

OPERA SAN JOSÉ CONCLUDES SEASON WITH
LEONARD BERNSTEIN AND STEPHEN SONDHEIM'S

WEST SIDE STORY

April 16 – May 1, 2022

Presented live at the California Theatre in downtown San Jose

SAN JOSE, CA (18 March 2022) – **Opera San José** will close its 2021–2022 season with ***West Side Story***, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins's classic American tale of two star-crossed lovers and the prejudices that keep them apart. Bursting with passion, humor, vibrant dancing, and some of the most memorable music ever written, this stunning production of ***West Side Story*** — the company's first-ever musical — will be conducted by Christopher James Ray, staged by director Crystal Manich, and choreographed by Michael Pappalardo. Acclaimed singers from across the U.S. have been cast to bring the leading roles to life, including soprano Teresa Castillo as Maria, tenor Noah Stewart as Tony, mezzo-soprano Natalie Rose Havens as Anita, baritone Trevor Martin as Riff, tenor Jared V. Esguerra as Chino, baritone Antony Sanchez as Bernardo, and Philip Skinner as Doc. "*West Side Story* is one of America's most important works; it absolutely belongs on our stage. Our job is to promote not only promising new talent and incubating new artists, but also to amplify American works, particularly those which speak to our current societal issues," says General Director Shawna Lucey. "The musical gestures of *West Side Story* are grand, perfectly suited to the operatic stage, where we can bring them to life with outstanding voices and orchestration." ***West Side Story*** will be sung in English, with English and Spanish supertitles, with performances **April 16 – May 1, 2022** (dates/times below) at the **California Theatre**, 345 South 1st Street, San Jose. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$55–\$195), the public can visit operasj.org or call (408) 437-4450 (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm). *Vaccination requirements are subject to change according to local city, state, and county mandates and OSJ health and safety policies. Please visit Opera San José's COVID-19 safety and health*

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protocols for the most up-to-date information concerning COVID protocols: operasj.org/health-and-safety/.

Inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, ***West Side Story*** is one of America's most iconic musical works, conceived by Jerome Robbins with soaring music by Leonard Bernstein, inventive lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and a book by Arthur Laurents that is by turns witty, funny, and heart-wrenching. Opera San José's production will feature the original book and music, with the incandescent music performed by some of America's brightest young operatic singers. Puerto Rican born, Emmy Award nominated director Crystal Manich, who first watched the film version at age 12 and has been a fan ever since, says, "At its core, I have always believed that the show could benefit from a Puerto Rican director, infusing other cultural elements that are not on the page. Opera San José has given me the opportunity to finally tackle the show that I have been waiting to direct for almost 30 years. It is a show that deserves to be reexamined, in the same way that I examined the film as an adolescent: over and over again."

A breakthrough work in American theatre, *West Side Story* exposes the gritty rivalry between two teenage street gangs, the US-born "Jets" and the newly transplanted Puerto Rican "Sharks," competing for supremacy in the streets of New York City. When a young man falls for the younger sister of his archrival, their forbidden love turns to tragedy. The original 1957 Broadway production, conceived, directed, and choreographed by Robbins, marked Sondheim's Broadway debut, and ran for 732 performances. It was nominated for six Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and won two, losing the top prize to its blockbuster competition that year, *The Music Man*. A 1961 musical film adaptation of *West Side Story*, co-directed by Robert Wise and Robbins, was nominated for 11 Academy Awards and won 10, including Best Picture. The 2021 film adaptation, directed by Steven Spielberg, features a new screenplay by Tony Kushner, which rearranges the songs and resets the production a few years later, when the neighborhood over which the gangs are warring is already being demolished to make way for Lincoln Center.

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The creative team includes **Christopher James Ray** (Conductor), **Crystal Manich** (Director), **Michael Pappalardo** (Choreographer), **Steven Kemp** (Scenic Designer), **Sarah Riffle** (Lighting Designer), **Linda Pisano** (Costume Design), **Christina Martin** (Makeup and Hair Designer), **Geoffrey Loff** (Assistant Conductor/Chorus Master), and **Dave Maier** (Fight Director).

About the artists:

Teresa Castillo (Maria)

Hailed by *SF Gate* as a "standout, bringing [vocal] power and florid elegance" and by *Opera News* for exhibiting "a clean, concentrated sound, and a lovely, intelligent musicianship," Costa Rican-American soprano **Teresa Castillo** made her company debut with Opera San José earlier this season, appearing as Frasquita in *Carmen*. Other debuts this season included covering the role of Königin der Nacht in Lyric Opera of Chicago's *Die Zauberflöte*, and Lucette in Opera Lafayette's production of Grétry's *Silvain*. Competition highlights include an Encouragement Award from the George London Foundation, First Place and Audience Favorite at the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition, First Prize Winner in the Lois Alba Aria Competition, Finalist in Opera Columbus' Cooper-Bing Competition, and Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, to name a few. Castillo made her Carnegie Hall debut with the New England Symphonic Ensemble in a world premiere entitled *Reflections on a Mexican Garden*, conducted by Gregory Gentry. Previous Young Artist engagements include San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Opera Program, where she sang the role of #1 in Conrad Susa's *Transformations*. Prior to her operatic training, Castillo performed as a clown and studied the flute.

Noah Stewart (Don José)

Tenor **Noah Stewart** is acclaimed by London's *Independent* as "A young black tenor from Harlem with a radiantly open sound." Stewart exploded into the public consciousness in 2012 with his Classical Brit-nominated, chart-topping, debut album (*Noah*, DECCA Records), becoming a regular and welcome performer on UK screens and stages. After making his company debut in Opera San José's 2019 production of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby-Dick*, Stewart returned this season as a 2021-22 Resident Artist, captivating audiences in his role of Don José in *Carmen*. Stewart has performed three sold-out solo tours of the UK for Kennedy Street; toured with the John Wilson Orchestra; performed with the Royal Opera Covent Garden, English National Opera, Opera Holland Park, Opera North, and Scottish Opera; appeared twice at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod; and has been a regular guest with the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Halle, and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He has forged a successful and enduring relationship with the BBC, performing on Radio 2 (including several performances on *Friday Night is Music Night*), Radio 3 (*In Time*), and Radio 4 (*Desert Island Discs*, *Saturday Live*). Stewart also appeared on BBC One (*Songs of Praise*, *BBC Breakfast*) and BBC Two (*Cardiff Singer of the World 2015*). Stewart has performed throughout the United States at opera houses, including San Francisco Opera, Atlanta Opera, Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, Glimmerglass, and Michigan Opera Theater, and with major European theatres such as the Bolshoi, Bregenz Festspiele, Götesborgoperan, Teatro Real Madrid, and Wexford Festival.

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Natalie Rose Havens (Anita)

Praised for having a "dark, compelling sound" (*Palm Beach Arts Paper*) Cuban-American mezzo-soprano Natalie Rose Havens has been gaining recognition throughout North America. Recent engagements have included Aldonza in San Diego Music Theatre's production of *Man of La Mancha*, Julia Child in Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!*, Flora in *La Traviata*, and Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* with Palm Beach Opera. Additional roles have included Zerlina *Don Giovanni* in New York, Third Lady in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Lola in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Mezzo in Philip Glass's *Hydrogen Jukebox*, Olga in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, The Marquise of Berkenfield in *La Fille du Régiment*, Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*, and Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Oratorio performances include Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Bruckner's Te Deum, Vivaldi's Gloria, and Mozart's Requiem. Ms. Havens currently resides in Philadelphia with her husband and cat (Dr. Gnocchi McCreamy). *Cuba Libre!*

Trevor Martin (Riff)

Currently based in New York City, baritone **Trevor Martin** was the winner of the prestigious Lotte Lenya Competition sponsored by the Kurt Weill Foundation in 2019, and was selected as a quarterfinalist for the American Traditions Competition for 2021. Martin has performed at many regional theaters in a variety of musical theater and operatic roles, including Sweeney Todd in *Sweeney Todd*, Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, and Captain Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*, among others. An advocate for new works, he has been a part of many world and regional premiere operas, and has also participated in workshops and readings of new works, both in opera and musical theater. Martin has appeared with opera companies around the country including Fort Worth Opera, Virginia Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Des Moines Metro Opera, among others. Also in demand as a concert and cabaret soloist, he has performed masterworks, chamber music, and pop concerts around the US with ensembles that include Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Échappé, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra, Barry University Community Chorale, Southern Crescent Chorale, and Opera North.

Jared V. Esguerra (Chino)

Filipino-American tenor **Jared V. Esguerra**'s range includes opera, concert repertoire, and musical theater. He made his company debut as a 2021–22 Opera San José Resident Artist earlier this season, when he was seen as Remendado in *Carmen*. In 2020, after starring as A-Rab in a sold-out run of *West Side Story* at the Edinburgh International Festival, Esguerra returned to Chicago Opera Theater (COT) in the critically acclaimed world premiere of *Freedom Ride*. He also covered the role of Giovanni in COT's live-streamed production of Daniel Catán's *La hija de Rappaccini* in April 2021. Other appearances include Fenton in Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Crested Butte Musical Festival, Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* with Chicago Fringe Opera, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with the Floating Opera Company, Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd* with the Janiec Opera Company at Brevard Music Center, and the Messenger in *Il trovatore* at Sarasota Opera. On the concert stage, Esguerra has appeared as the tenor soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in its MLK Tribute Concert Series.

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Antony Sanchez (Bernardo)

Antony Sanchez has appeared at regional theatres around the country – from the Fulton Theatre to the Gateway Playhouse, Barrington Stage Company, Musical Theatre West, East West Players, and San Diego Musical Theatre, among others. Stage credits include *On Your Feet!* (Kiki), *La Cage Aux Folles* (Mercedes, u/s Hanna), *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (Swing), and *Chess* (Viigan), among others. TV: *Law and Order: SVU* (Renaldo) Comedy Central's *Alternatino* (Hornet). He can also be seen in current running commercials with AriZona Iced Tea, Babble, Carl's Jr. and Cavit. Sanchez is a graduate of the Edge Pac Scholarship Program.

Philip Skinner (Doc)

Bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** has been seen at opera companies throughout the nation including the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Parallèle, San Francisco Opera, Charlottesville Opera, West Edge Opera, Opera Colorado, San Diego Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Seattle Opera, Washington National Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Livermore Valley Opera, among others. A familiar face to Bay Area audiences, Skinner has had a long association with San Francisco Opera, with nearly 400 performances in 55 productions. Equally prolific in the concert hall, he has performed the Verdi *Messa da Requiem* at Carnegie Hall with the Masterworks Chorale and in Europe with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra. Other engagements include Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* at the Hollywood Bowl with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with Kent Nagano and the Berkeley Symphony, the *Lord Nelson Mass* at the Spoleto Festival in Italy, as well as Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Creation*, and other concert pieces with the Dusseldorf Symphoniker, and Minnesota Orchestra, among others. Skinner was a Schwabacher Debut Recitalist and Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera. He received his Master's and the prestigious Performance Certificate from Indiana University.

Other roles include: **Michael Mendelsohn** (Schrank), **Lance LaShelle** (Krupke), and **Daniel Galpin** (Glad Hand).

Members of The Jets include **Jawan Jenkins** (Action), **Joshua Hughes** (Baby John), **Taylor Simmons** (Diesel), **Nick Rodrigues** (A-rab), **Jack Swartz** (Snowboy), **Sydney Strong** (Big Deal), **Ryan Byrne** (Gee-Tar), **Jim Ballard** (Mouthpiece), **Leandra Ramm** (Anybodys), **Mariah Ziel** (Graziella), **Tracy Fuller** (Velma), **Gabrielle Catipon** (Minnie), **Hollie Rudolph** (Clarice), and **Karen Law** (Pauline).

Members of The Sharks include **Timothy Matthew Flores** (Pepe), **Dario Rodriguez-Jackson** (Indio), **Michael Kuo** (Luis), **Nicolas Vasquez-Gerst** (Anxious), **Erick Aguirre** (Nibbles), **Christopher Cruz** (Juano), **Augusto Silva** (Toro), Lino **César Vázquez** (Moose), **Christine Capsuto-Shulman** (Rosalia),

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Cristina Hernandez (Francisca), **Erin Rose** (Consuelo), **Samantha Mills** (Teresita), **Vanessa Spiteri** (Estella), **Elise Holmes** (Margarita), and **Natalia Santaliz** ("A Girl").

Christopher James Ray (Conductor)

A conductor with a diverse background in both traditional and contemporary operatic works, **Christopher James Ray** returns to Opera San José for a third consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. He is also a current assistant with the San Francisco Symphony. In place of the previously planned 2020-21 season, Ray worked with Opera San José to create a variety of filmed performances – from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* to Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers* and Tom Cipullo's *The Husbands*. Other past conducting credits with Opera San José include *Il trovatore*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Moby Dick*, and *Pagliacci*. In 2017 Ray 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*. For the 2021-22 season, Ray will conduct performances of *Dido and Aeneas*, *Carmen*, and *West Side Story* at Opera San José, as well as a debut with the Lima Symphony Orchestra. A protégé 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, available through GPR Records on the Naxos label. Ray is a native of Sumrall, Mississippi, and is a graduate of Florida State University where he studied with Douglas Fisher and Carlisle Floyd.

Crystal Manich (Stage Director)

Crystal Manich is an Emmy Award-nominated, versatile Latina international director whose works for stage and screen have been seen across the United States, Argentina, and Australia. She recently won Best First Time Female Filmmaker at the 2021 Toronto International Women Film Festival for her feature film *The Copper Queen*, and was nominated for a 2021 Chicago/Midwest Regional Emmy Award for Daniel Catán's Spanish opera *La Hija de Rappaccini*. Crystal directed and co-produced this multi-cam production with Chicago Opera Theater and Valhalla Media live from the Field Museum in April 2021. She has also collaborated with singer-songwriter Ivywild and has directed music videos for "Willing to Find Out" and "Longing for You" (to be released March 2022).

Michael Pappalardo (Choreographer)

Michael Pappalardo began his dance training at the age of 6 and was accepted into the New Zealand School of Dance. He worked with the Royal New Zealand Ballet during his time in New Zealand and was privileged to perform in works by Val Caniparoli, Jiri Kylian, Frederick Ashton, Stanton Welch, and George Balanchine. After returning to Australia, Michael worked with Queensland Ballet before launching himself into a very successful independent Dancer career working with Leigh Warren and Dancers, Melbourne Ballet Company, Victoria State Ballet, Opera Victoria, and various independent projects. Michael's love for creating ballets came to the forefront when he was appointed Artistic Director of Melbourne City Ballet in 2013. There he guided the organization to become Australia's largest classical touring company, performing over 100 shows across Australia, New Zealand, and Japan annually. In 2016, Michael was also invited to work as co-

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director with Niconomiel dance company in Osaka, Japan. In 2020 Michael joined San Jose Dance Theatre as Artistic Associate and choreographed Dido and Aeneas for Opera San Jose in 2021. In 2022 Michael was appointed Artistic Director of Canyon Concert Ballet in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Opera San José is an opera company located in the heart of Silicon Valley. Maintaining a resident company of artists, OSJ presents four mainstage productions annually in San Jose's historic California Theatre, while regularly broadcasting fully-produced productions from its state-of-the-art Heiman Digital Media Studio. Now in its 38th season, OSJ specializes in role debuts, serving as an artistic incubator for established and emerging artists alike, producing world-class operatic performances for diverse audiences throughout the Bay Area and around the globe. More information is available at operasj.org.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: **Opera San José** will close its 2021–2022 season with ***West Side Story***, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins's classic American tale of two star-crossed lovers and the prejudices that keep them apart. Bursting with passion, humor, vibrant dancing, and some of the most memorable music ever written, this stunning production of ***West Side Story*** — the company's first-ever musical — will be conducted by Christopher James Ray, staged by director Crystal Manich, and choreographed by Michael Pappalardo. Acclaimed singers from across the U.S. have been cast to bring the leading roles to life, including soprano Teresa Castillo as Maria, tenor Noah Stewart as Tony, mezzo-soprano Natalie Rose Havens as Anita, baritone Trevor Martin as Riff, tenor Jared V. Esguerra as Chino, baritone Antony Sanchez as Bernardo, and Philip Skinner as Doc. ***West Side Story*** will be sung in English, with English and Spanish supertitles.

WHEN: 7:30pm, Saturday, April 16
2:00pm, Sunday, April 17
7:30pm, Thursday, April 21
2:00pm, Saturday, April 23
2:00pm, Sunday, April 24
7:30pm, Friday, April 29
2:00pm, Sunday, May 1

TICKETS: \$55–\$195

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INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public can visit operasj.org or call **(408) 437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

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MEDIA: Contact Sydney Albin, Carla Befera & Co.
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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos will be available here:
<https://cbpr.co/press/westsidestory/>