

OPERA SAN JOSÉ WELCOMES 2020-21 RESIDENT ARTISTS

**Dynamic new cohort of Resident Artists to shelter in San Jose,
perform in virtual/live season**

SAN JOSE, CA (13 August 2020) – General Director Khori Dastoor has unveiled **Opera San José's** 2020-21 Resident Artist company, welcoming the selected artists who will be part of Dastoor's inaugural year at the company's helm. Opera San José's artist residency program is unique in the United States, in that the company seeks out emerging operatic talent and offers resident contracts, opportunities for artists to hone and develop their craft, and to perform in debut roles over the course of an entire year. The public will be introduced to these artists at **1pm, Sunday, August 30th** when Opera San José will premiere its first live-stream broadcast for the company's annual Resident Artist Showcase, a popular event featuring performances by the incoming residents. For more information and a link to RSVP to the event, the public may visit www.operasj.org.

Said Dastoor, "Opera San José's mission has always been the development and support of emerging artists. By providing housing, professional development, and performance opportunities like few opera companies in America do, Opera San José keeps the artist at the very heart of its creative and administrative life. During this ongoing health and economic crisis, Opera San José's mandate must be the continued support of these artists – to serve as a lifeline, to preserve their immense artistry, and to keep producing art through any and all mediums available to us in this time apart from one another. Through innovation, determination and a sprinkling of luck, we have navigated these challenging times to create a stable, isolated cohort of singularly talented artists who will be sheltering and performing together in the weeks and months ahead. "

In addition to the full-scale, mainstage operas slated for Opera San José's 2021 season, members of the resident ensemble will perform in digital concerts, recitals, in-conversation and Meet the Artists

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events, and fully produced operas created specifically for digital broadcast, as well as educational programming for youth and adults.

Dastoor notes, “Our artists will, in fact, have more opportunities to perform than ever before. And with our new Fred Heiman Digital Media Studio, we’re able to share their tremendous talents with audiences across the globe. With these artists, and the continued patronage and support of our community, Opera San José will emerge from this time a strong, vibrant, and innovative opera company. I am so proud of the cohort we have assembled, and can hardly wait for them to share their immense talents, stories, and artistic perspectives with our patrons, who make our work possible.”

The Resident Artists for Opera San José’s 2020-21 season are: **Eugene Brancoveanu** (Baritone), **Ashley Dixon** (Mezzo-soprano), **Maya Kherani** (Soprano), **Christopher James Ray** (Resident Conductor), **Carlos Enrique Santelli** (Tenor), **Efraín Solís** (Baritone), and **Nathan Stark** (Bass-Baritone).

Eugene Brancoveanu

Growing up in Romania and Germany, baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu** studied at the Academy of Music in Transylvania, Romania and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria before pursuing a successful international career, earning critical acclaim throughout North America and Europe. Career highlights include receiving a Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre for his participation in the principal ensemble (as Marcello) in Baz Luhrmann’s innovative Broadway production of Puccini’s *La bohème*, and his performance in the title role of Shostakovich’s *Orango* with the Los Angeles Symphony under the direction of Esa-Pekka Salonen and Peter Sellers, which was recorded for Deutsche Grammophon. Known for his robust voice and superior stagecraft, Brancoveanu was an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera for two seasons, directly following his critically acclaimed summer 2004 performances of Tarquinius in Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia* with the Merola Opera Program. Discovering Opera San José’s European style Resident Artist program, Brancoveanu was immediately drawn to the organization and appeared as a guest artist as early as 2014. Last season he became a Resident Artist, performing in Strauss’s *Die Fledermaus* (as Eisenstein), Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* (Father), and Verdi’s *Il trovatore* (Count de Luna).

Ashley Dixon

A Grand Finals winner of the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon** is quickly establishing herself as one of the most exceptional artists of her generation.

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In February 2020, Dixon made her critically acclaimed debut with the Los Angeles Opera, stepping in as Sara in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* alongside bel canto veterans Ramon Vargas and Angela Meade, under conductor Eun Sun Kim. The *Los Angeles Times* declared Dixon, "A young mezzo soprano worth paying attention to" who "brought an excellent fluidity to Sara." A 2019 alumna of San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship, Dixon made her SFO mainstage debut in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life* as Angel First Class. During her two-year Adler tenure, she was also heard as Mércèdes in Bizet's *Carmen*, the Third Wood Sprite in Dvořák's *Rusalka*, the Italian Singer in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, and the Sandman in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. As a two-year participant in the Merola Opera Program, Dixon performed as La Ciesca in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Mrs. Nolan in Menotti's *The Medium*, Popova in William Walton's *The Bear*, and ended her summer season on the stage of the War Memorial Opera House, singing an aria from Massenet's *Cendrillon* as part of the Merola Grand Finale concert.

Maya Kherani

Lauded for her vibrant voice and exciting characterizations in repertoire from the Baroque to the modern, soprano **Maya Kherani** returns to Opera San José as a 2020/21 Resident Artist. She made her company debut as a guest artist during the 2017-18 season, appearing as Despina in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Yvette in Puccini's *La Rondine*. Additional career highlights include starring in the title role of Handel's *Partenope* with Opera NEO; Meera in the premiere of Jack Perla's *The River of Light*, commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera; and Altisidore in Boismortier's *Don Quichote chez la Duchesse* with Central City Opera. She received First Place and Audience Favorite at the James Toland Vocal Competition, two Encouragement Awards from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and the top overall Barlow Award at the San Francisco Bay Area NATS competition, where she also won First Place in both the Professional Art Song and Aria categories.

Christopher James Ray

Conductor **Christopher James Ray** returns to Opera San José for a second consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. In 2017 he joined the music staff of the renowned Bayreuth Festival, where he worked on productions of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Parsifal*. Christopher made his professional debut leading a double bill of *Gianni Schicchi* and *Pagliacci* with Mississippi Opera in 2014. Past conducting credits with Opera San José include *Il trovatore*, *Hansel & Gretel*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Moby Dick*, and *Pagliacci*. As assistant conductor, Ray has worked with the San Francisco Symphony, Memphis Symphony, Salzburg State Theater, North Carolina Opera, and Sarasota Opera. A protegee of American composer Carlisle Floyd, Ray is a sought-after interpreter of Floyd's works. In addition to serving as the assistant to the composer, he recorded an album of Floyd's songs with the celebrated mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer.

Carlos Enrique Santelli

Tenor **Carlos Enrique Santelli** makes his company debut with Opera San José in the 2020/21 company of Resident Artists. Santelli was a winner of the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National and Council Auditions and has appeared in a special gala celebrating the ten-year anniversary of La Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program. He recently appeared with Dayton Opera as

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Count Almaviva in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and performed as a tenor soloist in Mendelssohn's *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht (The First Walpurgis Night)* with the Sacramento Choral Society. On the concert stage, Santelli's many appearances as tenor soloist include Handel's *Messiah* (with the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra), as well as in joint recitals with his wife, mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon, who will be a fellow 2020/21 Resident Artist.

Efraín Solís

Baritone **Efraín Solís** also makes his company debut with Opera San José this season. A recent graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship and alumnus of the prestigious Merola Opera Program, he has been applauded by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his "theatrical charisma and musical bravado." Solís was a Grand Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2013, as well as a finalist in Houston Grand Opera's Eleanor McCollum Competition and the Loren L. Zachary Society for the Performing Arts National Vocal Competition. Solís has been seen with opera companies throughout the nation, including Utah Opera, Opera Carolina, Virginia Opera, Toledo Opera, West Edge Opera, Opera Saratoga, Livermore Valley Opera, and Opera Memphis.

Nathan Stark

Seen as a guest artist at Opera San José, bass-baritone **Nathan Stark** returns as Resident Artist for the 2020-21 season. Praised by *The Washington Post* for having a voice of "unearthly power," by the *Houston Press* as a "blow-away singer," and *The Mercury News* as a "natural comic actor," he has performed with opera houses throughout the United States including the Metropolitan Opera, Atlanta Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Arizona Opera, Virginia Opera, Dayton Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Stark was the 2006 Southern California District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Competition, and First Place winner of the Los Angeles Classical Singers Association, in addition to awards from the Palm Springs Opera Competition, Fort Worth Opera Competition, The Opera Buffs Competition, The Pasadena Opera Competition, The Columbus Opera Aira Competition, and recipient of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music Corbett Opera Scholarship.

Opera San José is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States.

Maintaining a resident company of artists and supporting emerging talent in role debuts, Opera San José specializes in showcasing the finest professional singers in the nation. In addition to mainstage performances, Opera San José maintains extensive educational programs in schools and in the community at large and offers preview lectures and Introduction to Opera talks for all mainstage productions. During the current pandemic, the organization continues to produce and provide content for viewing at home. For additional information visit www.operasi.org.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/osjresidentartists>