

OPERA SAN JOSÉ ANNOUNCES 2023-24 RESIDENT COMPANY

TO BE FEATURED IN VIRTUAL SHOWCASE STREAMING AUGUST 13

SAN JOSE, CA (19 July 2022) – General Director Shawna Lucey has announced **Opera San José’s** 2023-24 Artists-in-Residence, a cohort of brilliant opera talent who will star 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 13, broadcast from Opera San José’s Heiman Digital Media Studio. In the coming year, resident ensemble members will also perform in concerts, recitals, in-conversations, Meet the Artists events, and operas presented via virtual broadcast – including the workshop of a new opera, *Zheng* by composer Shinji Eshima. Said Opera San José General Director Shawna Lucey, “We are thrilled with the cohort of artists joining us this year. They are each heading into a brilliant career in music, and our audiences will cherish the opportunity to see the international opera stars of tomorrow in our productions this season. From sparkling role debuts, to conducting and directing debuts, our community is the home of these artistic ‘firsts.’ Because our audiences listen with their hearts, our artists learn to fly, and this is the beginning of a deep artistic collaboration between our new company of artists and the audiences and community of San José.” For more information and to RSVP to the free **Artists-in-Residence Showcase**, the public may visit operasj.org/event/resident-artist-showcase.

Recognized as a leading force in cultivating and nurturing emerging opera talent, Opera San José’s **Artists-in-Residence Program** serves as a thriving incubator, providing a fertile environment where promising artists can flourish and develop their skills to their fullest potential. Unique in the country, OSJ is the home of artistic debuts – for singers, directors and conductors. Focused on giving the opera stars of tomorrow their “firsts”, Opera San José puts emerging artists at center stage, on the podium and in the director’s chair. Artist receive personalized mentorship, allowing them to refine their technique while experimenting and exploring their artistic range. Additionally, Opera San José’s Artists-in-Residence Program provides free housing for artists during their residency. This unique benefit allows artists from around the country and the world to live and work in the heart of Silicon Valley. From mainstage productions to community engagements, the Artists-in-Residence showcase their talents to diverse audiences in the theater, the digital sphere, and in the community, gaining invaluable stage experience and building their professional portfolios.

This season, OSJ is proud to announce the inaugural Wadhwani Chair for South Asian Artists. Through the generous support of the Wadhwani Foundation, Opera San José is committed to focusing on incubating the incredible talent of the South Asian opera community. Melissa Sondhi,

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who has been selected as the inaugural Wadhvani Artist-in-Residence, began her relationship with OSJ as a member of the chorus, steadily rising through the ranks to be one of opera's most exciting emerging sopranos. The 40th Anniversary Opera San José season will see her take on the roles of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and Rosalba in *Florenxia en el Amazonas*. The Wadhvani Foundation is a not-for-profit with the primary mission of accelerating economic development by driving job creation in India and other emerging economies through large-scale initiatives in entrepreneurship, small business growth, innovation, and skilling. Founded in 2000 by Silicon Valley entrepreneur Dr Romesh Wadhvani, today, the Foundation is scaling impact in multiple countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America, through technology, networks and partnerships.

This year's selected artists are **Melisa Bonetti** (Mezzo-soprano), **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** (Director), **Vartan Gabrielian** (Bass-baritone), **Johannes Löhner** (Conductor), **Courtney Miller** (Mezzo-soprano), **Joshua Sanders** (Tenor), and **Melissa Sondhi** (Soprano). See full bios below.

Each of these Artists-in-Residence will be featured in Opera San José's upcoming gala 40th anniversary season, which will celebrate the organization's illustrious past, innovative present, and exciting future. The 2023-24 season launches with an all-new production of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* (Sept. 9 – 24, 2023), directed by OSJ General Director Shawna Lucey, followed by a family-friendly romp with Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (Nov. 11 – 26, 2023). The season continues with a thrilling revival of Verdi's *Rigoletto* (Feb. 17 – Mar. 3, 2024), and rounds out with the Bay Area Premiere of the stunning magical-realism opera *Florenxia en los Amazonas* (April 20 – May 5, 2024) by Mexican composer Daniel Catan. Opera San José will also present a digital workshop of the new opera *Zheng*, based on the life of San Francisco mezzo-soprano Zheng Cao (date TBA).

Artist bios:

Melisa Bonetti (Mezzo-soprano, Stéphanie in *Romeo and Juliet*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*)
Mezzo-soprano **Melisa Bonetti** makes her company debut with Opera San José this season. Hailed by *Opera Today* as “a warm, supple mezzo that struck all the right impressions,” Bonetti is a versatile singer whose experience encompasses a mix of new works, large traditional operas, and concerts. In 2024, Bonetti will appear as Lola in Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* with the Helena Symphony. Recent highlights include the lead role in New Latin Wave and National Sawdust's premiere of *Paraíso* by Sokio and Natasha Tiniacos and appearances as mezzo-soprano soloist at Carnegie Hall for Bach's *Magnificat* and *Christmas Oratorio* with The Cecilia Chorus of New York, as well as soloist at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center and the Kimmel Center with the Philadelphia Orchestra in a concert of Ancient Tang Poems with the I Sing International Festival. Bonetti has worked as an educator in various musical outreach and community programs throughout the New York City area with the Metropolitan Opera Guild, Brooklyn Music School, and the Bronx School for Music.

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Michelle Ainna Cuizon (Resident Director)

Director **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** makes her company debut at Opera San José, where she will serve as the Assistant Stage Director for this season's four California Theatre mainstage productions. Cuizon completed the 2022-23 season at the Metropolitan Opera as the Bank of America Stage Director Fellow, where she assisted on new productions of Terence Blanchard's *Champion* and Kevin Puts' *The Hours*. She has also worked on revivals of David McVicar's productions of Puccini's *Tosca* and Bellini's *Norma*, Bartlett Sher's production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, Graham Vick's production of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and the iconic Sonja Frisell staging of Verdi's *Aida*. This summer, Cuizon assistant directed Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, directed by world-renowned soprano Patricia Racette. Other New York City credits include serving as the Assistant Director for the World Premiere of John Patrick Shanley's *Candlelight* (Nylon Fusion Theater Company), and as the Assistant Stage Manager for *Charlotte Lucas is 27 and Not Dead* by Jessie Field and James Salem (Piper Theatre).

Vartan Gabrielian (Bass-baritone, Frère Laurent in *Romeo and Juliet*, Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*, Capitán in *Florencia en el Amazonas*)

Bass-baritone **Vartan Gabrielian**'s 2023-24 season marks numerous role and house debuts – including his company debut with Opera San José. Later this season, Gabrielian will make a festival debut as Nick Shadow (Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*) at the Verbier Festival, a house debut as Dottore Grenvil (Verdi's *La traviata*) at the Paris Opera, and appear as Fasolt (Wagner *Das Rheingold*) at Edmonton Opera. A sought-after concert performer, Gabrielian will also be performing Handel's *Messiah* with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra at the end of 2023. Highlights from the 2022-23 season include Masetto and Commendatore (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*) at the National Arts Centre, Nourabad (Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*) at the Vancouver Opera, and a return to the Canadian Opera Company to perform Dottore (Verdi's *Macbeth*) and cover Figaro (Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*), Banquo (*Macbeth*), and Angelotti (Verdi's *Tosca*).

Johannes Löhner (Resident Conductor)

Conductor **Johannes Löhner** returns to Opera San José as an Artist-in-Residence, where he will serve as the Resident Conductor. Löhner is also the Music Director of the Kammerorchester Regensburg and an Adjunct Professor of Conducting at the Hochschule für Musik Nürnberg. He was last seen at Opera San José for its productions of Verdi's *Falstaff* and Puccini's *Tosca* during the 2022-23 season. Löhner has been mentored by Sir Roger Norrington and Riccardo Muti for several years. He has gathered experience with institutions that include the Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Zurich Chamber Orchestra, SWR Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Symphoniker Hamburg, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and Nürnberger Symphoniker, among others. Löhner speaks six languages, and travels upwards of 20 weeks a year. From 2017-2023, he was also active as Artistic Director and CEO of The International Salon Project. Recent engagements include Verdi's *Macbeth* at the Tokyo Spring Festival, the release of his groundbreaking Live-Solo-CD/DVD debut of Schubert's *Winterreise*, new productions of Handel's *Alcina* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Chicago

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Summer Opera, serving the Director of Studio Artists and Assistant Conductor at Sarasota Opera in 2022.

Courtney Miller (Mezzo-soprano, Gertrude in *Romeo and Juliet*, Berta in *The Barber of Seville*, Giovanna in *Rigoletto*)

Praised by *Opera News* for her “fluent musicality,” mezzo-soprano **Courtney Miller** has been applauded for her captivating stage presence and excellent sense of comic timing. She makes her company debut with Opera San José this season. Earlier in 2023, Miller debuted with Pocket Opera as Nancy in Britten’s *Albert Herring* and was a fellow of the Somatic Songs with 3340 Recitals. Her new art song recital, *Tell me the truth about love*, will tour in 2024. Career highlights include Sister St. Charles in Francis Poulenc’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (San Francisco Opera), Hannah in Mieczysław Weinberg’s *The Passenger* (Detroit Opera), Olga in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* (Florida Grand Opera), Meg in Mark Adamo’s *Little Women* (Madison Opera), and Cherubino in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (Opera Saratoga). A lover of new music, Miller has premiered works in opera, art song, and musical theater.

Joshua Sanders (Tenor, Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*)

Tenor **Joshua Sanders** makes his company debut at Opera San José. Later in the 2023-24 season, he will also cover Don Ramiro in Lyric Opera of Chicago’s production of Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* and will make his debut at Nashville Opera as Tamino in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*. During the 2022-23 season, Sanders joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for Robert Carsen’s *Der Rosenkavalier* and debuted as Goro in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* with Palm Beach Opera, where he also covered Ferrando in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*. In 2017, Sanders made his international debut at Teatro Regio Torino as Der Hirte in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, conducted by Gianandrea Noseda. In concert, he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2019 as a soloist in Vaughan Williams’ *Serenade to Music*. Sanders has appeared as a guest soloist with the New Jersey Symphony as the titular character in Berlioz’s *Lélio, ou Le retour à la vie*, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Lee Mingwei’s Sonic Blossom Exhibit, featuring the music of Schubert. He has also performed at New York City’s iconic Public Theater in a cabaret curated by Justin Vivian Bond for New York State’s “NY PopsUp” concert series.

Melissa Sondhi (Soprano, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Rosalba in *Florenzia en el Amazonas*)

Soprano **Melissa Sondhi** returns to Opera San José as an Artist-in-Residence for the 2023-24 season to make three role debuts. Her previous appearances with the company include Barbarina in Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* during the 2022-23 season and the First Witch in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* during the 2021-22 season. Local critics have applauded Sondhi for “a voice that is nothing short of wowing” (*TheatreEddys*) and for her “effortless performance” (*Opera Tattler*). Previous roles include Musetta in Puccini’s *La bohème* (San Francisco Opera Guild), Le feu and Le rossignol in Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (Air Opera Collective), Angelina in Arthur Sullivan and William Schwenck Gilbert’s *Trial by Jury* (Lyric Theatre of San José), and Giannetta in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* (Pocket Opera). In 2023, Sondhi won first place in the Adult Classical Voice category at the Los Angeles Semifinals of the Music International Grand Prix competition and was also a semifinalist in the Orpheus Vocal Competition in 2021.

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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/osjresidentcompany>