



Photo: Christian Steiner, Royal College of Music

Countertenor William Sauerland (here in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) will make his Festival Opera debut as Oberon.

A Magical Dream in Midsummer

Few experiences are more magical than attending an exceptional live performance... especially if it is an opera that sparkles with both the magic of the imagination and the magic found in true love. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has enchanted audiences of all ages. With a

multi-faceted story both comic and heartfelt, Shakespeare's play has remained almost continuously in repertoire for more than 400 years and has been successfully reinterpreted as both a ballet and opera.

Poetry for the Voice

This August, Festival Opera will stage *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the opera by Benjamin Britten based on Shakespeare's play. This marks the first time the company has produced a work by the man considered to be the foremost English composer of the 20th century. Britten collaborated with his longtime creative partner, tenor Peter Pears, to write the opera for the Aldeburg Festival (Suffolk, England) in August 1960.

The libretto for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is considered a masterful reduction of

the original verse. Britten had enormous respect for Shakespeare's text and, in an interview prior to the opera's debut, held that "everyone ought to set Shakespeare to music in order just to get to know the incredible beauty and intensity of these words." He saw in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "amazingly beautiful poetry already intended for singing."

"This must be a magical place. It's all about the imagination... a fantasy world"

Britten's operas were successful from his first, *Peter Grimes* (1942) to his last, *Death in Venice*, which debuted in 1973, the year he died. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a notably different feel from his other operas, however. Inspired by the three groups in the play—lovers,

rustics, and fairy folk—Britten effectively used varying voice types, instruments, and musical styles to characterize each one. Rather than use a typical orchestration, he selected specific instruments with fairylike sounds such as the harp, celeste, and harpsichord for his composition.

A Timeless Vision

Festival Opera's artistic director Michael Morgan will serve as both conductor and stage

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How the Magic Happens

The Road to Opening Night...

For many people, the true magic of opera is to be sitting in the audience as the curtain slowly rises on opening night. Spellbound—by the singing, by the music, by the visuals—the multimedia art form that is opera is more than enough for most attendees. But for others, there is endless fascination in how the production comes together.

From the audience, it can be easy to believe that the magic "just happens." Opera is one of the most complex art forms, however, merging the beauty of the human voice and richness of the orchestra with the visual, emotional drama of the theater. Accordingly, it is also a complex and expensive art form, requiring far greater time and coordination than any single element alone. How any opera company manages its productions differs based on venue, budget and other factors. What follows is a backstage view of how Festival Opera brings its unique magic to the stage.

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From the Chair

I'm writing this while in Denver attending the National Performing Arts Conference with several Festival Opera board members and staff. We're here as members of Opera America, one of 30 participating organizations representing all disciplines of performing arts, including opera, ballet, theater, chorus, and orchestra. This year's focus is "Taking Action Together," an attempt to find common ground among the over 4,000 people attending from organizations around the world.

One presentation considered the question "Is it live?" What effect will the growing popularity of hi-def theater showings of Live Opera from the Met and other companies have on local productions? A high-tech, slick theater presentation gives the audience close-up views with fantastic surround-sound. But, is it live? No, it is actually a huge flat-screen television show. Is the audience missing anything? Yes, depth of view and a personal connection with the artists.

Last night we traveled in six busloads to Central City Opera, an hour from Denver, to

see Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. The opera house, 130 years old, has showcased some of the world's most respected opera stars during its history. The performance was superb. The staging was innovative, the voices were outstanding, the experience was magical. **It was live!** The ambiance of the house and the audience reaction added a magnetism that could only be experienced during a live performance.

Hi-def theater productions are wonderful and are here to stay. They allow many people who live far from live productions or who are new to opera to experience it. But these shows can never replace the live experience.

We know you will enjoy our two summer productions, *Il Trovatore* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as much as we enjoy bringing them to you ... **live** in a regional theater that provides an affordable opportunity to experience opera and opera singers in an intimate setting.

See you at the opera.

— Dave Kingsbury ■

Festival Opera Awarded Funding Grants

Festival Opera is very pleased to announce the recent receipt of several generous grants from local foundations. The Dean and Margaret Leshner Foundation is committed to the visual and performing arts in Contra Costa County and has supported Festival Opera for many years, helping it grow into the third largest opera company in the Bay Area. A new \$150,000 grant to be distributed over two years will support the 2008 and 2009 seasons and includes an annual challenge grant to assist the company in building donor support in the community.

Two foundations associated with the late William Randolph Hearst recently awarded Festival Opera \$50,000 in support of the 2008 season. Of the nearly \$1.1 million in total grants awarded by the foundations, Festival Opera and the San Francisco Symphony were the only Northern California arts groups honored.

For the third year, the Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA) has again chosen to act as a lead production sponsor. The DRAA is a primary sponsor for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this year and supported both *Don Giovanni* in 2006 and the West Coast Premiere of *Our Town* last summer.

In addition, the company was recently notified that the Bernard Osher Foundation will continue its generous support for a fourth year. These grants join an existing multi-year grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which has supported Festival Opera since 1998.

"As with any opera company, Festival Opera's ticket sales cover less than half the expense incurred in producing its performances," says Helen Sheaff, executive director. "The company is grateful for the generous support not just from our foundation and corporate sponsors, but the many individuals who attend and support the opera. Their support helps us continue to showcase exceptional artists and entice audiences to the highly professional productions people have come to expect from Festival Opera." ■

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Il Trovatore

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A Midsummer Night's Dream

Festival Opera 2008 Preview

Il Trovatore

Il Trovatore

(in Italian with English supertitles)

Music by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano and Leone Emanuele Bardare after the play by Antonio García Gutiérrez

Conductor Michael Morgan

Stage Director Giulio Cesare Perrone

Set Designer Giulio Cesare Perrone

Leonora Hope Briggs

Manrico Noah Stewart

Count di Luna Scott Bearden

Azucena Patrice Houston

Performances:

July 12, 15, 18 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, July 20 – 2:00pm

Leshar Center for the Arts

Tickets: \$36-100 Call (925) 943-SHOW (7469) or visit www.festivalopera.com

Background:

Il Trovatore was created during an exceptionally creative and prolific period of Verdi's life. Already a critically acclaimed composer at 40, he had just completed *Rigoletto*, and was simultaneously composing *La Traviata*, which debuted in Venice barely two months after *Il Trovatore*. All three were immediate successes and have achieved a level of enduring popularity reserved for relatively few works. Unlike the other two, with linear storylines over short time periods, *Il Trovatore's* action is triggered by an earlier event, unseen by the audience. Despite its complex and rather improbable plot, Verdi's stunning music provides a powerful connection for its listeners.

Librettist Salvatore Cammarano had worked with Verdi on several other operas and with Donizetti on an equally tragic tale, *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Just before *Il Trovatore* was complete, Cammarano died unexpectedly. Fortunately, careful notes allowed Emanuele Bardare to finish it and the opera made its highly-praised debut in Rome in January 1853.

Synopsis:

On watch, soldiers in the service of Count di Luna listen to the tales of their captain, Ferrando. His story tells of the old Count di Luna who burned a gypsy at the stake for bewitching his family. In revenge, the gypsy's daughter threw his infant son, brother of the current Count, into the burning fire and escaped.

As she waits in the palace garden that evening, Lady Leonora tells Ines about the mysterious troubadour who has stolen her heart. In the darkness, she mistakes Count di Luna, whose love she has rejected, for Manrico. When the Count discovers Manrico is also a political enemy, he challenges him to a duel.

In a gypsy camp, the wounded Manrico listens to his mother, Azucena, talk of her revenge on the old Count. When she reveals that, blinded by rage, she accidentally threw her own child into the fire, he questions his parentage. Azucena has just succeeded in distracting him when he learns that Leonora, believing him dead, intends to enter a convent. He rushes off to dissuade her, thwarting the Count who has arrived with the same intent. Manrico departs with Leonora.

The Count's army prepares to attack the fortress Castellor, which Manrico and his men defend for the Prince of Biscay. When a gypsy is captured nearby, Ferrando recognizes her as the one who murdered the Count's infant brother. Azucena calls for her son and the Count realizes he can both kill his rival and avenge his brother's death. Manrico and Leonora are preparing to marry when news arrives of Azucena's capture. Telling Leonora he must save his mother's life, Manrico rushes away.

Leonora hears that Manrico and his mother have been captured, and offers herself to the Count in exchange for her beloved's life. Going to the prison to release Manrico, she swallows poison, knowing she could never keep her bargain. Manrico, believing he was betrayed, scorns her until the poison takes effect. As he learns the immensity of her sacrifice, she dies. Discovering he has been tricked, the Count sends Manrico to his execution, forcing Azucena to watch. The gypsy turns on him, declaring "He was your brother. My mother is avenged!" as the curtain falls.



Hope Briggs (soprano) returns as Leonora following her previous appearances with Festival Opera as Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera* (2005) and the High Priestess in *Aida* (2003). She made her San Francisco Opera debut as the Duchess of Parma in *Doktor Faust* in 2004, a role she reprised at the Staatstheater Stuttgart in 2005. Briggs has performed extensively both in the US and abroad, appearing last November in the title role of *Aida* for Nevada Opera. She has received the Metropolitan Opera International Vocal Competition Award, and performed for Ms. Jessye Norman at the presentation of the Trophee des Arts by the Alliance Francais.



Scott Bearden (baritone) returns to Festival Opera after his debut as Renato in *Un Ballo in Maschera* (2005). He recently won first place in Opera New York's second annual Chester Ludgin Memorial American Verdi Baritone Competition, which was judged by a panel that included Placido Domingo and Mignon Dunn. A former resident artist with Opera San Jose, Bearden returned there this spring for the Irene Dalis Vocal Competition, where he was awarded the top prize. He is known for a variety of roles, including the title roles of Falstaff and Rigoletto, Scarpia (*Tosca*), and Germont (*La Traviata*).



Noah Stewart (tenor) makes his Festival Opera debut as Manrico. A graduate of the Julliard School of Music, Stewart was introduced to Bay Area audiences as a 2006 Merola Opera Program participant. He remained at San Francisco Opera on a two-year Adler Fellowship, making his debut there in *Der Rosenkavalier* and appearing in a number of roles including Malcolm in Verdi's *Macbeth* and as T. Morris Chester in the world premiere of Glass' *Appomattox*. Among his many achievements, he was awarded first prize in the Florida Grand Opera Competition, and received the Marian Anderson Encouragement Award.



Patrice Houston (mezzo-soprano) will sing the role of the gypsy Azucena. She made her Festival Opera debut in 1998 as Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and has returned as Ulrica (*Un Ballo in Maschera*) and as Mrs. Gibbs in the 2007 West Coast Premiere of Rorem's *Our Town*. In 2006, Houston was awarded the Washington Summer Opera Guild Award for her portrayal of Azucena in their production of *Il Trovatore*. She has performed in the US and Europe in a variety of roles including Frugola in *Il Tabarro*, La Principessa in *Suor Angelica*, Marthe in *Faust* and Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*.

Festival Opera 2008 Preview

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream*(in English with English supertitles)*

Music by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
 Libretto by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears
 after the play by William Shakespeare

Conductor Michael Morgan
 Stage Director Michael Morgan
 Set Design Peter Crompton

Oberon William Sauerland
 Tytania Marnie Breckenridge
 Bottom Kirk Eichelberger
 Puck Kurt Krikorian

Performances:

August 9, 12, 15 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, August 17 – 2:00pm

Leshner Center for the Arts

Tickets: \$36-100 Call (925) 954-7469

or visit www.festivalopera.com**Background:**

Since Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written, its complex plot – intertwining fairy folk, royalty, and peasants – has found universal appeal. For more than 400 years, it has remained almost continuously popular as a stage play and has been adapted into both opera and ballet.

The pre-eminent British composer of the 20th century, Benjamin Britten was well established when he began work on his operatic version of Shakespeare's play. The light and fanciful themes were notably different from his prior operas, such as the intensely tragic *Peter Grimes* or the broad comedy of *Albert Herring*, and the resulting music reflects Britten's exceptional skill across a range of musical styles.

Unlike many operas based on Shakespeare, Britten and Pears' adaptation holds true to the spirit of the play with a libretto based wholly on the original text. The opera opened in August 1960 and since its debut has enjoyed worldwide success.

Synopsis:

In the early evening, Puck and the fairies prepare the woods for their king and queen. Oberon and Tytania quarrel over a mortal page boy. Tytania leaves and Oberon commands Puck to pluck a magic herb that will cause Tytania to fall in love with any creature she sees upon awakening.

Two mortal lovers enter, Hermia and Lysander, who have eloped to escape Hermia's father's demand that she marry Demetrius. The two are followed by Helena, who despairs over the loss of Demetrius' love. Oberon instructs Puck to use the magic flower on Demetrius so he will again love Helena.

Soon a group of rustics appear, preparing for a play called "Pyramus and Thisbe" written for the Duke's upcoming wedding. Bottom, the self-appointed star of the play, attempts to cast himself in all the roles to the disgust of his rival, Flute.

Meanwhile, the mortals have fallen asleep, so Puck puts the magic herb on Lysander's eyes. Upon awakening, he sees Helena and falls in love, pursuing her into the woods and leaving Hermia to wake alone.

As the rustics rehearse, Puck places an ass's head on Bottom, whose friends depart in terror. As Oberon had placed the magic herb on Tytania's eyes as she slept, when she awakens and sees Bottom, she promptly falls in love. Despite her wiles and the entertainment of her fairies, Bottom is not interested.

Oberon, dismayed by the results of Puck's magic herb on the mortals, attempts to right matters. His efforts only make things worse when Demetrius, under the spell, sees Helena and returns his love to her. After punishing Puck, Oberon lulls them all to sleep with a magic fog and manages to restore order. The spell on Tytania is reversed. She wakes to see her beloved Oberon and returns the mortal page boy to him. Bottom wakes too and believes it has all been a dream.

Back at the Duke's palace, Theseus declares that both couples shall be joined in a wedding celebration with the play "Pyramus and Thisbe" to entertain the guests. At evening's end, Oberon and Tytania bless the couples and Puck begs the audience to "Give me your hands if we be friends..."



William Sauerland (countertenor) makes his Festival Opera debut as Oberon. He has appeared on the concert stage in Vienna, Amsterdam, and Moscow, and throughout the US. The recipient of a Marshall Scholarship, Sauerland is currently working on a Masters of Music in Vocal Performance at the Royal College of Music in London with a focus on the music of the 17th and 18th centuries. He previously earned a degree in Vocal Performance and Music Education from Miami University in Ohio. Sauerland sang locally for two years with the Grammy-award winning vocal ensemble Chanticleer based in San Francisco.



Kirk Eichelberger (bass) sings the role of Bottom and also appears as Ferrando in Festival Opera's *Il Trovatore* this July. He made his company debut in 2001 as The Bonze in *Madama Butterfly* and returned in subsequent seasons as King of Egypt (*Aida*), Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Leporello (*Don Giovanni*), and most recently as Dr. Gibbs in *Our Town* (2007). Eichelberger made his Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Gambler* this spring, followed by his debut with Opera Theatre of St. Louis as the four villains in *Tales of Hoffmann*. This fall he will sing the role of Don Ferrando (*Fidelio*) with Opera Company of Philadelphia.



Marnie Breckenridge (soprano) returns to Festival Opera as Tytania, following appearances as Gilda in *Rigoletto* (2004), Cunegonde in *Candide* (2005) and Emily in the West Coast Premiere of *Our Town* (2007). She reprised her role as Cunegonde with the Prague State Opera last year and again in her recent debut with English National Opera at Covent Garden. In addition to singing the title roles in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Roméo et Juliette*, Breckenridge has broad experience in contemporary works. She substituted for Isabel Bayrakdarian in Jake Heggie's *To Hell and Back* at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago last year.



Kurt Krikorian (baritone) returns to Festival Opera in the speaking role of Puck. He most recently appeared with the company last season in the role of Sam in *Ned Rorem's Our Town* and was a featured soloist in several company sponsored concerts of art songs leading up to the production's West Coast Premiere. Krikorian had previously appeared as a member of the company's chorus in *Candide* (2005), *Tosca* and *Don Giovanni* (2006), and *Carmen* (2007).

A Magical Dream in Midsummer ...continued from page 1

director for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a challenging dual role he finds interesting and exciting. Two years ago, Morgan made his debut as an operatic stage director with Festival Opera's production of *Don Giovanni*, which he also conducted.

Morgan's vision for the opera emphasizes the timelessness of the story. The design team has used light and colorful fabrics to convey the enchanted woodland scene. Works for the theater typically require some suspension of disbelief, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no exception; at times groups on stage are unable to see, asleep, or invisible. "We intentionally didn't want the production to be too visually literal," says Morgan. "This must be a magical place. It's all about the imagination... a fantasy world."

His production concept is set in the mid-twentieth century, the time period when Britten wrote it, allowing a visual design with a very colorful palette. One of the most fascinating elements, says Morgan, is the use of a "live forest." Working with choreographer Mark Foehringer, young people and dancers dressed to represent trees will create a living, moving, changeable scene as the opera unfolds.

The Magic of the Music

Seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an opera allows the audience to experience the beauty of Shakespeare in a new way. Some music has always been associated with the play, even in Shakespeare's time. In 1842 Felix Mendelssohn wrote an overture, famous for its wedding march, and some incidental music for stage productions. Music, as Morgan says, "puts an emotional context around the story that mere words can't. This is particularly true in opera where the singing slows down the action and illuminates the emotions of the character."

A Midsummer Night's Dream "has lots of roles and even the smallest ones are important," says Morgan. One of the most markedly different elements of Britten's opera was his choice of the countertenor voice for Oberon, king of the fairies, reinforcing the role's supernatural element. Countertenors are male singers who sing in a high register above that of a tenor; their falsetto sound is often compared with the female contralto range. Roles for countertenors were more common in operas from the Baroque period but rare in subsequent periods. Morgan points out that while Britten was ahead of his

time in reviving the countertenor voice for opera, hearing men sing in the higher registers has become quite common in popular music.

Countertenor William Sauerland makes his debut with Festival Opera in the role of Oberon. He always loved classical music and found his voice singing in a school choir at the age of twelve. He discovered opera by performing in a local company as a teen and went on to develop his countertenor voice while obtaining his undergraduate music degree in Ohio. After singing for two years with San Francisco-based vocal group Chanticleer, Sauerland obtained a Marshall Scholarship to attend the Royal College of Music in London last year. In addition to obtaining a singing degree, his studies include exploring the authenticity of countertenors in Baroque opera. Sauerland is looking forward with pleasure to singing in what he considers Britten's strongest and most important opera – one that highlights his uncommon vocal skills.

Festival Opera's production is also notable for a stellar group of artists who fit their roles both vocally and visually. Sauerland is joined by returning artists soprano Marnie Breckenridge as Tytania, and bass-baritone Kirk Eichelberger as Bottom, both seen last year in the West Coast Premiere of Ned Rorem's *Our Town*. The extensive cast includes singers who are both new to and returning to Festival Opera's stage.

The Course of True Love...

At heart, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a fairy tale. "The challenge is to make it believable," says Morgan. "The thing that's interesting about the play and the characters is that everyone can recognize parts of ourselves in them. It's a very universal story." Morgan cites the example of Oberon and Tytania. "They have a good marriage – the story finds them in the middle of a fight, but that's really all it is. By the end, they've made up just as couples in a good relationship do. People can relate to that." The lovers, Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, tell a classic story of the pursuit of love with the right person. "And the rustics are just

...continued on page 7



Set designer Peter Crompton's scale model for the opening scene of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

How the Magic Happens ...continued from page 1

Stage 1: Discussion

With the opera selected and casting begun, the production team starts work. Initial meetings begin around eight months before the opera opens. For the July production, the executive director, artistic director, and director of production convene in November with the stage director and design team—those responsible for what is seen by the audience. Also included are the chorus director and conductor, although at Festival Opera, the artistic director often conducts. The stage director explains his vision, collaborating with the artistic director who sets general direction and style. Together the group explores the concept so that everyone has a clear understanding of what is to emerge.

The stage director guides the work so that each element—sets, lighting, props, costumes, hair and makeup—supports the vision. The entire production team will meet as a group at least three more times during the process.

Stage 2: Coordination

As the production takes shape, music is already being practiced. Group chorus auditions are held in November and chorus rehearsals begin in January. Festival Opera's dedicated chorus members are expected to bring their own music, which costs from \$30 to \$100 depending on the score, and learn it independently. Although rehearsals may only be every few weeks to start, by early spring they are weekly, and in the final few weeks are held many evenings and on weekends.

Meanwhile, set design is finalized and costumes planned. As many costumes are rented or borrowed, in addition to those that are designed and built, the sooner singer measurements are obtained the easier it is to locate appropriate items. Actual fittings occur when

singers arrive for rehearsals.

Stage 3: Taking Shape

Festival Opera does not own a scene shop, so sets are built in rented spaces or other shops. Storage is also expensive, so director of pro-



Photo: Michael Harvey

Conductor Bryan Nies enjoys a break during staging rehearsals for Carmen (2007).

duction Frederic Boulay is adept at precisely timing the set to be completed when the theater is available. Depending on the complexity of the design, it takes five to six workers—skilled carpenters and painters—four to six weeks to build the set under the supervision of a technical director.

Stage 4: Sing

Artistic director Michael Morgan is known for matching the right vocal and theatrical talent to each role. Since the Bay Area has a wealth of stellar artists, many of these singers live nearby. Others, however, travel from homes or jobs across the country. Hotel rooms are costly, so Festival Opera relies on generous volunteers who invite singers into their homes as guests. It is a tremendous gift to the opera and hosts have an opportunity to get to know singers and peek inside the production.

There are just two weeks for staging rehearsal and one week for technical rehearsals due to the availability of the singers and the venue. In the rented rehearsal hall, a warehouse-like space near the theater, preparations are quickly made—stage and set lines taped on the floor, folding tables and chairs set up.

On the first day of rehearsals, the cast, production team and stage staff meet; they will get to know each other well in the coming month! Initial rehearsals may include just a few singers working with the director, conductor, and rehearsal accompanist. Eventually, rehearsals become crowded as the principals, comprimarios (secondary roles), chorus, and supernumeraries (non-speaking roles) join in.

Stage 5: Set

Six days before opening night, sets are

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Photo: Michael Harvey

Baritone Kurt Krikorian gets into costume for the role of Sam in Our Town (2007).

Midsummer ...continued from page 5

trying to prove themselves, to find their place,” says Morgan. “Perhaps the moral of their story is that if you try hard enough you can succeed!” Morgan believes that what holds the whole thing together is the tremendous sensuality of the whole show—singers, music and scenery blend together seamlessly. Shakespeare has Helena exclaim, “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,” but in Britten’s opera, the ears play an equally vital role until the curtain falls on his enchanted dream. ■

Alumni Notes

In its nearly two decades, Festival Opera has had the privilege of showcasing many exceptional artists, some of them early in what have become stellar careers. Here is a brief update on some of the artists who have graced our recent cast lists, many of whom encounter fellow alumni in their exciting engagements around the world.

Mezzo-soprano **Kendall Gladen**, who was compelling in the title role of *Carmen* last summer, appeared with San Francisco Opera as Elizabeth Quickly in the world premiere of *Appomattox* by Philip Glass. She was one of eight former Adler fellows in the production, as was tenor Noah Stewart, who will make his Festival Opera debut as Manrico in *Il Trovatore*. Gladen went on to appear in another contemporary opera, *Amistad* by Anthony Davis at the Spoleto Festival USA in May. The production also included tenor Brian Frutiger, highly praised as Don Ottavio in Festival Opera’s 2006 *Don Giovanni*. This September, Gladen will make her San Francisco Symphony debut.



Baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu** has maintained a fast-paced and varied performance schedule since singing Escamillo in *Carmen* last year. This season, he made his New York City Opera debut as Pandolfe in *Cendrillon*, before singing in Brahms’ Requiem with Alabama Symphony. He returned to the Bay Area in May as The Pilot in San Francisco Opera’s production of *The Little Prince* by Rachel Portman, which also featured former Festival Opera artists Brian Leerhuber and Thomas Glenn. This summer Brancoveanu will appear at the Mendocino Music Festival in *The Marriage of Figaro*, with Leerhuber and soprano Nicolle Foland. He returns to San Francisco Opera in the fall as Belcore in Donizetti’s *Elixir of Love*.



Magic Happens ...continued from page 6

loaded into the theater and lights hung and focused. The orchestra joins the singers in rehearsal for the first time for a “sitzprobe” (seated rehearsal). The last week, piano and dress rehearsals are held for four nights in the theater. At a table set across the center seats, the director and others listen, watch, and adjust, sharing their notes with the singers at the end of the night. On Tuesday, costumes, wigs and makeup are seen under stage lighting for the first time.

Thursday evening, the “final dress” rehearsal is run straight through, ideally without interruption as everything should be in order. Last minute adjustments are made and photos are taken for publicity use. Finally, on Friday, everyone gets a night off to relax.

Stage 6: Opening Night

The cast begins to arrive at around 6:00 p.m. on Saturday night. Backstage, the crew, costume and make-up teams are ready to go to work under the precise supervision of the stage manager. In just two hours, all of the effort that has gone into the production for the past eight months will come to fruition.

Out in the theater the lights dim, the music begins, and the curtain rises. Once again, magic is happening! ■



Photo: Michael Harvey

Backstage at the Lesher Center, stage director Beth Greenberg, soprano Marnie Breckenridge, and artistic/music director Michael Morgan confer before a dress rehearsal for Our Town (2007).

cino Music Festival in *The Marriage of Figaro*, with Leerhuber and soprano Nicolle Foland. He returns to San Francisco Opera in the fall as Belcore in Donizetti’s *Elixir of Love*.

Mezzo-soprano **Layna Chianakis**, who last appeared with Festival Opera in 2006 as Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), has released a new album of songs, “I Recognized Your Face.” The album is an eclectic collection of classical art songs, including “The Spring in Lebanon.” As Chianakis once explained at a Festival Opera Sostenuuto event, the lyrics were adapted from a beautiful poem written by her husband shortly after they met. It was later set to music by composer Craig Bohmler as part of his song cycle *Love Letters*, written specifically for her voice. ■





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FESTIVAL OPERA



GIUSEPPE VERDI
TROVATORE

Featuring
 ★ Hope Briggs, soprano
 ★ Noah Stewart, tenor
 ★ Scott Bearden, baritone
 ★ Patrice Houston, mezzo-soprano
 ★ Conducted by Michael Morgan

One of Verdi's most popular and enduring operas, this stirring story of obsession, madness and retribution has captivated audiences worldwide. Its passionate score offers many of the composer's most memorable arias and vocal ensembles.

"Scott Bearden... sang brilliantly, with commanding tone, velvety musical line and astonishing reserves of power." — *Contra Costa Times*
photo: William Moore, courtesy Opera Memphis

July 12 • 15 • 18 • 20

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FESTIVAL OPERA



benjamin britten
a midsummer night's dream

Britten's magical adaptation of Shakespeare's play invites you deep into the irresistible enchantment of a summer's evening... where anything is possible in the name of love!

Directed/conducted by Michael Morgan
 Sung in English with English supertitles

Marnie Breckenridge "sounded as gorgeous as she looked, achieving both lyrical poignancy and dramatic power." — *Chicago Tribune*
Photo: Otak Jump, courtesy West Bay Opera

August 9 • 12 • 15 • 17

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