

Lyric

Season Opening Concert

Brian Stokes Mitchell
and **Laura Benanti**
in Concert



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Brian Stokes Mitchell & Laura Benanti in Concert

Friday, October 10, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

ROB FISHER, conductor
LYRIC OPERA ORCHESTRA

Musical selections to be announced from the stage.

Stage Manager: **Adrienne Bader**
Assistant Stage Manager: **Alycia Martin**

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Running Time: 2 hours with one 25 minute intermission

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Artist profiles



BRIAN STOKES MITCHELL

Two-time Tony Award winner Brian Stokes Mitchell has enjoyed a career that spans Broadway, television, film, and concert appearances with the country's finest conductors and orchestras. He received Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle awards

for his star turn in *Kiss Me, Kate*. He also gave Tony-nominated performances in *Man of La Mancha*, August Wilson's *King Hedley II*, and *Ragtime*. Other notable Broadway shows include *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, and *Shuffle Along*. In 2016, he was awarded his second Tony Award, the prestigious Isabelle Stevenson Tony for his charitable work with The Actors Fund. That same year, Stokes was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame. He has performed at venues spanning jazz, opera, pop, country, and musical theater worlds, working with John Williams, Marvin Hamlisch, Gustavo Dudamel, Keith Lockhart, Michael Tilson Thomas, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Big Band, the Mormon Tabernacle choir, and the Muppets. Stokes has made multiple appearances at Carnegie Hall, and he has been invited twice to perform at the White House (both times aired on PBS's "Great Performances"). His musical talent has extended to the present day as producer, arranger, and orchestrator on his three solo albums including *Simply Broadway* and his latest recording *Plays With Music*. Stokes has appeared on more than 20 albums.

His extensive screen credits include a seven-year stint on *Trapper John, MD* and have continued with memorable appearances on everything from PBS's *Great Performances* to *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Frasier*, *Glee*, *Jumping the Broom*, and his most recent recurring roles on *Madam Secretary*, *Mr. Robot*, *The Path*, *Billions*, and *The Good Fight*. He is on the board of Americans for the Arts and is serving his 16th term as Chairman of the Board of the Entertainment Community Fund (formerly The Actors Fund).



LAURA BENANTI

Tony Award-winner and five-time Tony Award-nominee Laura Benanti is a highly celebrated stage and screen actress. She took Broadway by storm at the age of 18 as Maria in *The Sound of Music* and has subsequently starred in 10 more Broadway

shows (musicals, straight plays, comedies, and dramas) including *Into the Woods*, *Nine* (opposite Antonio Banderas), *Gypsy* (for which she won a Tony Award), *She Loves Me*, *My Fair Lady*, and Steve Martin's *Meteor Shower* opposite Amy Schumer and Keegan-Michael Key. Benanti debuted her highly celebrated solo comedy show *Laura Benanti: Nobody Cares* at the Minetta Lane


Theater Off-Broadway. Benanti created, wrote (songs co-written by Todd Almond), and starred in the show, which was recorded by Audible and is currently streaming on the platform. Benanti recently brought the show to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with an encore performance at Underbelly Boulevard in London. She can be seen playing the series regular role of Cindy on the Paramount+ series, *Mayor of Kingstown*, starring opposite Jeremy Renner, and in the film *Everything's Going to be Great* with Bryan Cranston and Allison Janney. Benanti co-starred in the film *No Hard Feelings* with Jennifer Lawrence and Matthew Broderick and guest stars in HBO Max's *Gilded Age*, Hulu's *Life & Beth* (created by and starring Amy Schumer), and *Elsbeth* on CBS. Benanti earned rave reviews for her portrayal of a grieving widow in Netflix's film *Worth*, starring opposite Michael Keaton, Stanley Tucci, and Amy Ryan. She can currently be seen in the film *Goodrich*, opposite Michael Keaton. Other TV work includes *Younger*, *Ziwe*, *Gossip Girl*, *Supergirl*, *Nashville*, and *Inside Amy Schumer*, among many others.



ROB FISHER

An internationally recognized music director, conductor, and pianist, and a leading figure in American music and musical theatre,

Rob Fisher has been a guest of every major orchestra in the country as conductor or pianist and has collaborated many times with the San Diego Symphony. At Lyric, he led the record-breaking production of *The Sound of Music* (2014/15). With the New York Philharmonic, he conducted the acclaimed concert versions of *Carousel* (Emmy nomination for Best Music Director) and *My Fair Lady*, both starring Kelli O'Hara, as well as *Mr. Keillor at 70*. At Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, he led gala performances of *Candide*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *The Sound of Music*. Fisher was recently represented on Broadway as the score supervisor and arranger for *An American in Paris* (Grammy nomination) and *Anything Goes* (Grammy nomination). Additionally, he remains the music supervisor and arranger for *Chicago: The Musical*.

In addition to collaborating in concert and recording with such artists as Renée Fleming, Kristin Chenoweth, Kelli O'Hara, Patti LuPone, Idina Menzel, Brian Stokes Mitchell, and David Hyde Pierce, he conducted the San Francisco Symphony in the Emmy-winning concert production of *Sweeney Todd* starring LuPone and George Hearn. Fisher was founding music director and conductor of the New York City Center Encores! series from its inception in 1994 until 2005. The series earned a 2000 Tony Award, and, in 1997, Fisher was given the Lucille Lortel Award. Fisher has made numerous recordings for Encores!, including the Grammy Award-winning *Chicago* cast album. Recently, Fisher arranged and conducted *Renée Fleming's Broadway*. 

A Baton for All Seasons

By Louise Guinther

Rob Fisher's credits range from solo pianist to musical arranger to sought-after conductor on Broadway and with symphony and opera orchestras. Here he talks about his career trajectory, podium style, and admiration for the stars of this year's Lyric season opening gala.



WHEN DID YOU FIRST EMBARK ON YOUR MUSICAL PATH?

I asked for piano lessons when I was six, and I played for everything at school and church growing up. By the fourth grade, I was writing a show. I knew I'd do music my entire life,

but it just didn't seem like a reliable career, so I went to Duke University and majored in botany to be a marine biologist. But I've never worked a botanical day. I've only worked music jobs.

HOW DID YOU MOVE FROM PIANO TO CONDUCTING?

I was doing summer stock during college, playing the piano in the orchestra and leading from the piano, and it often happens that the person who's taught everyone the music suddenly has to stand up and conduct. One of the reasons I went to American University and got a graduate degree was to get my conducting skills together — because I could see the moment was going to come. But because I was such a classical-music kid, I really wanted to learn classical conducting technique. So that's what we did — Beethoven and Mahler, and some Puccini. We did all kinds of stuff, and I value those lessons tremendously. The path that unfolded in front of me kept being heavy doses of show business — but I still *love* playing Beethoven sonatas and Chopin ballades. There are

a lot of things about conducting that I enjoy more; it's about being the facilitator for the musicians and getting the group energy unified, which is a responsibility. It's not the ability to control other people *at all*. It's the ability to feel what they're bringing and put it together.

WHAT DIFFERENCES DO YOU FIND BETWEEN CLASSICAL ENSEMBLES AND MUSICAL THEATER ORCHESTRAS?

Broadway bands know they're going to be doing the show for a long time, so there are certain elements they want to get specific about, because it's a forever thing. Opera orchestras are more like symphony orchestras in that there's so much classical training, and you can just use that vocabulary and get speedy results. But if you want something to swing, that can take a longer time for opera and symphony orchestras. Broadway orchestras have to be told to *not* swing.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST ABOUT THE LYRIC GALA?

I *loved* the Lyric Opera Orchestra very much when we did *The Sound of Music* [2013/14]. I really enjoyed their commitment to the music, even though it wasn't Puccini. I've found that to be the case in really good orchestras everywhere — like the NY Philharmonic. They will lay into *My Fair Lady* like it's their favorite Mahler, and it's *thrilling*! They do not look down on it or pooh-pooh it.

AND YOU KNOW THESE PERFORMERS WELL?

Stokes and I have done a lot of things together. I remember seeing him in that 1991 revival of



Gary Payne Photography

Oh Kay! and thinking, “There’s a really good leading man! Tall and good-looking and with a tremendous voice.” And Laura — I mean, she is *gorgeous*, all the time, and she has this beautiful voice that’s happy being a soprano or happy singing folk music. He was born to be a leading man, she was born to be a leading lady. We’re just super excited to get together and make music — because as well as being tremendous communicators, they’re really good musicians.

YOU HELPED FOUND THE HIT ENCORES! SERIES AT CITY CENTER. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

That’s my other big super-proud thing. When Judith Dakin, who’d been at Brooklyn Academy of Music, came over to run City Center, she really wanted to find a way to bring music theater back there. She and I had done a giant Gershwin festival at BAM, so as soon as she got to City Center she called: “How can we do this?” We both love the older shows with the great orchestrations and great songs that have terrible books. So the original concept was, “These are things that aren’t going to get revived, but their scores *must* be heard!” We were trying to make it sound exactly the way it would have sounded. That first season, we didn’t know if we were going to be able to manage it, and by the fifth or sixth season, people were willing their seats to their grandchildren. It became such a thing!

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH GARRISON KEILLOR’S “AMERICAN RADIO COMPANY”?

Keillor married a Danish girl back in the late ‘80s, and he took a break and went to Denmark. Then he missed performing on the radio, but was anxious about going back to the Twin Cities, and so settled

in New York. He wanted to start a new radio show that had a much bigger diversity of music. So he interviewed two or three people, and I got the job. We started the Coffee Club Orchestra, which could play *anything*. We had the widest possible variety of singers and performers, and we accompanied all the scripts. I love working out underscores for dialogue, whether it’s a radio show or it’s onstage. It was a thrilling time to be performing live.

YOU HAVE AN EXTENSIVE DISCOGRAPHY. IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO HAVE YOUR WORK PRESERVED FOR POSTERITY?

Some of those Encores shows never had a proper cast album, and now they do, with original orchestrations. So that’s a source of pride. I’ve had the privilege to work with really great engineers and editors, and I love the process soup to nuts — how the microphones are set up, where everybody is placed, and then listening to the take, deciding can it be improved or do we move it on, and then going in and splicing things together and making everything perfect — I love all that.

WHAT FULFILLS YOU IN YOUR OFFSTAGE LIFE?

It’s all nature. That’s one of the reasons I moved to New Mexico. I’m not a city person. I pretended for decades. Now I just love the place where I am. It full-on recharges me day and night. I’m very attuned to the cycles of the sun and the moon. It’s beautiful there everyday. The views from my house are *stunning*. The light on the mountains changes all day long, and you can see storms moving around all over the place. I miss it when I’m not there. ■

Louise T. Guinther, longtime senior editor at *Opera News*, is an arts writer based in New York.

Orchestra

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Enrique Mazzola
*The John D. and Alexandra
 C. Nichols Endowed Chair*

MUSIC STAFF

Michael Banwarth
 William C. Billingham
 Aaron Breid
 Kyle Dickson
 Levi Hammer
 Susan Miller Hult
 Tess Jackson
 Keun-A Lee
 Chi-Yuan Lin^{^^}
 Noah Lindquist^{*}
 Francesco Milioto
 Jerad Mosbey
 Jacob Niemann[^]
 Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad
 Stefano Sarzani
 Madeline Slettedahl
 Morgan Stevenson
 Marika Yasuda

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Robert Hanford, *Concertmaster,*
Mrs. R. Robert Funderburg
Endowed Chair
 Emily Nebel,
Assistant Concertmaster
 Eleanor Bartsch
 Alexander Belavsky
 Kathleen Brauer
 Renée-Paule Gauthier
 Laura Miller
 Liba Shacht
 Heather Wittels
 Bing Jing Yu

Violin II

Yin Shen, *Principal*
 John Macfarlane,
Assistant Principal
 Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
 Ann Palen
 Irene Radetzky
 John D. Robinson
 David Volfe

Viola

Carol Cook, *Principal*
 Terri Van Valkinburgh,
Assistant Principal
 Patrick Brennan
 Amy Hess
 Rebecca Swan
 Melissa Trier Kirk

Cello

Calum Cook, *Principal*
 Ana Kim, *Assistant Principal*
 Mark Brandfonbrener
 William H. Cernota
 Walter Preucil

String Bass

Samuel Shuhan,
Acting Principal
 Andrew L. W. Anderson,
Acting Assistant Principal
 Jeremy Attanaseo^{**}
 Gregory Sarchet
 Collins R. Trier

Flute

Marie Tachouet, *Principal*
 Dionne Jackson,
Assistant Principal
 Alyce Johnson

Piccolo

Alyce Johnson

Oboe

Paul Lueders, *Principal*
 Judith Zunamon Lewis,
Assistant Principal

English Horn

Judith Zunamon Lewis

Clarinet

Heesoo Kim, *Principal*
 Susan Warner,
Assistant Principal

Bass Clarinet

Susan Warner,
Acting

Bassoon

Preman Tilson, *Principal*
 Lewis Kirk, *Assistant Principal*

Contrabassoon

Lewis Kirk

Horn

Abigail Black, *Principal*
 Fritz Foss, *Assistant*
Principal/Utility
 Robert E. Johnson, *Third Horn*
 Samuel Hamzem
 Neil Kimel

Trumpet

William Denton, *Principal*
 Rebecca Oliverio,
Acting Assistant Principal

Trombone

Jeremy Moeller, *Principal*
 Mark Fisher, *Assistant Principal*
 Will Baker

Bass Trombone

Will Baker

Tuba

Andrew Smith, *Principal*

Timpani

Edward Harrison, *Principal*

Percussion

Douglas Waddell,
Acting Principal
 Eric Millstein,
Acting Assistant Principal

Harp

Lynn Williams, *Principal*

Librarian

John Rosenkrans, *Principal*

Stage Band Contractor

Christine Janicki

EXTRA MUSICIANS

Amy Barwan, oboe
 Wagner Campos, clarinet
 Mike Brozick, trumpet
 Jordan Olive, trumpet
 Matt Gaunt, tuba
 Rob Kassinger, bass
 Steve Roberts, guitar

^{*} On leave, 2025/26 Season

^{**} Season Substitute

[^] Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency

^{^^} Ryan Opera Center Conductor

The Lyric Opera Orchestra string sections utilize revolving seating. Players behind the front desk change seats systematically and are listed alphabetically in the roster above.

The **2025 | 26** Season

Lyric
OPERA OF
CHICAGO

Cherubini

Medea

October 11 - 26, 2025

Movie Nights at Lyric

Coco in Concert Live to Film

October 16 & 18, 2025

Mascagni / Leoncavallo

Cavalleria rusticana & Pagliacci

November 1 - 23, 2025

Black Leadership Arts Collective

**Echoes of Excellence: Celebrating
the Legacy of Chicago's Black Voices**

November 8, 2025

Orff

Carmina Burana

November 14, 16, 18, 2025

Billy Corgan

A Night of Mellon Collie and Infinite Sadness

November 21 - 30, 2025

Richard Strauss

Salome

January 25 - February 14, 2026

Renée Fleming in Recital

Voice of Nature: The Anthropocene

February 5, 2026

Mozart

Così fan tutte

February 1 - 15, 2026

Puccini

Madama Butterfly

March 14 - April 12, 2026

Gabriela Lena Frank & Nilo Cruz

El último sueño de Frida y Diego

March 14 - April 12, 2026

Movie Nights at Lyric

Mary Poppins in Concert Live to Film

April 10 & 11, 2026

avery r. young

safronia

April 17 & 18, 2026

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