

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Cast Biographies



American tenor **William Burden** (George Bailey) has won an outstanding reputation in a wide-ranging repertoire throughout Europe and North America. He returns to San Francisco Opera following his appearances with the Company in the world premieres of *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *Heart of a Soldier*, and Laca Klemeň in 2016's *Jenůfa*.

Burden has appeared in many prestigious opera houses in the United States and Europe, including the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Santa Fe Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, New York City Opera, New Orleans Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Opéra National de Paris, Glyndebourne Opera Festival, Théâtre du Châtelet, Bayerische Staatsoper, Berliner Staatsoper, Madrid's Teatro Real and the Saito Kinen Festival. His repertoire includes the title roles of *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Faust*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Béatrice and Bénédicte*, *Candide*, and *Acis and Galatea*; Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, Don Jose in *Carmen*, Pylade in *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Gerald in *Lakmé*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Nerone in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Narraboth in *Salome*, and Lensky in *Eugene Onegin*.



Making her San Francisco Opera debut as Clara in Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, soprano **Golda Schultz** (Clara) is a graduate of the Juilliard School and a recent member of the ensemble of Munich's Bavarian State Opera where she appeared in a wide variety of roles including as Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*), Liù (*Turandot*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), Micaëla (*Carmen*), Freia (*Das Rheingold*), and Pamina (*The Magic Flute*). After a successful Salzburg Festival debut as Sophie in 2015, Schultz returned in the summer of 2017 in *La Clemenza di Tito*. She returns to Austria this season in her debut for Vienna State Opera as Contessa Almiviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Following her very well-received debut as Pamina for the Metropolitan Opera, she also performs this season Mendelssohn's *Elijah* under Fabio Luisi for Opernhaus Zürich, Mozart and Beethoven concert arias at Konzerthaus Berlin under Riccardo Minasi, Mahler Symphony No. 2 with Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Hannu Lintu, and Mahler Symphony No. 4 with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra under Gustavo Dudamel. In addition, she gives her debut recital at London's esteemed Wigmore Hall.



Making her San Francisco Opera debut as Clara in Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, American soprano **Kearstin Piper Brown** (Clara) recently debuted with Rochester Oratorio Society in Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*. She also toured Israel as Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. Later this season Brown will return as a guest artist with the Chaliapin Festival in Kazan, Russia and with the Rochester Oratorio Society. Next season brings her back to California for Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with the San Jose Symphony.

Brown made her debut with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under conductor Robert Spano in the role of the High Priestess in *Aida*, and was invited to sing concerts under the auspices of the Lebanon Symphony and Chorus, Cincinnati Opera, and the Finger Lakes Opera Company. In previous seasons she was heard as Violetta (*La Traviata*) with Utah Lyric Opera, Musetta (*La Bohème*) with Dayton Opera, Micaëla (*Carmen*) with Arbor Opera Theater, and Clara in *Porgy and Bess* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples. She has performed Bess at Utah Festival Opera, Opera Kazan, Skylight Music Theatre, Dayton Opera, Virginia Opera, and the Belarusian State Philharmonic Orchestra in Minsk.



Making her San Francisco Opera debut as Mary Hatch in *It's a Wonderful Life*, Canadian soprano **Andriana Chuchman** (Mary Hatch) most recently created the roles of Boonyi/India in the world premiere of Jack Perla's *Shalimar the Clown* at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Other recent engagements have included Adina in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Miranda in *The Enchanted Island*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, and Valencienne in *The Merry Widow* at the Metropolitan Opera; her house and role debut as Pat Nixon in *Nixon in China* at the Houston Grand Opera; Micaëla in *La Tragédie de Carmen* at the San Diego Opera; Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi* at the Los Angeles Opera; Gretel on the Glyndebourne Festival Tour; Magnolia in *Show Boat* and Marie in *La Fille du Régiment* at the Washington National Opera; Magnolia at the Dallas Opera; John Adams' *A Flowering Tree* at the Opera Omaha; Guinevere in *Camelot* at the Glimmerglass Festival; Yum-

Yum in *The Mikado*; Cleopatra in *Guilio Cesare*, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and staged performances of *Carmina Burana* at the Michigan Opera Theatre.

Chuchman is a recent graduate of the Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and an alumna of the Merola Opera Program.



Baritone **Rod Gilfry** (Mr. Potter) was brought to worldwide attention when he created the role of Stanley Kowalski in the 1998 premiere of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* at San Francisco Opera. Other world premieres include Nicholas in Deborah Drattel's *Nicholas and Alexandra* at Los Angeles Opera; Nathan in Nicholas Maw's *Sophie's Choice* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; and Edward Gaines in Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner* at Michigan Opera Theatre. In 2015, he created his eighth world premiere in Boston in the role of Walt Whitman in Matthew Aucoin's *Crossing*. Other recent projects include Howard K. Stern in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Anna Nicole* with New York City Opera and Covent Garden, a return to the Metropolitan Opera as Danilo in a new production of *The Merry Widow* opposite Susan Graham, Peter in *Hansel and Gretel* with the Alabama Symphony, *Don Giovanni* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, concerts with the San Francisco Symphony in music of Thomas Adès and Felix Mendelssohn, performances with the Dallas Symphony as Lyndon Baines Johnson in Steven Stucky's *August 4th, 1964* in Dallas and at Carnegie Hall, and selections from Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with the Grand Rapids Symphony. He sang the title role of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Frank Butler to Deborah Voigt's *Annie* in *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Glimmerglass Festival, and Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* at the Oregon Bach Festival. He appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel for the final installment of the Mozart/Da Ponte Trilogy as Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, directed by Christopher Alden.

Gilfry's other performances with San Francisco Opera have included Valentin in *Faust* (1995), Lescaut in *Manon* (1998), Belcore in *L'Elisir d'Amore* (2000), Danilo (2002), the title role of *Doktor Faust* (2004), and Lionel in *The Maid of Orleans* (2006). He is currently a voice professor at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music.



Making his San Francisco Opera debut as Uncle Billy Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, tenor **Keith Jameson** (Uncle Billy Bailey) recently debuted at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Sicily as Flute/Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. During the 2016–17 season, he sang Sancho Panza in *Man of La Mancha* at Utah Opera and Triquet in *Eugene Onegin* at Lyric Opera of Chicago. Last summer, he performed Ali in André Grétry's *Zemire et Azor* and Harry Druggist in *The Cradle Will Rock* with Opera Saratoga. Last year, he was seen at the Hollywood Bowl as Spoletta in *Tosca* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and conductor Gustavo Dudamel, and as the tenor soloist in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with Brevard Music Center and conductor Keith Lockhart. Jameson also debuted with Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center singing Basilio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. His recent and upcoming engagements include a return to Lyric Opera of Chicago for Pong in *Turandot*, and as Gherardo in *Gianni Schicchi* and the Tea Pot/Little Old Man/Frog in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* in Tokyo and Kyoto with the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy.



Making his San Francisco Opera debut as Harry Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, Canadian baritone **Joshua Hopkins** (Harry Bailey) has been chosen by *Opera News* as one of 25 artists poised to break out and become a major force in the coming decade. In the 2017–18 season, he makes his house debut at the Norwegian National Opera as Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, followed by a return to Lyric Opera of Chicago as Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, directed by John Cox and conducted by James Gaffigan. In the spring, he returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Mercutio in Bartlett Sher's production of *Roméo et Juliette*, conducted by Plácido Domingo, and he finishes his season with a return to the Glimmerglass Festival as Figaro in a new production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, directed by Francesca Zambello. Concert performances include Handel's *Messiah* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In Hopkins' busy 2016–17 season, he stepped in for two unexpected projects: a debut at Dutch National Opera creating the leading role of Niccolò Machiavelli in the world premiere of Mohammed Fairouz and David Ignatius's *The New Prince* and a return to Houston Grand Opera as Valentin in *Faust*. Future seasons will see return invitations to the Metropolitan Opera and Washington National Opera.



Soprano **Sarah Cambridge** (Angel Quartet) is currently a second-year Adler Fellow with San Francisco Opera. She made her Company debut last fall as the Fourth Maidservant in *Elektra*, and, most recently, she made her role debut as Amelia in Livermore Valley Opera's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. As part of the 2016 Merola Opera Program, she performed Elsa in *Lohengrin* at the Schwabacher Recital Series. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in vocal performance from the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music, and she was the winner of the 2016 Denver Lyric Opera Guild Competition and a national semifinalist in the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Upcoming engagements include Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* at Opéra National de Bordeaux and a Foreign Princess in the Company's *Rusalka*.



As a participant in the 2017 Merola Opera Program, mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon** (Angel Quartet) sang the role of Popova in William Walton's *The Bear* and also covered the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and ended her summer season on the War Memorial Opera House stage singing an aria from Massenet's *Cendrillon*. Dixon's 2016–17 season included her debut with Michigan Opera Theatre in Copland's *The Tender Land* as Mrs. Splinters. In concert, Dixon appeared on the Hill Auditorium stage as a soloist in Mozart's Requiem and with University of Michigan's Men's Glee Club in Schubert's *Ständchen*. She also sang Dido in a concert performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with University of Michigan's conducting program. In the same year, the Gerda Lissner Foundation awarded her the Encouragement Award for their Song/Lieder Competition in New York. In past seasons, Dixon was engaged as a young artist with the Des Moines Metro Opera where she made her professional debut as Flora in Verdi's *La Traviata*. Her inaugural summer at the Merola Opera Program in 2015 had her singing La Ciesca in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Mrs. Nolan in Menotti's *The Medium*. Ashley Dixon holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Michigan and a Bachelor of Music from Louisiana State University.



Amitai Pati (Angel Quartet) is a tenor of Samoan descent who received his master's degree in advanced vocal studies at the Wales International Academy of Voice under the tutelage of tenor Dennis O'Neill. As a participant of the 2016 Merola Opera Program, he performed his first principal role as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*. Pati won the Lexus SongQuest in 2012 and the Waiariki Institute of Technology NZ Aria in 2015. In 2014, he was invited to be a part of the Young Singers Project in Salzburg, Austria, where he appeared in performances and concerts including *La Favorite* with Elīna Garanča, Juan Diego Flórez, and Ludovic Tézier, and the tenor solo in a production of Mozart's *Spatzenmesse*. Pati has extensive experience in choral singing, having performed and toured with the New Zealand Youth Choir, Graduate Choir, and the Auckland University Choir. He has sung in master classes with the likes of Joseph Rouleau, Della Jones, Dame Josephine Barstow, Dame Anne Murray, Maestro Richard Bonyngé, and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. Pati, along with his brother Pene Pati and their cousin Moses Mackay, comprise the highly successful New Zealand vocal trio SOL3 MIO, which mixes both classical and contemporary music.



A national semi-finalist of the 2016 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** (Angel Quartet) earned acclaim for his role in the world premiere of Gregory Spears' *Fellow Travelers* at Cincinnati Opera. His 2017 season saw debuts at both Houston Grand Opera (Tom in Laura Kaminsky's *Some Light Emerges*) and the Vienna State Opera (Second Englishman in Prokofiev's *The Gambler*). As a participant in the 2017 Merola Opera Program he received critical acclaim for his performance of Dandini in *La Cenerentola*. Recent engagements include Pandolfe in *Cendrillon*, Harašta in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Belcore in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and Pilate in a staged production of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. As concert soloist, he has performed Britten's *War Requiem*, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Haydn's *The Creation*, Faure's Requiem, Handel's *Messiah* and Strauss' *Salome*. Pursell is a 2017 recipient of the Sara Tucker Study Grant and Second Award winner of the 2017 Jensen Foundation Competition.



Mezzo-soprano **Catherine Cook** (Mother Bailey) has appeared with San Francisco Opera in more than 40 roles since her debut in 1991. Company credits include originating the roles of Jade Boucher in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* and Arlene Kamen and Wang Tai-Tai in Stewart Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Countess de Coigny (*Andrea Chénier*), Berta (*Barber of Seville*), Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*), Mother Goose (*The Rake's Progress*), Annina (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Flora (*La Traviata*), Lapák the Dog and Woodpecker (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), Emilia (*Otello*), Marthe (*Faust*), Mrs. Sedley (*Peter Grimes*), and La Frugola, Sister Monitor, and La Ciesca (*Il Trittico*). She recently sang the title role in the world premiere of Tobias Picker's *Dolores Claiborne*, Mrs. McLean in *Susannah*, Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, as well as Berta (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). Cook has sung with the Metropolitan Opera in *Faust* and *Kát'a Kabanová*; at Lyric Opera of Chicago in *Peter Grimes*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; with Houston Grand Opera as Marthe, Berta, and Tisbe (*La Cenerentola*); and she has appeared at Los Angeles Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, and Portland Opera as well as with the San Francisco Symphony. A winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Cook is a graduate of the Merola Opera Program and a former Adler Fellow. Recent and upcoming engagements include the Old Lady in *Candide* with Arizona Opera, Marthe with the Metropolitan Opera, and Mistress Quickly (*Falstaff*) with Opera Santa Barbara.