



SAN FRANCISCO  
OPERA

## *Rigoletto*

### Cast 2020 Biography



(Tbilisi, Georgia)

"The Georgian baritone **George Gagnidze** was an exceptionally menacing Scarpia, singing with robust, earthy power and seductive lyricism when the villain turns on the charm". With these words the New York Times hailed George Gagnidze in a 2008 performance of Tosca at Avery Fisher Hall at the New York Lincoln Center. One year later he made his sensational debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York as Rigoletto, and has since then ranked among the leading singers of his genre.

Born in Tbilisi and trained at the State Conservatory of his hometown, George Gagnidze debuted as Renato in *Un ballo in maschera* in 1996 at the Paliashvili State Opera. He entered the "Concorso Voci Verdiane" in 2005 as an award-winner of the "Leyla Gencer Voice Competition" and the "Elena Obraztsova Competition". The jury, chaired by José Carreras and Katia Ricciarelli, awarded him first prize for his outstanding vocal interpretation. After launching his international career from Germany, he was soon engaged by many of the world's important opera houses.

In the course of his career, George Gagnidze, who now masters the genre of dramatic heroic baritone, has worked with many renowned conductors and directors, including James Levine, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Fabio Luisi, James Conlon, Plácido Domingo, Mikko Franck, Jesús López-Cobos, Nicola Luisotti, Daniel Oren, Gianandrea Noseda, Kirill Petrenko, Yuri Temirkanov; Luc Bondy, Liliana Cavani, Robert Carsen, Peter Stein, Giancarlo Del Monaco, Henning Brockhaus, and Robert Sturua.



(Yerevan, Armenia)

**Nina Minasyan** was born in Armenia and earned her diploma at the Tchaikovsky School of Music. In 2010, she became a soloist at the Yerevan Conservatory Opera Studio where she performed the roles of Serpina (*La Serva padrona*) and Serafina (*Il Campanello*). A prize-winner at the Tatevik Sazandaryan and Pavel Lisitsian singing competition in 2011, she joined the programme for young artists at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow that same year and perfected her skills under the guidance of Elena Obraztsova, Evgeny Nesterenko, Lyubov Orfenova, Mzia Bachtouridze and Diane Zola, among others.

She made her stage debut at the Bolshoi Theatre in the role of Xenia (*Boris Godunov*) then went on to play the Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*, Masha in *The Queen of Spades*, Ninetta in *The Love for Three Oranges*, a Young Polovtsian in *Prince Igor*, the Shepherdess, the Owl and the Bat (*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*), and Despina (*Così fan tutte*).



(Auckland, New Zealand)

Since his 2017 debut in Verdi's *Rigoletto* while still a young artist on San Francisco Opera's Adler Program, tenor **Pene Pati** has swiftly risen to international attention and recently been hailed as "the most exceptional tenor discovery of the last decade" (*Opéra-Online*). Pati made his European operatic debut as Percy in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* at Opéra national de Bordeaux under Paul Daniel, and has further expanded his repertoire in the last seasons with productions of *L'elisir d'amore* and *Madama Butterfly* in his homeland of New

Zealand.

In 2012 he earned a master's degree in music from the Wales International Academy of Voice in Cardiff. Pene is also a graduate of the Merola Opera Program at the San Francisco Opera. He has been recognized as an emerging talent and has won numerous prizes in singing competitions. In summer 2015 he was awarded second prize in the Plácido Domingo Operalia competition and in 2014 he won the Monserrat Caballé International Singing Competition. He also won the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Award in 2012. Together with his brother Amitai and his cousin Moses Mackay, he is part of Sol3Mio, which performs a mixture of classical repertoire pieces and Samoan pop songs.



(Liepāja, Latvia)

Latvian mezzo-soprano, **Zanda Švēde** begins her second season with the ensemble at Oper Frankfurt where roles this season include Zenobia in *Radamisto*, Sonyetka in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, the title role *Carmen* and Forester's wife / Owl in *Cunning Little Vixen*. In her native Latvia, she performs Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* with Sinfonietta Riga and travels to USA to bring further performances of her *Carmen* to Pittsburgh Opera. In the UK she joins Royal Scottish National Orchestra for performances of Verdi *Requiem* conducted by Thomas Søndergård.

Last season at Oper Frankfurt she made her house debut as Dryade *Ariadne auf Naxos* and also sang title roles of *Xerxes* and Barrie Kosky's *Carmen*. To end the season she gave further performances of *Carmen* in Paul Curran's production at Seattle Opera.



(Craryville, New York)

Gaining rapid international and national acclaim for his commanding performances, **Alfred Walker** sings his first American performances of the title role of *Der fliegende Holländer* with Boston Lyric Opera and joins the roster of the Teatro alla Scala for its production of the same title in the 2012–2013 season. He returns to the Boston Symphony Orchestra to reprise *Porgy* in *Porgy and Bess* and to the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for Verdi's *Requiem* in addition to the Metropolitan Opera for its productions of *Il trovatore* and *Don*

*Giovanni*. Future engagements include returns to Seattle Opera and Minnesota Opera as well as debuts at the Wagner Geneva Festival and with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Last season, he reprised his performances of Parsi Rustomji in *Glass' Satyagraha* at the Metropolitan Opera and sang Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Palm Beach Opera. On the concert platform, he joined the Stuttgart Philharmonic for Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and the Reno Philharmonic for Verdi's *Requiem*.

A graduate of Dillard University, Loyola University and the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Program, the New Orleans native is the recipient of awards from the George London Foundation, Palm Beach Opera Competition, Houston Opera Studio's Eleanor McCollum Competition and the Sullivan Foundation career grant.



(Atlanta, Georgia)

**Baritone Reginald Smith, Jr.** has been lauded as a “passionate performer” (*New York Times*) with an “electric, hall-filling” (*The Baltimore Sun*), and “thrillingly dramatic” (*Opera News*) voice that is “one of the most exciting baritone sounds to come along in years” (*Opera News*). Reginald, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, is a Grand Finals winner of the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and he is a graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

Reginald Smith, Jr.'s 2019-2020 season opens with his much-anticipated debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Jim in *Porgy and Bess*, followed by Amonasro in *Aida* with the Houston Grand Opera and the Cincinnati Opera and Jake in *Porgy and Bess* with the Atlanta Opera. His orchestral appearances include Christmas Pops Concerts with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with Oregon Symphony. Future engagements include stage debuts with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Santa Fe Opera.