

OPERA SAN JOSÉ PRESENTS
PUCCINI'S TIMELESS TALE OF PASSION
LA BOHÈME

November 16 – December 1, 2024

SAN JOSÉ, CA (4 October 2024) — Snow will fall in San José when one of opera's greatest love stories, Puccini's *La Bohème*, returns to **Opera San José** in a production set in Paris at Christmastime, following the aftermath of the Great War. Opera San José Artist-in-Residence tenor **WooYoung Yoon** stars as the poet Rodolfo, with sopranos **Kearstin Piper Brown** and **Mikayla Sager** alternating as Mimì, in this tantalizing tale of young artists living on the edge. Set in bustling Parisian cafés, raucous parties, and chilly garrets, *La Bohème* follows the pair of doomed lovers and their coterie of artist friends chasing happiness against impossible odds. Audiences will experience this production in the beautifully gilded historic California Theatre, one of the world's most elegant and intimate opera houses. Opera San José Resident Stage Director **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** will make her mainstage directorial debut with Opera San José Music Director **Joseph Marcheso** set to conduct this masterpiece, performed in Italian with English and Spanish supertitles. *La Bohème* will be presented **November 16 – December 1, 2024** (performance dates/times below) at the **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street, San José. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$58–\$215), the public can visit operasj.org or call **408-437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

“With a backdrop of Christmastime in Paris, this production of *La Bohème* will usher audiences into the holidays,” said Opera San José General Director/CEO **Shawna Lucey**. “Puccini's brilliant score and heart-rending arias bring to life one of opera's most exquisite works, making it a great favorite of longtime operagoers and a perfect introduction for those new to this art form.”

Opera San José has assembled a top-flight cast featuring tenor **WooYoung Yoon** as Rodolfo, recently seen as the prince Tamino in OSJ's *The Magic Flute*. Making their company debuts are sopranos **Kearstin Piper Brown** and **Mikayla Sager**, alternating as Mimì. Baritone **Kidon Choi**, who made a vivid impression as Baron Scarpia in OSJ's *Tosca* returns as Marcello. Inaugural Wadhvani Chair soprano **Melissa Sondhi** will play Musetta, and bass-baritone OSJ Artist-in-Residence **Jesús Vicente Murillo** will play Schaunard. Three Opera San José fan favorites, bass **Younggwang Park**, bass-baritone **Philip Skinner**, and tenor **Eric Mellum**, featured as Sarastro, Speaker, and First Priest in *The Magic Flute*, return in this production as Colline, Benoît/Alcindoro, and Parpignol.

The chorus ensemble is comprised of **Leonardo Capistrano, Carter Dougherty, Danielle Imai, Julia Johnson, Brennah Kemmerly, Michael Kim, Ilhee Lee, Kyounghee Lee, Michael Jesse Kuo, Pravesh Mehra, Fallon Nunes, Alexandra Olsson-Anderson, Nathan Savant, and Jessica Williams.**

The creative team for ***La Bohème*** is Opera San José Music Director **Joseph Marcheso** (Conductor), Opera San José Resident Stage Director **Michelle Ainna Cuizon** (Director), **Kim A. Tolman** (Scenic Designer), **Eric Watkins** (Lighting Designer), **Alina Bokovikova** (Costume Designer), **Y. Sharon Peng** (Hair and Makeup Designer), and **Johannes Löhner** (Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master).

“Classically Curious” night for ***La Bohème*** will be held Friday, November 22, bringing together people who have a passion for deepening their involvement with opera. This Silicon Valley 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 connect emerging opera lovers. More information can be found at go.operasj.org/ClassicallyCurious.

Written by Giacomo Puccini, with a libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, and based on Henri Murger’s episodic novel “Scènes de la vie de bohème” (“Scenes of Bohemian Life”), ***La Bohème*** premiered at Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy, in 1896. ***La Bohème*** features three back-to-back showstoppers in Act I alone—Rodolfo’s famous aria “Che gelida manina,” followed by Mimì’s “Mi chiamano Mimì,” and their duet “O soave fanciulla.” Puccini’s own life as a student in Milan influenced many aspects of ***La Bohème***; some personal experiences, like pawning his coat to take out a young dancer, directly inspired moments in the libretto. The 1996 musical ***RENT*** is based on ***La Bohème*** with most of the characters and plot elements drawn from the opera.

Artist Bios:

WooYoung Yoon (Rodolfo)

Opera San José Artist-in-Residence tenor **WooYoung Yoon** has been praised by *Opera News* for his “soaring high notes” and a voice that “conveys nobility.” Recent roles include Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, the Duke in *Rigoletto* and Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet* for Opera San José, Mozart’s *Requiem* for the Evansville Philharmonic, and the title role in *La Damnation de Faust* with Maestro Nelson and the Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional de Costa Rica. For the New York City Opera, he made his role debut as Edgardo in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, premiered a concert commemorating the heroism of Chiune Sugihara which debuted at Carnegie Hall, and was featured in its production of Peter Rothstein’s *All Is Calm*. Yoon also returned to Carnegie Hall this past spring as a soloist in Hagenberg’s *Illuminare* and in Ramírez’s *Misa Criolla*.

Kearstin Piper Brown (Mimi)

Praised for her “thrilling singing” by *Opera Now* and recognized as “a rising talent to watch” by *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, sought-after lyric soprano **Kearstin Piper Brown** has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Atlanta Opera, Indianapolis Opera, New Orleans Opera, Lincoln Center Theater, and Opera Parallèle. On the concert stage, Brown has performed with the National Philharmonic Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Dallas, Atlanta, and Oregon Symphonies. In 2022, she made her debut at Carnegie Hall with the Cecilia Chorus of New York. Brown has also performed the world premiere of *Two Corners* with Finger Lakes Opera and the world premiere of *The Walkers* by Daniel Bernard Roumain with Lyric Opera of Chicago. Additionally, in 2022, she resumed performances in the lead role of Esther in Ricky Ian Gordon’s opera *Intimate Apparel*, for which she won several awards, including the World Theater Award for Outstanding Debut Performance in an Off-Broadway Production.

Mikayla Sager (Mimi)

The *San Francisco Chronicle* hailed Canadian soprano **Mikayla Sager** as “an extraordinarily gifted young soprano,” praising her rendition of Desdemona’s arias for their “intensity and hushed majesty.” *Opera Canada* similarly noted that Sager “demands attention” and described her rich soprano as “arresting.” She has performed many roles with San Francisco Opera, including Inez in *Il Trovatore*, Giannetta in *L’Elisir d’Amore*, and covered Eliza in *Omar*. As an Adler Fellow, Sager was featured in San Francisco Opera’s centennial season as the Guardian of the Temple in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Image No. 1 in Gabriela Lena Frank’s *El Último Sueno de Frida y Diego*, Sister Felicité in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and covered both Violetta in *La Traviata* and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. As the 2022 Maria Manetti-Shrem Prize winner, she appeared as Giannetta in *L’elisir d’Amore*. She has also appeared as Violetta in *La Traviata*, Fiordiligi in *Così Fan Tutte*, Vitellia in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Micaela in *Carmen*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, and The Fox in *The Cunning Little Vixen*. She has performed additional concerts with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, including the “Future is Now” concert and “Eun Sun Kim Conducts Verdi.” Other concert highlights include an appearance at Carnegie Hall and a performance at David Geffen Hall with the New York Philharmonic.

Kidon Choi (Marcello)

Baritone **Kidon Choi** has appeared at Opera San José as Baron Scarpia in the 2023 Spring production of *Tosca*. He is a recent graduate of the prestigious Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera. While in the program, he was seen as José Castro in *La Fanciulla del West*, Herald in *Otello*, and Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*. His future engagements include a debut with Arizona Opera as Amonasro in *Aida*. Additionally, he will join Los Angeles Opera to cover the title role in *Rigoletto*. Choi has performed with San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Wolf Trap Opera, San Diego Opera, Opera San José, Chautauqua Opera, Bay Street Theatre, North Carolina Opera, Opera Idaho, and The Korea

National Opera. On the concert stage, he has appeared with the KBS Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Melissa Sondhi (Musetta)

Praised for her “charm” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, her “shimmering, agile soprano” and “remarkable dynamic range” by *Operaville*, her “warm and evocative” voice by *Cordell Reports*, and her “effortless performance” by *Opera Tattler*, Indian American soprano **Melissa Sondhi** is the inaugural Opera San José Wadhvani Artist-in-Residence. In the 2023-24 season, she debuted as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and covered the role of Rosalba in *Florencia en el Amazonas* at Opera San José. She also performed as Musetta in Pocket Opera and Cinnabar Theater’s collaborative production of *La Bohème*. Other roles include Adele in *Die Fledermaus*, Barbarina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Giannetta in *L’elisir D’amore*, and Le feu in *L’enfant et Les Sortilèges*. 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 2017.

Jesús Vicente Murillo (Schaunard)

Hailed by *Opera News* as “utterly loveable, with an expansive sound and easy stage presence,” Opera San José Artist-in-Residence bass-baritone **Jesús Vicente Murillo** has performed across the United States and Canada since making his debut 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 Theater, and Opera America’s New Works Forum, and made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Flemish Deputy in *Don Carlo*. He appeared as Antonio in Opera San José’s *The Marriage of Figaro*. Murillo was the Resident Artist baritone with Utah Opera, 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, Santa Fe Opera, Chautauqua Opera, Fargo-Moorhead Opera, Opera Saratoga, and The Ohio Light Opera.

Younggwang Park (Colline)

Opera San José Artist-in-Residence **Younggwang Park** is a bass from South Korea who recently appeared in Opera San José’s *The Magic Flute* as the high priest Sarastro. In 2022, he won the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Georgia District). The following year, he achieved third place in the Southeast Region of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, received an Encouragement Award at the Giulio Gari Vocal Competition, and secured second place at the Opera at Florham International Vocal Competition. In 2023, he won the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (New York District) and the Opera Index Vocal Competition. He performed as Pastore in *Orfeo* at Santa Fe Opera, where he was an apprentice artist in the summer of 2023.

Philip Skinner (Benoît/Alcindoro)

Lauded for his “mellifluous bass-baritone” by *Opera News*, **Philip Skinner** has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Seattle Opera, Dallas Opera, New York City Opera, La Monnaie, Teatro di San

Carlo, Opéra de Nantes, and Victoria State Opera, as well as prominent orchestras such as the Israel Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. Among his many roles, Skinner has sung Zaccaria in *Nabucco*, King Marke in *Tristan und Isolde* in concert (Claude Heater Foundation in San Francisco), Olin Blicht in *Susannah* (Festival Opera), Nikititsch in *Boris Godunov* (San Francisco Symphony), Scarpia in *Tosca* (Sacramento Opera), Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande* (West Edge Opera), The Speaker in *The Magic Flute* (Seattle Opera), Eric/Ghost of Bazzetti in *Great Scott* (San Diego Opera), Capulet in *Roméo et Juliette* (Madison Opera), Wotan/Gunther in the *Mini-Ring* (Minnesota Concert Opera), Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* (Opera Parallèle), Iago in *Otello* (Livermore Valley Opera), Dr. Schön/Jack the Ripper in *Lulu* and the Forester in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (West Edge Opera), the title role in *The Flying Dutchman* (Livermore Valley Opera), the King in *Aida* (Pacific Symphony), and Casaubon in *Middlemarch in Spring* (Charlottesville Opera).

Eric Mellum (Parpignol)

Tenor **Eric Mellum** made his role debut with Opera San José as First Priest in *The Magic Flute*. He moved to the Bay Area after more than 20 seasons with Minnesota Opera, where he was featured in the world premieres of *Silent Night* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the North American premiere of *The Handmaid's Tale*. He has performed with various arts organizations, including The Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company, Out of the Box Opera, Minnesota Orchestra, Colorado Opera Festival, Mill City Summer Opera, Skylark Opera, Pocket Opera, Lamplighters Music Theatre, Lyric Theatre, and Coastal Repertory Theatre.

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: Snow will fall in San José when one of opera's greatest love stories, Puccini's *La Bohème*, returns to **Opera San José** in a production set in Paris at Christmastime, following the aftermath of the Great War. Opera San José Artist-in-Residence tenor **WooYoung Yoon** stars as the poet Rodolfo, with sopranos **Kearstin Piper**

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WHEN: **November 16 – December 1, 2024**
7:30pm, Saturday, Nov. 16 – opening night
2:00pm, Sunday, Nov. 17
7:30pm, Friday, Nov. 22 – “Classically Curious” night
2:00pm, Sunday, Nov. 24
2:00pm, Saturday, Nov. 30
2:00pm, Sunday, Dec. 1

WHERE: **California Theatre, 345 S 1st St, San José**

TICKETS: **\$58–\$215**

INFO: For more information, the public can visit operasj.org or call **408-437-4450** (open Tuesday through Friday, 10:00am–4:00pm).

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MEDIA: Contact Courtney Heimbeck, CBCO Public Relations & Marketing
650-308-4390 | courtney@cb-pr.com

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos will be available here:
cbpr.co/press/osj_laboheme