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OPERA

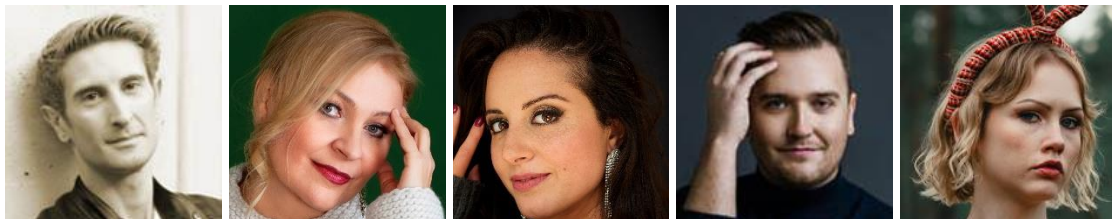
U.S. PREMIERE OF KAIJA SAARIAHO'S *INNOCENCE*  
War Memorial Opera House, June 1–21, 2024



Scenes from *Innocence*. Photos: Jean-Louis Fernandez. The late composer Kaija Saariaho. Photo: Andrew Campbell

Kaija Saariaho's final opera, with an original Finnish libretto by Sofi Oksanen and multilingual libretto by Aleksis Barrière, explores the emotional aftermath of a school shooting

A co-commission of San Francisco Opera, *Innocence* is presented in Simon Stone's production under the baton of Clément Mao-Takacs



Clément Mao-Takacs; Ruxandra Donose; Lilian Farahani; Miles Mykkanen; Vilma Jää

BEYOND *INNOCENCE* events in May and June  
explore resilience and healing, prevention of gun violence  
and the collective power of community and the arts

Livestream tickets for June 12 performance on sale now

Tickets available at (415) 864-3330 and [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com)

*"[Saariaho's] masterpiece ...*

*Porous and agile; simmering beneath and around the voice; and only occasionally, briefly exploding, this is music as a vehicle for exploring and intensifying drama"* (New York Times)

*"Powerful, shocking, devastating. All these words certainly apply to Innocence ... but none does it justice ... the impact of this work is made in music and in what goes unsaid"* (Opera)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (April 4, 2024; revised April 12, 2024) — San Francisco Opera presents the American premiere of composer Kaija Saariaho's final opera, *Innocence*, at the War Memorial Opera House from June 1–21. The work, which had its world premiere at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in 2021, is a co-commission of San Francisco Opera and features an original libretto by Finnish novelist Sofi Oksanen with multilingual translation by dramaturg Aleksí Barrière. The production by director Simon Stone is conducted by Saariaho specialist Clément Mao-Takacs in his Company debut leading the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. Company Chorus Director John Keene prepares the artists of the Opera Chorus.

*Innocence* is a 105-minute opera in five acts without intermission that is performed in nine languages. The work opens at a wedding reception when a horrific tragedy from the past reemerges. A waitress, Tereza, is serving guests at the wedding when she recognizes the groom as the brother of the gunman who killed her child during a mass shooting at a Helsinki international school 10 years prior. Unfolding along two simultaneous timelines—the wedding and memories of the violent incident—the story explores questions of innocence and guilt in the wake of painful truths.

In conjunction with the U.S. premiere of *Innocence*, San Francisco Opera, in partnership with local and national partners, will present **BEYOND INNOCENCE**, a series of events in May and June bringing together local and national community leaders, activists and the public to explore and promote awareness around the themes in *Innocence*, including the prevention of gun violence, community resilience and the role the arts can play. In addition to a free daylong symposium on May 31, post-show activations will offer space for collective reflection, dialogue and healing.

## INNOCENCE

Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, who passed away on June 2, 2023, at the age of 70, was one of the leading musical forces of opera. In the 1980s, her music was informed by French “spectralist” composers who used computer analysis of the sound-spectrum. She quickly developed a unique musical identity through her personal approaches to harmony and timbre, and the use of the sonorities of electronic and traditional symphonic instruments. Throughout her career she received commissions from the world's leading operatic, symphonic and chamber music institutions. Her first opera, *L'Amour de Loin*, set to a libretto by Amin Maalouf, had its premiere at the 2000 Salzburg Festival. She collaborated with Maalouf on her second opera, *Adriana Mater*, which premiered in 2006 at the Paris Opera and was recently performed by the San Francisco Symphony in June 2023 just days after her passing.

Saariaho's sixth and final opera, *Innocence*, is a co-commission and co-production of Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Finnish National Opera and Ballet and Dutch National Opera. After a postponement brought on by the global pandemic, the opera was first performed at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and proclaimed, “the most powerful work Saariaho has written in a career now in its fifth decade” (*New York Times*). Years before the premiere, the composer heard her score for *Innocence* performed for the first time in 2018 at the War Memorial Opera House during an early orchestra reading by the San Francisco Opera Orchestra under the baton of Clément Mao-Takacs.

The original libretto for *Innocence* was written in Finnish by award-winning writer Sofi Oksanen, whose works are regularly translated into English. Her novels include the international bestseller *Purge*, along with *Dog Park*, *Norma* and *When the Doves Disappeared*. Aleksis Barrière, a writer/director specialized in new opera, who served as *Innocence*'s dramaturg during its development from 2013 to the world premiere, adapted the libretto into nine languages: English, Finnish, Czech, Romanian, French, Swedish, German, Spanish and Greek.

Director Simon Stone, known for his acclaimed stagings of Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt* (Munich's Bavarian State Opera) and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Metropolitan Opera and LA Opera) along with his directorial work in film (*The Dig*), created the

production for *Innocence*, which will be remounted by **Louise Bakker** for its American premiere. The story takes place on a continually rotating, two-level cube by set designer **Chloe Lamford** and features the work of costume designer **Mel Page**, lighting designer **James Farncombe**, sound designer and mixing engineer **Timo Kurkikangas** and choreography by **Arco Renz**.

French conductor **Clément Mao-Takacs** has been associated with *Innocence* from its early conception and was a frequent collaborator with Saariaho. In 2013 Mao-Takacs conducted the premiere of the chamber version of her oratorio-opera *La Passion de Simone* and in 2021 led the Japanese premiere of her opera *Only the Sound Remains* (both directed by Barrière). Mao-Takacs assisted at the first performances of *Innocence* at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and conducted the performances at the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki in 2022. He makes his Company debut in the American premiere of *Innocence*.

The ensemble cast features mezzo-soprano **Ruxandra Donose** making her role debut as the Waitress, Tereza. Donose first appeared in the U.S. with San Francisco Opera in 1996 as Nicklausse and the Muse in Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and returned for leading roles in Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. Tenor **Miles Mykkanen** makes his Company debut as the Bridegroom, Tuomas. Soprano **Lilian Farahani**, who performed the Bride, Stela, in the world premiere of *Innocence*, makes her San Francisco Opera debut in the role.

Baritone **Rod Gilfry**, whose San Francisco Opera credits include Stanley Kowalski in the 1998 world premiere of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, returns to make his role debut as the Father-in-Law, Henrik. Icelandic bass **Kristinn Sigmundsson**, who was heard most recently on the War Memorial Opera House stage as King Heinrich in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, returns in his role debut as the Priest. Sopranos **Claire de Sévigné** and acclaimed contemporary specialist **Lucy Shelton** make their debuts with the Company as the Mother-in-Law (Patricia) and Teacher, respectively.

Multi-genre instrumentalist and vocalist **Vilma Jää**, whose art spans Finnish folk songs to ethno pop, makes her American operatic debut as the student Markéta. Additional students at the international school are portrayed by **Beate Mordal**, **Julie Hega**, **Rowan Kievits**, **Camilo Delgado Díaz** and **Marina Dumont**.

Since it first presented a world premiere in 1961, San Francisco Opera has commissioned or co-commissioned more than 30 works for its mainstage and affiliates from leading composers including John Adams, Philip Glass, Jake Heggie, Gabriela Lena Frank, Rhiannon Giddens, Tobias Picker and Bright Sheng. The Company has a parallel history of introducing American audiences to important contemporary works that had their premieres outside of the United States, including (with the American premiere year) Maurice Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1930), Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1957), Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1959), Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1961), Janáček's *The Makropulos Case* (1966), Reiman's *Lear* (1981), Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise* (2002) and Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* (2004). This presentation of Saariaho's *Innocence* in San Francisco joins both traditions as both a co-commissioned work and an important American premiere.

Sung and spoken in nine different languages with English and original language supertitles, the six performances of *Innocence* are scheduled for June 1 (7:30 p.m.), 7 (7:30 p.m.), 12 (7:30 p.m.), 16 (2 p.m.), 18 (7:30 p.m.) and 21 (7:30 p.m.), 2024.

### **BEYOND INNOCENCE**

Inspired by *Innocence*'s U.S. premiere, San Francisco Opera presents **BEYOND INNOCENCE**, a series of events in May and June that will bring together local and national leaders, activists and the public to explore themes such as the prevention of gun violence; collective responsibility; trauma recovery; and community vitality, resilience and healing. A free daylong symposium on Friday, May 31, **BEYOND INNOCENCE: The Power of Community and the Arts & the Prevention of Gun Violence**, will showcase prominent voices such as Pastor Mike McBride (Live Free USA); UCSF trauma surgeon Dr. Rochelle A. Dicker (Advisor to UCSF's San Francisco Wraparound Project and Section Chief, Acute Care Surgery) and GIFFORDS' Mike McLively (Community Violence Intervention Policy Director from GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence) and moderators including W. Kamau Bell and KQED's Mina Kim, among other participants. Presented in partnership with [Live Free USA](#) and [Lumahai Productions](#), the symposium is conceived to help attendees foster new and existing relationships and create connectivity across sectors in order to achieve deep and

focused collective impact. The event will be held at San Francisco Opera's Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater; a number of tickets will be available to the public.

The Company's other full circle offerings include special community gatherings, art installations and pre-performance talks, as well as trauma-informed training for Company members and artists. Special post-show activations will provide opportunities for advocacy, dialogue and reflection.

San Francisco Opera's **BEYOND *INNOCENCE*** partners include [Collective Impact](#), [Community Arts Stabilization Trust](#), [Live Free USA](#), [UCSF San Francisco Wraparound Project](#), [GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#), [Lumahai Productions](#) and [William James Association](#).

### **LIVESTREAM: *INNOCENCE*, Wednesday, June 12**

The Wednesday, June 12 performance of *Innocence* will be livestreamed at 7:30 p.m. PT. The opera will also be available to watch on demand for 48 hours beginning on Thursday, June 13 at 10 a.m. PT. Tickets for the livestream and limited on-demand viewing are \$27.50. For tickets and more information about livestreams, visit [sfopera.com/digital](https://sfopera.com/digital).

### **PRE-OPERA TALKS**

San Francisco Conservatory of Music faculty member Alla Gladysheva will provide a 20-minute overview of the opera 55 minutes prior to each performance in the Opera House auditorium for ticketholders. An audio recording of the talk will be available at [sfopera.com/innocence](https://sfopera.com/innocence).

### **TICKETS AND INFORMATION**

Tickets for *Innocence* range from \$26 to \$426 and are available at the San Francisco Opera Box Office (301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco), by calling (415) 864-3330 and online at [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com). San Francisco Opera Box Office hours are Monday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (Saturdays phone only). A \$2 per-ticket facility fee is included in Balcony 1, 2 and 3 zone prices; all other zones include a \$3 per-ticket facility fee.

Subscriptions for all three summer operas—including Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Handel's *Partenope*—are priced from \$78 to \$1,245.

Tickets for the June 12 livestream of *Innocence* are \$27.50 each. For more information, visit [sfopera.com/digital/livestream](https://sfopera.com/digital/livestream).

Dolby Family's *Opera for the Bay* program provides \$10 tickets to all mainstage performances to Bay Area residents (home address zip code between 94000-95999) who have not purchased tickets in the past three seasons. *Opera for the Bay* tickets for *Innocence* go on sale at noon on May 1. Visit [sfopera.com/dolby](https://sfopera.com/dolby) for more information.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART/Muni Station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and F Market Street. For further public transportation information, visit [bart.gov](https://bart.gov) and [sfmta.com](https://sfmta.com).

Gifts of all sizes help create San Francisco Opera's programs and are appreciated. To donate visit [sfopera.com/donate](https://sfopera.com/donate).

All casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about San Francisco Opera's 2023–24 Season, visit [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com).

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### **INNOCENCE CASTING AND CALENDAR**

\*\*American Debut \*San Francisco Opera Debut †Role Debut  
‡Current Adler Fellow +Merola Opera Program Graduate ++Merola and Adler Fellowship Graduate

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House  
(301 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco)

**INNOCENCE** music by Kaija Saariaho, original Finnish libretto by Sofi Oksanen, multilingual libretto and dramaturgy by Aleksis Barrière

## U.S. PREMIERE

June 1 (7:30 p.m.), 7 (7:30 p.m.), 12 (7:30 p.m.), 16 (2 p.m.) 18 (7:30 p.m.), 21 (7:30 p.m.), 2024

The June 12 performance of *Innocence* will be livestreamed at 7:30 p.m. PT.

Co-commission and co-production of Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, San Francisco Opera, Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam, Royal Opera House-Covent Garden, London and Finnish National Opera and Ballet, Helsinki.

In partnership with the Metropolitan Opera.

Sung in English, Finnish, Czech, Romanian, French, Swedish, German, Spanish and Greek with English and original language supertitles

Approximate running time: 1 hour and 45 minutes, no intermission

World Premiere: Grand Théâtre de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, July 3, 2021

### Cast:

<i>The Waitress (Tereza)</i>	Ruxandra Donose ♫
<i>The Bridegroom (Tuomas)</i>	Miles Mykkanen * ♫
<i>The Bride (Stela)</i>	Lilian Farahani *
<i>The Mother-in-Law (Patricia)</i>	Claire de Sévigné * ♫
<i>The Father-in-Law (Henrik)</i>	Rod Gilfry ♫
<i>The Priest</i>	Kristinn Sigmundsson ♫
<i>The Teacher (Cecilia)</i>	Lucy Shelton *
<i>Student 1 (Markéta)</i>	Vilma Jää **
<i>Student 2 (Lilly)</i>	Beate Mordal **
<i>Student 3 (Iris)</i>	Julie Hega **
<i>Student 4 (Anton)</i>	Rowan Kievits **
<i>Student 5 (Jerónimo)</i>	Camilo Delgado Díaz **
<i>Student 6 (Alexia)</i>	Marina Dumont **
<i>Actors</i>	Oksana Barrios *, Jordan Covington *, Victoria Fong *, Sam Hannum *, Jalen Justice *, Rachael Richman *, Brian Soutner *, Kevin Walton *

### Creative Team:

<i>Conductor</i>	Clément Mao-Takacs *
<i>Production</i>	Simon Stone *
<i>Revival Director</i>	Louise Bakker *
<i>Set Designer</i>	Chloe Lamford *



<i>Costume Designer</i>	Mel Page *
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	James Farncombe *
<i>Sound Designer &amp; Mixing Engineer</i>	Timo Kurkikangas *
<i>Choreographer</i>	Arco Renz *
<i>Chorus Director</i>	John Keene
<i>Fight Director</i>	Dave Maier

San Francisco Opera Orchestra and San Francisco Opera Chorus

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## BEYOND *INNOCENCE*, May–June 2024

*Innocence*, a gripping opera about the aftermath of a school shooting, is making its U.S. premiere at San Francisco Opera in June 2024. San Francisco Opera, in partnership with local and national partners, will present **BEYOND *INNOCENCE***, a series of events in May and June bringing together local and national community leaders, activists and the public to explore and promote awareness around the themes in *Innocence*. Post-show activations are also planned to offer space for reflection, healing and discussion.

Events include a symposium, **BEYOND *INNOCENCE*: The Power of Community and the Arts & the Prevention of Gun Violence**, on Friday, May 31, presented by San Francisco Opera, Live Free USA and Lumahai Productions in partnership with Collective Impact, Community Arts Stabilization Trust, GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and UCSF San Francisco Wraparound Project. The daylong convening for a by-invitation audience of peacemakers, community organizers and representatives from community- and faith-based organizations will explore the prevention of gun violence and the collective power of community and the arts (a number of tickets will be available to the public).

Additional **BEYOND *INNOCENCE*** information will be announced at a later date.

# # # # #

*Innocence* is made possible, in part, by the Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions; Keith and Priscilla Geeslin; Louise Gund; and Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem.

San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by Norby Anderson, Julie Dickson, Jerome L. and Thao N. Dodson, The Dolby Family, Carol and Dixon Doll, Bertie Bialek Elliott, Peter Fenton and Kate Greer, Keith and Priscilla Geeslin, Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation for the Arts, Louise Gund, John A. and Cynthia Fry

Gunn, Elizabeth B. Jamieson (in memoriam, J. Burgess Jamieson), Franklin and Catherine Johnson, Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Bernard and Barbro Osher, Barbara Oshman, Jeff and Marieke Rothschild, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne and Tad Taube, Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, and Barbara A. Wolfe.

San Francisco Opera livestreams are made possible, in part, by George and Leslie Hume.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera.

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**PRESS PHOTOS:** High-resolution, downloadable photographs, including artist headshots and production images, for *Innocence* are available at [sfopera.com/press](https://sfopera.com/press).

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