
Lyric
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DONIZETTI
DON
PASQUALE

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Ying Fang
as Norina

Photo: Leah Wellman/Lyric Opera of Chicago



Welcome to *Lyric*

Lyric Opera of Chicago is redefining what an opera company can be. We stand at the intersection of artistic excellence and civic purpose, harnessing the full power of opera — voices, orchestra, stagecraft, and story — to illuminate the emotions and narratives that define the human experience. We create one-of-a-kind shared moments, with a dedication to performance at the highest level. We know that this art form moves people in ways nothing else can. And we welcome you to **where life sings.**

John Mangum
General Director

Enrique Mazzola
Music Director

From the Chair and the General Director

Greetings!

Partnership and collaboration are key ingredients of great opera. Here at Lyric, we bring the best of every art form together from around the world to create unforgettable experiences for you, our wonderful audience.

These performances of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* bring an exciting collaboration to Chicago for the first time. Director Mariame Clément, a frequent collaborator with Music Director Enrique Mazzola, makes her U.S. debut with her exquisite jewel of a production, first performed at the Glyndebourne Festival in 2013. Enrique conducted that premiere run, and we are thrilled that he wanted to bring Mariame's fresh and insightful take on Donizetti's beloved comedy to our stage.


Kyle Flubacker

Enrique brings a special touch to the bel canto repertoire, best exemplified by the works of Donizetti and his contemporaries Bellini and Rossini. Literally "beautiful singing," bel canto focuses on showing off the human voice, with long-breathed melodies giving way to dazzling vocal fireworks. Enrique is in great demand for his insights in this music, his triumphant Paris Opera debut over the summer conducting Rossini's *La Cenerentola* just the latest example.

Our cast is fully up to Donizetti's demanding vocal requirements. In the title role, Georgian baritone Misha Kiria makes his Lyric debut, coming to us from acclaimed turns on stages in Vienna, Berlin, Milan, and other leading houses. Mexican tenor Alberto Robert also makes his Lyric debut as Pasquale's lovesick nephew Ernesto, fresh from a string of successes in Europe, Mexico, and South America.

We're delighted to welcome back star soprano Ying Fang in her role debut as Norina, the object of Ernesto's affection. She has wowed audiences at Lyric before, as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* (2019/20), as Pamina in *The Magic Flute* (2021/22), and as an unforgettable Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* (2024/25). For the final performance of the run, our Norina will be soprano Sydney Mancasola, who debuted at Lyric as Marzelline in *Fidelio* (2024/25), and last season took a star turn as soloist for the world premiere of *A Night of Mellon Collie and Infinite Sadness*. Baritone Ian Rucker rounds out the cast as Dr. Malatesta, typically played as Pasquale's sidekick but here presented as a viable romantic rival for Norina's affections. This will be the eighth role here for the alum of our Ryan Opera Center training program, and we all look forward to his Metropolitan Opera debut later this season.

We know you'll love this production of Donizetti's comic gem. Our connections to the wider world of opera allow us to bring these collaborative experiences home to Chicago, to share with all of you. Enjoy the performance!

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DON PASQUALE

Welcome to the rococo grandeur of 19th-century Rome in this fizzy comedy of errors, returning to the Lyric Opera of Chicago stage for the first time in more than a decade. There's plenty of deception, dupes, and double-crossing — all in the name of true love.

Photo: Ying Fang as Norina. Leah Wellman/Lyric Opera of Chicago



Spreading Her Wings

With this Donizetti role debut, Ying Fang continues her stellar career in bravura style.

By F. Paul Driscoll



The Marriage of Figaro

Liz Lauren

When Chinese soprano Ying Fang takes the stage to sing Norina, the clever young widow who powers the action of Donizetti's Don Pasquale, it will mark the latest important role debut in a career that only continues to soar. It's also a rare comic opportunity for Fang, whose exquisitely poised voice is most often heard in the operas of Handel and Mozart. (Indeed, her luminous previous appearances at Lyric are Mozart's Susanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 2024/25), Pamina (*The Magic Flute*, 2021/22), and Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*, 2019/20)). Fang still loves that set of heroines, but she's more than ready to take on a slightly racier character.

"You can still meet a Norina nowadays, right? She's human — you can understand her. And she's super fun to play," she says. "*Don Pasquale* is *opera buffa* — a really funny comedy, and so different from *opera seria*, which I've been doing recently. Works like *Idomeneo* are about princes and these kinds of high, perfect characters. The characters in *Don Pasquale* are flesh-and-blood."

When Fang describes the role, it's not hard to see the appeal she holds for this exciting performer.

"Norina is very special — one of the most spicy characters I have encountered," Fang notes. "She's apparently very smart, and a very good actress,

and she's quite independent for her time. We understand that she is financially independent, because she lives by herself. She is a widow, of course, and she knows what she wants in her life. Norina makes a very sharp turn from pretending to be a convent girl, who says, 'Oh, I'm so afraid. I'm so good.' And then, immediately after the marriage contract with Don Pasquale is signed, she turns into this scary, extravagant monster."

There is other new territory here. To date, Fang has sung relatively little bel canto repertoire. "I have done some Rossini — the Contessa de Folleville in *Il viaggio a Reims* at Wolf Trap and Elvira in *L'italiana in Algeri* at the Met. And Donizetti's *Elisir* — Adina at Juilliard and Giannetta at the Met. But *Don Pasquale* is a great expansion of my repertoire as a singer and as an actress. It is a great role, written so beautifully by Donizetti." Donizetti devised show-stopping moments for all the characters in *Don Pasquale*, but he was particularly generous to Norina, whose dazzling Act I aria with cabaletta, "Quel guardo il cavaliere…so anch'io la virtù magica," requires a virtuoso, a soprano who can command crisp trills, rapid-fire *staccati*, and a solid high C. While no one would consider Mozart roles simple to bring to the stage, Norina brings a particular set of requirements. "Musically, it's so different from what I've been doing. This is fully bel canto — those works are all about the voice, and about the singer," Fang adds. "The composer gives freedom to the individual — you can do what fits you the best in a cabaletta, or in ornamentation, or in how long you want to hold a note. Donizetti gives a singer the freedom to show off her voice!"



Don Giovanni Kyle Flubacker

Fang's hometown is Ningbo, in southeastern China. She attended Shanghai Conservatory before earning her master's degree at Juilliard and entering the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. Fang remembers a big shift in learning style when she started at Juilliard. "My training [at Shanghai Conservatory] was not as specific as it is in the U.S. conservatories," she remembers. "In the U.S. they tell you, 'You should sing this because you're going to do this in five years.' In China, school was not as much about the career as it was about discovering the potential of the voice. At Juilliard, because it's a much more systematic way of thinking and learning, you start to think, 'Ah. My voice is good for this and such and such, and Baroque and Mozart, and then you start to kind of plan what's next."

Fang demonstrated her versatility early in her career, when she took on three contrasting roles in a 2014 Met + Juilliard "Concert of Comic Operas," in which she sang full-scene excerpts from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Benvenuto Cellini*, and *L'elisir d'amore*, conducted by James



Levine. She credits her success in that concert to "…encouragement from Maestro Levine, for sure, because it was very ambitious to do three very different characters by three composers in one night. Back then, I thought, 'I don't think I can sing this Constanze aria!' And Maestro Levine said, 'No, it's in your voice. It's beautiful. Just *do it*.' It's difficult to put into words, but Maestro Levine would hear someone for the first time and he could hear the future of the voice. For him, it was always about what was next — that was what made his conducting so exciting."

It's fascinating to learn also that Fang almost took on Norina more than a decade ago.

"When I was a young artist, the opportunity came for me to sing Norina at the Met. It was very last minute. And I went to Maestro Levine and I said, 'Maestro, should I take this?' And he said, 'No, absolutely not! Not now — wait until you are ready.' And he was right. It's a difficult thing, I think, to know when you're truly ready for something. But I'm glad I listened to him. To wait was the smart thing. Now, years later, I feel truly ready."




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DON PASQUALE

Opera in three acts sung in Italian
Music and libretto by ***Gaetano Donizetti***
November 12, 15m, 18m, 21, 24, 27, 2026

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Dr. Malatesta	**Ian Rucker**••
Don Pasquale	**Misha Kiria**+
Ernesto	**Alberto Robert**+
Norina	**Ying Fang**
	Andrea Carroll+ (11/27)
Notary	**Sid Chand**•+
Berta	**Sarah Sapperstein**
Actor	**Jessica Goforth**

Conductor	**Enrique Mazzola**
Director	**Mariame Clément**+
Set & Costume Designer	**Julia Hansen**+
Lighting Designer	**Bernd Purkrabek**+
Chorus Director	**Michael Black**
Wig & Makeup Designer	**John Metzner**
Assistant Director	**Katrina Bachus**
Stage Manager	**Rachel A. Tobias**
Musical Preparation	**William C. Billingham**
	Susan Miller Hult
	Francesco Milioto
	Jerad Mosbey
Prompter	**Susan Miller Hult**
Projected English Titles	**Ian Julier**

First performed at Théâtre-Italien, Paris, on January 3, 1843.
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on November 20, 1963.

+ 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 Mid-19th century
PLACE Rome

ACT I

The elderly bachelor Don Pasquale, at his house in Rome, awaits his friend Dr. Malatesta, who has arranged a marriage for him. The bride, Malatesta tells him, is beautiful and innocent, and happens to be Malatesta's sister.

Don Pasquale reminds his nephew, Ernesto, that he has offered to wed him to a wealthy lady on pain of disinheritance if he refuses. Ernesto refuses again; he intends to marry the impoverished Norina.

At home, Norina scoffs at a romantic novel. Malatesta arrives and tells her of the scheme he has hatched to help her and Ernesto marry. Norina will be introduced to Pasquale as Malatesta's sister, Sofronia, fresh from the convent. After they are married by a false notary, Pasquale will be at their mercy.

ACT II

Disowned by Pasquale, Ernesto feels he cannot ask Norina to share his poverty.

Malatesta arrives at Pasquale's house with 'Sofronia,' apparently shy and afraid of men. Pasquale proposes and she accepts.

Malatesta's false notary draws up the contract, making Sofronia mistress of the house and owner of half of Pasquale's goods. The ceremony done, Sofronia instantly transforms into a domineering, spendthrift shrew and appoints Ernesto her escort.

INTERMISSION

APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

This production will be performed with one intermission.

Act I & II	1 hour 25 minutes
Intermission	30 minutes
Act III	45 minutes
Total	**2 hours 40 minutes**

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ACT III

Don Pasquale, his home completely revamped by Norina/Sofronia, examines the bills with horror. Norina enters dressed up to go to the theater. Pasquale tries to stop her, but Sofronia treats him harshly. As she leaves, she deliberately drops a piece of paper.

Pasquale discovers that it is a note from Sofronia's lover arranging a tryst in the garden that evening. Pasquale sends for Malatesta and shows him the note. They agree to confront the lovers in the garden that night.

Later, in the garden, Ernesto serenades Norina, and they sing of their love. Pasquale and Malatesta spy on them and then ambush them, but Ernesto escapes unrecognized. Sofronia denies her guilt and refuses to leave, but Malatesta persuades her that she cannot stay, as Norina is to arrive tomorrow as Ernesto's bride. Pasquale is thus forced to accept Ernesto's chosen wife in order to get rid of his own.

When the truth is finally revealed, Pasquale forgives the youngsters, and all are reconciled.

Don Pasquale is a Glyndebourne Production.

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A Large Inheritance

***Don Pasquale* has a rich history, both at Lyric and around the world. Here's a look back at some of the greatest talents to sing the opera's demanding and delightful roles.**

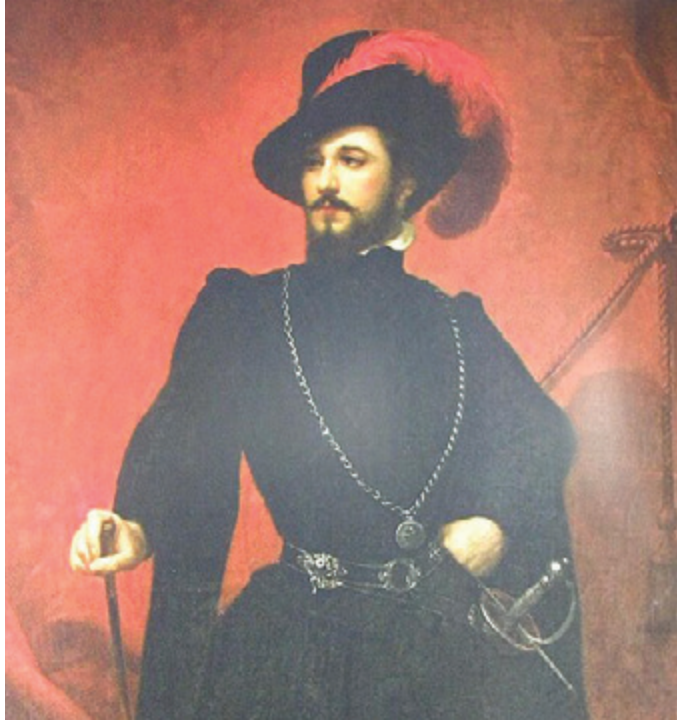
By F. Paul Driscoll



Giulia Grisi, a formidable diva who sang the first Norina, shown here circa late 1850s.

The first Norina, the clever heroine in Gaetano Donizetti's *Don Pasquale,* was an authentic virtuoso — Giulia Grisi, one of 19th century opera's legendary prima donnas. Born in Milan in 1811, Grisi was a lissome, raven-haired beauty blessed with charismatic stage presence and a dramatic soprano voice of impressive size and smoothness. Grisi created two roles for composer Vincenzo Bellini when she was still in her twenties — Adalgisa in *Norma* (1831) and Elvira in *I puritani* (1835) — and was also celebrated as an interpreter of the title roles of Rossini's *Semiramide,* Bellini's *Norma,* and Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* and *Lucrezia Borgia*. Ambitious and shrewd, Grisi maintained her star status for more than three decades. She sang 18 seasons in Paris and 26 seasons in London, where she was adored by the young Princess Victoria, whose pencil sketches of the soprano as Anne Boleyn and Ninetta in Rossini's *La gazza ladra* are now part of the Royal Collection Trust. In 1835, Grisi was invited to sing at Kensington Palace as part of Victoria's 16th-birthday celebrations, and remained the queen's favorite singer for the rest of her career.

By the time of the world premiere of *Don Pasquale,* in 1843, Grisi was an unequaled critical and popular favorite, her celebrity placing her Norina at the center of the action in *Don Pasquale,* despite the presence of three other star singers in the cast. *Don Pasquale's* first Ernesto was the aristocratic



The first Ernesto, known to the public simply as "Mario."

Sardinian tenor Giovanni Matteo de Candia, known by his mononymic stage name "Mario." Mario was Grisi's lover and later, her second husband; their joint appearances in opera were box-office dynamite. Elegant and slim, with a handsome face and velvety, youthful timbre, Mario scored an enormous success at the *Don Pasquale* premiere with Ernesto's intoxicating Act III solo, "Com'è gentil," designed by Donizetti to show off the divo's supple, caressing way of phrasing.

The role of the scheming physician Malatesta was created by Antonio Tamburini, a witty, accomplished baritone from Faenza who had sung in the world premieres of several earlier operas by Donizetti, as well as the first performances of works by Mercadante, Bellini, and Pacini. The first interpreter of *Don Pasquale's* title character was the magnificent Neapolitan bass Luigi Lablache, considered peerless as Mozart's Leporello, Oroveso in *Norma*, Henry VIII in *Anna Bolena*, and Sir Giorgio Walton in *I puritani*. Unlike the character of *Don Pasquale*, Lablache was no "elderly bachelor": the bass's long and happy marriage to singer Teresa Pinotti produced 13 children.

The first performance of *Don Pasquale* at the Salle Ventadour in Paris was a huge success; before the year was out, Donizetti's opera was presented in Milan, Vienna, London, and Brussels. *Don Pasquale* reached the United States in 1845, in a production at the Théâtre d'Orléans in New Orleans; an English-language version arrived in New York the following year. *Don Pasquale* was first presented by the Metropolitan Opera in 1899, with Polish coloratura Marcella Sembrich's glittering Norina as the chief ornament of the cast. Sembrich brought her Norina to Chicago in 1903, when *Don Pasquale* was featured on the Met's annual tour.

Lyric Opera of Chicago first offered *Don Pasquale* in the company's 1963 season, with Carlo Felice Cillario pacing a cast headed by the incomparable basso buffo Fernando Corena as Don Pasquale, Italian soprano Mariella Adani as Norina, and Spanish tenor Alfredo Kraus as Ernesto. Kraus is the artist most closely associated with *Don Pasquale* at Lyric: his patrician, thrillingly sung Ernesto returned for Lyric's three subsequent *Pasquale* revivals, paying court to the Norinas of Reri Grist (1968), Ileana Cotrubas (1974) and Judith Blegen (1978).

Kraus's "uncles" during his years as Lyric's Ernesto of choice included Welsh star Sir Geraint Evans (1968 and 1978) and the crisply comic Italian bass-baritone Wladimiro Ganzarolli (1974). Kraus's successor as Lyric's Ernesto was American tenor Bruce Ford, who wooed the Norina of American soprano Ruth Ann Swenson in the 1995/96 Season. Lyric's most recent *Pasquale*, staged by Sir Thomas Allen in 2012/13, gathered German soprano Marlis Petersen as Norina, Ryan Opera Center alumni René Barbera





Clockwise from left: The legendary Afredo Kraus sang Ernesto multiple times at Lyric; the company's first Norina, Italian soprano Mariella Adani, shown here at La Scala; conductor Carlo Felice Cillario, pictured here in 1960, lead Lyric's first *Don Pasquale* in 1963.

and Corey Crider as Malatesta, and Italian bass-baritone Ildebrando d'Arcangelo as an uncommonly vigorous Don Pasquale.

Lyric's *Don Pasquale* production, originally seen at Glyndebourne, will be staged by French director Mariame Clément and conducted by Lyric's Music Director, Enrique Mazzola, one of opera's superlative interpreters of Donizetti. Georgian baritone Misha Kiria makes his Lyric debut as Don Pasquale, with rising Mexican tenor Alberto Robert, another Lyric debut artist, as his nephew Ernesto. Wisconsin native Ian Rucker, an alumnus of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, returns to the company for his first Malatesta.

Ying Fang's Norina will also be a role debut — and she sounds delighted at the prospect of taking this artistic step at Lyric. "I love Chicago," she says, with enthusiasm. "I cannot wait!" And neither can we. L

F. Paul Driscoll writes and lectures on the performing arts. He is the former Editor in Chief of OPERA NEWS.



Director's note

By Mariame Clément



Don Pasquale is a blessing and a curse for a director. A light, entertaining bel canto piece, in the direct *Commedia dell'arte* tradition, it flies by in a flash and seems to pose no specific "conceptual" challenges; but when given the task of staging it, one cannot help but think: What makes this piece special? What makes it stand out among the dozens of similar pieces belonging to these traditions?

Unexpected subtlety, in the score as well as in the libretto, is probably the key to *Don Pasquale*. The characters all derive from *Commedia* stereotypes, yet they all have their weaknesses, their fragility, their dark or pathetic side, which, beyond the scheming and plotting, make them likeable, complex, moving — in other words, human. Pasquale is a buffo figure indeed, and in many ways an obnoxious man who deserves to be fooled; but if one looks closer, isn't there something moving in the way this sickly old man rejoices at the prospect of having children — perhaps a lifelong desire which he was about to give up on? Doesn't Ernesto's despair at having been cast away by his uncle — his one and only relative, the father figure he grew up with — reveal a hidden tenderness in their relationship, in spite of all the fighting and arguing? Even Norina, the cunning widow, may sometimes find it difficult to make ends meet and to survive as an independent woman. The sole exception is Malatesta, the so-called doctor (or is he just an adventurer impersonating a doctor?) manipulating the other three, who constantly seem to be impatiently awaiting him. No hidden fragility there, it seems – just cold, almost devilish plotting, which clearly differentiates him from the rest of the cast.

Our goal was to underline these complex relationships and show actual characters — and not just stereotyped puppets — within the very simple dramatic frame. *Don Pasquale* is an opera that is irresistibly funny (the second act finale still makes me laugh out loud more than 20 years after the first time I staged it), but it also has the potential to make us cry. In my eyes, comedy and tragedy always go hand in hand: the wider the range of emotions we go through with the characters, the more we empathize with them.

Together with Julia Hansen, who designed the sets and costumes, we initially thought of transposing *Don Pasquale* into a modern setting, with dozens of props and contemporary costumes. It is indeed a very tempting idea, but something didn't feel quite right in that approach: we soon realized that what bothered us was that it lacked elegance. We felt that in order to match the elegance of Donizetti's music, a more challenging approach was to try and bring the characters to life and make those situations read without the obvious help of modernization.

But there is period and *period*. Strangely enough, as much as so-called "modernization" (or rather, transposing pieces to a contemporary setting, which *per se* is hardly modern anymore) still attracts a lot of criticism, most people don't really notice anachronism if the costumes look vaguely historical. Donizetti's opera was written in 1843 and — in an unusual and rather bold move for the 19th century — it is supposed to take place around the time of its premiere. But we felt that the bourgeois fashion of the 1840s didn't quite convey the atmosphere we wanted. In this production, the Malatesta-Norina plotting has a dangerous, almost devilish quality, which we felt audiences would subconsciously associate with 18th-century costumes. Anachronism by anticipation (rather than modernization) seemed best.

Our *Don Pasquale* thus takes place in a beautiful jewel box full of surprises — from the somewhat uncanny beginning, showing an almost supernatural Malatesta, to the final outcome, perhaps slightly more open than what we are used to…

Artist profiles



MISHA KIRIA
DON PASQUALE
Lyric debut

The Georgian baritone has been acclaimed for his performances in roles such as Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola*, and the title role in *Falstaff*. He has appeared at the Teatro Real in Madrid, Teatro Regio di Parma, La Scala in Milan, Dutch National Opera, the Bavarian State Opera, and the Vienna State Opera, among others. Highlights last season included *Falstaff* in Parma; *La fille du régiment* and *La Cenerentola* in Munich; *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *L'italiana in Algeri* and *Gianni Schicchi* in Berlin; *Il viaggio a Reims* at the Salzburg Festival; and *La traviata* at the Rome Opera. Kiria made his debut in the title role of *Falstaff* at the Verdi Festival in Parma in 2017, and portrayed Lord Sidney in *Il viaggio a Reims* at the Palau de les Arts in Valencia. Highlights of recent seasons include his debut at the Salzburg Festspiele in a new production of *Il trittico*, broadcast live on ARTE, as well as performances at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in *La forza del destino* as Fra Melitone, Lord Sidney in *Il viaggio a Reims*, and Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*. He regularly appears at the Bavarian State Opera where he has performed in *Il signor Bruschino*, *Il turco in Italia* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. He made house debuts at the Vienna State Opera as Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore* and at Teatro Real in Madrid with *Falstaff* in Laurent Pelly's production.



YING FANG
NORINA
Previously at Lyric: Three roles since 2019/20, most recently Susanna/*The Marriage of Figaro* (2024/25), and Pamina/*The Magic Flute* (2021/22).

This season, the renowned soprano makes her role debut in the title role in a new production of Handel's *Theodora* at Grand Théâtre de Genève and returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*. In concert, she will appear with NHK Symphony conducted by Fabio Luisi, Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Donald Runnicles, and Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival conducted by Riccardo Muti. Last season, Fang made her house debut at Houston Grand Opera in the U.S. premiere of Robert Wilson's staged version of Mozart's arrangement of Handel's *Messiah*, and sang Ilia in *Idomeneo* with Wiener Staatsoper. She recorded Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Pittsburgh Symphony with Manfred Honeck, and joined the Manchester Camerata for an all-Mozart concert released by Chandos Records. Other recent highlights include Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Vienna Philharmonic and Andris Nelsons, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence as Pamina in Simon McBurney's production of *Die Zauberflöte*, and the Baden-Baden Festival where she joined for performances of Mozart's *Mass in C minor* and *Requiem* as well as a lieder recital. Fang made her house debut at the Royal Ballet and Opera as Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, in a production by Sir David McVicar, debuted at the Bayerische Staatsoper as Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, and made her role debut as Marzelline in *Fidelio* at the Metropolitan Opera opposite Lise Davidsen, conducted by Susanna Mälkki and broadcast as part of *The Met Live in HD* series.



ANDREA CARROLL
NORINA (11/27)
Lyric debut

This season, the American/Guatemalan/Austrian soprano returns to the Wiener Staatsoper as Susanna/*Le nozze di Figaro*, and makes a house debut at The Atlanta Opera as Micaëla/*Carmen*. Last season, Carroll returned to the Metropolitan Opera as Zerlina/*Don Giovanni*, to Semperoper Dresden as Gretel/*Hänsel und Gretel* and Pamina/*Die Zauberflöte*, and to Teater an der Wien as Smorfiosa/*L'opera seria*. She also made her debut at Opéra national de Paris as Musetta/*La Bohème*. Other recent performances include a return to Teatro alla Scala as Woglinde in David's McVicar's new production of *Das Rheingold* under the baton of Christian Thielemann. She also had her debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra in Mozart's *Requiem*, with the PKF Prague Philharmonia as Norina/*Don Pasquale*, with Semperoper Dresden as Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel*, and San Francisco Opera as Musetta/*La Bohème*. She has sung Norina also at Teatro alla Scala. Other recent highlights include Nanetta/*Falstaff* at Houston Grand Opera and Palm Beach Opera, Micaëla/*Carmen* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Tokyo Philharmonic, Susanna/*Le nozze di Figaro* for Canadian Opera Company, and Zerlina/*Don Giovanni* at Teatro alla Scala. She created the world premiere roles of Mary Bailey in Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life* with Houston Grand Opera and both Kitty in Johannes Maria Staud's *Die Weiden* and Fatima in Johanna Doderer's *Fatima* at the Wiener Staatsoper.



ALBERTO ROBERT
ERNESTO
Lyric debut

This appearance in *Don Pasquale* marks Robert's U. S. debut. Other highlights this season include *Il turco in Italia* at the Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine, and *La traviata*, *Idomeneo*, and *La Cenerentola* at the Stuttgart State Opera. Currently a member of the Opera Studio at that company, his roles there have included the Zeremonienmeister in Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*, Missail / Ein Leibbojar in *Boris Godunov*, Don Curzio in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Remendado in *Carmen*, Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola*, Il Conte di Lerma in *Don Carlo*, the Glassmaker in *Death in Venice*, the Huntsman in *Rusalka*, Roderigo in *Otello*, and Pang in *Turandot*.

Recent international engagements include Francesca Caccini's *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola di Alcina* at the Teatros del Canal in Madrid; Donizetti's *Le convenienze e inconvenienze teatrali* at the Wexford Opera Festival; *La fanciulla del West* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples; *L'occasione fa il ladro* at Theater an der Wien; *Falstaff* at the Opéra de Marseille; *Don Pasquale* at the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen; and *Carmen* at the Tiroler Festspiele

Erl. Robert took First Prize at the first Opera Competition of the Conservatorio de Música y Artes de Celaya, Second Prize at the V Linus Lerner International Vocal Competition, an Encouragement Award from the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, and Second Prize at the XIV Ópera de San Miguel Competition. He was also among the first three young singers to receive a scholarship from the Spanish Fundación *Ópera Actual*.



IAN RUCKER
DR. MALATESTA

Previously at Lyric: Six roles since 2022/23, most recently Guglielmo/*Così fan tutte* (2025/26) and Schaunard/*La Bohème* (2024/25).

Highlights for the baritone this season include debuts at the Metropolitan Opera as William Dale in *Silent Night* and at Royal Danish Opera in the role of Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Last season included Dandini in *La Cenerentola* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* at Scottish Opera. A recent Ensemble member of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, Rucker's time at Lyric included Foreman in *Jenůfa* (2023/24), Man in Bar in *Champion* (2023/24), Raimbaud in *Le comte Ory* (2022/23), and Moralès in *Carmen* (2022/23). Rucker performed the title role in the world premiere of *The Story of Billy Budd* at Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in summer 2025. A recent prize winner in the final of the Neue Stimmen vocal competition, he sang the role of Diener IV in *Capriccio* at the 2024 Salzburg Festival. Rucker was a Renée Fleming Artist at the Aspen Summer Music Festival and an Apprentice Artist with Palm Beach Opera. He holds a masters in Vocal Performance from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, and a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from The University of Wisconsin.



SID CHAND
NOTARY

Lyric debut

Sid Chand, a New Zealand Fijian-Indian tenor, is a first-year member of the Ryan Opera Center Ensemble. In Lyric's 2026/27 Season, Chand will also sing Gastone/*La traviata*. In 2025, he was named a Manetti Shrem Opera Program Fellow at Festival Napa Valley, where his assignments included covering the role of Tonio in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*. Most recently, he made debuts with Livermore Valley Opera and the San Francisco Symphony. Other roles include Rinuccio/*Gianni Schicchi*, Ferrando/*Così fan tutte*, and Miles/Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up*. A strong advocate for contemporary music, Chand premiered Alexander Cowdell's *A Place of Quiet* with the Auckland Youth Orchestra. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees from The University of Auckland, he continued his studies at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, earning a Professional Studies Certificate and Artist Diploma. Chand is supported by several major New Zealand arts foundations, including the Dame Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation, Circle100, and the Mardell Cosgrove Foundation Trust. *Sid Chand is sponsored by* ***Philip G. Lumpkin, Julian Oettinger,*** *and* ***Drs. Joan & Russ Zajtchuk.***



ENRIQUE MAZZOLA
CONDUCTOR

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



MARIAME CLÉMENT
DIRECTOR

Lyric debut

This season, Clément will direct Hèctor Parra's world premiere *Miroir de nos peines* at the Paris Opera (Garnier). Last season, she returned to the Opéra de Lausanne, where she began her career, to direct *Orlando*. Other recent highlights include *Così fan tutte* at Oper Frankfurt, a debut at the Salzburg Festival with *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, and *Roméo et Juliette* at Staatsoper Berlin. At the Glyndebourne Festival she directed *Don Giovanni* in 2023 and *Le nozze di Figaro* in 2025, the same year she directed *Die Schweigsame Frau* by Richard Strauss at Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe. In the 2023/24 Season she directed *Die lustige Witwe* at Volksoper Wien. In the 2022/23 Season, she directed a new

production of *Achille in Sciro* by Francesco Corselli at the Teatro Real in Madrid. Her *Anna Bolena* at the Grand Théâtre de Genève that season launched a Donizetti trilogy including also *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*. Her production of *Barkouf* at the Opéra national du Rhin in 2018 was the first performance since 1860 of this newly rediscovered major piece by Offenbach. Also at Opéra national du Rhin, she staged the French premiere of Wagner's second opera, *Das Liebesverbot*, in 2016. Other recent highlights include creating Philippe Hurel's *Les Pigeons d'argile* at the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, and numerous credits at major European houses.



JULIA HANSEN
SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER
Lyric debut

Forthcoming engagements for the German designer include *La traviata* at the Tiroler Festspiele, *L'elisir d'amore* at Göteborg Opera, *The Little Witch* at the Wiener Staatsoper/NEST, *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* at Korea Opera, *Penthesilea* at the Bregenz Festival, and *Jenůfa* at the Royal Danish Opera. Hansen has won numerous awards including the EOP for her *Fidelio* and Designer of the Year 2010 from the Syndicat professionnel de la critique de France for her design for *Platée*. Her production of Massenet's *Don Quichotte* was awarded Best Production of the Year 2019 by the Österreichischer Musiktheaterpreis, and her Offenbach production of *Barkouf* was named Best Rediscovery of 2019 by the Oper! Awards. Recent seasons include designs for *Les contes d'Hoffmann* at the Salzburg Festival, *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Royal Danish Opera, *Roméo et Juliette* at the Staatsoper Berlin, *Cendrillon* at the Opéra Bastille Paris, *Carmen* at Santa Fe Opera, and the Donizetti Trilogy at Geneva Opera. Other recent highlights include *Achille in Sciro* at Teatro Real Madrid; *Étoile* at the Royal Ballet and Opera; *Die verkaufte Braut* at the Semperoper Dresden; *Hänsel und Gretel* at the Opéra national de Paris; *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; *Castor et Pollux* and *The Fairy Queen* at the Theater an der Wien; and *Don Pasquale, Poliuto, Il turco in Italia*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Glyndebourne Festival. *Costume Designers are supported by the* ***Richard P. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer Endowment.***



BERND PURKRABEK
LIGHTING DESIGNER
Lyric debut

Purkrabek has worked internationally on lighting design for opera, theatre, and dance. Highlights of his credits include *Der Prinz von Homburg, Les vêpres sicilliennes, Macbeth, Jenůfa, La fanciulla del West, Charodejka, Maria Stuarda,* and *Peter Grimes*, directed by Christof Loy; *Lazarus, Saul, Orlando* and *Jephtha* directed by Claus Guth; *Der Ferne Klang* directed by Florentine Klepper; *Suster Bertken* and *Troparion*, directed by Pierre Audi; and *The Time of Our Singing, Die Vögel, Denis & Katya*, directed by Ted Huffman; and *Juditha Triumphans, Combattimento, la théorie du cygne noir, Pierrot Lunaire, Orfeo,* and *Freitag aus Licht*, directed and designed by Silvia Costa. Among numerous other houses and festivals, his work has been seen at Royal Ballet and Opera, Theater an der Wien, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Schauspiel Köln, Wiener Festwochen, Glyndebourne Festival, Vlaamse Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, Opernhaus Zürich, Wiener Staatsoper, Wiener Taschenoper, Staatsoper Hamburg, Théâtre de Champs-Élysée, Palais Garnier, Opéra de St. Etienne, Opéra National de Lorraine, Opernhaus & Ballett Graz, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, Oper Frankfurt, New National Theatre Tokyo, Festspielhaus Baden Baden, Gran Teatre, Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, Kungliga Operan Stockholm, Bregenzer Festspiele, and Team Odratek. Purkrabek was nominated for the Knight of Illumination Award in 2017 for his work on *Così fan tutte* at the Royal Ballet and 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*. In 2025, he worked with the Young Artists at Opera Australia and the apprentice singers at the Santa Fe Opera, and he has lectured or given masterclasses at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University. Black has served as chorus director for close to 140 different operas on four continents, and his work has been recorded and/or aired on ABC, BBC, PBS, for many HD productions in movie theaters, and on television. *Michael Black is supported by the* ***Howard A. Stotler Chorus Director Endowed Chair.***



JOHN METZNER
WIG AND 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 St 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

Kedrick Armstrong
Michael Banwarth^^^
Kseniia Polstiankina Barrad
William C. Billingham
Aaron Breid
Austin Chanu^
Susan Miller Hult
Tess Jacskon
Myungseo Kim^^
Noah Lindquist
William Long
Francesco Milioto
Jerad Mosbey
Luke Poeppel^^
Stefano Sarzani
Madeline Slettedahl^^^
William Garfield Walker

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**
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
Ann Palen
Irene Radetzky
John D. Robinson
David Volfe

Viola
Carol Cook, *Principal*
Terri Van Valkinburgh, *Assistant Principal*
Rose Armbrust Griffin**
Amy Hess
Rebecca Swan
Melissa Trier Kirk

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

String Bass
Kevin Fink, *Principal*
Samuel Shuhan, *Assistant Principal*
Andrew L. W. Anderson
Gregory Sarchet
Collins R. Trier

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

Piccolo
Alyce Johnson

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

English Horn
Judith Zunamon Lewis

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

Bass Clarinet
Susan Warner, *Acting*

Bassoon
Preman Tilson, *Principal*
Hanna Sterba, *Acting Assistant Principal***

Contrabassoon
Hanna Sterba, *Acting***

Horn
Abigail Black, *Principal*
Fritz Foss, *Assistant Principal/Utility/Acting Third Horn*
Samuel Hamzem
Neil Kimel

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

Trombone
Jeremy Moeller, *Principal*
Mark Fisher, *Assistant Principal**
Hugo Saavedra, *Acting 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*

Librarian
Crozet Duplantier, *Acting Principal*

Stage Band Contractor
Christine Janicki

EXTRA MUSICIANS

Jennifer Cappeli, violin
Karin Gambell, violin
Hana Kim, violin
Josef Fischer, viola
Michael Gurevich, viola
Amy Barwan, oboe
Trevor O'Riordan, clarinet
Vincent Karamanov, basoon
Angela Bilger, horn

STAGEBAND

Patsy Dash, percussion
Alec Oudinot, guitar
Kacey Ellis, guitar

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, 2026/27 Season
** Season Substitute
^ Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency
^^ Ryan Opera Center Ensemble Member
^^^ Ryan Opera Center Alumni

CHORUS DIRECTOR AND HEAD OF MUSIC

Michael Black
The Howard A. Stotler Endowed Chair

REGULAR CHORUS

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

Mezzo-Soprano
Marianna Kulikova
Emily Price
Ola Rafało
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
Emily Mwila
Ariana Strahl

Mezzo-Soprano
Christina G. Adams
Carla Janzen
Quinn Middleman

Tenor
Joshua Benevento
Ace Gangoso

Bass
Michael Cavalieri
David Govertsen^^^
Adam W. Kim
Ian R. Prichard

SUPPLEMENTARY CHORUS

Soprano
Andrea Alderman
Nicole Besa
Regina Ceragioli
Anna Donnelly
Cassandra Douglas
Victoria Ellington
Megan Fleischmann
MiKayla Lynn Hatfield
Elise Hurwitz
Alexandra Kassouf
Claire Kuttler
Rosalind Lee
Thalia Moore
Marlaina Owens
Amanda Payne
Emlynn Shoemaker
Molly Snodgrass
Diana Stoic

Mezzo-Soprano
La'Shelle Allen
Jade Dashá
Leah Dexter
Elizabeth Frey
Savannah Gordon
Miya Higashiyama
Audrianna Hughes
Georgia Jacobson
Anya Newsome Hill
Stephanie Schoenhofer
Marissa Simmons
Leeza Yorke

Tenor
Charles M. Anderson
Jerek Fernández
Lance Fisher
Alec Fore
Klaus Georg
Ernest C. Jackson Jr
Luther Lewis III
Jordan Loyd
Taiwan Norris
Nathan Oakes
Steven Michael Patrick
Brett Potts
Brian Skoog
Chase M. Taylor
Fred C. VanNess Jr.

Bass
Brandon Coleman
Lifan Deng
Samuel James Dewese
Chris DiMarco
Dimitri German
Sankara Harouna^^^
Earl Hazell
Nicholas LaGesse
Joseph Lodato
Dorian McCall
De'Ron McDaniel
Douglas Peters
William Powell III
Leo Radosavljevic
Dan Richardson
Rocky Eugenio Sellers
Justice Yates



Thank you for your support

With your generous support, Lyric is advancing opera in America — maintaining artistic excellence, engaging audiences, and supporting our diverse community. And **our success is because of you,** our partners and benefactors in this shared endeavor. We sincerely thank you.



Photo: Kyle Flubacker/Lyric Opera of Chicago

Bravissimi

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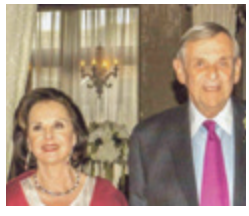
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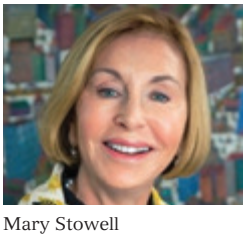
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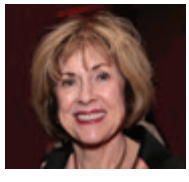


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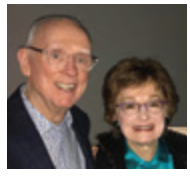


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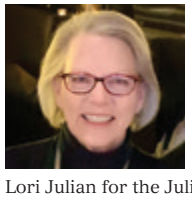


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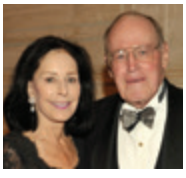


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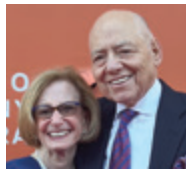
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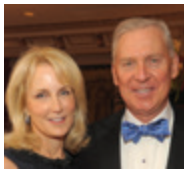
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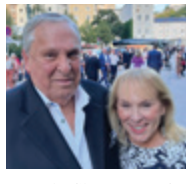


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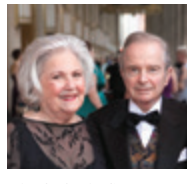


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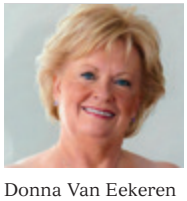


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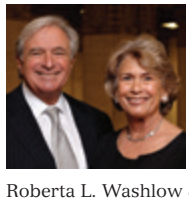


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The American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO (AGMA), is the union that represents the singers, dancers, actors, and staging personnel at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

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Local USA 829 of the IATSE is the union representing scenic, costume, lighting, sound and projection designers in Live Performance

Ryan Opera Center



For more than 50 years, **The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center** has nurtured emerging talents from around the globe — and every season, the training program's alumni continue to showcase their talents on the greatest stages of the world.



The 2026/27 Ryan Opera Center Ensemble

Front row, left to right: Camille Robles, Alexis Peart, Adam Partridge, Josie Larsen, Kylie Kreucher, AJ Helms, Myungseo Kim.

Back row: Matthew Dexter, Lin Fan, Sihao Hu, Benjamin R. Sokol, Daniel Luis Espinal, Luke Poeppel, Sid Chand, Alexi Ortega Chavez

Photo: Kyle Flubacker/Lyric Opera of Chicago

Ryan Opera Center alumni around the world



Matthew Polenzani (1995-1997) in the title role of *Werther* at Gran Teatre del Liceu (2025/26).

OTHER APPEARANCES



Rodell Rosel
(2005-2007)
Valzacchi / *Der Rosenkavalier*
Houston Grand Opera



Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi
(2014-2017)
Janthe / *The Vampire*
Landestheater Coburg



Kathryn Henry
(2022-2024)
Title role / *Jenůfa*
Sarasota Opera

For more information, please visit lyricopera.org/ryanoperacenter

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Bryan Hulscher
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Photo: Kyle Flubacker

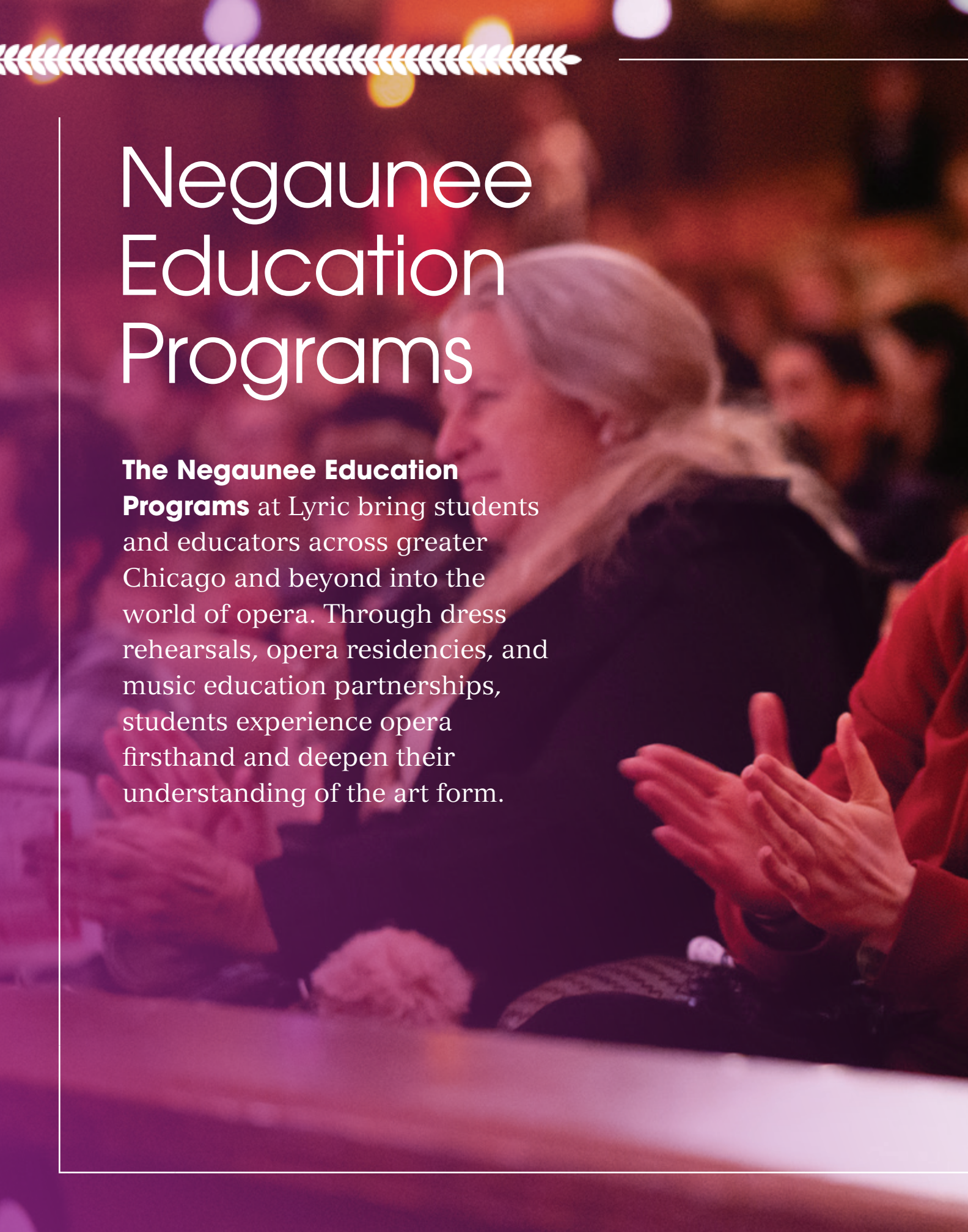
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Lyric OPERA OF CHICAGO

Photo: Kyle Flubacker



Negaunee Education Programs

The Negaunee Education Programs at Lyric bring students and educators across greater Chicago and beyond into the world of opera. Through dress rehearsals, opera residencies, and music education partnerships, students experience opera firsthand and deepen their understanding of the art form.

Engagement Programs

Engagement Programs at Lyric connect audiences and communities of all ages with opera through artist interactions, exhibitions and activities at the opera house, and performances throughout the city's neighborhoods.



Photo: Jaclyn Simpson/Lyric Opera of Chicago

Looking Deeper

Opera Insights explores the enduring relevance of opera's powerful stories.

By Janie Ragsdale



From life-long aficionados to first-time opera goers and every audience member in between, Lyric Opera of Chicago offers a growing number of programs focused on connecting with patrons and pulling back the curtain on opera. These initiatives allow Lyric to more deeply engage its patrons while providing new audiences an opportunity to explore the world of opera. A cornerstone of this programming is *Opera Insights*, a series of engaging community and academic discussions focused on Lyric's mainstage productions.

"We welcome every level of curiosity and background to *Opera Insights* in the hopes that patrons discover and deepen their connection to opera," says Lyric's Manager of Engagement Programs, Ivory Stephenson. The events are open to all audiences, and are free to attend with a registration, creating a welcome environment for longstanding patrons and the opera-curious. No matter their level of operatic experience, attendees can gain new perspectives on the art form and explore the enduring relevance of opera's powerful stories.

Hosted at Lyric or other cultural institutions across the city selected for their cultural or thematic connection to the repertoire, the foundation of each *Opera Insights* event is a panel discussion. These discussions feature renowned artists and scholars who delve into the societal impacts of works across the repertoire. Each panel is composed of four panelists and a moderator who are selected for their connection to the piece.
Experts range from historians and musicologists to academics and artists working on the production. This season's *Opera Insights* has also featured a unique, peer-led panel of dynamic Gen Z scholars as Lyric seeks to engage with the next generation of opera artists and fans.

At each event, the group examines the selected opera's connection to contemporary issues and





Director Matthew Ozawa (above, at right) at the *Madama Butterfly Opera Insights* event; the series draws a variety of opera lovers.

timeless themes. From unmasking the enduring power dynamics that make *Don Giovanni* a mirror to our own world, delving into the historical and musical traditions that shape *Omar*, and investigating complex family dynamics and generational divide through the lens of *Don Pasquale*, *Opera Insights* invites audiences into conversations that make opera more than just a performance, but a vital reflection of the shared human experience. The conversations at the core of *Opera Insights* are another way that Lyric creates a more immersive experience for attendees.

And the impact continues to expand. "While audience members have always greatly enjoyed the discussions," says Lyric's Director of Engagement Programs, Sheran Goodspeed Keyton, "we saw that there was room for growth in the overall experience." *Opera Insights* events now begin with a one-hour pre-show reception, where audiences are swept into the world of opera through an interactive, immersive experience featuring light bites and music from the featured opera. Lyric partners with local restaurants to craft a menu that aligns with the culture or themes of the production, inviting audiences to explore a cuisine connected to the work.

Reception entertainment ranges from a live preview of the repertoire performed by members of the Ryan Opera Center Ensemble to a playlist of audio or video excerpts from the production. *Opera Insights* also highlights the work of community collaborators — primarily local social service organizations connected to the themes of the event — who are present on site to interact with and educate attendees during the reception.

Through two hours of compelling education, entertainment, and connection, *Opera Insights* welcomes newcomers and aficionados alike deeper into the worlds that will unfold on stage.

"Audience members walk away from *Opera Insights* with a richer perspective." L

People of Lyric

A behind-the-scenes conversation



Kyle Flubacker

Will Raj

Vice President,
Information Technology

Hometown
Chicago

When did you start at Lyric?
2013

First opera you saw live?
La traviata, here. I'd never seen an opera before.

Favorite opera?
Rusalka. Because it was *The Little Mermaid*, and I figured that out pretty quickly.

Favorite opera character?
Brünnhilde. I saw Chrstine Goerke sing the role. Just amazing.

Favorite performer?
Idina Menzel. I've seen her live three times. I'm very excited that she's coming here.

When did you start, and what is your role here at Lyric?

I joined in 2013, after more than a decade working as a Chief Technology Officer in the nonprofit sector. Today, as Vice President of Information Technology, my team is responsible for everything from the systems and infrastructure our staff rely on every day to cybersecurity, applications, and major technology projects. A big part of my role is working with departments across Lyric to understand what they need and find ways technology can make their work easier and more effective.

You must have seen a lot of changes.

When I arrived, everything was outdated. Our network and our servers were more than a dozen years old. The phone system was 16 years old. So I rolled up my sleeves. And we've really increased the technology support staff and capabilities.

What is something surprising about your job?

I think people would be surprised by how much technology is involved in almost every part of the Lyric experience. IT supports the workings behind box office and online ticket sales, ticket printing and scanning, restaurant reservations, point-of-sale systems in our concession stands, and our call center operations. We run the Graham Room systems, which most people probably don't know. We're very involved with unique departmental needs such as in wigs and wardrobe. If we're doing our job well, most of that technology is something you never really have to think about.

What do you like about working in the arts?

It's so different from a typical office environment. An opera house has such a unique combination of artistic, technical, and business needs, and being a nonprofit adds yet another dimension. It makes the work interesting because no two days are quite the same.

A favorite moment at Lyric?

When we transformed our concessions from a cash-only operation to a modern point-of-sale system that could quickly process credit card transactions. It may not sound like a traditional opera-house milestone, but seeing a technology project make an immediate, noticeable improvement to the patron experience was incredibly rewarding.

A Lyric production that you are particularly proud of?

I'm particularly proud of *A Night of Mellon Collie and Infinite Sadness*. There was an incredible amount of excitement and demand surrounding the world-premiere production. Our IT team spent a lot of time preparing for the on-sale, increasing capacity for our website and phone systems, implementing an online waiting room, and closely monitoring everything as tickets went on sale. After being involved with so much of the behind-the-scenes preparation, getting to sit in the sold-out opera house and experience the performance myself was thrilling.

Beyond opera, what are your other passions?

I love to travel. So far, I've visited 46 states and six continents, and I'm always looking forward to the next adventure. My partner and I went on a safari in South Africa that was amazing. And we saw Victoria Falls. For me, travel is about discovering and experiencing something new, which is probably why I enjoy it so much.


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