

OPERA SAN JOSÉ PRESENTS
ARMIENTA'S SWASHBUCKLING TALE
OF HONOR AND PASSION

ZORRO

April 19 – May 4, 2025

SAN JOSÉ, CA (19 February 2025) — **Opera San José** will conclude its 41st season with the Northern California premiere of Héctor Armienta's *Zorro*. Latino stage director **David Radamés Toro** will make his OSJ debut staging the production, while Argentinian conductor **Jorge Parodi**, who last conducted *Rigoletto* for OSJ, will return to the podium. Inspired by California's own heroic masked protector of the poor and disenfranchised created by Johnston McCulley, this swashbuckling opera is filled with ravishing romance and sword-fighting suspense. Set in the early 1800s in El Pueblo de Los Ángeles, still a colony of Spain, *Zorro* follows the adventures of Diego de la Vega, a Spanish nobleman who hides his identity to become a mysterious masked hero, the dashing defender of the less fortunate. With a lush score influenced by mariachi, flamenco, and corrido music, the caped crusader comes to operatic life, battling tyranny and corruption, juggling romantic interests of the beguiling daughter of the Governor, Carlota de Obragón, and the brave and kind Ana Maria Soza, and taking on his nemesis, the oppressive General Moncada. *Zorro* will be performed in English and Spanish with English and Spanish supertitles, **April 19 – May 4, 2025** (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, 11:00am - 5:30pm).

"I can't wait to bring *Zorro* to our audiences," said **Opera San José General Director/CEO Shawna Lucey**. "This mesmerizing opera blends stunning orchestration with high drama, delivering an enthralling experience for both regular opera-lovers and newcomers to the form. From the fierce brass fanfares to the rich strings and sonorous woodwinds, the score pulses with adventure, romance, and suspense. With thrillingly challenging vocals and nonstop momentum, *Zorro* takes us on a heart-pounding ride." Lucey adds, "This is the second Spanish-language opera to be presented on our mainstage, following last season's production of *Florencia en el Amazonas*. So many in our community speak Spanish in the home, and we have been delighted to welcome new audiences who are excited to hear works they can instantly follow." She also notes that as many California schools study the history of the state, its missions, and early settlements, "This production will provide an outstanding – and wildly dramatic – look at the political dynamics of that era, making it a great introduction for younger audiences."

This action-packed production features tenor **Xavier Prado** as Diego de la Vega/Zorro and soprano **Maria Brea**, an OSJ Artist-in-Residence, as Ana Maria Soza. Baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu**, OSJ Emeritus Artist-in-Residence and critically acclaimed for his portrayal of the title role in last season's *Rigoletto*, takes on the role of the villainous Octavio Rivera y Moncada. Mezzo-soprano **Melisa Bonetti Luna**, continuing her tenure as an OSJ Artist-in-Residence, portrays Carlota de Obragón, while soprano **Arianna Rodriguez** plays Luisa. Mezzo-soprano **Deborah Martínez Rosengaus** portrays Toypurina, and Opera San José Artist-in-Residence bass-baritone **Jesús Vicente Murillo** stars as Sergeant Jose Maria Gomez. The chorus ensemble is comprised of **Caleb Alexander, Lauren Biglow, Rebecca Bradley, Leonardo Capistrano, Charles Calotta, Carter Dougherty, Ru Huang, Danielle Imai, Brennah Kemmerly, Michael Jesse Kuo, Nina Mutalifu, Fallon Nunes, Jessica Gonzalez-Rodriguez, Brendan Graham Stone, Steve Valenzuela, and Nicolas Vasquez-Gerst.**

The creative team for *Zorro* includes **David Radamés Toro** (Director), **Jorge Parodi** (Conductor), **Liliana Duque Piñeiro** (Scenic Designer), **Tlaloc Lopez-Watermann** (Lighting Designer), **Ulises Alcalá** (Costume Designer), **Christina Martin** (Hair and Makeup Designer), **Michelle Cuizon** (Assistant Director), **Rodrigo Gonzalez-Jacob** (Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master), **Dave Maier** (Fight Choreographer).

“Classically Curious” night for *Zorro* will be held Friday, April 25, 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.

Héctor Armienta's opera *Zorro* made its world premiere on September 25, 2010, at the San Francisco Opera. Set in the early 1800s in El Pueblo de Los Ángeles, during a time of political upheaval in Spain and Mexico, the story follows Diego de la Vega, a young Spanish nobleman and trained swordsman, who returns from Spain to his birthplace in Alta, California. Upon his return, he finds the local populace oppressed by tyrannical rulers. To combat this injustice, Diego adopts the masked identity of Zorro, becoming a defender of the poor and enslaved. Throughout his journey, he encounters old flames, confronts corrupt officials, and leads a rebellion against the Spanish Empire, igniting a revolution and becoming a hero to the people.

Artist Bios:

Xavier Prado (Diego de la Vega/Zorro)

Described by *Opera News* as possessing "truly stunning acting and vocals, an epic voice, endearing stage presence," **Xavier Prado** is a Chilean-born tenor celebrated for his exceptional voice and dynamic stage presence. He has earned numerous accolades, including being a finalist and grant recipient at the 2023 Loren L. Zachary Vocal Competition and a finalist at the 2023 Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition. In 2024, he secured first prize at the Concorso Internazionale Piero Cappuccilli. Prado's operatic repertoire is diverse, encompassing roles such

as Don Quixote in *Dulcinea XL* by Juan Colomer, Ruodi in *Guillaume Tell*, and the title role in *Zorro* by Héctor Armienta. He has also portrayed Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. In addition to his operatic engagements, Prado has performed as a soloist with various orchestras and ensembles, including the California Philharmonic, Golden State Pops Orchestra, and the Rouse Philharmonic in Bulgaria.

Maria Brea (Ana Maria Soza)

Currently an Opera San José Artist-in-Residence, Venezuelan soprano **Maria Brea**, praised by *Opera Wire* for her “virtuosity” and “luxurious polish,” has garnered international recognition, including as a finalist in the 2022 Paris Opera Competition and a competitor in the 2021 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. She has won awards at the Tenor Viñas Contest and performed with Teatro Liceu de Barcelona. In 2023, she debuted with the American Ballet Theatre in *Like Water for Chocolate* and returned for *Depuis le Jour* at the David H. Koch Theater. Her 2023-24 season included debuts with the Phoenix Symphony, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Arizona Opera, and Vero Beach Opera, alongside performances with major orchestras in works by Handel, Beethoven, Mahler, and Haydn.

Eugene Brancoveanu (Octavio Rivera y Moncada)

A Romanian-born baritone renowned for his dynamic stage presence and versatile performances across opera, musical theatre, and concert stages, **Eugene Brancoveanu** gained significant acclaim for his portrayal of Marcello in Baz Luhrmann's Broadway production of Puccini's *La Bohème*, recognized with a Tony Honors Award for Principal Ensemble. Brancoveanu's extensive operatic repertoire includes leading roles such as the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Escamillo in Bizet's *Carmen*. He has performed with prestigious companies including San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, New York City Opera, and the Israeli Opera. In the 2019-20 season, Brancoveanu joined Opera San José as a Resident Artist, portraying Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, The Father in *Hansel and Gretel*, and Count di Luna in *Il trovatore*. He continued his residency in the following two seasons, performing as The Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Escamillo in *Carmen*, and Ford in *Falstaff*. In 2024, he returned to perform the title role in Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Beyond his singing career, Brancoveanu has ventured into stage direction, making his debut with *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at West Bay Opera. He has since directed productions such as *La Bohème*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Barber of Seville* for the Mendocino Music Festival, as well as *Carmen* and *La Bohème* for Livermore Valley Opera. Brancoveanu has performed with esteemed orchestras, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he portrayed the title role in Shostakovich's *Orango* under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen. He has also been a soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana* with various orchestras and has an active recital career.

Melisa Bonetti Luna (Carlota de Obragón)

Dominican American mezzo-soprano **Melisa Bonetti Luna**, an Opera San José Artist-in-Residence, is celebrated for her versatility in both traditional and contemporary opera. *Opera Today* lauds her "warm, supple mezzo that struck all the right impressions" and her ability to "easily soar heavenward with a well-schooled top." Bonetti Luna made her debut with Opera San José in the 2022–23 season, performing the role of Stéphano in *Romeo and Juliet*. Since

then, she has continued to collaborate with the company, notably portraying Maddalena in Verdi's *Rigoletto* and as Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*. Her other engagements include Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* with Virginia Opera, and Tyler in the world premiere and Grammy-nominated recording of *Three Way* by Robert Paterson and David Cote, performed with Nashville Opera and American Opera Projects at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. She also portrayed Federico García Lorca in *Ainadamar* with the Lexington Philharmonic and Kentucky Opera, as well as Mother in the premiere of *Paraíso* by Sokio and Natasha Tiniacos at National Sawdust. She also starred as Carmen in a reimaged adaptation, *CarmXn*, at the Hogfish Festival, which featured a new Spanish libretto and tango arrangements. In concert, Bonetti Luna was a featured soloist at Carnegie Hall for Bach's *Magnificat* and *Christmas Oratorio* with The Cecilia Chorus of New York. She also performed at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and the Kimmel Center with the Philadelphia Orchestra in a concert of Ancient Tang Poems. Dedicated to contemporary works, she premiered *The Climate Opera Project* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music with American Opera Projects and took on the lead role in the premiere of *Five Ways to Die* with Experiments in Opera.

Arianna Rodriguez (Luisa)

Guayanese and Puerto Rican soprano **Arianna Rodriguez** is known for her poised and playful performances. Praised as "crystalline" by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and described by *Eagle Times* as "a delight... a brilliant soprano delivering her wit with flair," Rodriguez is currently a second-year Adler Fellow with San Francisco Opera and participated in the Merola Opera Program in 2022. She has performed the role of Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte*, Gianetta in *L'elisir d'Amore*, made her mainstage debut in Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and portrayed Musetta in the company's production of *Bohème out of the Box*, a San Francisco Opera exclusive featuring free, live performances of an abridged version of *La Bohème*. Rodriguez has also covered leading roles at San Francisco Opera, including Chrisann Brennan in *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* and Julie in *Omar* by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels. She performed excerpts as the title role in Amadeo Vives' *Doña Francisquita* at the Merola Opera Program's Schwabacher Summer Concert and participated in Merola's song recital, *A Celebration of American Song*, curated by pianist Craig Terry. Other performances include *Ask Your Mama*, a multimedia work based on poetry by Langston Hughes and originally composed by Laura Karpman for Jessye Norman, and a staged production of Bernstein's *Mass*, conducted by Marin Alsop. Additional roles include Lauretta in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Krysia in Jake Heggie's *Two Remain*. Rodriguez was a District Winner and Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, a finalist in the Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition, and received Encouragement Awards from the Vero Beach Opera Rising Star Vocal Competition and the Gerda Lissner Foundation International Vocal Competition.

Deborah Martínez Rosengaus (Toypurina)

Celebrated for her dynamic performances and rich, flexible voice, **Deborah Rosengaus** is a versatile mezzo-soprano with extensive training in opera, theatre, music, and dance. Rosengaus has performed internationally in prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Beijing Center for the Performing Arts, and Suntory Hall in Tokyo. She has collaborated with esteemed ensembles, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Walt Disney Hall and the

People's Liberation Army Orchestra in Beijing. She premiered the role of Principessa Louling in Bruno Riggacci's one-act opera *Dodici personaggi in cerca di voce*. She has received critical acclaim for her portrayal of Jo in Mark Adamo's *Little Women* and was nominated for a Theatre Bay Area Award for her role as Ruth in *Pirates of Penzance*.

Jesús Vicente Murillo (Sergeant Jose Maria Gomez)

Opera San José Artist-in-Residence bass-baritone **Jesús Vicente Murillo** has captivated audiences across North America with his dynamic performances in opera, musical theater, concerts, and art song. Praised by *Opera News* as “utterly lovable, with an expansive sound and easy stage presence,” Murillo has performed extensively throughout 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*. Murillo completed a two-year residency with Utah Opera in 2019, performing in productions such as *Roméo et Juliette*, *The Little Prince*, *The Magic Flute*, *Candide*, *Moby Dick*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *The Elixir of Love*, and *The Messiah*. He also participated in prestigious Young Artist Programs, including Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Santa Fe Opera, Chautauqua Opera, Fargo-Moorhead Opera, Opera Saratoga, and The Ohio Light Opera. In the 2022-23 season, he made his Metropolitan Opera debut as a Flemish Deputy in *Don Carlo* and performed Antonio in Opera San José’s *The Marriage of Figaro*. The 2023-24 season saw Murillo debut at Portland Opera in the title role of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, earning praise for his energetic and stylish portrayal. He also appeared as the Commentator in *Scalia/Ginsburg* with both Anchorage Opera and Opera Ithaca and as Papageno in *The Magic Flute* with Nashville Opera. In the 2024-25 season, he performed Il Principe di Bouillon in *Adriana Lecouvreur* with Pittsburgh Opera and returned to Opera San José to sing Schaunard in *La Bohème*.

David Radamés Toro (Director)

Distinguished Latino American opera director, mime, and pedagogue, **David Radamés Toro** is renowned for his innovative productions that blend his musical and physical theatre backgrounds. He has directed a diverse range of operas, with a particular focus on Baroque and 20th/21st-century works. His directing career includes engagements with esteemed companies such as Minnesota Opera, the Wexford Opera Festival, Washington National Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Central City Opera, Opera Saratoga, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, and Opera Neo. Beyond his directing work, Toro is dedicated to education, offering classes and workshops in acting for the opera stage and physical theatre. He coaches singers in interpretation and audition preparation, with his workshops in Gestural Mechanics influenced by his training in Meisner technique, Suzuki/Viewpoints, and classical mime. He has taught movement and acting to singers at Minnesota Opera, Opera Neo, Tri-Cities Opera, The University of Texas – Austin, Arizona State University, and Opera Steamboat. In 2023, David joined the faculty at Arizona State University's School of Music, Dance and Theatre as a professor in the Music Theatre and Opera program.

Jorge Parodi (Conductor)

Maestro **Jorge Parodi**, praised by *New York Daily News* for having “the most expressive conducting hands since Stokowski,” has an extensive international career across North America,

Latin America, and Asia. Parodi returns to Opera San José after conducting last season's production of *Rigoletto*. He has conducted other major companies such as Opera Tampa, New York City Opera, The Atlanta Opera, Opera Hispánica, and Buenos Aires Lírica, among others, and led world premieres of works by Anton Coppola, Michael Ching, and John Musto. Parodi is the Artistic Director of the Sherrill Milnes VOICE Programs and Gulfshore Opera, Music Director of Opera in Williamsburg, and a long-time faculty member at The Juilliard School. He also serves as Music Director of the International Summer Opera Festival of Morelia and is the founder of the Tokyo International Vocal Arts Academy Summer Workshop.

Héctor Armienta (Composer)

Nationally recognized composer and librettist Héctor Armienta is renowned for exploring Mexican and Mexican American cultural experiences through opera and music theater. Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, he is one of the few Chicano opera composers whose works have been performed both nationally and internationally. Armienta's compositions blend classical techniques with traditional Mexican musical forms, including Mariachi, Aztec music, and corridos, to create a distinctive and emotive sound. His notable works include *Bless Me*, *Ultima*, *Zorro*, *La Llorona*, *Mi Camino*, and *Coyotes and Rabbits*. His work has received support from prestigious organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, and the MAP Fund. In 2022, he was awarded a CCSRE Arts Mellon Fellowship at Stanford University. Beyond his compositions, Armienta is the founder and artistic director of Ópera Cultura, the only Latinx opera company in the United States dedicated to exploring music theater and opera through a cross-cultural lens. He also serves on the board of Opera America, contributing to the advancement of opera in the United States.

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 41st season with the Northern California premiere of Héctor Armienta’s **Zorro**. Latino stage director **David Radamés Toro** will make his OSJ debut staging the production, while Argentinian conductor **Jorge Parodi**, who last conducted *Rigoletto* for OSJ, will return to the podium. Inspired by California’s own heroic masked protector of the poor and disenfranchised created by Johnston McCulley, this swashbuckling opera is filled with ravishing romance and sword-fighting suspense. Set in the early 1800s in El Pueblo de Los Ángeles, still a colony of Spain, **Zorro** follows the adventures of Diego de la Vega, a Spanish nobleman who hides his identity to become a mysterious masked hero, the dashing defender of the less fortunate. With a lush score influenced by mariachi, flamenco, and corrido music, the caped crusader comes to operatic life, battling tyranny and corruption, juggling romantic interests of the beguiling daughter of the Governor, Carlota de Obragón, and the brave and kind Ana Maria Soza, and taking on his nemesis, the oppressive General Moncada.

WHEN: **April 19 – May 4, 2025**
7:30pm, Saturday, Apr. 19 – opening night
2:00pm, Sunday, Apr. 20
7:30pm, Friday, Apr. 25 – “Classically Curious” night
2:00pm, Sunday, Apr. 27
7:30pm, Friday, May 2
2:00pm, Sunday, May 4

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 Monday through Friday, 11:00am–5:30pm).

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MEDIA: Contact Paige D'Encarnacao, CBCO Public Relations & Marketing
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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos will be available here: cbpr.co/press/zorro