SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS
RENEE AND HENRY SEGERSTROM CONCERT HALL

PACIFIC SYMPHONY presents

2016-17 HAL & JEANETTE SEGERSTROM FAMILY FOUNDATION CLASSICAL SERIES

Performance begins at 8 p.m.; Preview talk with Alan Chapman begins at 7 p.m.

CARL ST.CLAIR • CONDUCTOR | MARY BIRNBAUM • STAGE DIRECTOR

PACIFIC CHORALE:
JOHN ALEXANDER • ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | ROBERT ISTAD • ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR AND CHORUSMASTER

Aida

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)
Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni

Act I & Act II

INTERMISSION

Act III & Act IV

Cast

Aida Kelebogile Besong, soprano
Radamès Arnold Rawls, tenor
Amneris Milena Kitić, mezzo-soprano
Amonasro Mark Delavan, baritone
Ramfis Julian Close, bass
King of Egypt Philip Skinner, bass
Messenger Nicholas Preston, tenor
High Priestess Renée Tatum, soprano
Dancers Tyquan Christie, Raymond Ejiofor, Lisa Gillespie, Isaac Huerta, Natalie Iscovich, Andrew Martinez

Technical Team

Grace Laubacher, scenic designer | Anshuman Bhatia, lighting designer
Katie Wilson, costume designer | Ora Jewell-Busche, wig and makeup designer

This production of Aida is generously sponsored by Catherine Emmi and Cameron Emmi.

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KUSC CLASSICAL 91.5

The Saturday, Feb. 25, concert is being recorded for broadcast on Sunday, March 19, at 7 p.m. on Classical KUSC.
A few operas are so deeply rooted in history as Aida. The story is a historical romance set amid the pharaonic splendor of ancient Egypt, and the opera has always been associated with the opening of the Ottoman Empire to the nations of the West, who saw the opening of the Suez Canal as an opportunity to gain political and economic advantage in the Middle East.

The opening of the canal was the epoch-making event that altered the course of modern Egyptian history. The Khedive of Egypt did seek to commission a ceremonial hymn from Verdi for the occasion. But Verdi almost always resisted such assignments, and for the opening of the canal in November 1869, a gala performance of his opera Rigoletto at the Khedivial Opera House marked the inaugural procession of some 75 ships through the locks connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Still, the Egyptian connection proved fateful for Verdi two years later. He had been searching for workable librettos with increasing difficulty in the late 1860s. The French impresario and librettist Camille du Locle, his collaborator on the masterpiece Don Carlos, had suggested possibilities ranging from comedies to historical epics. But it was not until early 1870, when du Locle passed along a scenario by the archeologist and Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, that the increasingly selective Verdi could see worthwhile possibilities for an opera. In the scenario for Aida, the dramatic unity and compelling theme that were lacking in the other proposals were finally evident. He appointed Antonio Ghislanzoni, his collaborator on the revised La forza del destino, as librettist, and set to work with Ghislanzoni and du Locle to develop grandeur and historic resonance in a story that was already built upon a sensational love triangle. With its successful and timely completion (and with opera you never know), it would be the opening production for the new opera house in Cairo. In this case, the work went well.

With Verdi, as with many other classical composers, musicologists find it useful to divide a lifetime of composition into three phases. Simplistic? Perhaps. But in Verdi’s case, it works: While “early” Verdi operas extend the bel canto tradition of the great Italian opera composers who preceded him—including Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini—“middle” Verdi operas reveal a more highly individual style that was innovative both musically and dramatically. In Aida we hear the “late” Verdi, a composer who totally dominated the Italian opera scene and was in complete mastery of his tools, pushing the boundaries of opera as a form.

The artistic freedom of late Verdi came at a time when Richard Wagner was challenging the very idea of opera as a form and when Verdi was thought to represent an “old guard.” In an irony of music history, Verdi and Wagner were born in the same year, and they have been thought to represent opposite aesthetic philosophies ever since. But the enmity that history has assigned to them is mainly invented; they were worlds apart stylistically, Verdi was interested in Wagner’s revolutionary style and learned from it. At the time he was composing Aida he attended and openly admired Wagner’s 1850 opera Lohengrin.

The Egyptian setting of Aida gave Verdi an ideal framework for trying out new musical ideas. Since the days of Haydn, Mozart and Rossini, the Middle East represented an exotic “other” that fascinated listeners with exotic effects that had little or nothing to do with reality, such as the blaring brasses and tinkley percussion we hear in Rossini’s The Italian Girl in Algiers or Mozart’s The Abduction from the Seraglio. Verdi’s efforts in Aida are more serious and more modern, but scarcely more authentic; they are informed by the raving public’s appetite for all things “Japonisme” following the 1862 International Exhibition in London, which astounded Europe and the U.S. In its wake, Japonisme came to represent not just Japanese culture, but everything unfamiliar and eastern. Archeology had the popular appeal that space exploration would have a century later, and...
Egyptologists such as Auguste Mariette were national heroes.

All this augured well for Aida, encouraging Verdi to combine tradition with judicious innovation. For example, a traditional grand opera—complete with ballet—was what the state occasion in Cairo called for. But while Verdi gives us ballet, he integrates it with his story rather than interrupting the plot to make way for a separate dance interlude. Verdi was not yet at the point of creating an opera that was “through-composed” in the Wagnerian mold (replacing set-pieces such as arias with continuous, uninterrupted music); that would come later in Otello and Falstaff. But he does give us a sound that is distinctly exotic, glinting with the light of prehistory.

Or so it seems. From the very opening bars of the opera’s prelude, we hear how Verdi wedd distant, unfamiliar melody with emotional depth. The opera’s sinuous melodic lines climb and fall back, full of “accidental” chromatic notes that express romantic yearning in a way that sounds familiar and strange at once. Somehow, the serpentine lines of music bring to mind ancient Egypt, with its familiar associations of the winding Nile River and of Cleopatra’s fatal asp. This musical language is pure invention on Verdi’s part. Puccini, Verdi’s heir, studied the music of ancient Japan and China for his Orientalist operas, Madame Butterfly and Turandot, at times quoting actual melodies from these cultures. We can’t know if Verdi might have done so if these sources had survived from ancient Egypt; but as far as Verdi (and we) knew, they did not.

As drama, Aida holds its own on the modern stage—so much so that Elton John and his partner in musical theater, Tim Rice, have attempted to outdo Verdi with their own pop-oriented version. How theirs stacks up to the original is a matter of personal judgment, but they are correct in finding modern truths at the core of the drama, including a riveting character in the person of Aida herself. Some past critics have found her father Amonasro, the King of Ethiopia, to be even more formidable. But not this listener. Yes, his regal dignity in the face of adversity grips us; but the opera’s tension and complexity belong to the ladies. When the captive Aida, unrecognized as a princess, faces her romantic rival Amneris, the music takes on an electric charge. Aida must hide her identity and her love until… well, you’ll find out.

As one of the “ABC Operas” (Aida, Bohème and Carmen), Aida is universally loved, and everyone in the business of opera has Aida anecdotes… including your intrepid annotator, who once prepped a well-known film and television critic for a performance of Aida that was to be his first opera. Everyone expected him to render a harsh judgment, full of acid humor. Instead, he was totally fascinated. “Aida’s dilemma is an interesting one,” he said, and so it is: Torn between her homeland and romantic longing, between filial loyalty and lover’s embrace, she is forced to choose, and does so with dignity. Few operatic characters so fully deserve the title “princess.”

Another telling anecdote belongs not to your annotator but to the great African American soprano Leontyne Price, and to the world. Price was a superb interpreter of Aida; at the beginning of what was to be a major international career, as she was about to go onstage for the spectacularly beautiful (and impossible difficult) “Nile scene” for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera, she uttered a prayer that has gone down in the annals: “Okay, Lord, You got me into this. Now You get me out.” (He did, magnificently.)

The Story of the Opera

Act I

In the hall of the Egyptian king in Memphis, the priest Ramfis advises the general Radames that the forces of Ethiopia are again threatening to attack. Though Radames expects to be appointed leader of his country’s forces, he is preoccupied with his love for Aida, and as Ramfis withdraws, he meditates on her beauty in the aria “Celeste Aida”—“Heavenly Aida.”

A fanfare heralds the entry of the King of Egypt and his retinue, and the king reveals that the Egyptian god Isis has chosen Radames to command the Egyptian army. Amid the stirring calls to battle, the captive Aida is distressed to find herself echoing the calls for Radames to “Ritorna vincitor”—“return victorious.” She is in love with him, but his triumph would mean the defeat of her homeland. The act ends with a solemn religious ceremony to propitiate Radames’ military campaign.

Act II

In her apartment, Amneris, the daughter of the King of Egypt, is attended by Moorish slaves and entertained by dancers, all celebrating reports of Radames’ military successes. But Amneris, though she sings languorously of her longings for Radames, has Aida on her mind: She suspects that this Ethiopian captive has caught Radames’ eye and returns his feelings for her. Alone with Aida, Amneris entraps her by first reporting Radames’ death, then contradicting it. Aida’s reactions reveal her true feelings. Their emotional confrontation ranges from tenderness to fury, comprising one of the greatest musical face-offs in all of opera, with Aida pleading for mercy as Amneris vents her rage.

The tense emotional intimacy of the act’s opening scene opens onto the aural spectacle of one of opera’s greatest crowd scenes, as the victorious Radames returns in triumph in a grand procession at the gate of Thebes. Dancers enact the general’s victories while prisoners of war and captured treasure are paraded before the citizens of Egypt. The princess Amneris crowns Radames with a laurel wreath, and in the intensity of the moment, Aida inadvertently reveals to onlookers that the prisoner Amonasro is her father—though Amonasro prevents her from further revealing his identity as King of Ethiopia. In the climactic celebration of the “glory of Egypt,” Radames calls for clemency to be shown to the prisoners, and the King of Egypt rewards him with the hand of his daughter, Amneris, in marriage.

Act III

We can envision the glint of moonlight on the Nile’s waters in the hushed opening bars of Aida’s famous “Nile scene.” In the background we hear a distant chorus chanting to the god Isis; in
the foreground we hear Aida lamenting the loss of her homeland. She is there to meet her father, who calls upon her loyalty to family and country to entrap Radames, luring him to reveal the Egyptians’ military plans. Her agonized duet with Amonasro is followed by a seductive duet with Radames, during which he discloses his army’s projected route. The hidden Amonasro emerges, gloating, from the shadows, to say that his army will be there to meet the Egyptians; Radames immediately surrenders to the vengeful Amneris and Ramfis, who have been lying in wait.

Act IV

Having lost both love and military glory, Radames can now only long for death. As the act opens, in a hall of the Egyptian king’s palace, Radames is to be tried for betraying his country and offending the god Isis; the priestly tribunal of sacerdoti will be led by Ramfis. But Amneris, who arranged with Ramfis to entrap Aida and Radames, is now horrified to face Radames’ death and is determined to save him. She alternately pleads and rages with the priests, but to no avail. And when Amneris lets slip the fact that Aida is still alive, Radames—who thought she’d been killed—rejoices at the possibility of one final act of self-sacrifice: He will die to protect his beloved.

In an opera of gilded fanfares, Radames’ trial is frighteningly austere: three times the tribunal of sacerdoti chant Radames’ name and repeat his charges, commanding “discolpati”—“defend yourself!” With each silence, they brand him a traitor and Amneris calls out for mercy. Finally, as they announce that Radames will be entombed beneath the temple of Isis, the miserable Amneris is reduced to sputtering curses at her former allies.

The final scene of Aida takes place on two levels: the underground vault where Radames, deprived of light, food and air, will eventually die; and the temple of Vulcan above it, where the prostrate Amneris could see Radames’ meditations “Celeste Aida” as they say farewell to the world of the living—“O terra addio.” Kneeling above them, the distraught Amneris prays for the peace of Radames’ soul.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

CATHERINE EMMI AND CAMERON EMMI

The Emmi family have long been among the Symphony’s most generous supporters. At the time of his passing in May 2016, James Emmi was Pacific Symphony’s longest-serving board member, serving for nearly 30 years. Through much of that time, his wife Catherine has been equally active as a Symphony volunteer leader and supporter, and we are happy to have Catherine join the Pacific Symphony Board of Directors. Catherine, along with her son, Cameron, continue the long tradition of generous giving to support Pacific Symphony. The Emmis’ financial support includes the endowment of the Principal Viola Chair, in perpetuity; recently they have also endowed the Symphony’s Principal Cello Chair, held by Timothy Landauer. Pacific Symphony is deeply indebted to Catherine Emmi and Cameron Emmi for their lifelong support of Pacific Symphony.

ABOUT THE COVER AND OUR MUSICIANS

SOMETIMES PACIFIC SYMPHONY MUSICIANS JUST WANT TO... DANCE!

While orchestra musicians spend considerable time playing indoors, the outdoors beckon, especially in Orange County. And alongside the meandering Santiago Creek in Orange is a nature lover’s paradise: Santiago Oaks Regional Park, with 1,269 acres of interconnected trails. Rocks, foothills, shady groves and Pacific Symphony musicians in concert attire—first violinist Ann Shiau Tenney and violist John Acevedo (see program cover)—nothing unusual about that! And as with the twisting terrain, so goes the life of musicians.

“Cool park...” remarks Ann. “Loved the gnarled trees. Orange County is fortunate to have so many parks available for hiking and biking. Growing up on the East Coast, I’d get sick a lot and be confined indoors,” she shares. “I also didn’t have the luxury of getting outdoors due to extensive practicing and music classes. Since moving here, I’ve spent quite a bit of time outdoors. My husband and I love to hike, mountain bike, ski, and also travel to tropical climes.”

“I don’t spend much time in parks,” counters John. “I do most of my outdoor activities around the ocean, because I grew up fishing, surfing and boating, while spending time at a family beach house.”

At first, it seems Ann and John have just music in common. For Ann, who grew up in Needham, Mass., the call to play came early. “As a baby, my mother calmed my crying with classical music. I started piano when I was 6. At age 7, my mother and I started group violin classes. She had wanted to learn as a child, but her father didn’t allow it.”

Continued on following page
ABOUT

“By the time I was 9, I knew I wanted to be a violinist,” she states. “I had been taking ballet, tap, swimming, figure skating, piano, violin, and my mother gave me an ultimatum: Choose one—or quit the rest. Ballet was my favorite. I was about to go on pointe, when I read Ballet Shoes and realized that I didn’t want to have bleeding feet; I deduced that a violin career had greater potential for longevity.” For seven years, Ann played in the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra.

John got serious about music rather late. He was introduced to the viola in the sixth grade and played in the school orchestra. But he didn’t start private lessons for viola until he was 16, after asking his orchestra instructor: “At what age do you reach your peak on a string instrument? He said skill and experience are in full bloom around 55. That answer inspired me to dedicate my life to the viola.

“Having come from a family of great athletes—two gymnastic Olympians, track stars and a pro-baseball player, whose physical gifts started to wane at 30—I was interested in a profession that would be gratifying and relevant for a very long time.” John’s dedication thereafter earned him scholarships for musical studies and private lessons.

Ann earned her bachelor of music from The Juilliard School. She received the William Randolph Hearst Foundation Scholarship as well as other awards and scholarships, including a fellowship to Tanglewood. She earned a master’s at Yale University in Connecticut, where she was assistant principal second violin in the New Haven Symphony Orchestra.

Ann won her position at Pacific Symphony in 1994. “I was at USC, happy to get a job doing what I love and paying back my student loans. I was looking forward to working again with Carl St.Clair, whom I’d met at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute.

“Music is who I am,” Ann declares. “My brain thrives on it. I love what I do, and do what I love. I wouldn’t change it for the world.” In addition to the Symphony, Ann freelances, maintains a private teaching studio, coaches Junior Chamber Music and serves as string chair for the Music Teachers Association of California in Irvine.

John joined the orchestra 28 years ago, at a time when Pacific Symphony was restructuring the players. “They wanted to hear each member play alone. Everyone was let go that day except for me. I was moved from the back to the front of the viola section. Since then, my work with the Symphony has supplied me with a major part of my income and source of artistic fulfillment.”

John has toured Europe and Asia as a soloist and in recitals and chamber music concerts. He was a featured artist in the 17th International Viola Congress, where his performance of Kalimatiano received five curtain calls. He has played on numerous television and movie soundtracks, and his solo performances on YouTube have amassed hundreds of thousands of views. He also teaches.

“During the ups and downs of life, playing the masterpieces of great composers has always had a jubilant or healing effect on me—except during my divorce (after a 25-year marriage), when only dancing could fix my despair.”

While John remains single, Ann is married to Robert, a software engineer. She finds that coordinating time together can be difficult. “We look forward to our free time together. We started ukulele lessons (apparently I can’t get away from music, even in my hobbies!). We currently sing and play Hawaiian music with a group in Huntington Beach. It’s never too late to start learning a musical instrument!”

In 2012, they entered the Walt Disney World Marathon. “My husband’s bucket list included running a marathon. I thought I’d support him by going through the Couch-to-5K program with him. What I didn’t expect was that I could do it too! We cheered each other on and finished our first marathon together!”

But, sometimes a musician just wants to...dance. “My husband and I dance West Coast Swing,” says Ann. “I’ve had a passion for dance all these years, but never time to pursue it. We’ve been studying for the last year and are really enjoying it.”

John’s interest in dance began 10 years ago, when he wanted to escape his big, empty house after his divorce and happened upon one of best salsa clubs in LA. “There was no way to feel sad or alone with all those happy people dancing to extremely exciting live Latin music,” he says. “I was hooked, and at 50 began my journey into the dancing world.”

John notes, “It was nice to talk with Ann about her dance lessons—and it was encouraging to me that my new project with tango partner, Heidi Nguyen, a relationship coach—to help couples find romance again through tango—might take off. I’ll be able to share the magic of Argentine tango’s passionate healing qualities with couples who are trying to create a closer connection.” (Learn more about John’s project “Tango Embrace” on page 22.)

Now, John can be found dancing at milongas and salsa clubs all over OC and LA. As a semi-professional dancer, he was a finalist in the 2016 LA’s Top Social Salsa Dancer Competition at The Granada and competed in the 2015 U.S. Argentine Championship in San Francisco. He attributes his great health at age 61 to all the dancing. “It keeps my playing and teaching inspired and full of energy.”

While visiting Santiago Park, John says he “realized people were there for some of the same reasons I dance—to escape everyday cares and worries, get exercise and experience beauty.”
The 2016-17 season marks Music Director Carl St.Clair’s 27th year leading Pacific Symphony. He is one of the longest tenured conductors of the major American orchestras. St.Clair’s lengthy history solidifies the strong relationship he has forged with the musicians and the community. His continuing role also lends stability to the organization and continuity to his vision for the Symphony’s future. Few orchestras can claim such rapid artistic development as Pacific Symphony—the largest orchestra formed in the United States in the last 50 years—due in large part to St.Clair’s leadership.

During his tenure, St.Clair has become widely recognized for his musically distinguished performances, his commitment to building outstanding educational programs and his innovative approaches to programming. Among his creative endeavors are: the opera initiative, “Symphonic Voices,” which continues for the sixth season in 2016-17 with Verdi’s Aida, following the concert-opera productions of La Bohème, Tosca, La Traviata, Carmen and Turandot in previous seasons; and the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which, now in its 17th year, celebrates the 70th birthday of John Adams with a performance of The Dharma at Big Sur, featuring electric violinist Tracy Silverman, followed by Peter Boyer’s Ellis Island: The Dream of America.

St.Clair’s commitment to the development and performance of new works by composers is evident in the wealth of commissions and recordings by the Symphony. The 2016-17 season features commissions by pianist/composer Conrad Tao and composer-in-residence Narong Prangcharoen, a follow-up to the recent slate of recordings of works commissioned and performed by the Symphony in recent years. These include William Bolcom’s Songs of Lorca and Prometheus (2015-16), Elliot Goldenthal’s Symphony in G-sharp Minor (2014-15), Richard Danielpour’s Toward a Season of Peace (2013-14) Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna (2012-13), and Michael Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore and The Gospel According to Sister Aimee (2012-13). St.Clair has led the orchestra in other critically acclaimed albums including two piano concertos of Lukas Foss; Danielpour’s An American Requiem and Goldenthal’s Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Other commissioned composers include James Newton Howard, Zhou Long, Tobias Picker, Frank Ticheli, Chen Yi, Curt Cacioppo, Stephen Scott, Jim Self (Pacific Symphony’s principal tubist) and Christopher Theofanidis.

In 2006-07, St.Clair led the orchestra’s historic move into its home in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. The move came on the heels of the landmark 2005-06 season that included St.Clair leading the Symphony on its first European tour—nine cities in three countries playing before capacity houses and receiving extraordinary responses and reviews.

From 2008-10, St.Clair was general music director for the Komische Oper in Berlin, where he led successful new productions such as La Traviata (directed by Hans Neuenfels). He also served as general music director and chief conductor of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle (GNTS) in Weimar, Germany, where he led Wagner’s Ring Cycle to critical acclaim. He was the first non-European to hold his position at the GNTS; the role also gave him the distinction of simultaneously leading one of the newest orchestras in America and one of the oldest in Europe.

In 2014, St.Clair became the music director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Costa Rica. His international career also has him conducting abroad several months a year, and he has appeared with orchestras throughout the world. He was the principal guest conductor of the Radio Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart from 1998-2004, where he completed a three-year recording project of the Villa–Lobos symphonies. He has also appeared with orchestras in Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South America, and summer festivals worldwide.

In North America, St.Clair has led the Boston Symphony Orchestra (where he served as assistant conductor for several years), New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Indianapolis, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver symphonies, among many.

A strong advocate of music education for all ages, St.Clair has been essential to the creation and implementation of the Symphony’s education and community engagement programs including Pacific Symphony Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, Sunday Casual Connections, OC Can You Play With Us?, arts-X-press and Class Act.
OMEET

Nominated for Best Newcomer of 2015 at the International Opera Awards in London, Mary Birnbaum has been singled out as a young stage director to watch. Her recent production of The Rape of Lucretia at Juilliard garnered a rave from Anthony Tommasini at The New York Times who called it “viscerally overwhelming.” Other New York credits include Die Zauberflöte (Juilliard), the premiere of Jeremy Denk and Steven Stucky’s The Classical Style at Carnegie Hall in December 2014, and a nine-singer chamber version of Eugene Onegin, also for The Juilliard School, co-led by conductor Matt Aucoin.

Internationally, Birnbaum’s work has taken her to Taiwan, Melbourne, Costa Rica and Tel Aviv. In the summer of 2016, she directed Otello at the Taipei Philharmonic. In the U.S., she has directed in Seattle, Santa Fe, Houston, Ojai, Berkeley, Columbus (Ohio) and Charlottesville (Va.) Her production of Hänsel und Gretel in Houston was No. 2 on a list of “Best Operas in 2014,” following only the Ring Cycle at Houston Grand Opera.

Birnbaum has produced and developed new plays and theatrical events in New York. From 2009-2012, she founded/managed a theater company, Art Party, which produced story-specific events that engaged the audience in creative ways. STARBOX, a performance installation in Bryant Park, involved the audience lining up for a face-to-face meeting with a star. However the real play happened while the audience waited, as over 40 actors performed scenes all over the park. She has also worked with playwrights to develop new work, most notably in the Soho Rep Writers/ Directors Lab and at Ars Nova. She co-wrote/directed a feminist pop-concert called Baby No More Times with Melissa Lusk and Caroline V. McGraw.

Teaching and working with young singers is another important part of Birnbaum’s career. She was invited to teach acting at Juilliard at age 26 and now holds the position of associate director of the artist diploma program. In addition, she has worked with singers from the Lindemann program in acting class and scenes. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard. Birnbaum holds a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature with a minor in French from Harvard College and a certificate in movement and design. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard. Birnbaum holds a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature with a minor in French from Harvard College and a certificate in movement and design. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard. Birnbaum holds a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature with a minor in French from Harvard College and a certificate in movement and design. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard. Birnbaum holds a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature with a minor in French from Harvard College and a certificate in movement and design. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard. Birnbaum holds a bachelor’s degree in English language and literature with a minor in French from Harvard College and a certificate in movement and design. She has also taught master classes at Mannes and currently teaches the opera workshop at Bard.

The young South-African spinto-soprano Kelebogile Besong is emerging on the international opera and concert stages as a talent of unusually strong stage presence, sensitive musicianship and vocal power. Her Pacific Symphony performance as Aida marks her North American debut.

Over the last few seasons, she has enjoyed successes in the title-role of Aida at Malmö Opera, as Musetta in La Bohème at Grange Park Opera and the Savonlinna Festival, a series of aria concerts with the NDR Radiophilharmonie conducted by Andrew Litton, as Violette in La Traviata at the Opéra National de Montpellier, Contessa in Le Nozze di Figaro at Tampere Opera, under the baton of Roy Goodman, the roles of Venus in John Blow’s Venus and Adonis as well as the Sorcess in Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas at the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik. Other operatic roles include Micaela in Carmen, Susanna in Le Nozze di Figaro, Gabisile in the Opera Africa world premiere of Ziyankomo and the Forbidden Fruit by Phelelani Mnomiya, the title role in Opera Africa’s production of the Zulu Opera Princess Magogo at Den Norske Opera in Oslo and Echo in Ariadne auf Naxos for Opéra Royal de Wallonie.

On the concert platform she has performed works such as Mahler’s Fourth Symphony, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and Mozart’s Requiem and Great Mass in C-Minor. Most recently, Besong appeared as Fiordiligi in Così fan tutte at the Bregenzer Festspiele, Aida at the Aalto Theater in Essen, Contessa in Le Nozze di Figaro with the Orchestra of the 18th Century and conductor Kenneth Montgomery and returned to the Opera National de Montpellier as Giorgetta in Il Tabarro and Dejanira in Weill’s Royal Palace. Forthcoming engagements include house debuts as Musetta with Teatro Regio di Torino and the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich and as Aida at La Monnaie in Brussels.

Besong won the national soloist competition at the Tirisano Schools Choral Eisteddfod for three consecutive years and was later awarded a scholarship to study for a BA in performing arts at Tshwane University of Technology. She is the proud recipient of the 2012 Standard Bank Young Artist Award in Music and in 2013 she was awarded Africa’s Most Influential Woman in Business and Government (Arts). Besong was a finalist of the 32nd Belvedere Singing Competition 2013, held at the Dutch National Opera in Amsterdam, and represented South-Africa in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition 2015.

MARY BIRNBAUM
STAGE DIRECTOR

KELEBOGILE BESONG
SOPRANO/aida
Tenor Arnold Rawls has delighted audiences with his unique combination of vocal and dramatic skills in performances ranging from art song to opera. He has been hailed for having a powerful, clarion-sounding tenor, a firm, pliant lyric tenor with ringing high notes, as well as a flair for acting.

Future engagements include a.o. Captain Ahab in Moby Dick at Polish National Opera in Warsaw in May 2017. Recent engagements include Das Lied von der Erde with Hangzhou Symphony Orchestra in March 2016, his debuts with the Opera Company of Philadelphia in the title role of Verdi’s Otello and with Oper Frankfurt in a double bill of L’Oracolo by Leonzi and Le Villi by Puccini as well as the role of Apollo in Strauss’ Daphne.

Rawls had return engagements with Seattle Opera as Foresto in Attila and Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos, Calaf in Turandot with Arizona Opera and he returned to Austria for the Bregenzer Festspiele as Radamès in Aida as well as the title role in Andrea Chenier. In the summer 2014 Rawls performed Walther in Die Meistersinger in Seattle. The 2009-10 season found Rawls singing the role of Radamès in Aida with Bregenzer Festspiele in Austria, Manrico in Il Trovatore with the Seattle Opera, Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos with the Indianapolis Opera, Turiddu and Canio in Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci with the Pensacola Opera and Erik in The Flying Dutchman with the Madison Opera. In April 2011 he made his MET debut as Manrico in Il Trovatore substituting an indisposed Marcelo Alvarez, having huge success.

His repertoire also includes roles such as Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly, Cavaradossi, Riccardo in Un Ballo in Maschera, Sam in Susannah, Des Grieux in Manon Lescaut, Alfred in Die Fledermaus, Don José in Carmen, the Duca in Rigoletto and Dick Johnson in La fanciulla del West. His concert repertoire includes Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, Mozart’s Requiem, Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, Handel’s Messiah, Rossini’s Stabat Mater, Schumann’s Requiem, Verdi’s Requiem and Puccini’s Messa di Gloria.

Milena Kitić, a renowned mezzo-soprano, has performed numerous roles with opera companies around the world in the last three decades. Best known for her performance as the title role in Carmen, Kitić has played Carmen in major performance venues across the United States and Europe including National Theatre in Belgrade (Serbia), Essen Opera in Germany, Washington National Opera, Baltimore Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Opera Pacific and Metropolitan Opera. She has received numerous accolades for her performances, including the German Music Critic’s Award for “Performer of the Season” in 1998 and the Opera Pacific Guild’s “Diva of the Year” in 2005. The International Jeunesses Musicales Competition in Belgrade has established a special prize for “the best young mezzo-soprano” in Kitić’s name.

Her talent earned her the inaugural artist-in-residence award given by Chapman University in Orange, where she has been an adjunct professor and master class instructor since 2007. She also works closely with USC, California State University, Northridge, Saddleback College, Orange County School of the Arts and runs a private vocal studio. Kitić currently serves as chair of artistic excellence for LA Opera with whom she most recently performed the role of Carmen, Albine in Thaïs (with Placido Domingo), Mrs. Noah in Noah’s Flood, and will again appear as Suzuki in Madame Butterfly in March 2016. With Pacific Symphony, she performed her signature role of Carmen in February 2015, sang selections from Carmen during the Summer Festival 2015, and helped opened the 2015-16 season with a performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. In March 2016, she also performed alongside Placido Domingo and Deborah Voight at the grand opening of Chapman University’s Musco Center for the Arts. Kitić’s next appearance at Musco Center for the Arts in scheduled as her solo recital in March 2017.

Kitić has studied with Metropolitan and Vienna State Opera star, Kammersängerin Biserka Cvejez. She holds a bachelor of music in performance from the University of Music in Belgrade, Serbia and a master of music in performance from the University of the Arts in Novi Sad, Serbia.
A singer of “incisive vocal power and fierce theatrical acuity,” Mark Delavan is sought after throughout the United States and Europe for the most demanding roles in his repertoire. He regularly appears in the title roles of Der Fliegende Holländer, Falstaff and Rigoletto, and as Iago in Otello, Scarpa in Tosca, Jochanaan in Salome and Amonasro in Aida. In the summer of 2011, Delavan completed his first performances as Wotan/Wanderer in Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen for San Francisco Opera’s new production by Francesca Zambello. The San Francisco Examiner said, “A great new Wotan has arrived. Mark Delavan is both majestic and heartbreakingly human. His acting, diction and warm, broad voice impress throughout...When he stumbles under the weight of his sorrow, when he spits out words of anger, Delavan joins the historic line of Wotans to remember.”

In the current season, Delavan will sing Amonasro in Aida at the Metropolitan Opera and Jack Rance in La fanciulla del West at Michigan Opera Theatre. Delavan recently returned to the Deutsche Oper Berlin as Jupiter in Die liebe der Danae and Alfio/Tonio in the double-bill of Cavalleria Tuscicana and Pagliacci. He returned to Pittsburgh Opera in the title role of Nabucco and debuted as Jochanaan in Salome at Teatro Carlo Felice in Genova under Fabio Luisi. He also sang Jack Rance in La fanciulla del West at Santa Fe Opera. Last season, he returned to San Francisco Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Scarpa. He also created the role of Giovanni in the world premiere of Marco Tutino’s Two Women (La Ciociara) at San Francisco Opera. In concert, Delavan was heard in Kurt Weill’s The Road of Promise with the Collegiate Chorale at Carnegie Hall and with the New York Choral Society in Mendelssohn’s St. Paul.

Noted as having “a rich voice that appears to come from the center of the earth,” as well as, simply “a voice to die for,” British bass Julian Close has appeared at several esteemed opera houses throughout his career including The Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North UK, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Buxton, Longborough, and English Bach Festivals in a wide range of roles. He has performed at Lincoln Center New York, The Royal Albert Hall, Barbican Centre, The Bridgewater Hall and he has made numerous television and radio broadcasts for the BBC.

This season, Close performs the role of Hunding in Die Walküre, which he previously sang in concert, with Saffron Opera Group. He reprises the role of Fafner in Das Rheingold with Minnesota Opera and makes a return to the Metropolitan Opera for their productions of Rigoletto and Der Rosenkavalier. He will also return to Welsh National Opera in 2017.

Recent engagements include his debut with Washington National Opera as Fasolt in Francesca Zambello’s ground-breaking production of Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen, as well as a return to the Metropolitan Opera as the Theatre Manager/Banker in Lulu. He first joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera in 2011 for their production of The Ring Cycle and has returned as a performer subsequently every season. Additional recent engagements include Hunding in a concert performance of Die Walküre with The Chandos Orchestra; Manager/Banker in Lulu with Dutch National Opera; Don Basilio in Il barbiere di Siviglia with the Longborough Festival; Verdi’s Requiem with the Eaton Christchurch Choir in Norwich; and a return to Welsh National Opera for Moses und Aron and Nabucco. He also returned to Opera Project for Madama Butterfly and joined Opera Rara for Donizetti’s Les Martyrs at Royal Festival Hall.

Baritone Philip Skinner has proven himself a highly versatile artist both dramatically and vocally. He has had great success singing roles ranging from the standard bass repertoire such as King Philip in Don Carlo, to Jocanaan in Salome and Escamillo in Carmen in the helden and dramatic baritone repertoire. In San Francisco Opera’s 2007-08 season, he performed the role of Edgar Ray Killen in the world premiere of Philip Glass’ Appomattox, as well as the Speaker in Die Zauberflöte and Rambaldo in La rondine. Recent performances include Crespin in Les contes d’Hoffmann with Opera Colorado and Florida Grand Opera, Sharpless in Madama Butterfly with Festival Opera, the Doctor in Wozzeck with Ensemble Parallèle and the Astoria Music Festival (Oregon), Doc Gibbs in Opera Idaho’s Our Town, the Poet and the Judge in Philip Glass’ Orphée with Ensemble Parallèle, the Speaker with Seattle Opera, the Musiklehrer in Ariadne auf Naxos with West Edge Opera, and the Duke in Roméo et Juliette and Second Soldier in Salome with San Diego Opera.

A San Francisco Opera Merola and Adler Fellow graduate, Skinner has performed leading and supporting roles in 54 productions there since his 1985 debut. He has also performed leading roles with the Lyric Opera Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, NYC Opera, Washington National Opera, Theatre de la Monnaie (Brussels), Teatro di San Carlo (Naples), Victoria State Opera...
(Melbourne), Canadian Opera and the Spoleto Festival. He has numerous appearances at the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall, as well as performances with the Israeli Philharmonic, Dusseldorf Symphoniker, San Francisco Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra.

Praised by the Orange County Register as being “resonant and warm” and by the classical music site Bachtrack as “a ringing stentorian tenor,” Hawai’i native Nicholas Preston is in demand as a soloist in Southern California and beyond, having performed throughout California, and toured as a soloist in France, Italy and Spain. He has been a member of Pacific Chorale and The John Alexander Singers since 2002, and has frequently appeared as a soloist with both ensembles.

Preston has also performed as a soloist with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Pacific Symphony, Claremont Chorale, Santa Maria Philharmonic Society, Cypress Masterworks Chorale and The Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra. He has worked under the batons of John Alexander, Carl St. Clair, Keith Lockhart, John Williams, Nicholas McGegan, Kent Nagano, John Mauceri, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Grant Gershon and Gustavo Dudamel. Preston’s recent solo appearances include Mendelssohn’s Elijah, Horatio Parker’s Hara Navissima, Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy and Symphony No. 9, Bach’s B Minor Mass and St. Matthew Passion, Mozart’s Coronation Mass and Requiem, Handel’s Messiah and Judas Maccabeus, and Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem.

Upcoming performances include tenor soloist in Vespers of 1610 by Claudio Monteverdi with Long Beach Camerata Singers, and tenor soloist in Mozart’s Requiem with Long Beach Symphony, both in April 2017. In December 2014, he appeared as a soloist with Pacific Symphony in the production of Handel’s Messiah, and in May of 2015, he performed as the soloist in Herbert Howells’ Hymnus Paradisi with Pacific Chorale and Pacific Symphony. Preston was featured in the world premiere of Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna, which was commissioned for the grand opening of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall and premiered by Pacific Symphony and Pacific Chorale under the direction of Carl St.Clair in 2006. He is also featured on the commercial release of The Passion of Ramakrishna, under the Orange Mountain label. Preston is proud to be involved with Pacific Symphony’s award-winning education programs, being a presenter with the Class Act program as well as a featured soloist in the Youth Concerts. Preston received his B.A. in music at Loyola Marymount University, where he studied voice with Karl Snider, and he is currently studying with Mark Goodrich at Cal State Fullerton.

Noted for her “commanding and dramatic presence” (Opera News), Renée Tatum is rapidly gaining critical acclaim on the most prestigious opera stages in the United States. This season, engagements include Flosshilde in Das Rheingold at the National Taichung Theatre and in Götterdämmerung in a return to Houston Grand Opera, Olga in Eugene Onegin with Boston Youth Symphony; and solos in Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis with Pacific Chorale, Mozart’s Requiem with Omaha Symphony and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with San Diego Symphony.

Recent seasons’ engagements include Suzuki in Madama Butterfly with Toledo Opera, Flosshilde and Waltraute in Der Ring des Nibelungen with Washington National Opera, Flosshilde in Götterdämmerung with Teatro Massimo di Palermo, a return to the Metropolitan Opera as the Second Lady in Julie Taymor’s production of Die Zauberflöte led by Adám Fischer, a return to Houston Grand Opera both as Third Lady in Die Zauberflöte under the baton of Robert Spano, and as Grimergerde in a new production of Die Walküre conducted by Patrick Summers. Tatum also joined an international cast in Japan as Flora in Verdi’s La Traviata, sang as the mezzo soloist in Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony and Mozart’s Requiem with The Eastern Music Festival, and as mezzo soloist in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with The Boston Symphony Orchestra at the Tanglewood Music Festival.

A recent alumna of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, Tatum made her Metropolitan Opera début as Inez in Il Trovatore conducted by Marco Armiliato. Additional performances at the prestigious house include Second Lady in Die Zauberflöte conducted by Jane Glover, Second Wood sprite in Rusalka led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Unborn in Die Frau ohne Schatten with Vladimir Jurowski, Emilia in Otello under the baton of Semyon Bychkov, Adonella in Zandonai’s seldom heard Francesca da Rimini conducted by Marco Armiliato, Fenena in Nabucco with Paolo Carignani, and Flosshilde in Robert Lepage’s landmark production of Der Ring des Nibelungen conducted by Fabio Luisi.
Artistic Director of Pacific Chorale since 1972, John Alexander is one of America’s most respected choral conductors. His inspired leadership both on the podium and as an advocate for the advancement of the choral art has garnered national and international admiration and acclaim. Alexander’s long and distinguished career has encompassed conducting hundreds of choral and orchestral performances nationally and in 27 countries around the globe. He has conducted his singers with orchestras throughout Europe, Asia and South America and, closer to home, with Pacific Symphony, Pasadena Symphony, Musica Angelica and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Equally versatile whether on the podium or behind the scenes, Alexander has prepared choruses for many of the world’s most outstanding orchestral conductors, including Zubin Mehta, Pierre Boulez, Seiji Ozawa, Michael Tilson Thomas, Leonard Slatkin, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Gustavo Dudamel, Lukas Foss, Max Rudolf, Carl St.Clair, Gerard Schwarz, Marin Alsop, John Mauceri, John Williams and Keith Lockhart.

Robert Istad is the associate conductor of Pacific Chorale and director of choral studies at California State University, Fullerton, where he conducts the University Singers and Concert Choir, in addition to teaching courses in conducting, advanced interpretation and literature. He has prepared choruses for Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Carl St.Clair and Pacific Symphony, Sir Andrew Davis and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, as well as conductors Bramwell Tovey, Eric Whitacre, Giancarlo Guerrero, Marin Alsop, George Fenton, John Alexander, William Dehning, David Lockington and Mark Mandarano. Istad received his bachelor of arts degree in music from Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill., his master of music degree in choral conducting from California State University, Fullerton, and his doctor of musical arts degree in choral music at the University of Southern California. Istad is also the artistic director of the Long Beach Camerata Singers and Long Beach Bach Festival.

Grace Laubacher is a New York City-based set designer for theater and opera. Recent credits include: Le Villi/ La Navarraise (Bard Music Festival); The Magic Flute (Juilliard); The Whole Truth / The Cask of Amontillado (American Modern Ensemble/Dixon Place); The Barber of Seville (Shepherd School, Rice University); and The Rape of Lucretia (Juilliard). Laubacher was recently named a “Young Designer to Watch” by Live Design Magazine (November 2015 issue), and was winner in Opera America’s 2015 Robert L.B. Tobin Director Designer Showcase. She is a regular associate designer to the Emmy- and Tony-award winning set designer Derek McLane. She received her M.A. in performance design (with distinction) from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London in 2011 and an A.B. in visual and environmental studies from Harvard University in 2009.

Anshuman Bhatia’s exciting designs for opera, theater and dance have been seen at Beijing’s National Center for the Performing Arts, Canada’s Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Soho Rep, The Public, The Atlantic, Arena Stage in Washington D.C., The Juilliard School, HERE Arts Center, LoftOpera, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, La Mama ETC, Bard Music Festival, Infinity Theater Company, The University of Denver, Brown/Trinity, Adirondack Theater Festival, Oxford Playhouse and The New School for Drama. Upcoming work can be seen at Rattlestick Theater, La Mama ETC, Edinburgh, Virginia Arts Festival and the Santa Fe Opera. Bhatia received her M.F.A. from New York University.

Kathryn Wilson has been designing costumes professionally for the past 11 years and is currently on the adjunct faculty at Chapman University. She received her M.F.A. in costume design at the University of California, Irvine. Her recent shows as costume designer include Urinetown, Picasso at Lapin Agile, Macbeth, Godspell, Hedda Gabler, Lend Me a Tenor, Trojan Women, The Tempest, School for Scandal, Noh Plays, Our Country’s Good (Chapman University), Comedy of Errors, Julius Caesar, Two Gentlemen of Verona, As You Like It, Merchant of Venice, The Tempest, Henry V, The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Orange County), Hansel and Gretel (UC Irvine) and Machiavelli (Hayworth Theater).
ORA JEWELL-BUSCH, WIG AND MAKEUP DESIGNER

Ora Jewell-Busche is a wig and makeup designer who has spent the last decade working in opera, theater, dance and film, primarily in the Chicago area. Her work has been seen in Pacific Symphony’s productions of Turandot, Carmen and La Traviata; and on the stages of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Lyric Opera of the North, Lookingglass Theater, Northlight Theater and River North Dance Chicago, to name a few. She is a recent transplant to Los Angeles.

TYQUAN CHRISTIE, DANCER

Tyquan Christie was born and raised in South Carolina, where the majority of training he received was under the direction of Dianne and Lacey Cheek. Upon graduating, Christie auditioned for Season 8 of So You Think You Can Dance and made the Top 30, which promptly began his professional dance career. Christie moved to Los Angeles in 2014 where he had the opportunity to perform on the Disney Channel with Sofia Carson, on The Talk and other various jobs. Christie is currently working on various projects and part of the R.ED Company working with Rhapsody James.

RAYMOND EJIOFOR, DANCER

Raymond Ejiofor is a Gates Millennium Fellow and earned a master’s of public health policy from USC. Ejiofor has performed and created works with Daniel Ezralow, Lula Washington, Bryan Arias, Ryan Heffington, Sidra Bell, Kyle Abraham and Robert Battle. Some of his performance credits include with Audi|Shanghai, Toshiba International Industrial, Samsung, Apple, Beijing Dance Festival, Springboard Danse Montreal and Pittsburgh Opera, Pharrell Williams, Future, Little Boots and Daft Punk. Ejiofor is currently collaborating with various companies such as Lula Washington Dance Theater, L.A. Contemporary Dance Company, Kevin Williamson Dance and Oui Danse.

LISA GILLESPIE, DANCER

Lisa Gillespie has been principal dancer in many operas including The Merry Widow, Carmen, The Pearlfishers, Aida, La Traviata, Eugene Onegin, Die Fledermaus and The Ghosts of Versailles for Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, The Dallas Opera, Washington National Opera and Seattle Opera, among others. Recent performances include Witch in LA Opera’s Macbeth and Eliza in The King & I at Lyric Opera of Chicago and Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris. She has danced with Raiford Rogers Modern Ballet (Los Angeles, New York, London) and Ballet Arizona. Gillespie trained at North Carolina School of the Arts and San Francisco Ballet.

ISAAC HUERTA, DANCER

Isaac Huerta has been dancing since a young age and has cultivated a joy and passion around the expression. He is a veteran of club, museum, video and live-stage performances. He knows dance as a primordial wonder and knows it needs to be accessible to all beings of every walk of life. Huerta continues to grow into movement and enjoys sharing the light movement brings.

NATALIE ISCOVICH, DANCER

Natalie Iscovich received a B.F.A. in dance performance from Chapman University. She has performed in LA Opera’s Macbeth with Plácido Domingo, on tour with Rudolph the Musical, regionally with Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (MTW), The Full Monty, The Addams Family, Tarzan, Side Show, Seussical The Musical (3DT) In The Heights, Kiss Me Kate and Bye Bye Birdie (CMT).

ANDREW MARTINEZ, DANCER

Andrew Martinez received his training from Anaheim Ballet under the direction of Lawrence and Sarma Rosenberg. He has performed in many of their productions with such roles as the Prince in The Nutcracker, the role of Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream and their Street View outdoor performances. He performed with Inland Pacific Ballet in their 2012 production of Cinderella. Martinez has received scholarships to train at Anaheim Ballet, Los Angeles Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theater and Inland Pacific Ballet. He has begun teaching ballet for students aged 5-18 and also began pursuing his dream to obtain a bachelor’s in engineering.

OPERA INITIATIVE

Pacific Symphony’s “Opera Initiative” is now in its fifth season, and has enjoyed great critical and audience acclaim. The project has been an artistic and financial success, and has enabled the Symphony to forge new relationships with a number of local institutions as well as singers and stage directors of national and international reputation. In addition, the Symphony has had great success in introducing opera to young people through its annual children’s opera, and now regularly hosts tours to regional opera productions in Los Angeles and San Diego.

Key to the success of this endeavor are a number of supporters who have been most generous in contributed financial help to ensure the viability of these efforts. From the enthusiastic volunteers of Opera Focus to major patrons, hundreds have come forward to make certain that professional opera in Orange County is artistically and financially successful.

The Symphony acknowledges those who have made current year leadership gifts (through Jan. 22, 2017) in support of the Opera Initiative. Please join us in thanking them for making this new endeavor a success.

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Founded in 1968, Pacific Chorale is internationally recognized for exceptional artistic expression, stimulating American-focused programming and influential education programs. Pacific Chorale presents a substantial performance season of its own at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and is sought regularly to perform with the nation’s leading symphonies. Under the inspired guidance of Artistic Director John Alexander, Pacific Chorale has infused an Old World art form with California’s hallmark innovation and cultural independence, developing innovative new concepts in programming and expanding the traditional concepts of choral repertoire and performance.

Pacific Chorale is comprised of 140 professional and volunteer singers. In addition to its long-standing partnership with Pacific Symphony, the Chorale has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the National Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Musica Angelica. John Alexander and the Chorale have toured extensively in Europe, South America and Asia, performing in London, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Russia, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, China and Hong Kong, and collaborating with the London Symphony, the Munich Symphony, L’Orchestre Lamoureux and L’Orchestre de St-Louis-en-

Pacific Chorale’s chamber choir, the John Alexander Singers, is a fully professional vocal ensemble of 24 singers recognized for their musical excellence across a broad range of musical periods and styles. The John Alexander Singers perform regularly in concert venues throughout Southern California. In addition to extensive collaborations with Musica Angelica, Southern California’s premier period instrument orchestra, the John Alexander Singers have performed with the Kronos Quartet, Mark Morris Dance Company, The Royal Ballet of London, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Pacific Symphony, and on the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s “Green Umbrella” new music series.

Pacific Chorale’s numerous awards from Chorus America, the service organization for North American choral groups, include the prestigious “Margaret Hillis Achievement Award for Choral Excellence,” the first national “Educational Outreach Award,” the 2005 ASCAP Chorus America Alice Parker Award for adventurous programming, and the 2015 “Education and Community Engagement Award.”

Pacific Chorale and the John Alexander Singers can be heard on seven CDs, including Nocturne and American Voices, collections of American choral works; Songs of Eternity by James Hopkins and Voices by Stephen Paulus, featuring Pacific Symphony; a holiday recording, Christmas Time Is Here, on the Gothic Records label; a live concert recording of Rachmaninoff’s Vespers; the world premiere recording of Frank Ticheli’s The Shore for chorus and orchestra; and the world premiere recording of Jake Heggie’s choral opera The Radio Hour. Pacific Chorale also appears on six recordings released by Pacific Symphony: Elliot Goldenthal’s Fire, Water, Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio, Richard Danielpour’s An American Requiem, Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna, Michael Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore, Richard Danielpour’s Toward a Season of Peace and William Bolcom’s Prometheus with pianist Jeffrey Biegel, all conducted by Carl St.Clair.

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Kathy Kerstein
Kellee King
Barbara Kingsbury
Amy Lawrence
Susan Lew
Corinne Linza
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Oscar D. Sebastian

Karl Forstrom, Singers Memorial Chair
Ryan Antal
Aram Barsamian
James Brown
Robert David Breton
Louis Ferland
Larry Gates
Randall Gremillion

Dr. Mark Hamilton
Michael Jacobs
Matthew Kellaway
Jonathan Krauss
Craig Landon
Sterling Liška
Ricardo Mckillips Jr.
Martin Minnich
Emmanuel Miranda
Ki-Hong Park
Seth Peele
Ryan Ratcliff
George Reiss
Robert F. Rife
Thomas Ringland
Jeong Sang Lyu
Jim Spivey
David Stankey
Pacific Symphony, currently in its 38th season, celebrates a decade of creative music-making as the resident orchestra of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Led by Music Director Carl St.Clair for the past 27 years, the Symphony is the largest orchestra formed in the U.S. in the last 50 years and is recognized as an outstanding ensemble making strides on both the national and international scene, as well as in its own community of Orange County. Presenting more than 100 concerts and events a year and a rich array of education and community engagement programs, the Symphony reaches more than 300,000 residents—from school children to senior citizens.

The Symphony offers repertoire ranging from the great orchestral masterworks to music from today’s most prominent composers, highlighted by the annual American Composers Festival. Five seasons ago, the Symphony launched the highly successful opera initiative, “Symphonic Voices,” which continues in February 2017 with Verdi’s Aida. It also offers a popular Pops season, enhanced by state-of-the-art video and sound, led by Principal Pops Conductor Richard Kaufman, who celebrated 25 years with the orchestra in 2015-16. Each Symphony season also includes Café Ludwig, a chamber music series; an educational Family Musical Mornings series; and Sunday Casual Connections, an orchestral matinee series offering rich explorations of selected works led by St.Clair.

Founded in 1978 as a collaboration between California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), and North Orange County community leaders led by Marcy Mulville, the Symphony performed its first concerts at Fullerton’s Plummer Auditorium as the Pacific Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of then-CSUF orchestra conductor Keith Clark. Two seasons later, the Symphony expanded its size and changed its name to Pacific Symphony Orchestra. Then in 1981-82, the orchestra moved to Knott’s Berry Farm for one year. The subsequent four seasons, led by Clark, took place at Santa Ana High School auditorium where the Symphony also made its first six acclaimed recordings. In September 1986, the Symphony moved to the new Orange County Performing Arts Center, where Clark served as music director until 1990, and from 1987-2016, the orchestra has additionally presented a Summer Festival at Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre. Ten years ago, the Symphony moved into the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, with striking architecture by Cesar Pelli and acoustics by Russell Johnson—and in 2008, inaugurated the hall’s critically acclaimed 4,322-pipe William J. Gillespie Concert Organ. The orchestra embarked on its first European tour in 2006, performing in nine cities in three countries.

The 2016-17 season continues St.Clair’s commitment to new music with commissions by pianist/composer Conrad Tao and composer-in-residence Narong Prangcharoen. Recordings commissioned and performed by the Symphony include the release of William Bolcom’s Songs of Lorca and Prometheus in 2015-16, Richard Danielpour’s Toward a Season of Peace and Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna in 2013-14; and Michael Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore and The Gospel According to Sister Aimee in 2012-13. In 2014-15, Elliot Goldenthal released a recording of his Symphony in G-sharp Minor, written for and performed by the Symphony. The Symphony has also commissioned and recorded An American Requiem by Danielpour and Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio by Goldenthal featuring Yo-Yo Ma. Other recordings have included collaborations with such composers as Lukas Foss and Toru Takemitsu. Other leading composers commissioned by the Symphony include Paul Chihara, Daniel Catán, James Newton Howard, William Kraft, Ana Lara, Tobias Picker, Christopher Theofanidis, Frank Ticheli and Chen Yi.

In both 2005 and 2010, the Symphony received the prestigious ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. Also in 2010, a study by the League of American Orchestras, “Fearless Journeys,” included the Symphony as one of the country’s five most innovative orchestras. The Symphony’s award-winning education and community engagement programs benefit from the vision of St.Clair and are designed to integrate the orchestra and its music into the community in ways that stimulate all ages. The Symphony’s Class Act program has been honored as one of nine exemplary orchestra education programs by the National Endowment for the Arts and the League of American Orchestras. The list of instrumental training initiatives includes Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra, Pacific Symphony Youth Wind Ensemble and Pacific Symphony Santiago Strings. The Symphony also spreads the joy of music through arts-X-press, Class Act, Heartstrings, OC Can You Play With Us?, Santa Ana Strings, Strings for Generations and Symphony in the Cities.