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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA



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On the cover:

Diana Ong (b. 1940) Electra #1, 1996 Computer graphics Bridgeman Images

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A MESSAGE FROM

THE BOARD OF SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

On behalf of the Board of Directors of San Francisco Opera, welcome to our 95th season!

From ancient mythology to California history, we embark in September on nine powerful journeys that celebrate the stories of humanity. We believe you will find this to be a season of tremendously diverse, ambitious, and emotionally thrilling offerings on the War Memorial Opera House stage. From sumptuous revivals of *Turandot* and *La Traviata*, to connoisseur's dreams



like *Elektra* and *Manon*, to one of the most highly anticipated cultural events of the year in the world premiere of John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West*, this will be a fall to remember.

The extraordinary artistic capability of this great Company is made possible by you, our audience. We are deeply grateful to all our patrons, subscribers, and donors. You are one of the most passionate and engaged audiences in the world, and your commitment and enthusiasm sustain San Francisco Opera. Thank you for your incredible support.

We wish to extend special recognition to our Company sponsors, who provide the major underwriting that makes everything we do possible: the Dolby family, Ann & Gordon Getty, Burgess and Elizabeth Jamieson, Mr. and Mrs. Franklin P. Johnson, Jr., the Edmund W. & Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Steven M. Menzies, Bernard & Barbro Osher, Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne & Tad Taube, the Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, and Barbara A. Wolfe. We also give special thanks to our Season Sponsor, Wells Fargo; our Corporate Partners, Chevron and United Airlines; and our Official Wine Sponsor, HALL Wines.

As always, we begin the season on a festive note in partnership with the San Francisco Opera Guild on our premier fundraising event of the year, Opera Ball. Opera Ball raises much needed funds to support the Company and the Opera Guild's artistic and educational programs, and we are grateful to this year's Opera Ball co-chairs, Courtney Labe and Maryam Muduroglu, for their wonderful dedication and hard work.

We also salute the artistry of Music Director Nicola Luisotti, who concludes nearly a decade of leadership at the end of the season. Nicola's contributions to the quality of our orchestra and the Company's overall musical values are exceptional, and San Francisco Opera audiences will enjoy the legacy of his work for years to come. We will never forget the countless electrifying performances he has led in our theater, and we look forward to welcoming him back to the podium in future seasons.

Enjoy the opera and revel in the music that moves the city!

In A.R.

⁷ John A. Gunn Chairman of the Board

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Delving Deeper into Girls of the Golden West

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Sept/Oct 2017

VEW

October Symposium to Prepare Audiences for John Adams World Premiere



and Julia Bullock, baritone Elliot Madore, mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, conductor Grant Gershon, and librettist/director Peter Sellars.

Grab your shovels and stake your claims! With the eyes and ears of the music world trained on San Francisco Opera for the highly anticipated world premiere of John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West* on November 21, local history buffs and opera fans will get a leg up on the excitement.

On Saturday, October 28, the *Girls of the Golden West* Symposium will be held in the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater at the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera. The all-day event will dig into the opera's themes, source materials, and its place within the broader context of the Gold Rush. Designed to prepare audiences for the opera and provide insightful perspectives into this critical period of California history, the symposium will be a multidisciplinary presentation of lectures, conversations, and music, including a discussion with composer John Adams (*Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic*) and librettist/director Peter Sellars. Authors, historians, and other Gold Rush authorities will explore topics such as "Women in the Gold Rush" and "Cultural Conflict." Rounding out the event, a set of miner and pioneer songs will be performed in period style by Theatre Comique. Tickets for the event are \$45.

Many Girls of the Golden West ancillary activities will be offered in collaboration with cultural and educational institutions around the Bay Area. Public exhibitions at Wells Fargo,



Levi Strauss & Co., and the Society of California Pioneers provide an excellent opportunity to learn more about the history of California. Gold Rush-era artifacts from the collections of the California Historical Society, Society of California Pioneers, Levi Strauss & Co., and Museum of Performance + Design will also be on view within the Opera House lobby from November through December. In a special collaboration with the San Francisco Public Library, *The Shirley Letters*—one of the key historical sources Adams and Sellars drew upon for the opera—will be the Library's fall book club selection.

For tickets to the *Girls of the Golden West* Symposium and more information, please visit: **sfoperacom**.

Did You Know?

The War Memorial Opera House chandelier consists of 588 100-watt light bulbs. Created by Arthur Brown Jr., who also designed the Opera House, Veterans Building, and City Hall, the chandelier was the first use of aluminum in an architectural feature anywhere in the world.

Vodka is the deodorizer of choice for the Company's Wardrobe Department. After every performance, dressers spray the undiluted spirit on areas of costumes where perspiration collects to kill odor-causing bacteria.

With 100 players, *Elektra* has the largest orchestra in any production in Company history. Among the more unusual instruments is the heckelphone. The lowest instrument in the oboe family (it reaches as far down as an A below middle C), it is mostly heard in *Elektra* in combination with other winds and brass.

An inspiration for Puccini in writing *Turandot* was a music box belonging to an acquaintance, Baron Fassini, who had been in China. In Act I, a children's chorus is heard singing the Jasmine Flower song "Mou-Li Hua," which was one of Puccini's discoveries from the music box.

The first San Francisco performance of *La Traviata* was at the American Theater on August 13, 1859. Presented by the Bianchi Opera Troupe and featuring Giovanna Bianchi in the title role, Verdi's opera was described by the *Alta California* as a work "founded on a plot similar to *Camille*. The music is exceedingly brilliant, being of a lighter character than most of this composer's works, and it abounds in a host of gems, which will soon become popular."

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA



Lianna Haroutounian In Recital

Armenian soprano Lianna Haroutounian will give her San Francisco recital debut on Saturday, November 25 at 3 p.m. in the Veterans Building's Herbst Theatre. The acclaimed opera star, who made a sensational San Francisco Opera debut in Tosca in 2014 and returned triumphantly last season in the title role of Madama Butterfly, will return for her only Bay Area appearance in a program of works by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Komitas, Rossini, Bellini, and Puccini, as well as Armenian folk songs. Georgian pianist Tamara Sanikidze will provide musical accompaniment. For tickets, call City Box Office at (415) 392-4400.





Interactive Adult Opera Workshops Return

Education Department adds to its fall offerings with Drinks & Drama

Back by popular demand, the **Overture Workshops for Adults**, a first-hand look at how opera is created and produced for the stage, will take place from **Monday**, **September 25 through Monday**, **October 23**. This fall's series will focus on the four main pillars of opera creation—story, music, production, and direction—with featured guests including Dramaturg Kip Cranna, Opera Center Director Sheri Greenawald, Properties Master Lori Harrison, stage director Jose Maria Condemi, and artists and musicians from across the Company. Learn more at **sfopera.com/overtureseries**.

Also for the opera-curious: join the Education Department on Friday, October 20 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. for Drinks & Drama: A Taste of the Season, a social-educational event featuring special live performances and mini-cocktails tailored to pair with each opera. Photographs, musical excerpts, and video clips from the San Francisco Opera Archives will immerse you in the fall 2017 season. Learn more at sfopera.com/drinksanddrama.







Jose Maria Condemi



The **San Francisco Opera Chorus** will offer a public concert of sacred, secular, and operatic music on **Thursday, November 30 at 8 p.m.**, in the intimate Taube Atrium Theater of the Wilsey Center for Opera. Under the baton of Chorus Director Ian Robertson and Associate Chorus Master and pianist Fabrizio Corona, the 47-member chorus will take center stage in musical offerings by Bach, di Lasso, Elgar, Ešenvalds, Massenet, O'Regan, Poulenc, Praetorius, Puccini, Purcell, Verdi, and Wagner. Tickets are \$35 and available now at the San Francisco Opera Box Office or by visiting **sfopera.com**.

Making their West Coast concert debut, the popular New Zealand trio **Sol3 Mio** will take to the War Memorial Opera House stage on **Friday, December 1 at 7:30 p.m.** for a special holiday concert, Kiwi-style. This exclusive San Francisco Opera presentation of Samoan brothers and Adler Fellow tenors Pene Pati and Amitai Pati and their baritone Samoan cousin Moses Mackay will feature the singers in a concert of holiday favorites, operatic works, crossover hits, and cherished songs from the South Pacific. Robert Mollicone will conduct the San Francisco Opera Orchestra.

To learn more about Sol3 Mio and to hear excerpts, visit **Sol3Mio.com**. Tickets range from \$20 to \$100 and are available at the San Francisco Opera Box Office or by visiting **sfopera.com**.





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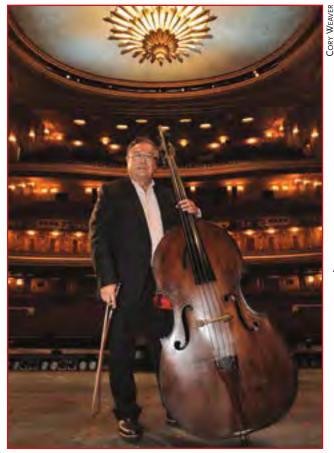
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SAN FRANCISCO **OPERA** Profile Shinji Eshima San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Bass

One of the most serene yet foreboding moments in all of opera happens during the prelude to Richard Wagner's Das Rheingold. Eight basses quietly sustain a single low E-flat for four measures. One of the basses you will hear in the orchestra pit during next summer's Ring cycle will be the 1843 Plumerel played by Shinji Eshima, who joined the Company in 1980. "The basses start on that note," he explains, "and the rest of the orchestra gradually gets layered in with E-flat arpeggios." The bassists play Eflat for 136 measures before a Rhinemaiden suddenly begins



to sing. Wagner's swirling setting expresses the depth and building flow of the Rhine River, creeping into your consciousness and opening Wagner's epic musical journey. About this prelude, Shinji says, "I associate E-flat with nature. ... Maestro Runnicles [who leads the Company's *Ring* in 2018] has said that he loves E-flat in particular because it makes the orchestra 'feel good.' I'll never forget him saying that."

Shinji's Plumerel double bass has appeared at the Paris Opéra, Metropolitan Opera, New York Philharmonic, and New York City Ballet. A visitor to Paris' Musée d'Orsay today can see the scroll of Shinji's Plumerel in Edgar Degas' 1870 painting *L'Orchestre de l'Opéra*; its original owner, Achille Gouffé, a soloist of the Paris Opéra, also appears in the painting. An oil sketch of the work is at the Legion of Honor Museum. Shinji's Juilliard teacher David Walter was the principal bass of the New York City Ballet orchestra and played the Plumerel for more than 30 years. Six years after his death, it was passed on to Shinji. The bass made its War Memorial Opera House debut in 2008 during the 75th anniversary of San Francisco Ballet. (Shinji joined that company in 1982.) Shinji's wife, Sandy, is a former dancer for NYCB, and because she currently stages Balanchine's ballets, she has access to NYCB's original videos. Shinji says that "virtually anything I hear with a bass on these recordings [from *Agon* to *Jewels*] is *this* bass."

A Japanese-American born in Berkeley, Shinji received his education at Stanford and Juilliard. Today, he is a faculty member at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and San Francisco State University.

When Shinji is not performing or teaching, he is composing. Last year, he collaborated with poet Scott Bourne on a chamber piece called *Bourne to Shelley*, which had its world premiere at SF Opera Lab's *ChamberWORKS*. San

Francisco Ballet commissioned him to create music for two ballets, *RAkU* (2011) and *Swimmer* (2015). The puppetry play *E.O.* 9066, featuring original music by Shinji, was recently performed at the opening of the Topaz Museum, dedicated to preserving the history of the World War II internment camp experience in Delta, Utah. The play's title derives from the Executive Order 9066, which forced 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry to leave their homes and transfer to internment camps. 11,000 of them were sent to Topaz, including Shinji's father. The theme from *E.O.* 9066 is a variation of a work Shinji composed originally for violin and double bass called *August 6*, which premiered at Grace Cathedral on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. Shinji later decided to orchestrate *August 6* for SF Ballet's *RAkU*.

A documentary of *RAkU* will have its world premiere screening as part of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival on October 20 at the Brava Theater Center. As a musician in the orchestra pit, composer, and teacher, Shinji Eshima demonstrates that music is deep with history and rich with storytelling.

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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Nicola!

"From the very first day, this company has made me a better man, a better artist, a better thinker—better everything. I discovered myself here."

-Music Director Nicola Luisotti

here may have been a time, when he was working as an apprentice blacksmith in Tuscany where he grew up, that Nicola Luisotti wondered and fretted a little about what lay ahead for him. Any such worries were fleeting. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that a conductor's baton and not a forger's hammer and tongs would become the defining tool of his working life.

From the moment he first sat down at a piano as a child and played something by ear he had just heard, Luisotti felt the musical pulse take hold. At nine, he began studying the organ and thought with characteristic fervor, "I will be the most famous organist in the world"—a conviction he recalls now with both a touch of honor for his youthful ambition and self-aware amusement. By age 12, he was studying with a taskmaster teacher in Lucca and learning Bach, Buxtehude, and Frescobaldi.

It turned out, as audiences in San Francisco and around the world well know, that Luisotti was destined to play an instrument far more complicated than even the most formidable church organ. Opera with its multiple interlocking parts of singers and orchestra, chorus and scenography, direction, lighting, costumes, and choreography would engage the full range of his powers and passion.

This season, in what amounts to a bittersweet victory lap, Luisotti will end his nine-year run as San Francisco Opera's music director by conducting *Turandot* and *La Traviata*. The 55-year-old Italian has accepted an associate music director position at Madrid's Teatro Real, where he will focus on his core strength of the Italian repertoire: *Aida, Don Carlo, Tosca, Un Ballo in Maschera*. Other bookings will take him to opera houses across the globe, from New York to Paris, Munich to Rome, London to Valencia. Luisotti is also a prolific symphonic conductor, with plans to enlarge on that growing résumé in the coming years. One project is to complete a full multi-city Mahler cycle.

For all his wanderings, he's not about to sever his ties to San Francisco, where he has brought his animating touch to some 35 productions of everything from Puccini and Verdi to Mozart, Bizet, Wagner, Strauss, and the 2015 world premiere of Marco Tutino's *Two Women*. Luisotti is already booked to conduct here in 2019 and 2020. The operas have not been announced, but both dates are in the fall.

"Why the fall?" he recently asked in a rhetorical deadpan in his Opera House office. "Because there are mushrooms."

The answer was both playfully waggish and dead-on earnest. Luisotti, who is as compelling, emotionally labile, and lyrically graceful in person as he is on the podium, brings the full weight of his personality to whatever topic is at hand. As a committed mushroom hunter, serious cook, and eater—pursuits he shares with his wife of 28 years, Rita—Luisotti was proud to offer a cellphone photo of the fresh porcini the couple had gathered in Sonoma County. But he wasn't about to be more specific about the location, offering only an enigmatic smile in response. Even a silence from the sleekly handsome Luisotti is eloquent.

When asked about leaving his San Francisco Opera music director post, he cleared the air of anything frivolous with a pause. "I'm not the same man I was when I came here," he said. "From the very first day, this company has made me a better man, a better artist, a better thinker —better everything. I discovered myself here."

The career change, he went on, was a painful but necessary decision. "About a decade," by his accounting, is the life span of an effective musical leader. (Luisotti first conducted here with *La Forza del Destino* in 2005 and assumed the music directorship in September 2009.) "I don't think you can be the same leader at the same level for 20 years. I've seen that happen too many times."

Luisotti's imprint on the Company, both to audiences and his colleagues, remains as fresh and vital as the day he arrived, hired by former General Director David Gockley. "It's in his complete commitment to the music," said Opera Orchestra Concertmaster Kay Stern, "his unquestionable desire for us to give everything at every moment to the emotional content of the score. I think we have learned a great deal from him and been inspired by him, and in many ways come alive because of him."

Like Stern, who described Luisotti's uncanny ability to embody an intention without having to verbalize it, Principal Oboist Mingjia Liu focused on Luisotti's communicative powers. "You don't guess," said Liu. "You don't think of





Top: "San Francisco is a great city full of open-minded, open-hearted people," says Luisotti who ends his nine-year tenure as music director at the end of the season.

Middle: Nicola and friends—with baritone George Gagnidze and mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges at the 2016 Opera Ball.

Bottom, left to right: Then-General Director David Gockley and tenor Plácido Domingo at a 2010 press conference for Cyrano de Bergerac; tenor Michael Fabiano and soprano Nadine Sierra at the David Gockley Gala in June 2016.

what you need to do to please him." Liu summoned a *Madama Butterfly* performance in the summer of 2014 as especially memorable, with Luisotti "so deeply buried inside the characters that for a third of the time his eyes were closed. Some older members of the orchestra told me that they hadn't experienced that kind of night in 20 years."

For an observer seated in the orchestra pit during a performance of this summer's *Rigoletto*, the conductor's full-body absorption was apparent. Trusting his orchestra to follow his suavely smooth beat, Luisotti fixed his attention on the stage, using a single right-hand finger to cue and coax the soloists while reserving four fingers on his left for the dark-cloaked chorus. Smiles, empathic grimaces, and gentle supplications played across Luisotti's face, as if he were experiencing every pulse of feeling onstage.

Baritone Quinn Kelsey, who sang the title role, said Luisotti creates an "electric" connection with singers. "He wants so much color and character through the singing of the text, and he's not afraid to tell you." There's some-

thing "terrible genuine" about him. Creating a visceral connection of music to audience, said Kelsey, is foremost. "You can only accomplish this if you are willing to step outside of yourself and your comfort zone, in order to produce something really magical on stage."

Tenor Michael Fabiano, who starred in the Company's recent *Don Carlo* and *Luisa Miller*, cited the conductor's "unique ability to merge rigor and emotion. He is also an intensely passionate man, which inspires everyone around him to meet him at his level."

Luisotti, who spent part of his career as a chorus director, pays particular attention to that ensemble. Citing the conductor's deep knowledge of both the libretto

> and architecture of a piece, San Francisco Opera Chorus Director Ian Robertson said Luisotti has crafted a unified and colorful choral sound here. "There's always something riveting about the way he goes straight to the point. He will stop a rehearsal, say a few things, and get his results right away." In *Rigoletto* it was an urgent but surreptitious "loud whisper" he wanted from the abductors—just one of the many details that become "integral," as Robertson put it, to the whole.

Luisotti tends to be less analytical and more instinctual about his art. "Technique? Oh no, I don't think so much about it," he said in his office, comparing conducting to driving a car. "You just do it—you stop on the red, you go

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From top to bottom: Nicola at the fortepiano for the Company's 2013 run of Così fan tutte; jamming with friends in his hometown of Bargecchia at age 14; a 15-year-old Nicola with sister, Biancamaria, and mother, Rita; foraging for mushrooms in Sonoma; with wife Rita Simonini

on the green." A few minutes later, he returned to the topic, citing the importance of preparation and knowing everything he can about the score, history, and context of an opera. In first rehearsals, he tends not to talk much, reading straight through a piece from beginning to end. Only then will Luisotti "try to get inside the story to discover why there is an accent here, a crescendo there."

An opera orchestra is "playing the soundtrack of the story," Luisotti said, illustrating the point by darting across the room to a piano and playing an ardent theme from the Sergio Leone film *Once Upon a Time in America*.

"Our life is inside the music," he said. "Without the music we are nothing." Lines like that come out of him without a hint of hyperbole. "Music is forever. It comes from eternity. What is the Big Bang? It means *sound*."

The youngest of five children, Luisotti freely admits he was babied and indulged growing up, even by his father, a carpenter, who thought blacksmithing might be a useful trade for an artistic son with uncertain prospects. Music was ever-present. His mother sang as a soloist in the church choir. His father played the clarinet in the village banda. The clanging church bells in his hometown of Bargecchia were the purported inspiration for the ones Puccini used, the melody slightly transposed, in the first act of *Tosca*. Not a note of Luisotti's musical past, it seems, has been forgotten. He brought himself and his listener to the brink of tears when he returned to the piano and played the minormode lullaby his mother used to sing.

Several days later, over a Mexican lunch with Rita and another friend, Luisotti described himself at one point as "happily depressed. I have a smiling mask over something melancholic." He wasn't talking about music at the moment, but it's that same ability to hold contrasting strong emotions in balance that has distinguished so many of his performances here.

Rita, who manages many aspects of her husband's busy career, smiled serenely as Nicola described the couple's courtship and first kiss and their custom of eating a home-cooked meal late and watching a movie on TV after one of his performances. While a move to Europe is still close to a year off, the conversation took a wistful turn to their time in

San Francisco.

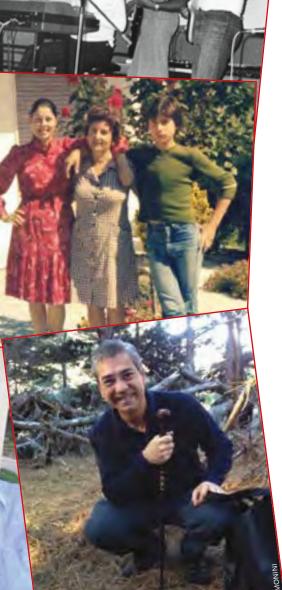
"The United States changed our life," said Luisotti. "This is a great city full of open-minded, open-hearted people." Rita seconded the feeling: "We will miss it so much."

But then again, as Luisotti said with one of his embracing grins, "We'll be back."

Steven Winn is a San Francisco writer and critic whose work has appeared in Art News, California, Humanities, The New York Times, and Symphony. He previously wrote about the Merola Opera Program's 60th anniversary for San Francisco Opera Magazine.







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also served before performances and during intermissions at Patina's Café Express (Lower level) and Dress Circle Café. Call (415) 861-8150 or visit opentable.com for reservations or to pre-order. Patrons dining in the Opera House may enter through the North Carriage entrance (adjacent to the War Memorial courtyard) up to two hours prior to curtain.

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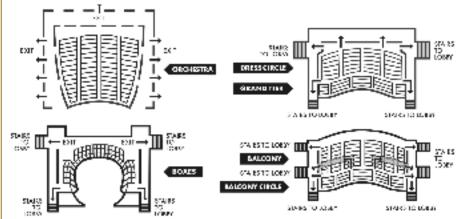
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San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center War Memorial Opera House Exit Diagram



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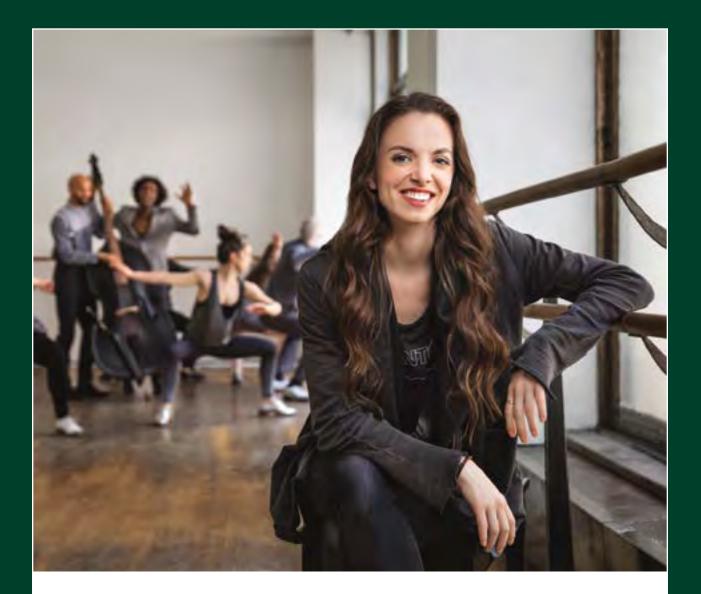
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nce again, the unprecedented generosity of Cynthia and John Gunn has set the stage for a dazzling season at San Francisco Opera. Since 2002, when John joined the Opera Board, the couple has underwritten numerous productions and provided exceptional support for many of the Company's innovative endeavors.

In September 2008, the Gunns made a historic commitment—believed to be the largest gift ever made by individuals to an American opera company—to help fund the signature projects of then-General Director David Gockley, including new operas and productions, multimedia projects, and outreach programs. This season, the Gunns' inspired generosity is helping make possible five productions—*Turandot, Elektra, Manon, Girls of the Golden West,* and the *Ring* cycle.

John shared his considerable insights at the 2014 conference of OPERA America, the national service organization for opera. As he told attendees, "Opera is a dynamic art form and all of us play a role in keeping it vital. We must expand our repertoire and our audiences, and strive for financial flexibility. And we depend on donors to keep opera alive."

John is the former chairman and CEO of Dodge & Cox

Investment Managers. He joined the firm in 1972, the year he received his MBA from Stanford Business School and married Cynthia, who graduated from Stanford with an A.B. in political science in 1970. Early in her career, Cynthia was the editor and director of The Portable Stanford book series for ten years. She edited twenty-eight books by Stanford professors on a vast array of topics, including *Economic Policy Beyond the Headlines* by George Shultz and Ken Dam.

In addition to their support of San Francisco Opera, the Gunns are active members of the community. John is the chair of the advisory board for the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR), serves as a trustee of Stanford University, and is Vice Chairman of the board of Stanford Hospital Care. Cynthia is an overseer of Stanford's Hoover Institution, a member of the advisory board of Family and Children Services, and serves on the boards of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health and the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums.

Opera lovers are grateful to Cynthia and John, and applaud their commitment to keeping San Francisco Opera a leading-edge company.

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Diane B. Wilsey (Opening Weekend Grand Sponsor, Turandot)

Longtime San Francisco Opera board member, patron and Opera Ball supporter, Dede Wilsey believes deeply in the transformative power of the arts, particularly the multi-faceted world of opera. Says Dede, "It's a marvelous spectacle. From the voices and pageantry to the scenery, costumes, and acting, opera fills the senses and takes you to another place." She also believes fervently that such experiences should be available to all. "We work hard to make events open to the public at no cost," she explains. "And because a love of any art form starts at a young age, we take opera into the schoolroom."

Thanks to Dede's generosity, opera enthusiasts of all ages have much to celebrate. As Opening Weekend Grand Sponsor for the twelfth consecutive year, she is supporting the

opening production of the 2017–18 Season, Turandot, the celebratory floral arrangements that grace the War Memorial Opera House on September 8, and the free, annual Opera in the Park concert at Sharon Meadow on September 10. Dede's leadership support was critical in the creation of the Wilsey Center for Opera, a dynamic, intimate new space at the Veterans Building, which opened in spring, 2016. The Center consolidates the Company's activities onto the War Memorial Campus, enabling San Francisco Opera to engage in exciting new programming and education work. Dede's philanthropic commitment to the community extends to many organizations. She is president of the Fine Arts Museums. She serves on the boards of the San Francisco Ballet, Grace Cathedral, the War Memorial, and is a lifetime trustee of UCSE.

Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem/Conductors Fund, Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund, and Emerging Stars Fund (Production Sponsor, Turandot; Sponsor, Maestro Luisotti)

After a career devoted to his publishing businesses in Japan and Europe, the creation of Clos Pegase Winery in California's Napa Valley, and his art collection, Jan Shrem, in joyous partnership with his wife Maria Manetti Shrem, is bringing his focus and affection to philanthropic causes that advance education and the performing and visual arts. Though they grew up half-a-world apart, Jan and Maria both developed a love of opera at a young age. While their lives led them each around the globe, their individual passions eventually led them to San Francisco Opera, and to each other. With a



HENRY FAIF

substantial multi-year commitment, Company Sponsors Jan and Maria have expanded their support with the establishment of three different funds. The Conductors Fund helps ensure the continued appearances of Maestro Nicola Luisotti and other Italian conductors in the orchestra pit. The Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund, helps bring today's most compelling artists in Italian repertoire to San Francisco Opera, and the Emerging Stars Fund supports the Company in showcasing several exciting rising young stars on our stage throughout the season.

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Joan and David Traitel/Great Singers Fund (Sponsors, Martina Serafin, *Turandot*; Christine Goerke and Adrianne Pieczonka, *Elektra*)

"Without great singers, opera is not all it could be," says San Francisco Opera board member Joan Traitel. "That's why my husband and I approached David Gockley with the idea of creating a special way of supporting singers exclusively." The result was the Great Singers Fund, launched by the Traitels in 2008 to provide San Francisco Opera with enhanced support to attract the world's best singers. Joan, a member of the Opera's board of directors since 1998, and her husband David were production sponsors for several years before founding the Great Singers Fund. "The Fund makes a difference in the quality of opera in San Francisco," Joan explains. "I am thrilled to see the remarkably talented Martina Serafin, Christine Goerke, and Adrianne Pieczonka returning to our stage. All three have been performing in the world's greatest opera



houses for years, and I am eager to see them back in San Francisco. I hope people see the relationship between the Great Singers Fund and this season's fantastic lineup. Your support truly can make a difference! These amazing artists make an evening special, and at the end you walk away happy."



Burgess and Elizabeth Jamieson

(Company Sponsor and Production Sponsor, Turandot)

Libby and Burgess Jamieson have made an extraordinary commitment to San Francisco Opera for over three decades by supporting traditional, classical productions. Their continuing enthusiasm for beloved, classic operas has assured an enduring place on the War Memorial Opera House stage for such applauded and memorable works as: *Die Meistersinger, Il Trittico, La Bohème, Madama Butterfly, Turandot, Tosca,* and *La Traviata*.

Both Libby and Burgess consider their sustained support of the arts, especially the San Francisco Opera Association, as a means of ensuring important cultural, traditional links for the next generations' listening appreciation.

To ensure its musical enjoyment here again, Burgess says that: "Libby and I are pleased to bring Turandot back to

San Francisco this season in this beautifully sung opera. In one of his final performances as a 10-year veteran of the company, San Francisco Opera Music Director, Nicola Luisotti, masterfully conducts a superbly assembled orchestra and cast of singers." With over 45 years of experience in private and public investment management, Burgess is active on the San Francisco Opera's board of directors and its investment committee.

Bernard and Barbro Osher (Production Sponsor, Turandot)

A native of Maine, Bernard Osher became involved with San Francisco Opera as a subscriber nearly fifty years ago, shortly after moving here from New York. He and his wife Barbro, a native of Sweden, have supported every aspect of the Company's work, from artist appearances to production facilities. Established in 1977, The Bernard Osher Foundation has funded virtually every major arts organization in the area, including youth programs. Higher education initiatives include community college support, Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes on 119 campuses nationwide, and Osher Centers for Integrative Medicine at several of the nation's leading teaching hospitals, and at the Karolinska institute in Stockholm, Sweden. Bernard is a longstanding member of the Opera's board of directors, serving on the Chairman's Council. Barbro is Honorary Consul General of Sweden in San Francisco, and serves as Chairman of the Board of the Osher Foundation.





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deliver. San Francisco Opera Guild's Education Fund ensures the continuation of these vital programs. San Francisco Opera Guild is a proud supporter of San Francisco Opera and a Production Sponsor of *Turandot*.

HALL Wines (Official Wine Sponsor, 2017–18 Season)

Craig and Kathryn Hall, HALL Napa Valley, are delighted to be the official wine sponsors for the 2017–2018 season. Recognized as leading luxury Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir producers, the Halls have aimed to incorporate art and sustainability into the tapestry of each of their operations. Each of their wine country properties—HALL Wines St. Helena and Rutherford, WALT Sonoma and SENZA Hotel—display a part of their collection of modern art.

Craig is chairman and founder of Dallas-based HALL Group, and a six-time author. He and his wife, Kathryn co-wrote New York Times bestseller, A Perfect Score, a story that describes the art and business of creating a 21st century winery. A life-long entrepreneur and investor, in addition to the vineyard and winery business, his professional interests today include real estate, venture capital, technology and hotels. Previously, Craig Hall was part



owner of the Dallas Cowboys; formed one of the first savings and loans in Michigan; founded one of the first for-profit HMOs in the country; and participated, along with Time, Inc., in growing the nation's largest chain of health and sports clubs.

Kathryn began her career as Assistant City Attorney in Berkeley, California, later joining Safeway Stores, where she was responsible for developing and administering one of the nation's first and largest affirmative action programs. She and her brother managed their family's Mendocino vineyard property from 1982 to 1992. From 1997 to 2001, Kathryn was the United States Ambassador to Austria. She is actively involved in the HALL and WALT winery operations.

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Richard Strauss ELEKTRA

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Matthew Shilvock, General Director

Nicola Luisotti, Music Director Caroline H. Hume Endowed Chair



This production is made possible, in part, by John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn.

Ms. Goerke's and Ms. Pieczonka's appearances are made possible by a gift to the Great Singers Fund by Joan & David Traitel.

Additional funding is provided by Dr. Richard H. Davis.

SYNOPSIS

ELEKTRA

We are in a contemporary museum. At closing time a visitor hides herself inside. She becomes obsessed with understanding the ancient Greek myth on display: the fall of the house of Atreus—a family steeped in generations of ill deeds, guilt, and revenge. These wrongs have been exacerbated by Agamemnon giving up his own daughter, Iphigenia, as a human blood-sacrifice to the gods. The visitor obsessively re-watches a film that has been showing in the museum: it details maidservants performing a human sacrifice, while gossiping about a mad creature, Elektra, a daughter of the house, who has been driven crazy by the deeds done to her father. Only one of the women present comes to the defense of the muchabused Elektra; her punishment for such compassion is to become the sacrificial victim. This myth seems so resonant to the visitor that the film comes alive to her. The visitor, someone also in mourning, becomes Elektra.

Elektra invokes the memory of her father, Agamemnon. She recalls how, having returned from the war, he was murdered in his bath by his wife and her mother, Klytemnestra, aided by her lover, Aegisth. Elektra begs her father to show himself and promises, invoking her long-lost brother, Orest, and her sister, Chrysothemis, to avenge his death by making blood sacrifices. Agamemnon appears to her: murder victim, father, and demi-god.

Chrysothemis tells Elektra that Klytemnestra and Aegisth plan to lock Elektra up. She begs her to resist the urge of revenge: only then, she says, will they be allowed out of this "prison" of a home. Chrysothemis craves a normal life with a lover and children. Elektra, at first intrigued by her sister's vision of a normal life, ultimately remains unmoved. Klytemnestra and her entourage are heard approaching. Chrysothemis passes on the gossip that Klytemnestra has been having nightmares about the return of her son, Orest, who was banished in infancy. Klytemnestra and her fawning servants enter; Elektra confronts her with a calm, cruel irony. Klytemnestra dismisses her attendants, who mutter about Elektra's deviousness, and stays alone with her daughter. Her sleep at nights has been racked with nightmares. Klytemnestra graphically describes her dreams, which feature images of putrid carcasses and maggots, and a torch whose flickering mocks her. Blood must flow, she says, before these dreams can end. Elektra begins to taunt her mother with talk of an appropriate ritual sacrifice, to be enacted by a stranger, but mysteriously one who also comes from the house. Elektra terrifies Klytemnestra with increasingly lurid threats: she will be pursued through the bedroom, bathroom, stairways, and cellars of the house

by one seeking bloody vengeance. Just as Elektra reaches a climax, a message is brought to Klytemnestra. As she takes in this fresh news, a look of evil triumph engulfs her. She sweeps out as Chrysothemis bursts in with the news: Orest is dead. Two servants hasten to take this "good news" to Aegisth.

Elektra at first refuses to accept Orest's death but tells Chrysothemis that it is then their duty to avenge his death using the very ax with which Agamemnon was murdered. Chrysothemis, terrified, rushes out. Elektra, once again alone, is startled by a stranger who has broken in. It is Orest in disguise. Cautious at first, he claims that he and a companion saw Orest killed and have been charged with bearing the information to Queen Klytemnestra. When Elektra tells him that she is of the same blood as Agamemnon and Orest, the siblings recognize each other. She tells him how she has sacrificed her sexuality to the cause of vengeance, and Orest swears vengeance to do the deed for her. Orest's mysterious old companion warns the two of them to be prudent and takes the ritual ax from Elektra.

The maids comment on the frightening events. Aegisth returns home, to be confronted by Elektra, who now taunts him and pretends to have "changed" in her understanding. He enters the house and is also immediately murdered by Orest. Elektra and Chrysothemis celebrate the murders in frenzied excitement. Elektra is left alone, and the terrible burden caused by the death of her father takes its toll.

First performance: Dresden, Court Theater; January 25, 1909

First performance in the U.S.: New York, Manhattan Opera House; February 1, 1910 (in French)

First San Francisco Opera performance: October 24, 1938

Elektra has been performed in 9 previous seasons at San Francisco Opera. For complete casting and other information, visit **archive.sfopera.com**.

Personnel: 16 principals; 47 choristers offstage; 19 supernumeraries; **82 total.**

Orchestra: 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 1 heckelphone, 2 clarinets in B-flat, 2 clarinets in A, 1 clarinet in E-flat, 1 bass clarinet, 2 basset horns, 3 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon, 8 horns, 4 doubling Wagner tubas, 6 trumpets, 1 bass trumpet, 2 trombones, 1 bass trombone, 1 contrabass trombone, 1 tuba, 2 timpanists (7 drums), 4 percussion, 2 harps, 1 celeste, 47 strings (8 first violins, 8 second violins, 8 third violins, 10 violas, 7 cellos, 6 basses); **100 total** Conductor Henrik Nánási*

Original Director Keith Warner*

Revival Director Anja Kühnhold*

Set Designer Boris Kudlička*

Costume Designer Kaspar Glarner*

Lighting Designer John Bishop*

Video Designer Bartek Macias*

Chorus Director Ian Robertson

Fight Director Dave Maier

Assistant Director Jose Maria Condemi

Assistant Conductor Joseph Marcheso

Prompter Dennis Doubin

Musical Preparation Maureen Zoltek Matthew Piatt Mario Marra* John Churchwell Fabrizio Corona

Supertitles DeAnna Sherer

Stage Manager Gina Hays

Assistant Stage Managers Andrew Landis Becki Smith Jayme O'Hara

Costume Supervisor Jai Alltizer

Head of Wig and Makeup Jeanna Parham

A co-production of San Francisco Opera, Prague National Theatre, and Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2017 AT 7:30 PM WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 AT 7:30 PM SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 AT 2 PM TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 AT 7:30 PM FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 AT 7:30 PM WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 AT 7:30 PM Opera in one act by **Richard Strauss** Text by **Hugo von Hofmannsthal** Based on the play by **Sophocles**

ELEKTRA

(Sung in German with English supertitles)

(in order of vocal appearance)

First maidservant	Jill Grove
Second maidservant	Laura Krumm
Third maidservant	Nicole Birkland
Fourth maidservant	Sarah Cambidge*†
Fifth maidservant	Rhoslyn Jones
The Overseer	Alexandra Loutsion*
Elektra	Christine Goerke
Chrysothemis	Adrianne Pieczonka
Klytemnestra	Michaela Martens
Klytemnestra's confidante	Erin Neff
Klytemnestra's trainbearer	Amina Edris†
A young servant	Kyle van Schoonhoven*†
An old servant	Bojan Knežević
Orest	Alfred Walker*
Tutor of Orest	Anthony Reed†
Aegisth	Robert Brubaker

Museum guards and visitors

*San Francisco Opera debut †Current Adler Fellow

PLACE AND TIME: A museum, present day

The performance will last approximately one hour and forty-five minutes without intermission.

Latecomers may not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed. Patrons who leave during the performance may not be re-seated.

The use of cameras, cell phones, and any kind of recording equipment is strictly forbidden. Please turn off and refrain from using all electronic devices.

igmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung approached the human mind as a museum. They toured patients' inner galleries, focusing on the permanent collections. What a show the princess Elektra would have offered, a display so disturbing that it gave birth to a psychoanalytical theory. Jung coined the term "Electra complex" in 1913, ten years after the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote his play Elektra, based on Sophocles' classic drama, and four years after Richard Strauss transformed Hofmannsthal's play into his most musically daring opera. For Hofmannsthal, the character of Elektra (to use the German spelling) must have exercised a powerful appeal, for she embodied the fevers and perfumes of fin-de-siècle art. As drawn to interiors as were Freud and Jung, Hofmannsthal saw opportunity in Elektra-the opportunity to depict a tortured mind, to open the doors to her inner museum. Strauss, more pragmatic than the sensitive aesthete who would become his favorite librettist, saw a good story.

In the myth, Elektra's father (King Agamemnon) has sacrificed her sister (Iphigenia) to appease the goddess Artemis, who in return revives the stilled winds and allows Agamemnon's ship to proceed to the battlefields of the Trojan War. During Agamemnon's ten-year absence, Queen Klytemnestra has taken a lover. The queen, ill-disposed toward her husband to begin with, is outraged by their daughter's death. Agamemnon returns home, to die at the hands of Klytemnestra and her paramour, Aegisth. In Greek antiquity, every party wronged must exact vengeance. Now, just as her mother avenged the young Iphigenia, Elektra seeks revenge for her father's death. His killers must die. Sophocles captures all this in a story of corrosive sorrow. Hofmannsthal chose not to mention Iphigenia in his version of the legend, thus erasing sympathy for Klytemnestra. His queen is no grieving mother. She is a self-centered adulteress who wants her husband gone. His murder drives Elektra to the edge of insanity.

When Strauss saw Hofmannsthal's Elektra in 1905, he knew it could become an opera, yet he balked at the subject, worried that it too closely resembled his last stage work, Salome. That story, drawn from the Bible and thus also set in antiquity, capitalized on flamboyance. The nymphet of the title teases her stepfather, King Herod, with a flood of adolescent sexuality and consummates her own degenerate fantasies as she fondles the severed head of John the Baptist. For this, Strauss invented a musical opulence that outdid even Berlioz and Wagner. The artistic distance between Salome and his first two operas, Guntram and Feuersnot, corresponds to the space Beethoven put between his Second Symphony and the Eroica. Salome, with its stunning color, acoustic volume, and dissonances-not to mention the lurid story—earned its composer a reputation as music's current bad boy, modernism's paragon.

Like most writers, Hofmannsthal cultivated a healthy opinion of his own talent and remained vigilant to whatever could



advance its recognition. Unwilling to forfeit an opportunity to link his name with the world's most celebrated living opera composer, he went to work on Strauss, emphasizing all that distinguished *Elektra* from *Salome*. He prevailed. Strauss, with his exquisite stage sense, tailored Hofmannsthal's play, cutting it by a third. Hofmannsthal bore Strauss' cuts with magnanimity. Only in subsequent projects would their work become a genuine collaboration, one that lasted two decades, until Hofmannsthal's death in 1929. Their partnership, on a level with Mozart and Da Ponte's, resulted in five more of Strauss' most memorable works for the stage, including *Der Rosenkavalier, Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Arabella*.

Some critics condemn *Elektra*'s creators for dismissing women as hysterics. But this is no tale told by a pair of misogynists. Elektra, a powerful woman, knows what she wants and does what she must. If at last she enlists a man to murder the queen and her lover, she remains the avenging force, for she has decreed the transgressors' fate.

That said, *Elektra* spends less time penetrating psyches than aiming for its listener's gut. While Hofmannsthal meant to bring Freud into the act, Strauss' cuts pare the libretto to a straightforward tale of good-over-evil. Strauss removed any moral complication the writer may have retained from Sophocles. As Bryan Gilliam writes in his *Elektra* monograph, Strauss "sacrifice[ed] psychological depth and motivational complexity in order to achieve... musical goals." What remains is painted in primary colors, a tight fusion of action, place, and time. Strauss' job was to find the musical analogue for this drama.

Elektra's orchestra is its Greek chorus, commenting on the action. Here, as in *Salome*, Strauss fit sound to subject. To those who ridiculed him for resorting to what his biographer Matthew Boyden has called "the most contrapuntally complex work of music ever written," scored for 100 musicians playing 110 instruments that generate a teeth-shaking roar, Strauss had a ready response: "When a mother is slain on the stage, do they expect me to write a violin concerto?"

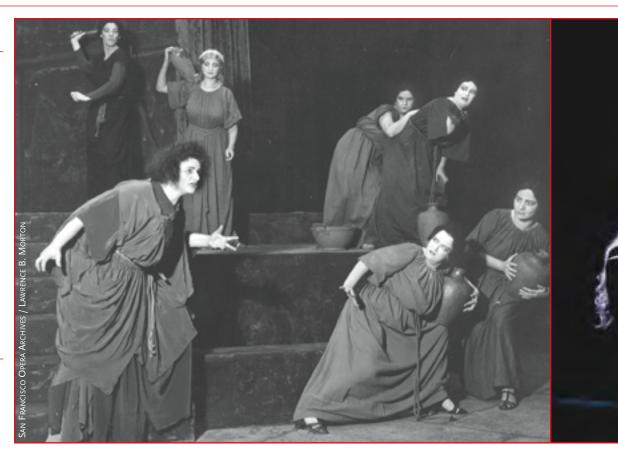
At Elektra's premiere, in Dresden on January 25, 1909, some listeners believed Strauss had gone too far. He himself wrote that he had "penetrated to the uttermost limits of harmony... and of the receptivity of modern ears." But, as Boyden warns, to concentrate on "the ugly and the shocking" is to misread *Elektra*, although he overstates the case in calling the opera "a work of almost conventional lyricism,... probably Strauss's most fluid score, as singable and melodious as anything by Mozart." His point is that *Elektra* is not a modernist manifesto, nor was Strauss' next opera, Der Rosenkavalier, a retreat into orthodoxy. In Rosenkavalier, music would match the elegantly upbeat story. Here it matches a tale of obsession and revenge. In both operas, Boyden continues, Strauss was true to the tradition that formed him. And in Elektra, he "confirmed both the conventions of his past and the conservatism of his future." Strauss scholar Michael Kennedy is

> Keith Warner's production of Elektra, which is receiving its U.S. premiere in San Francisco, debuted in Prague in 2016.

Left to right: In 1938, soprano Rose Pauly brought her fiery interpretation of Elektra to San Francisco Opera, under the baton of fellow Hungarian Fritz Reiner.

In the Company's unforgettable 1991 production, Welsh soprano Gwyneth Jones starred in the title role, opposite Helga Dernesch as Klytemnestra.

Elektra was the first of six collaborations between composer Richard Strauss and (pictured here) librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929).



blunter: "The theory that after *Elektra* Strauss shied away from 'modernity' and retreated into a cosy world free from atonality is rubbish."

The opera unfolds in seven sections. In (1), the servants prepare us for Elektra's entrance. In (2), Elektra raises a plea to Agamemnon. In (3), we meet Elektra's sister Chrysothemis, a stable presence dropped into a dysfunctional family and thus a destabilizing figure in this somersaulting world. (4) In this central episode, we understand what Elektra faces in Klytemnestra, a mother who makes Joan Crawford look like Carol Brady. (5) Believing her brother dead, Elektra determines to murder Klytemnestra and Aegisth herself. She tries to enlist Chrysothemis into her plan. (6) A messenger arrives to confirm Orest's death, then reveals the death as a ruse. He, the herald, *is* Orest. (7) Orest kills the queen and Aegisth. Elektra dies. Strauss builds this two-hour span from many pieces—tender love songs, waltzes, tearing dissonance. And every piece fits.

I cannot verify Boyden's claim that Strauss has threaded 63 leitmotifs through his score, each stemming from the figure D-A-F-D, but the contention itself attests to the work's simultaneous simplicity and complexity. The orchestra announces the first three notes of the D-A-F-D figure in the opening bars. Minutes later the figure recurs in full, and we understand what it means. To the four tones, Elektra utters the four syllables of her dead father's name: Agamemnon.

Throughout, Strauss varies his four-note cell, creating signatures for his actors and triggers for their actions, all while weaving a dense web of musical markers that engulf us, overtly and subliminally. The Agamemnon theme recurs in its primary form at crucial points, and besides opening *Elektra*, it ends the opera. Among its many variants: the despondent, descending figure associated with Orest's supposed death; the murmuring low brass that stalks Klytemnestra (murmuring Agamemnon's name, or hers?) as she laments her tortured dreams; and, at the opera's climax, the shift into the major mode as Chrysothemis exults with a cry of *Es ist Orest*! The music says even more than her words. It says *Mission accomplished*!

More breathtaking still is what the orchestra offers in the Recognition Scene. As the messenger announcing Orest's death changes his story and tells Elektra her brother is indeed alive, she begins to grasp this herald's identity. "Who are you, then?" she asks. Hofmannsthal envisioned a few moments of silent action after this question. According to his stage direction: "The solemn old servant, followed by three other servants, enters quietly from the courtyard, throws himself before Orest and kisses his feet. The others kiss Orest's hands and the hem of his garment." Emerging as if from nowhere comes the opera's most transparent music, a lilting pianissimo tune generated by the Agamemnon motif, rising and falling, a song in itself (which is how Strauss asks the orchestra to play it), mirroring the rebirth of Elektra's world as she recognizes her brother. The music alone can support the scene and does so even if the stage direction is not followed (often it is not). But to witness a production in which the servants appear while the orchestra sings is to understand how Strauss wed his art to Hofmannsthal's, creating stage magic.

Strauss does not limit himself to working with the Agamemnon theme. He also unifies and comments on the action by repeating themes literally. In her opening monologue, to five repeated notes—one long and three short staccato, followed by a



final rising note—Elektra asserts that Agamemnon will return (so *kommst du wieder*). We hear this figure again as Klytemnestra explains the power residing in the jewels—*Steine*, literally stones—that hang from her neck. When the "herald" reveals that Orest is alive, a ray of light emerges in the form of a muted fanfare, which reappears in the celebration after Orest dispenses his mother and her lover. Even Elektra's final dance is prefigured early, before 60 bars have passed.

Of the score's many beauties, Chrysothemis owns two that stand above the music's contours, proclamations that detach themselves from their context and head for the sky: *Kinder will ich haben!* (her hymn to motherhood) and *Es ist Orest!* Chrysothemis wants to leave the past behind, but nothing about her suggests weakness. She is what she seems, a foil to her sister, and a tough one. She stands her ground against Elektra. No stranger to violence, she applauds the murders. And while Elektra appears to dismiss her sister's yearning for children, she also sees Chrysothemis's point. Children continue the bloodline. They fulfill the wishes even of the dead: *Glücklich ist, wer Kinder hat,* Elektra sings—"happy are they who have children." And so she treats her brother with a mother's sympathies. "Child," she calls him, having traded her own hope of love for the revenge that fills her and inches toward birth.

Elektra has set this nightmare world right, but that act can have no encore. Her death is no ritual punishment devised for a strong woman. As the final C major chord confirms, it is an apotheosis. This museum's closing time has come.

Larry Rothe is author of Music for a City, Music for the World *and co-author of* For the Love of Music.

More about Elektra

Books

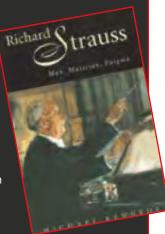
Richard Strauss by Matthew Boyden (Northeastern University Press).

Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma by Michael Kennedy (Cambridge University Press).

Boyden adopts a less traditional approach than Kennedy, but both are fluent writers who love their subject and offer many insights.

I offer a personal take on Strauss in my essay "First-Rate Second-Class Composer" in *For the Love of Music* (Oxford University Press).

Videos and Recordings



Elektra has been filmed and recorded often. Among the many video versions, two that stand out are those with Claudio Abbado conducting the Vienna Philharmonic and Christian Thielemann conducting the Munich Philharmonic. Abbado's all-star cast includes Éva Marton, Brigitte Fassbaender, and Cheryl Studer and features eerily effective staging by Harry Kupfer (Arthaus Musik). Thielemann's cast includes Linda Watson, Jane Henschel, and Manuela Uhl, in a minimalist production by Herbert Wernicke (Opus Arte). A historical footnote: Thielemann made his memorable U.S. conducting debut leading the Company's 1991 production of *Elektra*, starring Gwyneth Jones in the title role and Helga Dernesch as Klytemnestra.

Georg Solti, who also made his American debut in San Francisco leading Elektra (in 1953), recorded the work with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1961. Featuring Birgit Nilsson, Regina Resnik, and Marie Collier, this account captures the score's brilliance in sound that remains exemplary (Decca).

—L.R.

3 RI DG EMAN

The Many Faces of

ou may have seen her in the form of Jennifer Garner's sword-wielding assassin in the 2005 film *Elektra*, on stage as a bitter Civil War spinster in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, in the words of Sylvia Plath's controversial poem "Electra on Azalea Path," in the famed portrait by Frederic Leighton, *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*, and indeed, in Richard Strauss' opera *Elektra**.

In the 2,000-plus years since her name was first etched on paper, Electra—the myth, the character—has inspired dozens, if not hundreds, of works of theater, literature, art, opera, and psychoanalysis. Around a century ago, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung suggested there was an "Electra complex" suffered by many little girls who were in love with their fathers in competition with their mothers, thus tainting forever the innocent tag "Daddy's little girl."

Even today, the vengeful, father-worshipping anti-heroine of Sophocles' tragedy continues to fascinate and perturb us—perhaps in part because her story of familial murder and mayhem makes *Game of Thrones* pale in comparison.

In the years following the Trojan War, Electra has waited for nearly a decade for the return of her brother Orestes

*When referring to the Sophocles play, the standard English spelling is "Electra." "Elektra" is the German spelling.



For centuries, the mythic figure of Electra has served as inspiration for artists. Examples include (from left to right): Frederic Leighton's circa 1868 painting Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon; Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra with Rosalind Russell and Michael Redgrave in the 1947 film adaptation; the ancient Roman stone statue Electra and Orestes; and the eponymous 1962 film, directed by Mihalis Kakogiannis.

from exile, hoping then he would take vengeance on their mother, Clytemnestra, and stepfather, Aegisthus, for the murder of their father, King Agamemnon. To Clytemnestra, her husband's murder was justified because Agamemnon had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia in order to win the war. To Electra, true justice can only be achieved with the murder of her mother and stepfather.

Perhaps one reason the Electra myth has continued to pique our curiosity over the millennia is because of its moral ambiguity. What constitutes right and wrong? Shouldn't murdering one's own mother be considered wrong, even if one's own mother is murderous herself? We are intrigued by the fact that Electra's moral compass seems to be broken, as she has convinced herself that virtue and justice is on her side, not her mother's.

To Electra, there are no shades of gray, only black and white. In the end, bloodbath concluded, we are divided over whether justice has been achieved or whether Electra has gone mad.

Another reason the Electra myth continues to resonate with modern audiences is that it challenges the virtue of expediency: is it better to take action against injustice or to turn a blind eye? Electra tries to convince her sister Chrysothemis to participate in the plot, but Chrysothemis refuses. Despite her anger toward their mother, she does not want to upset the apple cart of her pleasant life as a princess. Chrysothemis is not the only one who vacillates. Electra may have vengeance on her mind, but waits for years to carry it out and only then because her brother has joined forces. Her anger without action is reminiscent of another fascinating but tragic figure, Hamlet. Although it should be noted that in Sophocles' day, loyalty and justice were seen as supremely important, and women were expected to be faithful and obedient to men. For these reasons, Electra was regarded as a heroine of that era.

Cicero, the Roman historian and orator, considered *Electra* a masterpiece, and British scholar Edith Hall called Electra "a remarkable figure, driven by deprivation and cruelty into near-psy-chotic extremes of behavior; no other character in (Sophocles') extant dramas dominates the stage to such an extent."

So it was only right that the theatrical character would get new life in other media, especially opera, which has always been a home for tales of high drama and low behaviors. When composer Richard Strauss saw a German theatrical version of *Electra*, written by Viennese-born playwright and poet Hugo Laurenz August Hofmann von Hofmannsthal, he was drawn to the story as a potential opera. They agreed to collaborate, and the opera version of *Elektra* came to fruition with its 1909 premiere in Dresden.

According to Strauss biographer Tim Ashley, "it was greeted by the critical equivalent of fits and screaming." The modernist score Left and center: Two objects from the the fifth century B.C. depict the meeting of Orestes and Electra at the tomb of Agamemnon: a relief and red-figure krater; right, the oil painting Electra Receiving the Ashes of her Brother Orestes by 19th-century French painter Jean Baptiste Joseph Wicar.

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

was challenging for some critics, while the character of Electra caused one writer to opine, "the blood mania appears as a terrible deformation of sexual perversity." Audiences were also divided on Hofmannsthal's updates, such as converting Sophocles' Greek chorus into a cluster of gossipy maids.

Soon after the opera's debut, though questionably connected to it, was the introduction of a new psychoan-

alytical theory of sexual development. Although Sigmund Freud had been the first to describe the psychodynamics of a girl's sexual competition with her mother for her father as the feminine version of the Oedipus complex, it was his collaborator Carl Jung who created the term "Electra complex" in 1913. That term would eventually be applied to existing works of literature from *Cinderella* to *The Flies* by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Hofmannsthal's play would become the inspiration for Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which was a Broadway hit in 1931, with its chorus of townspeople substituting for Hofmannsthal's maids and Sophocles' divine chorus. Electra is now Lavinia, a wealthy spinster angry with her mother's infidelities while awaiting the return of her husband from the Civil War. Spun from O'Neill's play were a 1947 film starring Rosalind Russell, a 1967 opera by Marvin David Levy, and a 1978 TV mini-series starring Joan Hackett.

Other Electra-inspired creations include the novel *Electra* by Henry Treece, in which she narrates her own story; a crime-fiction series set in Italy by American author Donna Leon, whose young protagonist is named Elletra (the Italian form of Electra); *The Forgotten Pistolero*, a Spaghetti Western by Ferdinando Baldi; *Ellie*, a 1984 film which transfers the story to a Southern U.S. locale; *Szerelmem, Elektra (Electra, My Love*), a Hungarian film by Miklós Jancsó, starring Mari Törőcsik. Other theatrical productions of the Electra myth were written by Jean Giraudoux (*Electra*, 1937),

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Ezra Pound (*Electra*, first staged in 1987), and, most recently and perhaps most interestingly, *Electricidad*, a 2004 play by Luis Alfaro, which is set in a Chicano barrio.

And so Electra continues to ... electrify.

Why continue to resurrect Electra today? What connects us with the questionably sane heroine of 2,000 years ago? Perhaps more than anything, it's the stark view Sophocles takes of the effects of revenge on its perpetrator, as well as the story's moral ambiguity. As the story unspools, Electra's quest for righteousness becomes just a quest for blood, and we watch her become increasingly irrational—and perhaps even mad.

Living in complicated times such as these, with the world a virtual powder keg, perhaps through Electra we see the dangers of viewing the world in black and white.

Jane Ganahl is the co-founder of Litquake, the West Coast's largest independent literary festival, and contributor to many magazines from Harper's Bazaar to Rolling Stone, Ladies' Home Journal, and San Francisco Opera Magazine.

ARTIST PROFILES



HENRIK NÁNÁSI (Pécs, Hungary) Conductor Making his San Francisco Opera debut in *Elektra*, Maestro Nánási was general music director of the Komische Oper

Berlin from 2012 to 2017 and led their new productions of Mazeppa, Eugene Onegin, Gianni Schicchi, La Belle Hélène, Die Zauberflöte, Così fan tutte, Don Giovanni, Bluebeard's Castle, The Fiery Angel, and Cendrillon. In recent seasons, he has made debuts at several major opera houses, including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Turandot), Lyric Opera of Chicago (Le Nozze di Figaro), Bavarian State Opera (La Traviata), Opéra National de Paris (Die Zauberflöte), Arena di Verona (Carmen), Zurich Opera (Le Nozze di Figaro), Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia (Bluebeard's Castle), and the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona (Die Zauberflöte). Highlights of the 2017–18 season include debuts at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma with La Bohème and the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples with Rigoletto, as well as his return to Covent Garden conducting Salome. On the concert podium, he will lead the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Essener Philharmoniker, Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana, Orchestra del Teatro La Fenice di Venezia, and the Orchestra del Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli.



CHRISTINE GOERKE

(Medford, New York) Elektra One of today's leading dramatic sopranos, Christine Goerke made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2006 as Rosalinde in *Die*

Fledermaus. Recent engagements include Brünnhilde in the *Ring* cycle with Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, and Canadian Opera Company; the title role of *Elektra* with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and at New York's Carnegie Hall; Cassandre in *Les Troyens* with Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the title role of *Turandot* with Covent Garden and Opera Philadelphia. Goerke has also appeared with a number of the leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, Houston Symphony, and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Her recording of Vaughan Williams' A Sea Symphony with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra won the 2003 Grammy Award for Best Classical Recording and Best Choral Performance. Later this season, Goerke returns to the Metropolitan Opera and Houston Grand Opera as Elektra, the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Brünnhilde in Die Walküre, and Covent Garden as Ortrud in Lohengrin. Other future plans include the full *Ring* cycle at Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera. She is the recipient of the 2001 Richard Tucker Award, the 2015 Musical America Vocalist of the Year Award, and the 2017 Opera News Award.



MICHAELA MARTENS (Dutchess County, New York) Klytemnestra Mezzo-soprano Michaela Martens made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2015 as Cassandre

in Les Troyens and has performed on many of the world's leading stages, including at the Metropolitan Opera, Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Vienna State Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, and English National Opera. Career highlights include Judith in Bluebeard's Castle, Kundry in Parsifal, Gertrud in Hänsel und Gretel, Marilyn Klinghoffer in Adams' The Death of Klinghoffer, and the Second Norn in Götterdämmerung at the Metropolitan Opera; Herodias in *Salome* with the Santa Fe Opera; Gertrud with Bavarian State Opera; Ortrud in Lohengrin with the Vienna State Opera and in Graz; Kostelnička in *Jenůfa* in Zurich; Judith, Kostelnička, and Marilyn Klinghoffer with English National Opera; and Die Amme in Die Frau ohne Schatten with Lyric Opera of Chicago and in Graz. She will reprise her Klytemnestra with Houston Grand Opera in January 2018. Martens is a past winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and she holds a degree from the Juilliard School. This is her role debut as Klytemnestra.



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ADRIANNE PIECZONKA (Burlington, Ontario) Chrysothemis Internationally celebrated for her interpretations of Wagner, Strauss, Verdi, and Puccini heroines,

Canadian soprano Adrianne Pieczonka made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2009 in the title role of Tosca. In recent years, her portrayal of Chrysothemis in Elektra has taken her to the Metropolitan Opera; Deutsche Oper Berlin; Aix-en-Provence Festival; Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Bavarian State Opera; Milan's Teatro alla Scala; and the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Last season, Pieczonka performed as Leonore in Fidelio at the Metropolitan Opera, Amelia in Un Ballo in Maschera with Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Bavarian State Opera, and Tosca at the Vienna State Opera and Canadian Opera Company. Upcoming highlights include Amelia at the Vienna State Opera and Tosca at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Vienna State Opera; and at Semperoper Dresden (the latter conducted by Christian Thielemann). In March, Pieczonka will perform the Marschallin in Der Rosenkavalier at the Bavarian State Opera and in a concert version at New York's Carnegie Hall.



ALFRED WALKER (New Orleans, Louisiana) Orest Making his San Francisco Opera debut as Orest in *Elektra*, bass-baritone Alfred Walker has

received acclaim for a variety of signature leads, including the title role of Der Fliegende Holländer, which he has performed at Seattle Opera, Oper Köln, Theater Basel, Théâtre de Caen, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, Boston Lyric Opera, and the Wagner Geneva Festival, and the Four Villains in Les Contes d'Hoffmann, which he has sung at the Komische Oper Berlin, Den Norske Opera, Seattle Opera, and Tulsa Opera. In the 2016–17 season, Walker sang his first performances of Wotan in Das Rheingold with North Carolina Opera and Méphistophélès in La Damnation de Faust at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago. He also created the title role of Josh Gibson in the world premiere of Daniel Sonenberg's The Summer King with Pittsburgh Opera. Later this season, Walker returns to the Metropolitan Opera for Titurel in Parsifal and The Speaker in Die Zauberflöte. He also joins Seattle Opera for Amonasro in Aida and Porgy in Porgy and Bess, and

Portland Opera for Méphistophélès in *Faust*. Walker's recording credits include Orest on the Hybrid label with Semyon Bychkov and the WDR Sinfonie Orchester Köln, as well as performances on Plácido Domingo's CD of Verdi tenor arias for Deutsche Grammophon.



ROBERT BRUBAKER (Manheim, Pennsylvania) Aegisth Making his San Francisco Opera debut this month as Emperor Altoum in *Turandot*, tenor Robert

Brubaker has been a frequent performer at the Metropolitan Opera, including as Mime in Siegfried and Das Rheingold, Monostatos in Die Zauberflöte, Malatestino in Francesca da Rimini, the Witch in Hänsel und Gretel, and Mao Tse-tung in John Adams' Nixon in China. He has also recently performed as Herod in Salome with the Dallas Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and Pittsburgh Opera; the Jailer/ Inquisitor in Il Prigionero at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona; Old Man Marshall in Mark-Anthony Turnage's Anna Nicole at the Brooklyn Academy of Music; Alviano in Die Gezeichneten, Dr. Caius in Falstaff, and Bégearss in John Corigliano's The Ghosts of Versailles at Los Angeles Opera; Luigi in Il Tabarro and Canio in Pagliacci at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; and Wilmer McLean/ J. Edgar Hoover in Philip Glass' Appomattox at Washington National Opera. Later this season he appears as Guillot de Morfontaine in the Company's Manon and as Herod at Teatro Regio Torino.



ANTHONY REED (Alexandria, Minnesota) Tutor of Orest Bass Anthony Reed made his San Francisco Opera debut in various roles in 2015's *Les Troyens*. A third-year

San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow, he most recently appeared on the War Memorial Opera House stage as Count Ceprano in Rigoletto, King of Egypt in Aida, Schmidt in Andrea Chénier, Mayor of the Village in *Jenufa*, The Speaker and Second Armored Man in The Magic Flute, Hans Schwartz in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, and Doctor Primus in Getty's Usher House. Other roles in his repertory include Sarastro in Die Zauberflöte, Truffaldin in Ariadne auf Naxos, Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Dulcamara in L'Elisir d'Amore, Don Magnifico in La Cenerentola, and the Four Villains in Les Contes d'Hoffmann. A participant of the 2014 Merola Opera Program, Reed received

a 2011 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Regional Encouragement Award and has been a young artist at the Wolf Trap Opera Studio and the Seagle Music Colony, in addition to his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and the University of Wisconsin. This fall, he also performs with the Company as Doctor Grenvil in *La Traviata*.



RHOSLYN JONES (Aldergrove, British

Columbia) **Fifth Maidservant** Canadian soprano Rhoslyn Jones made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2006 as Frasquita in *Carmen*.

More recent credits include the Countess in Le Nozze di Figaro with Opera Santa Barbara, Musetta in La Bohème with Arizona Opera and Pittsburgh Opera, Tatyana in Eugene Onegin with Vancouver Opera, Donna Anna in Don Giovanni with Chicago Opera Theater and the title role of Susannah with Arizona Opera. As a San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow from 2006 through 2007, Jones created the starring role of Julia Dent Grant in the Company's world premiere of Philip Glass' Appomattox. A frequent performer of concert repertoire, she has been director of the University of British Columbia Summer Vocal Workshop, on faculty at Sonoma State University, as well as an artist in residence at the San Francisco School of the Arts.



ALEXANDRA LOUTSION (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) Overseer Soprano Alexandra Loutsion is making her San Francisco Opera debut as the Overseer

in *Elektra*. Last season, she made her role debut as Turandot at Pittsburgh Opera, debuted at the Palm Beach Opera as Cio-Cio-San in Madama Butterfly and made her role debut as the Foreign Princess in Rusalka at Arizona Opera. She also sang the title role of Tosca in concert with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic and returned to Wolf Trap Opera as Tosca. Her 2017–18 season includes a return to Palm Beach Opera as Tosca, her debut at Tulsa Opera as Turandot, and her first performances of Leonora in Il Trovatore at Central City Opera. Additional engagements include a debut with the Cathedral Choral Society of Washington, D.C. where she will be the soprano soloist in Haydn's Mass in C and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.



(San Antonio, Texas) First Maidservant Mezzo-soprano Jill Grove made her San Francisco Opera debut in 1996 as Anne Kronenberg and Dyke in Stewart

IILL GROVE

Wallace's Harvey Milk. In 2016, she returned to San Francisco Opera to sing the roles of Madelon in Andrea Chénier and Grandmother Buryjovka in *Jenůfa*. She has also made recent returns to Houston Grand Opera as Ježibaba in Rusalka, Lyric Opera of Chicago as Filipyevna in Eugene Onegin, and Pittsburgh Opera as Baba the Turk in The Rake's Progress. Other appearances include Klytemnestra in Elektra at Michigan Opera Theatre and Ježibaba at New Orleans Opera. Grove is a frequent guest at the Lyric Opera of Chicago where she has also sung the Witch in Hänsel und Gretel, Margret in Wozzeck, Die Amme in Die Frau ohne Schatten, Amneris in Aida, Erda in Götterdämmerung, and Countess Geschwitz in Lulu. At the Metropolitan Opera, her performances include Erda, Magdalene in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Madelon, Pantalis in Mefistofele, Emila in Otello, and Cornelia in Giulio Cesare. Later this season, she performs with Lyric Opera of Chicago as Marthe in Faust.

LAURA KRUMM

(Iowa City, Iowa) Second Maidservant Mezzo-soprano Laura Krumm made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2012 as Countess Ceprano and Page in *Rigoletto*

and has appeared in several other roles on the Company's main stage, including Kate Pinkerton in last season's Madama Butterfly, the Maid in *Jenufa*, Rosina in the family performances of The Barber of Seville, and a Maid in the world premiere of Tobias Picker's Dolores Claiborne. For San Francisco Opera she also created the part of Martha Sowerby in the world premiere of Nolan Gasser's The Secret Garden, and she sang Laura in Jack Perla's *Love/Hate* at the ODC Theater in association with the San Francisco Opera Center. Recent engagements include her company and role debuts as Zerlina in Don Giovanni for Nashville Opera, Mrs. Webb in Ned Rorem's Our Town with Fresno Grand Opera, and Meg in Mark Adamo's Little Women for Michigan Opera Theatre. Krumm is a 2013 graduate of San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship Program. Later this season, she appears with the Company as Javotte in Manon and Siegrune in the Ring cycle.





NICOLE BIRKLAND (Moorland, Iowa) Third Maidservant Mezzo-soprano Nicole Birkland made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2012 as Third Secretary to Mao in John Adams' *Nixon*

in China. A favorite at Opera San José, she has appeared there as Dame Quickly in Falstaff, Gertrud in Hänsel und Gretel, Suzuki in Madama Butterfly, Donna Elvira in Don Giovanni, Prince Orlofsky in Die Fledermaus, Zita in Gianni Schicchi, La Principessa in Suor Angelica, and Azucena in Il Trovatore. Birkland's repertoire also includes the title role of The Rape of Lucretia, Amneris in Aida, Ulrica in Un Ballo in Maschera, Dalila in Samson et Dalila, and Brangäne in Tristan und Isolde. A graduate of the 2008 Merola Opera Program, she has participated in apprenticeship programs at Chautauqua Opera, Sarasota Opera, and Des Moines Metro Opera. Later this season, Birkland appears as Mary in Der Fliegende Holländer with Opera San José and Schwertleite in San Francisco Opera's Ring cycle.



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SARAH CAMBIDGE

(Vancouver, Canada) Fourth Maidservant Making her San Francisco Opera debut as Fourth Maidservant in *Elektra*, soprano and first-year San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow Sarah Cambidge

was winner of the 2016 Denver Lyric Opera Guild competition and a 2015 semifinalist for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions after being named the winner of the Rocky Mountain Regional finals. As a participant of the 2016 Merola Opera Program, she performed Elsa from *Lohengrin* in the Schwabacher Concert Series. Cambidge has sung with the Boulder Symphony Orchestra and the Boulder Music Institute, Vancouver Recital Society, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Spoleto Vocal Arts Symposium (Spoleto, Italy), Evergreen Chamber Orchestra, Colorado Youth Symphony Orchestra, and Yakima Symphony Orchestra. Cambidge is on faculty as a guest artist-in-residence for the vocal department at the Denver School of the Arts and studies voice with Kenneth Cox from the University of Denver. She received her master's degree in vocal performance at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music.

AMINA EDRIS

(Christchurch, New



Zealand) Klytemnestra's Trainbearer Egyptian-born, New Zealand soprano Amina Edris is a second-year San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow who made her San

Francisco Opera debut in 2016 as Frasquita in Carmen. More recent appearances include Countess Ceprano in the Company's production of Rigoletto last summer and Tina in Jonathan Dove's Flight at Opera Parallèle. A participant in the 2015 Merola Opera Program, Edris is a winner of the Palm Springs Opera Guild Competition, Sydney Eisteddfod McDonald's Operatic Aria Competition, and the Deborah Reidel award in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonynge Bel Canto Award Competition 2013, as well as being awarded a Western Regional Special Encouragement Award in the 2014 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Later this season, she appears as Annina in the Company's La Traviata.



BOJAN KNEŽEVIĆ (Belgrade, Serbia) **An Old Servant** Bojan Knežević made

his Company debut as Marquis d'Obigny in *La Traviata* in 1995 and has since appeared with the Company in over 30 roles. Most recently, the bass-baritone and San Francisco Opera Chorus member appeared as a Custom-House Sergeant in La Bohème, Notary in Don Pasquale, Antonio in Le Nozze *di Figaro*, and as a member of the Ensemble in Sweeney Todd. Career highlights include Frosch in Die Fledermaus with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Scarpia in Tosca with Mississippi Opera, the Four Villains in Les Contes d'Hoffmann with Sacramento Opera and Fort Worth Opera, and the title role of Le Nozze di Figaro with the New National Theatre in Tokyo. A former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow and Merola alumnus, he also appeared in the title role of Wozzeck for San Francisco's Opera Parallèle, as well as George Wilson in John Harbison's The Great Gatsby.



KYLE VAN SCHOONHOVEN

(Lockport. New York) **A Young Servant** Making his San Francisco Opera debut as a Young Servant in *Elektra*, tenor Kyle van Schoonhoven is a first-year San Francisco

Opera Adler Fellow. He was recently awarded the Nicolai Gedda Memorial Award from the prestigious George London Foundation, was a finalist in the 2016 Jensen Foundation Vocal Competition, and was named a 2017 winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Van Schoonhoven's repertory includes Don José in Carmen, Alfredo in La Traviata, Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos, Hoffmann in Les Contes d'Hoffmann, Lysander in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Oronte in Alcina, Tamino in Die Zauberflöte, Peter Fallow in Stefania de Kenessey's Bonfire of the Vanities, the title role of Chandler Carter's Bobby, and Genaro in the U.S. Russian-language premiere cast of Prokofiev's Maddalena. He was a 2016 participant in the Merola Opera Program and holds a master's degree in music from Westminster Choir College as well as a bachelor's degree in music from SUNY, Fredonia School of Music.



ERIN NEFF

(San Jose, California) Klytemnestra's Confidante Mezzo-soprano Erin Neff has been singing in the San Francisco Opera Chorus for over 20 years and had featured

roles in the Company's recent productions of *Rigoletto, Sweeney Todd, Le Nozze di Figaro,* and *Show Boat,* among others. She has appeared as soloist with numerous companies around the Bay Area. In 2016 Neff made her directorial debut for the San Francisco Opera Center in *Setting the Record Straight: Salieri and Mozart*

Redux. Additionally, she collaborates with artists in multimedia art pieces. Her sound installation *Carlota* can be heard through 2018 at Joshua Tree National Park Visitor Center.



KEITH WARNER (London, England) Original Director Making his San Francisco Opera debut in *Elektra*, Keith Warner has directed more than 150 operas in 20 countries, as well

as plays and musicals, and has written the librettos to three operas by David Blake. He has directed two Ring cycles (at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and in Tokyo) and has directed Lohengrin for the Bayreuth Festival. Warner has also directed the world premieres of a new version of Penderecki's The Devils of Loudon (Copenhagen), Hans Gefors' Notorious (Göteborg), and André Tchaikowsky's The Merchant of Venice (Bregenz Festival and Welsh National Opera). His awards include the Austrian Music Theatre Prize for Mathis der Maler (Theater an der Wien). In 1981, Warner joined English National Opera and was associate director there from 1984 through 1989. He has been associate director of Scottish Opera, artistic director of Opera Omaha, and artistic director of the Royal Danish Opera, and he is currently director of theatre studies for London's National Opera Studio. Highlights of the current season include Peter Grimes at Oper Frankfurt and La Forza del Destino for Semperoper Dresden.

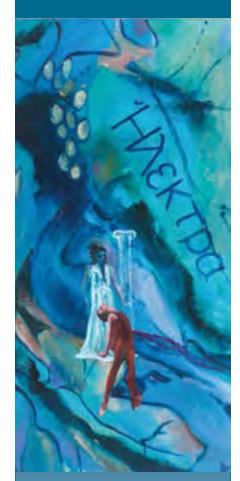


ANJA KÜHNHOLD (Görlitz, Germany) Revival Director Making her American debut in *Elektra*, Anja Kühnhold is chief stage director (*Oberspielleiter*) at the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe,

where she has worked since 2014. She has closely collaborated with directors Tilman Knabe, Ingo Kerkhof, and Keith Warner on numerous projects at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Berlin State Opera, Prague State Opera, and the Semperoper Dresden. Previously, she was assistant director at the Staatstheater Mainz where she worked alongside directors Sandra Leupold, Lorenzo Fioroni, Vera Nemirova, Tatjana Gürbaca, and Katharina Wagner. The latter hired her as production manager for the 2013 Wagner Year in which she coordinated the partnership between Oper Leipzig and the Bayreuth Festival. In the summer of 2015, Kühnhold collaborated on the "Fidelio Project" at the Theatre Trier with Tilman Knabe, with whom she also staged her first play, The

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Big Shoot. Her most recent opera staging of *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Grigori Frid was performed last September as part of the Festival for Young Artists in Nürtingen. Later this season, Kühnhold stages the children's opera *Gold!* by Leonard Evers at the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe.



BORIS KUDLIČKA

(Bratislava, Slovakia) **Set Designer** Making his San Francisco Opera debut in *Elektra*, set designer Boris Kudlička began collaborating with director Keith Warner in

2006 with Death in Venice at Oper Frankfurt. Together they have also worked on Aribert Reimann's Lear and Thomas Adès' The Tempest at Oper Frankfurt, Simon Boccanegra and Tannhäuser at Opéra National du Rhin in Strasbourg, Le Nozze di Figaro at the Polish National Opera, Krzysztof Penderecki's The Devils of Loudun for the Royal Danish Opera, and most recently Otello at Royal Opera, Covent Garden. He regularly works with director Mariusz Treliński, credits including Der Fliegende Holländer, Iolanta, Bluebeard's Castle, Madama Butterfly, Tristan und Isolde, Eugene Onegin, Orfeo ed Euridice, and La Traviata. Many of these productions have been staged internationally, including by the Metropolitan Opera, Berlin State Opera, and Los Angeles Opera.



KASPAR GLARNER (Zurich, Switzerland)

Costume Designer Making his American debut in *Elektra*, Swiss designer Kaspar Glarner began his theater career at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg, and assisted

stage designer Erich Wonder on several opera productions. Since then, his credits with director Keith Warner include costume designs for Death in Venice, Aribert Reimann's Lear, and Falstaff at Oper Frankfurt; Tannhäuser and Simon Boccanegra at Opéra National du Rhin, Krzysztof Penderecki's The Devils of Loudun for the Royal Danish Opera; Die Dreigroschenoper at Theater an der Wien; Otello at Royal Opera, Covent Garden; set designs for *Die Frau ohne* Schatten at Hamburg State Opera; and set and costume designs for *Kát'a Kabanová* at Theater an der Wien. He also works regularly with director Walter Sutcliffe, opera credits including set and costume designs for Owen Wingrave and The Turn of the Screw. Further opera work includes collaborations with directors Vincent Boussard, Dale Duesing, Johannes Erath, and Christine Mielitz.



JOHN BISHOP

(West Yorkshire, England) **Lighting Designer** Making his San Francisco Opera debut in *Elektra*, John Bishop is an award-winning lighting designer who

has created original lighting designs for more than 190 major productions, including Hänsel und Gretel at Oper Frankfurt, Tannhäuser at Opéra National du Rhin, Der Ring des Nibelungen and Der Fliegende Holländer at Den Norske Opera, Ernani at the English National Opera, La Traviata and West Side Story at the Welsh National Opera, Albert Herring at Opera North, numerous productions for Opera Zuid in Maastricht, The Netherlands, and many for the Buxton Opera Festival in England. Bishop recently created the lighting design for the world premiere of John Metcalf's Under Milk Wood at the Taliesin Theatre in Swansea, England. He has collaborated on numerous productions with director Keith Warner, most recently Hans Gefors' Notorious at Göteborg Opera.



BARTEK MACIAS (Kraków, Poland) Video Designer Making his San Francisco Opera debut in *Elektra*, Bartek Macias is co-founder of the animation and post-production studio

Lunapark and also a founder and creative director of Yes Eye Do! Initiatives. He is a pioneer in the adaptation of moving graphics and incorporating them in operatic and theatrical productions. His achievements include a number of collaborations with directors Keith Warner, Grzegorz Jarzyna, Mariusz Treliński, and Amon Miyamoto. He has also collaborated with set designer Boris Kudlička in creating theater and opera projects all over the world, including *Manon Lescaut* at Welsh National Opera and *Elektra* at Prague National Theatre and Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe.



(Dundee, Scotland) **Chorus Director** Recipient of the 2012 San Francisco Opera Medal, Ian Robertson has been chorus director and conductor with San Francisco

IAN ROBERTSON

Opera since 1987, having prepared more than 300 productions for the Company. He was awarded the Olivier Messiaen Foundation Prize in 2003 for his artistic contribution to the preparation of the Company's North American premiere of *Saint François d'Assise*. Robertson has also conducted ten main stage productions with the Company. Other North American opera credits include productions with Sarasota Opera, Edmonton Opera, and Philadelphia's Curtis Opera Theatre.

DAVE MAIER (Great Neck, New York) Fight Director Resident fight director for San Francisco Opera, Dave Maier made his Company debut in 2013 with *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. His work

has most recently appeared in the Company's *Rigoletto, Don Giovanni, La Bohème, Aida,* and *Madama Butterfly*. Maier has directed fight scenes for American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, San Jose Repertory, Aurora Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, and Magic Theatre, among others. He is a five-time recipient of the San Francisco Bay Area Drama Critics Circle Award for Fight Direction, as well as an adjunct faculty member at the University of California Santa Cruz and St. Mary's College of California. He currently teaches combat-related courses in Berkeley.

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Martina Serafin

Andrea Silvestrelli

Philip Skinner† 🎜

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Dawn Harms First Violin



First Violin

ORCHES



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RA



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Associate Principal Second Violin



Second Violin









Linda Deutsch

Second Violin

Natalia Vershilova Viola

Victoria Ehrlich

Cello

58



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Principal Bass



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Ruth Lane Cello



Joseph Lescher













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Assistant Principal Cello







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Stephanie McNab Flute & Piccolo



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Mark Almond Co-Principal Horn



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Lawrence Ragent

Horn







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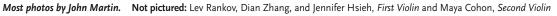
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John Burgardt Timpani



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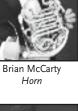
















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Sara Colburn Soprano



Dvora Djoraev Soprano



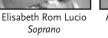
Mary Finch . Soprano



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Claire Kelm Soprano







S

Angela Eden Moser Soprano



Rachelle Perry Soprano



Virginia Pluth Soprano



Carole Schaffer Soprano



Mitzie Kay Weiner Soprano



Buffy Baggott Mezzo-Soprano





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Sally Mouzon Mezzo-Soprano



Sally Munro Mezzo-Soprano



Erin Neff Mezzo-Soprano





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Donna Turchi Mezzo-Soprano



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Alan Cochran Tenor



Chris Corley Tenor



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Shelley Seitz

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Tenor



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Chester Pidduck Tenor



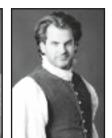
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Tenor



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Baritone



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Baritone

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Baritone





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Baritone

Bass



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William Pickersgill

Bass



Baritone



Baritone



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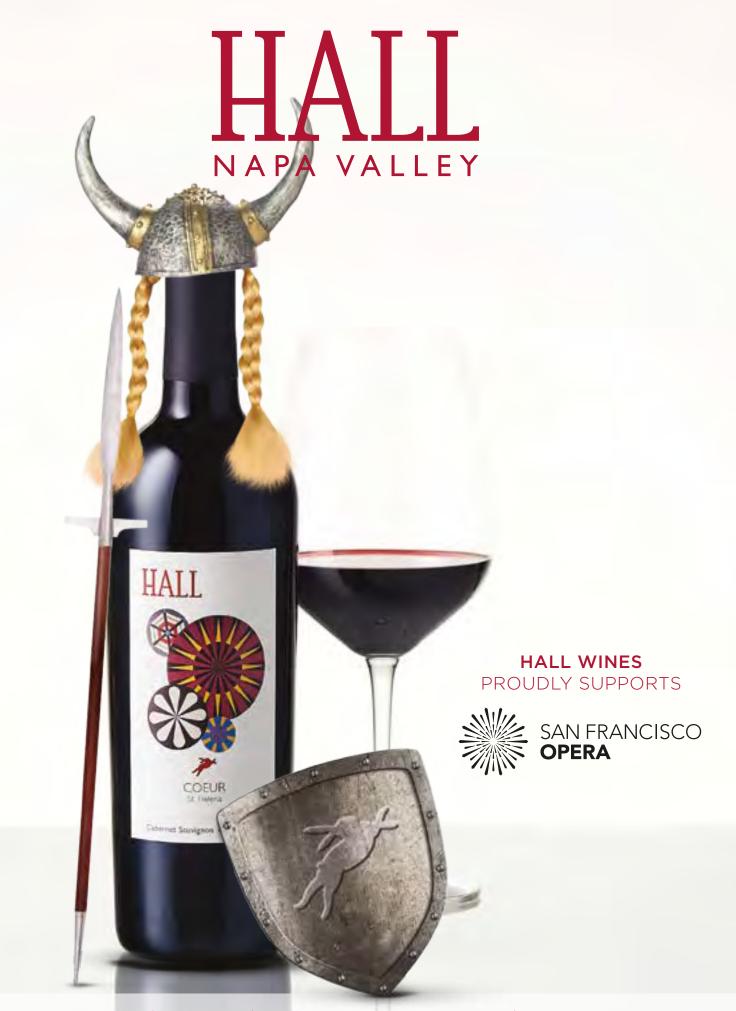
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For over 30 years, Randy Laroche and David Laudon have shown their commitment to San Francisco Opera through their subscription and annual support. Inspiring their gifts is their profound love for music and the art form. "Opera is where all the arts meet—where song, instruments, dance, and design come together in a beautiful melding of the arts," Randy reflected. "Opera is the entire package," says David. "The soaring music, the drama, the acting, and the staging comes together to make magic."

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- *Turandot:* Robert Hartwell *Elektra:* Bruce Lamott *La Traviata:* Peter Susskind *Manon:* Marcia Green
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BY GENERAL DIRECTOR MATTHEW SHILVOCK



INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND OPERA

In *The Voice of Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi tells us that "a nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." Culture and the arts are inextricably intertwined with society. The arts give voice to, and grow out of, society's aspirations, beliefs, tensions. Sometimes there is an urgent, vital connection between art and society. I think of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, written and premiered in a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1941. But sometimes the intersection of culture and society is more aesthetically motivated, drawing with curiosity on the vast array of colors, harmonies, themes, and ideas that mark the beautiful diversity of global culture.

There is a universality about the most profound musical works. They transcend boundaries of time and place to reach our innermost core as humans. But even music is made up of specific ideas, representations, and themes. What happens when those specifics run counter to societal values, leaving people feeling alienated, hurt, or excluded?

This potential for cultural misalignment is particularly acute in art works that can reflect societal exclusion or inequality, whether in the depiction of race, gender, class, or orientation. In our world of opera, works like *Madame Butterfly* and *Turandot* represent an early 20th-century fascination with Asia that can appear hackneyed, anachronistic, and even offensive given today's much more nuanced understanding. We must recognize the cultural disconnect that art can engender when viewed through our modern lens, while still recognizing the creative integrity, vision, and impact of the artist's original work.

Works like *Turandot* and *Butterfly* raise further issues: i) issues of production choices and sensitivity for racial depiction; there is now a near-universal repudiation of using makeup to change a person's racial appearance onstage; ii) the equity of casting opportu-

nities and how to cast roles like Cio-Cio-San to better reflect the cultural authenticity of the piece; and iii) whether there are works that last for all time, or whether there are works which will eventually become fundamentally at odds with contemporary values. San Francisco Opera is engaging in serious dialogue around two vitally important questions:

- 1. How do we better understand the broader community's perception of opera to attain a deeper appreciation for the multiple perspectives around a work of art?
- 2. How do we utilize the art form of opera to build resonance with our fast-changing city, developing trust that opera can engage with the most essential of human emotions and situations?

We don't have all the answers to these questions yet, but we are committed to learning. We are exploring how we can better connect opera to community in a number of critical areas:

- Fundamentally, these are questions that can only begin to be answered by a dialogue with the Bay Area community. We are building partnerships to better understand the broader perception of the Opera and ensure that as many people as possible feel comfortable with, and welcome to, our work.
- We are looking to create art to build interconnections between art and society. Through works like *Girls of the Golden West*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, we want to tell stories that reflect our local culture on the opera stage.
- San Francisco Opera has a strong tradition of inclusivity in its training programs, including historic connections to the Pacific Rim. I want to expand that legacy to create opportunities for audiences, singers, instrumentalists, technicians, and administrators from underrepresented and marginalized communities.

I am sensitive to the challenge that certain art works can create in our society, but I am also excited that opera is an art form that can explore challenging subjects. We must find ways to produce, share, and engage with opera, such that it reflects the amazing breadth of our community, and allows us all to connect on the most fundamental of levels. Returning to the words of Gandhi: "No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive."





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