



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA OPENS 97TH SEASON ON SEPTEMBER 6
WITH CHARLES GOUNOD'S *ROMEO AND JULIET*
STARRING TENOR PENE PATI AND SOPRANO NADINE SIERRA**

**San Francisco Opera Opening Weekend Includes
Opera Ball and BRAVO! CLUB Galas on September 6;
Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd* on September 7;
and Free *Opera in the Park* Concert on September 8**

Tickets available at sfopera.com and (415) 864-3330



Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* © Alain Hanel; Pene Pati; Nadine Sierra; Lucas Meachem; Yves Abel

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (August 16, 2019; updated September 3) — San Francisco Opera inaugurates its 97th season on Friday, September 6 with Charles Gounod's romantic ***Romeo and Juliet*** (*Roméo et Juliette*) and two season-opening benefit events—***Opera Ball 2019: The Capulets' Masked Ball*** and **BRAVO! CLUB's Opening Night Gala**. The Company's opening weekend also includes Benjamin Britten's ***Billy Budd*** in director Michael Grandage's acclaimed production opening on September 7; and on September 8 ***San Francisco Chronicle Presents Opera in the Park***, the annual free concert tradition celebrating the opening of the opera season.

The curtain rises on San Francisco Opera's 2019–20 Season with **Charles Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*** (*Roméo et Juliette*), a French operatic adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic love story. Distinguished by rapturous duets and brilliant, show-stopping arias, this sensuous lyric drama returns to the Company's repertory, after a 32-year absence, under the baton of French-Canadian conductor **Yves Abel**. Making his American directorial debut, Opéra de

Monte-Carlo Director **Jean-Louis Grinda** brings his colorful staging evoking the Verona of the original play.

San Francisco Opera's cast is headed by tenor **Pene Pati** and soprano **Nadine Sierra** as the titular lovers. Pati most recently sang the Duke of Mantua in the Company's 2017 *Rigoletto* while still an Adler Fellow. Since graduating from the program, he has joined New Zealand's Festival Opera for a new production of *Madama Butterfly*, appeared as Alfredo (*La Traviata*) for Opera San José and made his role debut as Nemorino (*L'Elisir d'Amore*) for New Zealand Opera. Pati makes his role debut as Romeo.

Sierra adds Juliet to her gallery of San Francisco Opera heroines, which includes the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* and the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The recipient of the 2017 Richard Tucker Award and the Metropolitan Opera's Beverly Sills Award in 2018, the former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow has emerged as one of today's leading sopranos, earning praise from the *New York Times* for "singing with expressivity and tenderness" and her "bright, agile voice." Sierra's first solo CD, *There's a Place for Us*, was released last summer by Deutsche Grammophon.

Baritone **Lucas Meachem** brings his "earnest appealing baritone" (*New York Times*) to Mercutio, a role he has previously performed with the Metropolitan Opera. Tenor **Daniel Montenegro**, a former Adler Fellow, is Tybalt. The cast is complemented by bass **James Creswell** as Friar Lawrence, baritone **Timothy Mix** as Capulet, bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** as the Duke of Verona and, in their Company debuts, mezzo-sopranos **Stephanie Lauricella** as Stéphano and **Eve Gigliotti** as Gertude. For the October 1 performance, the role of Juliet will be performed by Egyptian-born New Zealand soprano **Amina Edris**, marking a rare instance when a husband-wife duo (Pati and Edris) will perform opposite each other in the title roles.

Of the production, director Grinda says, "To ensure this drama of absolute love touches every spectator, we respect its original setting and gracefully simplify its scenographic presentation. Without being minimalistic, we suggest Renaissance splendor and leave the imagination to work, focusing the attention on the stage artists." The staging, originally a co-production by Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice and Opéra de Monte-Carlo, premiered in 2012 with sets designed by **Eric Chevalier**, costumes by **Carola Volles** and lighting by **Roberto Venturi**.

Sung in French with English supertitles, the seven performances of *Romeo and Juliet* are scheduled for September 6 (8 p.m.), Sep. 13 (7:30 p.m.), Sep. 18 (7:30 p.m.), Sep. 21 (7:30 p.m.), Sep. 24 (7:30 p.m.), Sep. 29 (2 p.m.); and October 1 (7:30 p.m.), 2019.

On September 21, San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Giants will present ***Opera at the Ballpark***, featuring a live simulcast of *Romeo and Juliet*. A free community event, the simulcast will be transmitted in high definition live from the stage of the War Memorial Opera House to the new Mitsubishi Electronic Diamond Vision Board at Oracle Park.

Roméo et Juliette was first performed by San Francisco Opera in its inaugural season (1923) at the Civic Auditorium. Company founder Gaetano Merola conducted the French work, the only non-Italian offering that season, featuring tenor Beniamino Gigli and soprano Queena Mario in the title roles. Leading artists in successive presentations included Bidu Sayão (Juliette), Jussi Björling (Roméo), Ezio Pinza and Emmanuel List (both Friar Lawrence). The Company's most recent staging in 1987 featured a production designed by Rolf Gérard and with Michel Plasson conducting Ruth Ann Swenson as Juliette opposite the three different Roméos: Alfredo Kraus, John David De Haan and Fernando De La Mora.

OPENING NIGHT GALAS (Sept 6)

One of the premier philanthropic events on the West Coast, San Francisco Opera Guild's *Opera Ball 2019: The Capulets' Masked Ball* celebrates the opening of the new season with an elegant pre-performance cocktail reception and dinner, followed by dancing and celebration into the night. Co-chairs for *Opera Ball 2019* are Elizabeth Birka-White and Jane Mudge. For more information or to reserve tickets, visit sfopera.com/operaball2019 or call (415) 565-3204.

The BRAVO! CLUB's annual black-tie gala for opera-loving, young professionals includes a cocktail reception and opening night performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. After the opera, revelers join in the festivities of the *Opera Ball* celebration. For more information and to join BRAVO! CLUB, visit sfopera.com/bravo.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S BILLY BUDD (Sept 7–22)

Based on the unfinished novella by Herman Melville and set to a libretto by E.M. Forster and Eric Crozier, Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd* returns to the Company's repertory after a 15-year absence in the "powerful" (*New York Times*) staging by Tony Award-winning director Michael Grandage. Lawrence Renes conducts the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and an all-male cast of 75 artists, led by tenor William Burden (Edward Fairfax Vere), baritone John Chest (Billy Budd), and bass-baritone Christian Van Horn (John Claggart). The performances coincide with the Melville bicentennial and the 100th anniversary of the posthumous discovery of the American author's unfinished manuscript of *Billy Budd*. For tickets and more information, visit sfopera.com/billybudd or call (415) 864-3330.

FREE CONCERT IN GOLDEN GATE PARK (Sept 8 at 1:30pm)

Presented by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Opera in the Park* features the stars of the Company's 2019 Fall Season in concert with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. This annual al fresco event held at Robin Williams Meadow in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park is free and open to the public. For more information, visit sfopera.com/park.

ROMEO AND JULIET – TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *Romeo and Juliet* are priced from \$26 to \$398. A \$2 facility fee is included in all Balcony sections. All other sections include a \$3-per-ticket facility fee. For tickets, visit sfopera.com, call (415) 864-3330 or visit the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco. Box Office hours: Monday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Standing Room tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. on the morning of each performance. Standing room tickets are \$10 each, cash only and limited to two tickets per person. Casting, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change

Each presentation of *Romeo and Juliet* (except for the September 6 performance) at the War Memorial Opera House features a 25-minute Pre-Opera Talk by Alexandra Amati, Professor and Director of the Music Program at the University of San Francisco.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue, within walking distance of the Civic Center BART Station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and the F Market Street. Van Ness Construction: Due to construction for the SFMTA Van Ness Improvement Project, vehicles are unable to pick-up and drop-off at 301 Van Ness Avenue, and bus lines 47, 49 and 90 may experience travel delays. Please use the white loading zone at 450 Franklin Street (behind the Opera House) for rideshare pick-up and drop-off. For further information about public transportation and parking, visit sfopera.com/plan-your-visit/directions-and-parking.

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ROMEO & JULIET – CASTING AND CALENDAR

*San Francisco Opera Debut **American Staged Opera Debut
‡Role Debut †San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House
301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco CA 94102

ROMEO AND JULIET (*Roméo et Juliette*) by Charles Gounod

Production New to San Francisco Opera

September 6 (8 p.m.), **13** (7:30 p.m.), **18** (7:30 p.m.), **21** (7:30 p.m.), **24** (7:30 p.m.), **29** (2 p.m.); **October 1** (7:30 p.m.), **2019**

Teatro Carlo Felice and Opéra de Monte-Carlo co-production

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

Sung in French with English supertitles

Approximate running time: 3 hours including one intermission

First Performance: Paris, April 27, 1867

First SFO performance: October 4, 1923

Most recent SFO performance: 1987–88 Season

Cast:

<i>Romeo</i>	Pene Pati ♪
<i>Juliet</i>	Nadine Sierra ♪ / Amina Edris ♪ (Oct 1)
<i>Mercutio</i>	Lucas Meachem
<i>Friar Lawrence</i>	James Creswell ♪
<i>Capulet</i>	Timothy Mix ♪
<i>Tybalt</i>	Daniel Montenegro ♪
<i>Duke of Verona</i>	Philip Skinner
<i>Stéphano</i>	Stephanie Lauricella *
<i>Gertrude</i>	Eve Gigliotti * ♯
<i>Gregorio</i>	SeokJong Baek †♪
<i>Benvolio</i>	Christopher Oglesby * †♪
<i>Paris</i>	Hadleigh Adams ♪

Creative Team:

<i>Conductor</i>	Yves Abel
<i>Director</i>	Jean-Louis Grinda **
<i>Associate Director</i>	Vanessa d'Ayral de Serignac **
<i>Set Designer</i>	Eric Chevalier *
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Carola Volles *
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Roberto Venturi *
<i>Fight Director</i>	Dave Maier
<i>Choreographer</i>	Lawrence Pech
<i>Chorus Director</i>	Ian Robertson

San Francisco Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Chorus and San Francisco Opera Dance Corps

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High-resolution downloadable photographs of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Billy Budd*, *Opera in the Park* are available at sfopera.com/press. For cast biographies, visit sfopera.com.

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