



FESTIVAL
OPERA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Helen Sheaff
(925) 944-9610
E-mail: publicity@festivalopera.com

**FESTIVAL OPERA INTRODUCES NEW ARTISTS
AS 2006 ANNIVERSARY SEASON OPENS WITH *TOSCA***

DATES: *Tosca*: July 8, 11, 14 at 8:00pm and July 16 at 2:00pm
LOCATION: Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek
COST: \$35 - \$100
TICKETS: (925) 943-SHOW

Walnut Creek, CA, June 15, 2006 – Festival Opera, the largest regional opera company in the East Bay, opens its 15th anniversary season July 8th with *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini. The new production highlights the company debuts of both soprano **Othalie Graham** and tenor **Robert Breault**, as well as stage director **Stephanie Leigh Smith**. *Tosca* will be followed in August with *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, featuring baritone Brian Leerhuber, who makes his mainstage debut with San Francisco Opera later in the year. All performances will be held at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek.

Embodying a range of passions – love, jealousy and revenge – Puccini’s *Tosca* includes some of opera’s most familiar arias and has remained one of the most popular operas for more than 100 years. *Tosca* is set in Rome, during Napoleon Bonaparte’s attack on Italy in 1800. When artist Mario Cavaradossi helps his friend Cesare Angelotti, a Bonaparte sympathizer, escape from prison, he sets in motion a tragic train of events. Rome’s chief of police, Baron Scarpia, has long desired Cavaradossi’s lover, singer Floria Tosca, for himself. Scarpia tricks Tosca into revealing Angelotti’s hiding place and then attempts to use his power to blackmail her into further betraying her love. Although Tosca manages to escape Scarpia, the lovers cannot escape his ultimate treachery.

More...

Joining Graham and Breault as Tosca and Cavaradossi will be Festival Opera favorite, bass-baritone **Bojan Knezevic** in the role of Scarpia. *Tosca* will be conducted by **Ari Pelto**, who returns to Festival Opera following his 1999 debut. The *Tosca* sets, designed by **Jean François Revon**, were co-produced with Opera Santa Barbara.

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. He returns to New York City Opera as Don Jose in *Carmen* later this year, 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 major opera companies throughout the United States including San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand 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.

About Festival Opera

Festival Opera, founded in 1991, is the largest regional opera company in the East Bay. It is considered a showcase for young American artists and strives to make opera accessible to a diverse audience.

###