

*Lyric*

OPERA OF  
CHICAGO



El último  
sueño de  
**Frida y Diego**

MUSIC BY  
*Gabriela Lena Frank*

LIBRETTO BY  
*Nilo Cruz*



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Coley Weaver / San Francisco Opera

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**On the cover:** Daniela Mack in the title role.  
Photo: John Shaw/Lyric Opera of Chicago

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# Welcome to your Lyric

# From the Chair and the General Director

Welcome to Lyric Opera of Chicago! Bienvenidos a la Ópera Lírica de Chicago!

We are so excited to present the first Chicago performances of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, after its triumphant world premiere in October 2022. As new as it is, audiences and critics already have hailed it as one of the most important works of this still young century.

It's no wonder, given the compelling score by Gabriela Lena Frank, one of the leading composers of our time, and the evocative libretto by lauded writer Nilo Cruz. Frank, a Grammy Award-winning composer who was named 2026 Composer of the Year by Musical America, foregrounds her own multicultural heritage — Peruvian, Chinese, Lithuanian, Jewish — in music of great sophistication and irresistible invention. Cruz, a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright (for his 2003 drama *Anna in the Tropics*), frequently collaborates with



leading composers; his work is known to many here at Lyric from *Bel Canto*, his opera with Jimmy López. Though *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* is Frank's first opera, she and Cruz have collaborated on a number of major works — a requiem, a song cycle, and an oratorio among them.

Taking the title role of Frida Kahlo is Daniela Mack, the celebrated Argentinian mezzo, in her third appearance here. She debuted with us in *Rusalka* (2013) and returned as cult leader sidekick Angela Rose in last season's *The Listeners*. Her recent performances as Lorca in Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* at both LA Opera and the Met were a great success. Mexican baritone Alfredo Daza makes

his Lyric debut as Frida's grieving partner, Diego Rivera, a role he created in the work's world premiere. And it's always a pleasure to welcome back Grammy winner Ana María Martínez, whose performance as Catrina marks her twelfth role at Lyric since her debut in 2009. Many of you will have seen her earlier this season as Despina in our delightful *Così fan tutte*.

Lyric has a long tradition of presenting new work by the leading creative voices of our time. We're proud to honor that with *Frida y Diego*. And we look forward to April 9, when we will share details of our new 2026/27 Season, which is full of the classics you love, local premieres, and some unexpected delights and surprises along the way. Thank you for being here — we do it all for you, our beloved audience, and you make it all possible.

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# *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and the Day of the Dead: Artistic alchemy

This new opera derives part of its power from a reverent and imaginative approach to this important holiday.



**T**he Day of the Dead, Día de Muertos, is a deeply rooted Mexican holiday that celebrates the lives of the deceased with color, memory, and joy. Far from a somber affair, it is a time of remembrance when families honor loved ones who have passed away, believing their spirits return to visit. This vibrant tradition has influence and presence in numerous works of art, literature, and music — among them, the 2022 opera *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* (*The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*), composed by Gabriela Lena Frank with a libretto by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Nilo Cruz. The opera not only draws from the emotional and symbolic language of Día de Muertos but also opens an artistic doorway into the unique relationship between two of Mexico’s most iconic artists: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

**Typically celebrated** on November 1 and 2, Día de Muertos blends pre-Hispanic indigenous beliefs with Catholic traditions introduced during Spanish colonization. Central to the celebration is the idea that the souls of the dead return each year to the world of the living. To welcome them, families create *ofrendas* (altars) adorned with marigolds, candles, food, personal items, and photographs. This act is not meant to mourn the dead, but to celebrate their lives and keep their memory alive.

Día de Muertos emphasizes that death is not an end, but a continuation of existence in a different realm. This belief system makes the boundary between life and death permeable, a theme that is central to *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. Premiered at San Diego Opera in 2022, the opera is an imaginative operatic narrative that takes place on the Day of the Dead. It tells the story of Diego Rivera, the famed muralist, longing to reunite with his deceased wife, Frida Kahlo, during Día de Muertos. Diego is still alive at the beginning of the opera, and as the dead return to visit the living, he hopes that Frida will cross over from the afterlife to see him once more. She is given the choice to return but initially refuses, having suffered greatly in her mortal life from illness, pain, and emotional turmoil. However, she ultimately does come back — not so much for Diego’s sake, but for her own need to remember and re-experience life through art, love, and self-discovery.

The opera’s storyline weaves a deep connection to Día de Muertos by building its central dramatic conflict around the threshold between life and death, and the possibility of reunion across that divide. Just as families wait in hope for their loved ones to return each year during Día de Muertos, Diego yearns for Frida’s spiritual return. This longing creates a shared emotional space between the opera and the cultural practices of the holiday.

**Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz** masterfully use the opera to explore the power of memory — another cornerstone of Día de Muertos. In Mexican tradition, the dead live on as long as they are remembered. Similarly, *El último sueño* suggests that Frida’s essence endures through Diego’s memories and her own artistic legacy. When Frida finally returns, she does not come back as a victim of her past, but as a woman who has reclaimed her narrative through memory and art.

Art becomes a form of resurrection in the opera. Frida’s paintings — which often depicted her pain, her identity, and her surreal imaginings — are echoed in the opera’s visual and musical landscape. Frank’s composition fuses classical Western opera with Latin American musical idioms, incorporating indigenous instruments and rhythms that evoke Mexican folk traditions. This blending of styles parallels Frida’s own artistic hybridity and mirrors the fusion of indigenous and Catholic elements in the holiday’s celebrations.

Another profound link between the opera and the holiday lies in the cultural significance of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera themselves. Both artists are deeply associated with Mexican national identity, and their work often celebrated indigenous culture, Mexican folklore, and revolutionary ideals. In many ways, they were living embodiments of the spirit of Día de Muertos: proud of their roots, unafraid of death, and deeply engaged with the beauty and pain of existence.

By choosing Frida and Diego as central characters in a Día de Muertos setting, the opera not only dramatizes a personal love story but also stages a national dialogue about death, memory, and cultural identity. Their return from beyond is symbolic of how Mexican culture continually reclaims its history and honors its ancestors, not just through private rituals but also through public, artistic expression.

**Though steeped in traditional themes,** *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* is also a thoroughly contemporary work, addressing modern concerns such as grief, legacy, agency, and the transformative power of art. Frida’s refusal to return initially can be read as a feminist assertion of control — she is not simply summoned by love or nostalgia, but returns on her own terms. This modern perspective breathes new life into the themes of Día de Muertos, showing that tradition is not static but dynamic, capable of evolving while remaining meaningful. The work itself gives voice to the enduring Mexican belief that death is not an end, but a transformation — and that love, memory, and art can transcend even the boundaries of life and death. The opera, itself, is a kind of *ofrenda*: a gift of remembrance, reflection, and reverence. **L**



Corey Weaver / San Francisco Opera

Frida returns on the Day of the Dead, surrounded by ofrendas and her own imagery.

On the Day of the Dead, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo crosses over from the underworld for 24 short hours with Diego Rivera, who remains in the living world, alone and grieving her loss.

*El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, which had its critically acclaimed world premiere in 2022, brings the legendary marriage — and revolutionary art — of Frida and Diego to the stage with vivid colors, surrealist touches, and lush, evocative music sung in Spanish and inspired by Mexican folk music traditions.



John Shaw / Lyric Opera of Chicago

Daniela Mack in the lead role

*Lyric*

# El último sueño de Frida y Diego



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# El último sueño de Frida y Diego

*New-to-Chicago production* | Opera in Spanish in two acts

Music by **Gabriela Lena Frank**

Libretto by **Nilo Cruz**

March 21, 24, 26, & 29M | April 1M & 4M, 2026

## CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

First Villager  
Second Villager  
Third Villager  
Diego Rivera  
Catrina  
Frida Kahlo

**Finn Sagal**<sup>+</sup>  
**Daniel Luis Espinal**<sup>•</sup>  
**Benjamin R. Sokol**<sup>•</sup>  
**Alfredo Daza**<sup>+</sup>  
**Ana María Martínez**  
**Daniela Mack**  
**Stephanie Sánchez** (April 1)  
**Daniel Luis Espinal**<sup>•</sup>  
**Key'mon Murrah**<sup>+</sup>  
**Corinne Wallace-Crane**  
**Adia Evans**<sup>•</sup>  
**Alexis Peart**<sup>•</sup>  
**Camille Robles**<sup>•</sup>

A Young Man  
Leonardo  
Guadalupe Ponti  
First Frida Image  
Second Frida Image  
Third Frida Image

Actors

**Jordan Reinwald**  
**Niki Southern**

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

Prompter  
Diction Coach  
Intimacy Director  
Projected English Titles

**Roberto Kalb**<sup>+</sup>  
**Lorena Maza**<sup>+</sup>  
**Jorge Ballina**<sup>+</sup>  
**Eloise Kazan**<sup>+</sup>  
**Victor Zapatero**<sup>+</sup>  
**Michael Black**  
**August Tye**  
**John Metzner**  
**Jordan Lee Braun**  
**Sandra Moore**  
**Stefano Sarzani**  
**Kseniia Polstiankina**  
**Barrad**  
**William C. Billingham**  
**Madeline Slettedahl**  
**Susan Miller Hult**  
**Eric Miranda**  
**Denise Cerna**  
**Bruce Stasyna**

First performed by San Diego Opera on October 29, 2022.  
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on March 21, 2026.

<sup>+</sup> Lyric debut

<sup>•</sup> Current Member, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center

# Synopsis

TIME | **Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead), November 2, 1957**

PLACE | **Mexico**

## ACT I

Three years after the death of his wife, painter Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera visits a cemetery where villagers have gathered for the annual ritual to honor departed loved ones and summon them to return from the underworld. A few villagers recognize the famous painter and dare to approach. They joke affectionately and then explain their ritual, emphasizing that it is faith in your soul that brings back the dead. As the villagers depart, Diego calls out to Frida, revealing his fears and loneliness and imploring her to return to him. Diego's reverie is interrupted by an old woman selling flowers. After Diego leaves, the old woman reveals herself as La Catrina, Keeper of the Dead.

In Mictlán, the Aztec underworld, Catrina summons Frida to arise and return to visit Diego. Frida defies the powerful Catrina, refusing to believe that Diego has called her. Catrina insists that Frida must return to accompany her dying husband on his journey to the underworld.

Frida, having found release in death from both her mercurial relationship and agonizing physical pain, questions why she would return to the world of the living. She prefers her refuge of darkness and silence. Other departed souls playfully implore Frida to return to Diego, but Frida refuses.

Catrina arrives to gather those who have been summoned, chasing off a young man trying to sneak back to the living world after he failed to return to the underworld in time the previous year.

Frida notices a young actor, Leonardo, practicing his impersonation of Greta Garbo. He wants to go back as Garbo, to please a fan of the actress who waits every year hoping for a visit from his long unseen (and assumed departed) idol.

A fellow artistic spirit, Leonardo encourages Frida to return for herself, her art, and the chance to paint a new Frida without pain or anguish. He dresses her in her trademark clothes, adorning her hair with ribbons and flowers. Catrina returns, calling out the names of those who have been summoned, and readies them for their return. She calls on Frida, who continues to protest. Catrina notices Leonardo in his Garbo costume and forbids his ruse as Greta Garbo has not yet died. Frida pleads for him, and Catrina relents.

At the last minute, Frida decides she will return to the world of the living. Catrina allows it but not before laying out the rules: The visit is for 24 hours only, and there is to be no touching the living — “A caress can cost you the memory of pain.” As Diego continues to summon Frida from above, she and the other departed souls begin their return.

## INTERMISSION

**ACT II**

In the world of the living, Diego is bereft of inspiration. He is unable to paint, unable to embrace his mortality, and tormented by the absence of Frida, when she suddenly appears to him. Diego's pleas have been answered, and Frida is again in the world of the living.

Frida and Diego find themselves together in Alameda Park, strolling among living and departed souls together. Frida is overjoyed to be without pain and part of the vibrant life around her. Diego pleads for an embrace which Frida cannot give.

A passing beggarwoman is a reminder of the darker world around them. Diego feels the presence of death and is reminded of his own mortality as the two artists mourn the state of the city and its broken, beautiful past. Frida finds Leonardo and learns that he has visited Greta Garbo's admirer, fulfilling the man's fantasy of meeting the movie star and providing the departed actor with a successful performance.

Diego leads Frida back to her beloved home, Casa Azul, where she must confront the realities of her past life and the limitations of her return. Leonardo encourages Frida to paint. Diego begs her to embrace him, and Catrina reminds Frida that her time is limited, and she must not touch the living. Frida tries to paint but, no longer having a reflection in the physical world, she cannot summon her primary subject — her own image. Diego comforts Frida, offers assistance, and asks for forgiveness for their difficult past. Suddenly, she embraces him and is racked by the returning pain of her living existence. Diego lovingly encourages her to paint as a distraction. Images of herself that Frida created throughout her life appear, beckoning her into a world of art. Diego and Frida are surrounded by a timeless world of blue.

As dawn breaks, Frida and Diego cling to their hope of staying together, but it is time for Frida to return to the underworld. As Leonardo bids a final farewell to the world of the living, Catrina gathers the departed souls for their return. She is angry to notice Frida's absence but keeps her procession moving.

Alone, Frida and Diego recognize that they cannot live forever in a dream world of art. With a final hope of being with Frida forever, Diego pleads for the gods of the underworld to call him back with her. Catrina appears, and Diego tells her his time has come. Catrina reminds him that only Mictlantecutli, god of the underworld, can decide his time. Frida begs her to help, and Diego's journey begins.

As they approach the underworld, Catrina calls out to Mictlantecutli, who appears and brings Diego into the world of the departed. As the departed souls welcome them, Frida and Diego whisper to one another, united for eternity in the underworld.

— *Synopsis reprinted courtesy of San Francisco Opera*

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**Diego Rivera artwork "Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park)"  
© 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York**

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**APPROXIMATE TIMINGS**

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

Act 1	55 minutes
Intermission	25 minutes
Act 2	55 minutes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 hours 15 minutes</b>

Catrina calls for the god of the underworld to bring Diego to the world of the departed



Corey Weaver / San Francisco Opera

# A Dream of Life and Death

The composer's first foray into opera continues her abiding commitment to riveting musical storytelling

By Dr. Naomi André

**Gabriela Lena Frank's** *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* is indeed her first opera, but it is preceded by decades of experience as a composer who knows how to tell a story through a great variety of instrumental combinations and across multiple genres. As a virtuoso pianist and accomplished violinist, she has learned her craft deftly and deliberately — she is an accomplished performer, composer, and teller of history. Starting as a young, gifted musician, Frank received a rigorous conservatory training that began at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and culminated with her doctorate at the School of Music at the University of Michigan. Her approach to writing music includes asking questions and partnering closely with other musicians.

“Since my earliest student days as an undergrad, I will grab friends and just ask them a lot of questions about their instrument,” she noted in an interview for a scholarly work on influential women in contemporary music. “I will often have little snippets of music I’ve composed, little combinations of things I’ve tried, and I want to see if they work — and if my friends have suggestions for how to make them more comfortable.” This collaborative practice and approach has been a hallmark that has continued through numerous residencies with leading orchestras and string quartets as well as at many educational institutions. In an interview after her 2013/14 residency with the Detroit

Symphony, she mentions a special climactic figure that is only in the basses because, in that city, “I got to know the bass section well.” In addition to writing for full orchestra and multiple kinds of smaller ensembles (she also performs as a concert pianist), Frank has written extensively for voice in solo songs, a cappella chorus, and accompanied voices with chamber ensembles as well as the orchestra. Behind *El último sueño*, which premiered October 29, 2022 at San Diego Opera (and was performed on the West Coast also at San Francisco Opera and LA Opera), is a composer who knows how to handle vocal and orchestral forces and remains a master at collaboration.

The “last dream” in the title encompasses the ethereal nature of in-betweenness that is threaded throughout the opera. We see this in the space between Earth and the underworld, living and the afterlife, a fleshy embodiment and the numinous spirit. Frank set Frida as a mezzo-soprano who extends to the top of the staff and down to the lower timbres at the bottom of the part’s range. Frida’s vocal writing and expressive orchestration give voice to the complexity of pain — a physical and emotional reality she sings about in her first entrance:

“In life I had two major accidents: the impact of a trolley, and the blow of meeting Diego Rivera. The world was torture....the pain...Agony!”



Corey weaver / San Francisco Opera

**Frida Kahlo's works come to vivid life on the stage.**

In a sonic landscape that creates a permeable passage between the heaviness of the past and present, Frida ultimately accepts the opportunity to return to the living. Importantly, this decision is not primarily made to accompany Diego through death, but rather to take up the challenge her fellow underworld artist Leonardo voices: to “paint a new Frida without anguish, without indifference, without pain.” This opera reanimates the power of art as a force that makes the weight of the world worth carrying.

**Frank's long-time association** with Nilo Cruz, Cuban-American playwright and librettist who won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Anna in the Tropics*, has brought the organic story-telling aspect of her music to the forefront. They met in 2007 and collaborated on several smaller scale works (including the song cycle *La centinela y la paloma*, 2010; *Journey of the Shadow*, 2013; and *Las cinco lunas de Lorca*, 2016) before *Conquest Requiem* (2017), an extended work for chorus with two soloists and orchestra. *Conquest* can be seen as a close relative to *El último sueño* (2022). The requiem interweaves movements from the Latin Mass for the dead with texts in Latin, Spanish, and Nahuatl (an indigenous Aztec language of central Mexico). *Conquest Requiem* was inspired by the true story of Malinche (a Nahua woman from the Gulf Coast of Mexico, enslaved by the Spaniards from a young age).

She was the consort of conquistador Hernán Cortés and, given Malinche's gift with languages, she also became an interpreter who was both implicated in (and victimized by) the colonial conquest of the Aztec Empire by the Spanish.

This story about the forceful European entrance to the Americas is central to modern history yet in this work it is not told from the usual Spanish/European viewpoint. With two soloists, soprano Malinche and baritone Martín Cortés (Malinche's son with Hernán Cortés), a large part of the narrative is sung in Nahuatl from the vantage point of the conquered. The requiem is a study of blending the western history of Europe (in the Catholic mass and use of Latin and Spanish languages) with a less familiar indigenous voice of the Americas.

In the dynamics between the paired mezzo-soprano and baritone central characters (Malinche and Martín, Frida and Diego), the use of multiple languages and vibrant orchestration illuminate the larger philosophical themes of legacy and cultural representation in Latin American stories.

*Conquest Requiem* illustrates other central features of Frank's music that figure prominently in *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. The seven-movement work features the musical transition between life and death, themes that encompass our behavior on earth and the passage into the beyond. This borderland between the

living and the dead is the site of the opera's true setting, the locus of Frida's mission to help her earthbound widower, Diego, peaceably pass into the afterlife. An important role in the opera is Catrina, the Keeper of the Dead, who summons Frida to return to Earth. Written for high soprano, the trickster-like character mirrors the dual nature of Malinche, the named soprano soloist in the requiem whose alliance with Hernán Cortés opened the path to exploration and collaborative beginnings as well as to exploitation and devastating ruin. The choral writing in both large works helps bind each story together as the chorus creates a sonic landscape delineating life on Earth and the existence beyond. The sound worlds of both earthly life and the imagined afterlife come alive especially through one important signature of Frank's orchestral style, her expanded virtuosic writing for percussion. In the two compositions, she constructs innovative soundscapes through marimbas, xylophones, tubular bells, cymbals, triangles, tamtam, snare drum, and various other instruments specific to each work. The requiem adds the low wood block, thunder sheet, and bass drum; the opera includes high wood block, rainstick, handbells, small nipple gong, mark tree, and celesta.

**With this opera, Frank** adds an important work and voice to an arena in opera that is only recently getting attention. Her combination of language, Latin American history, and stories told from lesser-known vantage points are bringing experiences that have been hidden in the shadows into better visibility. Most seasoned opera-goers are not accustomed to hearing operas in Spanish — this production is just the second on Lyric's stage — or even to seeing stories about the Latin American diasporic experiences, though Spain (and especially Seville) were popular settings for operas ranging from the late 18th century (Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*) and into the early 19th century with Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1814) and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (1816). Later in the 19th century are operas by Verdi (*Ernani*, *Il trovatore*, *La forza del destino*, and *Don Carlos*), and — most famously — Bizet's *Carmen*, among others.

Frank's opera joins a growing number of productions that are sung in Spanish and reflect

elements of a diasporic culture that goes beyond an imagined exoticized locale. An early start to this tradition extends back to Brazilian composer Antônio Carlos Gomes, who trained in Italy and wrote eight operas in different languages (Portuguese and Italian), most famously *Il Guarany* (1870). Manuel de Falla, born in Spain, wrote zarzuelas and operas in Spanish (*La vida breve*, 1905).

While this is a music history still being written, audiences in recent decades have experienced a newer group of operas sung in Spanish that showcase Latin diasporic stories, exemplified perhaps most prominently in Daniel Catán's 1996 *Florençia en el Amazonas* (with a libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Berain), a vivid work that incorporates Gabriel García Márquez's

magic realism. Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* (In Arabic, "Fountain of Tears") was composed in 2003 (revised in 2005) and has a libretto by David Henry Hwang that was translated from English into Spanish by Golijov. An "opera in three images," the extension of "real time" showcased in Márquez's magical realism applies to *Ainadamar*; in it, the story of Federico García Lorca is told in a series of flashbacks by his muse, the actress Margarita Xirgu, as time in the opera moves between the past, the present, and the moment before her death.

This opera reanimates the power of art as a force that makes the weight of the world worth carrying.

**Though the musical languages** of *Florençia*, *Ainadamar*, and *El último sueño* are very different, the three operas in Spanish present diasporic stories that encompass Spain and Latin America — Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay — in ways that move across time, language, and history. With a keen sense of their compositional voices, Frank and Cruz have sharpened the vanguard of what opera can do and say today. Through Mexican folklore of the Day of the Dead and the lives of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, we are given a sophisticated collage, a new vision of history being represented on the opera stage with care, nuance, and power. **L**

*Naomi André is the David G. Frey Distinguished Professor in Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement and other projects examining opera and representation.*

# Director's note

by Lorena Maza



**Frida Kahlo is one** of the very few artists whose work is immediately recognizable. Diego Rivera is the father of Mexican Muralism, the first artistic movement the Americas gave to the world. They were extraordinary artists with extraordinary lives, bound together by a passionate, painful, and deeply human love story and, through their work, they created an entire universe containing their bodies, their homes, their politics, their collections, the way they dressed, the way they loved, and the way they imagined Mexico. They painted the visual identity of Mexico at its core, reconnecting us with our indigenous past, popular culture, and social ideals. They remain cultural icons, but they also belong to the realm of imagination.

*El último sueño de Frida y Diego* invites us to imagine them once more, to step inside their universe, and to witness a final encounter. Nilo Cruz's libretto unfolds as a poetic journey between worlds — life and death, memory and imagination, flesh and art — set on Diego Rivera's last day on earth, during Día de Muertos, that sacred threshold where the living and the dead briefly coexist. The story moves fluidly through the underworld, the realm of memory, and the world of creation itself, allowing Frida and Diego to meet again in a dreamlike space where love, betrayal, pain, forgiveness, and unresolved questions remain alive. Rather than presenting a conventional biographical narrative, the opera unfolds as an oneiric landscape in which art becomes identity and creation becomes an act of resistance against disappearance. At its core, this opera is not only about a final encounter between two lovers, but about art as the space where meaning endures and human bonds — however fractured — continue to resonate.

This story contains all the elements of opera at its most powerful: love and loss, desire and suffering, politics and physical pain, the body as territory, gender,

diversity, disability, and death. It is also a story about devotion to art and the search for meaning through creation — a space where life and art are inseparable, as they were for Frida and Diego. Our challenge in this production has been to build a universe capable of holding all these layers, distilling the essential symbols, gestures, and imagery of their lives into a poetic and resonant language. We consciously chose not to rely on digital technologies, projections, or multimedia effects, and instead embraced an artisanal, handcrafted aesthetic inspired by their own way of creating — rooted in material presence, popular art, and intimacy. In avoiding literal reconstructions, folkloric clichés, and overexposed imagery, we sought a refined, symbolic world that allows the audience to encounter these two artists anew — and to dream with them one last time.

The original creative team behind *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* represents eight or nine different cultures, nationalities, and artistic sensibilities. I am a Mexican stage director directing an opera by an American-Peruvian-Lithuanian composer, with a Cuban American librettist, portraying two artists who still belong to many communities at once.

This is what the world looks like today. We do not simply live in a globalized world — we live in a multicultural one. From Alaska to Patagonia, the American continent is a vast mixture of races, migrations, indigenous cultures, and histories. In a sense, we are all mestizos — a mix.

As with all great operas, this work can help us to understand both our differences and our shared humanity. Through music and art, we can connect deeply, recognize ourselves in others, and celebrate complexity with respect. I hope this opera brings communities closer, welcomes new audiences, and allows all listeners alike to feel proud of a rich, layered heritage that ultimately belongs to all of us. **L**

# Artist profiles



## GABRIELA LENA FRANK COMPOSER

### *Lyric debut*

In 2025, Frank concluded a long-term residency with the Philadelphia Orchestra, marked by the world premiere of *Picaflor: A Future Myth*, and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, her first opera, will appear also this season at the Metropolitan Opera. It was produced at LA Opera, Omaha Opera, and San Francisco Opera following its 2022 world premiere at San Diego Opera. Other upcoming premieres include a song cycle for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and a work for the Pacifica Quartet and narrator Sigourney Weaver. Winner of a Latin Grammy and nominated for Grammys as both composer and pianist, Frank also holds a Guggenheim Fellowship and a USA Artist Fellowship. She has received commissions and performances from leading American orchestras including the Chicago Symphony, the Boston Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Houston Symphony, and the San Francisco Symphony. Her work has been commissioned by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, soprano Dawn Upshaw, the King's Singers, the Cuarteto Latinoamericano with guitarist Manuel Barrueco, and Brooklyn Rider, among others. This year, NAXOS will release a recording of her and librettist Nilo Cruz's oratorio *Conquest Requiem*, featuring the Nashville Symphony and conductor Giancarlo Guerrero. In 2017, she founded the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (GLFCAM), which helps composers of any aesthetic and demographic, from emerging through mid-career levels, to develop self-determined 21st century lives. *Gabriela Lena Frank is sponsored by Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation.*



## NILO CRUZ LIBRETTIST

### *Previously at Lyric: Bel Canto (2015/16).*

The Cuban-American writer first rose to prominence in 2003 when he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Anna in the Tropics*, which also earned the Steinberg Award and a Tony Award nomination. Cruz's works have been widely produced across the United States and internationally. He is a longtime collaborator with composer Gabriela Lena Frank, and along with *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, their works include *Conquest Requiem*, commissioned by the Houston Symphony; *Santos*, an oratorio commissioned by the San Francisco Girls Chorus and the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra; and *La centinela y la paloma (The Keeper and the Dove)*, a song cycle commissioned by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and premiered by soprano Dawn Upshaw. They also collaborated on *Las Cinco Lunas de Lorca (The Five Moons of Lorca)*, an orchestral song commissioned by LA Opera; and *Journey of the Shadow*, a dramatic work for narrator and musicians,

commissioned by the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Cruz adapted Ann Patchett's novel *Bel Canto* for Lyric, working with Peruvian composer Jimmy López. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Public Theater, McCarter Theatre, New Theatre in Coral Gables, and at UCLA through a Hearst Foundation grant.



## DANIELA MACK FRIDA

### *Previously at Lyric: Angela Rose/The Listeners (2024/25) and Kitchen Boy/Rusalka (2013/14).*

This season, the Argentine mezzo-soprano sings Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Houston Grand Opera and Opera Omaha and, in concert, returns to San Francisco Opera in a program of Beethoven and Falla. Last season, Mack returned to both the Metropolitan Opera and LA Opera as Federico García Lorca in the new production of *Ainadamar*, appeared with San Francisco Opera as Idamante in *Idomeneo*, and made her house debut at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma as Orsini in *Lucrezia Borgia*. Other recent highlights include her Metropolitan Opera debut as the Kitchen Boy in *Rusalka*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at the Royal Ballet and Opera, Rosmira in *Partenope* at Teatro Real, Romeo in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* at Teatro de la Maestranza, Béatrice in *Béatrice et Bénédict* with the BBC Philharmonic, and a performance of *Serse* with The English Concert at Carnegie Hall. Recent engagements include performances with Santa Fe Opera, Washington National Opera, Seattle Opera, Minnesota Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, English National Opera, Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Ópera de Oviedo, Opéra National de Bordeaux, and the Verbier Festival. Mack's extensive repertoire includes the title role in *Carmen*, Charlotte in *Werther*, Isabella in *Litaliana in Algeri*, and Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*.



## STEPHANIE SÁNCHEZ FRIDA (April 1)

### *Previously at Lyric: Three roles since 2022/23, most recently Mrs. Moreno/The Listeners (2024/25) and Passenger 3/Proximity (2022/23).*

The mezzo-soprano's 2025/26 Season includes Carlotta de Obragón in *Zorro* with Arizona Opera and alto soloist in Handel's *Messiah* with the Apollo Chorus of Chicago. Recent highlights include Mary in *Der fliegende Holländer* and the Owl in *The Cunning Little Vixen* with Des Moines Metro Opera; Phoenix Symphony for *Messiah*; Seattle Opera as Yesi in the workshop of *Stomping Grounds*; the Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel* with Kentucky Opera; *Mesías [Spanish Messiah]* with the Phoenix Symphony; Nettie Fowler in *Carousel* and Maddalena in *Rigoletto* with Opera Montana; Opera Omaha as Frida in *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*; Newport Music Festival as the titular *Carmen*; and West Edge Opera as Flosshilde/Fricka/Erda in *Der Ring in einem Abend*. Additional debuts include

singing Ines in Francesca Zambello's 90-minute adaptation of *Il trovatore* with Glimmerglass Festival, Third Spirit in *The Magic Flute* at Ravinia, and Chief Officer's Wife in *The Knock* with Cincinnati Opera. Sánchez also recently made returns to Opera Southwest for *Zorro* as Carlotta de Obragon and Arizona Opera as Dryade in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. She was the Audience Choice Award winner at the 2021 Jensen Foundation competition.



**ANA MARÍA MARTÍNEZ CATRINA**

**Previously at Lyric:** 12 roles since 2008/09, most recently Despina/*Così fan tutte* (2025/26) and Florencia/*Florencia en el Amazonas* (2021/22).

Later this season, the Grammy Award-winning soprano will return to Lyric to sing a *Beyond the Aria* recital with pianist Craig Terry at the Harris Theatre. Last season, Martínez returned to LA Opera with appearances as Margarita Xirgu in Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*, in the company's premiere, and as Despina in *Così fan tutte*, conducted by James Conlon. She also made her house debut at Pittsburgh Opera as the title role in *Tosca*, premiered her recital program "Unveiling" at the Houston Hobby Center with Andy Einhorn, appeared in residency with the Aspen Music Festival where she reprised "Unveiling," and gave a performance of Ravel's *Schéherazade* with conductor Fabien Gabel. She was the inaugural recipient of the Lynn Wyatt Great Artist Award from Houston Grand Opera, where she made role debuts as Carmen and Cio-Cio-San, in addition to performing the title role of *Rusalka*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Nedda in *Pagliacci*, Mimì in *La Bohème*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and Lucero in the world premiere of Daniel Catán's *Salsipuedes*. Additional performances include Elisabetta in *Don Carlo* with Bayerische Staatsoper; Contessa in *Le nozze di Figaro*, the title role of *Carmen*, Cio-Cio-San, and Mimì in *La Bohème* with LA Opera; and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* and Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* with the Metropolitan Opera. She is a Professor of Voice at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University.



**ALFREDO DAZA DIEGO**

**Lyric debut**

This season the Mexican baritone sings *Nabucco* in Salerno, *Rigoletto* in Copenhagen, and *Don Carlo* in Berlin. In 2024/25 he returned to the Staatsoper unter den Linden to play Paolo Albiani in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, appeared in *La traviata* at the Dallas Opera and at Ópera nacional de Chile, in *L'elisir d'amore* in Salerno, and as *Falstaff* in Leipzig. Daza sang Diego Rivera in the world premiere of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* at San Diego Opera, and reprised the role at San Francisco Opera. Recent highlights include *Fedora* at the Teatro Pérez Galdós in Las Palmas, a debut at the Liceu Theater in Barcelona as Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Ezio in *Attila* in Tenerife, Zurga in *The Pearl Fishers* in Dallas, and Joaquin in *La del manojito de rosas* in Oviedo. From 2003 to 2018, Daza was part of the ensemble at the Staatsoper unter den Linden, portraying roles such as Count Almaviva in

*Le nozze di Figaro*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*, and Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.



**KEY'MON MURRAH LEONARDO**

**Lyric debut**

This season, the countertenor sings the European premiere of Tyshawn Sorey's *Save the Boys* at the Ruhrtriennale Festival and joins Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra for Handel's *Messiah* under Nicholas McGegan. He tours Vivaldi's *Farnace* in the role of Gilade with Ensemble I Gemelli, performing at Teatro Real, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and Victoria Hall, Geneva. He sings Leshnoff's *The Sacrifice of Isaac* with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano, reprises the solo alto role in Jake Heggie's *Earth 2.0* with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and at the Aspen and Bellingham Music Festivals, and performs in the world premiere of Angelica Negrón's *For everything you keep losing* with the Dallas Symphony. He also tours the U.S. and France with Les Talens Lyriques and Christophe Rousset with a program entitled *Handelian Heroes*. Last season, Murrah debuted with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl in performances of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, led by Gustavo Dudamel. Other recent highlights include the world premiere of *Earth 2.0* with the Fort Worth Symphony (and later performances with Grand Rapids Symphony) and a recital at the Kennedy Center as the 2024 recipient of the Marian Anderson Award.



**FINN SAGAL FIRST VILLAGER**

**Previously at Lyric:** 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 made his company debut last spring in *The Listeners*. He received 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.*



**DANIEL LUIS ESPINAL**  
**SECOND VILLAGER/YOUNG MAN**

**Previously at Lyric:** Four roles since 2024/25, most recently Third Jew/*Salome* and Beppe/*Pagliacci* (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 the company in 2024/25 as Jacquino/*Fidelio*. This summer Espinal makes his debut with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as Frederic/*The Pirates of Penzance*. 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.*



**BENJAMIN R. SOKOL**  
**THIRD VILLAGER**

**Previously at Lyric:** Fifth Jew/*Salome* (2025/26).

Originally from Westbury, New York, Sokol is a first-year Ryan Opera Center bass-baritone. This season at Lyric he made his debut in *Salome*. 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.*



**ADIA EVANS**  
**FIRST FRIDA IMAGE**

**Previously at Lyric:** Three roles, most recently Theresa Alvarez/*The Listeners* and Girlfriend 2/*Blue* (both 2024/25).

A second-year soprano with the Ryan Opera Center from Baltimore, Evans sang Countess Ceprano/*Rigoletto* 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 (Handel's *Messiah*), Annapolis Opera (First Lady/*The Magic Flute*), Borderland Arts Foundation (Mimi/*La Bohème*), 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.*



**ALEXIS PEART**  
**SECOND FRIDA IMAGE**

**Previously at Lyric:** Kate Pinkerton/*Madama Butterfly* (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*, 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 Pettite and the Thierer Family Foundation.*



**CAMILLE ROBLES**  
**THIRD FRIDA IMAGE**

**Previously at Lyric:** Lola/*Cavalleria rusticana* and Second Handmaiden/*Medea* (both 2025/26).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center member, the mezzo-soprano from San Juan, Puerto Rico, was a Jan Miller Studio Artist at Pensacola Opera for the 2024/25 Season. While there, she covered the role of Cherubino/*Le nozze di Figaro* and performed the Dolphin in

° Deceased

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 recently received a Gulf Coast Region Encouragement Award in the Metropolitan Opera's Laffont Competition. Following undergraduate studies at the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music, she earned her Master of Music degree from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, where she appeared as Olga/*Eugene Onegin*. *Camille Robles* is sponsored by **Heidi Heutel Bohn** and **Mark & Gale Kozloff**.



**ROBERTO KALB**  
**CONDUCTOR**

**Lyric debut**

Mexican-born conductor Roberto Kalb is currently the Music Director of Detroit Opera. This season, he makes several important house debuts including at the Metropolitan Opera conducting *La Bohème*, and the Staatsoper Stuttgart conducting *Carmen* in his German debut. Other highlights include his return to Atlanta Opera for *Götterdämmerung*; *Lili Elbe*, in the U.S. premiere of Tobias Picker's opera at the Santa Fe Opera; a double bill of Still's *Highway One* / Weill's *Down in the Valley* with Detroit Opera, and *Madama Butterfly* with Lyric Opera of Kansas City. In 2024/25, he led performances of *West Side Story* for his house debut with the Houston Grand Opera, *Siegfried* with the Atlanta Opera, and *La traviata* and *Rinaldo* with Detroit Opera. He also made his debut at the Britt Festival, with the Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México, and led the Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería in concert with Sir Bryn Terfel. In 2021, Roberto was awarded a Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award. He holds degrees from the University of Michigan and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.



**LORENA MAZA**  
**DIRECTOR**

**Lyric debut**

Maza was Director of Mexico's National Theater Company and directed Teatro UNAM and Teatro Helenico, where she managed three venues and produced more than 40 plays annually. She has been recognized with numerous awards for Best Direction and Best Play of the Year, has participated in six national and international festivals, and has translated more than 40 dramatic texts, including work for the National Theater LIVE Project. Maza founded the Ocesa Theater Department-CIE, and wrote, directed, and co-produced *Bésame Mucho*, Ocesa's first original all-Mexican musical. In 2017, she opened her own production company, 19TEATRO, with other theater professionals. She has twice received the prestigious national grant for artists, Sistema Nacional de Creadores. She recently directed two feature films: *El Paraíso de la Invención* with Marina de Tavira and Alfonso Herrera; and the opera *La Hija de Rappaccini* (2021) with libretto by Octavio Paz and music by Daniel Catán. She currently lives and works in Mexico City.



**JORGE BALLINA**  
**SET DESIGNER**

**Lyric debut**

Born in Mexico City, Ballina graduated as an architect at Universidad Iberoamericana and studied with famous Mexican set designer Alejandro Luna. His numerous opera credits include *Die Zauberflöte*, *Macbeth*, *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Fidelio*, *Rusalka*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *L'amour de Loin*, *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci*, *Carmen*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Elektra*, Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, and *Death in Venice*, which he also directed. For the theater, he has made set designs for *Copenhagen*, *The Shape of Things*, *All about My Mother*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Red*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Salome*, *Constellations*, *Richard III*, *As You Like It*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *No Exit*, *The Blue Room*, *The Father*, and, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, *A Soldier in Every Son*. His musical theater credits include *Si nos dejan*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Rent*, *Next to Normal*, *Seven Times Goodbye*, *Mentiras*, and *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*. His dance credits include *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Snow White*, and *Omphalos*. His work as set designer has been exhibited in five Prague Quadrennial festivals of Stage Design where he won an Honorary Mention in 2003. He won the Gold Medal for Set Design at the World Stage Design Toronto exhibition in 2005 and Second Place for Set Design at the World Stage Design Calgary 2022.



**ELOISE KAZAN**  
**COSTUME DESIGNER**

**Lyric debut**

The award-winning costume and production designer's work has been seen in the United States, Mexico, Spain, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Croatia, at companies including San Francisco Opera, LA Opera, and the Royal Shakespeare Company, among others. Her opera credits include *Macbeth*, *Jen'ufa*, and *Rusalka* for Ópera de Bellas Artes — the latter also presented at Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. Additional work includes *Così fan tutte* (Mozart Festival, A Coruña) and *Le Nozze di Figaro* for the Croatian National Opera. She was the production designer for the 2016 feature film *Split*, directed by Deborah Kampmeier. Other credits include costume design for *A Soldier in Every Son*, directed by Roxana Silbert for the Royal Shakespeare Company; *The Good Canary*, directed by John Malkovich (produced by Retrolab and Mr. Mudd, Mexico, 2008); and costume design for *Let's Play*, a presentation of the fashion house Hermès Paris. Kazan was among the recipients of the Gold Medal for Best Costume Design at the Prague Quadrennial (2007) and was awarded the First Prize for Costume Design at WSD 2025. *Costume Designers* are supported by the **Richard P. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer** endowment.



### VICTOR ZAPTERO LIGHTING DESIGNER

#### **Lyric debut**

The Mexican lighting and visual artist is currently collaborating at Teatro Conde Duque in Madrid, Spain, designing the set and lighting for *Antígona González*, starring Marina de Tavira, consolidating a practice that bridges contemporary performance and expanded visual creation. In 2025, he was invited to serve as an Honorary Juror at World Stage Design, an event at which he was awarded First Prize in Lighting Design in 2021, for his work on *Omphalos* by Danish choreographer Damien Jalet. In 2022, alongside producer Diego López Rivera, he created the videomapping spectacle *A 100 Years of Mexican Muralism*, which premiered at the International Cervantino Festival. Beginning in 2020, he formally transitioned toward immersive visual art, premiering *The Forest* at the International Cervantino Festival. The piece has since been presented in Mexico, Slovenia, and the United Arab Emirates. In 2013, he served as Lighting Coordinator for the production of *Einstein on the Beach* at the Palacio de Bellas Artes under the direction of Robert Wilson. That same year, he designed the lighting for the inauguration of the amphitheater created by James Turrell at Hacienda Ochil in Yucatán, featuring a musical performance by Philip Glass. *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 the Young Artists at Opera Australia and the apprentice 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.*



### AUGUST TYE CHOREOGRAPHER

**Previously at Lyric:** Choreographer since 2004/05, most recently *Le Comte Ory* and *Don Carlos* (both 2022/23).

The American dancer, choreographer, and ballet mistress has worked on nearly 50 productions at Lyric since 1993/94. She remounted the choreography of Lyric's *Iphigénie en Tauride* at San Francisco Opera and the Royal Ballet and Opera. She has presented a 20-year retrospective of her work at Chicago's Vittum Theater and Ruth Page Dance Center, as well as in her hometown of Kalamazoo, Michigan. A graduate of Western Michigan University, Tye performed with the Kalamazoo Ballet, dancing leading roles in *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *The Nutcracker*. In addition to Lyric and Joel Hall Dancers, she has performed in Chicago with Salt Creek Ballet, Second City Ballet, and Chicago Folks Operetta. Tye is Artistic Director at the Hyde Park School of Dance, which she founded in 1993. Four years later she founded Tyego Dance Project, which has performed at Steppenwolf, the Athenaeum, and throughout America in a revival of Spike Jones's *Nutcracker*.



### 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.*

# Orchestra & Chorus

## MUSIC DIRECTOR

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

## MUSIC STAFF

Michael Banwarth  
Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad  
William C. Billingham  
Aaron Breid  
Kyle Dickson  
Levi Hammer  
Susan Miller Hult  
Tess Jackson  
Keun-A Lee  
Chi-Yuan Lin<sup>^^</sup>  
Noah Lindquist<sup>\*</sup>  
Francesco Milioto  
Jerad Mosbey  
Jacob Niemann<sup>^</sup>  
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 Choi<sup>\*\*</sup>  
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson  
Ann Palen  
Irene Radetzky  
John D. Robinson  
David Volfe

### Viola

Carol Cook, *Principal*  
Terri Van Valkinburgh,  
*Assistant Principal*  
Kunjing Dai<sup>\*\*</sup>  
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\*\*)*  
Robert E. Johnson<sup>\*</sup>  
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*

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## EXTRA MUSICIANS

Cristina Bučiu, *violin*  
Jennifer Cappelli, *violin*  
Christine Chon, *violin*  
Lisa Fako, *violin*  
Rose Armbrust Griffin, *viola*  
Beatrice Chen, *viola*  
Mara McClain, *cello*  
Isidora Nojkovic, *cello*  
Jeremy Attanaseo, *bass*  
Kit Polen, *bass*  
Amy Barwan, *oboe*  
Hanna Sterba, *bassoon/*  
*contrabassoon*  
Angela Bilger, *horn*  
Richard Janicki, *timpani*  
William C. Billingham,  
*piano/celeste*

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.

<sup>\*</sup> On leave, 2025/26 Season

<sup>\*\*</sup> Season Substitute

<sup>^</sup> Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency

<sup>^^</sup> Ryan Opera Center Conductor

**CHORUS DIRECTOR  
AND HEAD OF MUSIC**

Michael Black  
*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 Wheeler

**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  
William M. Combs  
John J. Concepción  
Kenneth Donovan  
Jared V. Esguerra  
Joseph A. Fosselman  
Cullen Gandy  
Cameo T. Humes  
Tyler Samuel Lee  
Joseph Shadday

**Bass**

David DuBois  
Christopher Filipowicz  
Robert Morrissey  
Rafael W. Porto  
Craig Springer  
Nicholas Ward  
Ronald Watkins  
Nikolas Wenzel  
Max Wier  
Jonathan Wilson

**CORE SUPPLEMENTARY  
CHORUS****Soprano**

Cara Collins  
Megan Fleischmann  
Emily Mwila

**Mezzo-Soprano**

Christina G. Adams  
Carla Janzen  
Emily Price

**Tenor**

Joshua Benevento  
Ace Gangoso

**Bass**

Michael Cavaliere  
David Goversen  
Nicolai Janitzky  
Ian R. Prichard

**SUPPLEMENTARY  
CHORUS****Soprano**

Nicole Besa  
Alexandra Burch  
Regina Ceragioli  
Anna Donnelly  
Elizabeth Fisher  
Hayley Fox  
Julia Frodyma  
Elise Hurwitz  
Mackenzie Jacquemin  
Alexandra Kassouf  
Courtney San Martin  
Taylor See  
Emlynn Shoemaker  
Alannah Spencer  
Diana Stoic  
Ariana Strahl

**Mezzo-Soprano**

Emily Amesquita  
Robin G. Bradley  
Leah Dexter  
Elizabeth Frey  
Miya Higashiyama  
Georgia Jacobson  
Samantha McGonigal  
Quinn Middleman  
Sarah Ponder  
Marissa Simmons

**Tenor**

Jerek Fernández  
Klaus Georg  
Jianghai Ho  
Ernest C. Jackson Jr  
Nathan Oakes  
Steven Michael Patrick  
Brett Potts  
Brian Skoog  
Ryan Townsend Strand  
Tristan Tournaud

**Bass**

Evan Bravos  
Chris DiMarco  
Dimitri German  
Stephen Hobe  
Brian Hupp  
Joseph Lodato  
Dorian McCall  
Wilbur Pauley  
William Powell III  
Douglas Peters  
Dan Richardson  
Aaron Wardell

**SUPERNUMERARIES**

Louisa Belian  
Raymond Cleveland  
Sarina Donohue  
Nicky Jasper  
Eric Marshall  
Vanessa Passini  
Jorge Salas  
Katrina Seabright  
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*Lyric*

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“

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Michael Murtaugh  
Brian Traynor  
*Scenic Artist*  
Alyssa Mohn, *Scenic Artist  
Apprentice*

Kim Buetzow, *Costume  
Director, The Richard  
P. and Susan Kiphart  
Endowed Chair*  
Lucy Lindquist,  
*Wardrobe Mistress*

Lauren Crotty  
Ellouise Davis  
Nina Escobedo  
Molly Herman  
M. Kate Keefe Marcheschi  
Cecylia Kinder  
Bryan McDonald  
Kathy Rubel  
Herbie Ruiz  
Marguerite Scott  
Ewa Szylak  
Michelle Tan  
Maggie Zabierowski,  
*Costumers*

Katelynn Barker  
Louie Barrios  
Samantha Holmes  
Kryстина Lowe  
Joanna Rzepka  
Sarah Santiago  
Kate Shattock  
Isaac B. Turner,  
*Production Administrators*

Samantha Holmes,  
*Wardrobe Crew Head*

Jane Blank  
Brigid Brown  
Miora Brumfeld  
Julianne Campbell  
Lauren Crotty  
Emilia Guzman  
Dawn-Marie Hamilton  
Claire Kroeger  
Mary Luchsinger  
Wendy McCay  
Moira O'Neil

Christopher Probyn  
Sarah Santiago  
Dulce Santillán  
Ayden Schwartz  
Roger Weir  
Samantha Yona,  
*Dressers*

John Metzner, *Wig &  
Makeup Designer,  
The Marlys A. Beider  
Endowed Chair*  
Necole E Bluhm,  
*Department Coordinator*  
Lynn Koroulis, *Shop Manager*

Brittany Powers, *Wig &  
Makeup Crew Foreman*

Victoria Ashmore  
Martha Contreras  
Krista D'Agostino  
Eric Daniels  
June Gearon  
Nini Jenkins  
Chantelle Johnson  
Lauren Mateling  
Melissa Musseau  
Mark Park  
Megan Pirtle  
Olivia Roach  
Alice Salazar  
Melanie Saso  
Jessica Scheithe  
Franni Valus,  
*Wig & Makeup Run Crew*

Victoria Ashmore  
Davis Campbell  
Colin Grice  
Chantelle Johnson  
Katie Kurz  
James Ogle  
Rebecca A. Scott,  
*Wig Shop Staff*

**Production**  
Rachel A. Tobias, *Production  
Stage Manager*

Katrina Bachus  
Jordan Lee Braun  
Adam Da Ros,  
*Assistant Stage Directors*

Alaina Bartkowiak  
Sandra Moore,  
*Stage Managers*

Adrienne Bader  
Alaina Bartkowiak  
Alycia Martin  
Sandra Moore  
Tommy Novak  
Daniel Sokalski  
Peggy Stenger  
Amy C. Thompson,  
*Assistant Stage Managers*



**Local 2:** Stagehands

**Local 476:** Studio Mechanics

**Local 769:** Theatrical Wardrobe



**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

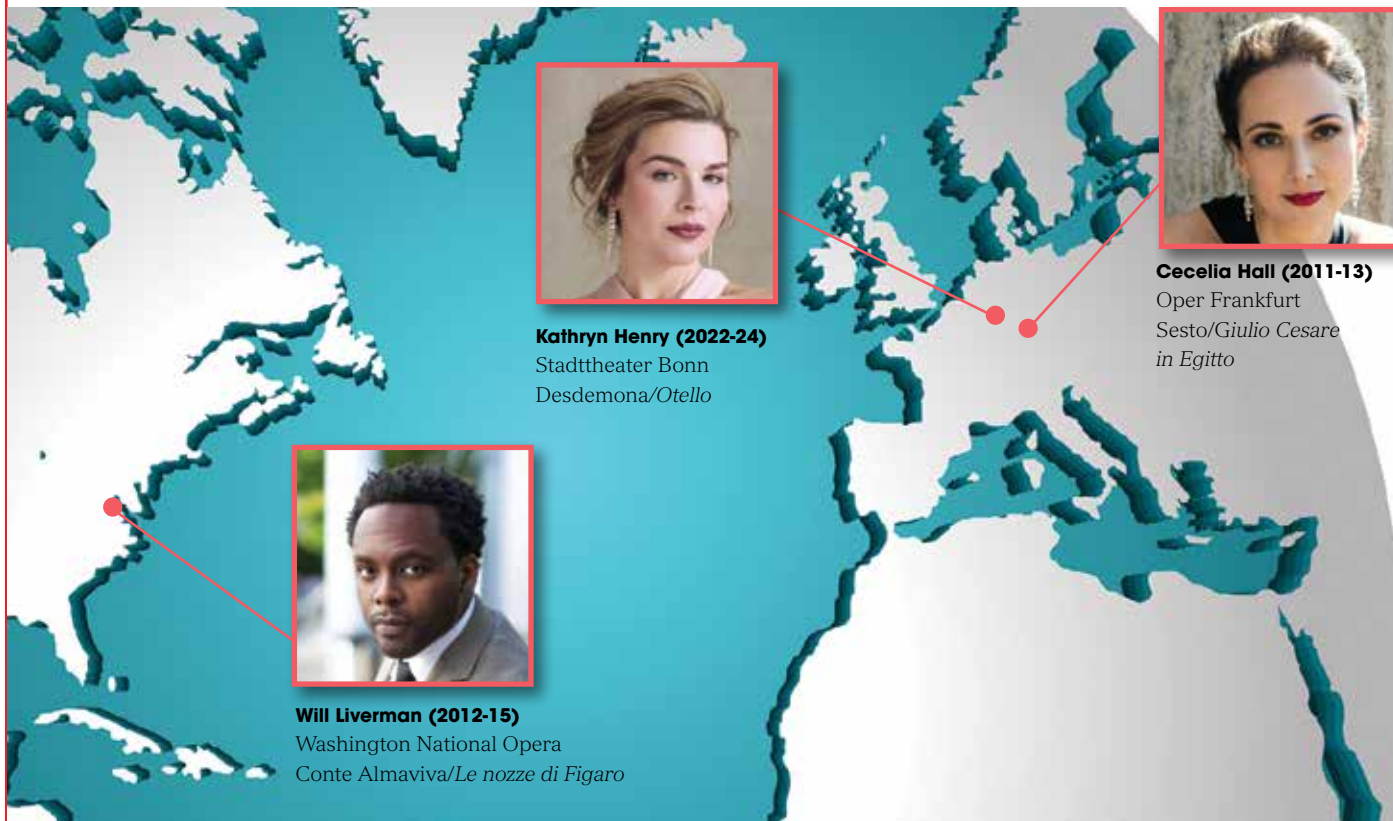
Back row, l to r: Camille Robles, Travon D. Walker, Benjamin R. Sokol, Christopher Humbert, Jr., Sihao Hu, Daniel Luis Espinal, Sankara Harouna

*Lyric*

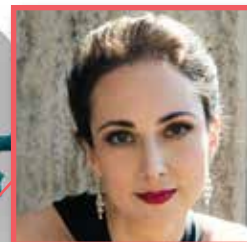
# Ryan Opera Center

# Ryan Opera Center alumni around the world

## THIS SEASON



**Kathryn Henry (2022-24)**  
Stadttheater Bonn  
Desdemona/*Otello*



**Cecelia Hall (2011-13)**  
Oper Frankfurt  
Sesto/*Giulio Cesare*  
in *Egitto*



**Will Liverman (2012-15)**  
Washington National Opera  
Conte Almaviva/*Le nozze di Figaro*

## PROGRAM STAFF

### Administration

Dan Novak  
*Director, The Ryan Opera Center*  
*Board Endowed Chair*

Craig Terry  
*Music Director,*  
*The Jannotta Family*  
*Endowed Chair*

Julia Faulkner  
*Director of Vocal Studies*

Logan Skirm  
*Manager*

Annika Donnen  
*Managing Librarian*

### Faculty

Julia Faulkner  
*Vocal Instruction,*  
*Robert and Ellen Marks Ryan*  
*Opera Center Vocal Studies*  
*Program Endowment*

Deborah Birnbaum  
Renée Fleming  
Dame Jane Glover  
Enrique Mazzola  
Gerald Martin Moore  
Matthew Polenzani  
Russell Thomas  
*Guest Master Artists*

William C. Billingham  
Alan Darling  
Laurann Gilley  
Susan Miller Hult  
Noah Lindquist  
Celeste Rue  
Hugh Russell  
Eric Weimer  
*Coaching Staff*

Isabelle Druc  
Julia Savoie Klein  
Derek Matson  
Morgan Stinson  
Alessandra Visconti  
*Foreign Language Instruction*

Paul Curran  
Peter McClintock  
*Acting and Movement*  
*Instruction*

Orit Carpenter  
Beth Clayton  
*Performance Psychology*

Katrina Bachus  
Louisa Muller  
Rachel A. Tobias  
*Production Mentors*

### Artistic/Production Personnel

Enrique Mazzola  
Donald Paulmbo  
*Conductors*

Kyle Lang  
Keturah Stickann  
*Directors*

Peggy Stenger  
*Stage Manager*

# Artistic roster

## SOPRANOS

Amanda Batista  
 Laura Benanti  
 Ellie Dehn  
 Adia Evans  
 Renée Fleming  
 Karen Chia-ling Ho  
 Jennifer Holloway  
 Alexandra Loutsion  
 Ana María Martínez  
 Sondra Radvanovsky  
 Alexandra Razskazoff  
 Gabriella Reyes  
 Emily Richter  
 Karah Son  
 Jacquelyn Stucker  
 Kara Shay Thomson  
 Elena Villalón

## MEZZO-SOPRANOS

Tanja Ariane Baumgartner  
 Nozomi Kato  
 Sabina Kim  
 Daniela Mack  
 Catherine Martin  
 Yulia Matochkina  
 Cecilia Molinari  
 Alexis Peart  
 Zoie Reams  
 Camille Robles  
 Stephanie Sánchez

## CONTRALTO

Lauren Decker

## COUNTERTENOR

Ryan Belongie  
 Key'mon W. Murreh

## TENORS

SeokJong Baek  
 Zhengyi Bai  
 Brad Bickhardt  
 Alex Boyer  
 Bille Bruley  
 Ryan Capozzo  
 John Easterlin  
 Daniel Luis Espinal  
 Evan LeRoy Johnson  
 Anthony León  
 Matthew Polenzani  
 Rodell Rosel  
 Cameron Schutza  
 Victor Starsky  
 Eric Taylor  
 Russell Thomas  
 Travon D. Walker

## BARITONES

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

## BASS-BARITONES

Nicholas Brownlee  
 Federico De Michelis  
 Jongwon Han  
 Christopher Humbert, Jr.  
 Benjamin R. Sokol  
 Alfred Walker

## BASSES

Scott Conner

## CONDUCTORS

Rob Fisher  
 Domingo Hindoyan  
 Roberto Kalb  
 Enrique Mazzola  
 Tomáš Netopil

## DIRECTORS

Julia Burbach  
 Michael Cavanagh  
 Lorena Maza  
 Peter McClintock  
 David McVicar  
 Elijah Moshinsky  
 Matthew Ozawa  
 Roy Rallo

## CHORUS DIRECTOR

Michael Black

## CHOREOGRAPHERS & MOVEMENT DIRECTORS

Andrew George  
 Noelle Kayser  
 Jo Meredith  
 Emily Piercy  
 August Tye

## ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

Melanie Bacaling  
 Jordan Lee Braun  
 Jonathon Loy

## FIGHT DIRECTORS

Chuck Coyl  
 Samantha Kaufman  
 Andrew Rathgeber  
 Denise Serna  
 Sheryl Williams



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.*



Lyric teaching artist Taylor Ott leads a rehearsal at Choral Fest.

*Lyric*

# Lyric Unlimited: Learning and Civic Engagement

# High schools in harmony

Lake View High School exemplifies the inspiring partnerships created through Lyric Unlimited's Opera Residencies program.

By Janie Ragsdale

**"As a choir teacher of 18 years,** I strongly believe that music education has the power to transform students of all ability levels," says Lake View High School choir director Puja Ramaswamy. Of her 18 years as a choir teacher, Ramaswamy has spent the last eight cultivating an inspiring relationship with Lyric Unlimited, the Learning and Civic Engagement branch of Lyric Opera of Chicago. "I have seen my students' musical skills grow immensely as a result of the High School Choir Residency."

Established in the 2015/16 Season, the High School Choir Residency supports vocal instruction and enrichment in Chicago Public School and Big Shoulders high school choir programs. The residency pairs classroom teachers with Lyric professional teaching artists to enrich students' learning through opera. Lyric teaching artists work collaboratively with choir teachers to deliver student instruction and foster artistic growth through a variety of lessons tailored to fit the learning objectives of each class.

"My favorite aspect of the program is the ability to collaborate with talented and knowledgeable teaching artists," says Ramaswamy. "It's wonderful to work with skilled individuals who bring their expertise to the classroom," she continues. "I feel that I learn as much as my students." The partnership between teachers and teaching artists begins before anyone steps into the choir classroom, with the educators first meeting at Lyric professional development workshops, where they get the opportunity to be students for the day and learn from one another.

Ramaswamy has collaborated with several talented teaching artists during her participation in the program, but she has developed an exceptional partnership with Lyric teaching artist Taylor Ott over the past two years. Ott, who has worked with Lyric Unlimited as a teaching artist for three years, brings her experience as a classically trained soprano, composer, and voice teacher to all five of the choir classes at Lake View High School, ranging from Beginner Bass & Treble to Advanced Choir.



Students from multiple choirs around the city come together to make music.

**Lake View High School choir director Puja Ramaswamy is an active participant in the Opera Residency program.**



“We have settled into a great co-teaching partnership,” says Ramaswamy. “I have also found that we complement each other’s teaching style and have a natural give and take when presenting a lesson or facilitating a rehearsal,” she continues. “Taylor helps create a positive learning environment for my students and has been a wonderful resource, especially for those that are considering a music major in college.”

The feeling is mutual. “Puja and I share core values both as educators and as humans, which makes the collaboration really fun and cohesive,” Ott explains. “We both believe in listening to the students’ voices, to make sure we are meeting them where they are at.” With five choir classes ranging from beginner to advanced levels of musicianship, the pair must work together to meet students at different points in their musical education, helping them to develop their confidence every step of the way.

“I get to teach increasingly difficult vocal techniques and musicianship as the classes advance,” Ott says of the class levels. “We start with the basics and if they stick with choir each year, I urge them to try new things, working on more advanced techniques as they grow.”


**Lessons in the High School** Choir Residency range from warmups, technique building activities, and sectional work to master classes, demonstrations, and preparations for future auditions. At Lake View, students have created projects ranging from rewriting an opera libretto to writing and performing an original aria. “When you are

standing in front of a group of teens who have worked so hard on a piece of music and they perform it with love and thoughtfulness, it’s truly amazing,” says Ott.

Learning does not stop in the classroom, with the program ushering students into the opera house to participate in the newest component of the residency: Lyric’s Choral Fest. Launched in the 2025/26 Season, Choral Fest provides students an inviting space to improve their musical skills, learn about professional career paths in the arts, and build relationships with their peers from across the city. And they sing on the Lyric stage.

In addition to this day of musical education and collaboration, the residency also provides students with the opportunity to return to Lyric as patrons. Participating schools receive passes to attend a final dress rehearsal at Lyric, as well as bus scholarships to transport students to the opera house.

“The moment my students — most of whom are first-time opera-goers — step into the Lyric Opera House, they are filled with a sense of awe and importance,” says Ramaswamy, whose students will visit the opera house this season to participate in Choral Fest and attend the final dress rehearsal for *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*. In short, the countless hours put into this collaboration serve to ensure opera is a continuous presence in the younger generation’s lives.

“It is my true belief that Lyric Unlimited strives to uplift Chicago communities,” Ramaswamy says, “cultivating a love of music that ensures our students feel a lifelong invitation to return to the opera house.” 

# People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



Kyle Flubecker

## Erin Johnson

Director of Financial Planning  
and Analysis

### Hometown

Slidell, Louisiana

### When did you start at Lyric?

September 2016

### First opera you saw live?

*Il Trovatore*, with Opera Grand Rapids. I was taking History of Opera as an undergrad.

### Favorite opera?

I love *Aida*, probably because there's a lot of brass and there's those magical trumpets.

### Favorite performer?

A Norwegian trumpet player, Tine Thing Helseth.

### A favorite moment at Lyric?

I got to meet Terence Blanchard during *Champion*. I grew up where he's from.

### What was your path to working at Lyric?

When I got out of college, I was trying to figure out where I fit into the world. I moved to Chicago and had various jobs, and I was an arts administrator for the Axiom Brass Quintet here in Chicago. At the same time, I went to graduate school at Roosevelt for a master's in arts administration with a focus in finance. My first jobs out of graduate school were simultaneously in Audience Services at Lyric and as an arts administrator for the Lake Forest Civic Orchestra.

### So your training is rather specialized.

We covered topics similar to those in an MBA program, but with a nonprofit and arts-focused lens. We had marketing, finance, leadership. But those classes also covered topics like union contracts and collective bargaining agreements, tax-exempt status, the role of volunteer boards, and sustaining missions. To a certain extent, nonprofit finance is different from for-profit finance. You track restricted and unrestricted funds, contributed revenue in addition to earned revenue, and financials with net asset classes.

### What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

When you're doing budgets and forecasts in more conventional business situations, lots of activities can be similar year after year, growing in a much more planned manner. But opera is unique even in the arts. No single show is the same as any other show, and no season is the same as any other season. It's just inherently complex.

### Can you describe a typical day?

It's not typical, but it's cyclical — and the cycles are bigger than a day or a week. We operate in quarters. So when we've just completed a quarter, my day-to-day focus is very much interacting with every department and seeing how they're spending against budget and what they anticipate. Around that, there are other points when we are super focused on budgets or long-range planning. My day becomes a lot of working with spreadsheets.

### What would surprise people about your job?

I think it's a common misconception about finance that we're just sitting at our desks with our numbers. But we have deep relationships and constant contact with every department. Everything is interconnected — and it has to be accounted for by someone somewhere. What happens on the eighth floor is going to have an impact on the fourth floor, and vice versa. Looking through the patterns and puzzles that this creates is one of the beautiful things about this work.

### What do you enjoy about working in the arts?

If you had asked me in high school what I wanted to do, I would have said I either want to do something with my trumpet or I want to study climatology — a tool combining history and math to forecast weather. I didn't know that you could do math and forecasting work within the arts — that I could find a way to marry my interests in numbers, analysis, and music, and that I didn't have to be on stage to still be contributing. That was a really important discovery to me. When something balances in my numbers and then I see it on stage, I get excited. It's a very good feeling. **L**