Omar

BY RHIANNON GIDDENS AND MICHAEL ABELS
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At a Glance

OMAR
MUSIC BY RHIANNON GIDDENS AND MICHAEL ABELS
LIBRETTO BY RHIANNON GIDDENS

Structure: 2 acts, with 1 intermission
Running time: 2 hours, 45 minutes
Language: Sung in English, with English supertitles
Key Characters:
• Omar, West African scholar who is enslaved and brought to America
• Julie, a friend who helps Omar
• Fatima, Omar’s mother who speaks to him in dreams
• Johnson/Owen, Americans who enslave Omar

Omar is the true story of 19th-century Islamic scholar Omar ibn Said, who was taken from his home in West Africa in 1807, forcibly brought to America through the Middle Passage, and sold into slavery in South Carolina. Despite the brutality he faced, Omar maintained his faith and identity, eventually writing his autobiography in Arabic. This 200-year-old text is the source and inspiration for the first opera by MacArthur Fellowship recipient and Grammy Award-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens and co-composer Michael Abels who is best known for his soundtracks to Jordan Peele’s films Get Out, Us, and Nope. The expansive sound world of Omar, set to a libretto by Giddens, synthesizes strains of bluegrass, spirituals, the West African kora, folk music, and jazz into a uniquely American musical language.

Did you know? Omar had its world premiere in May 2022 at Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina, the city where Omar ibn Said was forced to enter the United States and sold into slavery. The work, which has been staged in multiple American cities, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music earlier this year.

THE ELIXIR OF LOVE
MUSIC BY GAETANO DONIZETTI
LIBRETTO BY FELICE ROMANI

Structure: 2 acts, with 1 intermission
Running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes
Language: Sung in Italian, with English supertitles
Key Characters:
• Adina, an independent and wealthy woman who owns the town hotel
• Nemorino, a timid waiter who is in love with Adina
• Dulcamara, a quack doctor who sells Nemorino an “elixir” to help him win Adina’s affection
• Belcore, a sergeant in the town’s garrison and a swaggering suitor of Adina

Donizetti’s tuneful and effervescent comedy follows the hapless Nemorino who pines for Adina, a wise and sophisticated beauty out of his league. Nemorino puts his hopes in a magic elixir sold to him by Dr. Dulcamara to win her affection. With the elixir—in truth a bottle of Bordeaux wine—Nemorino finds both confidence and new possibilities open to him. This staging by director Daniel Slater and designer Robert Innes Hopkins sets the story in a sun-soaked world of pleasure on the Italian Riviera. Harkening back to Federico Fellini’s La Dolce Vita, the updated setting finds the heroine as the proprietor of the Hotel Adina where Nemorino works as a waiter.

Listen for: Nemorino’s aria in the second act, “Una furtiva lagrima” (“A secret tear”), is one the most famous arias in all of opera, but The Elixir of Love is filled with memorable melodies. Adina’s entrance aria, “Della crudele Isotta” (“Of the cruel Isolde”), is a joyous number that begins like a gentle narrative ballad, telling the story of Tristan and Isolde (well before Wagner wrote his opera), which breaks into lively exchanges with the chorus and culminates in some dazzling vocal fireworks.
Connection and Inspiration

We are delighted to welcome you to the close of our fall season with two very special and entirely different operas in *Omar* and *The Elixir of Love*.

*Omar*, by Grammy Award-winning American singer, instrumentalist, and co-composer Rhiannon Giddens and co-composer Michael Abels, is inspired by the true story of West African scholar Omar ibn Said, enslaved and brought to North Carolina in 1807. He left a number of writings in Arabic, including his autobiography, which form the basis of this deeply moving work. *Omar* won the Pulitzer Prize in Music earlier this year and has found profound resonance in every city in which it is played. It is the second of three new co-commissioned works we present this season, part of the Company’s commitment to expanding the repertoire and sharing urgent stories created by leading artistic voices of our time.

Our final opera of the fall season takes us to the sunny Italian Riviera, with Daniel Slater’s production of Gaetano Donizetti’s effervescent *The Elixir of Love*. It is a delicious comedic romp and a musical banquet of melodies. We’re so excited to welcome back San Francisco favorite, tenor Pene Pati, as well as meet a number of wonderful new artists who will bring joyful exuberance to the stage. And on December 1 we have the next in our “Encounter” series—part opera, part party—a fabulous introduction to the Company and to this beautiful theater.

The overarching thread that connects all of these artistic offerings is you, our community of patrons. We are deeply grateful for all that you do to champion this incredible art form. It is your attendance, your advocacy, and your financial support that allow San Francisco Opera to create connection and inspiration for our entire community. Thank you for being champions for this great art form.

Sincerely,

John A. Gunn
Chairman of the Board
San Francisco Opera Association

Jack Calhoun
President
San Francisco Opera Association
CONCERTS ON DECEMBER 2 AND 8
Mark your calendars! On Saturday, December 2 San Francisco Opera’s resident artists, the Adler Fellows, take to the stage of Herbst Theatre with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and maestro Ramón Tebar, conductor for this fall’s The Elixir of Love, for an evening of arias and scenes. Then, on Friday, December 8, the San Francisco Opera Chorus will hold the spotlight in the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater for their annual concert under Chorus Director John Keene with Associate Chorus Master Fabrizio Corona at the piano. For tickets, visit sfopera.com.

Around the World with Eun Sun Kim
Over the next six months, Caroline H. Hume Music Director Eun Sun Kim will be traveling back and forth across the Atlantic with some very exciting musical engagements. Beginning in November, Kim is in Paris to conduct Offenbach’s Les Contes d’Hoffmann and a concert honoring the centenary of soprano Maria Callas. Her New Year begins in Houston with a production of Wagner’s Parsifal. This is followed by several important engagements including her New York Philharmonic debut in February; concerts in Torino, Duisburg, and Montreal; and performances of Schoenberg’s Erwartung in Barcelona, Minnesota, and in her debut with the Berlin Philharmonic. Kim returns to San Francisco in May to open the Opera’s 2024 Summer Season with Mozart’s The Magic Flute. And stay tuned for news about an exciting new San Francisco Opera film project about Eun Sun Kim, slated for release next spring.
JOIN US FOR SELECT POST-SHOW CHATS WITH THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM OF OMAR

“Tell your story, Omar—you must / Or they will never know.”

Following select performances of Omar (November 7, 11, 15, 17, and 21), audiences are invited to stay for a post-show conversation that gives space for deeper exploration and processing of Omar ibn Said’s life and legacy. Hear firsthand the experiences of the artists and creative minds behind this opera, including conductor John Kennedy, and performers Jamez McCorkle and Rehanna Thelwell.

The future is in your hand.
Encore+ digital programs are available from these performing arts organizations:

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Once 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, and they have proudly continued that support for General Director Matthew Shilvock. This season, the Gunns’ inspired generosity is helping make possible four productions—Il Trovatore, The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs, Lohengrin, and The Magic Flute. The Gunns invite everyone to give and join them as a member of San Francisco Opera’s donor community. John comments, “Opera is a dynamic art form, and all of us play a role in keeping it a meaningful part of our social fabric. With you we can propel San Francisco Opera into its next 100 years of artistic history.” 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 10 years. She edited 28 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 a former trustee of Stanford University and is Chairman Emeritus of the Advisory Board for the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. Cynthia currently serves as a trustee of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, is a former overseer of Stanford’s Hoover Institution, and has been a member of the advisory board of Family and Children Services and the board of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health. Opera lovers are grateful to Cynthia and John and applaud their commitment to keeping San Francisco Opera a leading-edge company.
Donor Spotlight

Bob Ellis (Production Sponsor, Omar)
Bob has been a longtime supporter of contemporary opera since he became a member of the board of directors in 2001. He has supported all of John Adams’ new productions for San Francisco Opera, beginning with the commission of Doctor Atomic in 2005 and continuing with Girls of the Golden West in 2017 and this past fall’s Antony and Cleopatra. Along with Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz’s El último sueño de Frida y Diego, other production sponsorships have included Douglas Moore’s The Ballad of Baby Doe, Olivier Messiaen’s Saint François d’Assise, and the 2011 premiere of Francesca Zambello’s production of Wagner’s Ring cycle. He has also served on the boards of Opera Parallèle, OPERA America, and Central City Opera.

Louise Gund (Production Sponsor, Omar)
Louise Gund is an accomplished theater producer with a wide range of artistic talents. She has produced twelve Broadway plays and musicals, winning a Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for All the Way, and receiving three additional Tony Award nominations. A subscriber to San Francisco Opera since 2010, Louise has served on the Opera’s board of directors since 2013. She has also served on the boards of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Cal Performances, Earthjustice, and the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra. In addition to her major support of these organizations, she is an environmental activist and a staunch advocate on behalf of women’s and children’s issues. She was awarded the San Francisco Opera Spirit of the Opera Award in 2019 for devoted service to the Company and was the inspiration behind the Opera’s Producers Circle. Louise is passionate about enabling creativity to flourish, telling stories of meaning, and ensuring a vibrant future for the arts.

Koret Foundation (Production Sponsor, Omar)
San Francisco Opera is deeply grateful to the Koret Foundation for its support of Omar. This funding is part of the Foundation’s generous three-year grant supporting new works, which began in the Centennial Season. “Koret is pleased to support this exciting new work and looks forward to more opportunities to bring new voices and stories to the opera stage,” says Jeffrey A. Farber, Koret Foundation CEO. Koret has been a longtime supporter of San Francisco Opera’s transformational stage productions, as well as education and community programs. Most recently, Koret supported San Francisco Opera’s sold-out co-commission El último sueño de Frida y Diego by composer Gabriela Lena Frank and librettist Nilo Cruz. “We are honored by Koret’s longstanding partnership which helps us bring the best quality opera to the broadest audiences in ways that are reflective of and relevant to our community,” says General Director Matthew Shilvock.
Donor Spotlight

Jerome and Thao Dodson (Production Sponsor, The Elixir of Love)

“A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hearty, ‘Hi-Yo, Silver!’”

Those words, accompanied by the galloping excitement of Rossini’s William Tell Overture, transfixed a young Jerry Dodson as he listened to The Lone Ranger on the family radio in Oak Park, Illinois. Just as Bugs Bunny’s Rabbit of Seville had done for many, a lighthearted entertainment sparked a future operatic devotion.

That little boy grew up to attend Berkeley in the 60s, serve with the American Embassy in Vietnam where he and Thao met, and attend Harvard Business School. Eventually, the couple married, settled in the Bay Area, and raised a family. In the 1980s, Jerry was a pioneer in the field of socially responsible investing with little interest in opera. But in 1992, when San Francisco Opera decided to celebrate Rossini’s bicentennial with the rarely performed Guillaume Tell, Thao, already an opera lover, suggested to Jerry that they go.

Tell was praised for its striking Mansouri production, and the Dodsons began attending regularly. They became season ticket holders in 1999 and supporters, “in a small way,” as Jerry puts it. A friendship with David Gockley, which endures to this day, led to a larger role as Company Sponsors. “I so admired what he did for the opera, but it was not very good for my pocketbook,” Jerry laughs. Jerry also lends his financial expertise to the audit committee.

In 2016, Dodson considered the import of Gockley’s departure. He met with Matthew Shilvock and joined the Board that year. “We hit it off right away!” Jerry says. He felt a similar affinity with Keith Geeslin, then President of the San Francisco Opera Association. Eager to continue support, the Dodsons see this as a perfect time to revitalize and energize the Company within the San Francisco community. The initial fire ignited by William Tell continues to burn brightly.

Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem (Production Sponsor, The Elixir of Love)

Sponsor, through the Conductors Fund: John Kennedy (Omar); Ramón Tebar (Elixir).
Sponsor, through the Emerging Stars Fund: Jamez McCorkle, Taylor Raven, and Brittany Renee (Omar); Pene Pati and Slávka Zámečníková (Elixir)

Jan and Maria both developed a love of opera at a young age, although they grew up half-a-world apart. Jan Shrem, after a career devoted to his publishing businesses in Japan and Europe, created Clos Pegase Winery in California’s Napa Valley, collecting some of the world’s greatest modern and contemporary art. Maria Manetti Shrem internationally succeeded with her fashion-based entrepreneurial companies, bringing Gucci and Fendi in the departments and specialty stores in the USA.

In joyous partnership the Manetti Shrem couple is bringing their focus and affection to philanthropic causes that advance education, the performing and visual arts, and medicine.

While their lives led them each around the globe, their individual passions eventually brought them to San Francisco Opera and to each other. As Company Sponsors for more than a decade, Jan and Maria have established four generous funds.

• The Conductors Fund helps ensure the continued appearances of noted 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.
• The Emerging Stars Fund supports the Company in showcasing exciting rising young stars on our stage throughout the season.
• The Luminaries Concert Fund enables San Francisco Opera to bring legendary artists to the stage for special events and performances.

In December 2022, Maria received The Spirit of the Opera award for her devotion to San Francisco Opera, her high level of commitment to advancing the success of the Company, and her ongoing support of the art form. She is the 2023 UC Davis Medal recipient for her profound arts legacy and passion for creating opportunities for exploration and education.
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To learn more about making a gift, visit sfopera.com/give or call (415) 565-3212.
Omar Giving Circle

San Francisco Opera is honored to recognize donors for their support of Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ *Omar* and their participation in this special Omar Giving Circle. This broad-based effort welcomes new supporters who, together, are helping to bring this important work to our community. There is still time to join the Omar Giving Circle by calling (415) 565-3212. Donors will be added to our digital recognition and will receive a special commemorative pin! Please see page 15 for more details. This listing reflects gifts received through October 2, 2023.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gift Level</th>
<th>Donors</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OLIVE TREE</strong></td>
<td>Marcia Barinaga &amp; Corey Goodman</td>
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<td>$30,000+</td>
<td>Bob Ellis</td>
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<td>Koret Foundation</td>
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<td>National Endowment for the Arts</td>
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<td>Jan Shrem &amp; Maria Manetti Shrem</td>
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<td><strong>TAMA</strong></td>
<td>Sylvia R. Lindsey</td>
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<td>$7,280+</td>
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<td><strong>BLUEGRASS</strong></td>
<td>Robert M. Anderson &amp; Kyong Shik Eom</td>
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<td>$4,000+</td>
<td>Jamie &amp; Philip Bowles</td>
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<td>Anonymous</td>
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<td><strong>SCHOLAR</strong></td>
<td>Dr. Barbara Lynn Bessey</td>
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<td>$1,831+</td>
<td>Dr. Judy C. Miner</td>
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<td><strong>AKONTING</strong></td>
<td>Arthur Strange</td>
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<td>$517+</td>
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The Future Is Now: Adlers in Concert

Join us for an exciting night of unforgettable music featuring conductor Ramón Tebar and San Francisco Opera’s Resident Artists in their final concert of the year.

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Fair market value may apply. Illustration by Brian Stauffer.
Join a special new giving circle, available for new and increased gifts to support Rhiannon Giddens’ and Michael Abels’ *Omar*. *Omar* is the true story of a 19th-century Islamic scholar from West Africa, enslaved in South Carolina, but who found and expressed identity and faith through the written word. The Omar Giving Circle is a broad-based effort beginning at only $22, embracing gifts of all sizes are vital to bring this important work to our community.

**GIFT LEVELS AND BENEFITS**

To join the circle with your philanthropic support, visit sfopera.com/omarcircle or call (415) 551-3212.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DONOR BENEFITS AT EACH LEVEL HERE!**

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**TAMBOURINE $22**
Encircled by repeating pairs of metal discs, the ‘22’ level is inspired by the prominence of the tambourine in the opera. Most scholars agree that the origins of the tambourine date back to 1700 BCE or even earlier, and it appears in sacred texts from West Africa, Turkey, Greece, Italy, India, and throughout the Middle East.

**KUFI $120**
The traditional hat worn by Omar in the opera is called a Kufi, from the Kufi script it resembles. It plays a significant role in the opera as Julie, an enslaved woman, becomes close to Omar. The Kufi script is thought to have gone into general use in the 12th century. The hat is a part of the national dress of many West African countries and symbolizes African descent in many American cultures.

**AKONTING $517**
The akonting is an African gourd lute known as the ancestor of the modern banjo played by co-composer Rhiannon Giddens, who studied the instrument. The three strings of the akonting are tuned to the pattern 5-1-7, which inspires the name for this level! (7-note scale with 7th, 5th, and 1st notes.)

**SCHOLAR $1,831**
The best known of the scholar Omar Ibn Said’s writings is his autobiographical essay, *The Life of Omar Ibn Said,* written in 1831, the work forms the basis of the opera.

**BLUEGRASS $4,000**
In honor of co-composer Rhiannon Giddens’ frequent genre, bluegrass. Bluegrass was born out of North American blues music which was directly influenced by West African music. Recognized as a new American art form in the 1940s, Bluegrass is a fusion of music styles and experiences, much like the fusion of opera, Senegalese, and American styles found in *Omar*.

**TAMA $7,280**
The Senegalese tama, or talking drum, is known to project sounds imitating human speech across a seven-to-eight kilometer distance, or 7-2-8. Omar ibn Said was originally abducted from West Africa, in the Futa Toro region (modern-day Senegal) where the tama is played widely and used to send messages as well as make music.

**OLIVE TREE $30,000+**
Omar sings of the olive tree during the moment of darkness when his humanity is attacked, “The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, which is within a glass, which is like a brilliant star fueled by a blessed tree, an olive tree, neither Eastern nor Western, whose oil would almost glow, even if untouched by fire.” The themes of our shared humanity can be seen in the symbol of the olive tree.

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Fair market value may apply. Illustration by Brian Stauffer.
Our Donor Family

The collective support of San Francisco Opera's generous donor family keeps world-class opera on the stage and brings community programs to students and families. Each year, support from individuals and institutional funders accounts for 86% of the revenue needed to create transformative opera.

Listed gifts were received between August 1, 2022 and October 2, 2023. We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of our donor listings. If we have misspelled or omitted a name, please accept our apology and notify us at (415) 565-3212 so that we may update our records accordingly.

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Renée Fleming, soprano
2023 Kennedy Center Honoree

One of today’s most in-demand lyric coloratura sopranos, Erin Morley has appeared in more than 100 Met performances, most notably as Sophie in Der Rosenkavalier, Olympia in Tales of Hoffmann, Constance in Les Dialogues des Carmélites, and Pamina in The Magic Flute. Here the supremely sensitive Martin Martineau joins Morley for this magical recital performance.

Mark Padmore, tenor
Mitsuko Uchida, piano
Schubert’s Winterreise

Renowned Schubertians, tenor Mark Padmore and pianist Mitsuko Uchida together tread a path of existential discovery in Schubert’s setting of Wilhelm Müller’s poems about love and loss, inviting us into the anguished inner world of the poem’s protagonist and bringing to vivid life the barren winter landscape of his solitary wanderings.

Ema Nikolovska, mezzo-soprano
Howard Watkins, piano

Possessing a rare combination of artistic sensitivity and technical skill and with an impressive array of honors already in hand, the young mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska visits with a program featuring songs by Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Debussy in her Cal Performances debut.

Amina Edris, soprano
Pene Pati, tenor
Robert Mollicone, piano
Voyages

Works by Duparc, Ravel, Saint-Saëns, Quilter, and Vaughan Williams, and traditional songs from Egypt and Samoa

Darlings of the opera world, the wife and husband duo of soprano Amina Edris and tenor Pene Pati returns to the Bay Area with a varied program of songs traversing eras and continents.
Bel Canto Legacy Society

Legacy gifts, for example including San Francisco Opera in your will, strengthen our long-term ability to create great opera performances and learning programs. We salute with appreciation those patrons who have made a legacy commitment to San Francisco Opera Association becoming Bel Canto Legacy Society members as of September 6, 2023. Please consider joining this extraordinary group. To learn more, please contact legacysociety@sfopera.com.
Tony and Emmy Award-winning actor **Billy Crudup** returns to Berkeley Rep in a tour-de-force thriller!

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**CULT OF LOVE**

*By Leslye Headland*  
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Omar

OPERA IN TWO ACTS
MUSIC BY RHIANNON GIDDENS AND MICHAEL ABELS
LIBRETTO BY RHIANNON GIDDENS

This production is made possible, in part, by
Marcia Barinaga & Corey Goodman, Bob Ellis, Louise Gund,
Koret Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts

John Kennedy’s appearance is made possible by
a gift to the Conductors Fund by Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem

Jamez McCorkle, Taylor Raven, and Brittany Renee’s appearances are made possible by
a gift to the Emerging Stars Fund by Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem

Omar is co-commissioned by Spoleto Festival USA, Carolina Performing Arts,
San Francisco Opera, LA Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Boston Lyric Opera, and Detroit Opera

Co-production by San Francisco Opera, the LA Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago

Originally co-produced by Spoleto Festival USA and Carolina Performing Arts
at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Original commission and production made possible by
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NOVEMBER 5, 7, 11, 15, 17, 21, 2023

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA
ACT I

SCENE ONE: 1806, Futa Toro (a region of West Africa now part of Senegal) In his peaceful village, Omar ibn Said chants verses from the Quran. Omar’s mother, Fatima, a spiritual matriarch of the village, leads the community in a prayer to Allah. Worried that his village will fall prey to the slavers pillaging the region, Omar’s brother Abdul has been negotiating with them for the safety of his people. Omar believes that Allah has a plan for him, but Fatima cautions him that the plan might not be what he anticipates.

Abdul discovers that he has been deceived, and he warns his family to flee the coming raiders. But it is too late. Warriors overrun the compound and begin taking people prisoner. Fatima is killed in the chaos.

SCENE TWO: The Middle Passage Omar is shackled closely together with other prisoners in the cramped cargo hold of a slave ship. The desperate prisoners, each of them with their own individual life stories, pray to survive their horrendous journey.

SCENE THREE: The Charleston Slave Market The enslaved woman Julie has been kidnapped and dragged to the market for sale. She plans to escape her kidnapper and return to the Owen plantation in Fayetteville, which seems like a better option than the uncertain future that awaits her at the market. Julie recognizes that the newly arrived Omar doesn’t comprehend what is about to happen to him. She tries to explain to Omar (who cannot understand her words) that if he manages to run away, he should try to make it to Fayetteville.

The slave auction begins. A family is brought up for sale. The father, Abe, pleads to be allowed to remain together, but the parents are sold separately from their young son. When Omar is led to the podium, his cap is removed and flung into the crowd, and Julie picks it up. In his anguish, Omar sees the spirit of his mother, who signals that Julie has managed to get free of her bonds. He creates a distraction so that Julie can escape. Omar is sold to Johnson.

SCENE FOUR: Johnson plantation Enslaved workers sing a work song as they labor. Omar keeps to himself. Johnson shouts at one of the men and strikes him. He then turns his wrath to Omar, asserting his authority in an unfamiliar language and sending him to pick cotton in the fields.

SCENE FIVE: Johnson plantation, five months later As Omar sleeps, the spirit of Omar’s mother watches over him. Johnson’s voice is heard, furiously calling for Omar. At his mother’s urging, Omar escapes.

—INTERMISSION—

ACT II

SCENE ONE: Fayetteville County Jail Omar has escaped but is eventually captured. He prays and writes Quranic verses in Arabic on the walls of the jail cell. This catches the attention of the townspeople, who wonder where he came from. The plantation owner Owen is urged by his daughter Eliza to buy Omar, who has by now learned to speak English. Owen questions Omar about his background, and their discussion turns to matters of spirituality. Owen sees an opportunity to convert Omar to Christianity.

SCENE TWO: Owen plantation The enslaved workers come to the end of the day’s labors. One of them, Katie Ellen, is surprised that Julie has returned to the plantation. Owen and his friend Taylor arrive with Omar and introduce him to the other enslaved workers, who remind Omar that they all must be wary. Julie is impressed that Omar has followed her advice. She tells him that her father used to wear a cap like Omar’s. When she was a child, her father was sold and taken away. She has kept Omar’s cap all this time because it reminded her of her father, and she gives it back to Omar.

SCENE THREE: Owen’s study Owen and Taylor are excited about the prospect of converting Omar to their faith, which will give Owen a great deal of prestige in his community. Owen gives Omar a Christian Bible written in Arabic and asks him to write “The Lord is my Shepherd” in that language. Omar actually writes the words “I want to go home.”

SCENE FOUR As Omar reads his new Bible under a tree, he asks Allah the meaning of his life journey. He recites and reinterprets Psalm 23 from the point of view of an enslaved Muslim. The scene ends with a choral amen, as Omar intones an Islamic prayer.

SCENE FIVE Julie is fascinated that Omar can read and write. She encourages him to write a book. The spirit of Fatima joins Julie in urging Omar to write about his experiences and his faith. As he finds his voice, Omar calls on people of the Carolinas and of America to honor the tenets of their faith. The company joins Omar in praising the omnipresence of Allah in all that has been and in all that will be.

Synopsis by Mark Lyons, courtesy of Los Angeles Opera
**Omar**

Opera in two acts

Music by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels

Libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

(Sung in English with English supertitles)

**CAST**

(in order of vocal appearance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Jamez McCorkle *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatima (Omar’s Mother)</td>
<td>Taylor Raven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul (Omar’s brother)/Abe</td>
<td>Norman Garrett *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amadou</td>
<td>Edward Graves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olufemi</td>
<td>Calvin Griffin *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suleiman</td>
<td>Kenneth Overton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Brittnay Renee *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auctioneer/Taylor</td>
<td>Barry Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson/Owen</td>
<td>Daniel Okulitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>Laura Krumm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Ellen/Caller</td>
<td>Rehanna Thelwell *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestral Figure</td>
<td>Jermaine McGhee *</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Chorus Soloists**


Senegalese Villagers, Freed, and Enslaved people

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**ACT I**

—INTERMISSION—

**ACT II**

The performance will last approximately two hours and forty-five minutes with one intermission. Latecomers may not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed. Patrons who leave during the performance may not be reseated until intermission. 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.
Over the last few years, we have been in the bones of the country. The bones of our own psyches. And we have been in the bones of our industry, of opera, of what it means to gather and share breath.

The opera we share with you touches all these bones: the story of Omar ibn Said, a Fulani man, forced to the United States and enslaved, literate before stolen from his home in West Africa, and author of an autobiography.

The West has a fantasy of its singularity, it imagines itself as consistent and fixed. Opera lost itself to that lie. Tonight, we return the opera to itself. A form built on hundreds of years of cultural exchange, sonic exchange, formal and aesthetic encounters with “others.” A form dependent on many different kinds of artists teaming up. A form built of hybridity. Perhaps one of the only places big enough for Said’s journey, the contradiction, the violence, the holiness, the omissions, the terror, and the triumph.

Slavery, of course, existed before people were torn from their homes in West Africa at gunpoint and enslaved in the United States. The institution of American Slavery created and named a permanent condition attached to your body.

The ferocious clarity in American Slavery on the power of language was such that one of the most sacrosanct laws was that you could not teach enslaved people to read. Or write.

And here, we have a text! From Omar ibn Said. Written by Omar. An Islamic scholar who was literate before mercenaries enslaved him. His autobiography is the prayer from which the music and words you hear tonight were created. The glory and triumph that his words exist, even if generated under duress, is holy.

We gather to tell you Said’s story through the contest of languages in his life, spiritual languages, cultural languages, spoken and written languages, the language of materials like wood and fabric. And ultimately, his holding of all these languages simultaneously brims with resistance, omission, refusal, and reincarnation.

Listening to the story of Omar ibn Said tonight, together, let us begin resetting the bones.

DIRECTOR’S NOTE BY KANEZA SCHAAL

Kaneza Schaal / BART MICHELS—STUDIO KNZ
Creating Omar

A NOTE FROM CO-COMPOSER/LIBRETTIST
RHIANNON GIDDENS

Omar is at once a story of one man and of many. He is himself, trying to understand the shape his life has taken; he is the enslaved Muslim (of which there were so many more than we will ever know) seeking his community in any way he can; he is the eternal outsider. The fractured yet steadfast nature of the culture that formed around the members of the African diaspora struggling for survival in the Americas wraps around his journey, as I have envisioned it; the anonymous voices of the countless Black musical creators from my musical lineage are shot through a score that is nevertheless firmly situated at a crossroads of the folk and western classical traditions.

Who was Omar? We will never really know. This Omar is merely one of a thousand different possible interpretations of his writings and what we know of his life. Nevertheless, I heard an echo of his voice reaching out to me over the centuries—I felt the spirits rise in me with every word written and every note composed. I felt the connection to a time that I cannot easily imagine; a time that tested the ancestors, gave no quarter, and took an unfathomable strength of spirit to survive. I hope this is merely the beginning of the artistic renderings of this remarkable man—let this not be the last operatic word on Omar, but merely the first. And I am honored it is so.

Rhiannon Giddens / EBRU YILDIZ

A NOTE FROM CO-COMPOSER MICHAEL ABELS

Omar is the story of one man's physical and spiritual journey, as told from veiled references in his own autobiography and interpreted through Rhiannon Giddens' moving libretto. Musically, the piece shows as many influences as the many cultures it flows through, from the music of Senegal and the broader Muslim diaspora to the earliest melody transcribed from enslaved people in North America, to spirituals, bluegrass, Protestant hymns, Gershwin, and even a touch of Wagner. The chorus plays a prominent, active role in the work, as a way to center it in a Black community that is multifaceted and real. These diverse elements are unified via the use of a traditional orchestral palette and immensely singable vocal lines.

Michael Abels / ERIC SCHWABEL
In the final scene of the opera *Omar*, Julie, an enslaved woman who met the title character at a slave auction in Charleston, South Carolina, confesses her fascination with his literacy: “You know, they told me you could write / Didn’t really believe it, I don’t think / But then they gave you pen and ink / and you wrote a word.” Earlier in Act II, Julie shared that her father, sold away when she was 10 years old, wore the same traditional *kufi* cap and adhered to similar dietary restrictions as Omar—that he, too, had been a Muslim. Julia urges Omar to use his ability to write as a buttress against the erasure of their shared histories. “Tell your story, Omar—you must / Or they will never know, and we will fade into dust.” The flesh and blood Omar ibn Said, born in West Africa and enslaved in the American South, did write his story, and the opera that bears his name, by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, draws inspiration from those words and reveals their lasting power.

One might situate *The Life of Omar ibn Said* among the roughly 6,000 surviving examples of the literary genre known as the slave narrative by African-descended people in the United States, including those contributed by Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs, and *Twelve Years a Slave* protagonist Solomon Northup. But, for many reasons, Omar’s 13-page manuscript—written in 1831 and rediscovered in a forgotten trunk in Alexandria, Virginia in 1995—stands apart. Above all, it is the only known slave narrative written in Arabic. The overwhelming majority of slave narratives were dictated to white writers and were often mediated by their editorial intervention and
daughter Eliza is transfixed by the indecipherable beauty of Omar’s right-to-left script—“words that fly”—telling her father: “Surely, if God wrote, he would write like that.”

What we know about Omar from his autobiography is supplemented by the newspaper stories, journal articles, and memoirs that chronicle the singular slave who could write words his captors could not understand. Another feature of Omar’s biography underscored by white observers was his purported conversion to Christianity. Owen’s character in the opera respects Omar’s erudition but dismisses the substance of his beliefs. “He knows a few things, I’ll grant you,” Owen tells his friend Taylor, “but it’s clear he gives allegiance to a false God.” The conventional narrative of Omar’s spiritual journey is typified by an 1863 *New York Observer* article by Presbyterian minister William Plumer. “Gradually he seemed to lose his interest in the Koran, and to show more interest in the Sacred Scriptures, until he finally gave up his faith in Mahomet [Muhammad], and became a believer in Jesus Christ,” Plumer wrote. Islam “has been supplanted in his heart by the better faith in Christ Jesus.”

Omar did claim that he converted to Christianity, and in his later years he regularly attended a Presbyterian church. But Plumer’s certainty that he abdicated Islamic scripture is belied by the fact that of the 13 surviving documents in Omar’s handwriting, the last, written in 1857 when he was in his eighties, is a transcription the *Surah* (chapter from the Qur’an) *al-Nasr*, which celebrates the victory of Islam. Indeed, Omar’s autobiography, which expresses his unequivocal gratitude for Master Owens’ benevolence, begins with a prologue that we might read as slyly subversive anti-slavery protest: an extended quotation of *Surah al-Mulk*, which proclaims Allah to be the Master of all. Religion scholar Kambiz GhaneaBassiri has argued that Omar negotiated the condition of being a Black African Muslim enslaved by white American Christians through Islam’s “poly-religious” capacity. This

The more humane and God-fearing Owen’s purchase of Omar, who went from backbreaking field labor to life as a house servant and gardener, was precipitated by Omar’s literacy and faith. Islam was introduced to the United States most significantly by enslaved Black Africans and some scholars estimate that as many as twenty percent of African arrivals were Muslim. Not many, however, were literate like Omar, who before he was sold to Owen gained local celebrity when, while on the run, he was captured and jailed for 16 days in Fayetteville and wrote prayers beseeching deliverance on the walls of his cell in Arabic. In the opera, Owen’s predicitions in shaping the story. Omar’s autobiography has received multiple translations into English, but the unfamiliarity of Arabic to his contemporaries means that we have a version of his story in his own hand. It is also a unique instance of a slave narrative produced while the subject was still enslaved and written by an author who was literate well before being sold into bondage.

From his autobiography we learn that Omar was born around 1770 in the Futa Toro region in present-day Senegal as a member of the predominantly Muslim Fulbe ethnic group and a scion of a wealthy family. A devout scholar of the Qur’an, Omar was immersed in study of this sacred book of Islam for 25 years, with his mother, featured prominently in the opera, as one of his teachers. At the time of his capture by raiding ethnic rivals in 1807—just a year before the abolition of the United States slave trade—Omar was a teacher-scholar and a prosperous trader. His new life began when the conquering army “walked me to the big Sea, and sold me into the hand of a Christian man who bought me and walked me to the big Ship.” A month and a half later, he landed in Charleston and was sold to “a weak, small, evil man called Johnson,” from whom he escaped, walking more than 200 miles to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he lived in servitude to James Owen until his death in 1864.

The more humane and God-fearing Owen’s purchase of Omar, who went from backbreaking field labor to life as a house servant and gardener, was precipitated by Omar’s literacy and faith. Islam was introduced to the United States most significantly by enslaved Black Africans and some scholars estimate that as many as twenty percent of African arrivals were Muslim. Not many, however, were literate like Omar, who before he was sold to Owen gained local celebrity when, while on the run, he was captured and jailed for 16 days in Fayetteville and wrote prayers beseeching deliverance on the walls of his cell in Arabic. In the opera, Owen’s
is less a matter of one set of beliefs superseding another or the emergence of a new syncretic blend of two religious practices, than a search for theological common ground. In his autobiography, Omar juxtaposed the Lord’s Prayer and Surah al-Fatiha, each being, GhaneaBassiri explains, “a scriptural prayer memorized for ritual recitation” by Christians and Muslims, respectively.

Thinking of Omar as an exploration of a poly-religious worldview brokered by the written word helps us make sense of how two themes—the talisman-like significance of Omar’s Arabic literacy and the slippery historical question of his conversion from Islam to Christianity—drive the opera. Plumer remembered “once hearing [Omar] read and translate the 23rd Psalm, and shall never forget the earnestness and fervor which shone in the old man’s countenance, as he read.” This anecdote is rendered in one of the opera’s most powerful scenes. After Owen gives Omar a copy of the Bible in Arabic, Omar sings a mesmerizing aria that sets the 23rd Psalm interspersed with an interpretive gloss that transforms its meaning. In Omar’s reading, “He leadeth me beside still waters” is a reminder of “the big Sea” that carried him away from his home to slavery, and the climactic verse “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” blurring the distinction between Lord and master, is less an anticipation of eternal life than Omar’s stark, existential confrontation with the reality of never again knowing freedom.

And yet, the enslaved Muslim’s autobiography and the opera’s production both suggest how Omar’s canny manipulation of Christian dogma to affirm his Muslim faith through the power of the word—as Arabic script and as Islamic scripture—perhaps represents another form of freedom and leads us toward a revised understanding of history. If the record left behind by Omar ibn Said’s Christian contemporaries depict an aberrant, if compelling, slave who finally saw the light, his own words, written in his autobiography and sung as the opera closes, register his self-determination and how he hoped to be remembered: “I am Omar. I love to read the book, the Great Qur’an.”

Mark Burford is Associate Professor of Music at Reed College and the author of Mahalia Jackson and the Black Gospel Field.
Behind the Scenes with *Omar*

REHEARSALS BRING THE OPERA TO LIFE
John Kennedy (conductor) with Jamez McCorlisle (Omar)

Ian Andrew Askew (assistant director) and Kaneza Schaal (director)

Malcolm MacKenzie (Johnson and Owen cover) and Rehanna Thelwell (Katie Ellen and Caller)

The creative team and cast at an early rehearsal.

Brittany Renee (Julie), Jamez McCorlisle (Omar), and Taylor Raven (Fatima)
**Artist Profiles**

* San Francisco Opera Debut  
* Role Debut  
† Current Adler Fellow  
† Merola Opera Program Graduate  
◊ Merola and Adler Fellowship Graduate

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**RHIANNON GIDDENS**  
(Greensboro, North Carolina)  
Co-Composer and Librettist  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Omar

(Spoleti Festival USA, LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera); You’re the One (Nonesuch Records); Black Lucy and The Bard (Nashville Ballet, PBS Great Performances); appearances in Ken Burns’ Country Music miniseries (PBS); Red Dead Redemption 2 game; My Music with Rhiannon Giddens (PBS); Aria Code podcast (WQXR)  
MacArthur Fellow “Genius” grant recipient 2017  
Grammy Award for Best Folk Album (They’re Calling Me Home)  
Grammy Award for Traditional Folk Album (Genuine Negro Jig)  
Pulitzer Prize for Music (Omar)

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**JOHN KENNEDY**  
(Minneapolis, Minnesota)  
**Conductor**  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (Spoleti Festival USA, LA Opera, Carolina Performing Arts, Boston Lyric Opera); Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos (Copenhagen’s Royal Danish Opera); Laca in Jenůfa (Vlaamse Opera); Froh in Das Rheingold (Dallas Symphony Orchestra); Duke of Cornwall in Lear (Munich’s Bavarian State Opera); Telemaco in Il Ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria (Theatre Basel); Peter the Honeyman in Kevin Puts’ The Hours (Philadelphia Orchestra); Britten’s War Requiem (Israel Philharmonic Orchestra); Tamino in Die Zauberflöte (Kentucky Opera); Glasses in Eugene Onegin (Michigan Opera Theatre)

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**JAMEZ MCCORKLE**  
(Tenor)  
(NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA)  
**Omar**  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar

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**MICHAEL ABELS**  
(Phoenix, Arizona)  
Co-Composer  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Omar  
**Co-composer of**  
Omar (Spoleti Festival USA, LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera); composer of Delights and Dances (Atlanta Symphony), Falling Sky ballet (Butler University), At War with Ourselves (Kronos Quartet), Bad Education (HBO); conductor of his score for Jordan Peele’s Get Out (Chicago Sinfonietta, National Symphony, San Francisco Symphony)  
Co-founder of the Composers Diversity Collective, an advocacy group to increase visibility of composers of color in film, game, and streaming media  
Pulitzer Prize for Music (Omar)

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**BRITTANY RENEE**  
(Soprano)  
(Minneapolis, Minnesota)  
**Julie**  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Musetta in La Bohème (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Destiny/Loneliness/Greta in Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmon’s Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago); Sadie Griffith in Blanchard’s Champion (Metropolitan Opera); Giannetta in L’Elisir d’Amore (Metropolitan Opera); Ancella in Medea (Metropolitan Opera); Countess Ceprano in Rigoletto (Metropolitan Opera)  
Instagram: @brittanyreneesoprano  
Facebook: @Brittany Renee, Soprano  
YouTube: @Brittany Renee

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**TAYLOR RAVEN**  
(Mezzo-Soprano)  
(Hope Mills, North Carolina)  
**Fatima**  
**San Francisco Opera**  
**Highlights:** Charmian in John Adams’ Antony and Cleopatra; Sister Mathilde in Dialogues of the Carmelites; Flora Bervoix in La Traviata  
**Recent and Upcoming:** Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia (Seattle Opera, Finger Lakes Opera, Wolf Trap Opera); Flosshilde in Das Rheingold (Los Angeles Philharmonic); Angelina in La Cenerentola (Kentucky Opera); Joan Clarke in Justine F. Chen’s The Life and Death(s) of Alan Turing (Chicago Opera Theater); title role of Carmen (Des Moines Metro Opera); Wowkle in La Fanciulla del West (Cleveland Orchestra); Third Lady in Die Zauberflöte (Houston Grand Opera, LA Opera); Malika in Lakmé (Washington Concert Opera); Moravec’s Sanctuary Road (North Carolina Opera); Pauline in Pique
Dame (Des Moines Metro Opera); Annio in La Clemenza di Tito (LA Opera); Tebaldo in Don Carlo (LA Opera); Sandman in Hansel and Gretel (LA Opera); Concepción in L’Heure Espagnole (Wolf Trap)

Merola Opera Program: 2016

**DANIEL OKULITCH**
Bass-Baritone
(Ottawa, Canada)

**Johnson/Owen San Francisco Opera Highlights:** Donald Gallup in Virgil Thomson’s The Mother of Us All; Bosun/Gunner’s Mate in Billy Budd

**Recent and Upcoming:** Count Almaviva in Le Nozze di Figaro (Zurich Opera); General Leslie Groves in John Adams’ Doctor Atomic (Santa Fe Opera); Beck in Joby Talbot and Gene Scheer’s The Factotum (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Dr. T in Proximity (Chicago); Ned in Treemonisha (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Count Almaviva in Le Nozze di Figaro (Seattle Opera); Riolobo in Daniel Catán’s Florencia en el Amazonas (Houston Grand Opera); Escamillo in Carmen (Opera Orlando); title role of Chausson’s Le Roi Arthus (Bard SummerScape); Foreman/Adult James in Terence Blanchard’s Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera, Chicago); title role of Don Giovanni (Dayton Opera); Jochanaan in Salome (Dayton); Larkens in La Fanciulla del West (Munich’s Bavarian State Opera); Crown in Porgy and Bess (Theater an der Wien, Fort Worth Opera); Jake in Porgy and Bess (Elbphilharmonie Orchestra on tour at Lucerne Festival); Jim in Porgy and Bess (Metropolitan Opera); Lieutenant Gordon in Kevin Puts’ Silent Night (Washington D.C.)

**NORMAN GARRETT**
Baritone
(Lubbock, Texas)

**Abdul/Abe Recent and Upcoming:** Bob in William Grant Still’s Highways USA (LA Opera); Masetto in Don Giovanni (Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera); Abdul in Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera); Garby in Will Liverman and DJ King Rico’s The Factotum (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Dr. T in Proximity (Chicago); Ned in Treemonisha (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Count Almaviva in Le Nozze di Figaro (Seattle Opera); Riolobo in Daniel Catán’s Florencia en el Amazonas (Houston Grand Opera); Escamillo in Carmen (Opera Orlando); title role of Chausson’s Le Roi Arthus (Bard SummerScape); Foreman/Adult James in Terence Blanchard’s Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera, Chicago); title role of Don Giovanni (Dayton Opera); Jochanaan in Salome (Dayton); Larkens in La Fanciulla del West (Munich’s Bavarian State Opera); Crown in Porgy and Bess (Theater an der Wien, Fort Worth Opera); Jake in Porgy and Bess (Elbphilharmonie Orchestra on tour at Lucerne Festival); Jim in Porgy and Bess (Metropolitan Opera); Lieutenant Gordon in Kevin Puts’ Silent Night (Washington D.C.)

**REHANNA THELWELL**
Mezzo-Soprano
(Avenel, New Jersey)

**Katie Ellen/Caller Recent and Upcoming:** Title role of Carmen (Washington National Opera); Girlfriend/Conregant 3 in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s Blue (Dutch National Opera, Washington D.C.); Anna I in The Seven Deadly Sins and Dinah in Trouble in Tahiti (Madison Opera); Ruby/Sinner in Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons’ Fire Shut

**LAURA KRUMM**
Mezzo-Soprano
(Iowa City, Iowa)

**Eliza San Francisco Opera Highlights:** Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia; Lola in Cavalleria Rusticana; Kitchen Boy in Rusalka

**Recent and Upcoming:** Dimitri in Fedora (Metropolitan Opera); Siegrune in Act III of Die Walküre (Hollywood Bowl); Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia (Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera, Mendocino Music Festival); Javotte in Manon (Metropolitan Opera); San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship: 2012, 2013

Merola Opera Program: 2011

**BARRY BANKS**
Tenor
(New York, New York)

**Auctioneer/Taylor San Francisco Opera Highlights:** Arnalta in L’Incoronazione di Poppea

**Recent and Upcoming:** Hades in Matthew Aucoin’s Eurydice (Metropolitan Opera); Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera); Mime in Das Rheingold (Dallas Opera, LA Philharmonic)

Adjunct professor of vocal studies at Peabody Conservatory

**EDWARD GRAVES**
Tenor
(Oxon Hill, Maryland)

**Amadou San Francisco Opera Highlights:** Gastone in La Traviata; Stone/Eunuch in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang’s Dream of the Red Chamber; Centennial Celebration Concert: Rodolfo in Bohème Out of the Box; Ruiz in Il Trovatore; Noble #2 in Lohengrin

**Recent and Upcoming:** Anatol in Vanessa (Spoleto Festival USA); Policeman 2 in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s Blue (Michigan Opera Theatre, Glimmerglass Festival); title role of Handel’s Judas Maccabaeus (Berkshire Choral International); What
the Heart Desires (Merola Opera Program); Back Home: Through the Stage Door (Merola Opera Program); Rinuccio in Gianni Schicchi/Michael Ching’s Buoso’s Ghost (Michigan Opera Theatre); Robbins in Porgy and Bess (Seattle Opera); John Blow’s Venues and Adonis (Florentine Opera)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship: 2022, 2023
Merola Opera Program: 2021

CALVIN GRIFFIN ♪ ♪ Bass-Baritone (Columbus, Ohio)
Olufemi Recent and Upcoming: Adult Robert in Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons’ Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago); Colline in La Bohème (Spoleto USA); Tommy McIntyre in Gregory Spears’ Fellow Travelers (Opera Columbus); title role of Le Nozze di Figaro (Florentine Opera, Florida Grand Opera); Der Lautsprecher in Viktor Ullmann’s Der Kaiser von Atlantis (Atlanta Opera); Dancairo in Carmen (Atlanta); Laura Karpman’s On the Edge (Opera Theater of Saint Louis); Death in Gustav Holst’s Sáviri (Wolf Trap Opera); Eddie in The Fix (Minnesota Opera); Doctor Bartolo in La Nozze di Figaro (Arizona Opera)
Website: calvingriffinbassbaritone.com

KENNETH OVERTON ♪ ♪ Baritone (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Suleiman San Francisco Opera Highlights: Frazier in Porgy and Bess; Sid in La Fanciulla del West; Second Mate in Billy Budd
Recent and Upcoming: Marcello in La Bohème (Intermountain Opera Bozeman); Will Todd’s Migrations (Welsh National Opera); Duncan in Boff Whalley’s The Shoemaker (Welsh National Opera; Porgy in Porgy and Bess (Opera Carolina, North Carolina Opera); Porgy and Bess (NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra in Hamburg); Strauss’ Daphne (American Symphony Orchestra); Frazier in Porgy and Bess (Metropolitan Opera); Ralph in Douglas Tappin’s I Dream (Opera Carolina); Homecoming Soldier in Zach Redler’s The Falling and the Rising (Opera Carolina); Germont in La Traviata (Fort Worth Opera); The Road We Came (On Site Opera); A Night of Black Excellence (Fort Worth Opera)
Co-founder and artistic director of Opera Noire of New York, a performing arts organization created to empower African American artists
Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance (Richard Danielpour’s The Passion of Yeshua)
Instagram: @kennytheeoverton
X: @KennyOVERTON
Facebook: @Kenneth Overtton, Baritone

JESSICA-ELISABETH ♪ ♪ Mezzo-Soprano (Whittier, California)
Woman #1 (Act 1)/Mary #1 Recent and Upcoming: Engagements with LA Opera, San Diego Opera, Opera Pacific, Pacific Chorale, Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers

THALIA MOORE ♪ ♪ Soprano (Loma Linda, California)
Woman #2 (Act 1) Recent and Upcoming: Nella in Michael Ching’s Buoso’s Ghost (Cal State Fullerton); recital of African American art songs (Pacific Opera Project)

ALETA BRAXTON ♪ ♪ Mezzo-Soprano (Los Angeles, California)
Woman #3/Mary #3 Recent and Upcoming: Performed in over 160 productions (LA Opera) and over 100 film soundtracks, including Avatar: The Way of Water; Black Panther: Wakanda Forever; Nope
Member of Los Angeles Master Chorale
Music faculty member of the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts
Member of San Francisco Opera Extra Chorus

SYDNEE TURRENTINE-JOHNSON ♪ ♪ Soprano (Dallas, Texas)
Woman #4/Tess #2/Chorus Soprano Solo Recent and Upcoming: The Mother in Hansel and Gretel; Anna Gomez in Menotti’s The Consul

EARL HAZELL ♪ ♪ Basso Cantante (New York, New York)
Man #1 (Act 1)/Rentyl #1 San Francisco Opera Recent and Upcoming: Terence Blanchard’s Champion (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Raimondo in Lucia di Lammermoor (Druid City Opera); Second Man/Whistle Patron in Gregory Spears and Tracy K. Smith’s Castor and Patience (Cincinnati Opera); Okojie in The Downy workshop (Cincinnati)
CHRISTOPHER CRAIG
Tenor
(Los Angeles, California)
Man #2 (Act 1)/
Man #1 (Act 2)
Recent and Upcoming: Engagements with LA Opera

JOHN FLUKER
Tenor
(Saint Louis, Missouri)
Slaveship Crewman #2
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Carmina Burana (Sing Napa Valley); Stephen Main’s The Image cantata

ALEXANDER TAITE
Tenor
(Oakland, California)
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Officer in The Barber of Seville; Sergeant in Manon; various roles in Billy Budd; A Captain/Zaretsky in Eugene Onegin; Messenger in La Traviata
Recent and Upcoming: Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus

WILLIAM O’NEILL
Bass-Baritone
(Providence, Rhode Island)
Slaveship Crewman #1/Slaver
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Ernie in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s It’s a Wonderful Life; Sweeney Todd; Manon; Pagliacci; Showboat; Celebrating the Voices of San Francisco Opera

CHESER PIDDUCK
Tenor
(Saint Louis, Missouri)
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Mr. Martini in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s It’s a Wonderful Life; A Waiter in Arabella; Parpignol in La Bohème; Nantucket Sailor in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer’s Moby-Dick

WILLIAM LEE BRYAN
Baritone
(San Francisco, California)
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Senator Potter/General Airlie/Bartender in Gregory Spears’ Fellow Travelers (Virginia Opera)

JOANNA LYNN-JACOBS
Mezzo-Soprano
(Santa Barbara, California)
Tess #1/
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Anthie in Theodosia Roussos’ Polyomnia (UCLA Center for the Study of Hellenic Culture); Meredith Monk’s Cellular Songs; Iphigenia of the Sea in Wayne Shorter and esperanza spaulding’s (…Iphigenia); Ash Fure and LIILETH’s Hive Rise installation (The Industry at Los Angeles’ MOCA); Elizabeth Lavenza/Female Monster in Frankenstein (Four Larks at Beverly Hills’ Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts); Alexandra in Monk’s ATLAS (LA Philharmonic); Opera Singer in Europeras (The Industry at LA Philharmonic)

MELISSA DUFORT
Mezzo-Soprano
(San Francisco, California)
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Member of San Francisco Opera Extra Chorus

JOHN FULTON
Baritone
(San Francisco, California)
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: El último sueño de Frida y Diego

ERNEST C. JACKSON JR.
Tenor
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
San Francisco Opera
Recent and Upcoming: Foreman in Scott Joplin’s Treemonisha (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Mingo in Porgy and Bess (North Carolina Opera, Opera Carolina, SFOPERA.COM
ARTIST PROFILES CONTINUED

Cincinnati Opera, Greensboro Opera, Fort Worth Opera); Nelson in Porgy and Bess (Seattle Opera, Atlanta Opera); Policeman/Buddy #2 in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s Blue (Pittsburgh Opera, Toledo Opera); Malcolm in Macbeth (Empire Opera)

CHLOE VAUGHT *
Soprano
(Los Angeles, California)
Woman #2 (Act 2)
Recent and Upcoming: Margaret Bonds’ Credo (Los Angeles Master Chorale at Los Angeles’ Walt Disney Hall); Black Panther: Wakanda Forever; Member of LA Opera Chorus, Los Angeles Master Chorale, HEX Vocal Ensemble, SAG-AFTRA, AGMA
Member of San Francisco Opera Extra Chorus

WILFORD KELLY *
Bass-Baritone
(Miami, Florida)
Man #2 (Act 2)
Recent and Upcoming: Engagements with San Francisco Conservatory of Music, West Edge Opera, Jacksonville Symphony, San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, Wolf Trap Opera Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus

JERMAINE MCGHEE *
(Charlotte, North Carolina)
Ancestral Figure
Recent and Upcoming: Ancestral Figure in Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera); Kanye West Sunday Service Mother’s Day Special
Instagram: @emeraldj27

KANEZA SCHAAL *
(Director)
Recent and Upcoming: Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (Spoleto Festival USA, LA Opera, Carolina Performing Arts, Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago); William Grant Still’s Highway 1, USA (LA Opera); KLII (New York’s Public Theater Under the Radar Festival, Minneapolis’ Walker Art Center, Cincinnati’s Contemporary Arts Center, Los Angeles’ REDCAT); Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s Blue (Michigan Opera Theatre); Cartography (Washington D.C.’s The Kennedy Center, Cleveland’s Playhouse Square, Philly Fringe, NYU Abu Dhabi, New York’s Victory Theater, Toronto’s Young People’s Theatre, Ubumbuntu Arts Festival); Triptych (Los Angeles Philharmonic, University of Michigan, Big Ears Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Amsterdam’s Holland Festival, Athens’ Stavros Festival, Austin’s Texas Performing Arts, Stanford University, Boston’s ArtsEmerson); Maze (New York’s The Shed); Jack & (Brooklyn, REDCAT, Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, On The Boards, Catskill’s Lumberyard, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, New York Live Arts)

KIARA BENN *
(Choreographer)
Recent and Upcoming: Choreographer of Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera), just for (you) (New York’s The Performing Garage); choreographer and dancer for Omar (Carolina Performing Arts, Boston Lyric Opera); assistant director for Omar (Spoleto Festival USA)
Instagram: @kiaramcb

CHRISTOPHER MYERS *
(Designer)
Recent and Upcoming: Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera); Percent for Art commission (Brooklyn Brownsville Public Library)

AMY RUBIN *
Set Designer
Recent and Upcoming: Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera, Spoleto Festival USA); Joel Thompson’s Snowy Day (Houston Grand Opera); Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s Blue (Michigan Opera Theatre); Paola Prestini’s Aging Magician (San Diego Opera); Lucy (Audible Theatre); Most Happy (Williamstown Festival); Octet (Signature Theatre/ Berkeley Rep); Cyro (The New Group); Thom Pain (based on nothing) (Signature Theatre); Gloria: A Life (New York’s Daryl Roth Theatre); Miles for Mary (Playwrights Horizons); Acquanetta (Prototype Festival) Assistant Professor of Theater at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee Website: amycrubin.com

APRIL M. HICKMAN *
Co-Costume Designer
Recent and Upcoming: Costume designs for The Thanksgiving Play (Dorset Theatre Festival); Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera, Spoleto Festival USA, Boston Lyric Opera); Trouble in Mind

ENCORESPOTLIGHT.COM 43
(Dallas Theater Center); Nine Night (Round House Theatre); associate costume designer for The Shark Is Broken Assistant Professor in the Practice of Costume Design at Wesleyan University
@Aprilmhickmandesign

MICHELINE RUSSELL-BROWN*
(Chicago, Illinois)
Co-Costume Designer
Recent and Upcoming: Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ Omar (LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera); costumer for The Good Fight

PABLO SANTIAGO*
(Chiapas, Mexico)
Lighting Designer
Recent and Upcoming: Missy Mazzoli’s Breaking the Waves (LA Opera); The Threepenny Opera (Boston Lyric Opera); Ellen Reid’s p r i s m (LA Opera, Prototype Festival, Sao Paulo); Desert In (Boston Lyric Opera); Mazzoli’s Proving Up (Opera Omaha, New York’s Miller Theatre); Ted Hearne’s Place (BAM); Giustino (Long Beach Opera); John Corigliano’s The Lord of Cries (Santa Fe Opera); Rev 23 (Prototype Festival); The Valkyries (Bard SummerScape); Orpheus and the Carmelites (Long Beach Opera); Mason Bates and Mark Campbell’s The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs; Lohengrin

JOHN KEENE
(Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
Chorus Director
San Francisco Opera
Highlights: Don Giovanni; Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang’s Dream of the Red Chamber; Eun Sun Kim Conducts Verdi; John Adams’ Antony and Cleopatra; Eugene Onegin; Dialogues of the Carmelites; La Traviata; Orpheus and Eurydice; Madame Butterfly; Die Frau ohne Schatten; Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz’s El último sueño de Frida y Diego; 100th Anniversary Concert: Il Trovatore; Mason Bates and Mark Campbell’s The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs; Lohengrin

Recent and Upcoming: The Elixir of Love; The Magic Flute; Kajja Saariaho, Sofi Oksanen, and Aleks Carrière’s Innocence

Personnel: 12 principals, 32 choristers (including 18 chorus soloists), 4 dancers, 2 supernumeraries; 50 total
Orchestra: 2 flutes (1 doubling alto flute, 1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling Eb clarinet, 1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, 1 contrabass trombone, 1 timpani, 3 percussion, 1 piano, 1 harp, 40 strings (12 first violins, 9 second violins, 7 violas, 7 cellos, 5 basses); 62 total

First performance: Spoleto Festival, USA Charleston, South Carolina, May 27, 2022

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James Bowman, countertenor
An Oxford graduate and a Westminster Abbey chorister, Bowman first attracted attention with Benjamin Britten’s English Opera Group in 1967, making his stage debut as Oberon in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Velvet timbre and admirable flexibility were expected from the still–relatively new countertenor voice type at the time, but the sheer amplitude of Bowman’s voice was astonishing—indeed, unique. In addition, his imposing height enhanced his characterization with all the necessary regality. Among his other early successes was playing the endearing shepherd Endimione in Cavalli’s *La Calisto* at Glyndebourne, where his scenes with Janet Baker’s Diana were gloriously sung. As Bowman continued to appear with major companies in America (San Francisco Opera as Oberon in 1971, Tolomeo in *Giulio Cesare* in 1982) and in Europe, he repeatedly filled sizeable theaters as easily as more “standard” voice types. He made a significant impact even when appearing with the great Marilyn Horne, his colleague in the United States premiere of Vivaldi’s *Orlando Furioso* (Dallas, 1980). Bowman’s performances made clear that roles previously assigned to female mezzos and contraltos could be assigned to him and the other countertenors who would eventually follow him. A pillar of the early music scene in Britain and internationally, he also appeared in the world premieres of Britten’s *Death in Venice* (Aldeburgh) and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies’s *Taverner* (London). His more than 150 recordings cover the gamut of countertenor repertoire. Possessing a famous sense of humor and enormous charm, Bowman was also a cherished adviser for young singers. England’s Vache Baroque Festival inaugurated a young artist program named for him in 2021.

Grace Bumbry, mezzo-soprano and soprano
Having won attention as a teenager on “Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts,” Bumbry became a prized pupil of Lotte Lehmann, who knew that European houses would provide Bumbry with the “big break” she needed. In 1960, at only age 23, she made a sensational operatic debut in Paris as Amneris in *Aida*. The entire musical world would learn her name the following year when, as Venus in *Tannhäuser*, she became the first Black artist to perform at the Bayreuth Festival. Stupendously charismatic, Bumbry won that famously demanding audience with her sumptuous, wide-ranging voice. Her historic triumph at Bayreuth moved the career into high gear, with Bumbry exuding an aura of a bold, glamorously jet-setting diva who sang exclusively star mezzo parts. One of them, Carmen, marked her debut in San Francisco in 1966. The following year, she was both Laura (*La Gioconda*) and Lady Macbeth, the latter also a huge success for her in Salzburg and at the Metropolitan Opera. Once she and an equally celebrated American mezzo, Shirley Verrett, began taking on soprano roles, they gave a series of exciting duo appearances, including a San Francisco Opera concert in 1984. Three years later, Bumbry made her final appearance here, starring as Abigaille (*Nabucco*). A favorite in virtually every other prestigious theater, Bumbry documented her artistry extensively, leaving particularly memorable recordings of two signature roles, Verdi’s Eboli in *Don Carlo* and Amneris.

Soňa Červená, mezzo-soprano
Červená began her distinguished stage career in her native Prague before moving on to the Berlin State Opera. She was a resident lyric mezzo there in 1962, when she was able to escape from East to West Berlin. That same year she launched a wonderfully varied, two-decade association with San Francisco Opera. Her first season saw her debuting as Carmen (mainstage and on tour to Los Angeles) and also singing Azucena in *II Trovatore* (Los Angeles, San Diego), but it soon became evident that her considerable gifts could leave a greater
mark in important supporting roles. She sang 25 of them here, concluding her tenure during the 1980–81 Season as Flora Bervoix. Very much a chameleon vocally and physically, Červená could transform herself into the sophisticated actress Clairon in Capriccio, the imperious Herodias in Salome, and the tragic Countess Geschwitz in Lulu, but she was just as adept playing more ordinary women, whether Marthe in Faust, the Hostess of the Inn in Boris Godunov, or Grandmother Buryiovka in Jenůfa. Her repertoire of more than 100 roles brought her to the Wexford Festival (where she was reportedly unforgettable as the vicious Kabanicha in Kát’a Kabanová). She had a close relationship with Oper Frankfurt, while also appearing at the Bayreuth, Glyndebourne, and Edinburgh festivals, as well as the major companies of Milan, Amsterdam, and Paris. Her later years included appearances as an actress (Hamburg, Prague). Červená was still performing as recently as 2022, in her mid-nineties. In a Czech song (accessible on YouTube), she sings exclusively in chest voice but with great charm and indomitable spirit.

Graham Clark, tenor
Clark’s versatility was evident at San Francisco Opera, where he portrayed the dashing Albert Gregor in The Makropoulos Case (1993), the riotously funny yet sinister Witch in Hansel and Gretel (2002), and the drunken Piet the Pot in Ligeti’s superhumanly difficult Le Grand Macabre (U.S. premiere, 2004). In performance, conquering superhuman challenges came easily to the English tenor. However exacting the role, he could illuminate it with a brightly penetrating voice and crystalline projection of the text. A former sports teacher, Clark was also a phenomenally skilled physical actor. He made his international reputation in Wagner, particularly at the Bayreuth Festival, where he sang six roles in 16 seasons. His matchlessly venomous Mime in Siegfried was also heard in 22 other major houses. He triumphed repeatedly as the Captain (Wozzeck), and he proved equally memorable as the venomous Bégarss in the world premiere of John Corigliano’s The Ghosts of Versailles. In London, Clark earned huge popularity at both London’s Royal Opera House and English National Opera. After initially singing a good deal of lyric tenor heroes at ENO, he concluded that his voice lacked “red wine and sunshine” and began concentrating on character parts. In addition to six major roles at the Metropolitan Opera, Clark was featured at Milan’s Teatro alla Scala, the Opéra National de Paris, and the major houses of Germany, Spain, Belgium, and Israel. When Clark’s passing was announced, Royal Opera House Music Director Antonio Pappano hailed him as “a mesmerising [sic] stage presence and gifted with a natural exuberance that kept everyone around him positive and always laughing. A star in every way.”

Robert Hale, bass-baritone
A native Texan, Hale learned his trade at New York City Opera, where he sang leading bass roles for a decade, beginning in 1967. As Don Giovanni, as well as in bel canto repertoire, Hale rapidly established himself as an artist of superb vocal, musical, and interpretive resources. Beginning in Wuppertal, Germany, where he sang his first Dutchman in 1978, he began taking on the Heldenbariton parts that would bring him great acclaim internationally. Hale was closely identified with both Wotan (San Francisco Opera debut, 1989 Ring cycle) and the Dutchman (Metropolitan Opera debut, 1990). In addition to a lengthy association with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, he starred in the major houses of Berlin, London, Vienna, Barcelona, Moscow, and Sydney, among many others. He continued to sing Italian and French roles, including Escamillo in Carmen, which marked his return to San Francisco in 1991. Invariably an eloquent, fearless singing actor, he created in-depth physical characterizations. He proved deeply impressive as Duke Adorno in The Makropoulos Case (metropolitan Opera debut, 1967). As Don Giovanni, as well as Jochanaan in Salome, Hale’s musicianship and professionalism earned the respect of some of the most distinguished conductors of our time, including Christoph von Dohnányi, Wolfgang Sawallisch, James Levine, John Eliot Gardiner, and Giuseppe Sinopoli. He was a superb colleague, and the aura he communicated offstage was that of a true gentleman.
Berit Lindholm, soprano

Although Swedish soprano Lindholm's career included successes in Verdi and Puccini, she made her biggest impact in German repertoire. Her voluminous instrument boasted not only an exciting top but also a particularly warm, almost mezzo-like color in the lower octave. Enhancing Lindholm’s vocalism were notable dramatic gifts. The Stockholm native debuted in 1963 at her hometown’s Royal Opera and was already singing internationally by 1966, when London heard her as Strauss’ Chrysothemis in Elektra. In 1970, she was San Francisco Opera’s Siegfried Brünnhilde, and two years later she and her compatriot Birgit Nilsson shared Sieglinde and Brünnhilde in the Company’s Ring (Lindholm’s Metropolitan Opera debut in 1975 was as Brünnhilde, opposite Nilsson’s Sieglinde). Other Wagner successes included starring roles in Chicago and the major houses of Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Spain. Hugely admired at the Bayreuth Festival, Lindholm appeared there from 1967 to 1973. She remained loyal to Stockholm, where prominent among her many successes were role debuts as Isolde and Elektra. In addition to her Wagner heroines (which also included Senta, Venus, Elisabeth, Ortrud, and Kundry), she also triumphed repeatedly throughout Europe as Salome. She was one of few singers who performed all three principal female roles in Elektra. On disc Lindholm can be heard as Helmwige in the Solti Ring and, more prominently, as Cassandre in the first complete recording of Berlioz’s Les Troyens. Beloved for her captivatingly down-to-earth personality (she hoped to be remembered chiefly as “a good grandmother”), Lindholm was decorated as one of Sweden’s “Royal Court Singers” in 1976.

John Priest, technical director

In opera, it is often the artists seen and heard onstage or in the pit who earn the adjective “legendary.” That stature is more rarely attained by someone whose gifts are utilized entirely behind the scenes of an opera house. Such a figure was Priest, who made history at San Francisco Opera in 1966 when then General Director Kurt Herbert Adler hired him as the Company’s first full-time technical director. Current General Director Matthew Shilvock has noted that “John made an indelible impact in defining the Company we know and treasure today.” Priest earned deep respect for his all-encompassing knowledge of what a major opera company needs to function with optimum efficiency. San Francisco Opera has him to thank for the smooth execution of countless major developments in the Company’s technical operation, including moving the carpentry shop out of the Opera House to make room for offices; the acquisition of the Indiana Street Scene Shop, which consolidated support spaces that the Company had around the city; and the addition of the “Patch” at the back of the Opera House, adding critically needed backstage and office space at the same time that the San Francisco Symphony was moving to Davies Symphony Hall. Priest retired as technical director in 1993 but returned as Opera House Project Coordinator from 1994 to 1998, supervising the move out of the Opera House for seismic retrofit. Throughout his career, Priest was a constant source of inspiration and wise advice for opera professionals across America. His legacy to San Francisco Opera includes his son, Mark Kotschnig, a stagehand since 1996 and a full-time member in the Props department since 2002.

Gabriele Schnaut, mezzo-soprano and soprano

In 1991, when Schnaut made her 1991 American debut at San Francisco Opera as Isolde, it was immediately evident that an important artist had entered the international Wagnerian ranks. The size and richness of Schnaut’s sound impressed as deeply as her authoritative musicianship and galvanizing presence. The German singer had arrived in San Francisco after 15 years of vital experience in major German houses. She began as a mezzo-soprano in 1976, working first in Stuttgart and then in Darmstadt. By 1985 she had moved into dramatic soprano parts, making her mark as Ortrud, Brünnhilde, and Isolde. Schnaut was a greatly admired figure in every leading German house, particularly those of Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and Munich. Her lengthy association with the Bayreuth Festival, which extended from 1977 to 2000, had much to do with sustaining her reputation as one of her generation’s most celebrated Wagnerians. Like Birgit Nilsson before her, Schnaut was also successful as Elektra.
(Metropolitan Opera, Munich, other major houses), the Dyer’s Wife in Die Frau ohne Schatten (Metropolitan Opera, Vienna), and the title role of Turandot, the latter her only other role in San Francisco (1998) and one she also sang at Lyric Opera of Chicago and at the Salzburg Festival (DVD). In 2008, she moved back to dramatic mezzo-soprano parts, excelling as Kostelnička, Herodias, and Klytämnestra. In addition to Wagner, she can be heard on disc in much 20th-century opera. In contrast to her imperious onstage persona, Schnaut offset was a vibrant, utterly irresistible human being, whose alluring speaking voice instantly brought everyone around her into her orbit.

## Renata Scotto, soprano

Renata Scotto was “an original”—truly an artist quite unlike any other. During her lengthy career she made her own rules, constantly reinventing herself in response to her own artistic interests. The luminous-voiced young Scotto first gained notice as one of Italy’s most beguiling, lyric-coloratura sopranos, appearing at Milan’s Teatro alla Scala in 1953, when only 19 (as Walter in La Wally, opposite Renata Tebaldi and Mario Del Monaco). Four years later she skyrocketed to stardom replacing Maria Callas in La Sonnambula at the Edinburgh Festival. When Puccini roles introduced her to America (Mimi in Chicago in 1960, Cio-Cio-San at the Met in 1965), she illuminated the music by approaching it with a technique securely anchored in bel canto. Having debuted in San Francisco with her incomparable Cio-Cio-San (1974), her return engagements displayed exciting evidence of her gradual acquisition of heavier repertoire—the Trovatore Leonora, Adriana Lecouvreur, and Gioconda. A mezzo role, Massenet’s Charlotte, marked her final San Francisco Opera appearance (1985). Scotto, who earned acclaim at virtually every leading American and European house, enjoyed a 22-year association with the Metropolitan Opera, where her many PBS telecasts significantly raised the prevailing standard of operatic acting on television. The Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Vienna, and London all witnessed Scotto’s miraculous development over time from a leggero singer to an interpreter of lyric, then spinto and dramatic-coloratura parts. She documented virtually all of her extensive repertoire, whether on LP, CD, or video. In later years, this electrifying, acutely intel-

## Virginia Zeani, soprano

In 1957 Romanian soprano Virginia Zeani made operatic history, creating the central role of Blanche de la Force in Dialogues of the Carmelites at Milan’s Teatro alla Scala. Twenty-five years later she returned to the Poulenc work as Mother Marie, making her San Francisco Opera debut in that formidable role. One of the most exquisitely beautiful, vocally gifted sopranos of her time, and blessed with exceptional musical curiosity, Zeani sang coloratura, lyric, and spinto parts during her 34 years onstage. Having studied in Bucharest and Milan, Zeani (née Zehan) achieved instant stardom in 1948, making her last-minute operatic debut at age 22 singing La Traviata in Bologna. Violetta subsequently became her signature role in 648 performances, heard at the Met, London, Vienna, Paris, and the Bolshoi, among many other major theaters worldwide. Zeani’s 69 roles extended from Handel’s Cleopatra to the gamut of 19th-century heroines (whether in bel canto, Verdi, French repertoire, and even Wagner) and numerous 20th-century parts, several of which were written especially for Zeani. She was celebrated in all the major Italian houses and was a particular favorite at Rome’s Teatro dell’Opera where she starred in resurrections of Rossini’s Otello and Verdi’s Alzira. Sadly neglected by recording companies, Zeani possessed a temperament that didn’t lend itself to fighting for professional opportunities. She enjoyed her status as a “connoisseur’s singer,” as well as her happy marriage to bass Nicola Rossi-Lemeni. A passionate, inordinately generous, immeasurably warm-hearted woman, Zeani was greatly loved during more than two decades on the voice faculty of Indiana University.

Roger Pines is a contributing writer to Opera News, Opera (U.K.), programs of opera companies internationally, and major recording labels. A faculty member of Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music, he has also been a panelist on the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts’ “Opera Quiz” every season since 2006.
Witnesses to History

This season, three of San Francisco Opera’s mainstage productions are new works co-commissioned by the Company from composers Mason Bates, Rhiannon Giddens, Michael Abels, Kaija Saariaho, and librettists Mark Campbell, Giddens, Sofi Oksanen, and Aleksi Barrière. This unprecedented proportion of new works to classics to inaugurate the Company’s second century is both unprecedented in San Francisco Opera history and supports its long-standing commitment to expanding the operatic repertoire and telling new stories by the leading artists of our time.

Of San Francisco Opera’s, to date, 30 commissions and co-commissions, these 12 works inspired by real people—witnesses to history such as Omar ibn Said or Steve Jobs—have transformed actual events into reverberant, communal experiences in ways that only opera makes possible.

1992
Sanford Sylvan portrayed Leon Klinghoffer in The Death of Klinghoffer, opera by John Adams with libretto by Alice Goodman.

PHOTO: MARTY SOHL

1996
Robert Orth as Harvey Milk, Juliana Gondek as Dianne Feinstein, and Gidon Saks as Mayor George Moscone in Harvey Milk, opera by Stewart Wallace with libretto by Michael Korie.

PHOTO: RON SCHERL

2000
Frederic von Stade as Mrs. Patrick de Rocher and Susan Graham as Sister Helen Prejean in Dead Man Walking*, opera by Jake Heggie with libretto by Terrence McNally.

PHOTO: KEN FRIEDMAN

2005
Gerald Finley as J. Robert Oppenheimer in Doctor Atomic*, opera by John Adams with libretto by Peter Sellars.

PHOTO: TERRENCE MccARTHY

2007
Andrew Shore as Ulysses S. Grant and Dwayne Croft as Robert E. Lee in Appomattox*, opera by Philip Glass with libretto by Christopher Hampton.

PHOTO: TERRENCE MccARTHY
2011
Thomas Hampson as Rick Rescorla in *Heart of a Soldier*, opera by Christopher Theofanidis with libretto by Donna Di Novelli. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

2013
Nathan Gunn as Yeshua (Jesus) and Sasha Cooke as Mary Magdalene in *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, opera and libretto by Mark Adamo. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

2017
J’Nai Bridges as Josefa Segovia and Julia Bullock as Dame Shirley in *Girls of the Golden West*, opera by John Adams with libretto by Peter Sellars. PHOTO: STEFAN COHEN

2022
Amina Edris and Gerald Finley as the title roles in *Antony and Cleopatra*, opera by John Adams. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

2023
Daniela Mack as Frida Kahlo, Alfredo Daza as Diego Rivera, and Yaritza Veliz as Catrina in *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, opera by Gabriela Lena Frank with libretto by Nilo Cruz. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

2023
Jamez McCorkle as Omar ibn Said in *Omar*, opera by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels with libretto by Rhiannon Giddens. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER/LA OPERA

2023
John Moore as Steve Jobs in *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, opera by Mason Bates with libretto by Mark Campbell. PHOTO: CORY WEAVER

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- As a courtesy to those who may have fragrance allergies, please avoid wearing perfume or cologne.
- Get to know and enjoy this wonderful community of opera lovers. Say hello to one another pre-show, at intermission, or leaving the theater.

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The San Francisco War Memorial acknowledges that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders, and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.
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Lynne Soffer, English Diction

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Mark Baumann, Assistant Head of Carpentry
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Daniel Friedman, Assistant Lighting Designer
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Jacob Zdunich, Rehearsal Coordinator: Personnel
Liz R. Ray, Rehearsal Coordinator: Administration
Heather Kelly-Laws, Rehearsal Assistant

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Steve McNally, Scenic Artist in Charge

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Darin Burnett, Jennifer Harber, Jayme O’Hara, Thea Railey, Stage Managers
Ian Andrew Askew, Jose Maria Conde, E. Reed Fisher, Jennifer Harber, Dan Wallace Miller, Roy Rallo, Morgan Robinson, Assistant Stage Directors
Collette Berg, Jonathan S. Campbell, Megan Coutts, Jayme O’Hara, Thea Railey, Anna Reetz, Assistant Stage Managers
Colm Seery, Dance Master

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Scott Cavallo, Assistant Technical Director

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Christina Martin, Assistant Department Head of Wigs, Hair, and Makeup

Dr. Myron Marx, Company Medical Adviser

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UCSF doctors: Dr. George Rutherford, Dr. Mark Almond, Dr. Robert Harrison, Dr. Sanziana Roman, Dr. Clark Rosen

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Roberto Alagna *
Andrea Alderman
Angela Arnold
Javier Arrey
Zhengyi Bai *
Barry Banks
Joseph Barron
C. Michael Be lä
Gabrielle Betea g  
David Bizic *
Angel Blue
Aleksy Bogdanov *
Aleta Braxton *
Bille Bruley *
William Lee Bryan
Cheryl Cain
Sarah Cambridge *
Victor Cardamone *
Maire Therese Carmack *
Arturo Chacon-Cruz *
Sarah Coif
Sadha Cooke
Christopher Craig *
Johanne Daniel
Claire de Sevigne *
Camilo Delgado Díaz *
Ashley Dixon *
Ruxandra Donose
Melissa Dufart *
Marina Dumont **
Jessica-Elisabeth *
John Fluker
Julie Fuchs *
John Fulton
Christina Gansch
Norman Garrett *
Margaret Genovese
Rod Gilfry
Kevin Gino
Renato Girolami *
Edward Graves *
Calvin Griffin *
Jongwon Han *
Stel la Hanno ck
Earl Hazell
Julie Heg a *
Jonah Hoskins *
Vilma Jää *
Christopher Jackson
Ernest C. Jackson, Jr.
Joanna Lynn-Jacobs *
Michael Jankosky
Silvie Jensen
James Johnson *
Sydney Turrentine-Johnson *
Wilford Kelly *
Hyona Kim
Simon Kluth *
Bojan Knežević
Laura Krumm *
Aleksandra Kurzak
Judit Kutasi *
Joseph Lattanzi *
Adam Lau *
Randy Lee
Thomas Lehman *
Christine Lyons
Daniela Mack *
Malcolm MacKenzie
James McCorkle *
Jermaine McGhee **
Liset McPherrin
Courtney Miller
John Moore *
Thalia Moore *
Beate Mordal *
Angela Moser
Brian Mulligan
Miles Mykkanen *
Daniel Okulitch *
Simon O’Neill *
William O’Neill
Kenneth Overton
Andrew Thomas Pardini
Pene Pati *
Amitai Pati *
George Petean *
Chester Pidduck
Robert Pormakov
Laurel Cameron Porter
Nikola Printz *
Taylor Raven *
Brittany Renee *
Arianna Rodríguez *
Mikayla Sager *
Maises Salazar *
Ekaterina Semenchuk
Lucy Shetton *
Alek Shrader *
Kristinn Sigmundsdottir
Anna Siminská *
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Alexander Taite
Nicholas Tamagna *
Rehana Thewel *
Jere Torkelsen
Lauri Vasa r *
Carlo Vistoli *
Chloe Vaught *
Wei Wu *
Katie van Schoonhoven *
Jesslyn Thomas
Kwangchul Youn *
Slavka Zamečníkova **

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Michael Christie
John Kennedy *
Eun Sun Kim
Clément Mao-Takacs *
Christopher Moulds
Ramón Tebar *

**PRODUCTION**
Barrie Kosky and
PRODUCTION
Clément Mao-Takacs
John Fluker *
Kevin Gino *
Stella Hannock *
John Fulton *
Christopher Jackson *
Michael Jankosky *
Silvie Jensen *
Wilford Kelly *
Claire Kelm
Crystal Kim *

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David Alden
Kevin Newbury
Roy Rallo
Peter Reiton *
Tobias Ribitzki *
Kaneza Schaal *
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Maxine Brahm *
Timothy Claydon *

**KEY:**
* San Francisco Opera Debut
** U.S. Debut
* Former Adler Fellow
† Current Adler Fellow
* Former Merola Opera Program participant
* Solo Dancer
Cover Artist

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Eun Sun Kim, Music Director

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Maya Cohn, Associate Concertmaster +
Heidi Wilcox, Assistant Concertmaster
Jennifer Cho
Dawn Harms
Marlyra Borozina
Naoko Nakajima
Barbara Riccardi
Dian Zhang
Leonid Iginosman
Jennifer Hsieh
Asuka Annie Yano

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Martha Simonds, Associate Principal
Ben Shinohara, Assistant Principal
Eva Karasik
Leslie Ludena
Ka-You Lee
Aya Kiyonaga
Craig Reiss

VIOLA
Carla Maria Rodrigues, Principal
Joy Fellows, Associate Principal +
Emily Liu, Acting Assistant Principal ^
Patricia Heller
Natalia Vershilo
Elizabeth Prior ^
Yi Zhou ^

CELLO
Evan Kahn, Principal
Thalia Moore, Associate Principal
Peter Myers, Assistant Principal
Nora Pirquet
Emil Milan
Jung-Hsun Ko
Ruth Lane

BASS
Joseph Lescher, Principal
Jonathan Lancelle, Associate Principal
Shinji Eshima, Acting Assistant Principal
Evan Hills ^
Zach Hislop ^

FLUTE
Julie McKenzie, Principal
Susan Kang ^
Stephanie McNab

PICCOLO
Stephanie McNab

OBOE
Mingjia Liu, Principal
Gabriel Young, Associate Principal +
Liam Boisset ^
Books Fisher ^
Wentao Jiang ^

ENGLISH HORN
Liam Boisset ^
Wentao Jiang ^

CLARINET
Jose Gonzalez Granero, Principal
Joanne Burke Eisler, Assistant Principal †
Sean Krisman ^
Junghwan Lee ^

BASS CLARINET
Junghwan Lee ^

BASSOON
Rufus Olivier, Principal
Daniel MacNeill *
Michael Severance †
Shawn Jones ^

CONTRABASSOON
Michael Severance †
Shawn Jones ^

FRENCH HORN
Kevin Rivard, Principal
Keith Green
Brian McCarty, Associate Principal
Meredith Brown ^
Phillip Palmore ^
Caitlyn Smith-Franklin ^

TRUMPET
Adam Luftman, Principal
Scott Macomber ^
John Pearson ^

TROMBONE
Michael Cox, Acting Principal
Jeffrey Budin ^
David Ridge

BASS TROMBONE
David Ridge, Principal

TUBA/CIMBASSO
Zachariah Spellman, Principal

TIMPANI
John Burgardt, Principal

PERCUSSION
Patricia Niemi, Acting Principal
Victor Avdienko ^

HARP
Annabelle Taubl ^

LIBRARIAN
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ADDITIONAL MUSICIANS
Bryndon Hassman, harpsichord
Yang Lin, piano

ORCHESTRA MANAGER
Tracy Davis
Kevin Myers, Orchestra Operations Manager
† = Leave of absence
* = Principal for one or more Summer season operas
^ = Season Substitute

Corps Dancers
Colm Seery, Dance Master

Alysia Chang ~
Vincent Chavez *
Christopher Nachtrab ^*
Jekyns Pelayes t
Maxwell Simoes ~
Chiharu Shibata ~
Marcos Vedovetto ~
Jeffrey Ware
Michael Wells

^ Tenured
† Tenured Dancer
on Leave of Absence
- Resident Corps
* Solo Role

Supernumeraries

Omar Child Supernumeraries
Jahla Love
Remi Abidoye

Elixir of Love Child Supernumeraries
Aidan Rhys Politza
Brayden Christian

Elixir of Love Supernumeraries
Doug Spradlin
Backstage Personnel

COSTUME SHOP
Jai Altizer (23), Costume Shop Manager
Galen Till (19), Senior Production Supervisor
Lyre Alston, Production Supervisor
Manuel Gutierrez (24), Production Coordinator
Sally Thomas (24), Master Tailor
Amy Ashton-Keller (30), Master Draper
Barbara Ebel (15), Senior Draper
Santiago Suanes (14), Men’s Draper
Nika Cassaro, Draper
Paula Wheeler (32), Senior Milliner
Amy Van Every (39), Senior Dyer
Karen Lewis, Assistant Dyer
Jersey McDermott (24), Senior Craftsperson/Shoe Specialist
Emma Lehman, Kristen Tracy (16), Assistant Cutters
Yui Takenouchi, Taylor Newell, Kaitlyn Patrick, First Hand
Robyn Marsh, Victoria Mortimer, Costume Assistants

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WARDROBE DEPARTMENT
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Linda Edwards (25)
Edward Fonseca (12)
Lorraine Lewis (11)
Emma Mueller
Rachell Nichols
Phil Perry (26)
Patrick Sanchez (14)
Don Smith (27)
Scott Stewart (23)
Grisel Torres
Kirsten Tucker (20)

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Kathleen Blake (11)
Ava Byrd
Ash Cable
Claudia Holaday (44)
Ralph Hoy
Michael Kruzhich
Jeffery Larsen
Demetrius Martin
Jennifer O’Neill (11)
Fox Radoshevcich
Mark Saladino

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Senior Wig Artists
Erin Hennessy (10)
Maur Sela

Wig Artists
Tori Grayum
Gloria Mueller
Sharon Peng
Lindsay Saier

Show Call Forepersons
Consuelo Lopez-Robbins
Christina Martin (11)
Sharon Peng
Tim Santry (32)

Principal Wig, Hair, and Makeup Artists
Melanie Birch (36), Calli Carvajal, Sarah Coy, Manicela Garcia, Denise Gutierrez (40), Anna Izadi, Amber Laundermilk, Consuelo Lopez-Robbins, Toby Mayer (32), Lisa Patnoe (32), Sharon Peng, Maurisa Rondeau, Tim Santry (32)

Show Call Wig, Hair, and Makeup Artists
Shana Astrachan,
Vanessa Blanchard Lee,
Kristen Campbell, Calli Carvajal,
Sarah Coy, Tatyana Fateyeva,
Maricela Garcia, Denise Gutierrez (40),
Erin Hennessy (10), Arina Izadi,
Amber Laundermilk,
Consuelo Lopez-Robbins, Letzy Lugo,
Christian Martin (11), Toby Mayer (32),
Gloria Mueller, Naki Mugambi,
Robert Mazarik (17), Leilani Norman,
Lisa Patnoe (32), Sharon Peng,
Jordon Plath, Mauritza Rondeau,
Lindsay Saier, Maur Sela,
Sophie Smith (9), Kimberly Virgen,
Lisa Zomer (24)

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Dylan Maxson
Victor Sanchez (26)

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Jennifer Bennes

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Robert Avery
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Gabriel Castellani (13), Automation Key
Michael Chapman (11), Key
Dennis Crisswell
Paul Delatorre (24), Key
Tony Garcia
Karla Hargrave
Greg Harsha (24), Key
Geoffrey R. Heron (17)
Geoffrey W. Heron (29), Key
Philip Heron, (21), Automation and Rigging Foreperson
Ed Joe, Warehouse Foreperson
Nick Kukiela
Michael Martino
Alex Meyer
Harry Niedzwetzki (31)
John O’Donnell (35), Key Flyperson
Enrique Pronio
Michael Ramirez
Ty Russell,
Night Crew Foreperson
James Ryan
Kenneth Ryan (41)
Michael Ryan
Eila Saami
Gregory Shaff (35), Key
Harper Shipley
Cyrus Sindicich
Sean Walden (12)
Randy Walsh (21), Assistant Key
Colin Whitfield
Sammy Wong

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Greta Calvo
Christy Carter
James Eldridge (19), Shop Mechanic
Hilary Engelmann
Qris Fry
Tim Heaney
Jane Henderson
Patricia Hewett (16), Assistant Key
Myron Seth Isaacs (23), Key
Mark Kotschnig (21), Key
Emilio Lopez
John Matlock, Assistant Key
Beth Ozarow (27), Out of House Key
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Sarah Shores (16), Shop Mechanic
Morgan Edward Womble-Dahl

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Juan Aldana (19)
Joni Ben-Yisrael
John Boatwright (36), House Head Electrician
Ariel Bott, Assistant Key Stage Left
Daniele Colburn
Erik Dooktor (16), Projection Programmer
Amy Domian, Layout Electrician
Stephen Echerd (20)
Will Grunig (21)
Robert Haycock, Key Stage Right
Ana Gabriela Hernandez-Mckig, Gel Room
Geoff Heron (34), Pyro Technician
Bernard Honigman (24), Key Light Board Operator
Karen Jine
Brendan Kierans (10), Electric Shop Foreperson
Sophie Landau
Maria Mendoza (35), Projection Coordinator
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Lloyd Murphy, Key Projectistant
Glenn Quilici, Assistant Key Stage Right
Kevin Quintero
Matthew Reynolds
William Rodriguez
Kirt Siders, Data Administrator
Andrew Sproule (24), Key Stage Left
Jax Steager,
Assistant Key Light Board Operator

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Tod Nixon, Key (25)
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Concertmaster

Heidi Wilcox
Assistant Concertmaster

Jennifer Cho
First Violin

Dawn Harms
First Violin

Mariya Borozina
First Violin

Naoko Nakajima
First Violin

Barbara Riccardi
First Violin

Dian Zhang
First Violin

Leonid Igudesman
First Violin

Jennifer Hsieh
First Violin

Asuka Annie Yano
First Violin

Jeremy Preston
Principal Second Violin

Martha Simonds
Associate Principal Second Violin

Beni Shinohara
Assistant Principal Second Violin

Eva Karasik
Second Violin

Leslie Ludena
Second Violin

Ka-Yeon Lee
Second Violin

Aya Klyonaga
Second Violin

Maya Cohon
Second Violin

Craig Reiss
Second Violin

Heeguen Song
Second Violin^*^

Carla Maria Rodrigues
Principal Viola

Joy Fellows
Associate Principal Viola

Emily Liu
Acting Assistant Principal Viola^*

Patricia Heller
Viola

Natalia Vershilova
Viola

Elizabeth Prior
Viola^*

Yi Zhou
Viola^*

Evan Kahn
Principal Cello

Thalia Moore
Associate Principal Cello

Peter Myers
Assistant Principal Cello

Nora Pirquet
Cello

Emil Miland
Cello

Jung-Hsuan Ko
Cello

Ruth Lane
Cello

^* = Season Substitute
SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ORCHESTRA CONTINUED

Joseph Lescher  
Principal Bass

Jonathan Lancelle  
Associate Principal Bass

Shinji Eshima  
Acting Assistant Principal Bass

Evan Hilis  
Bass

Zach Hislop  
Bass

Julie McKenzie  
Principal Flute

Susan Kang  
Flute

Stephanie McNab  
Flute & Piccolo

Mingjia Liu  
Principal Oboe

Gabriel Young  
Associate Principal Oboe

Liam Bosset  
Oboe/English Horn

Brooks Fisher  
Oboe

José González Granero  
Principal Clarinet

Joanne Burke Eisler  
Assistant Principal Clarinet

Sean Krissman  
Clarinet

Rufus Olivier  
Principal Bassoon

Daniel MacNeil  
Bassoon

Michael Severance  
Bassoon & Contrabassoon

Shawn Jones  
Bassoon/Contrabassoon

Kevin Rivard  
Principal Horn

Keith Green  
Horn

Brian McCarty  
Associate Principal Horn

Phillip Palmore  
Horn

Caitlyn Smith-Franklin  
French Horn

Adam Luftman  
Principal Trumpet

John Pearson  
Trumpet

Scott Macomber  
Trumpet

Michael Cox  
Acting Principal Trombone

Jeffrey Budin  
Second Trombone

David Ridge  
Principal Bass Trombone

Zachariah Spellman  
Tuba/Cimbasso

John Burgardt  
Timpani

Patricia Niemi  
Acting Principal Percussion

Victor Avdienko  
Percussion

Annabelle Taubl  
Acting Principal Harp

^ = Season Substitute
SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ORCHESTRA CONTINUED

Most photos by John Martin.
Not pictured: Wentao Jiang (Oboe), Junghwan Lee (Clarinet), Meredith Brown (Horn), Kevin Myers (Orchestra Operations Manager), Krisha Montmorency (Assistant Librarian)

^ = Season Substitute

San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus

Nadima Avakian
Soprano

Kathleen Bayler
Soprano

Cheryl Cain
Soprano

Sara Colburn
Soprano
Leave of Absence

Claire Kelm
Soprano

Crystal Kim
Soprano

Elisabeth Rom Lucio
Soprano

Liesl McPherrin
Soprano

Angela Eden Moser
Soprano

Rachelle Perry
Soprano

Carole Schaffer
Soprano
Leave of Absence

Jesslyn Thomas
Soprano

Buffy Baggott
Mezzo-Soprano

Janet Campbell
Mezzo-Soprano

Edith Dowd
Mezzo-Soprano

Stella Hannock
Mezzo-Soprano

Silvie Jensen
Mezzo-Soprano

Sally Mouzon
Mezzo-Soprano

Sarah Nadreau
Mezzo-Soprano

Erin Neff
Mezzo-Soprano

Laurel Cameron Porter
Mezzo-Soprano

Tracy Davis
Orchestra Manager

Carrie Weick
Librarian

San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus

Tracy Davis
Orchestra Manager

Carrie Weick
Librarian

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Whitney Steele  
Mezzo-Soprano

C. Michael Belle  
Tenor

Alan Cochran  
Tenor

Kevin Gino  
Tenor

Daniel Harper  
Tenor

Christopher Jackson  
Tenor

Michael Jankosky  
Tenor

Phillip Pickens  
Tenor

Chester Fidduck  
Tenor

Jonathan Smucker  
Tenor

Andrew Truett  
Tenor

William Lee Bryan  
Baritone

Anders Frölicher  
Baritone

Andrew Thomas Pardini  
Baritone

John Fulton  
Baritone

Jere Torkelsen  
Baritone

Wilford Kelly  
Bass

Bojan Knežević  
Bass

William O’Neill  
Bass

William Pickersgill  
Bass

Valery Portnov  
Bass

San Francisco Opera Corps Dancers

Jamielyn Duggan  

Brett Conway  

Blanche Hampton  

Bryan Ketron  
Leave of Absence

Rachel Speidel Little  
Leave of Absence

Christopher Nachtrab  

Jekyns Peláez  
Leave of Absence

Chiharu Shibata  

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BY GENERAL DIRECTOR MATTHEW SHILVOCK

I like to say that opera is a participatory sport. If we are doing our job, you the audience should feel like you are not just observing something on stage, but you are actually a part of it, emotionally connected to the stage. That is part of the extraordinary potential of opera. We breathe through these stories collectively, and the emotional intensity of the artists onstage melds with our own emotional experiences.

That concept of opera as participation came into particular relief a few weeks ago. Rhiannon Giddens, the co-composer and librettist of *Omar*, joined us for a day of rehearsals, jetting in both from preparations for her tour as artistic director of the Silk Road Ensemble, and from primary source research at the University of North Carolina. As Rhiannon has done in the other cities that have produced *Omar*, it is imperative to her that she prepare the cast, chorus and company for what it means to bring this opera to life, and, to dance.

And dance we did! Rhiannon led us on an hour-long square-dancing workshop, with techniques, music, and calls that tied back directly to early 19th-century North Carolina. As Rhiannon shared, by connecting to these traditions, she was able to take us back to glimpse the cultural traditions that Omar ibn Said might have experienced himself—social dance forms that, like Omar’s writings, were a way of retaining identity amidst the oppression of slavery.

At the core of Rhiannon’s music are the deep-rooted traditions of North Carolina, carrying forth the artistry of musicians like Joe Thompson (1918–2012), one of the last proponents of the Black string band tradition and himself carrying forward a lineage from pre-Civil War music. Through these lineages are contributions of Black Americans to the square-dancing tradition including the caller—a mainstay of American dance culture for at least two hundred years. The caller helps to keep the energy of the dance high, allowing it to be created in real time.

And that is what happened in our large rehearsal room. On an uncommonly sweltering day in the city, Rhiannon paired us up and taught us the basic dance steps, teaching us to create just enough pressure with our hands, such that each couple supports each other in beautiful equilibrium. Then the couples joined into fours, the fours became eights, and the eights became sixteens, the dance becoming more and more communal. And then, with Rhiannon calling, suddenly the whole room was one big circle—maybe sixty of us—promenading, handing off to each other around the circle, and eventually dancing in a huge snaking line that coiled up in a spiral before simultaneously unwinding on itself. Sixty people, a whole community, completely in sync with each other.

These dances represent a deep and complex history: they are shaped by the horrors of slavery, but are also expressions of hope and community. Being invited to participate in this workshop was a profoundly impactful opportunity to step into and reflect on this complex and traumatic history. The group’s singular focus bound us together and reminded us of our collective responsibility to each other. For me, it was also a beautiful example of the kind of cultural intelligence we are working to build into all of our spaces and work at San Francisco Opera.

The Opera House can and should be a place where we gather in community with each other. *Omar* is an extraordinary opportunity for us to invite new communities, particularly members of the African Diaspora and members of the Muslim faith, into the experience of an opera that connects us to both the pain and the joy of our shared history together.

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