

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 15, 2008 – Walnut Creek, CA



Festival Opera's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to feature William Sauerland, Ani Maldjian, and Kirk Eichelberger

**Opening August 9, the production will feature
a rare performance by a countertenor**

Festival Opera's production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will feature countertenor William Sauerland as Oberon, soprano Ani Maldjian as Tytania, Kurt Krikorian as Puck (spoken), bass Kirk Eichelberger as Bottom, baritone Igor Vieira as Theseus, mezzo-soprano Lauren Groff as Hippolyta, tenor Jorge Garza as Lysander, baritone Nikolas Nackley (Demetrius), mezzo-soprano Jessica Mariko Deardorff as Hermia, and soprano Stacey Cornell as Helena.

"There are so few countertenors today that this will be a rare opportunity to see one in performance," says Helen Sheaff, executive director of Festival Opera, about the type of male vocalist who can sing in the range of a contralto, mezzo-soprano or soprano. "And Britten's opera is one of the most famous

countertenor roles, but most companies are limited to using a contralto or female soprano. So this will be a treat for Bay Area opera lovers.”

Benjamin Britten’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s romantic comedy will be conducted and directed by Michael Morgan, with set design by Peter Crompton and costume design by Susanna Douthit.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream will open on Saturday, August 9, at 8 pm. Three performances will follow: on August 12 and 15 at 8 pm, and a Sunday matinee at 2 pm on August 17. All performances will take place at the Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA. Tickets are \$36 - \$100. Order online at www.LesharArtsCenter.org or call (925) 943-SHOW. For more information, visit www.FestivalOpera.org.

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Countertenor **William Sauerland** has performed in many of the world's finest concert halls including Vienna's Musikverein, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Moscow's Tchaikovsky Hall and Disney Hall in Los Angeles. The recipient of a Marshall Scholarship, he is currently working on a Masters of Music in Vocal Performance degree at the Royal College of Music in London. His primary interest is the study and performance of music from the 17th and 18th centuries, and specifically the authenticity of countertenors in Baroque opera, as well as to the technique and pedagogy of modern falsettists. While earning an undergraduate degree in Vocal Performance and Music Education from Miami University in Ohio, Sauerland trained as a countertenor under the tutelage of Audrey Luna. Following graduation, he was a member of the Grammy-award winning vocal ensemble Chanticleer for two years.

Soprano **Ani Maldjian**, a two-time San Francisco Opera Merola Program participant, is considered one of the country’s fast-rising sopranos. She was the toast of Southern California last year for her tour-de-force performance in Russian composer Grigori Frid’s one-woman opera, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, at Long Beach Opera. Among other accolades, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote "Her singing was commanding and brilliant, fresh and strong from beginning to end.... Discovering talent like Maldjian’s is no easy feat." Maldjian graduated at 20 with a B.A. in fine arts from the California Institute of the Arts, and went on to obtain a M.A. from California State University in Northridge.

Kirk Eichelberger – who is also singing the role of Ferrando in Festival Opera’s production of *Il Trovatore* in July – made his Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Gambler* on March 27. A 1999 national finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, he most recently appeared with Festival Opera as Dr. Gibbs in last summer’s West Coast premiere of Rorem’s *Our Town*, following his

performance the year before as Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, also directed by Michael Morgan. Later this month, Eichelberger will be featured in Opera Theatre of St. Louis' production of *The Tales of Hoffman*, followed by roles in *Fidelio* for the Opera Company of Philadelphia in October and as Ferrando again in *Il Trovatore* for Manitoba Opera in November.

Kurt Krikorian, in the speaking role of Puck, has performed with the San Francisco Opera in *Tristan und Isolde* and for Festival Opera in its 2006 production of *Tosca*. A world finalist of the 1995 Luciano Pavarotti Voice Competition, **Igor Vieira** previously appeared with Festival Opera in 2007, and has sung internationally with the Teatro Municipal of Rio de Janeiro, the Amazonian Opera Festival, The Belém Opera Festival, and Opera du Villecroze. **Lauren Groff**, who is currently completing her Master's degree at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, serves as the alto section leader of the San Francisco Concert Chorale and cantor at the National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi. A former participant in the Merola Opera Program, **Jorge Garza** apprenticed at the Glimmerglass Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and Wolftrap, before becoming a Young Artist, then a mainstage performer, at Los Angeles Opera. Piedmont native **Nikolas Nackley**, who now lives in Boston and holds a Masters of Music degree from the New England Conservatory of Music, has been frequently featured as a soloist throughout New England, California, and abroad. **Jessica Deardorff**, who will also appear with Festival Opera this season as Inez in *Il Trovatore*, recently made her Opera San José debut as the Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*. Deardorff holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Pacific Conservatory of Music and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Arizona. She was a finalist and winner in the Western and Pacific Regional Finals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Stacey Cornell has sung in several prior Festival Opera productions, most recently in *Don Giovanni*.

Michael Morgan made his debut as an operatic stage director with Festival Opera's 2006 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. 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*.

Festival Opera under executive director Helen Sheaff 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.

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DETAILS

Festival Opera presents *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* by Benjamin Britten

DATES: August 9, 12 and 15 at 8 pm; August 17 at 2 pm

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

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

MORE INFORMATION: Visit www.FestivalOpera.org

CAST: countertenor William Sauerland (Oberon), soprano Ani Maldjian (Tytania), Kurt Krikorian (Puck), bass Kirk Eichelberger (Bottom)

STAGE DIRECTION: Michael Morgan

SET DESIGN: Peter Crompton

COSTUME DESIGN: Susanna Douthit

CONDUCTOR: Michael Morgan

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