

# Lyric

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#LyricKing

## Broadway artists Ali Ewoldt, Alan Ariano and Rona Figueroa join cast of Lyric Opera's grand-scale production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*

Chicagoland artists also announced for principal roles

April 29 – May 22, 2016



THE  
KING  
AND I

CHICAGO – Lyric Opera of Chicago announced today casting for the remaining principal roles in its grand-scale production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, featuring Broadway stars **Kate Baldwin** and **Paolo Montalban** as Anna Leonowens and the King of Siam. Additional Broadway artists **Ali Ewoldt** (Tuptim), **Alan Ariano** (The Kralahome) and **Rona Figueroa** (Lady Thiang) join the cast, along with **Sam Simahk** (Lun Tha) and Chicagoland artists **Charlie Babbo** (Louis Leonowens), **Jomar Ferreras** (Interpreter), **John Lister** (Captain Orton), **David Parkes** (Sir Edward Ramsay), **Peter Sipla** (Phra Alack) and **Matthew Uzarraga** (Prince Chulalongkorn). All but Lister make their Lyric debuts with *The King and I*.

Lyric Opera's ***The King and I*** runs April 29 through May 22 (press opening April 30) at the Civic Opera House, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago. Tickets start at \$29 and are available now at [lyricopera.org/king](http://lyricopera.org/king) or at 312-827-5600.

"We are delighted to have so many accomplished artists from Chicago and around the country making their Lyric debuts in this beautiful production," says Lyric's general director **Anthony Freud**. "The full cast, chorus, and orchestra will collaborate marvelously in creating an exceptional experience for our audience."

*The King and I* is the fourth Rodgers and Hammerstein musical to be presented as part of Lyric's American Musical Initiative. **Lee Blakeley**, who staged the production's 2014 premiere at Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, makes his Lyric debut teaming up with distinguished Broadway conductor **David Chase**, who conducted Lyric's acclaimed *Carousel* last season. The creative team also includes choreographer **Peggy Hickey** (*A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*), costume designer **Sue Blane** and scenic designer **Jean-Marc Puissant**.

**Alan Ariano** (The Kralahome) makes his Lyric debut, marking his tenth production of *The King and I*, having played the King three times and the Kralahome six times. Broadway credits: *The King and I* (Lincoln Center Theater revival), *M. Butterfly*, *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, *Shogun: The Musical* and *Miss Saigon* (original company member). National tour credit: *Flower Drum Song*. Off-Broadway credits: *Shanghai Moon* (opposite Charles Bush) and Pan Asian Rep's *Imelda*, *A New Musical*. World premieres include The Geffen Playhouse's *Extraordinary Chambers*, The Portland Center Stage's *Show Falling on Cedars*, Prospect Theater's *Honor* and Diverse City Theatre's *The Encounter*. Regional theaters include The Kennedy Center, The MUNY, Segerstrom Center, Dallas Summer Musicals, Walnut Street Theatre, Pioneer Theater, The Fifth Ave, TUTS Houston, Music Theatre of Wichita, San Diego CLO and Weston Playhouse. Television credits include: *Harry's Law*, *Leverage*, *Law & Order*, *As The World Turns*, *One Life Left to Live*, *Parco, P.I.*, *Saturday Night Live* and guest-starring opposite Isabella Rossellini on HBO's *Treme* as Annie's parents.

**Charlie Babbo** (Louis Leonowens) makes his Lyric debut. Theater credits: *Mary Poppins* (Paramount Theatre); *Les Misérables*, *A Christmas Carol* (Drury Lane); *Treasure Island* (Lookingglass Theatre); *A Christmas Story: The Musical* (National Tour, Off-Broadway); *A Walk on the Moon* (Broadway workshop, dir. Michael Grief); and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater workshop). Television/film credits: *Chicago Fire*, *Season 2* (recurring; NBC); *Finding Santa* (TLC); *The Onion*; and upcoming feature film *American Fable*.

**Ali Ewoldt** (Tuptim) makes her Lyric debut, taking a hiatus from the Broadway revival of *The King and I* at Lincoln Center. She made her Broadway debut as Cosette in the first Broadway revival of *Les Misérables*, starred as Maria in the first national tour of *West Side Story* directed by Arthur Laurents and David Saint (including at the Cadillac Palace Theater) and played Luisa in the *The Fantasticks* Off-Broadway, the world's longest running musical. Other credits include: *Carnival* (Musicals Tonight Off-Broadway, Lili), *Les Misérables* (third national tour, Cosette), *West Side Story* (international tour, PCLO, MUNY; Maria), Tennessee Williams' *Period*

of *Adjustment* (W.H.A.T.; Isabel) and concerts at Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall and The Town Hall. TV/Film credits include: *The Michael J. Fox Show*, *Yield* and *DRAMA: The Webseries*.

**Jomar Ferreras** (Interpreter) makes his Lyric debut. Chicago credits include: *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Theo Ubique), *South Pacific* (Light Opera Works), *A Christmas Carol* (Quest Ensemble Theatre), *The Guide to Being Single* (Underscore Theatre). Regional: *Disney's Believe* (DCL), *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* (Crossroads Repertory Theatre), *Mixed Signals* (Duplex NYC).

**Rona Figueroa** (Lady Thiang) makes her Lyric debut with her first production of *The King and I*, returning to Chicago where she made her professional debut as an actor in the ensemble of *Miss Saigon*, first national tour. Figueroa has also appeared in Chicago in the third national tour of *Les Miserables* in the role of Eponine. Broadway: *Miss Saigon*, Kim; *Les Miserables*, Eponine; *Nine (Revival)* Juliette & Carla u/s; *Lennon*; *Les Miserables Revival*, Fantine u/s. Regional: *Rent*, Mimi; *Boys From Syracuse*, Luciana; *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Mary Magdalene; *We Will Rock You*. Film/TV: *Dragonheart*, *A New Beginning*, *Slow Jam King*, *Mysteries of Laura*, *Eye Candy*, *Gossip Girl*, *Royal Pains*.

**John Lister** (Captain Orton) returns to Lyric for his third production, having previously appeared in *Show Boat* and *Porgy and Bess* both under the direction of Francesca Zambello. His Chicago theater credits include numerous productions with: Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Steppenwolf, Writers Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Remy Bumppo, Eclipse, CollaborAction, Theatre at the Center and Marriott Lincolnshire. Regional credits include productions with: American Players Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Peninsula Players, Notre Dame Summer Shakespeare and The International Mystery Writers' Festival (under the direction of the late Brian Bedford). He received his Bachelor's degree in performance from Ball State University and his Master of Fine Arts degree in acting from Michigan State University. Film and television credits include: *Public Enemies* (Universal), *Animals* (Oscilloscope), *The JAMZ* (NYTVF), *Prison Break* (FOX), *The Beast* (A&E), *The Secret Santa* (TLC) and *Chicago Fire* (NBC).

**David Parkes** (Sir Edward Ramsay) makes his Lyric debut. As a company member of TimeLine Theatre his work includes the roles of Martin Heidegger in *Hannah and Martin* (After Dark Award), John Proctor in *The Crucible* (After Dark Award), Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, Richard Apple in *The Apple Plays*, John Honeyman in *A Walk in the Woods*, Henry II in *The Lion in Winter*, Moe Axlerod in *Awake and Sing* and Warden Whalen in the Chicago premiere of Tennessee Williams' *Not About Nightingales* (Joseph Jefferson citation). Additional Chicago credits: Steppenwolf's production of Tennessee Williams' *One Arm* (dir. Moises Kaufman); and productions with American Theater Company, Apple Tree, Eclipse, Footsteps, Greasy Joan, House, Northlight, Streetsigns, and the Piven Theatre Workshop. Parkes's recent television credits include *Chicago Med*, *Chicago Fire*, *The Beast*, *The Chicago Code* and *Boss*. He is a graduate of New York University's BFA program in conjunction with the Lee Strasberg Institute, and Florida State University's MFA program with the Asolo Conservatory.

**Sam Simahk** (Lun Tha) makes his Lyric debut, returning to Siam after a few years away. Previous credits include: Huntington Theatre Company (*A Little Night Music*), Lyric Stage Company of

Boston (*Sondheim on Sondheim*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, and *Spelling Bee*), Speakeasy Stage Company (*Big Fish*), Starlight Theatre (*Miss Saigon*), Ocean State Theatre (*The King and I*), Ogunquit Playhouse (*Miss Saigon*), Seacoast Repertory Theatre (*Grease!*), and Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre (*Carousel*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*). Born and raised in Ashburnham MA, Simahk is a graduate of Emerson College, resident of New York City, and member of AEA.

**Peter Sipla** (Phra Alack) makes his Lyric debut. He was most recently seen as Sonny in Marriott Theatre's *City of Angels*. Prior to this, Peter spent nine months traveling the Caribbean, being friends with the Genie in *Disney's Aladdin* in The Walt Disney Theatre on the Disney Fantasy. Chicago area credits include: *Miss Saigon* (Paramount Theatre); *Juno, Blood and Gifts* (TimeLine Theatre); *Maple and Vine* (Next Theatre); *Travels with my Aunt* (Writers' Theatre), *Year Zero* (Victory Gardens Theater); *Passion* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Elephant's Graveyard* (Red Tape Theatre); *Company* (Brightside Theatre); and work with Theatre Wit, First Folio Theatre, Fox Valley Rep, Porchlight Music Theatre, Collaboraction, Steel Beam Theatre and regionally at Cardinal Stage Company. Sipla's voiceovers can be heard in numerous commercials on national television, radio and online. He is a North Central College alumnus.

**Matthew Uzarraga** (Prince Chulalongkorn) makes his Lyric debut. He was most recently seen as Schwartz in *A Christmas Story the Musical* at Paramount Theatre. Other Chicago area credits: *The King and I* (Prince Chulalongkorn) at Marriott Theatre; *Disney's The Little Mermaid* (Flounder) and *Shrek the Musical* (Young Shrek/Baby Bear) at Chicago Shakespeare Theater; *Les Miserables* (Gavroche) and *Oliver!* (Workhouse Boy/Fagin's Gang) at Drury Lane Oakbrook; and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (Children's Chorus) and *Miss Saigon* (Tam u/s) at Paramount Theatre. Commercial and industrial credits include Accenture, Toys R Us, Shout, Incredible Islands and Cap Gun Collective. Voiceover credits: Toys R Us and Dish Network, and the forthcoming star-studded cast of the animated short film *Moose*.

The Lyric premiere of *The King and I* is generously made possible by **The Negaunee Foundation**, two **Anonymous Donors**, **Robert S. and Susan E. Morrison**, and **Northern Trust**.

#### **About Lyric**

Lyric Opera of Chicago's mission is to express and promote the life-changing, transformational, revelatory power of great opera. Lyric exists to provide a broad, deep, and relevant cultural service to Chicago and the nation, and to advance the development of the art form.

Founded in 1954, Lyric is dedicated to producing and performing consistently thrilling, entertaining, and thought-provoking opera with a balanced repertoire of core classics, lesser-known masterpieces, and new works; to creating an innovative and wide-ranging program of community engagement and educational activities; and to developing exceptional emerging operatic talent.

Under the leadership of general director Anthony Freud, music director Sir Andrew Davis, and creative consultant Renée Fleming, Lyric strives to become The Great North American Opera Company for the 21st century: a globally significant arts organization embodying the core values of excellence, relevance, and fiscal responsibility. Visit [www.lyricopera.org](http://www.lyricopera.org) for more information.

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