

OPERA SAN JOSÉ ANNOUNCES 2022-23 RESIDENT COMPANY

*RESIDENT ARTISTS TO BE FEATURED IN
SHOWCASE STREAMING AUGUST 7*

SAN JOSE, CA (8 July 2022) – General Director Shawna Lucey has announced **Opera San José’s** 2022-23 Resident Company, a cohort of brilliant opera talent who will be featured in this season’s four California Theatre mainstage productions. They will be introduced to audiences in a free live-streamed concert at 4:00pm, Sunday, August 7, broadcast from Opera San José’s Heiman Digital Media Studio. In addition, members of the resident ensemble will perform in concerts, recitals, in-conversation and Meet the Artists events, and fully-produced operas created specifically for digital broadcast – including the virtual world premiere of a work commissioned by the company’s first ever Composer-in-Residence. For more information and to RSVP to the free **Resident Artist Showcase**, the public may visit www.operasj.org.

“In continuing Irene Dalis’ brilliant vision, we are proud to welcome **Rene Orth** as our first-ever Resident Artist Composer, from whom we have commissioned a new opera specifically for the digital realm,” says Lucey. “The creation of this residency expands and continues our unique mission at OSJ. We prepare artists for the stage, both live and digital and by supporting the genesis of a new American work but an emerging female composer, we are shepherding Irene’s unique vision into the future – all through the support of our cherished audience.”

This year’s selected artists include **Zhengyi Bai** (Tenor), **Darren Drone** (Baritone), **Megan Esther Grey** (Contralto), **Rene Orth** (Composer-in-Residence), **Maria Natale** (Soprano), and **Natalia Santaliz** (Soprano), as well as **Tara Branham** (Director), **Eugene Brancoveau** (Baritone), and **Nikola Printz** (Mezzo-soprano), who will be welcomed back for another season.

Lucey adds, “We are thrilled to welcome this new cohort of resident artists to Opera San José for a sparkling season of role debuts. These residents include cherished returning artists taking on roles they’ve dreamed of for years, as well as new faces that we cannot wait to see take to the stage of the California Theater. This cohort is the future of opera – and the future is bright indeed. OSJ not only incubates opera’s next great artists and administrators, but our community who join us for performances, events and our digital projects are the secret ingredient to the glorious successes our Residents achieve.

The artists will be featured in Opera San José’s exciting 2022-23 season which kicks off with Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* (Sept. 10-25, 2022), reset in colonial India during Victorian Imperial

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rule, followed by a lavish production of Alma Deutscher's *Cinderella* (Nov. 12-27, 2022) that will feature the conducting debut of the internationally-acclaimed young composer/musician. The season concludes with handsome revivals of two classic works: Verdi's comic masterpiece, *Falstaff* (Feb. 11-26, 2023), and Puccini's political thriller, *Tosca* (April 15-30, 2023). Single tickets go on sale, July 7.

Artist bios:

Zhengyi Bai (Tenor, Basilio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Dr. Caius in *Falstaff*)

Tenor **Zhengyi Bai** recently completed his training in the renowned Adler Fellowship Program at the San Francisco Opera (SFO). He makes his company debut with Opera San José this season, appearing as Basilio in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Dr. Caius in Verdi's *Falstaff*. As a 2018 participant of the Merola Opera Program, Bai has been recognized by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his "charming verve." During the 2019-2020 season, he made his SFO debut as Remendado in Bizet's *Carmen*, and also appeared as the Dancing Master and Lamplighter in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. In the spring of 2021, Bai performed in SFO's *The Adlers: Live at the Drive-In* concert, which heralded the company's return to live performance. Here, he covered the role of Almaviva in SFO's production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. In the 2021-22 season, Bai performed the role of the First Prisoner in Beethoven's *Fidelio* with SFO. Born and raised in the Shandong province of China, Bai began his studies as a piano student and a collaborative pianist. In his junior year of college, he discovered his true instrument: his voice. With a solid foundation of music study, Bai flourished in his vocal studies, completing his initial vocal training in Shandong, China and continuing his opera training in the United States.

Tara Branham (Director; Director of *Tosca*; Assistant Director of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Cinderella*, and *Falstaff*)

A director of opera and theatre, **Tara Branham** returns to Opera San José for a third consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. Throughout the 2022-23 season, she will put her stamp on each Opera San José production, serving as the Director for Puccini's *Tosca* and the Assistant Director for Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Alma Deutscher's *Cinderella*, and Verdi's *Falstaff*. In July 2022, Branham will direct the U.S. premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Coralline* at West Edge Opera, in collaboration with Papermoon Opera Productions. In the 2022-23 season, Branham will make her California Theatre debut directing *Tosca* for Opera San José, followed by a return to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL) to direct a reimagining of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. She has previously directed *The Barber of Seville* for OTSL's Opera on the Go education program, seen by over 80,000 students nationwide. As Resident Director for Opera San José, Branham helmed digital productions of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*, starring Susan Graham, and *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy*, which included Wolf-Ferrari's *Il segreto di Susanna*, Ned Rorem's *Four Dialogues*, and Tom Cipullo's *The Husbands*. She has also directed and co-created the musical pastiches *Sing For Your Supper!* and *The Parting Glass* for Opera San José. Her production of the U.S. premiere of *Octagon*, starring Kiki Layne (*If Beale Street Could Talk*, *The Old Guard*) at Jackalope Theatre, received a sold-out extension. This was a culmination of three years of development and collaboration with Kristiana

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Rae Colón (Showtime's *The Chi*), with whom she also directed and co-produced the sold-out premiere of *Good Friday*.

Eugene Brancoveanu (Baritone, Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Ford in *Falstaff*)

This season, baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu** returns as a Resident Artist at Opera San José (OSJ) to appear as Count Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff*. Past roles with the company include Eisenstein (J. Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*), the Father (Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*), Count Di Luna (Verdi's *Il trovatore*), Stubb (Heggie and Scheer's *Moby-Dick*), Leporello (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), Stanley Kowalski (Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*), and Escamillo (Bizet's *Carmen*). He has also appeared in OSJ's digital productions of *Sing For Your Supper!* and *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy*, as well as Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* ('A Poet's Love'). Recent engagements for Brancoveanu include Older Brother in Jabri's *Cities of Salt* with Opera Movie NY, and serving as director and performing the role of Pasha Selim in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* with Livermore Opera. In Freiburg, Germany, Brancoveanu appeared as Falke in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, Darcy in Mechem's *Pride and Prejudice*, Escamillo in Bizet's *Carmen*, and performed the title role in *Don Giovanni* in Warsaw, Poland. Other international performances include appearances at Heidelberg Opera, Stuttgart Opera, Salzburg Festival, Munich State Opera, Berlin Opera, Teatro Rossini, Piccola Scala di Milano, Macerata Opera, Romanian National Theater, Tokyo Opera House, Opéra de Montréal, and the Opera Theater of Tel Aviv. After his successful apprenticeship with the Merola Opera Program, Brancoveanu was awarded the position of Adler Fellow, where roles performed included Tomski in Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame*, Riccardo in Rossini's *The Italian girl in Algiers*, the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the Pilot in Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince*, Belcore in Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, Enrico in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Tarquinius in Britten's *Rape of Lucretia*. 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. Brancoveanu graduated from the Academy of Music in Transylvania, Romania and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria.

Darren Drone (Baritone, Falstaff in *Falstaff*)

Described as having "a gorgeously warm tone and deep resonance" (*Opera News*), baritone **Darren Drone** is quickly making a name for himself in the opera world as an exciting up-and-comer. During the 2021-22 season, Drone joined the Metropolitan Opera roster as a featured soloist in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, covered Mtchll in the world premiere of Carlos Simon and Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *it all falls down* at Washington National Opera, made his Opera Memphis debut as Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and was set to make a debut with Florentine Opera as Schaunard in Puccini's *La bohème* – which was rescheduled to 2024 due to COVID-19. In the 2022-23 season, Drone will make his Opera San José debut in the title role of Verdi's *Falstaff* and will create a role in a world premiere by Rene Orth. He will also make his Portland Opera debut as Zuniga in Bizet's *Carmen*. In the summer of 2021, Drone joined the Santa Fe Opera roster, covering the roles of the Count in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Starveling in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the Captain in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. In the summer of 2022, Drone returns to Santa Fe,

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appearing as Moralès in *Carmen* and covering the title role of Falstaff.

Megan Esther Grey (Contralto, Emeline in *Cinderella*, Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff*)

A recent graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development program, contralto **Megan Esther Grey** is quickly gaining attention in roles large and small across the U.S. In the 2021-22 season, she returned to the Metropolitan Opera to cover both Suzuki and Kate Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, performed the title role of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* with the University of North Texas (UNT) Opera, sang Emilia in a concert production of Verdi's *Otello* with the UNT Symphony Orchestra, and made her Washington Concert Opera debut as Mistress Bentson in Léo Delibes's *Lakmé*. In the summer of 2022, Grey will join the Santa Fe Opera, covering the role of Brangäne in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. During the 2022-23 season, Grey will make her Opera San José debut as Emeline in Alma Deutscher's *Cinderella* and Mistress Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff*. She will also appear as the soloist in Mahler's *Rückert Lieder* with the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestra and cover Dritte Dame in both the holiday adaption and new production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* with the Metropolitan Opera. Throughout the disrupted 2020-21 season, Grey performed in multiple recitals in collaboration with pianist Matthew Gemmill. In April 2021, she was joined by pianist Mark Bilyeu and trombonist Derek Bromme for performances of Libby Larsen's *Mary Cassatt* and Dominick Argento's *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. This multimedia recital featuring paintings by Mary Cassatt, as well as mixed media prints by Mer Brich an animated script by Alexandra Saulsbury. In the summer of 2021, Grey also returned to Wolf Trap Opera as Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street in Concert*.

Maria Natale (Soprano, Countess Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Floria Tosca in *Tosca*)

Praised by *The New York Times* for her "plummy, penetrating voice," soprano **Maria Natale** is the recipient of many awards and grants from some of the most prestigious vocal competitions nationwide. She was awarded First Prize in the National James Collier Vocal Competition, Second Prize and Audience Choice in the Elizabeth Connell Prize, Second Place in the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition, a Grand Finalist in the Loren L. Zachary Vocal Competition, a grant recipient from the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation, Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition, and the Second Prize winner of the Opera at Florham Vocal Competition. Recently, Natale made her debuts at Tulsa Opera as Cio-Cio San in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and at Opera San José as Nedda in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. She has also been seen at Opera San José as Cio-Cio San and Rosalinde in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*. Other engagements include Opera Maine as Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata* under conductor Stephen Lord, about which *Opera News* wrote "her powerful soprano easily filled the house." In her Sarasota Opera debut as Liù in Puccini's *Turnadot*, Natale was hailed by *New Outpost* as having an "unequivocal Italian sound." As a concert soloist, Natale has been featured at Carnegie Hall in Fauré's Requiem and Mozart's Missa Solemnis with MidAmerica Productions. She has also appeared as the soprano soloist with NYC Master Chorale in Dvořák's's Te Deum and Mozart's Requiem. During the 2022-23 season, Natale will return to Opera San José as Countess Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, and will make her debut as the title role in Puccini's *Tosca*.

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Rene Orth (Composer, Composer of commissioned piece TBA)

Rene Orth is a composer who “breaks new ground” (*Opera News*), writing music described as “...always dramatic, reflective, rarely predictable, and often electronic” (*Musical America*). Her music focuses on dramatic and lyrical storytelling, and she takes a keen interest in blending electronic soundscapes with acoustic music. Orth recently completed her three-year tenure as Composer-in-Residence for Opera Philadelphia and will be the inaugural Composer-in-Residence at Opera San José for the 2022-23 season. Her work has been performed by a variety of opera companies and orchestras, including Chautauqua Opera/Opera Memphis (upcoming TBA), Berkeley Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Summerville Orchestra, New World Symphony, Juilliard Youth Symphony, Festival d’Aix en Provence, Opera Philadelphia, Tapestry Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Washington National Opera, and Curtis Opera Theater. Orth has also collaborated with notable artists and ensembles – from Del Sol to Dover, Aizuri Quartet, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Sasha Cooke, Daniela Mack, Blythe Gaissert, Zachary James, Seraph Brass, Rock School of Dance, and Pennsylvania Ballet. Recent distinctions include an OPERA American Commissioning Grant and Discovery Grant for Female Composers, American Composers Forum Subito Grant, as well as the Kentucky Foundation for Women Artist Enrichment Grant. She has been in residence at Festival d’Aix en Provence, Yaddo, Virginia Center for Creative Arts, The Orchard Project Greenhouse, Avaloch Farm Institute, Tapestry Opera, Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival, and Luzerne Music Center.

Nikola Printz (Mezzo-soprano, Meg Page in *Falstaff*)

Mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz** is an artist and performer known for their dark, velvety voice; charismatic stage presence; and artistic fearlessness. Most recently, Printz was seen as the title role in Jacques Offenbach’s *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* with Pocket Opera, as well as the title roles of Carmen and Dido with Opera San José, where they were a Resident Artist for the 2021-22 season. Printz returns to Opera San José this season to appear as a Resident Artist for a second consecutive year, where they will appear as Meg Page in Verdi’s *Falstaff*. Printz was praised by *Opera News* as having “a big opulent tone and an easy reach to their high register.” Additional appearances include *Behind the Stage Door* during Merola Opera Program’s 2021 Summer Festival, Poulenc’s *La Voix Humaine*, and the premiere of Jake Heggie’s song cycle, *Intonations*. Other role debuts include Orfeo ed Euridice and Carmen, as well as Rosina, Cherubino, and Isabella in Rossini’s *L’italiana in Algeri* with Opera Memphis, where they were a Resident Artist. Earlier this year Printz received high praise for their recital debut with San Francisco Opera, opening the Schwabacher Recital season with a program based around their journey of their gender discovery. During their Artist Residency in Memphis, Printz became an accomplished aerialist, training in the Static and Dance medium. Since then, Printz has cultivated several aerial acts sung and performed live with both piano and orchestra. Printz will be a featured solo artist in their second summer at Merola in 2022, and in the fall as the role of Hannah After in Laura Kaminsky’s *As One* with Opera Steamboat. They will also return to San Francisco to sing Oreste in Leonardo Vinci’s Baroque gem, *Astianatte* with Ars Minerva. Outside of opera, Printz writes and records their own music, playing a plethora of different instruments as well as riding their motorcycle and roller skating. Printz is an advocate for accessibility in the arts and is currently learning ASL.

Natalia Santaliz (Soprano, Cinderella in *Cinderella*, Nanetta in *Falstaff*)

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During the 2021-22 season, Puerto Rican soprano **Natalia Santaliz** made her debut as Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with Berkshire Opera Festival, performed as soprano soloist for the Fauré Requiem with Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico, and joined the Gerdine Young Artists Program at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis where she covered Papagena in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. She also appeared with Opera San José last season, covering Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Maria in Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's *West Side Story*. For the 2022-23 season, Santaliz will return to Opera San José as a Resident Artist, where she will appear as the title role in Alma Deutscher's *Cinderella* and Nanetta in Verdi's *Falstaff*. Career highlights include singing Nella and covering Lauretta in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* under Kent Nagano at the Festival Napa Valley; performing *The Blue Project: Puerto Rican Folk Music*, presented by New World Symphony; and appearing as soprano soloist in John Rutter's Requiem with the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra. Santaliz has sung the roles of Susanna in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mařenka in Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Camila in Navarro's *Frenesí*, and has been a guest artist with Ópera de Puerto Rico, Teatro de la Ópera, Fundación Puertorriqueña de Zarzuela y Opereta, and Teatro Lírico del Oeste, among others. She has participated in Martina Arroyo Foundation's "Prelude to Performance" and the Sherrill Milnes Voice Studio, as part of the Savannah Voice Festival in Georgia. Santaliz began her training at the Escuela Libre de Música Ernesto Ramos Antonini de Mayagüez before graduating with honors from the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico and ultimately receiving her master's degree from Mannes School of Music.

Opera San José (OSJ) is a flagship arts organization of Silicon Valley. Maintaining a resident company of artists, OSJ presents four mainstage productions annually in San José's beautifully restored, magnificent California Theatre. It also regularly broadcasts fully produced productions from its state-of-the-art Heiman Digital Media Studio. OSJ specializes in role debuts, serving as an artistic incubator for established and emerging artists and administrators, producing world-class operatic performances for diverse audiences throughout the Bay Area and around the globe. More information is available at www.operasj.org.

The California Theatre is one of the most magnificent, best-preserved examples of 1920s-era lavish motion picture palaces. Lovingly restored at the turn of the 21st century, its opulently ornamented interiors were completely refurbished, including the elaborately stenciled entry foyer ceiling and magnificent gallery. With only twenty rows of seats in the orchestra section, five rows in the grand tier, and six in the mezzanine, every seat has an excellent view of the stage. With just over 1,100 seats, the California is comparable to England's Glyndebourne and Venice's historic Teatro la fenice and is in the select ranks of the world's most intimate opera houses.

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