* under the direction of Francesca Zambello at the Glimmerglass Festival, and *Governess/Turn of the Screw* at Union Avenue Opera. Adeb has sung the title role in Puccini's *Suor Angelica* at Tri-Cities Opera, Joy in the world premiere of *Everything for Dawn* with Experiments in Opera, Annie in the world premiere of *The Flood* at Opera Columbus, Frasquita in *Carmen* with Annapolis Opera, Clara in *Porgy and Bess* with both Fort Worth Opera and Teatro Regio di Torino, and Galatea in *Acis and Galatea* in a virtual co-production with Annapolis Opera and Tri-Cities Opera. Other notable performances include Nannetta in *Falstaff*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and Bard 2 in Ben Moore's opera *Odyssey*. Adeb won third place in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, and second place in the Deborah Voigt/Vero Beach Opera Foundation Inaugural International Vocal Competition. She studied at Louisiana State University and received a master's degree at SUNY Binghamton.



**KRYSTY SWANN**  
**COUSIN BLANCHE**

**Previously at Lyric:** Third Maid/*Elektra* (2018/19) and Grimmerde/*Die Walküre* (2017/18).

The Philadelphia-born, New York-based mezzo-soprano opened the 2023/24 season as Jade Boucher in *Dead Man Walking* at the Metropolitan Opera, which was followed by the Mother in New Orleans Opera’s production of Jeanine Tesori’s and Tazewell Thompson’s *Blue*, a role she has performed also at Detroit Opera. Other engagements this season include Schönberg’s *Gurre-Lieder* with the American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, and *Sanctuary Road* with Princeton Pro Musica. Last season, Swann returned to the Metropolitan Opera as Cousin Evelyn in *Champion*, and sang Rossweisse in Detroit Opera’s *The Valkyries, Elijah* with Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park, *The Ordering of Moses* for Oberlin Conservatory, and Handel’s *Messiah* for Pacific Symphony. Other recent highlights include a debut at the Metropolitan Opera as the Third Maid in *Elektra* and an appearance in the revival of Philip Glass’s *Akhmaten*. For Lincoln Center Theater, she created the role of Mayme in the world premiere of *Intimate Apparel*, directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Lynn Nottage and Ricky Ian Gordon. With the Metropolitan Opera, she has appeared in productions of *Die Walküre, Marnie, Il tabarro*, and *Francesca da Rimini*.



**NAYA ROSALIE JAMES**  
**LITTLE EMILE**

**Lyric debut**

Recent highlights for James include Sophie in *School of Rock* at The Paramount Theatre in Aurora, where she also understudied the role of Tomika, and the lead role of Matilda in *Matilda the Musical* at Magical Starlight Theatre. She has twice played the role of Amaryllis in *The Music Man*, at Downers Grove North High School and Oak Lawn Community Theatre, where she was also the youngest member of the ensemble in *Hello, Dolly!*



**IAN RUCKER**  
**MAN IN BAR**

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

The second-year Ryan Opera Center baritone is from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He holds a master’s degree in vocal performance from Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music. His roles there included Count Almaviva/*The Marriage of Figaro* and the title role/*The Barber of Seville*. He has also appeared as Papageno/*The Magic Flute* at Bloomington Chamber Opera. The baritone previously earned his bachelor’s degree in vocal performance at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where he was heard in the title roles/*Don Giovanni* and *Sweeney Todd*, as well

as Officer Lockstock/*Urinetown* and Ernst Ludwig/*Cabaret*. Rucker is a former Palm Beach Opera Apprentice Artist and a former Aspen Music Festival Renée Fleming Artist. He recently received an Encouragement Award in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Wisconsin District) and first place in the James Toland Vocal Arts Competition. *Ian Rucker is sponsored by Karen Peitite, Jennifer L. Stone and Heidi Heutel Bohn.*



**LARRY YANDO**  
**RING ANNOUNCER**

**Lyric debut**

The Chicago-based actor performed as Scar in the national tour of *The Lion King* for three years. Winner of five Joseph Jefferson awards, Yando has appeared in leading roles at all the major Chicago theaters. He has played Scrooge in the Goodman Theatre’s *A Christmas Carol* to great acclaim for more than a dozen years. Role highlights include *Lear/King Lear, Malvolio/Twelfth Night*, and *Prospero/The Tempest* (Chicago Shakespeare), *Roy Cohn/Angels in America Parts I and II* (Court Theater), *Pangloss/Candide* (Goodman), and *Dawson/Fake* (Steppenwolf), among numerous others. In 2019, Yando toured Europe in Peter Brook’s production of *Battlefield*. He has taught advanced acting classes at The Theatre School at DePaul University, Northwestern University, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s Classical Training Program.



**URIA BENNETT**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

The Chicago Native has trained with many dance companies including Joffrey Ballet and Deeply Rooted. Her most recent credit is *Personality, the Lloyd Price Musical*.



**BENJAMIN FREEDMAN**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Freedman earned his BFA from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, where he currently serves as a professor in the dance department. He began his career as a company member with the Mark Morris Dance Group and was featured in the PBS special *Allegro il Penseroso ed il Moderato* filmed at the Teatro Real in Madrid. He has danced with the Metropolitan Opera in productions of *Champion, The Magic Flute, Turandot, Der fliegende Holländer, and Samson et Dalila*, and as a soloist in *Agrippina*. Other opera credits include the Santa Fe Opera, Opera Lafayette, Against the Grain Opera, and Opera Columbus. Off-Broadway, he performed in Third Rail Project’s *The Grand Paradise* and Company’s *Nutcracker Rouge* and *Boylesque Bullfight*. He has danced as a member of Séan Curran Company, Keigwin + Company, the Bang Group, Jennifer Muller/The Works, and Peridance Contemporary Dance Company.



among others. He worked as choreographer and associate director for West Edge's *Eliogabolo*. Most recently, he served as choreographer and stage director for the feature film *She Came To Me* directed by Rebecca Miller featuring Anne Hathaway and Marisa Tomei.



**DEDRICK D. BANKS GRAY**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Gray is a dance artist, educator, and producer. He received his MFA at Florida State University in Choreography and Performance in 2022. He also studied at Jacobs Pillow in 2015 under Camille A. Brown and Moncell E. Durden, in 2016 under Jawole Zollar, and Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute in 2017. His teaching and guest artist experiences include adjunct and faculty positions at Florida State University, Florida A&M University, University of Wyoming, and Columbia College Chicago. Gray is a visiting professor at Bard College, a production assistant with Jawole Zollar and Urban Bush Women for special projects, and an apprentice with Camille A. Brown Dancers. Performance credits include work with Gwen Welliver, Ron K. Brown, Allison Janae Hamilton, Onye Ozuzu, Darrell Jones, Diane McIntyre, J'Sun Howard, Nick Cave, BET, BraveSoul Movement, Muntu Dance Theater of Chicago, and Red Clay Dance Company.



**MARCUS HARDY**  
**DANCER**

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

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.



**LAURYN HAYES**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

The classically trained dancer has enjoyed two seasons with the Met Opera Ballet. She has worked with renowned choreographers such as Wayne McGregor, Camille A. Brown, Rickey Tripp, and Bill T. Jones, and her modeling work has appeared in *Vogue España*, *Vogue US*, *Vogue Italia*, and *The New Yorker* magazines. Hayes graduated from Marymount Manhattan College with a BFA in Dance and a BA in Business.



**MORGAN REED McDANIEL**  
**DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Jenůfa* (2023/24) and *West Side Story* (2022/23).

The dancer graduated from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, where she worked with esteemed choreographers including Jae Man Joo, Francesca Harper, Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrish, and Tina Bush, and performed with the Metropolitan Opera in their production of *The Flying Dutchman*. She joined South Chicago Dance Theatre as an emerging artist, and she spent a season with Visceral Dance Chicago. McDaniel had a residency with Ballare Carmel in Monterey, California, where she performed work by Noelle Kayser, Jennifer Archibald, and Ihsan Rustem.



**OLIVIER MEDUS**  
**DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

Medus will dance this season at the Park Avenue Armory and at the Metropolitan Opera, where his previous credits include *Fire Shut up in My Bones*, *Champion*, and *Porgy & Bess*. His training began with Ailey II, the junior company of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Medus has performed with Camille A. Brown and Dancers and Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, and served as a dance captain for Norwegian Cruise Line's production of the Broadway show *After Midnight* and in *Havana*, directed by Warren Carlyle. He currently serves on the faculty at The Ailey School and has taught at American Ballet Theater, Manhattan Youth Ballet, and Joffrey Ballet School.



**MARTIN ORTIZ TAPIA**  
**DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Jenůfa* (2023/24) and *West Side Story* (2022/23).

Ortiz Tapia spent nearly a decade touring with Giordano Dance Chicago as a company member. He has appeared in productions of *Saturday Night Fever*, *Newsies*, *Cabaret*, *Mary Poppins*, and most recently *A Chorus Line*. He earned a BFA from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, and has trained also at Luna Negra Dance Theater and Thodos Dance Chicago.



**JUDE M. PERRY-EVANS**  
**DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Carmen* (2022/23) and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

The New York-based artist was recently featured in Harlem Opera Theater's 100th anniversary presentation of *Shuffle Along* and in the Queens College Opera production of *The Image Maker*. He is a featured dancer in the *Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz Dance* documentary and the Hal King *The Musical* film. Perry-Evans has appeared in such productions as *Dance*

*Africa* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) and *Voices of Congo Square* in his hometown of New Orleans. He has performed with Phoenix Danse, De La Soul Dance Company, Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, Long Island Ballet Theater, Sekou Miller Dance Company, Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company, The Workshop Theater, and Balance Dance Theatre, and was a founding member of Urban Souls Dance Theater in Houston.



**MARTELL RUFFIN**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Born and raised on the south side of Chicago, Ruffin began his formal dance training at Joffrey Ballet under the direction of Pierre Lockett. He attended Chicago High School for the Arts (Chiarts) and continued his dance training on scholarship at The Ailey School. He has completed summer programs with Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Alvin Ailey, and has performed works by Alvin Ailey, Kyle Abraham, Robert Battle, George Faison, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Jae Man Joo, and others etc. Martell has danced with Ailey II and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, and has choreographed for The Ailey School, Princeton University, Peridance, Orsolina 28 arts foundation, and Triptych (*Eyes of One Another*), in a work based on Robert Mapplethorpe.



**DYMON SAMARA**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Samara, a graduate of the New World School of the Arts, has performed works by choreographers Ohad Naharin, Camille A. Brown, and Stephen Petronio, and apprenticed with Ronald K. Brown's Evidence A Dance Company in 2021. Samara is a Dean Scholar graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and a former dance artist with A.I.M by Kyle Abraham.



**BABOU SANNEH**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

The Gambian-American artist is currently a dancer at the Metropolitan Opera and a model/commercial dancer based in New York. Sanneh has performed works by Martha Graham, Bill T. Jones, Johannes Weiland, Victor Quijada, Linda Celeste Sims, Glenn Allen Sims, and others. Sanneh has appeared in HBO's *Random Acts of Flyness*, in the world premiere of *Doppelganger* at the Park Avenue Armory, and in campaigns for Telfar and Burberry. Sanneh is a recent graduate from the Conservatory of Dance at Purchase College.



**BRIAN SELCIK**  
**DANCER**

**Lyric debut**

Selcik's recent credits include *Cinderella*, *Grease*, and *Elf* (Drury Lane); Bitelle in *La Cage aux Folles* and *Billy Elliot* (Music Theatre Works); *The Wedding Singer* and *State Fair* (Clinton Area Showboat Theatre); *The Tempest* (Oak Park Festival Theatre); and Andy Lee in *42nd Street* (Chicago College of Performing Arts). Selcik recently received his BFA in Musical Theatre with a Dance Concentration from the Chicago College of Performing Arts.



**WHITNEY WANDLAND**  
**DANCER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *The Factotum* (2022/23).

The multi-disciplinary performer's training began with the Deeply Rooted Dance Company and later continued at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Recent credits include *Empire* (Fox), *Soundtrack* (Netflix), *Usher*, and *Power Book IV: FORCE* (Starz).



**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.*



### JAMES ROBINSON DIRECTOR

**Previously at Lyric:** Co-director/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22)

In 2009 the American director became Artistic Director of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where he has directed such productions as *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *Street Scene*, *Miss Havisham's Fire*, *The Golden Ticket*, *La traviata*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Champion*, and "27". He has created new productions for the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, and the major houses of Seattle, Houston, San Diego, San Francisco, Dallas, and Santa Fe, as well as for the Baltimore Symphony, Hollywood Bowl, and Minnesota Orchestra. Internationally, he has mounted new productions for Canadian Opera Company, Royal Swedish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera Australia, the Wexford Festival, and the London Symphony Orchestra. Recent productions include *Porgy and Bess* (Met), *Champion* (Washington National Opera), *Vanessa* (Santa Fe Opera), *Dolores Claiborne* (San Francisco Opera, world premiere), *Nixon in China* (San Diego Opera), *Eugene Onegin* (Seoul Arts Center), and *M. Butterfly* (Santa Fe Opera, American premiere).



### ALLEN MOYER SET DESIGNER

**Previously at Lyric:** Designer/*The Flying Dutchman* (2022/23), Set Designer/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

Among the distinguished designer's credits are *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, and *Champion* for the Metropolitan Opera, along with productions for New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera, English National Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Santa Fe Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Dallas Opera, LA Opera, Seattle Opera, Scottish Opera, Washington National Opera, Welsh National Opera, and the Glimmerglass and Wexford Festivals. His numerous Broadway credits include *Grey Gardens* (Tony/Drama Desk nominations, Henry Hewes Award), *Paradise Square* (Tony nomination), *The Lyons*, *Lysistrata Jones*, *Thurgood*, *The Constant Wife*, and *Twelve Angry Men*. Other theater credits include productions Off-Broadway for The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Second Stage, The Roundabout Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, and numerous other regional theaters nationwide (including the Goodman and Steppenwolf). Moyer designed *Carousel* and *Showboat* with the New York Philharmonic, as well as the Delibes ballet *Sylvia* (The San Francisco Ballet) and *Romeo and Juliet: On Motifs of Shakespeare* (Mark Morris Dance Group), both choreographed by Morris.



### MONTANA LEVI BLANCO COSTUME DESIGNER

**Lyric debut**

Blanco's recent highlights include *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *A Strange Loop* on Broadway; Emma O'Halloran's *Mary Motorhead / TRADE* for Irish National Opera; *sandblasted* by Charly Evon Simpson and *White Girl In Danger* by Michael R. Jackson at the Vineyard Theatre; *Daddy* by Jeremy O. Harris at the Almeida Theatre in London; *Epiphany* by Brian Watkins at LCT/Mitzi Newhouse; *Mother Russia* by Lauren Yee at La Jolla Playhouse; and *Grass* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins at Signature Theatre. Opera credits include *Iphigenia* (Kennedy Center), *Hansel and Gretel* (Houston Grand Opera), and *La Rondine* (Minnesota Opera). His numerous Off-Broadway credits include: *Fairview*, *Is God Is* (SOHO REP); *A Strange Loop*, *Selling Kabul* (Playwrights Horizons); *Ain't No Mo'* (Public); *The House That Will Not Stand*, *Red Speedo*, *Nat Turner* (NYTW); *Fabulation*, *The Death of the Last Black Man*, *In the Blood* (Signature); *Fefu and Her Friends*, *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box* (TFANA); and *Pipeline*, *Ghost Light*, *War* (Lincoln Center). Blanco is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (BM Oboe Performance), Oberlin College (BA History), Brown University (MA Public Humanities), and the Yale School of Drama (MFA Design). *Costume Designers* are supported by the **Richard P. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer** endowment.



### DONALD HOLDER LIGHTING DESIGNER

**Previously at Lyric:** *Carmen* (2016/17).

Donald Holder has worked extensively in theatre, opera, dance, architectural, and television lighting in the US and abroad for over 30 years. He has designed 58 Broadway productions and has been nominated for 14 Tony awards, winning the Tony for Best Lighting Design for *The Lion King* in 1998, and for the 2008 revival of *South Pacific*. Recent Broadway productions include: *Tootsie*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Anastasia*, *My Fair Lady*, *Oslo*, *Straight White Men*, *She Loves Me*, *Fiddler On The Roof*, *The King and I*, *On The Twentieth Century*, and many others. Projects at the Metropolitan Opera include *Porgy and Bess*, *Samson et Delilah*, *Otello*, *The Magic Flute*, and the premiere of *Two Boys*. He has worked at most of the nation's leading resident theatres, and has designed over 100 Off-Broadway productions. His television/film work includes the theatrical lighting for seasons one and two of *Smash* (NBC-Dreamworks), *Oceans 8* (Warner Brothers Pictures), *The Bad Witch* (HBO Max), and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (Amazon). *Lighting designers* are supported by the **Mary-Louise and James S. Aagaard** endowment in honor of Duane Schuler.



**GREG EMETAZ**  
**VIDEO DESIGNER**

**Previously at Lyric:** *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22), and *Bel Canto* (2015/16).

Emetaz is a filmmaker and projection designer. In addition to *Bel Canto* at Lyric, his projection design work includes many other important opera world premieres, including *Dolores Claiborne* at San Francisco Opera, *Enemies: a Love Story* at Palm Beach Opera, and *Shalimar the Clown*, “27”, *Champion*, and *The Golden Ticket* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Emetaz is the director of the feature film *Camp Wedding*; short films including *Spell Claire*, *Bowes Academy* (NC Gay + Lesbian Film Fest Jury award), *Get the F K Outta Paris!*, and *Death by Omelette* (SNCF Prix du Polar Finalist and Hong Kong Mobile Film Awards Silver Medalist); and music videos including *Eating 4 Two* and *Butt Drunk* (Friars Club Comedy Film Festival special Jury Award, iTVfest Best Director Award, co-directed with Amanda DeSimone). Emetaz has also created the behind-scenes documentaries for Julie Taymor’s *The Tempest*, Broadway musical *Spider-Man Turn off the Dark*, and numerous productions at New York City Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.



**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. Stoffer Chorus Director Endowed Chair.*



**CAMILLE A. BROWN**  
**CHOREOGRAPHER**

**Previously at Lyric:** Co-director & Choreographer/*Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22).

The choreographer, Artistic Director of Camille A. Brown & Dancers, is reclaiming the cultural narratives of African American identity by tapping into both ancestral stories and contemporary culture, capturing a range of deeply personal experiences. Among her numerous honors are a Guggenheim Award, a Bessie Award, a Dance Magazine award, and Tony, Drama Desk, and Lucille

Lortel Award nominations. Brown’s trilogy on race, culture, and identity has won accolades across the country. Broadway, Off-Broadway, and television credits include *Choir Boy*, *Once On This Island*, *Jesus Christ Superstar Live* on NBC, Broadway’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, among many other productions. Brown, who choreographed the Metropolitan Opera’s *Porgy and Bess*, made her feature-film debut in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (Netflix). She made her directorial debuts with the Broadway revival of *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* for the Met (co-directed with James Robinson), and *Ain’t Misbehavin’* at Westport Country Playhouse.



**CHRISTOPHER FIGARO JACKSON**  
**ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER**

**Lyric debut**

The educator, dancer, and choreographer began his training at The Stairway of the Stars Dance Studio and is a graduate of The Chicago Academy of the Arts. His numerous dance credits include Disney’s *The Lion King* national tour, *The Wiz* (40th Anniversary Concert), *Dreamgirls the Musical*, *Dorothy Dandridge The Musical*, *Let There Be Light*, *On The Town*, *Porgy & Bess*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, and *Champion* (Metropolitan Opera), *X*, *The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (Detroit Opera, Omaha Opera, Metropolitan Opera, and Seattle Opera), and *Kinky Boots*. He has performed with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Ailey II, Camille A. Brown & Dancers, Elisa Monte, River North Dance Chicago, and Victory Dance Project, among others. He has choreographed for Roundabout Theater (NYC), American Conservatory Theater (San Francisco), and elsewhere.



**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 *Iphigénie 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.*



**ALISON POGORELC**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

**Lyric debut**

This season, the American director will return to the stage directing staff at the Metropolitan Opera, where she previously served as assistant director for *Idomeneo* and *Champion*, and will make her directing

debut at the Kennedy Center in DC on a production of Handel's *Partenope* with Washington National Opera's Cafritz Young Artist Program. Last season, she made her West Coast debut with an acclaimed production of Paul Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* for West Edge Opera. Pogorelc has received the National Opera Association's JoElyn Wakefield-Wright Stage Director Fellowship and OPERA America's Robert L. B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize for her conceptualization of Strauss' *Salome*. She also recently directed the Studio Showcase at Wolf Trap Opera and Handel's *Agrippina* at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and was assistant director on the world stage premiere of *The Knock* at Cincinnati Opera. A regular collaborator with Milwaukee's Early Music Now, Pogorelc creates short films inspired by music from the Medieval, Renaissance, and early Baroque periods. She was part of Glimmerglass' Young Artist Program during the 2020 and 2021 seasons, where she assisted on a new adaptation of *The Magic Flute* and worked with Francesca Zambello on *Il trovatore*. In the 2020/21 season, she was Resident Artist Director for the Florentine Opera. Other assistant director credits include *The Knock*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Cincinnati Opera); *The Rake's Progress*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Vanessa*, *Così fan tutte*, *Street Scene* (Mannes Opera); *Hänsel und Gretel*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Berlin Opera Academy); and *The Echo Drift* (Prototype Opera Festival). [L](#)

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# 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<sup>\*</sup>, *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<sup>\*</sup>,  
*Assistant Principal*  
Trevor O'Riordan<sup>\*\*</sup>,  
*Acting Assistant Principal*

### Bass Clarinet

Trevor O'Riordan<sup>\*\*</sup>

### 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<sup>\*\*</sup>

### Bass Trombone

Mark Fry<sup>\*\*</sup>

### 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*  
Injoo Choi, *violin*  
Renee-Paule Gauthier, *violin*  
Rebecca Swan, *viola*  
David Gauger, *trumpet*  
Josh Jones, *percussion*  
Stu Mindeman, *piano*  
Christian Dillingham, *bass*  
Quin Kirchner, *drum set*  
Dave Miller, *guitar*

## STAGE BAND

William C. Billingham, *organ*

<sup>\*</sup> On leave, 2023/24 Season

<sup>\*\*</sup> 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  
Laureen 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 Eberling  
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 Cavalieri  
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

**SUPERNUMERARIES**

Elena Avila  
Vanessa Passini

+ Lyric debut

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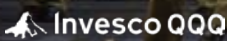
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“

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Ashraf Sewailam  
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Lester Gonzalez  
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Vernon Gooden  
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Johnathan Hart  
Lauryn Hayes  
Kara Hunsinger  
Maddy Joss  
Christopher Kelley  
Drew Lewis  
Isaac Alan Lindy  
Morgan Reed McDaniel  
Olivier Medus  
Mickey Nixon  
Anne O'Donnell Passero  
Martín Ortiz Tapia  
Jude M. Perry-Evans  
Ashley Rivette  
Martell Ruffin  
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The American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO (AGMA), is the union that represents the singers, dancers, actors, and staging personnel at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

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Thomas Fernandez

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Asiel Simpson

Matt Swiatkowski

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*Property Master*

Michael McPartlin,

*Properties Crew Head*

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Claire Moores



*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

## MARTIN LUTHER CLARK (2020-2023)

**Appearances this season:** *Orderly/The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, The Dallas Opera; *Luis/Champion*, Lyric Opera of Chicago.

“The Ryan Opera Center had been a dream since I was an undergraduate and being invited to join was the most incredible moment. Throughout my tenure, my mentors presented many high-standard challenges, but the most important was to become my most authentic self in my artistic expression. Through trial and error, self-discovery, and overcoming the fear of being vulnerable, I learned who I am as an artist and as a human being—and that has been tremendously valuable as I’ve launched my career. I’m deeply grateful for all the Ryan Opera Center did for me.”



Martin Luther Clark performing in Lyric's *The Factotum* (2022/23).

## THIS SEASON



**Denis Vélez (2020-2023)**  
*Florecia en el Amazonas*  
Ópera de Bellas Artes (Mexico City)



**Will Liverman (2012-2015)**  
*X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*  
The Metropolitan Opera



**Emily Fons (2010-2012)**  
*The Tales of Hoffmann*  
Palm Beach Opera

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*The Jannotta Family*  
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*Robert and Ellen Marks Ryan*  
*Opera Center Vocal Studies*  
*Program Endowment*

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Lawrence Brownlee  
Sir Andrew Davis  
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Noah Lindquist  
Celeste Rue  
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Julia Savoie Klein  
Derek Matson  
Klára Moldová  
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Sayjal Joshi  
Katie Klein  
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*Lyric*

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# People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



**Camilla Fernandez**  
Talent Management  
Coordinator

**Hometown:** Arlington Heights

**First opera you saw live:** I took my father to see *Tosca* and, since I'm a pianist, the music means a lot to me. At the end of the first act, there's this big chorus scene. It's just so powerful—I got shivers! Music really fuels my passion for opera.

**Favorite Lyric production:** *West Side Story*. It was the first time I got to see a dress rehearsal and, at some point, a song had to be restarted. The singer started over and it was so magical. I proceeded to see it four more times.

**Hobbies:** I love to do yoga, and I love to travel. I'm also a foodie, so I like trying new restaurants. That's one of the benefits of working in the People and Culture department—you get to choose what food is catered.

## What is your role here at Lyric?

I am in charge of the talent acquisition for all administrative positions, which includes full-time staff, part-time staff, and interns. I also assist with hiring for the front of house—ushers, bartenders, and coat checkers, for example. And I run the paid internship program, which is made possible by the generosity of the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., and Jim Alexander, co-trustees. I also onboard new hires. Essentially, I work with staff from the moment they apply for a position to the moment I send the offer and their first day.

## What was your path to working at Lyric?

I've always known about Lyric. My grandparents were season ticket holders here. I played piano for my whole life, so when I saw the position posted, I thought, "Why don't I throw my hat in the ring and see what happens?" I did the entire interview process while I was studying abroad in Florence, Italy, which is crazy, since Italy is the birthplace of opera. I got the offer in Florence, and after I returned to Chicago I started three weeks later.

## Can you describe your typical work day?

I work on all positions in any phase they're in. Something that a lot of people don't know is that I sort through every candidate for each position. I read every resume, and then I work on the interviewing and the scheduling of the interview. While I'm working on that, I'm working on the onboarding process, which could be for any position. And I'm already working on positions for the next summer and fall seasons.

## It doesn't sound like there is a typical day!

I don't necessarily have the same schedule every week. I also work on employee engagement; any time there's an event hosted by the People & Culture department, it's all hands on deck. A lot of my hours will coincide with the hours of the new hires and interns because I need to be there for their onboarding process. I like that my schedule changes.

## What do you love about your role at Lyric?

Every interviewee asks me the same question. I love getting to know people from the moment they apply to seeing them a year in and seeing how much they've grown. It's fun to give tours on the first day. Besides knowing all 120-plus people in the administrative department, I also know where they sit. I like to make sure that, on an employee's first day, they feel really comfortable and welcome.

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

I enjoy being surrounded by art all the time, whether that's hearing music on the speakers while sitting at my desk or going into the theater during a rehearsal. So many people here are artists themselves, whether they're still practicing or not. I stopped playing piano competitively at 18, but being here has made me want to go back to it. Any time I see a piano here, I start to play. 🎹