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# Festival Opera Announces 2015 Season

## Spoiler Alert: Everyone Lives!

Festival Opera bounds back with optimism and a robust 2015 season, featuring Opera in the Park, chamber opera, and the company premiere of Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

*Opera in the Park* will return to Walnut Creek's Civic Park on Father's Day, Sunday, June 21, 2015, with a special serenade to fathers. Festival Opera presents some of the region's top singers in an afternoon performance



*Shawnette Sulker*  
photo Steve Pereira

before an audience on lawn chairs and blankets. The adjoining community fair will feature children's activities, arts, crafts, local business and food booths.

Returning to the Leshner Center for the Arts in July of 2015, Festival Opera presents a semi-staged production of Richard Strauss' jewel, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In the story, grand passions and comedy collide when two sets of performers - one an opera company and the other a *commedia dell'arte* troupe - are forced to perform together. Chaos ensues! Strauss collaborated with librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal. After the enormous success of *Der Rosenkavalier*, the two men conceived the idea of a light entertainment, a small trifle to amuse and divert the public. Maestro **Michael Morgan** returns to conduct a cast that includes **Shawnette Sulker** as Zerbinetta and **Shirin Eskandani** as the Komposer.

Festival Opera will also present two chamber operas – Gustav Holst's *Savitri* and Jack Perla's *River of Light*. Both chamber operas will be sung in English.

*Savitri* is a chamber opera in one act by

Holst [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav\\_Holst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Holst), his Opus 25, with the libretto by Holst himself. It was considered revolutionary in 1908 because there are only three solo singers, a wordless female chorus, and the accompanying orchestra consists of no more than 12 musicians. *Savitri* was the first English chamber opera since the end of the seventeenth century. The story is based on the episode of Savitri and Satyavan from the *Mahābhārata*, and is about the attempt of the title character, a loving wife, to save her husband from Death. Indo-American soprano **Maya Kherani** will make her company debut with Festival Opera in the role of Savitri.

**Philip Skinner**, bass baritone, will sing the role of Death, and Satyavan will be sung by tenor **Jorge Garza**.



*Maya Kherani*  
photo Valentina Sadiul



*Jorge Garza*

Festival Opera’s production will be the West Coast premiere and only the second staging of *River of Light*. It was composed by Bay Area composer **Jack Perla** with a libretto by award-winning and bestselling author, poet, and activist **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**. The work was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera’s HGOco, a unique initiative that connects the company to the community through collaboration. Its debut was March 2014.

*River of Light* tells a story of the immigrant experience through the eyes of one woman. Having moved from India, Meera loves her new husband, her high-powered job, and her lifestyle—until the birth of her daughter makes her long to recreate authentic Diwali traditions at home.

The role of Meera will be sung by **Maya Kherani** who sang the role for HGOco. Traditional Indian instruments and dancers will augment the cast and orchestra for the production. The Festival Opera Chamber Orchestra will be conducted by **John Kendall Bailey** who returns to Festival Opera where he was formerly assistant conductor (2010) and chorus director (2002-2006).

Festival Opera’s production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* is scheduled for July 10-12, 2015, at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, CA. It will be presented in German with English subtitles. Dates and venue for *Savitri* and *River of Light* will be announced soon. For more information, visit [www.FestivalOpera.org](http://www.FestivalOpera.org).

*All artists and programs subject to change.*



*Shirin Eskandani*

### About Festival Opera

Festival Opera has emerged as one of the most respected opera companies in the San Francisco Bay Area and one of the top 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.

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