



FESTIVAL  
OPERA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 17, 2006

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## FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES 15<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON

*Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini  
July 8, 11, 14, and 16, 2006

*Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
August 12, 15, 18, and 20, 2006

**Walnut Creek, CA** – Festival Opera announced today that its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary season will include new productions of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* in July and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in August, 2006. *Tosca* will feature the company debut of both soprano **Othalie Graham** and tenor **Robert Breault**, as well as director **Stephanie Leigh Smith**. Festival Opera's artistic and music director **Michael Morgan** makes his opera stage director debut in *Don Giovanni*, with bass **Matthew Treviño** in the title role. Performances will be at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek.

Puccini's *Tosca* embodies a range of passions – love, jealousy and revenge – and includes some of opera's most familiar arias. Joining Graham and Breault as the lovers Floria Tosca and Mario Cavaradossi, the role of Baron Scarpia will be sung by Festival Opera favorite, bass-baritone **Bojan Knezevic**. *Tosca* will be conducted by **Ari Pelto**, who returns to Festival Opera following his 1999 debut. The *Tosca* sets, designed by **Jean François Revon**, are a co-production with Opera Santa Barbara.

More...

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In honor of Mozart's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, Festival Opera presents a fascinating production of *Don Giovanni*, the story of the infamous Don Juan. The staging concept, developed by Festival Opera's artistic and music director **Michael Morgan**, will be brought to life by Morgan with the assistance of **Patrick O'Neill**. Morgan will also conduct. Bass **Matthew Treviño**, returning as Don Giovanni, is joined by a stellar cast of young singers also returning to the Festival Opera stage. These include bass **Kirk Eichelberger** as Leporello, soprano **Kristin Clayton** as Donna Anna, mezzo **Layna Chianakas** as Donna Elvira, tenor **Brian Frutiger** as Ottavio, soprano **Aimée Puentes** as Zerlina, and tenor **John Frederick** as Masetto. **Matthew Antaky** returns as production designer.

"Festival Opera is pleased to be opening its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with *Tosca*, an opera which 10 years ago successfully set the company on the path to its current artistic level, and pairing it with Michael Morgan's timely vision of *Don Giovanni*," said **Helen Sheaff**, executive director for Festival Opera. "These two productions will be a wonderful representation of the level of artistic creativity and innovation we have built over the past 15 years."

### **Tosca**

Puccini's *Tosca*, with its dramatic story and transcendently beautiful music, has become one of the world's most familiar and beloved operas. The opera tells of a love triangle made deadly by passion and politics, and is one of the few operas with both a very specific historic and physical setting – Rome in June of 1800, during Napoleon Bonaparte's attack on Italy.

Canadian-born soprano **Othalie Graham**, singing her first *Tosca*, has sung other major roles including *Aida*, *Elektra*, as well as *Turandot*, which she sang with Sacramento Opera this season. She is the recipient of the prestigious Sullivan Foundation Grant and the Jean Chalmers prize in the Canadian Music Competition. Tenor **Robert Breault**, who has built an international career in opera, oratorio and concert, makes his company debut as Cavaradossi. He returns to New York City Opera as Don Jose in *Carmen* this season, having made his debut there in 2004 as Alfredo (*La Traviata*). Bass-baritone **Bojan Knezevic**, a former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow, returns to Festival Opera as Baron Scarpia. Heard in numerous roles with San Francisco

Opera and throughout the United States, he makes his debut with Sarasota Opera this season in the title role of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Director **Stephanie Leigh Smith** makes her Festival Opera debut with *Tosca*. She most recently directed *Madama Butterfly* for Opera Columbus and has worked at opera companies throughout the United States including San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, LA Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and New York City Opera.

Guest conductor **Ari Pelto** conducted *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1999 for Festival Opera and returned for *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* the following season. He has been a regular conductor with the New York City Opera, Wolf Trap, San Francisco Opera Center, Toledo Symphony, Atlanta Ballet, and New National Theater Tokyo.

*Tosca* will be sung in Italian with English supertitles.

### **Don Giovanni**

Written in 1787, just four years before his death, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is one of his best-known operatic works. His timeless story of Don Juan is filled with music that ranges from the light-hearted to the highly dramatic. Eight years ago, Festival Opera presented a traditional *Don Giovanni*. This season, Michael Morgan's original staging concept retains the complex personal relationships, but sets the opera in the modern setting of a nightclub. Contributing to the intimacy of the opera experience, the orchestra will be placed on stage, becoming a visual part of the production and moving the stage action closer to the audience.

Bass **Matthew Treviño**, recipient of the Thomas Stewart Award for Vocal Excellence at Baylor University, was recently heard as Doctor Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville* with Eugene Opera. Bass **Kirk Eichelberger** (Leporello) most recently appeared with Festival Opera in 2004 as Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*. A former Opera San Jose principal artist, he returns there this season for several productions, including the role of Leporello.

Last seen with Festival Opera in 2002's *Don Pasquale*, soprano **Kristin Clayton** (Donna Anna) was recently heard with San Francisco Opera as Nedda in *Pagliacci* and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*. Clayton stepped in for Renée Fleming to perform an original work by Jake Heggie for

the grand opening of the Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver. Mezzo-soprano **Layna Chianakas** (Donna Elvira) made her Festival Opera debut in 2004 as Maddalena in *Rigoletto*. She has appeared in leading roles throughout the United States and makes her debut this season with Sarasota Opera as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Tenor **Brian Frutiger** (Don Ottavio) made his Festival Opera debut last season in *Candide*. A graduate of San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and an alumnus of the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Artist Program, he makes his mainstage debut with San Francisco Opera in their fall production of *Carmen*.

Production designer **Matthew Antaky** returns to Festival Opera following his debut as set and lighting designer last season on *Candide*. Antaky's unique and visually exciting work has been seen in all forms of theater throughout the US, Canada and Europe, where he has been the recipient of numerous awards.

Festival Opera's artistic and music director, **Michael Morgan**, makes his opera staging debut this year with *Don Giovanni*. Morgan served as Assistant Conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin. He made his operatic debut in 1982 at the Vienna State Opera and became Assistant Conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1986. Now in his sixteenth year as music director of the Oakland East Bay Symphony, Morgan also serves as Artistic Director of the Oakland Youth Orchestra, Music Director of the Sacramento Philharmonic, makes frequent guest conducting appearances throughout the United States, and is on the board of the American Symphony Orchestra League. He is very involved in schools throughout the Bay Area and nationally, and is widely regarded as an expert on the importance of arts education and minority access to the arts.

*Don Giovanni* will be sung in Italian with English supertitles.

**Festival Opera** is the largest regional opera company in the East Bay. Founded in 1991, it is considered a showcase for young American singers, directors and conductors. Cast lists, artist photos, synopses, and additional information on the company and its productions can be found in the Press Room section of Festival Opera's website [www.festivalopera.com](http://www.festivalopera.com). Tickets for the 2006 season range from \$36 to \$100 and will be available in March 2006.

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