

Lyric
OPERA OF
CHICAGO



Puccini

Madama
Butterfly



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On the cover: Karah Son in the title role.
Photo: John Shaw/Lyric Opera of Chicago

At Lyric, you'll be amazed, replenished, and inspired with must-see, must-hear live experiences. Through the timeless power of voice, acting that brings characters to life in triumph and tragedy, the splendor of a great orchestra and chorus — coupled with theater, dance, design, and truly magical stagecraft — Lyric is devoted to immersing audiences in worlds both familiar and unexpected, creating shared experiences that resonate long after the curtain comes down.



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!

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* bombed at its La Scala premiere in February 1904. That's hard to believe now, but after several revisions, the opera took its rightful place as one of the most beloved works in the repertoire.

Even a work this renowned not only requires, but also deserves, a fresh perspective. Lyric's own Chief Artistic Officer, Matthew Ozawa, an internationally acclaimed director, is the creative force behind



this new-to-Chicago *Butterfly*, a production that combines the beauty of tradition while offering greater empathy for both Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly*) and even for Pinkerton, the brash American naval officer who cruelly abandons her. Ozawa teamed up with an all-female Japanese creative team to redesign and re-imagine the work, and the resulting production provides a fresh new framing for this classic opera.

As *Butterfly* we are pleased to have soprano Karah Son, acclaimed in the role in dozens of leading houses worldwide. Her combination of power and great sensitivity

has led her also to Mimì in *La Bohème*, Liù in *Turandot*, the title role in *Tosca*, and Desdemona in *Otello*. She joins a long line of distinguished Cio-Cio-Sans in Lyric's history, including Renata Scotto, Leontyne Price, and, at the opera's first run here at Lyric in 1955, Maria Callas.

This run of *Madama Butterfly* closes just before the final events of our 2025/26 Season: the world premiere of Avery T. Young's *Saffronia* on April 17 (a revelatory funk-soul-gospel opera not to be missed); our annual open house, *Explore Your Lyric*, on April 26; and the spring tour of this year's *Opera in the Neighborhoods* title, *Katie, Strongest of the Strong*, which ends on May 3. As we near the end of another great run here at the Lyric Opera House and around Chicago, we celebrate the enduring strength of our art form, Lyric's artistic and financial good health, and you, the audiences that make everything we do possible.

We're delighted you're with us for this performance. Enjoy!

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A Toast to Lyric

The Lyric Wine Auction — this year dubbed “A Divine Duet” — is back with its signature blend of spectacular bottles and impactful philanthropy.

By David Zivan



Kyle Flubacker

Co-chairs John Holmes and Jenni Sorenson, and Women's Board President Karen Z. Gray-Krehbiel, look forward to raising a glass with you at the two-day event.

The splendid offerings on the Ken Pigott stage at the Lyric Opera House have always been the company's calling card to the world.

But since 1988, another kind of production has garnered a great deal of international attention as well. It's the Lyric Wine Auction, one of the most dazzling dates on Chicago's social calendar (and certainly the city's most significant wine event of any kind). A signature initiative of Lyric's Women's Board, the event has evolved, survived the pandemic, and raised significant funds for Lyric for several decades now. What hasn't changed is the festive environment — a sense that it's a great party, for a great cause — and that it's worth the wait. As with wine, the rarity of the auction is part of its appeal.

"There's a lot of excitement about it, particularly since it's only done every three years," says Karen Z. Krehbiel, current president of the Women's Board — and, for some time now, a leading force in the auction. "It's an opportunity for a lot of creativity, and to share incredible wines, and above all it's a really fun weekend. It's about celebrating friendships and shared passions."

The wine world's book of record, *Wine Spectator*, named the Lyric event a "Top Charity Wine Auction," and evidence backs that assessment. Since its inception, the event has brought in close to \$15 million in support, a generous tally from the guests in attendance and those bidding from afar. The funds raised support all the efforts of the company — onstage productions, of course, but also programs like Lyric's education and

engagement efforts for children and adults across the community, the training of professional artists, and even the creation of new works.

This season's edition, to be held May 8 and 9, promises to be every bit as stellar as in years past, and there are a couple of fun twists — literally. Krehbiel, and the event's co-chairs Jenni Sorenson and John Holmes, have deemed the weekend "A Divine Duet." That refers to two true firsts in the auction's history: Not only are Sorenson and Holmes the first to co-chair as a couple, but also there will be two honored guests instead of the usual one — Chateau Cheval Blanc, from the Bordeaux region, and Domaine Faiveley, from Burgundy, will be honored.

"One reason we're doing that is really because, at home, we can't decide if we love Bordeaux or Burgundy more," laughs Sorenson, who is also a member of the Women's Board. "They are the two most legendary wine producing regions in the world, so we thought: Why don't we have both?"

Representing Chateau Cheval Blanc is proprietor Pierre Lurton, an important figure in Bordeaux and beyond. Cheval Blanc rests on a storied plot of land that has seen grape production since Roman times, and the estate is widely acknowledged as the greatest producer in the St. Emilion region. Lurton's family has been a key



Board chair Sylvia Neil and Amy Carbone from the Board of Directors enjoy the 2023 auction.

Diane M. Smutny



Auctioneer Ben Ferdinand, who will return this year, and Shirley W. Ryan, at the 2023 auction.

part of Bordeaux for centuries and today also owns the legendary Chateau d'Yquem, producer of perhaps the world's finest sweet wines.

Erwan Faiveley's ancestors created the family winery in 1825 and today the house produces wines from the most exclusive areas of Burgundy. With his sister, Eve — they represent the 7th generation of ownership — Erwan and his team are known for hand-picking plot by plot, sorting the grapes as they come in from the vineyards, and precise monitoring of each barrel. They have continued their old-school approach in the New World, as proprietors of California's Williams Selyem, a Russian River Valley operation also known for its exquisite Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

"The significance of this event is evidenced by the honorees we've had over the years — it's truly just a who's-who from the wider wine world. And this is really a banner year," says Holmes. "Jenni and I have known Pierre Lurton for at least 15 years, and he's about as significant as you get, running two iconic chateau. We've become friends with Erwan more recently, though we've known the wines for a long time. It probably goes without saying that both these houses make extraordinary wines."

An assortment of both will be served to attendees at both nights of the weekend — first during a walk-around tasting event Friday evening in the Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Grand Foyer, sponsored by Taittinger champagne and featuring wines from a stellar list of

featured vintners. That's to be followed by a smaller VIP dinner to toast the honored guests. The next evening, a fully formal affair with dinner on the Lyric stage, will feature special bottles from Cheval Blanc and Faiveley and, of course, the auction itself, to be called by Ben Ferdinand and Dale Salentiny of the Hart Davis Hart wine company.

Highlights in the auction include exceptionally generous donations from the major wine regions of the world — a tour and tasting at Napa legend Quintessa; a visit to Piedmont titan Gaja; extravagant tours and tastings at some of the leading wineries in Oregon's Willamette Valley, to give just a taste. From the honorees themselves come a number of one-of-a-kind lots — a visit for eight at Cheval Blanc (and, for good measure, another at Chateau d'Yquem); and a mixed case of 2020 Grand Cru bottles from Faiveley (or perhaps you'll be interested in an Imperial [eight standard bottles] of their 2005 Clos Vougeot?).

Krehbiel, who began her term as president in 2024, is quick to note the efforts of her co-chairs as well as fellow Women's Board members. "To be able to share the incredible wines that Jenni and John have secured for us is truly a pleasure," she says. "And this Women's Board is really a wonderful combination of talents — businesswomen, creatives, philanthropists, all of them with a wide range of interests throughout our community. It's going to be an exceptional weekend." [L](#)



Diane W. Smutny



Jaoclyn Simpson



Jaoclyn Simpson

A spectacular trumpet fanfare, from Lyric's own brass section, welcomes glamorous guests such as benefactors Ann Ziff (at left) and Liz Stiffel to dinner on stage.

Meet Cio-Cio-San — known as Madama Butterfly — a faithful but doomed geisha in love with B.F. Pinkerton. Everyone but Butterfly knows the Navy lieutenant will break her heart and ruin her life.

Opera newcomers will be swept away by the familiar melodies, gorgeous costuming, and colorful sets — and seasoned opera fans will thrill at this beautiful, thoughtful production from Lyric's own Matthew Ozawa that brings new dimension to an age-old story.



Philip Greshong / Cincinnati Opera

Suzuki and Butterfly hope for brighter days.

Lyric

Madama Butterfly



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Madama Butterfly

New-to-Chicago production | Opera in Italian in three acts

Music by **Giacomo Puccini**

Libretto by **Giuseppe Giacosa** and **Luigi Illica**

Based on a play by **David Belasco**

March 14, 19, 22, 25M, 28, & 31 | April 6, 9M, & 12M, 2026

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton
Goro
Suzuki
Sharpless
Cio-Cio-San
(Madama Butterfly)
Imperial Commissioner
Official Registrar
The Bonze
Prince Yamadori
Kate Pinkerton
Cousin
Mother
Aunt
Uncle
Trouble

Evan LeRoy Johnson⁺
Rodell Rosel^{••}
Nozomi Kato⁺
Zachary Nelson
Karah Son⁺

Christopher Humbert, Jr.[•]
Sankara Harouna[•]
Jongwon Han⁺
Sihao Hu[•]
Alexis Pearl[•]
Kimberly McCord
Yvette Smith
Emily Price
Jared V. Esguerra
Florence Agpalo⁺

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

Fight Director

Domingo Hindoyan
Matthew Ozawa
dots⁺
Maiko Matsushima⁺
Yuki Nakase Link
Michael Black
John Metzner
Melanie Bacaling
Katrina Bachus
Rachel A. Tobias
Aaron Breid
Jerad Mosbey
Kseniia Polstiankina
Barrad
Chuck Coyl

Actors

Mai Claypool
Richard Manera
Izzy Wolf

First performed by La Scala, Milan on February 17, 1904.

First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on November 11, 1955.

⁺ Lyric debut

[•] Current Member, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center
^{••} Alumnus, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center

Synopsis

TIME | **Present day and the turn of the 20th century**

PLACE | **Nagasaki, Japan**

ACT I

In the present day, B.F. Pinkerton enters his apartment and dons a virtual reality headset to escape into a fantasy. Within moments, he rejoins a game which transports him to Nagasaki, where he embodies his avatar as a U.S. Navy lieutenant. He inspects a house that he will occupy with his young bride, Cio-Cio-San (a.k.a. Madama Butterfly). Sharpless, the U.S. Consul, arrives, and Pinkerton shares his vision of a sailor in search of pleasure and the beautiful Japanese girl who has captivated him. Sharpless tries to warn him of this view, but Pinkerton laughs, toasting the American girl who will someday be his “real” wife.

Butterfly, her colleagues, and family arrive for the wedding. She tells Pinkerton that since her father’s death, she now earns her living as a geisha. She also has secretly converted to Christianity. The Imperial Commissioner performs the marriage ceremony. Then, Cio-Cio-San’s uncle, the Bonze, bursts in. He curses her, inciting the crowd. Protecting Butterfly, Pinkerton orders the guests away. Butterfly weeps and her new husband consoles her. As night falls in this pleasure fantasy, the lovers share a moonlit duet.

INTERMISSION

ACTS II & III

Three years later, modern-day Pinkerton and his American wife have grown distant. His only means of escape is through gaming, where he can voyeuristically watch his Japanese bride’s future. In the virtual world, Cio-Cio-San patiently waits for him. Her servant Suzuki implores the gods for aid, but Butterfly bids her to have faith — one day, Pinkerton will return and embrace his wife again.

Sharpless enters with a letter telling of Pinkerton’s marriage to an American. Before he can tell Butterfly, Goro interrupts along with a suitor, Prince Yamadori. Cio-Cio-San refuses his marriage proposal. She brings forth her young son, Trouble, and insists that as soon as Pinkerton knows of him, he will return. If not, she would rather die.

A cannon roars from the harbor, and Butterfly discovers Pinkerton’s ship coming into port. She and Suzuki strew the house with blossoms. As evening falls, she prepares to keep vigil through the night.

Modern-day Pinkerton turns off the game and goes to bed. In the middle of the night, the game turns on, luring him back to play the next level, where he chooses how he will impact Butterfly's destiny. Pinkerton chooses an American wife avatar, Kate. As the level continues, Butterfly still waits, though Suzuki persuades her to rest. Soon, Sharpless, Pinkerton and Kate arrive. Suzuki realizes who the woman is and reluctantly agrees to inform Butterfly. Pinkerton, now aware of Butterfly's devotion, bids an anguished farewell and rushes away. Cio-Cio-San hurries in expecting to find her husband, and instead finds Kate. She instantly guesses the truth and touchingly wishes Kate happiness. She says that Pinkerton may have his son if he will return for him.

Butterfly orders Suzuki and Trouble away. She has no choice but to escape this nightmare, and she pulls out the dagger with which her father committed suicide. As she raises the blade to her throat, Trouble appears. Cio-Cio-San drops the knife and embraces him. She then blindfolds him, takes the dagger, and stabs herself. As the fantasy dies, Pinkerton desperately tries to hold onto his creation, Butterfly.

— *Courtesy of Cincinnati Opera*

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Lyric Opera of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the NIB Foundation Italian Opera Endowed Chair.

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Lyric Opera of Chicago thanks its Official Airline, United Airlines.

APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

This production will be performed with one intermission.

Act 1	55 minutes
Intermission	30 minutes
Acts 2 & 3	1 hour 30 minutes
TOTAL	2 hours 55 minutes



The stylized (and beautiful) costumes in this production reference and also interrogate Western conceptions of Japanese style.

Philip Greshong / Cincinnati Opera

Madama Butterfly: Between Fantasy and (Virtual) Reality

This new production offers a boldly relevant, gorgeous reimagining for the present day

By Kunio Hara

When the curtain rises on Matthew Ozawa’s new production of Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, we see the dimly lit interior of a room furnished with sleek, modern furniture in neutral colors. The exception is the red and black gaming chair, center stage, whose colors echo those in the room’s posters of women in kimono. The door opens and Pinkerton, wearing a T-shirt and a pair of slacks, enters. He grabs a can of beer, sits, and puts on a virtual reality headset.

The stage is suddenly bathed in cold blue light; Puccini’s prelude begins. As additional characters begin to interact with Pinkerton, it becomes clear that we are now seeing the onstage action through his eyes. This is *Madama Butterfly* presented as a kind of artificial game world in which Pinkerton acts out an elaborate fantasy.

This provocative theatrical conceit can provide a jarring sensation, especially for audience members accustomed to standard renditions. But Ozawa’s overarching gesture immediately engages with a long-standing trope that existed in Europe at the turn of the 20th century, when Puccini composed the opera, which premiered early in 1904. Camille Saint-Saëns’s one-act comic opera, *La princesse jaune* (1872), for example, features a Dutch student, Kornélis, who falls in love with a portrait of a Japanese woman, Ming. With the aid of a magical potion laced with opium, Kornélis hallucinates and mistakes his cousin Léna for Ming.

Puccini and his librettists, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, also play with this idea; early in Act I, before Cio-Cio-San sets foot on stage, in his aria “Amore o grillo,” Pinkerton explain to Sharpless that his future Japanese wife “seems like a figure from a screen (*sembra figura da*

paravento).” The very voice of Pinkerton encourages the audience to experience Cio-Cio-San as a visual object. (In the exchange that follows, the kinder and more emotionally sensitive Sharpless reminds Pinkerton, and the audience by extension, to listen to her voice.)

This phenomenon — and this production of *Madama Butterfly* — point to the historic fact that European and American exposure to Japanese culture in the late 19th century came primarily through objects — imported prints, furniture, ceramics, and fabrics — rather than through interactions with Japanese people. Ozawa’s ambitious construct not only updates this mediated cultural process for the 21st century, but also foregrounds the work as an artistic creation rather than a documentary reflection of history. To acknowledge that a piece of opera, an inherently stylized genre, is a fictional work may seem self-evident. The significance of Ozawa’s *Madama Butterfly*, however, becomes more clear as we examine the performance history of the work, where cultural authenticity has often been a central concern, and consider his framing of its narrative.

The desire to present a kind of realism in performances of *Madama Butterfly* began in the work’s very early stages. For the libretto, Puccini and his collaborators relied on a cluster of related literary sources written by French and American authors: Pierre Loti’s autobiographical novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), John Luther Long’s short story “Madame Butterfly” (1898), and David Belasco’s one-act play “Madame Butterfly” (1900). Loti was stationed in Nagasaki, the setting of *Madama Butterfly*, as a naval



The perils of cultural imperialism have been present in the opera from its inception.

Philip Greshong / Cincinnati Opera

officer. Long had no direct connection to Japan, but had a sister, Jennie Corell, who lived in Nagasaki with her husband, head of a Methodist mission there. Belasco, a native of San Francisco, had experience encountering immigrants from East Asia in that city.

To musically evoke the Japanese setting, Puccini made at least some efforts to understand its culture. He interviewed the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy, Hisako Ōyama, possibly witnessed a performance of Sadayakko, a Japanese actress then touring Europe, and studied printed Japanese music that was available to him. The numerous costume illustrations for the first production at La Scala, by Leopold Metlicovitz and others (accessible at digitalarchivi.oricordi.com), amply demonstrate how the European artists had studied Japanese prints and art works.

Toward the end of his life (he passed late in 1924), long after *Madama Butterfly* had entered the repertory around the world, the composer attended a 1920 performance of the work in Rome with the Japanese soprano Tamaki Miura (1884-1946), a well-known figure in Japan, Europe, and the United States, in the title role.

Puccini invited her to his villa in Torre del Lago, where they discussed Japanese music; he was at the time seeking additional inspiration for his current project, *Turandot*. A remarkable encounter, to be sure — though the composer reaching out to a Japanese musician while composing an opera set in ancient China indicates a somewhat casual approach to cultural accuracy.

This production of *Madama Butterfly* by Ozawa, who is Japanese American, comes not as a disruption but a bold continuation of a long line of productions in the United States informed by artists of Japanese ancestry. In 1952, 1953, and 1956, Japan's oldest opera company, the Fujiwara Opera, engaged in three North American tours, bringing together Japanese singers and local musicians for performances of *Madama Butterfly*. The Metropolitan Opera invited director Yoshio Aoyama, connected to the Fujiwara Opera Company, and the scenic designer Motohiro Nagasaka, for its new *Butterfly* in 1958. Following this success, in 1969 Lyric Opera of Chicago invited Aoyama to direct a new production, and participation of Japanese directors at major operatic houses continued in

Europe, including Keita Asari's stylized production at La Scala in 1986 and Yoshishige (Kijū) Yoshida's experimental staging set in postwar Nagasaki for Opéra de Lyon in 1990.

Originally co-commissioned by Cincinnati Opera, Detroit Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and Utah Opera, this *Butterfly* is also part of a group of innovative stagings by Asian and Asian American directors that have emerged in recent seasons. These productions introduced non-speaking roles, depicted Trouble as an adult man, relocated the setting, and even had Cio-Cio-San performed as a puppet. These dislocations (and Ozawa's) may be seen at least in part as responses to the ghosts of anti-Asian sentiments that surfaced, unexpectedly and violently, during and after the pandemic.

Especially notable also in Ozawa's production is the collaborative approach he took to develop a visually stunning and intellectually engaging staging that seeks to challenge the status quo while maintaining the musical integrity of the opera. Ozawa first assembled a team of female artists of Japanese origins — Kimie Nishikawa from dots (set designer), Maiko Matsushima (costume designer), and Yuki Nakase Link (lighting designer) — who have experience working in both Japan and the United States. The collaborators initially struggled to forge a narrative in which they could see their lived experiences as Japanese women reflected in the character of Cio-Cio-San. They ultimately determined that, rather than endowing the figure of Madama Butterfly with realism, they would engage directly with the premise that she is a fictional character — one created by a group of European and American men. Forgoing the concerns about authenticity that had been central for earlier generations of Japanese artists, they foreground the artificiality of Puccini and his collaborators' vision of Japan. The result retains the familiar musical sumptuousness of the opera, but in neon-

tinged light and with costumes inspired by contemporary Japanese pop culture.

Interestingly, presenting the opera as a virtual reality game also brings about a transformation of Pinkerton. While "traditional rendition of the opera has the American naval officer as a villain of sorts," Ozawa points out, his production reveals that the officer, too, is a victim of societal structure, "taught to love the fantasy version of Japanese people." Pinkerton comes to a world of *Madama Butterfly* that has already been created to satisfy his desires. As the bright visual elements of the production mesmerize Pinkerton deeper into his escapist fantasy, we too become engrossed in Puccini's fictional world.

At the same time, the juxtaposition of the techno-Orientalist visuals with Puccini's familiar score has the potential to move audiences toward a kind of critical distance from the work — one that does not have to detract from but can contribute to an enriched understanding of the lasting relevance of *Madama Butterfly*, well more than a century after its creation. In this production, audience members who have historically struggled to come to terms with the opera's casual, unthinking racism (often evident in ill-advised makeup and exaggerated shuffling and bowing), will see even Cio-Cio-San experience a transformation — an answer of sorts to the longing felt by many Asian women, past and present, to liberate themselves from a confining narrative of loss, self-sacrifice, and shame. This production, then, provides us with opportunities to reflect on desires, fears, and hopes that are unique to our time — to help us make sense of the world we live in. **L**

Kunio Hara is Associate Professor of Music History at the University of South Carolina. His most recent publication on Puccini, "The Racial Politics of Madama Butterfly and Turandot" is included in Puccini in Context (2023).



The wedding scene demonstrates this production's bold color scheme and set design.

Director's note

by Matthew Ozawa



As we allow ourselves to become immersed in the fantasy of Japan portrayed in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, it's illuminating to consider through whose lens we are viewing this opera. What experiences, perspectives, histories, and biases do we bring with us as we engage with Butterfly's story?

When I investigate my own lens, I see that mine represents the East-West conflict that is core to *Madama Butterfly*. I am biracial — the son of a Caucasian mother and a Japanese father. I am an American whose family was interned during World War II. I grew up in Asia but spent holidays in California. I have spent most of my professional life devoted to the Western art form of opera, though I am often one of the only artists of color in the spaces where I work. I have loved Western classical music as much as I have loved Eastern art forms. Like Butterfly, I have yearned for acceptance but never felt truly at home in any single culture or place.

Butterfly has spent most of her existence seen through the lens of Western white men. Her story was first told by French novelist Pierre Loti, and it then passed successively to American writer John Luther Long, American playwright David Belasco, and Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. Likewise, so many of the *Butterfly* productions we have enjoyed throughout history have presented her story primarily through a white male lens. This fantasy of Japan has been created not by those whose culture is meant to be represented in the opera — namely, Japanese people and, in particular, Japanese women — but by those who, in many cases, have had no direct connection to Japan. Has this

tradition had an impact on those whose story *Madama Butterfly* has actually meant to represent?

I believe it has.

This new production of *Madama Butterfly* reclaims the opera's narrative through the lens of an entirely Japanese and Japanese American creative team and amplifies the voices of an entirely female Japanese design collective. Together, we have grappled with the challenges of presenting this work for diverse American audiences. Just as Butterfly is trapped with little agency in the opera, we as Asian Americans have been trapped by many of the traditional depictions of Butterfly's story. We seek now to release this opera's wings for all to experience anew. To do this, we own that the fantasy of Butterfly that we have come to love is a Western fantasy. Instead of pretending that Butterfly is representative of our Japanese American identity, our production aims to amplify that her story has been seen through the lens of a white man, Pinkerton.

Madama Butterfly is an opera I have spent 20 years studying and directing. I have deep love for this work, but it has simultaneously made me, as an Asian American, feel ostracized, and I have felt a duty to reclaim its narrative. With this new production, we aim to acknowledge that there are many ways to view this opera. Our hope is that this journey enables our empathy to be open to the impact we have on each other, and the need for a more compassionate understanding of perspectives outside our own. May the voyage into this production's fantasy capture your senses, sweep you up in the music's emotional power, and awaken your own lens. **L**

Artist profiles



KARAH SON CIO-CIO-SAN

Lyric debut

Past highlights for the Korean soprano include *Biancofiore/Francesca da Rimini* at the Opéra de Monte-Carlo; the title role in *Aida* in Korea and in Halle; Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* in Korea, Tampere, Warsaw, Leipzig, Berlin (Deutsche Oper), Gothenburg, Turin, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Dresden, Cardiff, Sydney, Warsaw, Turin, Kansas City, Stuttgart, Montpellier, Bordeaux, Bologna, Angers, Nantes, Rennes, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh, among other houses; Mimì/*La Bohème* in Sydney; and Liù/*Turandot* in Melbourne, the title role in *Tosca* in Sydney and Cincinnati, *Desdemona/Otello* in Venice, and *Michaela/Carmen* in Busan. Son also recently performed a series of concerts at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Future plans include *Madama Butterfly* in Washington and Manitoba. She has distinguished herself in numerous international competitions: first prize at the national competition organized by *Korea Joongang Daily* in Seoul; first prize at the “Vissi D’Arte” International Competition in Milan; Special Sorooptimist Prize at the G.B. Viotti International Competition in Vercelli (Italy); Premio Extraordinario at the Francisco Viñas International Competition in Barcelona; and second prize at the Opéra de Marseille International Competition. Son made her professional debut in 1997 singing Contessa in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the National Theater in Seoul. She has since performed Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* at the Teatro S. Lorenzo in Milan; Mimì in *La Bohème* at the Teatro Cristallo in Bergamo, in Milan, and at the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari; Liù in *Turandot* in Verona (Teatro Filarmonico), in Bologna, in Nancy, and at the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía in Valencia.



EVAN LEROY JOHNSON LIEUTENANT B.F. PINKERTON

Lyric debut

This season, the American tenor debuts at the Metropolitan Opera in *Arabella* (Count Elemer) and returns to National Theatre in Prague for a new production of *Idomeneo* (title role) and revival of *Rusalka* (Prince). On the concert stage, Johnson debuts with the Dallas Symphony and *Bravo! Vail* for concert performances of *Madama Butterfly* (Pinkerton) conducted by Fabio Luisi. Last season brought a hometown debut at Minnesota Opera in *Roméo et Juliette* (Roméo) followed by returns to San Francisco Opera for *La Bohème* (Rodolfo) and National Theatre in Prague for *Medea* (Giasone). He debuted also with the Canadian Opera Company in *Eugene Onegin* (Lenski). In 2023/24, Johnson made debuts at the National

Theatre in Prague in *Rusalka* (Prince) and Royal Danish Opera for *Madama Butterfly* (Pinkerton), with returns to Glyndebourne Festival and BBC Proms for *Carmen* (Don José) and Bayerische Staatsoper for *Otello* (Cassio) and *Tannhäuser* (Walther). Recent engagements include his debut with San Francisco Opera in *Eugene Onegin* (Lenski) followed by a return to the Ensemble at Bayerische Staatsoper where he was seen in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Chevalier de la Force), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Brighella), *Salome* (Narraboth), *Manon Lescaut* (Edmondo), *Die Zauberflöte* (Erster Geharnischter), and *Otello* (Cassio). Evan made debuts at Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and Berliner Philharmoniker in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (Die Erscheinung eines Jünglings) conducted by Kirill Petrenko, Salzburger Festspiele for a new Krzysztof Warlikowski production of *Macbeth* (Malcolm) conducted by Philippe Jordan, and a concert of Bizet and Bernstein at Musikfest Bremen with the Bremer Philharmoniker.



NOZOMI KATO SUZUKI

Lyric debut

Recent highlights for the Japanese mezzo-soprano include Suzuki at Teatro Cervantes de Málaga, Tokyo Niki Kai Opera Theatre, Pittsburgh Opera, and Vancouver Opera, as well as Leonora di Guzman in Donizetti’s *La Favorita* at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Italy. Other appearances as Suzuki include Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Cincinnati Opera, Teatro Petruzzelli di Bari, Teatro Magnani in Fidenza, Teatro Municipale di Piacenza, and Teatro Comunale di Modena. Kato made her debut in Italy in 2014 as Clarina in Rossini’s *La cambiale di matrimonio* at Teatro Regio di Parma. Other appearances in Italy include Enrichetta in Bellini’s *I Puritani* (2017 and 2023), Siébel in Gounod’s *Faust* (2018), and Bersi in Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier* (2019). In 2016, she took part in Accademia del Belcanto of the Festival della Valle d’Itria, where she was selected to sing Ismene in Mayr’s *Medea in Corinto* with Fabio Luisi conducting. She was invited back the following year as Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, also conducted by Luisi. She has appeared at the opera houses in Bari and Trieste, as well as at several major music festivals in Italy. In Spain, she participated in the Opera (e)Studio of Opera de Tenerife in 2013, and in 2014 made her house debut there as Smeton in Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena*. At Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía in Valencia, she has appeared as Celia in Handel’s *Silla*, Hermia in Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw*.



ZACHARY NELSON SHARPLESS

Previously at Lyric: Four roles since 2016/17, most recently Paul/*The Listeners* (2024/25) and Marcello/*La Bohème* (2018/19).

This season the baritone will sing Marcello in *La Bohème* at Pittsburgh Opera, and make a role and house debut as Don Pizarro in *Fidelio* with Utah Opera. Future seasons include his debut with Dallas Opera. Other recent highlights include a role debut as the titular Bluebeard in *Bluebeard's Castle* with Opera San José; one of his signature roles, Leporello, in *Don Giovanni* with Opera Omaha; and Alberich in his first performances of *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried* with Atlanta Opera. In concert, he joined the Santa Fe Symphony for a New Year's Eve concert of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Nelson returned to Palm Beach Opera in the 2023/24 season, making his role debut as the Four Villains in Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. Other appearances included Santa Fe Opera as Golaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande*; Atlanta Opera as Marcello in *La Bohème*, and Arizona Opera as Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. In concert he joined the Utah Symphony for Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Act 3 of Berg's *Wozzeck*, and he appeared in recital with the Sag Harbor Song Festival. During the summer of 2024 he debuted the role of Faninal in *Der Rosenkavalier* with Santa Fe Opera, his 11th opera with the company.



RODELL ROSEL GORO

Previously at Lyric: 20 roles since 2005/06, most recently Spoletta/*Tosca* (2021/22) and Goro/*Madama Butterfly* (2019/20).

The Grammy-nominated tenor and Ryan Opera Center alumnus appears regularly in major opera houses around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, LA Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Royal Ballet and Opera. He is primarily known for superb portrayals of character roles: Monostatos, Goro, Mime and Loge, Basilio, Tanzmeister, Spoletta, and the Four Servants in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Recent highlights include appearances at the Metropolitan Opera and the Cleveland Orchestra as Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte*, Boston Lyric Opera and Houston Grand Opera as Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, Austin Opera as Beppe in *Pagliacci*, and Calgary Opera as Loge in *Das Rheingold*. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Valzacchi in *Der Rosenkavalier*, opposite Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, and Sir Thomas Allen. He originated the roles of Ong Chi Seng in Paul Moravec's *The Letter* at Santa Fe Opera, as well as Anthony Candolino in Terrence McNally and Jake Heggie's *Great Scott* at Dallas Opera, which starred Joyce DiDonato and Frederica von Stade, conducted by Patrick Summers. As Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*, he debuted in the David McVicar production at the Royal Ballet and Opera, in the U.S. premiere of the Barry Kosky production at LA Opera, and in the Julie Taymor production at the Metropolitan Opera. In addition, he has sung the title role in Zemlinsky's *Der Zwerg*, Britten's *Albert Herring*, as well as Tamino in *The Magic Flute* and Don José in *Carmen*.



JONGWON HAN THE BONZE

Lyric debut

Currently an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera, the Korean bass-baritone made his debut there in the summer of 2023 as The Bonze in *Madama Butterfly* and has since appeared as Tom in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, La Voce in *Idomeneo*, Colline in *Bohème Out of the Box*, 3rd and 4th Noble in *Lohengrin*, and Sprecher in *Die Zauberflöte*, along with numerous cover roles. This season, he sings Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and Second Knight in *Parsifal*, appears in the Adler Fellowship's annual *Rising Stars* concert, and performs at the Grant Park Music Festival. Han made his professional debut at the Vernazza Opera Festival (Cinque Terre, Italy) and has been featured in concerts in Osaka, Japan; Seoul, South Korea; and New York City. Other recent engagements have included his debuts at Atlanta Opera as Schaubard in *La Bohème* and at Palm Beach Opera as The Bonze, and concert performances of Handel's *Messiah* with Dayton Opera, Beethoven Symphony No. 9 and Penderecki's *Credo* at the Oregon Bach Festival, Haydn's *Theresienmesse* and Mozart's *Sparrow Mass* with the New Choral Society, and Bach's Cantata BWV 140 in Seoul. Han won Third Prize at the 2022 Operalia World Opera Competition and was a Grand Finalist in the 2021 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition.



SIHAO HU PRINCE YAMADORI

Previously at Lyric: Second Nazarene/*Salome* (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. Hu participated in more than 50 performances across his homeland as well as abroad throughout his undergraduate studies. Highlights of his operatic experience include creating the title role of *Tang Xian Zu* 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.**



ALEXIS PEART KATE PINKERTON

Lyric debut

A first-year Ryan Opera Center mezzo-soprano from Titusville, New Jersey, Peart will also appear at Lyric this season in *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. 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*, as well as in the company's educational touring productions. 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, Peart is a two-time alumna of the Wolf Trap Opera Studio and has worked with the Princeton Festival, Chautauqua Opera Company (Studio Artist), Rochester Oratorio Society, Guerilla Opera, and Castle of Our Skins. *Alexis Peart is sponsored by Lead Sponsor Blythe McGarvie and cosponsors Karen Petitte and the Thierer Family Foundation.*



CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. IMPERIAL COMMISSIONER

Previously at Lyric: Five roles since 2024/25, most recently Second Soldier/*Salome* and Captain of the Guard/*Medea* (both 2025/26).

Last season at Lyric, the third-year Ryan Opera Center bass-baritone sang Ceprano/*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. Originally from Akron, Ohio, he has performed widely throughout his home state, 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 the 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. Humbert is recipient of a 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.*



SANKARA HAROUNA OFFICIAL REGISTRAR

Previously at Lyric: Three roles since 2023/24, most recently A Cappadocian/*Salome* (2025/26) and Marullo/*Rigoletto* (2024/25).

A Chicago native, the Ryan Opera Center baritone appeared as Benny Paret and Benny Jr./*Champion* in 2023/24. 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. 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.*



DOMINGO HINDOYAN CONDUCTOR

Previously at Lyric: *La Bohème* (2018/19).

Hindoyan is Chief Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director Designate of Los Angeles Opera, where he will begin his tenure as Music Director in the 2026/27 season. He appears regularly with leading orchestras across Europe and the United States, and this season returns to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, New World Symphony Miami, Orchestre National de Bordeaux Aquitaine, and Paris Opera. He also makes debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, and Zurich Opera. Hindoyan has conducted productions at the Metropolitan Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, Wiener Staatsoper, Paris Opera, Opéra National de Bordeaux, Teatro Real Madrid, Royal Swedish Opera, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Opéra du Rhin, Royal Opera House Muscat, and LA Opera. He continues to lead acclaimed ensembles worldwide, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, New Japan Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, and Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. He is a regular guest at international festivals, including the Menuhin Festival Gstaad and Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier. Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Domingo Hindoyan began his career as a violinist in the renowned El Sistema program and later joined Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. His discography with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic includes *Verismo* (2023), Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 and *Venezuela! Music from the Americas!* (2024), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 and *Souvenir de Florence* (April 2025).



**MATTHEW OZAWA
DIRECTOR**

Previously at Lyric: Six operas since 2015/16, most recently *Fidelio* (2024/25) and *The Three Queens* (2019/20).

A multidisciplinary stage director, artistic director, and educator, Ozawa became Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Chief Artistic Officer, a new position, in 2022. He recently premiered a critically acclaimed production of *Parsifal* at San Francisco Opera, where he has also created new productions of *Fidelio*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and *The Barber of Seville: Drive-In Opera*. Ozawa’s *Madama Butterfly* premiered at Cincinnati Opera in 2023, and has since appeared at Detroit Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and Utah Opera. His highly regarded production of *Romeo and Juliet*, originally commissioned by Minnesota Opera, has been seen at seven companies in the past decade. Committed to new and modern work, his recent production highlights include Ruo’s *Angel Island* (Brooklyn Academy of Music/Beth Morrison Projects) and Ruo/Hwang’s *An American Soldier* (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis). At Lyric, Ozawa has directed *Fidelio*, *Nabucco*, *Don Quichotte*, *The Three Queens*, *An American Dream*, and *Second Nature*. Ozawa’s productions have also been seen at Canadian Opera Company, Santa Fe Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Minnesota Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Colorado, and numerous others.



**DOTS
SET DESIGN
Lyric debut**

dots is an award-winning design collective based in New York City. Originally from Colombia, South Africa, and Japan, they are Santiago Orjuela-Laverde, Andrew Moerdyk, and Kimie Nishikawa. Recent highlights include the Broadway productions of *Floyd Collins*; *Romeo + Juliet*; *Oh, Mary!*; *An Enemy of the People* (Tony Award Nomination for Best Scenic Design of a Play); *Appropriate* (Tony Award, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award nominations for Outstanding Scenic Design); and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*. Recent awards include a 2025 United States Artists Set Design Fellowship, a 2024 Obie Award for Sustained Achievement in Design, and a 2023 Henry Hewes Design Award.



**MAIKO MATSUSHIMA
COSTUME DESIGNER
Lyric debut**

A visual and installation artist, and a scenic and costume designer for theatre, dance, opera and film, Matsushima is based in Philadelphia, where she often designs for the Wilma Theatre, Pig Iron, the Arden, Headlong, and BalletX. Matsushima spent a decade based in New York City, designing costumes for regional theaters and New York theaters, and associate designing Broadway productions such as *Wicked*, *Pacific Overtures* and *Spring Awakening*. Her work has been seen at Classic Stage Company, the Prototype Festival, La

Jolla Playhouse, Children’s Theatre Company, and Soho Rep. She is a professor of design at Bryn Mawr College. *Maiko Matsushima is supported by Ross° & Patricia D. Bender.*



**YUKI NAKASE LINK
LIGHTING DESIGNER**

Previously at Lyric: Lighting Designer/*Fidelio* (2024/25).

Based in New York City and the Baltimore area, Link started her career as a lighting designer for Nippon Television Network Corporation in Tokyo, working with them for eight years before she moved to the United States. She has previously designed with Matthew Ozawa for Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* at San Francisco Opera; Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, a co-production of Cincinnati Opera, Detroit Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and Utah Opera; and Huang Ruo’s *Angel Island* at BAM Harvey/Prototype Festival. Recent credits include Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* at Detroit Opera, John Cage’s *Europeras: 3 & 4* at Detroit Opera, Aaron Zigman’s *Émigré* at New York Philharmonic, Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* at Santa Fe Opera, and Christopher Cerrone’s *In a Grove* at Pittsburgh Opera. *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*. He has lectured or given masterclasses at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, and in 2025 worked with singers at the Santa Fe Opera. 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.*

°Deceased



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.*



MELANIE BACALING
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Previously at Lyric: *La Bohème* (2024/25) directorial debut.

At Lyric, Bacaling previously served as associate director on *Fidelio* (2024/25), and assistant director on *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2021/22) and *The Factotum* (2022/23). Bacaling is currently on the stage directing staff at the Metropolitan Opera, where she most recently assisted on David McVicar's production of *Il trovatore* and Michael Mayer's production of *Aida*. She is also the House Assistant Director at the Santa Fe Opera where she has worked for five summers. Recent engagements include serving as associate director for Matthew Ozawa's production of *Madama Butterfly* at Pittsburgh Opera. Bacaling holds production credits with LA Opera, Detroit Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Omaha, Washington Concert Opera, Aspen Opera Center, and the Sun Valley Music Festival. As a producer, Bacaling worked with Boston Lyric Opera to create *WE NEED TO LISTEN*, a series of conversations interrogating the racial inequities in classical music and opera. She holds a BM in Vocal Performance and BS in Psychology from the University of Evansville, as well as a Master of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from the Boston Conservatory. 

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Orchestra & Chorus

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

MUSIC STAFF

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

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

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

Violin II

Yin Shen, *Principal*
John Macfarlane,
Assistant Principal
Injoo Cho:^{**}
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
Ann Palen
Irene Radetzky
John D. Robinson
David Volfe

Viola

Carol Cook, *Principal*
Terri Van Valkinburgh,
Assistant Principal
Kunjing Dai:^{**}
Amy Hess
Melissa Trier Kirk
Rebecca Swan

Cello

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

String Bass

Samuel Shuhan,
Acting Principal
Collins R. Trier, *Acting
Assistant Principal*
Andrew L. W. Anderson
Gregory Sarchet

Flute

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

Piccolo

Alyce Johnson

Oboe

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

English Horn

Judith Zunamon Lewis

Clarinet

Heesoo Kim, *Principal*
Susan Warner,
Assistant Principal

Bass Clarinet

Susan Warner,
Acting

Bassoon

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

Contrabassoon

Lewis Kirk

Horn

Abigail Black, *Principal*
Fritz Foss, *Assistant
Principal/Utility
(Third Horn^{**})*
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Samuel Hamzem
Neil Kimel

Trumpet

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

Trombone

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

Bass Trombone

Will Baker

Tuba

Andrew Smith, *Principal*

Timpani

Edward Harrison, *Principal*

Percussion

Douglas Waddell,
Acting Principal
Eric Millstein,
Acting Assistant Principal

Harp

Lynn Williams, *Principal*

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
^{^^} Ryan Opera Center Conductor

Librarian

John Rosenkrans, *Principal*

Stage Band Contractor

Christine Janicki

EXTRA MUSICIANS

Cristina Buçiu, *violin*
Jennifer Cappelli, *violin*
Olga Kossivich, *violin*
Christine Chon, *violin*
Sheila Hanford, *violin*
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Bruno Vaz da Silva, *viola*
Nomin Zolzaya, *cello*
Jeremy Attanaseo, *bass*
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Wagner Campos, *clarinet*
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Beatrice Chen, *viola*
Joel Cohen, *percussion*
Richard Janicki, *percussion*

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AND HEAD OF MUSIC**

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*The Howard A. Stotler
Endowed Chair*

REGULAR CHORUS**Soprano**

Angela De Venuto
Cathleen Dunn
Desirée Hassler
Rachael Holzhausen
Kimberly McCord
Heidi Spoor
Stephani Springer
Sherry Watkins
Kelsea Webb
Tara Wheeker

Mezzo-Soprano

Marianna Kulikova
Ola Rafalo
Yvette Smith
Marie Sokolova
Maia Surace
Corinne Wallace-Crane
Pamela Williams
Michelle K. Wrighte

Tenor

Geoffrey Agpalo
Timothy Bradley
Hoss Brock
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Joseph Shadday

Bass

David DuBois
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Rafael W. Porto
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**CORE SUPPLEMENTARY
CHORUS****Soprano**

Cara Collins
Megan Fleischmann
Emily Mwila

Mezzo-Soprano

Christina G. Adams
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Tenor

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Ace Gangoso

Bass

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CHORUS****Soprano**

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Ariana Strahl

Mezzo-Soprano

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Leah Dexter
Elizabeth Frey
Miya Higashiyama
Georgia Jacobson
Samantha McGonigal
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Marissa Simmons

Tenor

Jerek Fernández
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Bass

Evan Bravos
Chris DiMarco
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Congratulations!

Lyric Opera of Chicago wishes to express its enduring gratitude, and warm congratulations, to these company members who will retire at the conclusion of the season.



PATRICK BRENNAN
Viola

Brennan joined Lyric in 1992, coming from the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra where he was Assistant Principal. He joined Grant Park Orchestra as well in 1995, and soon became Assistant Principal there. Starting violin at age nine, Brennan also studied Irish music, becoming Chicago Teenage Irish Fiddle Champion at 17. He earned a Bachelor of Music in Performance at Northern Illinois University. He continued his studies at Southern Methodist University, eventually transitioning to viola in 1986, studying with Rami Solomonov, then Principal at Lyric. He currently lives in River Forest, where he grew up and where he and his wife, Nora, raised their three kids.



JOSEPH DUNN
Assistant Box Office Treasurer

“In many ways, and to many people,” Dunn says, “the people in the box office ARE Lyric. Obviously it’s important that box office people be courteous and professional.” Over 20 years, Dunn has assisted innumerable patrons with ticketing sales and solved various ticket problems like lost tickets, and even tickets to the wrong performance. Subscribers, he notes, had fewer issues than the general public, but he “enjoyed working with everyone. It was a pleasure, all those years, and I will miss my colleagues and our patrons.”



ELIZABETH HURLEY
Deputy General Director and Chief Advancement Officer

Hurley joined Lyric in 2018 and worked closely with the company’s board and executive leadership to grow philanthropic support for the company. She was a member of the leadership team during the dark days of the pandemic when collaboration across the company and with the wider artistic community produced dozens of highly acclaimed digital programs that engaged new audiences, resulted in increased philanthropy, and positioned Lyric to emerge from the pandemic as a stronger and more nimble company. Before joining Lyric, Elizabeth served in leadership positions at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera, the Art Institute of Chicago, and The Juilliard School.



LEWIS KIRK
**Assistant Principal Bassoon/
Contra Bassoon**

Kirk’s first opera performance, as a teenager, was with the Mobile Opera in Alabama, playing second bassoon on *Carmen*. He joined Lyric in the 1987/88 Season, and has also performed with the Städtisches Orchester Bremerhaven in Germany and the Santa Fe Opera. In Chicago he has performed with Music of the Baroque, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Opera Theater, Bach Week in Evanston, the Fulcrum Point New Music Project, and the Chicago Chamber Musicians. Kirk has served on the faculties of DePaul University, Northwestern University, and Roosevelt University, and, for the premiere run of Michael Daugherty’s *Dead Elvis*, for bassoon soloist with chamber orchestra, he donned full Elvis regalia.



JOHN ROSENKRANS
Principal Librarian

Rosenkrans began his music studies with the piano at age 5 and discovered the bass at age ten. He earned performance degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and discovered the orchestral librarian world in 1993 at the Austin Symphony. In 1999, he moved to The Phoenix Symphony as their librarian, and arrived at Lyric in 2005. He has worked at the orchestra libraries in Minnesota and Los Angeles, served as librarian for the Spoleto (Italy) Festival in 1996, and spent two summers as the librarian for the Grant Park Symphony. He now lives in Geneva, Illinois, with his wife, cellist Kerena Fox.



ANDREW TRUSK
Carpenter

Trusk retires after more than 30 years with Lyric. He began working at the company during the renovation in the 1990s, he established the welding and machine shop needed for the complex sets used in today’s productions. Trusk studied theatre and science at UIC and worked in scene shops in Chicago before touring with the *Magic of David Copperfield* show for three years. He plans to spend his days scuba diving the world.

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Mark Park
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Olivia Roach
Alice Salazar
Melanie Saso
Jessica Scheithe
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Local USA 829 of the IATSE is the union representing scenic, costume, lighting, sound and projection designers in Live Performance

The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center identifies exceptionally talented emerging artists from around the world and provides them with comprehensive training and performance opportunities. On the world's stages, the Center's impressive roster of alumni continually proves the value of training at Lyric.



The 2025/26 Ryan Opera Center Ensemble

Sopranos

Adia Evans
Emily Richter

Mezzo-sopranos

Alexis Peart
Camille Robles

Tenors

Daniel Luis Espinal
Travon D. Walker

Baritones

Sankara Harouna
Sihao Hu
Finn Sagal

Bass-baritones

Christopher Humbert, Jr.
Benjamin R. Sokol

Conductor

Chi-Yuan Lin

Pianist

Michael Banwarth

Stage Director

Marinette Gomez

Stage Manager

Gemma DeCetra

Kyle Flubacker

Front row, l to r: Emily Richter, Chi-Yuan Lin, Marinette Gomez, Gemma DeCetra, Adia Evans, Michael Banwarth, Finn Sagal, Alexis Peart

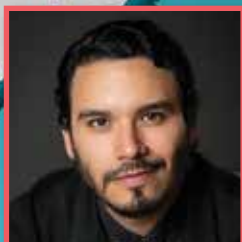
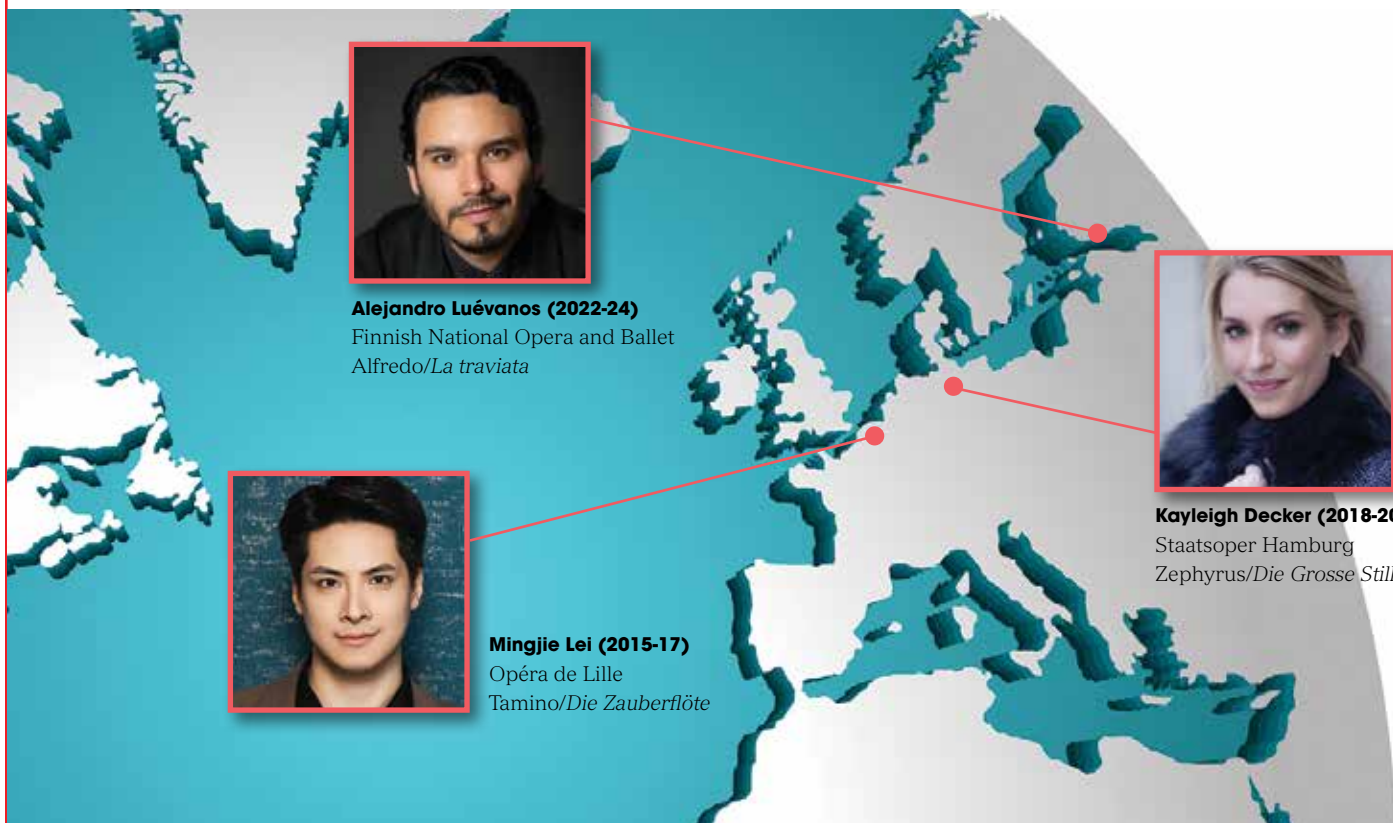
Back row, l to r: Camille Robles, Travon D. Walker, Benjamin R. Sokol, Christopher Humbert, Jr., Sihao Hu, Daniel Luis Espinal, Sankara Harouna

Lyric

Ryan Opera Center

Ryan Opera Center alumni around the world

THIS SEASON



Alejandro Luévanos (2022-24)
Finnish National Opera and Ballet
Alfredo/La traviata



Kayleigh Decker (2018-20))
Staatsoper Hamburg
Zephyrus/Die Grosse Stille



Mingjie Lei (2015-17)
Opéra de Lille
Tamino/Die Zauberflöte

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Stage Manager

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 Renée Fleming
 Karen Chia-ling Ho
 Jennifer Holloway
 Alexandra Loutsion
 Ana María Martínez
 Sondra Radvanovsky
 Alexandra Razskazoff
 Gabriella Reyes
 Emily Richter
 Karah Son
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 Kara Shay Thomson
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 Cameron Schutza
 Victor Starsky
 Eric Taylor
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 Travon D. Walker

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 Alfredo Daza
 Rod Gilfry
 Sankara Harouna
 Sihao Hu
 Quinn Kelsey
 Brian Stokes Mitchell
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 Ian Rucker
 Hugh Russell
 Finn Sagal
 Daniel Scofield
 Luke Sutliff

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 Alfred Walker

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The American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO (AGMA), is the union that represents the singers, dancers, actors, and staging personnel at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

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.



Kyle Flubacker

Explore Your Lyric offers captivating live performances.

Lyric

Lyric Unlimited: Learning and Civic Engagement

Choose your own adventure!

The annual *Explore Your Lyric* event, coming April 26, invites audiences of all ages to step into the world of opera.

By Janie Ragsdale

Have you ever wanted to stand on Lyric Opera of Chicago's grand stage? Peek into the orchestra pit? Try your hand at costume design? This is your chance! On April 26, the doors to the opera house will swing wide open, welcoming visitors to *Explore Your Lyric*, an immersive, hands-on event where visitors choose their own adventure by navigating through a variety of special opportunities and performances.

"*Explore Your Lyric* is all about creativity, curiosity, and fun," says Jill LeCesne Potter, Senior Director of Learning Programs for Lyric Unlimited. "It's a day to step into the roles of designer, musician, performer, and see what makes opera such a thrilling, collaborative art form."

For this edition of the annual, family friendly event, Lyric will pull back the curtain on nearly all aspects of the art form, allowing guests of all ages to journey through the opera house at their own pace as they explore the artistry

that brings productions to life. The interactive event puts visitors at the center of the action through hands-on activities and behind-the-scenes access, ranging from costume and scenic displays, make-and-take art projects, and DJ sets.

And of course, it's not a true experience at the opera house without a live performance. This year, *Explore Your Lyric* will feature two 20-minute performances of *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong*, a bold new opera for young audiences that celebrates the life and legacy of circus strongwoman Katie Sandwina. This season, the production has toured the city as the main offering of Lyric Unlimited's *Opera in the Neighborhoods* program, which provides complimentary performances to school groups, close to where they live and attend class.

Composed by Faye Chiao with a libretto by Anton Dudley, *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong* introduces young



Children can get their face painted — and get up close to the orchestra pit.



Maestro Enrique Mazzola met some of his youngest fans, while others checked out opera costumes.




audiences to a figure whose story embodies resilience, justice, and community. Known in her time as “the strongest woman in the world,” Sandwina was also a wife, mother, and activist who fought for women’s suffrage in the early 20th century. Pairing the wonder of circus life with the urgency of social change, this family-friendly show is a wonderful way to introduce young people to opera and the important history of women’s rights.

The immersive experience of *Explore Your Lyric* will be further enhanced by a variety of circus-themed lobby activations, bringing guests into the opera house and under the big top. From roaming jugglers and stilt walkers to face painting and circus classes, visitors will be immersed in the world of opera through the lens of *Katie: The Strongest of the Strong*. Backstage, young attendees will have the chance to practice some of those same circus skills, led by Lyric’s own experts.

The afternoon will also feature exciting opportunities for opera-lovers, including an exhibit on the history

of Lyric; a chance to “Meet the Maestro,” during an appearance by Lyric’s Music Director Enrique Mazzola; and a rare “Peek in the Pit,” which offers a birds-eye view of the orchestra pit, a first-hand discussion with orchestra members, and a chance to see their instruments up close. With additional offerings for this year’s event still to be revealed, it’s clear that when the opera house opens its doors from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on April 26, the three hours are sure to fly by! *Explore Your Lyric* is an ideal entryway for guests of all ages to understand and relate to the many elements of opera — the kind of connection Lyric hopes can create fans for life.

“The opera house can sometimes feel like a big unobtainable space filled with formal gowns, tuxedos, and fur coats,” says Sheran Goodspeed Keyton, Director of Civic Engagement for Lyric Unlimited. “While that is one aspect of who we are, we want to ensure that everyone knows this house is *their* house,” she continues. “This fun-filled, relaxed environment is just the space to make everyone feel right at home!” 

People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



Kyle Flubacker

Lena Reynolds Sneed Front of House Manager

Hometown

Chicago — the Chatham neighborhood (I used to call it Mayberry).

When did you start at Lyric?

Spring 2018

First live performance?

My mother took me to *Les Misérables*. It wasn't opera, but it introduced me to musical storytelling. Later, I came to Lyric at least once a year and saw classics like *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*.

Favorite performer?

J'naï Bridges

Favorite opera character?

Carmen — fiery, colorful, and full of passion.

What was your path to working at Lyric?

I started as an usher and worked my way up to mezzanine monitor. Before Lyric, I owned a business for about 20 years, worked in real estate, and served as a director in the No Child Left Behind program, mentoring students and advocating for families. Wherever I go, I don't just do the job — I ask, *How can I help? How can I improve things?*

Can you describe a typical day?

Preparation is everything. I start on the sixth floor and work my way down, checking each level and making sure staff, bars, and concessions are set. We say, "Clear, clear, clear, clear," before doors open. Then the audience arrives — and gratitude is at the core of it all. It's joy.

You're known for going the extra mile.

I love helping people — whether that's simply making sure someone feels cared for or standing in the rain with a blind couple to help them get a cab. Once, a donor saw that and increased her contribution. I don't do it for recognition. I do it because that's how I was raised.

What's most challenging?

Managing people and energy. When it's showtime, something comes over me — I can see the whole picture. I'm often the first call for de-escalation, a skill I gained working in public schools. I believe in face-to-face connection, reading the room, and making people feel seen. That's both the hardest and best part.

Do you enjoy working in the arts?

Music saved my life. I was essentially an only child, and music became my constant companion. When my dad finally bought me a stereo, everything changed. Music has always been how I process life.

What might surprise people about your job?

I've had 100 percent attendance since taking this position — I've never missed a show.

Do you have a favorite thing about Lyric?

I'm deeply grateful to lead in such a prestigious house. I remind staff: You're working on one of the largest opera stages in the world. This is like Microsoft or Google for tech people. It's both a responsibility and a privilege. And if someone says they have "nosebleed seats," I tell them, *No — you're in the penthouse.* 🎭