

*Lyric*

THE PATRICK G.  
AND SHIRLEY W.  
RYAN OPERA  
CENTER



# Rising Stars in Concert

# Rising Stars in Concert

**Saturday, April 25, 2026, 7:30 p.m.**

The 2025/26 Ensemble of  
The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago

Enrique Mazzola, *conductor*

Members of the Lyric Opera Orchestra

Kyle Lang, *director*

*Rising Stars in Concert* is generously made possible by **Lead Sponsor** the **Donna Van Eekeren Foundation**, with additional support from the **Dr. Scholl Foundation, Penelope R. Steiner**, the **Thierer Family Foundation, Dr. Nora Jaskowiak and Mr. Matthew Hinerfeld**, and **Phyllis Neiman**.

Maestro Enrique Mazzola is generously sponsored by **Alice & John Butler, H. Gael Neeson, Sylvia Neil & Daniel Fischel**, the **Robert and Penelope Steiner Family Foundation, Mary Stowell**, and the **Zell Family Foundation** as members of the Enrique Circle.

*Rising Stars in Concert* is being recorded for broadcast on 98.7 WFMT and streaming on wfmt.com on Sunday, May 17, at 5 p.m. The *Rising Stars in Concert* radio broadcast is generously made possible by the **Donna Van Eekeren Foundation**.

# Program

## PART ONE

Gaetano Donizetti  
(1797–1848)

From *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali*  
or, *Viva la mamma*

Preludio

N. 1 Introduzione

FINN SAGAL (Maestro)  
EMILY RICHTER (Prima Donna)  
ADIA EVANS (Luigia)  
CAMILLE ROBLES (Musico)  
DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL (Tenore)  
SANKARA HAROUNA (Procolo)  
BENJAMIN R. SOKOL (Poeta)  
SIHAO HU (Impresario)

N. 2 Cavatina  
"Lazzarune, scauzacane"

CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata)  
FINN SAGAL (Maestro)

N. 3 Duetto  
"Ch'io canti un duetto?"

EMILY RICHTER (Prima Donna)  
CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata)

N. 4 Terzetto  
"Per me non trovo calma"

DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL (Tenore)  
FINN SAGAL (Maestro)  
CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata)

N. 5 Sestetto  
"Livorno, dieci aprile"

CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata)  
ADIA EVANS (Luigia)  
BENJAMIN R. SOKOL (Poeta)  
FINN SAGAL (Maestro)  
SANKARA HAROUNA (Procolo)  
EMILY RICHTER (Prima Donna)  
ALEXIS PEART (Direttore)

## INTERMISSION

## PART TWO

Donizetti

From *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali*  
or, *Viva la mamma*

Larghetto & N. 6 Romanza  
"Assisa a piè d'un sacco"

CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata)  
FINN SAGAL (Maestro)

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)	"Nacqui all'affanno...Non più mesta" from <i>La Cenerentola</i>	ALEXIS PEART (Angelina) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor) MARINETTE GOMEZ (Director)
Donizetti	"Decio, Signor del mondo...Di tua beltade immagine" from <i>Poliuto</i>	SIHAO HU (Severo) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor) MARINETTE GOMEZ (Director)
Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835)	"Se Romeo t'uccise un figlio" from <i>I Capuleti e i Montecchi</i>	CAMILLE ROBLES (Romeo) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Rossini	"La calunnia" from <i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>	BENJAMIN R. SOKOL (Don Basilio) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Donizetti	"Son cifre di Riccardo...Bella e di sol vestita" from <i>Maria di Rohan</i>	SANKARA HAROUNA (Enrico) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Rossini	"Principe più non sei... Sì, ritrovarla io giuro" from <i>La Cenerentola</i>	TRAVON D. WALKER (Ramiro) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)	"Pace, pace, mio Dio" from <i>La forza del destino</i>	ADIA EVANS (Leonora) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Nikolai Kapustin (1937–2020)	Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano, Op. 86, Movement III, <i>Allegro giocoso</i>	MICHAEL BANWARTH (Piano) MARIE TACHOUET (Flute) MARK BRANDFONBRENER (Cello)
Donizetti	From <i>Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali</i> or, <i>Viva la mamma</i>	
	N. 9 Finale "Ch'è successo?"	EMILY RICHTER (Prima Donna) ADIA EVANS (Luigia) CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Agata) SANKARA HAROUNA (Procolo) FINN SAGAL (Maestro) BENJAMIN R. SOKOL (Poeta) SIHAO HU (Impresario) ALEXIS PEART, CAMILLE ROBLES DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL & TRAVON D. WALKER (Chorus)

Lighting Designer: **Chris Maravich**

Assistant Director: Ryan Opera Center Stage Director **Marinette Gomez**

Stage Management: **Daniel Sokalski, Alaina Barikowiak**, Ryan Opera Center Stage Manager **Gemma DeCetra**

Musical and Language Preparation: **Michael Banwarth, William C. Billingham, Julia Faulkner, Myungseo Kim, Jerad Mosbey, Hugh Russell, Craig Terry**  
Hair, Makeup, and Wardrobe: **Necole E. Bluhm, Eric Daniels, Wendy McCay, Jessica Scheithe, Roger Weir**

Projected Titles Translation and Design by: **Dyan Yoder**

Cover Photo: **Kyle Flubacker**

*Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* critical edition edited by R. Parker and A. Wiklund with the collaboration of the Municipality of Bergamo and the Donizetti Theater Foundation of Bergamo Casa Ricordi, Milan.

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# Artist profiles



## 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 *Hérodiade* and performances of *Le prophète*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Werther*, *Falstaff*, *Les vêpres 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, and Aix-en-Provence. *Enrique Mazzola is supported by the John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols Endowed Chair.*



## KYLE LANG DIRECTOR

### Lyric debut

Recent directing credits include *Intelligence* with Virginia Opera; *La traviata* with San Diego Opera; *Carmen* with Florentine Opera; *Hansel and Gretel* with Utah Opera; *Carmen* with Virginia Opera; *Don Giovanni* with San Diego Opera and Virginia Opera; *Turandot* with Teatro Petruzzelli di Bari; *La Bohème* with Hawaii Opera Theatre; *The Pirates of Penzance* with Charlottesville Opera and Central City Opera; *The Puccini Duo*, *Carmen*, and *As One* with San Diego Opera; *Becoming Santa Claus* with Chicago Opera Theater; *Die Zauberflöte* with The Dallas Opera; *Le nozze di Figaro*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and *La Cenerentola* with Virginia Opera; *Die Fledermaus* with Utah Opera; and *The Bear* with Wexford Festival Opera. Lang's recent choreographic credits include *La traviata* with San Diego Opera; *Carmen* with Virginia Opera;

*Turandot* with Virginia Opera and Teatro Petruzzelli di Bari; *Becoming Santa Claus* with Chicago Opera Theater; *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Santa Fe Opera; and *Vanessa* with Wexford Festival Opera. Upcoming projects include *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Charlottesville Opera, *The Turn of the Screw* with CMU Opera, *Pagliacci* with Virginia Opera, *The Pirates of Penzance* with Arizona Opera, and *Turandot* with Virginia Opera and Santa Fe Opera.



## MICHAEL BANWARTH PIANIST

**Previously at Lyric:** Music staff for *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* (2025/26) and *Blue* (2024/25).

The third-year pianist with the Ryan Opera Center from Dubuque, Iowa, served on Lyric's music staff for *Champion* (2023/24). Banwarth recently completed a Master of Music in collaborative piano at the New England Conservatory of Music. A recipient of the Dean's Scholarship and Gunther Schuller medal at NEC, he was a teaching assistant for the Song Lab program, performed frequently in the Liederabend and Sonata Night concert series, and prepared productions of *The Turn of the Screw* and *L'enfant et les sortilèges*. Banwarth was a staff pianist for the 2025 Internationale Meistersinger Akademie in Neumarkt, Germany (returning in 2026), and was invited to be a 2022 vocal piano fellow at Music Academy of the West. He has also held fellowships at the Bay View Music Festival and the Atlantic Music Festival, and served as assistant music director and harpsichordist for the Iowa State Opera Studio during his undergraduate studies. Chicago engagements include two recitals for the Dame Myra Hess series. *Michael Banwarth is sponsored by Nancy Dehmlow, Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, Philip G. Lumpkin, and Richard O. Ryan.*



## GEMMA DECETRA STAGE MANAGER

**Previously at Lyric:** *Madama Butterfly*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* (all 2025/26); and *The Listeners*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Fidelio* (all 2024/25).

A second-year Ryan Opera Center member and the second person to hold the Stage Manager position in the Ensemble, DeCetra spent the past summer on the stage management team for the Trentino Music Festival in Italy, following an engagement with Chicago Opera Theater for *She Who Dared*. An alumna of Northwestern University's theater program, where she received a 2023 Prague Quadrennial Grant for costume construction, she was the stage manager for *Jason and the Argonauts* for Lyric Unlimited's 2023 *Opera in the Neighborhoods*. Other recent projects include Salieri's *Falstaff* (Chicago Opera Theater, 2025), *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Chicago College of Performing Arts Opera, 2024), *The Nose* (Chicago Opera Theater, Wardrobe, 2023), and *Indecent* (Wirtz Center, 2023). She was also on the production staff at the 2023 Grant Park Music Festival. DeCetra is originally from Madison, Wisconsin, where she worked with students at Children's Theater of Madison and Shorewood Drama. *Gemma DeCetra is sponsored by Roberta L. Washlow & Robert J. Washlow.*



**DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL**  
TENOR

**Previously at Lyric:** Five roles since 2024/25, most recently Second Villager & Young Man/*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and Third Jew/*Salome* (both 2025/26).

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. He debuted with Lyric in 2024/25 as Jacquino/*Fidelio*. This summer Espinal makes his debut with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as Frederic/*The Pirates of Penzance* and the Grand Teton Music Festival with Sir Donald Runnicles. 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 previously participated in San Francisco's Merola Opera Program for two summers. *Daniel Luis Espinal is sponsored by Lead Sponsor the J. Thomas Hurvis Endowment, in loving memory of Dick Kiphart and cosponsors Fred & Phoebe Boelter, Margo & Michael Oberman & Family, and Jennifer L. Stone.*



**ADIA EVANS**  
SOPRANO

**Previously at Lyric:** Four roles, most recently First Frida Image/*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* (2025/26) and Theresa Alvarez/*The Listeners* (2024/25).

A second-year soprano with the Ryan Opera Center from Baltimore, Evans sang Countess Ceprano/*Rigoletto* and Girlfriend 2/*Blue* in Lyric's 2024/25 Season. After participating in the 2025 Britten Pears Young Artist Programme in Aldeburgh, England, she presented a recital for the Dame Myra Hess Series in Chicago. Recent debuts include The Cliburn in Recital with Jake Heggie, the Dayton Philharmonic, Annapolis Opera, Borderland Arts Foundation, and the National Orchestra Institute (Beethoven's 9th with Marin Alsop). Evans has performed with Santa Fe Opera, Merola Opera Program, Fort Worth Opera, Dallas Opera Guild, Opera Columbus, Tulsa Opera, and Knoxville Opera, among others. A winner of the 2026 London Foundation Competition and a semi-finalist in the 2026 Tenor Viñas Competition, her other numerous honors include the 2025 Lola Fletcher Award from the American Opera Society of Chicago, a 2024 Richard F. Gold Career Grant, third place in the 2023 and 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, Midwest Region, and a 2022 Sullivan Foundation Award. *Adia Evans is sponsored by Lead Sponsor the H. Earl and Miriam U. Hoover Foundation and cosponsors Ron and Peggy Beata, Pamela Crutchfield, Margo & Michael Oberman & Family, and Sheila & David Ormesher.*



**MARINETTE GOMEZ**  
STAGE DIRECTOR

**Previously at Lyric:** *El último sueño de Frida y Diego, Salome, and Medea* (all 2025/26); and *La Bohème, The Marriage of Figaro, and Fidelio* (all 2024/25).

Gomez is a second-year Ryan Opera Center member in the recently created Ensemble position of Stage Director. As part of an emerging artists team, Gomez received a 2025 Robert L. B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize from OPERA America for a production concept of *Breaking the Waves*. Recent highlights include directing Handel's *Silla* for Chicago Summer Opera, serving as a Young Artist Assistant Director for the Glimmerglass Festival's *Pagliacci*, being a Directing Fellow at the Metropolitan Opera, and assisting at Rice University for *Eugene Onegin*. The Orlando, Florida native also staged a production of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* for Bold City Opera at St. John's Cathedral in Jacksonville, Florida. As Assistant Director for University of North Florida's opera program, Gomez directed various productions and scenes, and she staged concerts of *La Bohème* and *The Magic Flute* for the Jacksonville Symphony. This summer she will be a Directing Fellow at Wolf Trap Opera. *Marinette Gomez is sponsored by Lead Sponsor an Anonymous Donor and cosponsors Donna Van Eekeren & Dale Connelly and Drs. Joan & Russ Zajchuk.*



**SANKARA HAROUNA**  
BARITONE

**Previously at Lyric:** Four roles since 2023/24, most recently Registrar/*Madama Butterfly* and A Cappadocian/*Salome* (both 2025/26).

A Chicago native, the Ryan Opera Center baritone stepped in to perform as Benny Paret and Benny Jr./*Champion* at Lyric in 2023/24 and sang Marullo/*Rigoletto* in 2024/25. The summer of 2025 featured his debut with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon's *This House* as well as with the Grant Park Music Festival to which he returns in 2026. Future engagements also include *Porgy and Bess* at Komische Oper Berlin. He joined Portland Opera as a Resident Artist in the 2023/24 Season, where he was seen in *Le nozze di Figaro* and *The Snowy Day*. A former apprentice artist at Des Moines Metro Opera, he performed there as Moralès/*Carmen* and Homecoming Soldier/Redler's *The Falling and the Rising*. Other previous engagements include Greensboro Opera, Atlanta Opera, Dayton Opera, Kentucky Opera, and Cincinnati Opera. In concert, Harouna performed Mozart's *Missa Brevis* with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. The baritone has participated in the artist-development programs of Atlanta Opera, Kentucky Opera, and Dayton Opera. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Music in Vocal Performance at Kentucky State University. *Sankara Harouna is sponsored by Lead Sponsors Michael Steinberg and Salme Harju Steinberg and cosponsors Mary Ellen Hennessy and Virginia Tobiason.*



### SIHAO HU BARITONE

**Previously at Lyric:** Prince Yamadori/*Madama Butterfly* and Second Nazarene/*Salome* (both 2025/26).

The first-year Ryan Opera Center baritone from Shenzhen, China, studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff. Highlights of his operatic experience include creating the title role of *Tang Xianzu* for its world premiere in 2017 and reprising it at the Sydney Opera House, the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, and the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, Czech Republic. Other roles in his repertoire include Ping/*Turandot*, Silvio/*Pagliacci*, Barmann/*Falscher Verrat*, Figaro/*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Chorèbe/*Les Troyens*, Germont/*La traviata*, the title role/*Don Giovanni*, Guglielmo/*Così fan tutte*, and Conte Almaviva/*Le nozze di Figaro*. Formerly an artist at Theater Kiel in Germany, Hu participated in the 2024 Merola Opera Program in San Francisco. In 2019, he won the Chinese Golden Bell Award for Music, the only standing music-related comprehensive award in China. *Sihao Hu* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor Peter Scheuermann** and cosponsors **Drs. George Dunea and Sally Metzler-Dunea, Richard W. Shepro & Lindsay E. Roberts, and Ms. Gay K. Stanek.**



### CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. BASS-BARITONE

**Previously at Lyric:** Six roles since 2024/25, most recently Imperial Commissioner/*Madama Butterfly* and Second Soldier/*Salome* (both 2025/26).

Last season at Lyric, the third-year Ryan Opera Center bass-baritone sang Ceperano/*Rigoletto*, 2nd Prisoner/*Fidelio*, and 3rd Policeman/*Blue*. Other engagements this season include soloist in Haydn's *Creation* with the Seattle Symphony, *Messiah* with Erie Philharmonic, and the Verdi *Requiem* with the Nashville Symphony. Humbert has performed widely throughout his home state of Ohio, including appearances with Opera Columbus, Mid-Ohio Opera, and Nightingale Opera Theatre. Other engagements include Boston Lyric Opera, Detroit Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, the Seagle Festival, Utah Festival Opera, and Annapolis Opera. Recipient of a 2025 Sullivan Foundation Award, Humbert was invited for the 2025 Young Singers Project at the Salzburg Festival and is a former participant in the artist development programs at Palm Beach Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. He is recipient of the 2025 Luminarts Cultural Foundation Men's Voice Fellowship and a 2024 American Opera Society of Chicago Scholarship Award. *Christopher Humbert, Jr.* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor Patricia Frank** and cosponsors **Maria C. Green & Oswald G. Lewis, Mary Houston, in loving memory of James Houston, and the Bill & Orli Staley Foundation.**



### CHI-YUAN LIN CONDUCTOR

**Previously at Lyric:** Music staff for *Madama Butterfly*, *Salome*, and *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* (all 2025/26); and *Fidelio* (2024/25).

Born in Taoyuan, Taiwan, Lin is the second artist named to the Conductor position with the Ryan Opera Center. This season she

returned for another season as Music Director and Conductor of the Avanti Orchestra in Washington, D.C. In the 2024/25 Season, she was engaged by Des Moines Metro Opera as associate conductor (*The Flying Dutchman*); she returns there in 2026. Previous engagements include the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Richmond Symphony Orchestra, Hartford Symphony Orchestra, São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, and Peabody Opera Theatre. Lin was invited to participate in the 2023/24 Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship program, the 2023 Fiskars Summer Festival in Finland, the 2023 Taiwan National Symphony Orchestra Educational Program, and the 2021 Aspen Music Festival Conducting Fellowship program. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in orchestral conducting at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. Lin was awarded the 2026-28 Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship. *Chi-Yuan Lin* is sponsored by **David Whitney & Juliana Chyu** and **Louise Yoder, in memory of Dorothy H. Whitney and Jack Whitney II.**



### ALEXIS PEART MEZZO-SOPRANO

**Previously at Lyric:** Second Frida Image/*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and Kate Pinkerton/*Madama Butterfly* (both 2025/26).

Peart is a first-year Ryan Opera Center mezzo-soprano from Titusville, New Jersey. A former Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artist with Boston Lyric Opera, she appeared there as Arbate/*Mitridate*, The Choreographer/*The Seasons*, Mrs. Noah/*Noah's Flood*, Tisbe/*La Cenerentola*, and Big Stone/*Eurydice*. Other recent roles include Dorabella/*Così fan tutte*, Jo/*Little Women*, Ruggiero/*Alcina*, Taller Daughter/*Proving Up*, title role/*Giulio Cesare*, Der Trommler/*Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, and Ada Lovelace in the world premiere workshop of Ruehr's *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage*. The mezzo can be heard on Boston Modern Orchestra Project and Odyssey Opera's Grammy-nominated recording of Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* and on several art song releases by PARMA Recordings. An Encouragement Award winner in the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition New England Region and recipient of second prize in the 2026 Musicians Club of Women Competition, Peart is a two-time alumna of the Wolf Trap Opera Studio and has worked with the Princeton Festival, Chautauqua Opera Company (Studio Artist), and Rochester Oratorio Society. *Alexis Peart* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor Blythe McGarvie** and cosponsors **Karen Pettite and the Thierer Family Foundation.**



### EMILY RICHTER SOPRANO

**Previously at Lyric:** First Handmaiden/*Medea* (2025/26) and First Peasant Girl/*The Marriage of Figaro* (2024/25).

The second-year Ryan Opera Center soprano from Arlington, Virginia, was a national winner of the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. In the summer of 2025, she was in residence at the Aix-en-Provence Festival Académie. She recently completed two years as a Resident Artist with Pittsburgh Opera. Role highlights during her tenure include the title role/*Iphigénie en Tauride*, Countess/*Le nozze di Figaro*, Ma/*Proving*

*Up*, and *Ginevra/Ariodante*. In the 2023/24 Season, she made her *Messiah* debut with the Seattle Symphony and her Verdi *Requiem* debut with the Westmoreland Symphony. Richter has spent her summers as an apprentice artist at Santa Fe Opera, Central City Opera, and the Seagle Festival. Recipient of the 2026 American Opera Society of Chicago Best Vocal Artist Award, she holds a Master's Degree from McGill's Schulich School of Music and a Bachelor's of Music in Vocal Performance from Lawrence University. Future engagements include Britten's *War Requiem* with the Erie Philharmonic and her debut with Opéra National de Paris. *Emily Richter is sponsored by Lead Sponsor The C.G. Pinnell Family and cosponsors Amy & Paul Carbone and Susan M. Miller.*



**CAMILLE ROBLES**  
**MEZZO-SOPRANO**

**Previously at Lyric:** Third *Frida Image/El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and *Lola/Cavalleria rusticana* (both 2025/26).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center member, the mezzo-soprano from San Juan, Puerto Rico, appeared this season at Lyric as Second Handmaiden/*Medea* and also performed with The Joffrey Ballet. Robles 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*. 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 received the 2026 American Opera Society of Chicago Award and previously 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 performed *Olga/Eugene Onegin*. *Camille Robles is sponsored by Heidi Heutel Bohn and Mark & Gale Kozloff.*



**FINN SAGAL**  
**BARITONE**

**Previously at Lyric:** First Villager/*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* (2025/26) and *A Policeman/The Listeners* (2024/25).

The second-year Ryan Opera Center baritone from La Cañada Flintridge, California, has performed at Lincoln Center, 54 Below, and the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas with such luminaries as Liza Minnelli, Michael Feinstein, and Kristin Chenoweth. Sagal received first place in the Gerda Lissner Foundation's 2025 Art Song Competition, a 2025 Sara Tucker Study Grant, first place at the 2025 Saengerbund Awards, the 2025 Ginger and Jim Meyer Centennial Award from the American Opera Society, and third place in the 2024 Neue Stimmen competition. The baritone returned to the Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS program in 2025 as a Renée Fleming Artist, performing *Guglielmo/Così fan tutte*, and participated in the 2023 Merola Opera Program. Sagal recently received a master's degree at the Yale School of Music, where he performed the roles of Junius/*The Rape of Lucretia*, the Tutor/*Le Comte Ory*, and Nick Shadow/*The Rake's Progress*. He holds

an undergraduate degree in vocal performance from UCLA. *Finn Sagal is sponsored by Lead Sponsor the Estate of Lois Siegel and cosponsors Patricia A. Kenney & Gregory J. O'Leary, Jennifer Malpass, and Julian Oettinger.*



**BENJAMIN R. SOKOL**  
**BASS-BARITONE**

**Previously at Lyric:** Third Villager/*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and *Fifth Jew/Salome* (both 2025/26).

Originally from Boston, Massachusetts, Sokol is a first-year Ryan Opera Center bass-baritone. He recently received his bachelor's and master's degrees in music and professional studies certificate from the Manhattan School of Music. Sokol was a winner of the 2025 Eisenberg-Fried Concerto Competition, semi-finalist in the 2025 George and Nora London Foundation Competition and 2023 Premiere Opera Foundation Competition, finalist in the 2022 Opera Index Competition, and winner of the 2021 Milnes Opera Idol Competition. He has previously participated in the artist-development programs at San Francisco's Merola Opera (Commendatore/*Don Giovanni*), Chautauqua Opera Company and Conservatory, and the Taos Opera Institute. He has also been with the Milnes VOICE Programs for several years, participating in the Florida VOICE Project and Milnes VOICE Studio and performing at the Savannah VOICE Festival. *Benjamin R. Sokol is sponsored by David & Janet Fox and Penelope R. Steiner.*



**TRAVON D. WALKER**  
**TENOR**

**Previously at Lyric:** Five roles since 2024/25, most recently Second Jew/*Salome* (2025/26) and *Parpignol/La Bohème* (2024/25).

Last season, the third-year Ryan Opera Center tenor made company debuts with Opera Philadelphia in *The Anonymous Lover* and the North Carolina Symphony, followed by a return to Wolf Trap Opera as a Filene Artist (*Dialogues of the Carmelites* and *Carmen*). Other Lyric appearances in 2024/25 include *Son/Blue*, 1st Prisoner/*Fidelio*, and *Borsa/Rigoletto*. Walker received his master's degree from Rice University, where he sang *Sam Kaplan/Street Scene*. A native of Hinesville, Georgia, he completed his undergraduate studies at the Eastman School of Music. The tenor was invited to participate in Renée Fleming's 2023 SongStudio and Joyce DiDonato's 2024 Masterclass Series, both at Carnegie Hall, as well as the 2023 Britten Pears Young Artist Programme. Walker received an Encouragement Award from the Kansas City District in the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, the 2024 Best Vocal Artist Award from the American Opera Society, the 2024 Luminarts Cultural Foundation Men's Voice Fellowship, and a 2025 Sullivan Foundation Award. *Travon D. Walker is sponsored by an Anonymous Donor, Robert & Isabelle Bass Foundation, Inc., the Boykins, Ford, and Mages families, and Cynthia Vahlkamp & Robert Kenyon.* †

<sup>†</sup>Deceased

# Fond farewells

As their tenures come to an end, outgoing Ryan Opera Center artists share highlights — and gratitude.



Kyle Fluckner

## MICHAEL BANWARTH

Working with artists the caliber of those in the Ryan Opera Center is a privilege that is difficult to fully articulate. The past three years have deepened my conception of the voice, of musical storytelling, and of artistic generosity. From playing rehearsals for *Cav/Pag* one day to recording R&B and jazz in the WFMT studio the next, I never knew precisely what a week in the program would entail, but I always knew it would involve incredibly rewarding (and often absurdly fun) music making. My time at Lyric has led to performances from Chicago to New York to Germany — and to developing musical partnerships and deep friendships that I hope will last for decades to come. Thank you to the teachers, coaches, and staff here for an unspeakably fulfilling three years, and a wider thank you to everyone who supports emerging artists in opera and beyond!



Lyric Opera of Chicago

## GEMMA DeCETRA

It has been such a privilege to be the Ryan Opera Center's Ensemble Stage Manager over the last two years. I have gained so much knowledge from working with the team at Lyric, and I am deeply grateful for all the mentorship I have received in my time here. Working on such technical, large-scale productions was something I'd never done before — and the learning curve was intense — but the experience has given me the confidence to take on whatever comes next. Stage management has been my passion for many years; after my time in the Ryan Opera Center, I have also found a deeper respect and admiration for the artistry behind the role. I'm incredibly thankful to have had such a supportive group of colleagues, and my sincere gratitude to everyone who makes this program possible.



Robert Kusiel

### ADIA EVANS

Three years ago, I wouldn't have believed that one day I would call this legendary opera house my workplace. I will always be deeply grateful to the Lyric team for seeing something in me that I couldn't yet see in myself and for including me in this class of incredible artists. They inspire me every day and have shaped my development and growth. Being in this program has not only taught me how to be a better artist, but it's also given me the courage to dream bigger, to trust my voice, and to step fully into my artistic identity. Thank you all for every word of encouragement and every moment of discovery and music making. My heart is filled with gratitude for the many memories of this place and the people here, which I'll carry with me forever. Thank you.



Lyric Opera of Chicago

### MARINETTE GOMEZ

Being part of the Ryan Opera Center as the Ensemble Stage Director has truly been life-changing. From working with some of the most fascinating, creative, and inspiring directors of our day, to learning from the best stage managers and assistant directors in the business, this experience has been fruitful in ways I never could have imagined. It has encompassed deep conversations after a hard rehearsal, long nights of paperwork, creatively driven rehearsals, and work scaled from one or two singers to massive rehearsals with the chorus. Participating in all of that and more has had a major impact on my growth as an artist, and I'll hold on to these memories and lessons for the rest of my life. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been here and to have worked with such exceptional people. With a special shoutout to the Lyric production staff, I thank you all!



Sankara Harouna, left, in *Rigoletto*, with Igor Golovatenko.

Todd Rosenberg

### SANKARA HAROUNA

It has been a source of immense joy for me, a native Chicagoan, to be able to return home to join the Ryan Opera Center. From intensive coaching sessions to observing world-class artists in action, this experience has fostered both my personal and professional growth. I have discovered a beautiful resilience in vulnerability and gained the tools to overcome fear and adversity. This program has truly prepared me for my future, and I am deeply thankful for the community at Lyric. I also feel incredibly fortunate to have shared this journey with such a stellar cohort — my fellow Ensemble members are top-tier artists who have inspired me to be the best colleague and friend I can be. My sincerest gratitude to everyone involved for all you've done for me.



Christopher Humbert, Jr. in *Madama Butterfly*.

Todd Rosenberg

### CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR.

My time in the Ryan Opera Center has been deeply meaningful and memorable, and I will truly miss it. I have been so blessed with opportunities to sing in the most riveting concerts and productions, performing alongside the most prolific operatic stars. I thank everyone for allowing me to witness firsthand how professionals work at the highest level. At the same time, the Ryan Opera Center provided a safe, nurturing environment where I could explore and develop my voice and artistic identity. The program challenged me to grow, expanded and elevated my capabilities, and helped highlight my strengths while supporting the areas where I needed improvement. It's an experience that has shaped me both as a singer and as an artist, and one for which I will remain deeply grateful for the rest of my life.



Kyle Flubacker

### CHI-YUAN LIN

These two years at the Ryan Opera Center have been truly transformative. Working at Lyric Opera of Chicago, I've been immersed in such an inspiring environment, where every artist strives for excellence while fostering genuine kindness. Conducting in the pit with the Lyric Opera Orchestra has been a life-changing experience. Step by step, I have learned how to collaborate more deeply with everyone in the room, broaden my artistry, and discover subtle nuances within each piece of repertoire. I am deeply grateful to the mentors and coaches who have helped me explore my potential. Most importantly, thank you to my beloved Ryan Opera Center colleagues for your support on and off the stage with laughter, care, and love. Your passion and fearless spirit are things I will carry with me wherever I go. My sincerest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to making my time here possible!



Liz Lauren

### EMILY RICHTER

The Ryan Opera Center is such a special place. It's a true privilege to be at Lyric and be immersed in artmaking at the highest level, and it's an honor to be surrounded by incredible artists and call them your peers. The Ryan Opera Center has created such an exceptional environment that has made me feel challenged, pushed, loved, and supported. It's a magical and humbling experience to find depths of yourself and of singing and expression that you didn't know you were capable of. To experience that at Lyric in the company of senior colleagues you admire is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, one that has been transformational for me personally and artistically. A huge thank you to this community for showing me what's possible and for launching me into the next phase of my life and career!



Kyle Flubacker

### FINN SAGAL

With family based here, I've been visiting Chicago for much of my life. When I began studying voice, the dream of being surrounded by loved ones while working at such an iconic opera house began to take shape but seemed unlikely. Having that dream come true at the Final Auditions knocked me off my feet! That life-changing moment was the start of an incredible journey that has been beyond what I ever imagined. Every day spent at Lyric Opera of Chicago is filled with the inspiration to grow and make incredible art. I have been so fortunate to be a part of this program with extraordinary peers and colleagues. These past two years have shaped my artistry and character in ways I will never be able to repay. I can only say that I am forever thankful for the Ryan Opera Center and all of those who make this program possible.



Kyle Flubacker

### TRAVON D. WALKER

The past three years in the Ryan Opera Center have been an absolute dream. Coming straight from grad school, I had no idea what was in store for this next part of my journey, and I feel incredibly thankful that I was received with such loving and supporting arms. Everyone at Lyric gave me the chance to explore the depths of not only my artistry, but also my personhood. All the time spent on stages, in practice rooms, and in rehearsal rooms watching the greats of our time, has fostered growth and development that I never believed possible — and all these lessons will stay with me for many years to come. I owe so much to my family at Lyric, and I can't wait to share with the world all that I've learned from them. **L**

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Heather Wittels  
Bing Jing Yu

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Yin Shen, *Principal*  
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*Assistant Principal*  
Injoo Choi\*\*

Diane Duraffourg-Robinson  
Ann Palen  
Irene Radetzky  
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Amy Hess  
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Alyce Johnson

### Piccolo

Alyce Johnson

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Paul Lueders, *Principal*  
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*Assistant Principal*

### English Horn

Judith Zunamon Lewis

### Clarinet

Heesoo Kim, *Principal*  
Susan Warner,  
*Assistant Principal*

### Bass Clarinet

Susan Warner,  
*Acting*

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Preman Tilson, *Principal*  
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Lewis Kirk

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The 2025/26 Ensemble, with Enrique Mazzola, greets the crowd after the triumphant performance in Millennium Park on September 7, 2025.

Upcoming Ryan Opera Center events:

**Sunday in the Park with Lyric**, August 23, 2026

**Ryan Opera Center Final Auditions**, October 4, 2026

**Rising Stars in Concert**, January 9, 2027



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