

OPERA SAN JOSÉ UNVEILS 2024-25 RESIDENT COMPANY

*WILL BE FEATURED IN SEASON PRODUCTIONS,
AND DEBUT IN VIRTUAL SHOWCASE STREAMING AUGUST 10*

SAN JOSÉ, CA (17 July 2024) — **Opera San José** General Director/CEO **Shawna Lucey** has revealed the opera company's 2024-25 Artists-in-Residence, a cohort of accomplished opera talents who will be featured in this season's four California Theatre mainstage productions. These selected artists will be introduced in a free live-streamed concert, 4pm, Saturday, August 10, broadcast from Opera San José's Heiman Digital Media Studio. During the season, the Artists-in-Residence will also perform in concerts, recitals, in-conversations, Meet the Artists events, and more. For more information and to RSVP to the free **Artists-in-Residence Showcase**, the public may visit operasj.org/event/resident-artist-showcase.

"This group of artists continues Opera San José's mission as an artistic incubator for established and emerging artists, while producing world-class operatic performances for the Bay Area and beyond," said Lucey. "From sparkling role debuts, to conducting and directing, our artists are given the opportunity to soar, and our audiences receive the joy of seeing brilliant talents at the launch of their careers."

This year's selected artists are **Maria Brea** (soprano), **Melisa Bonetti Luna** (mezzo-soprano), **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** (director), **Johannes Löhner** (conductor), **Jesús Vicente Murillo** (bass-baritone), **Younggwang Park** (bass), **Melissa Sondhi** (soprano), and **WooYoung Yoon** (tenor). More information about each of the artists is below.

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. 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. Each Artist-in-Resident receives a 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 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, 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 will continue its partnership with Wadhvani Foundation, offering the Wadhvani Chair for South Asian Artists. Through this generous support of the Wadhvani Foundation, Opera

San José is committed to focusing on incubating the incredible talent of the South Asian opera community. Soprano **Melissa Sondhi** will continue for her second season as the inaugural Wadhvani Artist-in-Residence. She 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. In last season's 40th anniversary, Sondhi took on role debuts of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Gilda in *Rigoletto*. 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.

All of the Artists-in-Residence will be featured in Opera San José's 41st season, which will include a regional premiere, operatic favorites, and the second Spanish language opera on its mainstage. The 2024-2025 season will feature four productions, presented September 14, 2024 through May 4, 2025 at the majestic California Theatre in downtown San José. The season launches with prodigy composer/conductor **Alma Deutscher** coming back to OSJ to conduct Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (Sept. 14-29, 2024). Next up is Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* reset in post-WWI Paris, (Nov. 16-Dec. 1, 2024) marking the mainstage directorial debut for OSJ Resident Stage Director **Michelle Ainna Cuizon**. In 2025, Opera San José General Director/CEO **Shawna Lucey** will direct Béla Bartók's spine-chilling one-act opera *Bluebeard's Castle* (Feb. 15-Mar. 2, 2025) featuring OSJ Emeritus Artist-in-Residence soprano **Maria Natale** in the role of the unsuspecting new bride Judith. The season will conclude with the Northern California premiere of Héctor Armienta's *Zorro* (Apr. 19-May 4, 2025), a swashbuckling opera full of romance, humor, and suspense directed by Latino stage director **David Radamés Toro**. *Zorro* will be presented in collaboration with Kentucky Opera.

ARTIST BIOS

Maria Brea, soprano

Julliard graduate soprano **Maria Brea** has been making a name for herself across North America and abroad, appearing at Carnegie Hall, The Metropolitan Opera, David H. Koch Theater, and Palais Garnier. Praised for being a "very classy Venezuelan soprano" by *The Arts Desk*, Brea's operatic roles include Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen*, Nedda in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Musetta in Puccini's *La bohème*, the title role in Handel's *Agrippina*, Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Elena in Giménez's *El barbero de Sevilla* (awarded Best Musical Actress by the Hispanic Organization of Latin Actors). She made her Metropolitan Opera debut with the American Ballet production of *Like Water for Chocolate* in June 2023. In 2022, Brea won first place in The Metropolitan Opera's Laffont Competition for the district of Philadelphia and was a finalist in the Paris Opera Competition. She placed in the Vinas competition and a Special "Zarzuela" prize for the best "Zarzuela" singer and was one of only six winners who sang in the orchestra concert at Teatro Liceu de Barcelona. She has performed and collaborated with arts organizations all over the world such as the Hogfish Festival in Maine, Opera Essentia, Arizona Opera, the Phoenix Symphony

Orchestra, Vero Beach Opera, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Operalia, the American Spiritual Ensemble for its New Orleans Opera recital, the Oratorio Society of New York, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, the Amadeus Ensemble, the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, Boston Philharmonic, the Schubert Club, Jasper Quartet, The Barn Opera, the Cecilia Chorus of New York, The Richmond Symphony Orchestra, Resonance Works, Southern Crossings, New Camerata Opera, Teatro Grattacielo, The Queens Symphony Orchestra, the New York Concert Opera, and West Bay Opera. Brea's other accolades include the title Eva and Stern Fellow at SongFest, second prize in the Opera Cultura Vocal Competition, and an Encouragement Award from the Gerda Lissner Song/Lieder Competition, all in 2019.

Melisa Bonetti Luna, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-soprano **Melisa Bonetti Luna** made her company debut with Opera San José last season appearing as Stéphanie in *Romeo and Juliet*. 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. Bonetti recently performed as Lola in Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* with the Helena Symphony. Additional 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 iSing! International Festival.

Michelle Ainna Cuizon, director

Director **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** made her company debut at Opera San José last season serving as the assistant stage director for the company's mainstage productions. She will make her directing debut with Opera San José in this season's *La bohème*. 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*. Last summer, Cuizon assistant directed Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, directed by world-renowned soprano Patricia Racette. Her 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).

Johannes Löhner, conductor

Maestro **Johannes Löhner** is music director of the Kammerorchester Regensburg, and adjunct professor of conducting at the Hochschule für Musik Nürnberg. He returns to OSJ where he conducted performances of all four productions *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Rigoletto*, and *Florença en el Amazonas* last season. Löhner has been mentored by Sir Roger Norrington and Riccardo Muti, speaks six languages, and performs internationally. He has gathered experience with

institutions such as the Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic, Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Stuttgart Radio-Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Hamburg Symphony, Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Nürnberger Symphoniker, and many others. In 2021, Löhner led productions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Alcina* at Chicago Summer Opera and he was named Director of Studio Artists and Assistant Conductor at Sarasota Opera in 2022, working on Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment*, Puccini's *Tosca*, Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*, and Verdi's *Attila*.

Jesús Vicente Murillo, bass-baritone

Hailed by *Opera News* as “utterly loveable, with an expansive sound and easy stage presence,” bass-baritone **Jesús Vicente Murillo**, has been performing across the United States and Canada since making his debut at with Detroit Opera (formerly Michigan Opera Theater) as The Android in Cary John Franklin's *The Very Last Green Thing*. He has performed with the Fargo-Moorhead Opera, Detroit Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Chicago Opera Theatre, Opera America's New Works Forum, and made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Flemish Deputy in *Don Carlo*. He appeared at Opera San José as Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*. From 2017 to 2019, Murillo was the Resident Artist Baritone with Utah Opera in Salt Lake City, where he sang leading roles in more than 400 performances. Other notable Young Artist Programs he has been selected for include Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (2022), Santa Fe Opera (2020), Chautauqua Opera (2014, 2019), Fargo-Moorhead Opera (2016), Opera Saratoga (2015), and The Ohio Light Opera (2013).

Younggwang Park, bass

Bass **Younggwang Park** is from South Korea and is a two-time winner of The Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Georgia district, New York district), as well as a third-place recipient in the Southeast Region of The Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. A 2023 Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Artist, Park has received an Encouragement Award at the Giulio Gari Vocal Competition, secured second place at the Opera at Florham International Vocal Competition, and placed at the Opera Index Vocal Competition. He has performed as Simone in *Gianni Schicchi*, Diarte in *Erismena*, covered the roles of Mercurio in *Atalanta* and Joe in *Later the Same Evening*, and made his Santa Fe Opera debut as Pastore in *Orfeo*.

Melissa Sondhi, soprano

Soprano **Melissa Sondhi** returns to Opera San José as the inaugural Wadhvani Artist-in-Residence. Last season she made two major role debuts: Juliet in the season opener *Romeo and Juliet* and Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Her previous appearances with the company include Barbarina in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and the First Witch in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Other 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 Gilbert and Sullivan'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. She was also a semifinalist in the Orpheus Vocal Competition in 2021.

WooYoung Yoon, tenor

A 2018 Merola artist praised for his “soaring high notes” and a voice that “conveys nobility” by *Opera News*, tenor **WooYoung Yoon**, returns to Opera San José where he appeared last season as Benvolio in Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet* and as the Duke in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. He made his role debut as Edgardo with the New York City Opera (NYCO) in its production of Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and returned for a concert commemorating the heroism of Chiune Sugihara which debuted at Carnegie Hall. Additional highlights include Mozart’s *Requiem* for the Evansville Philharmonic and a return to the NYCO for *All Is Calm*. He made his Carnegie Hall debut as the tenor soloist in Mozart’s *Regina Coeli*, debuted as Almoviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Knoxville Opera and the New York City Opera, performed Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* with the Lubbock Symphony, held title roles in *Les contes d’Hoffmann* with Opera Theater Rutgers and *Le Damnation de Faust* with the Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional de Costa Rica, performed as Rodolfo in *La bohème* with the New Jersey State Opera, and made his role debut as Don José in *Carmen* for the Trentino Music Festival, a role he later reprised for the Martina Arroyo Foundation. At the Manhattan School of Music, he performed the Mozartian roles Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Tito in *La Clemenza di Tito*, and Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Manhattan School of Music. Yoon was heard in the final round of the 2023 Viñas competition in Barcelona. Among his numerous awards, he is a 2022 Opera Index Awards winner, a 2019 Grand Prize winner in the Orpheus Competition, a Metropolitan Opera National Council Eastern Regional Finalist, a finalist in the Harbin competition, a semi-finalist in the Zachary Competition, winner of the Grand Prix Prize at the Talents of the World Voice Competition as well as the Audience Favorite Award, third place winner in the Marcella Sembrich International Voice Competition, and a prize winner in the Altamura/Caruso International Voice Competition.

ABOUT OPERA SAN JOSÉ

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 Theatre is comparable to England’s Glyndebourne and Venice’s historic Teatro La Fenice in the select ranks of the world’s most intimate opera houses.

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