



**FESTIVAL OPERA**  
2008 season to  
present  
*Il Trovatore* and *A*  
*Midsummer*  
*Night's Dream*

Recent Adler Fellow  
Noah Stewart  
to return to the Bay  
Area for role of Manrico

Festival Opera announced today that its 2008 season will feature all-new productions of two classics, Giuseppe Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, opening July 12, and Benjamin Britten's musical adaptation of

William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, opening August 11, at the Leshar Arts Center in Walnut Creek.

Verdi's stirring masterpiece of obsession, madness and retribution will feature tenor **Noah Stewart**, a recent Adler Fellow who now lives in New York, as Manrico. Joining him will be soprano **Hope Briggs** as Leonora; baritone **Scott Bearden** as Count di Luna; dramatic mezzo **Patrice Houston** as Azucena; bass **Kirk Eichelberger** as Ferrando; and mezzo **Jessica Mariko Deardorff** as Inez. The production will be directed by **Giulio Cesare Perrone** and conducted by **Michael Morgan**.

The Festival Opera production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be directed by **Morgan** in collaboration with choreographer **Mark Foehringer**. Morgan's planned interpretation of Britten's brilliant adaptation of Shakespeare's romantic comedy will include a rare opportunity for audiences to hear a

countertenor and a large chorus of young local vocalists staged to make the forest come alive. Morgan first conducted Britten's score in the late 1990s at Oberlin College, his alma mater.

## About the Performers / Artistic Talent

A graduate of the Juilliard School, Noah Stewart began dazzling Bay Area audiences as a 2006 Merola Opera Program participant, when he made his San Francisco Opera debut as the Wizard in Conrad Susa's *Transformations*. The *Chronicle's* Joshua Kosman noted at the time: "...for sheer musical and dramatic magnetism, the evening's star was tenor Noah Stewart." Kosman went on to call his performance as African American journalist T. Morris Chester in the San Francisco Opera's world premiere of *Appomattox* by composer Philip Glass "a brilliant star turn." During Stewart's final performance with San Francisco Opera in the role of Malcolm in Verdi's *Macbeth*, he appeared in the principal role of Macduff when the tenor fell ill.

Festival Opera's *Il Trovatore* marks the fifth time Hope Briggs and Festival Opera's Music and Artistic Director Michael Morgan have worked together. After casting her in a small part in Festival Opera's 2004 production of *Aida*, Morgan specifically chose *Un Ballo in Maschera* for Festival Opera's 2005 program to showcase her talent, and has twice invited her to solo with the Oakland East Bay Symphony – including last November to perform arias from a variety of operas by Wagner, Puccini and Verdi. Of the latter, Joshua Kosman wrote, "She holds the stage like a true diva."

Scott Bearden – who previously performed as Renato in Festival Opera's 2005 production of *Un Ballo in Maschera* – won first-place in Opera New York's second annual Chester Ludgin Memorial American Verdi Baritone Competition last November. The competition of 60 contenders was judged by a panel that included Placido Domingo and Mignon Dunn. A former resident performer with San Jose Opera, he returned to their stage in the title role of *Rigoletto* last season.

In 2006, Patrice Houston won the Washington Summer Opera Guild Award for her portrayal of Azucena in their production of *Il Trovatore*. Last summer, she sang the role of Mrs. Gibbs in Festival Opera's West Coast premiere of *Our Town*. Among her many Bay Area appearances, Houston was one of four vocal soloists featured in January in the Oakland East Bay Symphony's presentation of Verdi's *Requiem* under Music Director Michael Morgan. *Contra Costa Times* critic Georgia Rowe called the evening a "brilliant performance" of the intensely dramatic work – adding that Houston made "large, lustrous contributions throughout the evening."

Kirk Eichelberger will make his Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Gambler* on March 27. The 1999 national finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions is also covering roles in three other Met productions this spring. Festival Opera ticket holders will remember Eichelberger as Dr. Gibbs in the company's West Coast premiere of *Our Town* last season, as Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* in 2004 and in the role of Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, directed by Michael Morgan, in 2006.

Jessica Mariko Deardorff's most recent performance for Festival Opera was last season in the role of Mercédès in *Carmen*. Since receiving her masters degree in vocal performance from the University of Arizona,

the regional finalist in both the Metropolitan Opera National Council and San Francisco Opera Merola auditions has performed around the Bay Area while serving as a master voice teacher for the San Francisco Girls Chorus.

Stage director and production designer Giulio Cesare Perrone was the recipient of a 2000 Pew National Artists Residency grant with Dell'Arte International for his adaptation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Perrone has since been awarded a 2002 Pew-Theatre Communications Group grant for his adaptation of *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova*. The 1988 graduate of the Accademia di Belle Arti "Brera" in Milan designed 28 productions for Italy's most important festivals, resident and touring companies, as well as directed plays, before moving to the U.S. in 1995. His first American production as a designer – Goldoni's *The Liar* staged by the Laguna Playhouse – received a Drama-Logue Award. Perrone has since been responsible for the sets on more than 70 theatre and opera productions for such companies as Festival Opera, Opera San Jose, and the San Jose Repertory Theatre.

Michael Morgan made his debut as an operatic stage director with Festival Opera's 2006 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Among other critical praise, *Contra Costa Times* classical critic Georgia Rowe wrote: "[Morgan's] decision to set the opera in a nightclub proves surprisingly effective in terms of clarifying the action. It also serves to unify the opera's often hard-to-reconcile comic and dramatic elements.... The strength of this 'Don Giovanni' is the way it delineates the plight of each character with absolute clarity. And the vocal performances ranged from assured to stunningly beautiful." Currently in his 18th year as Music Director of Oakland East Bay Symphony, Morgan has served as Music Director of Festival Opera since 1996 and Artistic Director since 2001. He also serves as Artistic Director of the Oakland Youth Orchestra and Music Director of the Sacramento Philharmonic. His operatic debut as a conductor came in 1982 at the Vienna State Opera with Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Mark Foehringer is the artistic director of the contemporary ballet company Mark Foehringer Dance Project/SF. His extensive body of work includes previous collaborations with West Bay Opera and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Among other honors, he received the Fulbright Award last year to hold a four month residency with Ballet Nacional del Peru and National Ballet School in Lima, Peru.

## About Festival Opera

Festival Opera under Executive Director Helen Seaff and Artistic Director Michael Morgan has emerged as the third-largest opera company in the San Francisco Bay Area and one of the top three professional arts companies based in Walnut Creek. Founded in 1991, the non-profit organization has become a showcase for providing young, emerging artists – many of them San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows and Merola Opera Program participants – with principal roles in professional productions. Festival Opera's season consists of two full productions presented each July and August. The company also provides a free annual community outdoor concert, complimentary lectures on opera throughout the community and before each performance, and internship opportunities for college and high school students. For more information, visit [www.FestivalOpera.org](http://www.FestivalOpera.org).

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## FESTIVAL OPERA – 2008 SEASON DETAILS

### **IL TROVATORE by Giuseppe Verdi**

DATES: **July 12, 15 and 18 at 8 pm; July 20 at 2 pm**

CAST: Tenor **Noah Stewart** (Manrico), soprano **Hope Briggs** (Leonora), baritone **Scott Bearden** (Count di Luna), dramatic mezzo **Patrice Houston** (Azucena), bass **Kirk Eichelberger** (Ferrando), mezzo **Jessica Mariko Deardorff** (Inez)

STAGE DIRECTION / SET DESIGN: **Giulio Cesare Perrone**

CONDUCTOR: **Michael Morgan**

### **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM by Benjamin Britten**

DATES: **August 9 and 12 at 8 pm; August 17 at 2 pm**

CAST: **To be announced**

STAGE DIRECTION: **Michael Morgan in collaboration with Mark Foehringer**

SET DESIGN: **Peter Crompton**

CONDUCTOR: **Michael Morgan**

WHERE: Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek

TICKETS: \$36 - \$100 Order online at [www.LesharArtsCenter.org](http://www.LesharArtsCenter.org) or call (925) 943-SHOW.

MORE INFORMATION: Visit [www.FestivalOpera.org](http://www.FestivalOpera.org)

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**PHOTO ID:** **Noah Stewart** as African American journalist T. Morris Chester in San Francisco Opera's world premiere of *Appomattox* by composer Philip Glass and librettist Christopher Hampton. Photo by [Terrence McCarthy](#), courtesy San Francisco Opera.

#### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

Lyla Foggia  
Foggia Public Relations LLC  
(503) 622-0232  
[lyla@foggiapr.com](mailto:lyla@foggiapr.com)

Helen Sheaff  
Executive Director

Festival Opera  
(925) 944-9610  
[info@festivalopera.com](mailto:info@festivalopera.com)