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2024
2025

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2024-2025

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to El Paso Opera's 2024-2025 Season 31 including productions of ***Roméo & Juliette*** and ***Bon Appétit!***

Anyone who knows me knows my love of Shakespeare. As director of the Madeline Park Shakespeare Festival, the bard's works are central to my life. When Justin proposed Gounod's operatic treatment of ***Roméo & Juliette*** for our 31st season, I was thrilled! I was proud of the beauty and thoughtfulness of last year's ***Sunday in the Park with George***, but I am even more excited to see us return to a traditional opera and to St. Roger's Depot.

I am particularly excited because this is the kind of production Justin Lucero does expertly. He has great facility for reconceiving and tightening traditional opera while still preserving the scope and grandeur of the source material. Who can forget Justin's exceptional production of 2020's ***Pagliacci*** at St. Rogers? He delivered all the beauty and passion of the libretto, in a streamlined and non-traditional format. To date, that production remains one of my absolute favorites. Of course, each production is unique and must be enjoyed for its own merits, and Justin's use of St. Rogers in 2020 was brilliant and the bar is set high. I am eager to see how he clears it.

Though smaller in scope and theme, I am equally excited to see Cherry Duke reprise the role of Julia Child in ***Bon Appétit!*** In 2020, EPO produced this show, but the live production had to be cancelled for safety. Like many of us, I watched it on a computer screen. The work was excellent, but I still felt ripped off. I saw it, but on screen, I wasn't able to truly experience it. Now in season 31, I am thrilled to say we will finally get to see ***Bon Appétit!*** live at Ardivino's Desert Crossing! This show is playful and charming and is a terrific vehicle for Cherry Duke. It will be the perfect counter note to our darker and grander ***Roméo & Juliette***.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the El Paso Opera, I think you for your support, and I invite you to enjoy our dynamic 31st season!

JAY STRATTON

President, Board of Trustees

MENSAJE DEL PRESIDENTE

Bienvenidos a la temporada n.º 31, 2024-2025, de El Paso Opera que incluye las producciones de **Roméo & Juliette** y **Bon Appétit!**

Cualquiera que me conozca sabe de mi amor por Shakespeare. Como director del Festival de Shakespeare en el parque Madeline, las obras de este bardo ocupan un lugar central en mi vida. Cuando Justin propuso el montaje operístico de **Roméo & Juliette** de Gounod para nuestra 31ª temporada, me entusiasmé. Estoy muy orgulloso de la belleza y sensatez del **Sunday in the Park with George** del año pasado, pero estoy aún más emocionado de vernos regresar a una ópera tradicional y al St. Roger's Depot.

Estoy especialmente entusiasmado porque este es el tipo de producción que Justin Lucero realiza con maestría. Él tiene una gran facilidad para reconcebir y condensar la ópera tradicional, preservando al mismo tiempo el enfoque y la grandeza del material original. ¿Quién podría olvidar la excepcional producción de Justin de **Pagliacci** de 2020 en St. Rogers? Esta ofreció toda la belleza y la pasión del libreto, pero en un formato reducido y no tradicional. Hasta la fecha, esa producción sigue siendo una de mis favoritas. Por supuesto, cada producción es única y debe disfrutarse por sus propios méritos, pero el uso que Justin le dió al St. Rogers en 2020 fue brillante y el listón ha sido puesto muy alto. Estoy impaciente por ver cómo lo supera.

Aunque de menor escala y temática, me entusiasma igualmente ver a Cherry Duke retomar el papel de Julia Childs en **Bon Appétit!** En 2020, EPO produjo este espectáculo, pero la función en vivo tuvo que ser cancelada por seguridad. Como muchos de nosotros, yo la vi en la pantalla de mi computadora. La obra resultó excelente, pero aun así me sentí estafado. Sí la vi, pero en la pantalla no pude realmente vivirla. Ahora, en la temporada 31, estoy encantado de decir que por fin podremos ver **Bon Appétit!**, en vivo en Ardovino's Desert Crossing. Este divertido y encantador espectáculo es un magnífico medio para Cherry Duke. Será el contrapunto perfecto a nuestro más oscuro y grandioso **Roméo & Juliette**.

En nombre de la Junta Directiva de El Paso Opera, les agradezco su apoyo y los invito a disfrutar de nuestra dinámica 31ª temporada.

JAY STRATTON

Presidente de la Junta Directiva



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MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to El Paso Opera's 31st Season!

Since our debut in 1994, El Paso Opera has performed every single year without fail—a milestone we're immensely proud of! This season, we're thrilled to present two exceptional productions: ***Roméo & Juliette*** and ***Bon Appétit!***

Opera is a timeless art form that has captivated audiences for centuries, and ***Roméo & Juliette*** embodies the very essence of classic opera. Known as “the greatest love story ever told,” it's a tale that resonates universally. So why bring such a familiar story to the stage? Because we're reimagining it in an entirely new way. Set in a non-traditional space, our production adds a fresh and unique perspective to this beloved masterpiece. You may know the story, but you've never experienced it like this!

In contrast, ***Bon Appétit!*** couldn't be more different. This contemporary opera is inspired by an iconic episode of Julia Child's groundbreaking television show. Julia—television's first celebrity chef—won hearts around the world with her culinary expertise and infectious charm. ***Bon Appétit!*** brings her unforgettable chocolate cake episode to life through music, creating an engaging and playful operatic experience. Perfect for audiences of all ages, it's sure to be as delightful as it is delicious!

Together, these productions showcase the extraordinary diversity of opera. From the timeless romance of ***Roméo & Juliette*** to the lighthearted fun of ***Bon Appétit!***, this season proves that opera is not only what you expect—it's so much more.

Thank you for supporting the arts in El Paso! We're honored to have you with us and can't wait for you to enjoy the magic of our shows.

ARIANNE MARCEE

Executive Director

MENSAJE DE LA DIRECTORA EJECUTIVA

¡Bienvenidos a la 31ª temporada de El Paso Opera!

Desde nuestro debut en 1994, El Paso Opera ha estado en escena todos los años sin falta —un logro del que estamos inmensamente orgullosos! Esta temporada, estamos encantados de presentar dos producciones excepcionales: ***Roméo & Juliette*** y ***Bon Appétit!***

La ópera es una forma de arte imperecedera que ha cautivado al público durante siglos, y ***Roméo & Juliette*** encarna la esencia misma de la ópera clásica. Conocida como "la mayor historia de amor jamás contada", esta es un relato que resuena universalmente. ¿Pero por qué llevar a escena una historia tan conocida? Porque la hemos reimaginado de una forma totalmente nueva. Escenificada en un espacio no tradicional, nuestra producción añade una perspectiva nueva y novedosa a esta amada obra maestra. Puede que usted conozca esta historia, ¡pero nunca la ha vivido así!

En contraste, ***Bon Appétit!*** no podría ser más distinta. Esta ópera contemporánea se inspira en un episodio emblemático del innovador programa de televisión de Julia Child. Julia, la primera chef famosa de la televisión, conquistó corazones en todo el mundo con su maestría culinaria y su contagioso encanto. ***Bon Appétit!*** da vida al inolvidable episodio de la tarta de chocolate a través de la música, creando una experiencia operística llamativa y divertida. Perfecta para públicos de todas las edades, seguramente será tan encantadora como deliciosa.

Juntas, estas producciones muestran la extraordinaria diversidad de la ópera. Desde el inmortal romance de ***Roméo & Juliette*** hasta la diversión desenfadada de ***Bon Appétit!***, esta temporada demuestra que la ópera no es sólo lo que uno espera, sino mucho más.

¡Gracias por apoyar las artes en El Paso! Es un honor tenerlos con nosotros y estamos deseosos de que disfruten de la magia de nuestros espectáculos.

ARIANNE MARCEE

Directora Ejecutiva

MESSAGE FROM STAGE DIRECTOR

My gratitude to each of you for being here and for supporting El Paso Opera and the performing arts in our beloved city, my hometown. This production is, in many ways, a love letter—to our art form, to our organization, to our collaborators, and to you, our dedicated supporters. I am so proud of what we do and all we've accomplished, and I hope you experience today's passionate and devoted performance as a reflection of my own passion and devotion, a culmination of 14 seasons of involvement with the company.

Last season, for our 30th anniversary milestone, I took the occasion to highlight the artist, and all that we artists might endure in the creation process. It was a dream come true. This season, we enter our next decade with a balance of returns and new beginnings: a return to French opera, a return to chamber-sized opera, and a return to this intimate and electric venue. We're also marking a return of some of the most dedicated core group of collaborators and magic-makers who have stuck alongside El Paso Opera and me project after project, season after season. In the spirit of new beginnings, we are also pleased to offer a performance run that spans beyond just a single weekend, or even a single one-night-only performance, not to mention a run that includes five sensational singers and a stellar conductor, all making their El Paso Opera debuts.

Whether or not you're familiar with Charles Gounod's brilliant opera, you're likely familiar with the Shakespeare classic that inspired it. My favorite kind of performance is one that invites an audience to bring their memories and familiarities with them as they engage in a new retelling of something so well-known. We all know what happens—in fact, just like the play, the opera begins with a spoiler of the tragic ending!—and yet it's our collective journey with the characters, and the portrayers of the characters, live and real time, breathing the same air, that sparks something that can only occur in a theater setting.

This time, Shakespeare's enduring tale is delivered with even more passion because the approach is, quite literally, operatic. The human voice, especially with orchestral underscore, is a direct tap into human emotion. A highlighting of emotion is the major order of business for any production of *Roméo & Juliette*, and we take it even one step further by placing the musicians within touching distance. You are able to see the intensity of their eyes, see the muscle in their movements, perhaps even detect the rhythms of their hearts beating in their chests.

We are thrilled to be able to perform this work, at this time, in this space, with this group. Thank you for participating in this journey with us.

JUSTIN LUCERO

Stage Director, *Roméo & Juliette*

MENSAJE DEL DIRECTOR DE ESCENA

Mi gratitud a cada uno de ustedes por estar aquí y por apoyar a El Paso Opera y a las artes escénicas en nuestra querida ciudad, mi ciudad natal. Esta producción es, en muchos sentidos, una carta de amor a nuestra forma de arte, a nuestra organización, a nuestros colaboradores y a ustedes, nuestros fieles seguidores. Estoy muy orgulloso de lo que hacemos y de todo lo que hemos conseguido, y espero que vivan la apasionada y entregada representación de hoy como un reflejo de mi propia pasión y entrega, una culminación de 14 temporadas de participación en la compañía.

La temporada pasada, con motivo de nuestro 30 aniversario, aproveché la ocasión para realzar al artista y todo lo que los artistas podemos sufrir en el proceso de creación. Fue un sueño hecho realidad. Esta temporada, nos adentramos en nuestra próxima década con un equilibrio entre retornos y nuevos comienzos: un retorno a la ópera francesa, un retorno a la ópera de cámara y un retorno a esta sala íntima y eléctrica. También marcamos el regreso de algunos de los más dedicados colaboradores y creadores de magia que nos han acompañado a la Ópera de El Paso y a mí, proyecto tras proyecto, temporada tras temporada. Con el espíritu de los nuevos comienzos, también nos complace ofrecer un ciclo de presentaciones que va más allá de un solo fin de semana, o incluso de una producción de una sola noche, además de incluir a cinco cantantes sensacionales y a un director estelar, todos haciendo su debut en El Paso Opera.

Independientemente de que conozcan o no la brillante ópera de Charles Gounod, lo más probable es que estén familiarizados con el clásico de Shakespeare que la inspiró. Mi interpretación favorita es la que invita al público a traer consigo sus recuerdos y familiaridades para participar en una nueva versión de algo tan conocido. Todos sabemos lo que ocurre—de hecho, al igual que la obra, la ópera comienza con un spoiler del trágico final—y, sin embargo, es nuestro viaje colectivo con los personajes, y los intérpretes de los personajes, en vivo y en directo, respirando el mismo aire, lo que provoca algo que sólo puede ocurrir en un teatro.

En esta ocasión, la perdurable historia de Shakespeare se interpreta con aún más pasión porque el enfoque es, literalmente, operístico. La voz humana, especialmente con un fondo orquestal, es un acceso directo a la emoción humana. Destacar la emoción es el principal objetivo de cualquier producción de *Roméo & Juliette*, y nosotros vamos un paso más allá colocando a los músicos a una distancia que se podrían tocar. Podrán ver la intensidad en sus ojos, ver sus músculos en movimiento, tal vez incluso percibir el latido de sus corazones en sus pechos.

Estamos encantados de poder realizar esta obra, en este momento, en este espacio, con este grupo. Gracias por acompañarnos en este viaje.

JUSTIN LUCERO

Director de Escena, *Roméo & Juliette*

EL PASO OPERA AND ST. ROGERS DEPOT PRESENT

GOUNOD
*Roméo
& Juliette*

ROLE

Roméo
Juliette
Mercutio
Tybalt
Frère Laurent
Count Capulet
Gertrude

ARTIST

Benjamin Werley
Helen Huang
Patrick McNally
Donovan Smith
Phil Cokorinos
Ricardo Herrera
Cherry Duke

UNDERWRITER

Wilma Salzman
Sara Shiloff
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Fay la Fon & Robert Postma

PRODUCTION TEAM

Conductor/Music Director
Stage Director
Lighting Designer
Costume Designer
Production Manager
Assistant Director
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Master Carpenter
Rehearsal Pianist
Costumers

Makeup Designer
Second Asst Stage Manager
Director of Video Content
Supertitles Creator & Operator
Fight Choreographer

Maria Sensi Sellner
Justin Lucero
Marissa Diaz
ArianMarie Moye
Adrian Salas
Megan McQueen
Karina Ortega
Malori Cade
Roy Lockhart
Dr. Esquiel Meza, Jr
Carlos de la Garza-Garcia
Luis Eddie Wilson
Ivan Cano
Maya Lavin
Will Seyffert
Antonio Motta
Rayven Armijo

Wilma Salzman
John Colquitt
Jonny & Lory Rogers
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Gloria Lavis
Wilma Salzman
Dr. Tom & Jan Brady/Dr. Ariana Bender

ST. ROGERS DEPOT • JANUARY 30 - FEBRUARY 6, 2025

Roméo & Juliette runs approximately 2 hours plus a single 20 minute intermission.
'REDUCED ORCHESTRATION BY JONATHAN LYNSS'





ORCHESTRA

INSTRUMENT

Concertmaster/Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Bass
French Horn
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet
Trumpet
Flute/Piccolo
Keys
Bassoon

Score Librarian

ARTIST

Stephanie Meyers
Stephen Nordstrom
Susan Hernandez
Michael Way
Will Scholten
John Groves
Raul Olivas
Nancy Taylor
Joy Zalkind
Cody Ritchey
Diego Delgado

Michael Way

UNDERWRITER

Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Gloria Lavis
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Wilma Salzman
Debbie Hamlyn
Wilma Salzman
Debbie Hamlyn
Debbie Hamlyn
Debbie Hamlyn

SYNOPSIS



In a full-cast Prologue, the Players tell of the endless feud between the rival Montague and Capulet families, and of the tragic end that meets two of their own, Roméo and Juliette, whose star-crossed love burned passionately.

At a masked ball in the Capulet palace, Lord Capulet presents his daughter, Juliette. Mercutio and Roméo, both Montagues, have donned masks to sneak in. Roméo tells about a strange dream he has had, but Mercutio dismisses it as the work of the fairy Queen Mab. In a chance passing, Roméo and Juliette lock eyes and experience the first sparks of love. Juliette explains to her nurse, Gertrude, that she has no interest in marriage, but when Roméo approaches her in a quiet moment, both feel that they are meant for each other. Tybalt happens upon them and recognizes Roméo, leading both Roméo and Juliette to discover each other's family identity. Lord Capulet prevents Tybalt from attacking Roméo, who, with Mercutio, makes a hasty retreat.

Later that night, Roméo enters the Capulets' garden, looking for Juliette. When she steps out onto her balcony, he declares his love. Gertrude briefly interrupts their midnight encounter. When they are alone once again, Juliette assures Roméo that she will be his forever. Roméo visits the friar, Frère Laurent, at the church and confesses his love for Juliette. Shortly thereafter, Juliette appears with Gertrude. Hoping that

their love might reconcile their families, Frère Laurent marries them. Elsewhere Tybalt challenges Mercutio to a fight.

Roméo steps between them and asks Tybalt to forget about the hatred between their families. Tybalt has nothing but scorn for him, and when he kills Mercutio in their duel, Roméo stabs Tybalt to death.

Roméo and Juliette have met in her bedroom to consummate their marriage. Juliette forgives Roméo for killing Tybalt. The newlyweds passionately declare their love as day is dawning. They can hardly bring themselves to say goodbye. After Roméo has left, Lord Capulet appears, together with Frère Laurent, and announces to his daughter that she is to marry Pâris that same day. Desperate, Juliette turns to the friar, who gives her a potion that will make her appear to be dead. He promises that she will awaken with Roméo beside her. Love lends Juliette courage: she overcomes her fear and drinks the poison.

Roméo arrives at the Capulets' crypt, not informed of the friar's plan. Discovering Juliette's body, he believes her to be dead and drinks a deadly poison. At that moment, she awakens, and the lovers share a final dream of a future together. As Roméo grows weaker, Juliette decides to join him in death and stabs herself with a dagger. The lovers die, united in eternity.

SINÓPSIS



En un prólogo con reparto completo, los actores hablan de la interminable disputa entre las familias rivales de los Montague y los Capulet, y del trágico final de dos de ellos, Roméo y Juliette, cuyo amor ardió apasionadamente.

En un baile de máscaras en el palacio de los Capulet, el Señor Capulet presenta a su hija Juliette. Mercutio y Roméo, ambos Montague, se han puesto máscaras para colarse. Roméo le cuenta un extraño sueño que ha tenido, pero Mercutio lo descarta como obra del hada reina Mab. Por casualidad, Roméo y Juliette intercambian miradas y experimentan las primeras chispas de amor. Juliette explica a su nodriza, Gertrude, que no está interesada en el matrimonio, pero cuando Roméo se acerca a ella en un momento de tranquilidad, ambos sienten que están hechos el uno para el otro. Tybalt los encuentra y reconoce a Roméo, lo que lleva a Roméo y Juliette a descubrir la identidad familiar del otro. Lord Capulet impide que Tybalt ataque a Roméo, quien, junto con Mercutio, se da a la fuga.

Esa misma noche, Roméo entra en el jardín de los Capulet en busca de Juliette. Cuando ella sale al balcón, él le declara su amor. Gertrude interrumpe brevemente su encuentro a medianoche. Cuando vuelven a estar solos, Juliette le asegura a Roméo que será suya para siempre.

Roméo visita al fraile, Frère Laurént, en la iglesia y le confiesa su amor por Juliette. Poco después, Juliette aparece con Gertrude. Esperando que su amor reconcilie a sus familias, Frère Laurent los casa. En otro lugar, Tybalt reta a Mercutio a pelearse. Roméo se interpone entre ellos y pide a Tybalt que olvide el odio entre sus familias. Tybalt sólo siente desprecio por él, y cuando mata a Mercutio en su duelo, Roméo apuñala a Tybalt hasta la muerte.

Roméo y Juliette se han reunido en la habitación de ella para consumar su matrimonio. Juliette perdona a Roméo por haber matado a Tybalt. Los recién casados se declaran apasionadamente su amor al amanecer. Apenas se atreven a despedirse. Tras la marcha de Roméo, aparece Capulet, acompañado de Frère Laurént, y anuncia a su hija que debe casarse con Pâris ese mismo día. Desesperada, Juliette acude al fraile, que le da una poción que la hará parecer muerta. Le promete que despertará con Roméo a su lado. El amor infunde valor a Juliette: vence su miedo y bebe el veneno.

Roméo llega a la cripta de los Capulet sin ser informado del plan del fraile. Al descubrir el cadáver de Juliette, la cree muerta y bebe un veneno mortal. En ese momento, ella despierta y los amantes comparten un último sueño de un futuro juntos. Cuando Roméo se debilita, Juliette decide unirse a él en la muerte y se clava una daga. Los amantes mueren unidos en la eternidad.

CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM



Benjamin Werley, *Roméo*

Pittsburgh native Benjamin Werley—praised as having a “gleaming, flexible tenor” (*Opera News*)—has performed at many of the country’s leading opera companies. Recent appearances include performances for Anchorage Opera (*Don José*, *Carmen*), St. Petersburg Opera (Edgardo, *Lucia di Lammermoor* | Cavaradossi, *Tosca*), Central City Opera (Red Whiskers, *Billy Budd*), Dayton Opera (Narraboth, *Salome* | Nemorino, *L’elisir d’amore*), The Southern Illinois Music Festival (Ruggero, *La Rondine*), and The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (Tenor soloist, Beethoven 9). Coming this season, Werley makes his San Diego Opera debut (Narraboth, *Salome*), returns to Virginia Opera for the world premiere of *Loving v. Virginia* (Sheriff Garnett Brooks/Judge Leon M. Bazile), and returns to the Southern Illinois Music Festival (Percy, *Anna Bolena*, Nemorino, *L’elisir d’amore*).



Helen Huang, *Juliette*

Helen Zhibing Huang is a Chinese-born soprano. She was recently described as “impressive” (*The New York Times*) after her compelling portrayal of Pamina in *The Magic Flute* for The Glimmerglass Festival.

For the 2024-25 season, Ms. Huang returns to Hawaii Opera Theatre as Ming in *Stuck Elevator*, a role that she will reprise with Knoxville Opera in May 2025. She will also make her debut with El Paso Opera as Juliette in *Roméo & Juliette*. In recent seasons, Ms. Huang has made appearances with Nashville Opera, Annapolis Opera, West Edge Opera, North Carolina Opera, Washington Concert Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and White Snake projects, as well as making concert and operatic debuts in Europe at the Deutsche Opera Berlin and Australia. She has joined the Alabama Symphony as the soprano soloist in Handel’s *Messiah*, Faure’s *Requiem*, and Mahler’s Symphony No. 4.

CAST & PRODUCTION TEAM



Patrick McNally *Mercutio*

Baritone Patrick McNally this season made his professional Italian debut, portraying the title role in *Don Giovanni* as well as a "sympathetic and complex" portrayal of Germont in *La Traviata*. Previously, he returned to St. Petersburg Opera to sing Taddeo in *l'Italiana in Algeri* and The Wolf in *Pinocchio*. He was also seen with the Quad Cities Symphony performing the role of Gad in Heggie's *Two Remain (Out of Darkness)*.

Recently, Mr. McNally recorded *Tangling with the Epic*, a CD of newly created English and Australian art songs. Over the pandemic Mr. McNally premiered the world premiere of the award-winning *Verdi by Vegetables* by Peter Hilliard and Matt Boresi, receiving

Opera America's Digital Excellence in Opera Award. Mr. McNally has been glowingly reviewed as "robust" and "standout" by the *Denver Post*, as having a "rich, expressive baritone," and with a "lively stage presence" as described by *Opera News*. Mr. McNally has performed at houses across the United States and internationally. Recent career highlights include appearances at Nashville Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Central City Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Sarasota Opera, Dayton Opera, Opera Louisiane, Bronx Opera, Opera Mississippi, City Lyric Opera, the Center for Contemporary Opera, the Boston Lyric Opera, and St. Petersburg Opera.

CAST & PRODUCTION TEAM



Donovan Smith, *Tybolt*

Donovan Elliot Smith, a Pittsburgh native, has recently moved back home after working as a tenor full-time in the opera chorus at Opernhaus Zürich, and at Theater Basel where he also sang small solo roles for several years. A few of those roles include one of the armed men in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and Iaryzhkin in Shostakovich's *The Nose*.

He has also appeared as the tenor soloist in McCullough's *Let My People Go* with the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh. Most recently he performed the role of The Lamplighter in *The Little Prince* with Resonance Works. Other recent roles include Serano in Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*, and Prince Charming in a production of Viardot's *Cinderella*. Some other solo credits throughout Europe include roles such as Tony in McNally's *Masterclass*, Beppe in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, the tenor soloist in Britten's *Serenade* (for tenor, horn, and strings), and solo recitals.



Phil Cokorinos, *Frère Laurent*

Hailed by *Opera News* for his “comedic high jinks” and “first-rate singing,” Philip Cokorinos has appeared in more than 400 performances of 40 operas at the Met since he won the MONC auditions, including the world premiere of *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Met premieres of *Sly*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Gambler*, and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and their productions of the standard repertoire, including *Tosca*, *La bohème*, *La fanciulla del West*, *La Traviata*, *Adriana Lecouvreur*, *La rondine*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Macbeth*, *Manon*, *Don Carlo*, *Tosca*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*. His most recent Met appearances include *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *La bohème*, and *Tosca*. Cokorinos also performed the Sacristan in *Tosca* at Los Angeles Opera, Benoit/Alcindoro in *La bohème* with The Atlanta Opera and the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy, and Simone in San Diego Opera's *Gianni Schicchi*. This season he returns to the Met for *Le nozze di Figaro*.

CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM



Ricardo Herrera, *Count Capulet*

Ricardo Herrera, bass-baritone, performer, teacher, and stage director. Ricardo has sung more than 50 operatic roles around USA, Mexico, singing with San Francisco Opera, Gotham Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Chicago Opera Theater, El Paso Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Caramoor Festival, Oldenburgisches Staatstheater, Opera Grand Rapids, and Atlanta Opera, among others. Ricardo was honored with the First Prize of the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation Competition in New York City and invited to participate in Plácido Domingo's Operalia World Opera Contest. As a Merola Opera Center participant he performed the title role in the Western Opera Theater National Tour of *Don Giovanni*. Mr. Herrera received the Demodocus Award that entitled him to his Carnegie Hall debut as the bass soloist in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony after participating in the premiere season of Opera Aegean in Greece. He also received the Adler Fellowship with San Francisco Opera where he appeared in many SFO productions including *La Traviata*, *Eugene Onegin*, *The Mother of Us All* and *Billy Budd*.

Ricardo Herrera is an El Pasoan and a graduate from The University of Texas at El Paso and The Juilliard School. He is Chair of the Voice Area at The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and served for seven years as Director of the Opera Studio.



Cherry Duke, *Gertrude*

Mezzo-soprano Cherry Duke has performed over 60 principal roles in opera and musical theatre throughout the US and abroad, including the world premiere, tour, and original cast album of the acclaimed 2012 opera, *Dog Days*. For El Paso Opera, Cherry Duke played Old Lady and Blair Daniels in *Sunday In The Park With George*, Flora in *La Traviata*, Julia Child in *Bon Appétit!*, Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*, and Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*. In 2019, she portrayed Dolly Levi in the UTEP Dinner Theatre's production of *Hello, Dolly!* Cherry Duke has served on the voice faculty and as the Director of Opera at The University of Texas at El Paso since 2015. Last summer, Cherry debuted at Central City Opera as Olga Olsen in *Street Scene*. This past fall, she revived her role of Julia Child with South Bend Lyric Opera in their production of *Bon Appétit!*.

For more information, visit
www.cherryduke.com

CREATIVE TEAM



Maria Sensi Sellner *Music Director/Conductor*

Conductor Maria Sensi Sellner's artistry, versatility, and reputation for innovation are making her a sought-after collaborator and an impresario for the 21st century. She was the first three-time winner of the American Prize for Opera Conducting and is a proud alum of The Dallas Opera's Hart Institute for Women Conductors. Maria is the Artistic and General Director of Resonance Works, the genre-defying performing arts company she founded in her native Pittsburgh in 2013; co-founder and lead producer of the Decameron Opera Coalition; and a frequent cover conductor for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Her unique, artist-driven programming has been praised for its "innovative streak" and for bringing a "welcome infusion of sophistication and diversity" to Pittsburgh's cultural landscape.

She recently has made a growing number of company debuts - including Portland Opera, Opera Ithaca, Lyric Opera of the North, Opera Steamboat, Fargo-Moorhead Opera, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City - conducting her favorite mix of Verdi, bel canto, and contemporary opera repertoire. Recent conducting highlights include the world premiere of "I am a Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams" (Sosa/Jacobs) for Boston's White Snake Projects and second production with Resonance Works, a remount of Resonance Works' award-winning immersive production of

L'elisir d'amore at Permian Basin Opera, the U.S. premiere of James MacMillan's *Gloria*, and numerous regional premieres, including David Lang's *little match girl* passion and Dvořák's *Rusalka*.

Previous opera and concert engagements include the Center for Contemporary Opera, Syracuse Opera, Symphoria, Akron Symphony Orchestra, Westmoreland Symphony Orchestra, Boston Opera Collaborative, Opera Theater of Pittsburgh, and Hubbard Hall Opera, among others. She was on the conducting team for what the New York Times called the "most inspiring feel-good performance of 2016," the world premiere of David Lang's "the public domain" for 1000 singers at Lincoln Center. Maria has previously held positions as Acting Music Director of the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh, Director of the Akron Symphony Chorus, Artistic Administrator for Festival Napa Valley's Blackburn Music Academy, Artistic Advisor for Hubbard Hall Opera, interim faculty at the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music, and Director of the Carnegie Mellon All University Orchestras for ten years.

Maria holds masters degrees in conducting (studying with Robert Page), composition, and mechanical engineering from Carnegie Mellon University. She has conducted in masterclasses around the US and in the UK, including for Helmuth Rilling's Discovery Series Concerts at the Oregon Bach Festival in 2008 and 2009.

CREATIVE TEAM



Justin Lucero,
Stage Director

Regarded as a leader of the theater field and in theater education, Mr. Lucero serves as Artistic Director of the award-winning musical theater company, Theater Latté Da, in Minneapolis. Previously he was a tenure-track member of faculty at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama as a Professor of Directing for The John Wells Directing Program, of which he was also Associate Chair. Previous to CMU, he enjoyed a two-year residency with the University of Houston as the inaugural Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fellow in Directing & Theatre Studies; he also has a long-standing relationship as Artist-in-Residence and guest director with The University of Texas at El Paso. Mr. Lucero has served as Artistic Director for six of his thirteen seasons with El Paso Opera. He is the recipient of prestigious engagements such as a Directing Fellowship with Asolo Repertory Theatre (Florida), a Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Observership at South Coast Repertory (Los Angeles), a FAIR Assistantship with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and a Directing Attachment at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre (London's West End). He was named to the 2021-2022 BIPOC Leadership Circle by artEquity, in partnership with the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale, and is a 2022-2023 TCG (Theatre Communications Group) Rising Leaders of Color awardee

supported by Opportunity Fund and Walt Disney Imagineering, as well as a member of TCG's board-level governance in the inaugural Next Generation Taskforce. He also served on the Blue Ribbon Panel with The American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League to select the 2023 Tony Award winner for Excellence in Theatre Education, and continues to be a grants evaluator for the Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, and the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, he was selected to be a member of the 2023 OPERA America Leadership Intensive cohort, a highly selective program which identifies and develops "leaders who will move opera forward for years to come." Mr. Lucero London-trained at the top-ranked East 15 Acting School, where he earned an MFA in Directing with Distinction. His work is at the intersections of the performing arts, education, community building, and the championing of underrepresented voices. His art and teaching aim to normalize the voices of the historically marginalized, including the championing of inclusion and interculturalism. As a theatre-maker, he explores the performer-spectator dynamic and exploits an audience's necessary role in theatrical creation.

CREATIVE TEAM



Marissa Diaz, *Lighting Designer*

Marissa A. Díaz is a proud native El Pasoan who has an MFA in Drama from The University of California Irvine and a BFA from The University of Texas at El Paso in Theatre. Marissa has worked with lighting for theatre, dance, and architecture and is thrilled to be creating art again here at home. Recent credits include *Heroes and Saints* with the The University of Texas at El Paso Department of Theatre and Dance. She thanks Adrian and her family for all their love and support.

www.madlightingdesign.com



ArianMarie Moya, *Costume Designer*

ArianMarie Moya is delighted to be making her debut with El Paso Opera. She is a Las Vegas-based costume designer for stage and film. Recent/favorite credits include *Hamlet*, *Raisin in the Sun* with Utah Shakespeare Festival, *A Christmas at Prime Rib Playhouse* with Oregon Cabaret Theatre, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *La bohème* with Bay View Music Festival and *Choir Boy*, *On Golden Pond* with Vegas Theatre Company. She has an MFA in Design/Technology with an emphasis in Costume Design from the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

You can see more of Ms. Moya's work at arianmarie86.myportfolio.com

CREATIVE TEAM



Megan McQueen, *Assistant Stage Director*

Megan McQueen became a Sondheim devotee while singing “I’m Still Here” in her high school’s production of *Follies*. Thirty years later, she’s portrayed The Witch in *Into the Woods*, Fosca in *Passion*, and an ensemble member in *Assassins*. While earning a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance at New Mexico State University, her roles ranged from Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* to Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*. She’s performed, produced, directed, or music directed countless shows between New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Texas. Learn more about her work as a teacher of painting, history, performance, and various other ways to explore “what it is to be a human being” (Wilde) by searching “Stands the Test of Rhyme.”



Rayven Armijo, *Fight Choreographer*

Rayven Laticia Armijo is a choreographer, dance educator, and stage combat specialist with extensive experience blending traditional martial arts and storytelling for dynamic stage performances. A visiting professor at The University of Texas at El Paso, rayven teaches movement and choreography, emphasizing groundedness, narrative depth, and safety.

With a Master of Fine Arts in Dance from UCLA, rayven has trained extensively in stage combat techniques, including swordplay, katana, bo staff, sai, nunchaku, and hand-to-hand combat. Her mentorship under Si Fu Li in China (2009–2015) deepened her expertise in Kung Fu and integrated martial arts choreography.

Rayven’s credits include choreographing *The Tempest* at Pepperdine University, *Romeo and Juliet* in Dongguan, and *Motion Bound* at UTEP. A former top 20 finalist on *So You Think You Can Dance*, she combines her artistry and technical knowledge to create compelling, safe, and precise movement for performers.



Special Thanks:

Charles Leinberger & UTEP
Department of Music
Cherry Duke & Opera UTEP
Todd Marcee
Andrea Davis
UTEP Dinner Theatre

UTEP Department of Theatre & Dance
St. Francis on the Hill
Carlos Barraza Treviño
Samantha Dávalos
Cynthia Hill
Dr. David Pritchard

Holly Kara Mesarch
Antonio Motta
Sarah Neely
Annie Pennies
Jasper Mesarch
Jan & Tom Brady

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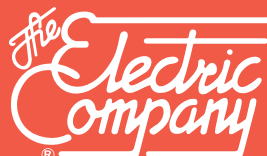
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EL PASO OPERA presents



ACT I

Carlos Barraza Treviño
Samantha Dávalos
Cynthia Hill
Holly Kara Mesarch
Antonio Motta
Sarah Neely
Annie Pennies

ROLE

Tenor
Soprano
Soprano
Soprano
Baritone
Soprano
Mezzo-soprano

UNDERWRITTEN

Gloria Lavis
Kitty Schild
Marshall Carter Tripp & Richard Tripp
Gloria Lavis

Featuring Collaborative Pianist:
Casey Robards

Directed by Cherry Duke, Director of Resident Artists

ACT II– *Bon Appétit!*

Cherry Duke
Stage Director
Music Director/Conductor

Julia Child
Justin Lucero
Casey Robards

Wilma Salzman
Marshall Carter Tripp & Richard Tripp

PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Manager
Master Carpenter
Stage Manager
Rehearsal Pianist
Director of Video Content

Adrian Salas
Roy Lockhart
Malori Cade
Dr Esequiel Meza, Jr.
Will Seyffert



ARDOVINO'S DESERT CROSSING JUNE 14, 2024

Bon Appétit! runs approximately 80 minutes plus one 15 minute intermission.

Bon Appétit! Composed by Lee Hoiby Text by Julia Child, adapted by Mark Shulgasser
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EL PASO OPERA

goes gourmet!

ACT 1 Whet your appetite with food-themed
selections sung
by El Paso Opera Resident Artists!

~Intermission~

ACT 2

Bon Appétit!

by Lee Hoiby

Act 1 Selections:

"O vin dissipe"Antonio Motta
from *Hamlet* by Ambrose Thomas and Company

"Food glorious food"Company
from *Oliver* by Lionel Bart

"Vanilla Ice Cream"Sarah Neely
from *She Loves Me* by Jerry Bock

La Bonne CuisineHolly Kara Mesarch
by Leonard Bernstein

Ah, quel dinerAnnie Pennies
from *La Périchole* by Jacques Offenbach

"Suzel, buon dì" and "Tutto tace" (the "Cherry Duet")Carlos Barraza Treviño & Cynthia Hill
from *L'amico Fritz*

Omelette QuartetCarlos Barraza Treviño, Samantha Dávalos,
from *Docteur Miracle* by Georges Bizet Antonio Motta & Sarah Neely

Champagne's Delicious Bubbles.....Antonio Motta, Sarah Neely,
from *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss II Annie Pennies and company

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RESIDENT ARTISTS



Greetings and thank you for supporting opera in El Paso. It is our mission to have opera support El Paso and El Pasoans as well. One of the primary ways we accomplish this is through *#CurbsideOpera* performances by our Resident Artists. This season, I am honored to direct the Resident Artist program, which includes programming for each of their appearances and offering artistic guidance to our artists. Each of our Resident Artists is an accomplished singing artist, and we are so fortunate to have them representing our company and bringing high quality vocal performances to our community year-round.

This season, *#CurbsideOpera* has evolved. All of our community performances now feature the talents of our Resident Pianist, Flor de la Garza. No longer in the back of a truck, we still offer *#CurbsideOpera* performances free of charge at local parks, but we also perform at hospitals, senior living communities, grocery stores, bars, farmers markets, and arts festivals! *#CurbsideOpera* is also available “on demand” for block parties or other special occasions. Reach out to Holly in the opera office if you would like to book our performers for your next event.

The Resident Artist program is essential to our season, building excitement for each of our main events, and marking the holidays with glorious singing. Toward the

end of this season, we will celebrate the Resident Artists at Ardovino’s Desert Crossing. As part of our delicious presentation of *Bon Appétit!*, the RAs will perform a cornucopia of songs about food and drink. At this performance, they will be accompanied by renowned pianist, Casey Robards, who will also conduct the one-act opera, *Bon Appétit!* We are delighted that Dr. Robards will also be visiting El Paso in March to offer coaching for our RAs, raising the value of their participation with EPO even more.

I hope you have enjoyed the RA’s performances many times over this season. They are essential to the mission of service and engagement with our beloved Borderland community. If you would like to support the RA program with an additional donation, that would help us continue to grow and expand. Please contact Holly in the opera office and mention this message.

Thank you for your continued support!

CHERRY DUKE
Director of Resident Artists

MENSAJE DE LA DIRECTORA DE LOS ARTISTAS RESIDENTES



Saludos y gracias por apoyar la ópera en El Paso. Nuestra misión es que la ópera también apoye a El Paso y a los paseños. Una de las principales formas en que logramos esto es a través de las presentaciones de **#CurbsideOpera** de nuestros Artistas Residentes. A partir de esta temporada, tengo el honor de dirigir el programa de Artistas Residentes, que incluye la programación de cada una de sus presentaciones y ofrecer orientación artística a nuestros artistas. Cada uno de nuestros Artistas Residentes es un consumado artista del canto, y somos muy afortunados de tenerlos representando a nuestra compañía y trayendo actuaciones vocales de alta calidad a nuestra comunidad durante todo el año.

Esta temporada, **#CurbsideOpera** ha evolucionado. Todas nuestras presentaciones en la comunidad cuentan ahora con el talento de nuestra pianista residente, Flor de la Garza. Aunque ya no sobre una camioneta, seguimos ofreciendo presentaciones gratuitas de **#CurbsideOpera** en parques locales, pero también nos presentamos en hospitales, comunidades de retiro, supermercados, bares, mercados al aire libre y festivales de arte. También ofrecemos **#CurbsideOpera** “a la carta” para fiestas de vecindario u otras ocasiones especiales. Póngase en contacto con Holly en la oficina de la ópera si desea contratar a nuestros artistas para su próximo evento.

El programa de Artistas Residentes es

esencial para nuestra temporada, creando entusiasmo para cada uno de nuestros eventos principales y marcando las fiestas navideñas con gloriosos cantos. Hacia el final de esta temporada, celebraremos a los Artistas Residentes en Ardovino's Desert Crossing. Como parte de nuestra deliciosa presentación de **Bon Appétit!**, los ARs interpretarán una cornucopia de canciones sobre comida y bebida. En esta presentación, serán acompañados por la renombrada pianista Casey Robards, quien también dirigirá **Bon Appétit!**. Estamos encantados de que la Dra. Robards también visitará El Paso en marzo para ofrecer clases particulares a nuestros ARs, lo que aumentará aún más el valor de su participación en EPO.

Espero que hayan disfrutado de las actuaciones de los Artistas Residentes muchas veces a lo largo de esta temporada. Ellos son tan importantes para la misión de servicio y compromiso con nuestra querida comunidad fronteriza. Si usted desea apoyar el programa de ARs con una donación adicional, nos ayudaría a seguir creciendo y expandirnos. Por favor, póngase en contacto con Holly en la oficina de la ópera y mencione este mensaje.

¡Gracias por su apoyo continuo!

CHERRY DUKE

Directora de Artistas Residentes

SYNOPSIS

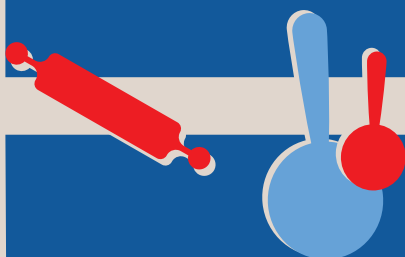
A comic culinary extravaganza that taps the wit and antics of one of America's best-loved television personalities.

Librettist Note:

Bon Appétit! was comprised of two icons of the television age: music draped over the words and gestures of Julia Child, the mother-of-all-foodies, in her black-and-white days; written for Jean Stapleton, famed original-cast, Broadway-musical comedienne, in her late career. The juxtaposition clicked for a few seasons and lives on by virtue of flamboyant mezzos, piano-accompanied at gala occasions where great quantities of chocolate are consumed.

Two episodes of the second WGBH-TV season were conflated: the race between the whisk and the electric beater comes out of a different cake. Hoiby's music deftly veers around Broadway chansons, early television, and Ravelian apotheosis to underline Julia Child's compelling domestic uplift.

— Mark Shulgasser, Librettist
(source: *WiseMusicClassical*)



SINÓPSIS

Una cómica extravagancia culinaria que explota el ingenio y las ocurrencias de una de las personalidades televisivas más queridas de Estados Unidos.

Nota del libretista:

¡*Bon Appétit!* se basa en dos íconos de la era de la televisión: música que envuelve las palabras y los gestos de Julia Child, la madre de todos los foodies, en sus días de blanco y negro; escrita para Jean Stapleton, la protagonista original y famosa comediente de musicales de Broadway, en los últimos años de su carrera. La yuxtaposición funcionó durante unas cuantas temporadas y sigue viva gracias a las extravagantes mezzos, acompañadas al piano en ocasiones de gala en las que se consumen grandes cantidades de chocolate.

Dos episodios de la segunda temporada de WGBH-TV fueron combinados: la batalla entre el batidor de mano y la batidora eléctrica surge de pasteles distintos. La música de Hoiby gira hábilmente en torno a las canciones de Broadway, la televisión antigua y la apoteosis raveliana que resalta el convincente enaltecimiento doméstico de Julia Child.

— Mark Shulgasser, libretista
(Fuente: *WiseMusicClassical*)

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



CHERRY DUKE, 'Julia Child' & Director of Resident Artists

Mezzo-soprano Cherry Duke has performed over 60 principal roles in opera and musical theatre throughout the US and abroad, including the world premiere, tour, and original cast album of the acclaimed 2012 opera, *Dog Days*. For El Paso Opera, Cherry Duke played Old Lady and Blair Daniels in *Sunday In The Park With George*, Flora in *La Traviata*, Julia Child in *Bon Appétit*, Hansel in *Hansel And Gretel*, Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*, and Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*. In 2019, she portrayed Dolly Levi in the UTEP Dinner Theatre's production of *Hello, Dolly!* Cherry Duke has served on the voice faculty and as the Director of Opera at The University of Texas at El Paso since 2015. Last summer, Cherry debuted at Central City Opera as Olga Olsen in *Street Scene*. This past fall, she revived her role of Julia Child with South Bend Lyric Opera in their production of *Bon Appétit!*

www.cherryduke.com



CARLOS BARRAZA TREVÍÑO Tenor

Carlos Elias Barraza Treviño, a Mexican tenor from Chihuahua, holds a bachelor's degree in music education (voice emphasis) from The University of Texas at El Paso. He earned a master's degree in Voice Performance & Pedagogy in May of 2023 and currently serves as a graduate teaching assistant at Arizona State University, pursuing a doctoral degree in Vocal Performance. Carlos excels in art song, particularly in German and Spanish, and has received several awards and voice scholarships. He has performed as a guest soloist for the Mount Desert Summer Chorale in Bar Harbor, Maine, the ASU Concert Choir, Arizona Masterworks Chorale, and several other professional choirs in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Beyond performing, he teaches voice as a teaching assistant at Arizona State University and is dedicated to elevating vocal artistry and education through performance and pedagogy.



SAMANTHA DÁVALOS

Soprano

Samantha Dávalos, soprano, obtained her Master of Music in Voice, Musical Theatre, and Opera Performance at Arizona State University in 2021 after receiving her bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from The University of Texas at El Paso in 2019. Samantha has performed many roles including Puccini's title role *Suor Angelica*. Other roles Samantha has performed include Mother in *Heart of Oksana*, La Badessa in *Suor Angelica*, Linda Morales in *Hometown to the World*, Anna Maurant in *Street Scene*, and Harriett Beecher Stowe in *The Infinite Energy of Ada Lovelace*. Samantha is also a member of the Arizona Women's Collaborative, a group of female and non-binary identifying artists who work across disciplines through cooperative composition.



CYNTHIA HILL

Soprano

Cynthia Hill, soprano, is thrilled to return to the El Paso stage after several years of living and performing in South Florida. Cynthia is a dedicated artist and educator. She has performed both in the United States and abroad, with her most recent performance as Marcellina from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Saluzzo, Italy. While her dedication to her own artistic development shines through in every performance, Miss Hill also dedicates herself to helping other aspiring young singers through her work as a public-school educator. She believes that music, specifically vocal music, helps shape, mold, and build the character necessary for success in all aspects of life.



HOLLY KARA MESARCH

Soprano

Holly Kara Mesarch, soprano, holds a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance. She is a first-place winner at regional NATS competitions, recipient of the NATS Rio Grande chapter's "Most Promising Singer" award. Holly made her first mainstage appearance last season as Annina in El Paso Opera's *La Traviata*. Characters she has played include Susanna from *Le nozze di Figaro*, Despina from *Così fan tutte*, and Adele from *Die Fledermaus*. She was proclaimed a "show stealer" in her most recent role of Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music*, under the direction of Norman Lewis. She has been a Chamber Choir singer in El Paso Choral Society, and the director/choral director for El Paso's community presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. She is currently a Resident Artist for El Paso Opera. She regularly gives recitals and appears as a guest soloist with choirs and local churches. Holly Mesarch lives to share her lifelong passion for music through performance and working as Assistant to the Director of El Paso Opera—all while balancing a busy family life with her husband and five sons.



ANTONIO MOTTA

Baritone

Antonio Motta, baritone, is a proud fronterizo and UTEP alumnus in his third season as a Resident Artist with El Paso Opera. Most recently, Antonio was seen as The Soldier in El Paso Opera's production of *Sunday in the Park with George* and as a soloist singer in *Mozart by Moonlight*. He has also been a featured soloist in two Young People's Concerts with El Paso Symphony Orchestra. Prior roles performed include Don Luis Nogales in Opera UTEP's *Luisa Fernanda* and Gus O'Neill in *Later the Same Evening* with the UNT Opera. During his years as an undergraduate student at The University of Texas at El Paso, he performed roles with Opera UTEP, including Ben in *The Telephone*, David in *A Hand of Bridge*, and Reinaldo Arenas in scenes from *Before Night Falls*. Antonio performed as a chorus member in the past productions of El Paso Opera including *La Traviata*, *Pagliacci*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *West Side Story*.



SARAH NEELY
Soprano

Sarah Neely, soprano, is Instructor of Voice/Director of the Lyric Theatre at New Mexico State University. A native of El Paso, Ms. Neely received her Bachelor of Music from West Texas A & M in Canyon, Texas and her Master of Music in Voice Performance and Pedagogy from The University of Texas at San Antonio in 2018, where she studied applied voice with Diana Allan and pedagogy with John Nix. In addition to her faculty position at NMSU, she is a resident artist with El Paso Opera and has been active in opera, operetta, musical theater, theater, and independent film, performing such roles as Helen in *Fun Home* and Annelie in *Steel Magnolias*. At NMSU, Ms. Neely teaches applied voice, ear training/sight singing, class voice, supervised studio teaching, and directs the lyric theatre. In spring 2023, she directed and starred in a world premiere one-act opera, *Burden of Love*.



ANNIE PENNIES
Mezzo-soprano

The New York Times reported, "...Annie Pennies sang her role with an alluring mischievousness." Her generous mezzo and dramatic intensity make her a unique and arresting presence on stage. Noted for her dynamic crossover versatility, Annie is a true singing actress. As a classical singer, roles include the title role in *Carmen* and Meg in *Falstaff* with the Rome Opera Festival, Hänsel in *Hänsel and Gretel* for Pacific Opera's Encore Performances, La Principessa in Opera Oggi NY's *Suor Angelica* and Forester's Wife in NYC-based One World Symphony's *A Cunning Little Vixen*. Most recently she sang the roles of Atalanta in *Xerxes* and Mrs. Nolan in *The Medium* with the Las Cruces Symphony. Annie played Doralee in *9 to 5* and the title role in *Aida*, both with the acclaimed UTEP Dinner Theatre. Other musical theater credits include Adelaide (*Guys and Dolls*), Foster Wilson (*Annie Get Your Gun*), and Cinderella (*Into the Woods*) in Tokyo, Japan. Ms. Pennies originated the role of Cecilia Gallerani in the world premiere and European tour of *Caterina's Son*. She is a co-creator of an original cabaret, *Bite of the Apple*, which continues to tour today.

CREATIVE TEAM



CHERRY DUKE,
Stage Director
'Resident Artist Program'

Mezzo-soprano Cherry Duke has performed over 60 principal roles in opera and musical theatre throughout the US and abroad, including the world premiere, tour, and original cast album of the acclaimed 2012 opera, *Dog Days*. For El Paso Opera, Cherry Duke played Old Lady and Blair Daniels in *Sunday In The Park With George*, Flora in *La Traviata*, Julia Child in *Bon Appétit!*, Hansel in *Hansel And Gretel*, Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*, and Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*. In 2019, she portrayed

Dolly Levi in the UTEP Dinner Theatre's production of *Hello, Dolly!* Cherry Duke has served on the voice faculty and as the Director of Opera at the University of Texas at El Paso since 2015. Last summer, Cherry debuted at Central City Opera as Olga Olsen in *Street Scene*. This past fall, she revived her role of Julia Child with South Bend Lyric Opera in their production of *Bon Appétit!*.

For more information,
visit www.cherryduke.com



JUSTIN LUCERO

Stage Director

Bon Appetit! operetta

Regarded as a leader of the theater field and in theater education, Mr. Lucero serves as Artistic Director of the award-winning musical theater company, Theater Latté Da, in Minneapolis. Previously he was a tenure-track member of faculty at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama as a Professor of Directing for The John Wells Directing Program, of which he was also Associate Chair. Previous to CMU, he enjoyed a two-year residency with the University of Houston as the inaugural Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fellow in Directing & Theatre Studies; he also has a long-standing relationship as Artist-in-Residence and guest director with the University of Texas at El Paso. Mr. Lucero has served as Artistic Director for six of his thirteen seasons with El Paso Opera. He is the recipient of prestigious engagements such as a Directing Fellowship with Asolo Repertory Theatre (Florida), a Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Observership at South Coast Repertory (Los Angeles), a FAIR Assistantship with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and a Directing Attachment at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre (London's West End). He was named to the 2021-2022 BIPOC Leadership Circle by artEquity, in partnership with the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale, and is a 2022-2023 TCG (Theatre Communications Group) Rising Leaders of Color awardee

supported by Opportunity Fund and Walt Disney Imagineering, as well as a member of TCG's board-level governance in the inaugural Next Generation Taskforce. He also served on the Blue Ribbon Panel with The American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League to select the 2023 Tony Award winner for Excellence in Theatre Education, and continues to be a grants evaluator for the Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, and the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, he was selected to be a member of the 2023 OPERA America Leadership Intensive cohort, a highly selective program which identifies and develops "leaders who will move opera forward for years to come." Mr. Lucero London-trained at the top-ranked East 15 Acting School, where he earned an MFA in Directing with Distinction. His work is at the intersections of the performing arts, education, community building, and the championing of underrepresented voices. His art and teaching aim to normalize the voices of the historically marginalized, including the championing of inclusion and interculturalism. As a theatre-maker, he explores the performer-spectator dynamic and exploits an audience's necessary role in theatrical creation.



CASEY ROBARDS

Music Director/
Conductor *Bon Appetit!* operetta;

Collaborative Pianist
Resident Artist Program

Korean American adoptee, Casey Robards (Suh Jung Ahn) is a music director, pianist and vocal coach known for her sensitive musicality, expert collaborative skill, stylistic versatility and expressive conducting. She has given performances throughout the United States, Europe, Central and South America and Asia. In 2024-2025, Robards debuts with Indianapolis Opera (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Opera Columbus (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), El Paso Opera (*Bon Appétit!*) and Soo Opera (Susannah, *Le Nozze di Figaro*). She has worked as répétiteur for Santa Fe Opera, New Orleans Opera, and Kentucky Opera, and conducting credits include *Three Decembers*, *The Scarf* (South Bend Lyric Opera); *Die Zauberflöte*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Suor Angelica* (Bay View, Michigan), *Carmen* (Wichita, Kansas) and *Water Riot in Beta: A Cyberpunk Rock Opera* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago). Robards is Music Director of Ensemble Concept 21, a chamber group devoted to the excellent performance of new music by established composers while mentoring and creating opportunities for local student composers.

A sought after collaborative partner, Robards maintains an active recital schedule, including separate touring programs with Karen Slack, Kenneth Overton, LaToya Lain, Ollie Watts Davis and Angelique Clay promoting justice and healing through the art song and spirituals of Black composers. Her latest CD with baritone, Kenneth Overton celebrates the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Robards chairs the Sacred in Opera Initiative for the National Opera Association. She is the foremost expert on Black composer, John Daniels Carter, the subject of her dissertation.

Robards served on the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music and Indiana Opera and Ballet Theater at Indiana University (2008-2010), was Resident Artist with Indy Opera under Jim Caraher (2012) and postdoctoral pianist at Oberlin Conservatory (2012-2013). Dr. Robards is currently Asst. Professor at the University of Illinois.

www.caseyrobarbs.com



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