

A close-up portrait of a Black man with a full, graying beard and mustache. He is wearing a white, short-sleeved button-down shirt with a large, irregular red bloodstain on the lower front. He is also wearing tan suspenders. His expression is serious and intense, looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting with warm lighting.

Lyric

OPERA OF
CHICAGO

Mascagni / Leoncavallo

Cavalleria rusticana & Pagliacci

In this issue



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John Mangum
*General Director,
President & CEO*

Enrique Mazzola
Music Director

Lyric

Welcome to your Lyric

From the Chair and the General Director

Welcome to Lyric Opera of Chicago!

It's truly a pleasure to welcome you to the Lyric Opera House for this production of one of the great double bills in the operatic repertoire. *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* have been tethered since 1893 — two passionate, tragic stories that reach the emotional heights that make the art form so unique.

It's especially gratifying to present the Lyric debuts of two young stars currently making meteoric rises. Soprano Yulia Matochkinka (Santuzza) has already been heard in many of the most storied houses around the world, and this season will sing Amneris in *Aida* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Ortrud in *Lohengrin* at



Hamburg State Opera. SeokJong Baek (Turiddu) won much acclaim, in his 2022 Royal Ballet & Opera debut as Samson, astonishing the audience; not only had he stepped in on short notice, but it was his professional debut as a tenor after beginning his career as a baritone.

They will be working with Music Director Enrique Mazzola, whose history with these works goes back to his days in the children's chorus at La Scala for a production of *Pagliacci*. He's well acquainted with some of the other leading talents here: Among their numerous other roles here, Lyric favorites Quinn Kelsey and Russell Thomas appeared in our

Grammy-winning film of *Pagliacci*, made during the pandemic.

Both old friends and new will be on our stage starting November 21, for the opening of our world premiere production of *A Night of Mellon Collie and Infinite Sadness*, an operatic reimagining of the legendary alternative rock album, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. It is a signature piece of programming, demonstrating how Lyric continues to expand the horizons of what it means to be an opera company today. It promises to be a high point of the cultural season — and we hope to see you there.

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^o Deceased

She Lives for Art

In March, through her family's foundation, Penelope Steiner gave Lyric Opera of Chicago an unrestricted gift of \$25 million — the largest such single donation in the company's history. It represents a bold coda to a long record of philanthropy — and it's also a kind of love story.

By David Zivan



Jaclyn Simpson

Penelope Steiner on stage in front of the Robert and Penelope Steiner Parquet.



Jaclyn Simpson

Penelope Steiner and Lyric General Director, President & CEO John Mangum at the Carol Fox Award ceremony.

All roads lead to Rome, they say — so it's no surprise that some stories begin there, too. The Eternal City was where Penelope Steiner, then a preternaturally bright college student, had her first encounter with grand opera — *La Bohème*, as this particular tale goes. She was, of course, not the first to be thunderstruck by that work (most operagoers would agree that it makes for a fine start), but few introductions have had such a wide-ranging and longterm impact. Up there in the faraway seats, Steiner grasped the richness of the genre — its grandeur and its humanity — and it was a life-changing experience.

"It was my *Pretty Woman* moment, long before Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) even existed," she says. "I was as floored by opera as she was in that film. It was instant love with the art form."

Over decades, Steiner has put that feeling into action, in extraordinary ways. She has been a decades-long subscriber to Lyric and over time her commitments have progressively deepened. It's not surprising, given her own first contact, to learn that her earliest philanthropic efforts with Lyric were focused on young audiences. She became involved with the company's Youth Opera Council, a select group of Chicagoland high school students, from a broad

range of backgrounds, who are supported in their passion for opera and the performing arts. She became an avid supporter of Lyric Unlimited's *Opera in the Neighborhoods* program, which continues to bring original productions to audiences across the city; she was so impressed with Gregory Spears's *Jason and the Argonauts*, a Lyric-commissioned touring work from 2016 that was revived for the 2023/24 Season, that she flew to Santa Fe Opera to see his world premiere, *The Righteous*, last summer.

Penelope is also a fierce champion of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center; a small-world connection through her husband's doctor led her to become a sponsor of bass-baritone Benjamin R. Sokol, a current member of the Ensemble. She is a founding member and current chair of the Enrique Circle, a group dedicated to supporting Maestro Mazzola (now entering his fifth season), and currently serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors. She is, in short, Lyric family.

And then, toward the end of last season, she took things to another level: In March 2025, the company announced her unrestricted gift of \$25 million, the largest one-time donation in the company's seven-decade history. As a result, and with gratitude, the seating on the main

floor of the Lyric Opera House is now known as the Steiner Parquet. At the Board of Directors meeting last spring, Penelope received the Carol Fox Award, the company's highest honor, named for Lyric's indefatigable co-founder and first general director. "No one deserves this award more than Penelope Steiner," said John Mangum, General Director, President & CEO of Lyric Opera of Chicago. "Her transformational gift is a remarkable affirmation of her belief in our mission, our commitment, and the future of this art form we all love so much."

And yet somehow, as pleasing as these honors must be, Penelope always seems to be looking past them — seeking not to be in the spotlight, but gazing toward where it shines. "Believe it or not, I'm most interested in finding opera lovers who will take my lead," she says. "Lyric means so much to me, and I know that's true for others. I want them to follow their heart, as I have."

A longtime Chicago resident, Penelope was born in Riverside, a suburb, and for high school attended what was then Nazareth Academy, a private school in La Grange. She credits her father for what she describes as a lifelong fearlessness; by age 10 or 11, she says, she had already determined that she would spend some of her educational years in Europe — a far less common practice than it is today. After her freshman year at Mundelein College — a school she chose primarily for its affordability — she applied to study programs abroad. She did not tell her parents her plans. The Sorbonne sent an acceptance, but required its students to live with a family; that wouldn't do. When she discovered that Loyola had a program in Rome, with dormitory living, the decision was made. Her parents simply said yes.

Independence combined with fearlessness equals high energy. "The unknown beckoned," she says — and soon that unknown became part of her daily life. In and between classes, Penelope dove deep — on cuisine, art (Michelangelo, da Vinci, Titian), literature (Primo Levi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Umberto Eco), customs, and, of course, music.

Rome and its environs, needless to say, are well suited for these pursuits. Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, for example — the glittering neo-Renaissance stunner where she saw *Bohème* — opened in 1880 with *Semiramide* by Gioachino Rossini, and hosted the world premieres for both *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) and *Tosca* (1900).

Today Penelope's tastes in opera range widely by any measure. Puccini became a favorite, of course — but he's rivaled by Verdi (an enjoyment enhanced by her friendship with Maestro Mazzola and his well-known affinity), Wagner, and Mozart. She made a special gift to the New Work Fund, and served as lead production sponsor last season for Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's contemporary work, *The Listeners*. She recently finished and admired director Yuval Sharon's newest book, *A New Philosophy of Opera*, described by one critic as "proposing radical ... and contentious views."

That's rather her cup of tea. "He's got a great deal of intellectual acumen when it comes to music. And he's been booed many times," Penelope says. "I love the fact that he finds that to be OK."

Robert Steiner, Penelope says, "was a brilliant man. We just had a major intellectual connection." They met in Chicago at a dinner with mutual friends, and were married less than a year later. Their two grown children, Nicole Louise and Robert M. Steiner, Jr., also live in Chicago.

Bob was a successful investor and financial advisor ("Nobody left his fund," Penelope says. "That tells you everything."), a son of immigrants and a self-made man. At age five, he started his first business, loaning out his comic books for pennies. His modest roots meant that



Robert and Penelope Steiner, celebrating his 50th birthday.

his own philanthropic interests were somewhat late-blooming — but no less significant for it. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, where he also received an MBA, he became a longtime benefactor to the business school. He was especially dedicated to the innovative Posse Foundation, a national organization that provides full-tuition scholarships to promising high school students — which, Bob might have noted, represents a long-term investment with a high possible upside.

All the while, Penelope's own activities blossomed, too. She is an expert on film, and for two decades has published witty reviews and commentary across genres at her own website, Peneflix. She has been a major supporter of the Chicago International Film Festival and served as Board Chair. Having studied art history, she was drawn to both the Art Institute and the Museum of Contemporary Art, serving both institutions as a longtime docent.

Did she and Bob do all of these things together? Not exactly, Penelope says — though of course they were



Penelope Steiner and Chief Artistic Officer Matthew Ozawa at the Vitum Theater for the Opera in the Neighborhood production of *Jason and the Argonauts*.

Kyle Flubacker

Penelope and Robert were married downtown — by Judge Norman Eiger, who at the time presided over the state’s divorce court. “When we were done, he said to Bob and me: ‘I never want to see the two of you again.’ About 25 years later, we happened to be in the building where he lived, and we ran into him in the elevator. He remembered us, and we remembered him. We told him, ‘It’s still going strong. You will not see us in your court.’”

That chance meeting took place at about the halfway point of their union. When Bob passed in 2020, they had been married for 51 years.

a regular presence at the major events. “At the MCA, people thought he was a myth,” she says, joking. “We had such an incredible relationship and respected each other’s passions. There was no competition. We were truly mindful of each other’s time. And no matter when, if I was leaving for something, he’d always be sitting there. All he would say to me is, ‘Let me look at you.’ When I came home, he’d be sitting there waiting. And say the same thing again.”

All along, they seem to have had a good bit of fun. The entire family rode the wave of the Chicago Bulls’ remarkable run of championships in the 1990s. “We were there,” Penelope puts it plainly. “We had wonderful seats because we started going when our kids were really young — before Michael Jordan was on the scene. My son met Michael Jordan, and Michael Jordan’s father. I met his wife, Juanita, and his mother. We had a huge poster from one of the championships, and my son — he was maybe 10 or 11 years old — took his magnifying glass out and found us in the crowd. There’s all of us, four little Steiners.”

The \$25 million gift formally comes from the Robert and Penelope Steiner Foundation (“His name will always come first,” Penelope says). Its small board consists of Penelope and her two children, a semi-retired family lawyer (a fraternity brother of Bob’s), a nephew-in-law, and Bob’s longtime assistant. The foundation’s giving will continue; any board member can vet and suggest other possible recipients. There are signs that opera may have a place in the hearts of generations to come. When Penelope and her family attended *Explore Your Lyric* day this past spring, her two-year-old grandson was entranced at a performance of *Frida Kahlo and the Bravest Girl in the World* — the 2024/25 Season’s Opera in the Neighborhoods offering.

That’s the future. But Penelope seems to take a moment of gratitude today. “I remember, on my 16th birthday, I had an epiphany: When I reached this point in my life, I wanted to have no ‘If onlys.’ My husband thought I took it too far. But I haven’t. I feel that I’ve been incredibly blessed. I’ve achieved volumes of my personal goals. At the same time, I feel I am just getting started.” 

This duo of passionate one-act operas explores the depths of spurned lovers' grief and the lengths they'll go to in avenging betrayal. Deadly love triangles unfold against starkly contrasted backdrops of an idyllic Sicilian countryside and a chaotic urban center.

Music Director Enrique Mazzola leads a world-class cast that includes Lyric favorites Russell Thomas, Quinn Kelsey, and Gabriella Reyes in Elijah Moshinsky's production.



Lyric Opera of Chicago / John Shaw

Russell Thomas as Canio in *Pagliacci*

Lyric

Cavalleria rusticana & Pagliacci



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Cavalleria rusticana & Pagliacci

Opera in Italian

Cavalleria rusticana Music by **Pietro Mascagni** |

Libretto by **Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti** and **Guido Menasci**

Pagliacci Music and libretto by **Ruggero Leoncavallo**

November 1, 4, 7, 9M, 12M, 15, 20M and 23M, 2025

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

Turiddu
Mamma Lucia
Santuzza
Alfio
Lola
A Woman

SeokJong Baek⁺
Lauren Decker^{••}
Yulia Matochkina⁺
Quinn Kelsey^{••}
Camille Robles[•]
Elise Hurwitz

PAGLIACCI

Tonio
Canio
Beppe
Villagers

Quinn Kelsey^{••}
Russell Thomas
Daniel Luis Espinal[•]
Christopher Filipowicz
Hoss Brock
Gabriella Reyes
Luke Sutliff⁺

Nedda
Silvio

Uniting Voices Chicago

Actors

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Conductor
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Set & Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
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Children's Chorus Director
Wig & Makeup Designer
Assistant Director
Stage Manager
Stage Band Conductor
Musical Preparation

Prompter
Fight & Intimacy Director
Projected English Titles

Enrique Mazzola
Elijah Moshinsky
Peter McClintock
Michael Yeargan
Duane Schuler
Michael Black
Josephine Lee
John Metzner
Adam Da Ros⁺
Alaina Bartkowiak
Stefano Sarzani
Michael Banwarth[•]
Susan Miller Hult
Chi-Yuan Lin[•]
Jerad Mosbey
Jacob Niemann[^]
Susan Miller Hult
Sheryl Williams
Francis Rizzo

These performances are dedicated to the memory of Sonia Florian, Lyric Life Director and production sponsor for *Cavalleria rusticana* & *Pagliacci*.

Cavalleria rusticana first performed at Teatro Costanzi, Rome on May 17, 1890.
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on November 11, 1955.

Pagliacci first performed at Teatro Dal Verme, Milan on May 21, 1892.
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on October 23, 1957.

- ⁺ Lyric debut
- [•] Current Member, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center
- ^{••} Alum, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center
- [^] Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency

Synopsis

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

TIME | **Late 19th century**

PLACE | **A village in Calabria**

It is Easter Sunday. Turiddu, who has recently returned from the army, sings a serenade to his lover, Lola. (Siciliana: *O Lola, ch'ai di latti la cammisa*) — clearly, he has spent the night with her. She is married to Alfio, a powerful and important man in the village who runs its carting and haulage business. In great agitation, Santuzza, Turiddu's former girlfriend, comes looking for him at the tavern of his mother, Mamma Lucia.

Alfio enters with his companions, bringing wine and gifts for Easter from the surrounding towns. He sings the song of the carter, expressing his great pleasure to be back with his faithful wife. (Aria: *Il cavallo scalpita*). An Easter procession passes by and enters the church (Easter Hymn: *Inneggiamo, il Signor non e morto*). Santuzza cannot go into the church with the rest of the village because she is expecting Turiddu's child. She reveals to Lucia that Turiddu has abandoned her and gone back to Lola (Aria: *Voi lo sapete, o mamma*). Santuzza asks Lucia to pray for her, and Lucia goes into the church.

When Turiddu arrives, Santuzza confronts him (Duet: *Tu qui, Santuzza?*). He claims to have been in a nearby village buying wine for his mother, but Santuzza replies that he was seen near Lola's house. She reproaches him for deserting her. He denies being in love with Lola and tells Santuzza to be silent lest her accusations reach Alfio, who would certainly kill him. Terrified, Santuzza says she will forgive him if he will return to her.

Lola enters the square gaily singing (Stornello: *Fior di giaggiolo*), and cruelly mocks Santuzza before entering the church. Turiddu starts to follow, but Santuzza begs him to stay with her. As she curses him, he strikes her and rushes into the church. When Alfio appears, Santuzza reveals that Lola and Turiddu are lovers (Duet: *Oh! Il signore vi manda*). Alfio's initial disbelief turns to rage. He swears vengeance and departs (Intermezzo).

When the townspeople emerge from church, Turiddu invites everyone for a glass of wine at his mother's tavern. (Brindisi: *Viva il vino spumeggiante*). Alfio violently rejects the wine. As the women lead Lola away, her husband challenges Turiddu to a duel, and goes off to await him behind the orchard. Turiddu bids his mother farewell (Aria: *Mamma, quel vino e generoso*), begging her to care for Santuzza should he not return.

As the tension mounts, the square fills with people. Suddenly, a villager screams that Turiddu has been killed.

INTERMISSION

PAGLIACCI

TIME AND PLACE | **Postwar Italy**

Tonio, a clown, exhorts his audience to look beyond the actors' costumes to glimpse the true human emotions provided by the play. (Prologue: *Si puo'?*)

ACT I

The village welcomes a troupe of traveling players. Canio, the leader, promises a great performance that night. He accepts the offer of some wine at the local inn, but Tonio stays behind. Villagers suggest that he simply wants to flirt with Nedda, Canio's wife. Canio declares that if he caught Nedda with another man, he would react quite differently from his stage character, Pagliaccio (Aria: *Un tal gioco*). Bagpipers are heard just as the church bells ring for vespers (Chorus: *Don, din, don*).

The crowd disperses, leaving Nedda alone. Spying a flock of birds, she envies their carefree existence. (Balatella: *Stridono lassu*). Tonio interrupts with declarations of love, but Nedda rejects his advances sarcastically, then strikes him. Swearing vengeance, Tonio rushes away. Almost immediately, the villager Silvio appears (Duet: *Silvio? A quest'ora*). He loves Nedda and persuades her to run away with him. Tonio returns with Canio just in time for the latter to hear Nedda's parting words to Silvio: "Until tonight, and I'll be yours forever." Canio runs after Silvio, whom he did not recognize. Unable to catch him, he then threatens Nedda and demands her lover's name, which she refuses to reveal. Brokenhearted, Canio prepares for the performance (Aria: *Vesti la giubba*).

ACT II

The performance of the *commedia* begins with Colombina (Nedda) announcing that her husband, Pagliaccio (Canio) is away for the evening. While awaiting Taddeo (Tonio), who is to bring supper, she hears her lover, Arlecchino (Beppe), singing outside her window, (Serenade: *O Colombina*). In return for his love offering of supper, Taddeo is received sarcastically by Colombina. Once Arlecchino arrives for his rendezvous with Colombina, they rid themselves of Taddeo. Arlecchino produces a sleeping potion and suggests that Colombina facilitate their elopement by drugging her husband. She agrees just as Taddeo bursts in to say that Pagliaccio has returned, after learning of Colombina's infidelity. Taddeo and Arlecchino run out, but Pagliaccio enters in time to hear Colombina sigh to her retreating lover, "Until tonight, and I'll be yours forever."

When he appears on stage, Canio lapses from his stage role into furious reproach as Nedda attempts to stay in character. He draws a knife on her and demands her lover's name. Before the horrified crowd, he stabs her. Fatally wounded, she cries for Silvio, whom Canio stabs as well. Tonio turns to the audience and announces, "The comedy has ended." 

Courtesy of Houston Grand Opera.

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APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

**This production will be performed
with one intermission.**

Cavalleria rusticana	1 hour 10 minutes
Intermission	30 minutes
Pagliacci	1 hour 15 minutes
TOTAL	2 hours 55 minutes

Dynamic Duo

The unlikely journey of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* — two verismo masterpieces, beloved by audiences and tethered almost by chance.

By Mark Thomas Ketterson



Ana María Martínez as Nedda and Vladimir Galouzine as Canio in Lyric's 2008/09 *Pagliacci*.

Both photos: Dan Rest / Lyric Opera of Chicago



Katherine Lerner as Lola, Carlo Ventre as Turiddu, and Guang Yang as Santuzza in Lyric's 2008/09 *Cavalleria rusticana*.

It all started with a contest. In 1888, the Milanese music publisher Edoardo Sonzogno, hoping to encourage emerging compositional talent, invited interested young Italian composers to submit a one-act opera to a panel of prominent critics and musicians. Three entries would receive fully-staged performances at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome. Just two months before the deadline, the competition came to the attention of Pietro Mascagni, a young Tuscan who had dabbled in opera with little success. Mascagni seized his opportunity aggressively, requesting that poets Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci provide a libretto.

As source material, Mascagni's librettists made the inspired choice of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a novella and play about a toxic love triangle in a rural Sicilian village, by Italy's master of the realistic school, Giovanni Verga. The title ("*Rustic chivalry*") contains a twist of intentional irony and may confuse those who associate "chivalry" with an idealized code of masculine honor; Verga was a writer who rendered his affection for his countrymen through a warts-and-all examination of their flaws, faith, and often overpowering passion. His vision is that of the common chivalry of the streets.

Cavalleria premiered on May 17, 1890, with the glamorous husband and wife team Gemma Bellincioni and Roberto Stagno creating the roles of Santuzza and Turridu. The opera caused a sensation. Here was the unbridled passion and narrative approach that was to define a newly-emerging operatic style; the orchestral interlude following the opening *Siciliana* could not evoke anything but a sun-drenched Sicilian square on Easter Sunday. Even Verdi was impressed. “He has invented a most effective genre,” the venerated composer recorded, “short operas without pointless longueurs.” *Cavalleria* swept Italy, and by the end of 1891 had premiered in Berlin, London, Philadelphia, and Chicago, arriving at the Metropolitan Opera on December 30. Bellincioni later re-created her Santuzza for a 1916 silent film, and in 1953 Anthony Quinn mimed to Tito Gobbi’s voice in another filmed version, marketed in the United States under the steamy title *Fatal Desire*.

Cavalleria’s success was duly noted by ambitious musicians, among them a young Neapolitan, Ruggero Leoncavallo. Like Mascagni, Leoncavallo had despaired of receiving an operatic commission, and was resigning himself to a career in academia; now with *Cavalleria*’s shining example before him, he set about composing *Pagliacci*. The source inspiration for the libretto has never been definitively verified. Popular legend has long held that Leoncavallo’s police magistrate-turned judge father brought home the story of the jealously deranged clown who so confuses actual and theatrical reality he murders his wife onstage. On at least one occasion, Leoncavallo also claimed to have witnessed the events personally (a suspect version, given he was responding to a plagiarism lawsuit; his storyline’s similarity to Catulle Mendès’s *La Femme de Tabarin* had caught attention). Whatever the truth, Leoncavallo’s libretto is a veristic dream come true, its earthy appeal heightened by his setting the action in Calabria, one of Italy’s more impoverished provinces.



Pagliacci premiered in Milan on May 21, 1892, with a cast including Fiorello Giraudo, Adelina Stehle, and the great French baritone Victor Maurel as Tonio. Like *Cavalleria*, *Pagliacci* was an immediate hit. The opera was first performed in North America at the Grand Opera House, New York, in June of 1893 and came to the Met the following December 1. In 1907, *Pagliacci* became the first opera to be recorded in its entirety, and in 1931 the first to be filmed complete with sound, in a now rarely-seen document starring Fernando Bertini and the San Carlo Opera company.

The initial pairing of the operas as a double bill may have occurred at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome in 1893. The Met first performed the “Cav/Pag” amalgam on December 22 of that year, though both works have subsequently been strange bedfellows there to such disparate partners as *Salome*, *La traviata*, and Gluck’s *Orfeo*; Lyric performed *Pagliacci* in 1982 alongside Poulenc’s *La Voix Humaine*. Beyond these occasional anomalies, the operas have rarely been disjoined, and neither has slipped from the permanent repertory.

After more than a century of shared billing, “Cav and Pag” have developed something of a dyadic identity. “Opera’s Castor and Pollux,” they have been called and, more irreverently, “opera’s ham and eggs.” There is a sensible history behind the humor, however, for though not conceived as the ubiquitous duo they became, the two works inadvertently poured the musical foundation for a burgeoning artistic movement known as *verismo*, or “realism.”

As the 19th century neared its end, Italian opera found itself surrounded by a rapidly evolving cultural consciousness. A gritty naturalism had crept into the visual arts through the paintings of Antonio Mancini and Francesco Paolo Michetti, and particularly into literature as manifested by the works of Giovanni Verga and the Frenchman Émile Zola. Theatrical writing eased away

from romantic verse-drama and chivalric fancies in favor of an emerging fascination with the everyday (and often sordid) dramas of the working class.

Compositional styles had advanced as well; both Verdi and Wagner had achieved a coalescence of music and text heretofore unknown in opera. But the new obsession with the plight of the common man within his social environment brought opera yet further away from one of the primary tenets of *bel canto* — beautiful sound for beauty's own sake — towards what many today might describe as a “cinematic” style of aural narration; nothing was to be merely pleasing to the ear.

The verismo era was relatively short-lived, and many of its exponents have vanished into the sands of operatic time. Puccini is occasionally tendered as an exception, and his output contains veristic elements, but his lyrical, Italianate writing is generally considered a thing apart from strict verismo. And when did anyone last hear Tommasini's *Uguale Fortuna*? Or Guasco's *Leggenda delle sette torri*?

As a distinct performance style, however, verismo's impact on the vocal art is incalculable. The career of Bellincioni, Santuzza at the *Cavalleria* premiere, is instructive; a prodigiously gifted singing actress, much admired in *Traviata* by Verdi himself, Bellincioni went from Santuzza to create roles in many new works, including Giordano's *Fedora*, establishing herself as the first true verismo soprano. Contemporary accounts suggest that the dramatic employment of her instrument required by veristic exercise exacted a price in flexibility and ease on high (though nominally scored for soprano, Santuzza's tessitura is rather low-lying; the role is often effectively taken by a mezzo with a good top). Purists were alarmed, fearing the standards of *bel canto* were fading away, but popular taste prevailed and singers enthusiastically adopted the new style.

That verismo could be sung beautifully was exemplified in the person of Enrico Caruso. Revered today as the quintessential Golden Age singer, in his own time the great tenor sang a great deal of what was then contemporary music, finding the genre

dovetailed perfectly with the extrovert style and populist sympathies which had set him apart from his predecessors. Caruso embraced the repertory with relish (photographs of him as *Pagliacci*'s Canio remain iconic images to this day), and endowed the music with all his accustomed tonal resplendency and technical prowess.

Over time, Caruso's example attenuated as vocalists sacrificed purity of line in a misguided quest for veristic passion, often interpolating sobs and verbal tics into the music. But while verismo was an outgrowth of *bel canto* (and in some ways a counter-movement) it was never intended as a wholesale rejection of its principles. The proof lies in the scores; Leoncavallo asks that Nedda field two perfectly calibrated trills in the introduction to the balatella “*Qual fiamma*,” and in order for Turiddu's *Siciliana* to make a proper effect, it requires the precise, seamlessly flowing legato of a belcantist. Happily, in the late-20th century many singers, notably soprano Renata Scotto, sought to restore the genre to its original luster.

“Much verismo had a bad reputation as I was learning it,” Scotto explains, “and I have felt compelled throughout my career to rediscover it and display it in a clean, bright light ... sloppy sobbings and lazy vocal technique became associated with verismo as an aberration.”

Neither Mascagni nor Leoncavallo ever matched their initial triumphs. Leoncavallo's *Zazà* had a brief shining moment, and he had great hope for his *La Bohème*, based on Henri Murger's popular novel — little suspecting that Puccini had the same idea. Mascagni was somewhat luckier with his *Iris* and the delightful *L'amico*

Fritz, which have earned a rare revival or two. But had neither composer produced anything beyond their flagship efforts, their legacy would be assured — and their names forever intertwined — for these two seminal masterworks. **1**

Mark Thomas Ketterson was the longtime Chicago correspondent for Opera News. He has also written for Opera UK, Playbill, the Chicago Tribune, Ravinia, the Edinburgh Festival, and other publications.



Canio became a signature role for more than one legendary tenor.

Artist profiles



YULIA MATOCHKINA SANTUZZA

Lyric debut

The mezzo-soprano opens her 2025/26 Season as Amneris in *Aida* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. She then returns to Hamburg Opera as Ortrud in *Lohengrin*, and sings Ulrica in *Un ballo in maschera* at both the Opernhaus Zürich and the Edinburgh Festival. Other recent highlights include *Venus/Tannhäuser* and *Azucena/Il trovatore* at Bayerische Staatsoper, and her return to Deutsche Oper Berlin as Ortrud/*Lohengrin*. She sang Eboli/*Don Carlo* at The Metropolitan Opera, Semperoper Dresden, and The Royal Ballet & Opera; Amneris/*Aida* and Ulrica/*Un ballo in maschera* at the Spring Festival Tokyo with Riccardo Muti; Dalila/*Samson et Dalila* with Opera de Tenerife; Verdi's *Requiem* at Opernhaus Zürich, the Verbier Festival, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, the Dutch National Opera, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; Carmen at Arena di Verona, *Azucena/Il trovatore* at Opernhaus Zürich; Ulrica/*Un ballo in maschera* at Teatro alla Scala and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Marfa/*Khovanshchina* with Opéra national de Paris; Federica/*Luisa Miller* at Staatsoper Hamburg and the Salzburg Festival. At the Mariinsky Theatre, her artistic home, she sang Principessa de Bouillon/*Adriana Lecouvreur*, Brangäne/*Tristan und Isolde*, Wellgunde/*Das Rheingold*, Kundry/*Parsifal*, and Polina/*Pique Dame*, among numerous others.



SEOKJONG BAEK TURIDDU

Lyric debut

This season, Baek returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Other highlights include a role and house debut as Macduff/*Macbeth* with the Bayerische Staatsoper, as well as a return to the Deutsche Oper Berlin as Radamès/*Aida* and Calaf/*Turandot*. Later in the season Baek reprises the title role in *Samson et Dalila* with the Royal Ballet & Opera. On the concert platform this season, Baek makes his debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel, as well as with the Seattle Symphony in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. In the 2023/24 Season, Baek made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Ismaele in *Nabucco*, and has made several returns to the house including as Calaf/*Turandot*, Cavaradossi/*Tosca*, and Radamès/*Aida*. Since making his debut at the Royal Ballet & Opera in 2022, Baek has also appeared as Pinkerton/*Madama Butterfly*, Radamès/*Aida*, Turiddu/*Cavalleria rusticana*, Cavaradossi/*Tosca*, and Calaf/*Turandot*. Other recent highlights include Calaf/*Turandot* for Teatro San Carlo, Radamès/

Aida for Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and Deutsche Oper Berlin, as well as Cavaradossi/*Tosca* and Rodolfo/*La Bohème* for Arizona Opera. Recent concert highlights include performances of Verdi's *Requiem* with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia led by Sir Antonio Pappano, with the Royal Danish Orchestra conducted by Bertrand de Billy, for the Teatro Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under the baton of Zubin Mehta, and in his BBC Proms debut performance at the Royal Albert Hall.



QUINN KELSEY ALFIO / TONIO

Previously at Lyric: 18 roles since 2003/04, most recently Don Carlo/*Ernani* (2022/23) and Miller/*Luisa Miller* (2019/20).

The Hawaii native and Ryan Opera Center alumnus opens his 2025/26 Season at Royal Ballet & Opera with Verdi's *Les vèpres siciliennes*, reprising the role of Guy de Montfort, and returns to the title role in *Rigoletto* with the Canadian Opera Company and the Baltimore Symphony. Kelsey will also return to The Metropolitan Opera as Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*. Kelsey makes his debut at The Royal Danish Opera, singing the title role in *Macbeth* in concert under the baton of Sir Antonio Pappano, and will debut with Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden as Germont in *La traviata*. He will also appear with his hometown opera company, Hawaii Opera Theatre, for the world premiere of Herb Mahelona's *Kamalehua: The Sheltering Tree*. Set in the mid-19th century, the opera tells the story of the Hawaiian Kingdom's early struggles to maintain independence. On the concert stage, Kelsey will join the Philadelphia Orchestra for Handel's *Messiah*, and pianist Craig Ketter in recital at the Cleveland Chamber Music Society and the Kennedy Center for Vocal Arts DC, presenting a program that includes selections from Vaughn Williams, Copland, and Finzi. Last season, Kelsey bowed at The Metropolitan Opera in three roles: Rigoletto (a role he sang at Lyric in 2017/18), Scarpia in *Tosca*, and Amonasro in Michael Mayer's new production of *Aida*.



LAUREN DECKER MAMMA LUCIA

Previously at Lyric: 9 roles since 2016/17, most recently Jade Boucher/*Dead Man Walking* (2019/20) and First Maidservant/*Elektra* (2018/19).

This season the contralto returns to Deutsche Oper Berlin as Erda, 1st Norm, and Schwertleite in Wagner's *Ring Cycle* under Sir Donald Runnicles, and La Zia Principessa and Zita in Puccini's *Il Trittico* under Giulio Ciona. In the U.S., she will sing Handel's *Messiah* with the South Dakota Symphony. Last season included

performances with Palm Beach Opera (*Roméo et Juliette*), Teatro Nacional de São Carlos (Mahler's Symphony No. 8), and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra (Beethoven's Symphony No. 9). She also performed with Camerata Chicago, singing *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem*. Other notable credits include roles at Toledo Opera, Madison Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Dayton Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and the Aspen Music Festival, where she was a Renée Fleming Artist. In concert, Decker has appeared with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Grant Park Music Festival, Banatul State Philharmonic, and many others in works by Mahler, Beethoven, Verdi, Brahms, and Holst. An alumna of the Ryan Opera Center, she made her Lyric debut in *Die Zauberflöte* in the 2016/17 Season.



CAMILLE ROBLES LOLA

Previously at Lyric: Second Handmaiden/
Medea (2025/26).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center member, the mezzo-soprano from San Juan, Puerto Rico, was a Jan Miller Studio Artist at Pensacola Opera for the 2024/25 Season. While there, she covered the role of Cherubino/*Le nozze di Figaro* and performed the Dolphin in the world premiere of *Mato and the Bear Who Couldn't Fish*. This season at Lyric, she will appear in *Medea* and *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. Previously, she was invited to the Aspen Music Festival as a Fellowship Artist for two summers and appeared as the Sandman/*Hansel and Gretel* and in scenes from *Carmen*, *Werther*, *La Favorita*, and *Die Walküre*. Robles recently received a Gulf Coast Region Encouragement Award in the Metropolitan Opera's Laffont Competition. Following undergraduate studies at the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music, she earned her Master of Music degree from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, where she appeared as Olga/*Eugene Onegin*. Camille Robles is sponsored by **Heidi Heutel Bohn**.



GABRIELLA REYES NEDDA

Previously at Lyric: Musetta/*La Bohème*
(2024/25) and Rosalba/*Florecia en el Amazonas* (2021/22).

The Nicaraguan-American soprano returns to the Metropolitan Opera this season to make a role debut as Catrina in a new production of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* with Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium. She will also make house and role debuts at the Los Angeles Opera as Maria in *West Side Story* and at Opera North as Contessa in a new production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Last season, Reyes returned to the Met to perform the roles of Margarita Xirgu in a new production of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*, and both Mimi and Musetta in Franco Zeffirelli's classic *La Bohème*. She also made her role debut as Violetta in *La traviata* with Palm Beach Opera. Other recent highlights include her recital debut at Carnegie Hall with pianist Andrés Sarre for the series "Nuestros sonidos: Celebrating Latin Culture in the US," before appearing in concert with the Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center for Golijov's *Three*

Songs for Soprano and Orchestra and Britten's *Les Illuminations* with Karen Kamensek. Also at the Metropolitan Opera, she sang the roles of Rosalba in a new production of *Florecia en el Amazonas*, as well as Liù in *Turandot*. She also made her role debut as Nedda in *Pagliacci* with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and revisited the role of Mimi in *La Bohème* with the Atlanta Opera.



RUSSELL THOMAS CANIO

Previously at Lyric: Seven roles since 2016/17, most recently Florestan/*Fidelio* (2024/25) and Radamès/*Aida* (2023/24).

This season the tenor returns to the Opéra National de Paris as Don José in *Carmen* and to the Canadian Opera Company for a role debut as Massenet's *Werther*. In concert he will appear in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Milwaukee Symphony and in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Baltimore Symphony. Future engagements include returns to the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Ballet & Opera, and the Washington National Opera, as well as to the Philadelphia Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra. Last season, Thomas returned to the Metropolitan Opera for his first Kaiser in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and to the Houston Grand Opera for his first *Tannhäuser*. In concert he sang his first Enée in *Les Troyens à Carthage* at the Seattle Opera, and appeared as Don José in *Carmen* for the Detroit Symphony and as Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* for the Canadian Opera Company. Further concert and recital appearances included Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the San Francisco Opera, Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* with the BBC Proms and a solo recital at La Sierra University. In Lyric's 2022/23 Season, he sang the title role in *Ernani*.



LUKE SUTLIFF SILVIO

Lyric debut

The American baritone, a top prize winner of the Metropolitan Opera's 2025 Laffont Competition and Second Prize winner of the 2023 Operalia Competition, is an alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. This season, he debuts at the Teatro Municipal in Santiago de Chile as Albert in *Werther* and at the Canadian Opera Company in his signature role of Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. He will return to the Atlanta Opera in a role debut as the Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In concert, he will debut with the Dallas Symphony as the baritone soloist in Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Fabio Luisi and in a New Year's Eve concert of Opera Pops in Toronto. He will also be heard in a joint recital with soprano Caitlin Aloia in their hometown of Houston. Future engagements include debuts with the Metropolitan Opera, the Glyndebourne Festival, and the Opéra de Lausanne, and returns to the Atlanta Opera and Seattle Opera. Last season Sutliff returned to the Atlanta Opera for two role debuts, Marcello in *La Bohème* and Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, and to the Houston Grand Opera for his first Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*. He also appeared as Marcello in *La Bohème* with Opera Maine. In the summer of 2024 he returned to Santa Fe Opera to perform Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*.



DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL BEPPE

Previously at Lyric: Don Curzio/*Le nozze di Figaro* and Jacquino/*Fidelio* (both 2024/25).

A second-year Ryan Opera Center member, the Cuban-Dominican tenor from Sarasota was a national winner of the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, received a 2025 Sara Tucker Study Grant, and was in residence at the 2025 Aix-en-Provence Festival Académie and Ravinia Festival's Steans Institute. This season at Lyric Espinal will also appear in *Salome* and *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Espinal continued his studies at Yale University, where he received a Master of Musical Arts degree. His roles there included Tom Rakewell/*The Rake's Progress*, Rinuccio/*Gianni Schicchi*, and Male Chorus/*The Rape of Lucretia*. The tenor has previously participated in San Francisco's Merola Opera Program for two summers, where he sang the Duke/*Rigoletto*, David/*Die Meistersinger*, and Arcadio/*Florencia en el Amazonas*. His repertoire also includes Alfredo/*La traviata* and Tamino/*Die Zauberflöte*. *Daniel Luis Espinal is sponsored by Lead Sponsor the J. Thomas Hurvis Endowment, in loving memory of Dick Kiphart and cosponsors Fred & Phoebe Boelter and Margo & Michael Oberman & Family.*



UNITING VOICES CHICAGO

Previously at Lyric: 16 productions since 2000/01, most recently *Carmen* and *Proximity* (both 2022/23).

Uniting Voices Chicago (Josephine Lee, president and artistic director), formerly Chicago Children's Choir, is the nation's preeminent youth choral organization, serving 5,200 students across the city of Chicago. Founded in Hyde Park in direct response to the Civil Rights Movement in 1956, Uniting Voices has grown from one choir into a vast network of in-school and after-school programs driven by one mission: to inspire and change lives through music. Uniting Voices has impacted the lives of more than 100,000 diverse youth throughout its 68-year history. Since its founding, Uniting Voices has focused on building programs that reflect the racial and economic diversity of Chicago. Eighty percent of youth served are from low-moderate income homes, with 100 percent of nearly 4,000 students annually participating at a subsidized cost. High school seniors enrolled in Uniting Voices have a 100% graduation rate, becoming global ambassadors who carry on UVC's core values in a wide array of professional fields.



ENRIQUE MAZZOLA CONDUCTOR

Lyric's Music Director — the third in the company's history — is internationally renowned as an interpreter and champion of *bel canto* opera and as a specialist in French repertoire and the works of Verdi. Mazzola's recently completed tenure as Principal Guest Conductor at Deutsche Oper Berlin included recordings of *Dinorah* and *Herodiade* and performances of *Le prophète*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Werther*, *Falstaff*, *Vepres Siciliennes*, and *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. He served as Conductor in Residence for the Bregenz Festival from 2021 to 2024, where he conducted a new production of *Rigoletto* and recorded DVDs of *Rigoletto*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Freischütz*, *Ernani*, and *Mosè in Egitto*. He served as Artistic and Music Director of the Orchestre National d'Île de France from 2012 to 2019, and in 2018 was named a Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Mazzola made his debut at Lyric with *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2016/17, and conducted Bellini's *I puritani* in 2017/18. During 2019/20, he led Verdi's *Luisa Miller* to launch the company's Early Verdi Series and, in his first performances as Music Director, opened Lyric's 2021/22 season with Sir David McVicar's new production of *Macbeth*. An accomplished interpreter of contemporary music, Mazzola recently conducted Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's *The Listeners* (2024/25) and Terence Blanchard's *Champion* (2022/23) at Lyric. He has conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the major houses of Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Zurich, Moscow, and Tokyo, as well as a historic Meyerbeer cycle with Deutsche Oper Berlin. Past major European festivals have included Glyndebourne (including DVD releases of *Don Pasquale*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *Poliuto*), Salzburg (*Orphée aux Enfers*), Pesaro (Rossini Opera Festival), Venice, Aix-en-Provence, and Bregenz. Symphonic highlights include the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Vienna Symphony, London Philharmonic, and Brussels Philharmonic. Mazzola was born in Barcelona, Spain, into a musical family, and grew up in Milan, where he studied violin and piano, earning diplomas in composition and orchestral conducting at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi of Milan. *Enrique Mazzola is supported by the John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols Endowed Chair.*

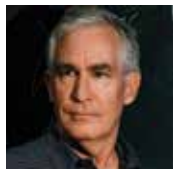


ELIJAH MOSHINSKY ORIGINAL DIRECTOR

Previously at Lyric: 12 productions since 1985, most recently *Simon Boccanegra* (2012/13) and *Lohengrin* (2010/11).

The renowned Australian opera, theater, and television director had numerous successes around the world, including with The Metropolitan Opera (*The Queen of Spades*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Luisa Miller*, *Nabucco*), Houston Grand Opera (*Béatrice et Bénédict*, *Cavalleria rusticana* & *Pagliacci*), and San Francisco Opera (*Simon Boccanegra*), and many other companies. Moshinsky, who died in 2021, made his debut at Lyric in the 1985/86 Season with Handel's

Samson. His numerous credits at the Royal Ballet & Opera include *Lohengrin*, *Il trovatore*, and *Peter Grimes*, the latter two released on DVD. Other highlights include productions at the Mariinsky Theater, the Vienna Staatsoper, Welsh National Opera, Opera Australia, and State Opera of South Australia. His work encompassed *The Turn of the Screw* at Wilton Opera House, London's oldest music hall; *Shadowlands* on Broadway; five Shakespeare plays for the BBC; The Royal Shakespeare Company's productions of *Richard III* and *Lord of the Flies*; and *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Three Sisters*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and several other productions seen in London's West End.



PETER McCLINTOCK **REVIVAL DIRECTOR**

Previously at Lyric: Three productions since 1996, most recently *Capriccio* (2014/15) and *Mefistofele* (1998/99).

As Staff Stage Director with the Metropolitan Opera for more than 30 years, McClintock has participated in over 70 productions during his tenure. In recent seasons, he has directed revivals of *Queen of Spades*, *Elektra*, and *La Clemenza di Tito*. At Lyric he also directed the Emmy-award winning film of *Pagliacci* (2021) and *Turandot* (1996/97). He has directed for Teatro alla Scala, Staatsoper Berlin, Liceu Opera Barcelona, Opéra de Paris, Canadian Opera Company, Rome Opera, Matsumoto Festival, Finnish National Opera, the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, Mariinsky Theater, Washington National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Vancouver Opera. McClintock also serves as a dramatic coach for the Ryan Opera Center, as well as for young artist programs at the Metropolitan Opera, the San Francisco Opera, and the Washington National Opera.



MICHAEL YEARGAN **SET & COSTUME DESIGNER**

Previously at Lyric: 12 productions since 1991/92, most recently *Aida* (2023/24) and *Le Comte Ory* (2022/23).

Yeargan has created sets (and sometimes costumes) for many major American companies, among them the Metropolitan Opera (12 productions to date, including a recent *Rigoletto*, in a co-production with the Berlin State Opera), and the San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, Seattle, and Washington opera companies, as well as The Glimmerglass Festival, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera, Frankfurt Opera, and Opera Australia. At Lyric, he designed *Rigoletto* (2017/18), *Romeo and Juliet* and *Nabucco* (both 2015/16), and *The Sound of Music* (2013/14). Since 1990/91 he has designed for London's Royal Ballet & Opera. Yeargan recently designed the Metropolitan Opera's new *Porgy and Bess*, and his work appeared also at the Berlin State Opera (*Rigoletto*) and Tulsa Opera (*Madama Butterfly*). He has designed many Broadway productions, winning Tony Awards for *The Light in the Piazza* (2005) and *South Pacific* (2008). Yeargan has also designed numerous productions off Broadway and for regional

U.S. theaters. He is resident set designer at the Yale Repertory Theatre. *Costume Designers are supported by the Richard P. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer endowment.*



DUANE SCHULER **LIGHTING DESIGNER**

Previously at Lyric: Previously at Lyric: More than 200 productions since 1977, most recently *La Bohème* and *Rigoletto* (both 2024/25).

Lyric's former resident lighting designer has recently created lighting for Opera Australia (*Cendrillon*), the Santa Fe Opera (*The Marriage of Figaro*, *La Bohème*), and LA Opera (*Romeo and Juliet*). Other operatic highlights have included works as diverse as *Turandot* (La Scala), *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *La Rondine* (Metropolitan Opera, where he has designed more than 25 productions), *La fanciulla del West* (Opéra national de Paris), *Elektra*, *Benvenuto Cellini* (Salzburg Festival), *Fidelio* (Royal Opera House), *Béatrice et Bénédict* (Glyndebourne Festival Opera), *The Bassarids* (Dutch National Theatre in Amsterdam), and *Lohengrin* (Festspielhaus Baden-Baden). Ballet credits include *Swan Lake*, *Of Love and Rage*, *The Snow Maiden* (American Ballet Theatre), *The Sleeping Beauty* (Stuttgart Ballet), *Giselle* (Deutsche Ballet), and *The Nutcracker* (Houston Ballet). Theater credits include *House and Garden* (Manhattan Theatre Club) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Broadway). Schuler is a founding partner of Schuler Shook, a Lighting Design/Theatre Planning /Audio Video design firm. *Lighting designers are supported by the Mary-Louise and James S. Aagaard endowment in honor of Duane Schuler.*



MICHAEL BLACK **CHORUS DIRECTOR**

The Australian chorus director joined Lyric full time in the 2012/13 Season, after having served as interim director the season before.

He was named Head of Music at Lyric, a new position, in the 2023/24 Season. Black was Chorus Director at Opera Australia in Sydney from 2001 to 2013, and has worked in this capacity for such distinguished organizations as the Edinburgh International Festival and Opera Holland Park (London), and, in Australia, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Choir, Motet Choir, the Cantillation chamber choir, and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In Chicago, Black became the first chorus director to work with the choruses of Lyric, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Grant Park Music Festival, where he served for six seasons, including preparation of *The Damnation of Faust* chorus and Haydn's *Creation*. Last summer, he worked with the Young Artists at Opera Australia and the apprentice singers at the Santa Fe Opera, and he has lectured or given masterclasses at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University. Black has served as chorus director for close to 140 different operas on four continents, and his work has been recorded and/or aired on ABC, BBC, PBS, for many HD productions in movie theaters, and on television. *Michael Black is supported by the Howard A. Stotler Chorus Director Endowed Chair.*



JOSEPHINE LEE
CHILDREN'S CHORUS DIRECTOR

Previously at Lyric: 16 productions since 2000/01, most recently *Carmen* and *Proximity* (both 2022/23).

Lee is President of Uniting Voices Chicago (formerly Chicago Children's Choir), a nonprofit organization that empowers nearly 4,000 diverse youth annually to find their voice and celebrate their common humanity through the power of music. Her efforts have established Uniting Voices Chicago as one of the city's premier civic and cultural institutions, and its ensembles regularly join Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, among other ensembles. Lee has led Uniting Voices Chicago singers in performances of *Carmina Burana* with Choral Arts Society at the Kennedy Center; recordings of James Lee III's *Pitch In* with Pacifica Quartet and Stacy Garrop's *Terra Nostra* with Cedille Records; with Colombian pop star Karol G on *Saturday Night Live* and at Lollapalooza (2023); and on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* (2021); PBS *Great Performances* national broadcast of Bernstein's *Mass* with Ravinia Festival (2020); with Bobby McFerrin & The SpiritYouAll Band at Ravinia Festival (2019); and recordings of Chance the Rapper's debut studio album *The Big Day* (2019) and Grammy Award-winning *Coloring Book* (2016); and performed with numerous renowned artists including Yo Yo Ma, Luciano Pavarotti, Solange, Al Green, Eddie Vedder, Wyclef Jean, Buddy Guy, the Eagles, Andrea Bocelli, and more. Lee received an Emmy award for *Songs on the Road to Freedom* (2008) and was nominated for a Grammy award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance. Lee has conducted the National Philharmonic at Strathmore, Choral Arts Symphonic Chorus and Orchestra at the Kennedy Center, Chicago Sinfonietta, Oregon Symphony, Grant Park Orchestra, Sphinx Virtuosi, Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra, and Portland Youth Symphony Orchestra.



JOHN METZNER
WIG & MAKEUP DESIGNER

The versatile designer first joined the staff of Lyric for the 2022/23 Season. He has previously collaborated with Chicago

Shakespeare Theater, Lookingglass Theatre, and Court Theatre. He served for nine years as Head of Wig and Makeup for Webster University's Conservatory of Theatre Arts, and designed hair and makeup for more than 50 performances at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. Other regional credits include work at The Muny, Great River Shakespeare Festival, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where he designed for *The Pirates of Penzance*, among many other productions. His advanced training includes wig styling at the Wig Room Training Academy and London School of Wig Making. *John Metzner is supported by The Marlys A. Beider Wigmaster and Makeup Designer Endowed Chair.* 

A man with a shaved head and red-rimmed glasses, wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit, white shirt, and red patterned tie. He is holding a baton in his right hand and looking upwards and to the right. The background is a blurred stage with warm lights.

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Carmina Burana

Nov. 14, 16, 18

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Photo: John Shaw/Lyric Opera of Chicago

Billy Corgan

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Photo: John Shaw/Lyric Opera of Chicago

Orchestra & Chorus

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Alyce Johnson

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Judith Zunamon Lewis

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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.

* On leave, 2025/26 Season

** Season Substitute

[^] Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency

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Todd Rosenberg

Lyric

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A photograph of a stage performance from the Lyric Opera of Chicago. In the foreground, several performers in elaborate 17th-century period costumes are seated at a long table. The table is set with ornate silverware, glassware, and a centerpiece of fruit and lit candles. One performer, a man in a red and gold patterned suit with a green cape, stands on the right, holding a small red flower and looking upwards with an expressive face. Behind him, another man in a silver and blue costume looks on. To the left, a woman in a pink and gold dress and a man in a grey and red costume are also looking towards the standing performer. In the background, a large, classical-style mural depicts a dramatic scene with a woman's face and outstretched arm, and a man's face below it. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and artistic inspiration.

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Photo: Todd Rosenberg/Lyric Opera of Chicago

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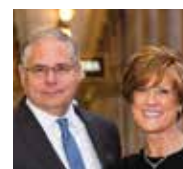
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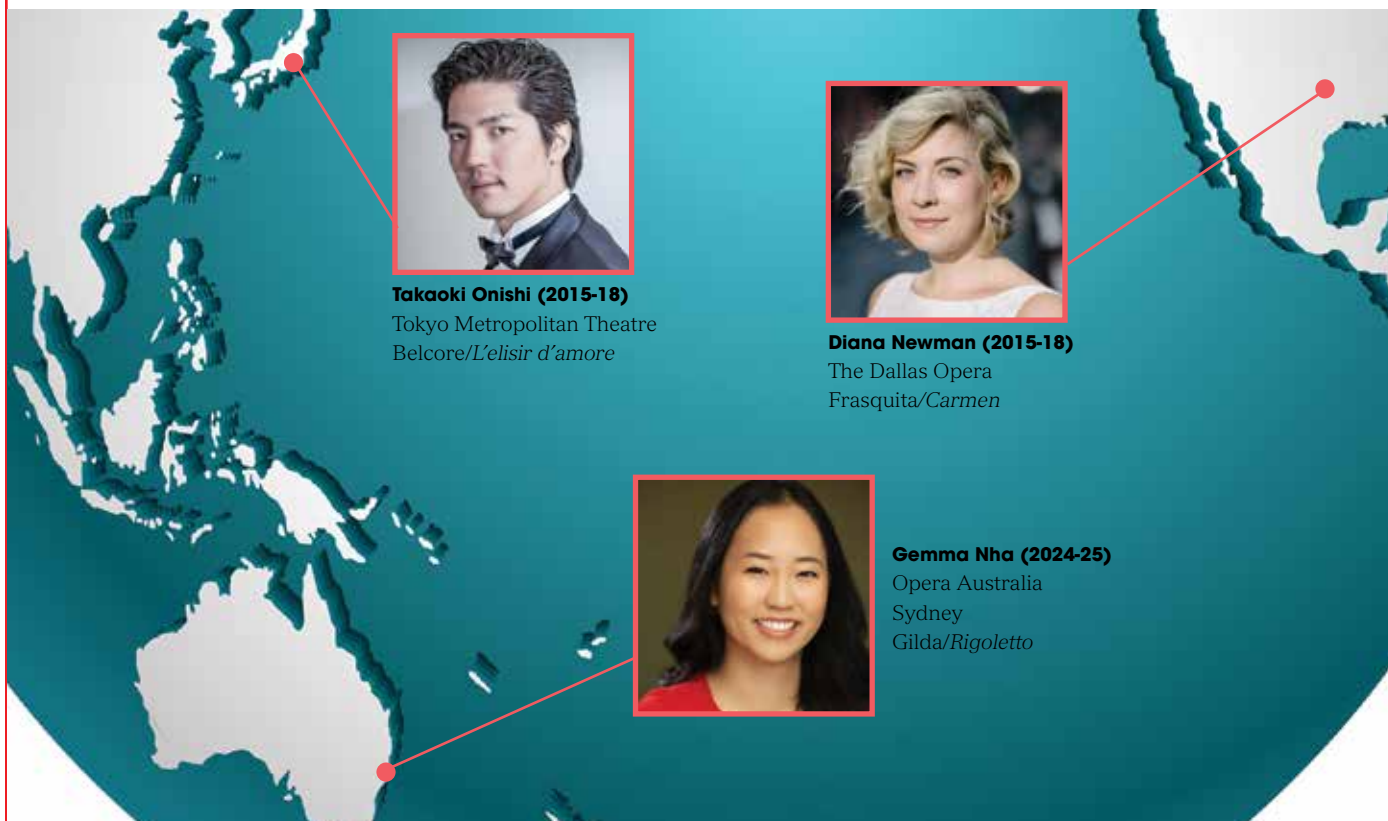
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Lyric

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Beyond the stage, and beyond the boundaries that often define opera companies, Lyric is igniting creativity across Chicago. Through innovative learning opportunities, creative exploration, and artist and scholar residencies, Lyric, with your support, encourages students, educators, families, audiences, and Chicagoans from neighborhoods across the city to share their voices and embrace the power of opera as a catalyst for growth and change.



Chorus Director and Head of Music Michael Black joined the assembled choir onstage at Lyric.

Lyric

Lyric Unlimited: Learning and Civic Engagement

Students take the stage

Lyric Opera of Chicago's inaugural Choral Fest welcomed students to the opera house for a day of musical education and collaboration.

By Janie Ragsdale

"When we open our doors and students fill the Grand Foyer with vibrant energy, they show us that this isn't just an opera house — it's *their* opera house," shares Jill LeCesne Potter, Senior Director of Learning Programs for Lyric Unlimited, reflecting on the inaugural Choral Fest hosted by Lyric Opera of Chicago during the 2024/25 Season.

Lyric's Choral Fest was created as an extension of the High School Choir Residency, a Lyric Unlimited program that supports vocal instruction and enrichment in Chicago Public School and Big Shoulders high school choir programs. The residency pairs classroom teachers with Lyric professional teaching artists to enrich students' learning through opera.

Lyric teaching artists work collaboratively with choir teachers to deliver student instruction and foster artistic growth through a variety of lessons tailored to fit the learning objectives of each class. Lessons can range from warmups, technique building activities, and sectional

work to master classes, demonstrations, and preparations for future auditions. In addition to musical support in the classroom, students are also given the opportunity to interact with experienced guest artists and even watch a final dress rehearsal at Lyric.

The High School Choir Residency has continued to grow over the years following its launch in the 2015/16 Season, building a supportive network for teachers, teaching artists, and students from schools across Chicago. The idea for Lyric's Choral Fest was born out of the network built by the program, developed in partnership with choir directors from partnering CPS high schools who expressed an interest in bringing their students together. The inaugural event ushered 120 students into the opera house, with one choir attending from each of the five participating CPS high schools, for a day centered around musical collaboration and education. Choral Fest provided students an inviting space to improve their musical skills,



Kyle Flubacker

The inaugural event proved so successful that it will expand this season.



Kyle Flubacker



Kyle Flubacker

More than 120 students from across the city rehearsed and performed in Lyric's professional spaces

learn about professional career paths in the arts, and build relationships with their peers from across the city.

Students were given a behind-the-scenes look at the world of professional opera as they came together in groups to participate in activities throughout the opera house. The day of opera education kicked off in Lyric's backstage rehearsal rooms, where choir directors from each school, in collaboration with their residency partner teaching artist, led sectionals with students from all five schools. In this session, students learned their vocal part for "O Love," a choral piece by Elaine Hagenberg, rehearsing in the same spaces used by professional opera singers.

For the next session, students broke into small groups to learn more about the professional paths they could take as they continue on their journeys in the performing arts. The career breakout session featured members of the Lyric staff from across the company, with students hearing from Costume Director Kim Buetzow and members of the wardrobe department, Assistant Technical Director Benji McCormack, and Chorus Director and Head of Music Michael Black, as well as members of the Lyric Opera Chorus. These sessions offered students valuable insight

into the different types of work that goes into bringing an opera to life, both onstage and behind the scenes.

After a break in the day to socialize with their peers from across the city and enjoy lunch in the beauty of Lyric's Grand Foyer, the students took the stage for a final performance. Choral Fest culminated with all 120 students coming together on the Lyric stage to unite their voices for a full ensemble rehearsal of "Oh Love" led by Michael Black. It was a proud, full circle moment for the High School Choir Residency students, who began by developing their choral skills in the classroom, visited Lyric as members of the audience, and were now performing on the very same stage.

"As they take the stage to rehearse and their voices rise together, there is a palpable shift in a student's confidence when they realize this is not just a place for someone else's art," Potter reflects on the experience. "They are not just rehearsing a piece of music together, but rehearsing a future where they know they belong in spaces like this, where their voices matter. The opera house becomes a launchpad, not just a landmark." 

People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



Kyle Flubacker

Shannan Moore Digital Marketing Associate

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When did you start at Lyric?

August 2021

First opera you saw live?

Macbeth, the 2021/22 Season opener — right after I got to Lyric! I vividly remember being in awe of the chorus.

Favorite opera?

I always say *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. It's contemporary — a real story, about a real person. I prefer works that place us in the now. And the music is really great; it's one of the only operas that I go back and listen to.

What was your path to Lyric?

I graduated from Columbia College Chicago in spring of 2020, with a degree in Contemporary, Urban, and Popular Music, right when the pandemic happened. Obviously, a lot of in-person gigs were canceled so I took a year to rethink what I wanted in life. I ended up getting a certificate as a social media specialist because that was something I was already doing with a friend's company right after lockdown started. And I realized it was something that I wanted to do longterm. By the summer of 2021, I was ready to start applying for digital marketing and social media jobs. Lyric was one of the few performing arts companies hiring in similar roles, so they had a lot of bonus points from me.

You studied voice. But you were also in school again when you started at Lyric.

I started my MA program in Critical Ethnic Studies at DePaul, right when I started working here, so I was doing the two at the same time. That took up a lot of my time outside of Lyric.

What does a typical week look like for you?

I do a lot of things across the digital space — mainly with social media and the website. I manage the Ryan Opera Center Facebook page and help with short form video content for TikTok and Instagram Reels on our main Lyric accounts. I also recently started managing our influencer program, which means inviting people to come see our shows and other events throughout the season. On the website side, I play a supporting role wherever I'm needed — updates for the Ryan Opera Center, cropping headshots, content edits on the main pages for our productions, and so on.

What is it like working with influencers?

I have cultivated relationships with them — not that we're the best of friends, but it's nice to have conversations with them about Lyric or what they're doing in the city. A lot of them are really into arts and culture in the city of Chicago, so that's always a point of connection. It's always great to see their responses to Lyric, especially those who haven't seen opera before we invite them.

What would surprise people about your role?

It's always interesting meeting world-renowned artists who are well-traveled and know their craft very well! During the season, I help a lot with artist interviews and am often in rehearsals and backstage for social media content. When I was at a Millennium Park film series a few weeks ago, they had a feature about a very young [the creator of *safronia*, a Lyric commission premiering this spring] before the movie started. And I immediately thought "Hey, that's Chicago's poet laureate!" I saw one of the *safronia* workshops.

What else do you do in your spare time?

If I am not listening to music or working, I'm more than likely reading. I'm a co-lead for Lyric Page Turners, our staff book club. And I love live concerts — my favorite performer so far is Beyoncé. She's fantastic. 