

OPERA SAN JOSÉ PRESENTS
CATÁN'S RIVETING MAGICAL REALISM ADVENTURE
FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS

April 20 – May 5, 2024

SAN JOSÉ, CA (11 March 2024) — **Opera San José** will conclude its 40th anniversary season with the Bay Area premiere of Daniel Catán's captivating opera, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, marking its debut at the California Theatre as the company's first Spanish language opera performed on its mainstage. In this two-act work, Mexican composer Catán transports audiences to a 20th-century riverboat sailing the Amazon River. There, a famous opera singer is returning home to perform, while hoping to reunite with her lover, a butterfly hunter who has disappeared into the jungle. A story rich in allusion that bridges drama and fantasy, *Florencia en el Amazonas* will be performed in Spanish with English and Spanish supertitles. Celebrated Latina international director **Crystal Manich** returns to OSJ where she helmed the company's award-winning production of *West Side Story*. Opera San José Director of Music **Joseph Marcheso** will conduct. *Florencia en el Amazonas* will be presented **April 20 - May 5, 2024** (performance dates/times below) at the **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street, San José. 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).

Florencia en el Amazonas, the third opera by acclaimed Mexican composer Daniel Catán, with a libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Berain, includes motifs taken from and characters inspired by the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Colombian Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez. It was co-commissioned by Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and Seattle Opera – making it the first Spanish language opera to be commissioned by major U.S. opera houses. *Florencia en el Amazonas* made its world premiere in Houston in 1996, followed by premieres in 1997 and 1998 in Los Angeles and Seattle, and its Latin American premiere in 1999 in Mexico City. It has since gone on to presentations throughout the world, making its New York Metropolitan Opera debut in November 2023, the Met's first work by a Latin American composer and its third-ever work presented in Spanish. *The New York Times* hailed *Florencia en el Amazonas* as "impressive," noting "Catán's score endlessly undulates and glitters," while *New York Classical Review* praised Catán's work as "lush, lyrical, and colorful." *Florencia en el Amazonas* is presented under license by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. copyright owners.

Opera San José has announced a brilliant cast to bring this magical realism tale to life including soprano **Elizabeth Caballero**, who will make her OSJ debut as opera singer Florencia Grimaldi, soprano **Aléxa Anderson**, who will also make her OSJ debut as the journalist Rosalba documenting Florencia's journey. Joining them are mezzo-soprano **Guadalupe Paz** making her

OSJ debut as Paula and former Resident Artist and OSJ audience-favorite baritone **Efraín Solís** as Alvaro – a couple on board hoping to reignite their flame. Tenor **César Delgado**, recently seen in both The Metropolitan Opera and Mexico City productions of this work, will make his OSJ debut as Arcadio, the nephew of the steamboat captain. Baritone **Ricardo José Rivera** – who charmed audiences as Figaro in this season’s *The Barber of Seville* – returns to OSJ as the mysterious man Riolobo, with bass-baritone OSJ Artist-in-Residence **Vartan Gabrielian** making his role debut as the Captain, who helms the steamboat El Dorado.

The chorus ensemble is comprised of **Rachel Beninghof, Lauren Biglow, Rebecca Bradley, Elise van Etten, Andrew Fellows, Glen Hall, Danielle Imai, Brennah Kemmerly, Kyounghee Lee, Joachim Luis, Eric Mellum, Daniel Rios, Brendan Stone, and Nicolas Vasquez-Gerst.**

“Florescia en el Amazonas is a production that I have been very much looking forward to presenting here at Opera San José. We know that more than a third of San José’s population is Latinx, with nearly 25 percent speaking Spanish in the home. It is more than time for us to present a Spanish language production on our mainstage, as we welcome all members of our community to experience this incandescent opera,” said Opera San José General Director/CEO **Shawna Lucey**. “Daniel Catán’s beautiful opera will take audiences on a life-changing adventure down the Amazon, where the boundaries of the real and the fantastic are blurred. This stunning, magical work is a wonderful piece to close out our fabulous 40th season and signals our commitment to incubating operatic artists and audiences of the future.”

The creative team for this production is **Joseph Marcheso** (Conductor), **Crystal Manich** (Director), **Haley Stamats** (Associate Director), **Liliana Duque-Piñeiro** (Scenic Designer), **Tlálloc López-Watermann** (Lighting Designer), **Ulises Alcalá** (Costume Designer), **Sharon Peng** (Hair and Makeup Designer), **Johannes Löhner** (Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master), and **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** (Assistant Director).

“Classically Curious” night for *Florescia en el Amazonas* will be held Friday, April 26, bringing together people ages 21-40 who have a passion for deepening their involvement with opera. This young professionals program was created to introduce new audiences to opera, offering access to discounted tickets, exclusive behind-the-scenes opportunities, and social and community events that will connect young adult opera lovers. More information can be found at go.operasj.org/ClassicallyCurious.

Opera San José received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) more than \$20,000 to engage with the South Bay community and celebrate the Bay Area premiere of *Florescia en el Amazonas*. This generous grant has enabled Opera San José to collaborate with other San José organizations to share this rich opera with the wider community, including *Florescia en el Amazonas* at Mexican Heritage Plaza at 5:00pm, Friday, March 22, library concerts at the Biblioteca Latinoamericana Library at 3:30pm, Sunday, March 24, and at the East San José

Carnegie Branch on 3:30pm, Sunday, April 7, a South of First Friday presentation at the California Theatre on Friday, April 5 at 5:30pm, plus a panel discussion at 3:00pm Thursday, April 25.

Artist Bios:

Daniel Catán (Composer)

The music of **Daniel Catán** (April 3, 1949 - April 9, 2011) is among the most significant and best-loved of any composers in the 21st century. Known principally as a composer of operas, Catán's oeuvre spans works for orchestra, chamber music, and art song, as well as music for film and television, music theatre, and even traditional Latin pop. His opera, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, was the first opera by a Mexican composer ever produced by a professional opera company in the United States (by San Diego Opera in 1994) and he is primarily responsible for the adoption and popularization of the Spanish language in contemporary opera and art song. Born in Mexico, Catán studied philosophy at the University of Sussex in England before enrolling in Princeton as a Ph.D. student in composition under the tuition of Milton Babbitt, James Randall and Benjamin Boretz. Catán composed in a lyrical, romantic style that lends itself particularly well to the human voice. Lush orchestrations reminiscent of Debussy and Strauss, along with Latin American instruments and rhythms, are regularly heard in his music. His opera *Florencia en el Amazonas* has the distinction of being the first opera in Spanish commissioned by a major American company. The success of this opera led to the commission of *Salsipuedes* for Houston Grand Opera. His fourth opera, *Il Postino*, was commissioned by Los Angeles Opera and premiered in Los Angeles, Vienna, and Paris in 2011 featuring Plácido Domingo. At the time of his death in 2011, Catán was at work on his next opera, *Meet John Doe*, with a libretto in English.

Marcela Fuentes-Berain (Libretto)

Having studied with celebrated novelist Gabriel García Márquez, **Marcela Fuentes-Berain** drew upon his work to provide the libretto for *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Her work has also appeared extensively across film, television, radio, and theatre. Her screenplays include Mexican Spanish productions *La Hija del Caníbal*, starring Cecilia Roth, *Hasta Morir*, and *Ciudad de Ciegos*, and Colombian director Víctor Gaviria's *Sumas y Restas*, winner of Best Movie at the Cartagena Film Festival and Best Foreign Film by the Mexican Academy of Film Arts and Sciences. She also collaborated with director Tony Scott on *Man on Fire*, starring Denzel Washington. She has served as a script consultant for the Sundance Institute for more than 20 years, has been a member of the selection committee of Spain's Huelva Ibero-American Film Festival since 2001, and was part of Mexico's Bicentennial Film Committee in 2010. She is a member of the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and was part of Proimágenes Colombia evaluating movie projects. A pioneer and founder of the prestigious Bolivia Lab and an esteemed educator, she has also been a teacher and advisor for many important Latin American films and books.

Elizabeth Caballera (Florencia Grimaldi)

Caballero, seen at opera houses worldwide including frequent starring roles at The Metropolitan Opera, is familiar with the role of Florencia. She has given critically acclaimed performances in *Florencia en el Amazonas* at Madison Opera, Nashville Opera, and New York City Opera where she was hailed as “stunning, singing with beautiful passion” (*New York Classical Review*) and “plush-toned, expressive” (*The New York Times*). Born in Havana, Cuba, Caballero built a reputation as “an intelligently responsive actress” (*Opera News*) after a string of early successes throughout the United States: Donna Elvira in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* at New York City Opera, Cio-Cio San in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* at Lyric Opera Kansas City, Alice Ford in Verdi’s *Falstaff* with Virginia Opera, Donna Anna in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* at Madison Opera, and Susanna in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* in her company debut at Seattle Opera, followed by a triumphant performance as Mimì in Puccini’s *La bohème*. Caballero’s dramatically compelling interpretation of her signature role, Violetta in Verdi’s *La traviata*, led to recent performances of the role in houses around the world including The Metropolitan Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera de Costa Rica, Florentine Opera, Madison Opera, Pacific Symphony, and the Orlando Philharmonic. She was engaged to perform the role of Musetta in *La bohème* for The Metropolitan Opera after capturing attention in the role at New York City Opera where *The New York Times* hailed her as “the evening’s most show-stopping performance offering a thrilling balance of pearly tone, exacting technique and brazen physicality.” She subsequently returned to The Met in its new production of Bizet’s *Carmen* as part of The Metropolitan Opera: Live in HD series and the role of Mimi in the production of Puccini’s *La bohème*. Recent international house debuts include Staatsoper Stuttgart as Mimi in Puccini’s *La bohème*, Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City as Desdemona in Verdi’s *Otello*, and at Teatro de la Zarzuela Madrid singing the title role in the European premiere of Roig’s *Cecilia Valdés* based on the Cuban novel of the same name. She also returned to The Metropolitan Opera for its production of Verdi’s *La traviata*.

Aléxa Anderson (Rosalba)

Soprano Aléxa Anderson’s voice has been described by Joshua Kosman (*San Francisco Chronicle*) as a “magical gift” and “glorious.” Making her OSJ debut in this role, she has soloed with Bay Area companies such as the San Francisco Symphony, Apollo Symphony, Gradus ad Parnassum, the San Francisco Opera Guild, West Edge Opera, Golden Gate Opera, Lamplighters Music Theatre, Pocket Opera, West Bay Opera, Lyric Theatre of San Jose, and Opera Cultura singing the roles of Mimi (*La bohème*), Musetta (*La bohème*), Nedda (*I Pagliacci*), Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Die Königen der Nacht (*Die Zauberflöte*), Mariana (*Das Liebesverbot*), Melisande (*Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*), Phyllis (*Iolanthe*), Princess Ida (*Princess Ida*), Adina (*L’Elisir d’amore*), Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Sara (*La Llorona*), among others. Upcoming engagements include creating the role of Olga Talamante in *¡Chicanísima!* with Quinteto Latino.

Guadalupe Paz (Paula)

Tijuana-born mezzo-soprano **Guadalupe Paz**, a graduate of Conservatorio Arrigo Pedrollo in Vicenza, Italy, is a frequent guest artist at the National Opera Company of Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Paz has performed throughout the world with Centro Nacional de las Artes' Aci, the Mainly Mozart Festival, San Diego Opera, and Aspen Music Festival, among others. On the concert stage, she has performed gala concerts alongside tenor Javier Camarena at Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Oviedo at the Auditorio Príncipe Felipe de Asturias, with the Bellas Artes Orchestra at Bellas Artes Theater in Mexico City, and La Jolla Symphony. Paz is a recipient of diverse accolades including first place in the 2015 inaugural competition of the Rossini Award organized by the Palm Springs Opera Guild of the Desert, and third place in the open vocal category of the same competition in 2016. She has also won first place at the Musical Merit Foundation of Greater San Diego, was a finalist in the Toti dal Monte competition, and won second place at the Mexican singing competition Carlo Morelli.

Efraín Solís (Alvaro)

Baritone **Efraín Solís** has been hailed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his “theatrical charisma and musical bravado,” with a performance that “would be hard to top.” He was last seen at Opera San José as Mercutio in the season opening production of Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet*. A familiar face to local opera audiences, Solís recently appeared in West Edge Opera’s production of *Cruzar*, where the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted, “Solís created yet another in the series of impeccably etched performances that have marked his career in the Bay Area.” A graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship, Solís was seen at Opera San José and again at Florida Grand Opera as Charlie in Jake Heggie’s *Three Decembers* and at Utah Opera as Escamillo in Peter Brooks’ *La tragédie de Carmen*, as well as Figaro in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* with Opera San José and Opera Southwest. Solís has also performed with Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, Opera Carolina, Toledo Opera, Opera Memphis, Livermore Valley Opera, Philharmonia Baroque, Virginia Opera, West Edge Opera, Washington Concert Opera, Century Chamber Orchestra, and Opera Saratoga. He is an alumnus of the prestigious Merola Opera Program.

César Delgado (Arcadio)

Mexican-born tenor **César Delgado** has been praised as a “generous, lustrous tenor” for his “committed, energetic acting” (*Opera News*) and has been steadily building an active career that finds him regularly on U.S., German, and Mexican opera house stages. This season he appeared with Gulfshore Opera, Conjunto Santander Theater, and Odyssey Opera, and last season’s highlights included the title role in the world premiere of Armienta’s *Zorro* with Fort Worth Opera and Opera Southwest, house debuts at Gulfshore Opera and Tulsa Opera, performances with Monterrey Opera and Santander Theater in Mexico, and returns to the Ontario Philharmonic Orchestra in Canada and Mazatlan Opera in Mexico. Operatic highlights from previous seasons include performances at Regensburg Theater in Germany, New Orleans Opera, The Charleston, the title role in the NYC premiere of Catán’s *Il Postino*, a house debut in New York City Opera’s production of Puccini’s *La fanciulla del West*, and a performance with Mazatlan Opera in Mexico conducted by Enrique Patron de Rueda. His international honors and

top awards include Opera PALCCO (Mexico), Gerda Lissner Foundation (NYC), Giulio Gari Foundation (NYC), Sinaloa International Singing Competition (Mexico), Murray Rosenthal Major Award at the Opera Index International Competition (NYC), Opera San Miguel (Mexico). In 2015, he was chosen to participate in Plácido Domingo's 2015 New York Master Class, sponsored jointly by *Opera News* and the Metropolitan Opera Guild. He was also invited to participate in the first International Residency of the Ryan Opera Center by Chicago Lyric Opera.

Ricardo José Rivera (Riolo)

Puerto Rican baritone **Ricardo José Rivera** returns to OSJ, where he made his debut as Figaro in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* earlier this season. He is a 2021 alumnus of the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and has performed with Washington Concert Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera San Antonio, Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Riccardo Muti, CulturArte de Puerto Rico, Houston Grand Opera, Opera de Puerto Rico, and concerts with the Mobile Symphony. He also debuted the role of Miller in Verdi's *Luisa Miller* with Sarasota Opera this spring. For the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Rivera sang Schaunard in Puccini's *La bohème*, Baron Douphol in Verdi's *La traviata*, and Sharpless in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. Recent engagements include Papageno in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at the Aspen Music Festival, Claudio in Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict* and Angel #7 in the American premiere of contemporary opera *Seven Angels* by Luke Bedford, both with the Aspen Music Festival, Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the International Lyric Academy of Rome, and Silvano in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* with Opera in the Heights. In concert, he has performed with the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago, Civic Orchestra at the Chicago Symphony Center, Dominican Republic Symphony Orchestra, and in several concerts with the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra. Also, in his native Puerto Rico, he has performed with the Opera de Puerto Rico, Teatro de la Ópera, Ópera al Fresco, the Zarzuela and Operetta Foundation. In 2016, he portrayed the role of Don Quixote in Manuel de Falla's *Master Peter's Puppet Show* as part of the prestigious Festival Casals. Rivera has been the recipient of several grants, including the Richard F. Gold Career Grant presented by the Shoshana Foundation, first prize and the Audience Prize winner in the Houston Saengerbund Voice Competition, and third prize winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Vartan Gabrielian (Captain)

Opera San José Artist-in-Residence bass-baritone **Vartan Gabrielian's** 2023-24 season marks numerous role and house debuts – including his company debut with Opera San José as Frère Laurent in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*. This season, Gabrielian made 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 as Fasolt (Wagner's *Das Rheingold*) at Edmonton Opera, plus concert performances of Handel's *Messiah* with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. 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*).

Crystal Manich (Director)

Crystal Manich is an Emmy Award-nominated, versatile Latina international creative director and writer whose works for stage and screen have been seen across the United States, Argentina, and Australia. She returns to OSJ where she directed the hit production of Bernstein and Sondheim's *West Side Story* last season. Manich is serving as the librettist for a new opera *Time to Act* composed by Laura Kaminsky and co-commissioned by Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and Intermountain Opera, which will make its world premiere in 2026 and is the artistic director of Cirque du Soleil's *Crystal*. She directed the new musical play *La Llorona* at Theater Latté Da in Minneapolis at the NEXT Festival this past summer.

Manich was nominated for a 2021 Chicago/Midwest Regional Emmy Award for Daniel Catán's Spanish opera *La Hija de Rappaccini* and directed and co-produced a multi-cam production with Chicago Opera Theater and Valhalla Media live from the Field Museum. Her feature film debut of the world premiere opera Borzoni's *The Copper Queen* was produced by Arizona Opera in collaboration with Manley Films where she won Best First Time Female Filmmaker at the 2021 Toronto International Women Film Festival for the film. She has also directed music videos for singer-songwriters Ivywild and Nicole Morton.

Joseph Marcheso (Conductor)

Music Director and Principal Conductor of Opera San José **Joseph Marcheso** was most recently seen conducting OSJ's production of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* this season. He has conducted more than 25 productions for OSJ, including the company premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby Dick*, the West Coast premiere of Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell's *Silent Night*, and the world premiere of Mark Weiser's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, among others. As staff conductor and cover at San Francisco Opera, Marcheso has served on many productions, including the San Francisco premiere of John Adams's *Nixon in China*, the world premiere of Mark Adamo's *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, and Heggie and Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life* (cover). Prior to joining OSJ, Marcheso was on the conducting staff for Washington National Opera's *Manon Lescaut* and served as the music director for the Amato Opera in New York City.

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 operasj.org.

Opera San José performs at the **California Theatre**, 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 20 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.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: **Opera San José** will conclude its 40th anniversary season with the Bay Area premiere of Daniel Catán's captivating opera, ***Florencia en el Amazonas***, marking its debut at the California Theatre as the company's first Spanish language opera performed on its mainstage. In this two-act work, Mexican composer Catán transports audiences to a 20th-century riverboat sailing the Amazon River. There, a famous opera singer is returning home to perform, while hoping to reunite with her lover, a butterfly hunter who has disappeared into the jungle. A story rich in allusion that bridges drama and fantasy, ***Florencia en el Amazonas*** will be performed in Spanish with English and Spanish supertitles. Celebrated Latina international director **Crystal Manich** returns to OSJ where she helmed the company's award-winning production of *West Side Story*.

WHEN: 7:30pm, Saturday, April 20 – opening night
2:00pm, Sunday, April 21
7:30pm, Friday, April 26 – “Classically Curious” night
2:00pm, Sunday, April 28
7:30pm, Friday, May 3
2:00pm, Sunday, May 5

Special community events include:

5:00pm, Friday, March 22 – *Florencia en el Amazonas* at Mexican Heritage Plaza
3:30pm, Sunday, March 24 – Library concert at the Biblioteca Latinoamericana Library
5:30pm, Friday, April 5 – South of First Friday presentation at the California Theatre
3:30pm, Sunday, April 7 – Library concert East San José Carnegie Branch
3:00pm, Thursday, April 25 – Panel discussion at the California Theatre

WHERE: **California Theatre**, 345 South First St., San José, CA

TICKETS: \$55-\$195

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

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<https://cbpr.co/press/florenciaenelamazonas/>