

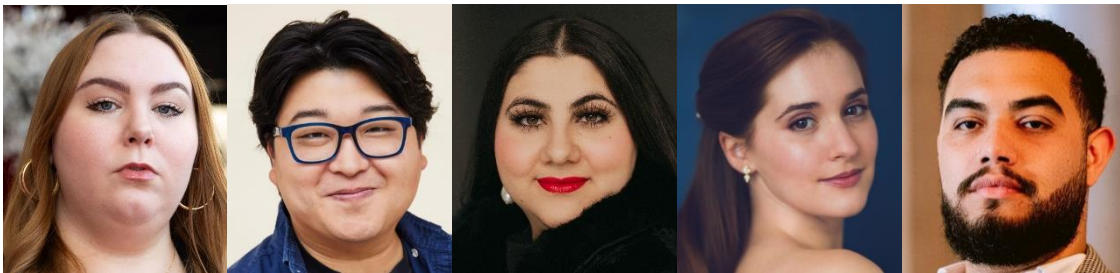


SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CENTER ANNOUNCES 2026 ADLER FELLOWS



Returning Adler Fellows: Mary Hoskins, Thomas Kinch, Ji Youn Lee, Olivier Zerouali



Incoming First-Year Adler Fellows: Sadie Cheslak, Brian Cho, Alexa Frankian, Sofia Gotch, Gabriel Natal-Báez

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (October 31, 2025) — San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director **Carrie-Ann Matheson** and General Manager **Markus Beam** announced today the 9 recipients of the 2026 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship. The cohort of talented young musicians begins the 2026 Fellowship in January, receiving individually tailored musical and performance training and a wide range of professional and personal development instruction. Since its inception in 1977, the prestigious Adler Fellowship has nurtured more than 200 young artists, launching the careers of many singers, conductors, vocal coaches, stage directors, arts professionals and educators throughout the industry.

The artists selected as 2026 Adler Fellows are sopranos **Alexa Frankian** (Oakville, Ontario, Canada), **Sofia Gotch** (Oakland, California) and **Mary Hoskins** (Saratoga Springs, Utah); mezzo-soprano **Sadie Cheslak** (Duluth, Minnesota); tenor **Thomas Kinch** (Cardiff, Wales); baritones **Gabriel Natal-Báez** (Toa Alta, Puerto Rico) and **Olivier Zerouali** (Middletown, Delaware); and coaches/pianists **Brian Cho** (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) and **Ji Youn Lee** (Seoul, South Korea). Sadie Cheslak, Brian Cho,

Alexa Frankian, Sofia Gotch and Gabriel Natal-Báez are incoming first-year fellows. Mary Hoskins, Ji Youn Lee, and Olivier Zerouali continue in the program as second-year fellows while Thomas Kinch returns as a third-year fellow.

San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows are trained in musical technique and preparation, foreign language skills, acting technique and movement, as well as financial management, leadership development, mental and emotional resilience, physical health and wellness and other skills necessary for a musical career in the twenty-first century. Adler singers are often cast in mainstage roles and leading cover assignments, and Adler pianists work closely with San Francisco Opera music staff to help prepare mainstage operas.

The 2025 Adlers concluding their fellowships at the end of this year are sopranos Georgiana Adams, Caroline Corrales and Olivia Smith, tenor Samuel White, baritone Samuel Kidd, bass-baritone Jongwon Han and pianist Julian Grabarek.

The 2025 Adler Fellows' season culminates on Friday, November 21 at 7:30 p.m. at Herbst Theatre with the annual showcase concert, *The Future Is Now*. The program of arias and operatic scenes, directed by Omer Ben Seadia, features the current Adler Fellows and the San Francisco Opera Orchestra under the baton of Ramón Tebar, who previously conducted the Company's productions of *L'Elisir d'Amore* and *La Bohème* at the War Memorial Opera House. For information and tickets, visit sfopera.com.

2026 ADLER FELLOW BIOGRAPHIES

FIRST-YEAR ADLER FELLOWS:



Sadie Cheslak
(Duluth, Minnesota)

In March, mezzo-soprano Sadie Cheslak was a winner of the 2025 Metropolitan Opera's Laffont Competition, receiving The Birgit Nilsson Award of the American-Scandinavian Foundation. Cheslak also won first prize at the 2025 Jensen Foundation Vocal Competition, first prize—the Robert Lauch Memorial Award—at the Wagner Society of New York's 2025 Singers Competition, first prize at the Vero Beach Opera 2025 Rising Stars Competition, third prize and The Luana DeVol Prize for the Dramatic Voice at the 2024 SAS Performing Arts Vocal Competition, and fourth overall and the prize for Most Promising Voice of the Competition at the 2024 NATS Artist Awards.

Cheslak was recently a participant with the Merola Opera Program, where she performed the role of La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica* scenes. In January, Cheslak covered the role of Madame de la

Haltière in Massenet's *Cendrillon* with Cedar Rapids Opera as a Smith Young Artist. In 2024, she sang at Wolf Trap Opera as a Studio Artist, featured in excerpts of Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* as Orphée, covered the alto soloist in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, and covered Mrs. Pascal in a workshop of *The House of Yes* by Kamala Sankaram.

Excelling in contemporary opera, Cheslak has workshopped pieces including *p r i s m* by Ellen Reid (2019 Pulitzer Prize winner and Beth Morrison Projects co-commission), *Black Square* by Ilya Demutsky and the title role in *The Surrogate* by Sky Macklay. Cheslak earned a BM Voice Performance from Concordia College, her MM Voice Performance and Literature from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign and a Post-master's Certificate in Voice from DePaul University.



Brian Cho
(Toronto, Ontario, Canada)

Brian Cho is a pianist and coach celebrated for his dynamic artistry and collaborative versatility. In the summer of 2025, he was a participant in the Merola Opera Program. From 2022 to 2025, he served as a Studio Ensemble Répétiteur and Intern Coach with the Canadian Opera Company, where he assisted on productions including *Faust*, *Don Pasquale*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Fidelio*, *Macbeth* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* under conductors such as Johannes Debus, Speranza Scappucci and Harry Bicket. A passionate advocate for new and diverse voices in opera, he co-founded the Can of Soup Collective, where he led performances of Menotti's *The Medium* and Holby's *Bon Appétit!*

Recent highlights include performing Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for their season-opening concerts, as well as serving as a Vocal Piano Fellow at the Music Academy of the West, where he worked with renowned mentors including Martin Katz, Margo Garrett, Tamar "Tata" Sanikidze and John Churchwell.

Cho is the winner of the 2023 Marilyn Horne Song Competition and recipient of the Patricia and Nicholas Weber Scholarship. He holds both bachelor and master of music degrees from the University of Western Ontario, where he was a Dr. Sherwood Fox Music Fellow and Dean's Honor List graduate.



Alexa Frankian
(Oakville, Ontario, Canada)

Hailed by *Opera Canada* as "abundantly talented" and praised for her "radiant, surging sense of purpose" (*San Francisco Chronicle*), Canadian soprano Alexa Frankian brings to the stage a rare fusion of youthful freshness and interpretive depth.

In 2024, Frankian joined the Merola Opera Program, debuting as a “simple, unaffected, and beautifully sung” Mimi in Puccini’s *La Bohème* (San Francisco Classical Voice). Her performances drew acclaim for their emotional honesty and musical richness, including her “voluptuously rich Russian” in the title role of Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta*. Invited back for a second Merola season in 2025, she expanded her repertoire with excerpts as the title role from Puccini’s *Suor Angelica*, Alice Ford from Verdi’s *Falstaff* and Fidelia from Puccini’s *Edgar*.

As a Resident Artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA) in Philadelphia, Frankian has performed roles including Countess Almaviva in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Suzel in Mascagni’s *L’Amico Fritz* and Despina in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*. She has distinguished herself on the competition stage as well, receiving Encouragement Awards from the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Philadelphia and Buffalo-Toronto Districts) and as the youngest finalist and third-prize winner at the 2023 Mildred Miller International Voice Competition.

She has appeared in groundbreaking contemporary productions such as the North American premiere of the Yiddish opera *Bas Sheve* and the Dora-nominated world premiere of Alice Ho’s *The Monkiest King*.

A graduate of the University of Toronto (BMus) and the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory (Artist Diploma), Frankian performed Madame Lidoine in Poulenc’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Older Woman in Dove’s *Flight* and Coach in Chan Ka Nin’s chamber opera *Ice Time*.



Sophia Gotch
(Oakland, California)

Italian American soprano Sofia Gotch has been praised for the “brightness and clarity” of her sound and her “command of style and diction” (Voce di Meche).

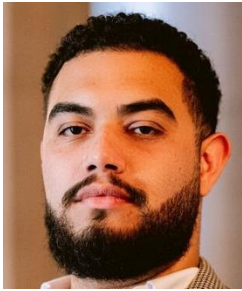
In 2025, Gotch was a participant in the Merola Opera Program and was named a Semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera Eric & Dominique Laffont Competition. She was awarded Third Prize in the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition, the Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition and the James Toland Vocal Arts Competition. Additionally, she received an Encouragement Award in the Gerda Lissner/Lieder-Song Competition.

Gotch is exceptionally grateful to have continued her training in leading young artist programs, where she received intensive training and performed in a wide range of repertoire under the guidance of renowned faculty and guest artists at Classic Lyric Arts (2022 and 2023), the Aspen Music Festival & School (2024 Renée Fleming Fellow) and Merola Opera Program (2025).

Recent performance credits include Alice in Merola Opera Program’s production of *Le Comte Ory*; Almirena in Manhattan School of Music’s production of *Rinaldo*; Juliette in MSM’s *Roméo et Juliette*; La Fée in MSM’s *Cendrillon*; Titania, the Fairy Queen, in MSM’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; Sharp Ears, the Vixen in MSM’s *The Cunning Little Vixen*; soprano soloist in Mahler’s Fourth Symphony with

the MSM Symphony Orchestra; high soprano soloist in Matthew Aucoin & Peter Sellars' production of *Music for New Bodies* with both the American Modern Opera Company and the Aspen Music Festival & School.

Gotch holds a master's degree and postgraduate performance diploma from the Manhattan School of Music. She studies with teacher, Ruth Golden. Sofia received her Bachelor of Arts in Music and in English (Creative Writing Emphasis) from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.



Gabriel Natal-Báez
(Toa Alta, Puerto Rico)

Gabriel Natal-Báez is a Puerto Rican baritone with a blossoming career in opera, art song and concert work. As a versatile singer with a repertoire that spans from the Baroque and Classical eras to contemporary works, Natal-Báez finds his greatest artistic expression in the Romantic and Bel Canto repertoire, where his artistic mission is to tell deeply human stories that resonate across time.

Natal-Báez has performed Marullo in *Rigoletto* with Teatro Lirico d'Europa and Le Podestat in *Le Docteur Miracle*. With the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, he has appeared as Beaumarchais in *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Aeneas in *Dido & Aeneas*, and Tarquinius (cover) in *The Rape of Lucretia*. In May 2025, he premiered the role of the Explorer in Theo Chandler's new chamber opera, *Breathe in Light*.

Last summer, he joined the prestigious Merola Opera Program, covering the role of Raimbaud in *Le Comte Ory* and performing on the *Songfest: A Grand Night for Singing*. His versatility also extends to the vibrant world of Zarzuela, where he has performed in multiple productions with Ópera de Puerto Rico.

Recently, he sang alongside his teacher and renowned soprano Ana María Martínez in *Noche Española*, a concert celebrating Latino Heritage Month with Zarzuela and Latin American repertoire. This December, he will make his debut with the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra.

Last season, Natal-Báez was a semi-finalist in Houston Grand Opera's *Concert of Arias* and a winner of the Puerto Rico District of the Laffont Met Opera Competition, where he also received the "La Zarzuela" Prize and went on to place third in the Gulf Coast Region.

In addition to his work as a singer, Natal-Báez holds a bachelor's degree in humanities with a concentration in painting, a lifelong passion that fosters his sensitivity toward the musical world.

SECOND-YEAR ADLER FELLOWS:



Mary Hoskins
(Saratoga Springs, Utah)

Soprano Mary Hoskins has been hailed as a “standout” with a voice that is “clear and utterly effortless” (The Opera Tattler). This year at San Francisco Opera, she performed a Cretan Woman in *Idomeneo* and covered Kitty Hart in Jake Heggie’s *Dead Man Walking* and Second Flower Maiden in *Parsifal*.

A participant of the 2024 Merola Opera Program, her assignments included the title role in the final scene of *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the Schwabacher Summer Concert, as well as an excerpt from *Fidelio* and Strauss’ showstopping aria “Zweite Brautnacht” from *Die Ägyptische Helena* for the Merola Grand Finale concert.

Hoskins won first place at the 2024 Palm Springs Opera Guild Vocal Competition and in 2022 and 2023 performed as a studio artist with Wolf Trap Opera for two summers, covering the title role of Pauline Viardot’s *Cendrillon* and performing in the Festival’s 2020 recorded scenes concert as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Mimi in *La Bohème*, Mary in Gregory Spears’ *Fellow Travelers* and the First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*. Other notable roles include the title roles of Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* and Handel’s *Theodora*.

She is a two-year alumna of Dolora Zajick’s Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, where she was featured in the Final Concert, performing arias from *Don Giovanni* and *Pagliacci*. She has performed the roles of the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Nella in *Gianni Schicchi* with Utah Vocal Arts Academy.

A graduate of Brigham Young University, where she received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Hoskins initially learned to love singing from her family’s car trip belting sessions. She discovered opera just after high school and has loved it ever since.



Ji Youn Lee
(Seoul, South Korea)

Adler Fellow Ji Youn Lee is an accomplished pianist who recently completed her Master of Music in Collaborative Piano at The Juilliard School. She earned a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from the New England Conservatory (NEC), graduating with honors in 2020. While at NEC, she was awarded first place in the Concerto Competition and performed with the New England

Conservatory Symphony at Jordan Hall. This year, she was on the San Francisco Opera music staff for *La Bohème*, *Dead Man Walking* and *Bohème Out of the Box*.

Lee has collaborated with renowned orchestras, including the Brockton Symphony, the Broad Street Orchestra and the Hawaii Symphony. Other notable achievements include prizes from the Duo Competition at the Music Academy of the West, the Ke'alohe International Piano Competition and the Jacob Flier International Piano Competition.

A participant of the Merola Opera Program in 2024, Lee played and coached the third act of *La Bohème* for the Schwabacher Summer Concert and helped musically prepare *Don Giovanni*. Her rich experiences with Merola deepened her understanding of vocal collaboration and enhanced her appreciation of the opera art form. Through her musical endeavors and performances, she continually aspires to connect with new audiences.



Olivier Zerouali
(Middletown, Delaware)

This year with San Francisco Opera, baritone Olivier Zerouali performed the roles of Marullo in *Rigoletto*, Motorcycle Cop in Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking* and a Trojan Man in *Idomeneo* and covered the role of Schaunard in *La Bohème*. He was a 2024 participant in the Merola Opera Program where he sang Silvio in the love duet from *Pagliacci*, was a featured soloist on the chamber music recital: *Song As Drama*, covered the role of Masetto in *Don Giovanni* and performed Malatesta in a scene from *Don Pasquale* at the Merola Grand Finale.

He has performed the roles of Robert in *Iolanta*, Slook in Rossini's *Il Cambiale di Matrimonio*, Betto in *Gianni Schicchi* and Brother in Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*, all with Yale Opera Theatre. In 2023 he performed Mercutio in *Roméo et Juliette* for his debut with the Glimmerglass Festival. Other roles include Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Pandolfe in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, the title role of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Zaretsky/Captain in *Eugene Onegin*. He also workshopped two new operas with Highlands Opera Studio: Olivia Shortt's *The Museum of the Lost and Found* and Ashley Au's *Inertia*.

Zerouali completed his undergraduate studies at SUNY Purchase's Conservatory of Music, completed his master's degree at Yale University, and has received training with the Merola Opera Program, Glimmerglass Festival, Young Artists Vocal Academy of Houston Grand Opera, Highlands Opera Studio and Berlin Opera Academy.

THIRD-YEAR ADLER FELLOW:



Thomas Kinch
(Cardiff, Wales)

Thomas Kinch is a Welsh tenor quickly establishing himself as an exciting young performer. His assignments with San Francisco Opera have included Don José in *Carmen*, Melot in *Tristan und Isolde*, First Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*, Amelia's Servant in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, as well as the cover of Luke in Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*. He is currently covering the title role and singing the role of Fourth Esquire in *Parsifal*.

A Merola Opera Program participant in 2023, Kinch sang the title role of *Otello* in the opera's second act for the Schwabacher Summer Concert. He recently performed Macduff in Verdi's *Macbeth* with Paisley Opera/Scottish Opera, returning after performing Turiddu in a 2022 adaptation of *Cavalleria Rusticana* (*A Paisley Kiss*) and made his American professional debut as Licinio in Spontini's *La Vestale* with Teatro Grattacielo in New York.

Kinch was a 2022 Associate Artist for Welsh National Opera, where he was the First Armored Man in a new production of *The Magic Flute* and covered Vitek in *The Makropulos Case*. He participated in Dolora Zajick's Institute for Young Dramatic Voices and was a 2021 new generation artist with Iford Arts, performing Canio in the double bill of *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci*, where he was described as a "remarkable Canio with emotion and strength to knock you out of your seat" (Opera Scene). In this double bill, Kinch jumped in at the last minute as Turiddu alongside Susan Bullock as Santuzza and Paul Carey Jones as Alfio, giving a performance of "raw emotion and power" that "defied his years" (Opera Scene).

In 2022, Kinch returned to Opera Bohemia to sing Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and in 2019 he made his international debut as Turiddu with Sri Lanka Opera. In 2020, Kinch toured the UK with Opera Up Close as Pinkerton, where his vocally powerful performance "stole the first half" (View from the Cheap Seat). Other recent engagements have included Turiddu with Edinburgh Grand Opera; Alfredo in *La Traviata* and Nadir in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* with Opera Bohemia; and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* and Turiddu with North Wales Opera.

About San Francisco Opera Center and Merola Opera Program

Initially founded as the San Francisco Opera/Affiliate Artists program in 1977, the Adler Fellowship Program is one of the nation's most prestigious performance-oriented residencies for advanced young singers and pianists. San Francisco Opera Center was created in 1982 by then General Director Terence McEwen to oversee the operation and administration of the education and training programs initiated by Kurt Herbert Adler in 1954.

Under the guidance of San Francisco Opera Center Artistic Director Carrie-Ann Matheson and General Manager Markus Beam, San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows are trained in musical technique and preparation, foreign language skills, acting technique and movement, as well as financial management, leadership development, mental and emotional resilience, physical health and wellness and other skills necessary for a musical career in the twenty-first century. Adler singers are often cast in mainstage roles and leading cover assignments, while Adler pianists work closely with the San Francisco Opera music staff to help prepare mainstage operas.

Each year, Adler Fellows are sponsored by individual donors and institutional funders to help cover the cost of their fellowship, and sponsors affiliated with the Adler Program have the opportunity to attend exclusive training sessions, such as master classes and workshops. Alumni of the Adler Fellowship Program include sopranos Julie Adams, Amina Edris, Elza van den Heever, Patricia Racette, Nadine Sierra, Ruth Ann Swenson and Deborah Voigt; mezzo-sopranos Daniela Mack, Zanda Švēde and Dolora Zajick; countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen; tenors Brian Jagde, David Lomelí, Amitai Pati, Pene Pati and Stuart Skelton; baritones Alfredo Daza, Mark Delavan, Joo Won Kang and Lucas Meachem; bass-baritones Philip Skinner, Philippe Sly and John Relyea and bass Kenneth Kellogg.

The Merola Opera Program was founded in 1957 and named in honor of San Francisco Opera's first general director, Gaetano Merola. The Merola Opera Program, which operates in close artistic collaboration with the San Francisco Opera Center, is widely regarded as the foremost summer opera training program for young professional singers, coach/pianists and stage directors. Over the course of a summer, Merola participants are offered numerous performance opportunities, including a fully staged opera, an orchestral scenes program, a recital and a gala concert at the War Memorial Opera House. In addition to master classes with internationally renowned artists, each participant receives daily individual coaching in the area of their discipline, classes in diction, acting and stage deportment, movement, financial planning, mental health/wellness, physical health/wellness and public relations/branding from leading professionals in the opera field. The Merola Opera Program is a financially independent organization with a separate 501(c)3 which operates in close collaboration with San Francisco Opera Center and San Francisco Opera. All Merola alumni are considered for participation in the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program and are eligible for career grants from the Merola Opera Program for five years after they leave the Merola program.

For more information on the San Francisco Opera Center, Adler Fellowship and Merola Opera Program, visit sfopera.com and merola.org.

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Headshots of the 2026 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows are available at sfopera.com/press.

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