

## **Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Dazzling Divas in Pittsburgh Opera's "The Capulets & the Montagues"**

<b>WHAT:</b>	<i>The Capulets &amp; the Montagues</i> by Vincenzo Bellini	
<b>WHERE:</b>	The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts	
<b>WHEN:</b>	Saturday, May 3 at 8:00 PM	Tuesday, May 6 at 7:00 PM
	Friday, May 9 at 8:00 PM	Sunday, May 11 at 2:00 PM
<b>RUN TIME:</b>	2 hours and 35 minutes with one intermission	
<b>LANGUAGE:</b>	Sung in Italian with English texts projected above the stage.	
<b>TICKETS:</b>	Start at \$16. Call (412) 456-6666, visit <a href="http://www.pittsburghopera.org">www.pittsburghopera.org</a> , or purchase in person at the Theater Square box office at 665 Penn Avenue.	

**Pittsburgh, PA.** . . April 16, 2008. . . Pittsburgh Opera announces *The Capulets & the Montagues* (I Capuleti e i Montecchi), the exquisite *bel canto* opera by Vincenzo Bellini. Two extraordinary divas return to Pittsburgh to interpret this rarely-performed tour de force: coloratura Laura Claycomb sings Giulietta to mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux's Romeo. In this pre-Shakespearean version of the classic tragedy, tenor Arthur Espiritu plays Tebaldo, the third protagonist in a love triangle destined for disaster. Thor Steingraber directs his own acclaimed production, designed by Robert Israel for Los Angeles Opera. Conducting the performance is a *bel canto* specialist, Pittsburgh Opera's own music director, Antony Walker.

#### **CAST & CONDUCTOR**

Giulietta	Laura Claycomb	coloratura soprano
Romeo	Vivica Genaux	mezzo soprano
Tebaldo	Arthur Espiritu**	lyric tenor
Capellio	David Pittsinger	bass
Lorenzo	Jonathan Beyer*	baritone
Conductor	Antony Walker	

**PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Production	Los Angeles Opera
Stage Director	Thor Steingraber
Set & Costume Designer	Robert Israel +
Lighting Designer	Christine Solger-Binder
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Chorus Master	Mark Trawka
Fight Director	Catherine Moore
+ Pittsburgh Opera debut	
** Alumnus of Pittsburgh Opera Center	
* Resident Artist of Pittsburgh Opera Center	

**ROMEO & GIULIETTA: PRE-SHAKESPEAREAN SOURCES**

Modern audiences will be surprised to see a different rendering of the classic tragedy in *Capulets* because the opera is not based on the Shakespeare play. Rather, the plot is loosely based on the original Italian legend, first recorded some 300 years earlier. Dante mentioned the “Montecchi e Cappelletti” in his Canto VI of his *Inferno* (c. 1300), where they appear as partisans in the civil war between supporters of the Pope (Guelfs) and the Holy Roman Emperor (Ghibellines). Another important source was one of the *Novelle* (tales) of Matteo Bandello, published beginning in 1554. Translated into English, the tales were the basis for Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet* (1595), *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night*.

**THE COMPOSER & OPERA**

In 1829, Gioachino Rossini premiered a grand opera in Paris, *Guillaume Tell*, and stunned the operatic world by announcing his retirement at the age of thirty-seven. The leading contenders for the Italian operatic throne were Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). Of these three great composers of *bel canto opera*, Bellini is known as the supreme melodist. Against his better judgment, Bellini was drawn into a contract with La Fenice in Venice in 1830 which left him with little over a month to compose a new opera, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. Pressed for time, both Bellini and his librettist, Felice Romani, scavenged earlier works for material. Bellini mined two earlier works: *Adelson e Salvini* and *Zaira*. In fact, the most famous aria from *Capulets*, Giulietta’s great romanza “O quante volte,” is substantially taken from the former work, Bellini’s first complete opera. Romani also revisited a libretto he had written five years earlier for Nicola Vaccai’s popular *Giulietta e Romeo*. This was based on a play of the

same title by Luigi Scevola. Romani lifted the basic shape and some of the verses from this play, whose action takes place in Dante's time period. There is no evidence that either Scevola or Bellini knew Shakespeare's play.

*I Capuleti e i Montecchi* was a triumph at its premiere in March of 1830. It drove Vaccai's operatic telling of the story from the stage—that is, until diva Maria Malibran decided she preferred Vaccai's tomb scene because it gave her more to sing. So from 1832 until the late 20th century, most performances of Bellini's opera used the Vaccai finale. Pittsburgh Opera restores the original Bellini finale.

Bellini's music for *Capulets* is sensuous, long-breathed, and drenched in longing. One of Sicily's greatest sons, he knew how to write poignant melodies that show off the voice to the best advantage, allowing the artists to shape the music with incredible freedom. The spare orchestral accompaniments support the voice with such simplicity and pathos that Chopin used them as a model for his exquisite piano works of the same era.

### **Bellini Operas at Pittsburgh Opera**

Since Pittsburgh Opera's first season (1939-40), *The Capulets & the Montagues* is only the third of Bellini's ten operas to be performed here. The artists of past performances of Bellini's works here at Pittsburgh Opera:

#### *La Sonnambula* (1831)

1964 Roberta Peters; Robert Moulson, Ezio Flagello; conductor Richard Karp, director Anthony Stivanello

#### *Norma* (1831)

1976 Cristina Deutkom, Bianca Berini; Rod McWherter, Ara Barberian; conductor Anton Coppola, director David Bamberger

1985 Rosalind Plowright, Stefania Toczyska; Corneliu Murgu, Eric Halfvarson; conductor Eduardo Mueller, director Tito Capobianco

1997 Kallen Esperian, Phyllis Pancella; Joseph Evans, Rosendo Flores; conductor Theo Alcantara, director Tito Capobianco

Although this production is the first time for *The Capulets & the Montagues* on Pittsburgh Opera's mainstage season, the Pittsburgh Opera Center gave one performance of *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* on February 20, 1998 at the Byham Theater. Among the cast were international opera sensation Rolando Villazón as Tebaldo and two of today's rising opera stars: Maria Zifchak as Romeo and Oren Gradus as Capellio.

## THE PRODUCTION

Stage director Thor Steingraber and designer Robert Israel collaborated in creating this production for LA Opera. Steingraber said, “Opera companies usually try to reinforce the expectations audiences bring to the theater. We were trying to do the opposite. We want people to experience this opera on its own merits.”

Israel’s scenery is more evocative than realistic, says Steingraber. “The opera is buoyant and vulnerable, as if suspended, and the scenery is meant to be the same. There is a sense of nostalgia, both in the music and in the production. The production exists as if in the memory of its characters—the world as seen, perhaps, through the eyes of young lovers who are united only in the moments before their death, and whose life together is spent not in the Earthly realm, but in eternity.”

The spare set combines architectural elements from across the centuries and serves as a frame for the action as a ballet set would do. Projected clouds create a series of skylines, reinforcing the idea of a dreamlike, celestial journey of the characters.

For Steingraber, the most notable aspect to the libretto is the fact that the action is entirely set on the day of Giulietta’s wedding to Tebaldo, creating a sense of urgency that drives the plot. “In fact,” he says, “my visualization of the production began with a wedding dress.” White wedding dresses first appeared in the Victorian period. Giulietta’s famous aria, “O quante volte,” depicts the young bride standing at her window, a common 19<sup>th</sup>-century theme in art. “I thought this was a way to link today’s audience—who still expect a bride in that kind of dress—both to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to the time of the original story.”

Rather than a family-versus-family battle, the production shows the generations in conflict. Romeo, Giulietta, and Tebaldo are the victims of centuries of familial repression in which a patriarchal society deprives young people of the right to choose their futures. For this reason, Capellio and the chorus men are represented as wealthy industrialists, their battles fought by younger men. As for the women, Giulietta has no voice in her future, and the chorus women are literally mute until the funeral procession. Underlining the gender issue, Steingraber has added a non-singing Lady Capulet, who silently represents the female point of view.

Steingraber notes another aspect to the updated setting: a female Romeo wearing trousers is more believable than one in tights. Bellini made this a “trouser role” because mezzos have long been used to play youths with unchanged voices. “I find it magical and transformative to have two

women playing the lovers. Bellini was able to bind them together musically in a way that's not possible with a tenor and a soprano—their lines literally wrap around each other.”

Steingraber continues, “Of course, most opera-goers associate the Romeo and Julietta story with 14<sup>th</sup>-century Verona. But I believe a contemporary setting has a greater sense of history—a sense that the conflict has become entrenched with the passing of centuries. The battle becomes a historic one in which the origin is long forgotten and the motive is revenge. And yet, a family palazzo in 21st-century Italy might appear unchanged by the centuries. This tension between modern and ancient is dynamic. By setting the opera in the Edwardian era, we create a sense of hope that an ancient conflict can be eclipsed by modern resolution.”

### **RELATED EVENTS**

#### **Pittsburgh Opera Preview on WQED-FM (89.3)**

*Sunday, April 27 at 6:00 PM and Thursday, May 1 at 7:00 PM*

An in-depth introduction to the singers, music and production of *The Capulets & the Montagues*.

[http://www.wqed.org/fm/programs\\_pop.php](http://www.wqed.org/fm/programs_pop.php)

#### **Free Pre-Opera Talks**

*One hour before every performance, Benedum Center.*

Join Pittsburgh Opera for a lively behind-the-scenes introduction to *The Capulets & the Montagues*. Free of charge to all ticket holders. No reservations necessary.

#### **Meet the Artists!**

Immediately following the *Tuesday, May 6* performance, the audience is invited to join Artistic Director Christopher Hahn and members of the cast for coffee and conversation in the lower lobby of the Benedum Center (free).

This production is generously sponsored by Equitable Resources

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Pittsburgh Opera, celebrating 69 years of opera in southwestern Pennsylvania, is a member of OPERA America, the national organization for opera companies, and the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. Pittsburgh Opera's performances are supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, and Allegheny Regional Asset District. KDKA is the season media sponsor.

## CAST & PRODUCTION BIOS

**LAURA CLAYCOMB – GIULIETTA** Native Texan Laura Claycomb excels in adventurous repertoire, ranging from baroque music and *bel canto* masterpieces to contemporary compositions at the major opera and concert houses. Her delicacy, refinement, and theatricality in high-flying repertoire make her one of the foremost lyric coloraturas of her generation. Her signature roles have taken her around the world to the major opera houses and orchestras, including her Pittsburgh Opera debut as Gilda/*Rigoletto* in 2005. Ms. Claycomb made her debut in Europe as Giulietta at the Grand Théâtre de Genève in 1994. Subsequently she had overwhelming successes in this role at the Paris Opera, LA Opera, and with the Munich Radio Orchestra. She made her La Scala debut in 1998 singing the title role in Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* and at the Salzburg Festival in 1997 as Amanda in Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* with Esa-Pekka Salonen and Peter Sellars. Ms. Claycomb has also performed several roles with San Francisco Opera, including Zerbinetta/*Ariadne auf Naxos* and Marie/*La fille du régiment*. She recorded *Le Grand Macabre* with Salonen on Sony, *Sir John in Love* of Vaughan-Williams with Richard Hickox on Chandos, Händel's "Arcadian Duets" with French baroque conductor Emmanuelle Haim on EMI/Virgin, and *La Partenza*, featuring *bel canto* chamber songs, duets and ensembles with pianist David Harper and various artists on the Opera Rara label. She also recorded Mahler's Fourth Symphony with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and Michael Tilson-Thomas.

**VIVICA GENAUX – ROMEO** Charismatic Alaska-born mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux continues to be praised for her extraordinary performances on the world's great musical stages, not only for the technical command and beauty of her voice, but also for her compelling character portrayals. She is consistently hailed as one of today's foremost interpreters of the music of the Baroque and *bel canto* eras. She made her debut with Pittsburgh Opera as Angelina/*La cenerentola* in 2002 and returns next season in the title role of *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. Ms. Genaux balances her appearances in the U.S. and abroad, crisscrossing the Atlantic, for operatic engagements, concerts, and recitals in new venues, as well as returns to sites of previous audience and critical acclaim. She adds three new parts to her pantheon of characters, one each by D. Scarlatti, Vivaldi and Rossini. Her operatic roles now encompass thirty-three characters, twenty-three of which are trouser roles. In 2007-08 she is heard in San Sebastian (*Ottavia restituita al trono*), Venice (*Bajazet*), Minneapolis (*L'italiana*), on a four-city Europa Galante tour (Cracow, Paris, Madrid, Metz), Geneva for a company debut (*Cenerentola*), concerts of Baroque gems in Istanbul and Basel, a first appearance with Washington Concert Opera in *Bianca e Falliero* with Antony Walker, a recital at the Royal Chapel at Versailles, a return to the Caramoor Festival, and concludes with another new Vivaldi recording, *Ercole sul Termodonte*, partnered again with Maestro Biondi and Europa Galante on Virgin Classics (her sixth on the label).

**ARTHUR ESPIRITU – TEBALDO** Making his La Scala debut this season, the young Philippine-American tenor Arthur Espiritu continues to set himself apart as a young artist possessing an exceptionally beautiful, lyric voice capable of conveying a broad range of characters. A recent alumnus of the Pittsburgh Opera Center, he sang the title role in Ormindo with the Pittsburgh Opera Center, as well Tybalt/*Roméo et Juliette*, Beppe/*Pagliacci*, Maintop/*Billy Budd*, Ferrando/*Così fan tutte* (cover), Brighella/*Ariadne auf Naxos*, and Borsa/*Rigoletto*. In 2007 he sang in Mozart's "Coronation" Mass with the Pittsburgh Symphony and was tenor soloist in *The Symphony on Ice*, also with the PSO. Upcoming roles include Pang/*Turandot* with Opera Memphis, Don Ramiro/*La cenerentola*, also with Opera Memphis. He has performed with Opera Memphis, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Utah Festival Opera, and Opera North, in addition to participating in the training programs of Santa Fe Opera and Opera Theatre of St. Louis. In concert Mr. Espiritu has sung with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, the Jefferson Performing Arts Society, and has performed in the summer series at the Marlboro Music Festival.

**DAVID PITTSINGER – CAPELLIO** American bass David Pittsinger he has sung with Pittsburgh Opera eleven times, most recently in the title role in *Mefistofele* in 1996. Recent career highlights include Massenet's *Don Quichotte* in Buenos Aires, Nick Shadow/*The Rake's Progress* for Paris, Hamburg, Brussels, Cologne, Lausanne, and Bordeaux; *Don Giovanni* for L'Opéra de Nice, New York City Opera, Philadelphia, and Vancouver; and the St. Matthew Passion with Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic. He has performed with the festivals of Salzburg, Dresden, Macerata, Tanglewood, and Santa Fe, as well as Martin's *Golgotha* with the Vienna Philharmonic, Verdi's Requiem with the LA Philharmonic, and staged performances with English National Opera. This season he sang Bellini's *I puritani* at Washington Concert Opera, his much anticipated role debut as Scarpia with Florida Grand Opera, and Rambaldo/*La Rondine* at LA Opera. In concert, he sings Handel's *Messiah* in Milan under Sir Neville Marriner and makes his Dallas Symphony Orchestra debut under Jiri Belohlavek in Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*. Other upcoming engagements include a new production of Massenet's *Thais* for the Metropolitan Opera, a new recording and concert performances of Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* for NYCO at Carnegie Hall, as well as Seneca in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Mr. Pittsinger can be heard on the Grammy-winning Virgin Classics recording of Floyd's *Susannah*, in Cavalli's *La Calisto* on Harmonia Mundi, and an upcoming Ives recording on Naxos.

#### **ANTONY WALKER - MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR**

Since his debut in 1991, this exciting and prolific young conductor has led 54 operas, 47 large scale choral/orchestral works and numerous symphonic and chamber works with companies in Europe, the United States, and Australia. His conducting schedule has included engagements with Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Australia, Welsh National Opera, Minnesota Opera, New York City Opera, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Cincinnati Opera, Hawaii Opera Theater, Arizona Opera, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, Sydney Opera House Orchestra, Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Barossa Festival Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and with the Pittsburgh Opera Center and Chatham Baroque for Monteverdi's *Ulysses* in 2004. Maestro Walker has recorded 26 CDs and DVDs of the works of Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart, Orff, Fauré, Puccini, Verdi, Purcell, Handel, Bach, and others. His CD collaboration with Teddy Tahu Rhodes garnered the ARIA award for Best Classical Music Album of 2004, and his DVD of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto won the international DVD Association Award for Music Excellence for 2005. Releases of additional works including Handel's *Semele*, Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Rameau's *Dardanus*, and Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* have won high praise in reviews. As Artistic Director of Washington Concert Opera, Maestro Walker has championed under-performed works, such as *Béatrice et Bénédicte*, *Stiffelio*, *Roberto Devereux*, *La donna del lago*, *Esclarmonde*, *Luisa Miller*, Rossini's *Otello*, and Bellini's *I puritani*. As Co-Artistic Director of Pinchgut Opera in Australia, he has conducted baroque works including *Dardanus*, *L'Orfeo*, and most recently *Idomeneo* with the Orchestra of the Antipodes on period instruments. Deeply committed to contemporary music, he has conducted many premieres of significant international compositions in his native Australia, among them Arvo Pärt's St. John Passion, Poulenc's *Figure humaine*, Iannis Xenakis' *Idmen A and B*, and more than 70 premieres of new Australian works.

**THOR STEINGRABER – STAGE DIRECTOR** *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* is Thor Steingraber's fifth production for Pittsburgh Opera. Past productions include *Elektra*, *Don Giovanni*, *La cenerentola*, and *La traviata*. He has staged this production of *Capuleti* at Minnesota Opera, New York City Opera, and LA Opera, where he conceived it. Steingraber has enjoyed a fourteen-year relationship with LA Opera where he also directed *Nabucco*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *La cenerentola*, amongst others. In the current Los Angeles season he directed *Tristan and Isolde* in a production conceived by David Hockney and in 2010 returns for *Turandot*. In residence at Lyric Opera of Chicago for ten seasons, he directed *La traviata* and staged *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* as part of the 2005 Ring Cycle. His favorite opera projects include his work with Chicago schoolchildren in two productions for Chicago Opera Theater, Noye's *Fludde* and

*Brundibar*, the latter designed by Maurice Sendak. Other companies where he has directed include Santa Fe Opera, San Francisco Opera, Utah Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Portland Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Opera Pacific. He is a Distinguished Guest Artist at the Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University where he just directed Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and has also taught at Indiana University, the Curtis Institute, and Yale University. This summer he directs two musicals for the ASCAP Festival of New American Musicals in Los Angeles, and next year takes time off from directing and teaching to be in residence at Harvard University's Kennedy School.

**ROBERT ISRAEL - SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER** Robert Israel has designed sets and/or costumes for numerous opera companies, among them the Metropolitan Opera, English National Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Paris Opéra, De Nederlandse Opera, Royal Danish Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, New National Theater of Tokyo, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, and the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto. He made his Seattle Opera debut with Wagner's *Walküre* in 1985, a preview to his 1986 *Ring des Nibelungen*. He returned for Verdi's *Aida* and *Macbeth*, as well as Wagner's *Parsifal* (which opened McCaw Hall in 2003). He also designed the sets and costumes for Daniel Catán's *Florenzia en el Amazonas* and Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*. Mr. Israel's credits include designs for London's National Theatre, designs for Chicago's Millennium Park, serving as a consultant on McCaw Hall, and projects with the Walker Art Center, the Foundation Maeght, and the Museum of Modern Art (His costume drawings for *Satyagraha* are part of the permanent collection at MOMA.). An elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Mr. Israel is also a professor in the School of Arts and Architecture at University of California in Los Angeles.

**CHRISTINE SOLGER-BINDER - LIGHTING DESIGNER** Christine Solger-Binder has designed over 100 productions in Chicago and around the country. Her work has appeared at Pittsburgh Opera in our most recent productions of *Don Giovanni*, *Fidelio*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Chris' has also designed for Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theatre, San Diego Opera, New York City Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Houston Grand Opera, and Theatre an der Wein in Vienna. In theater, Ms. Binder has designed for Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare, the Court Theatre, Redmoon Theatre, Northlight, About Face Theatre Company, Lookingglass Theatre Company, the McCarter Theatre, and Hartford Stage. Recent designs include: *Tartuffe* for the Oregon Shakespeare and *La traviata*, *La bohème*, *Falstaff*, and *Onegin* for the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Upcoming work includes *Kosi Dasa* for the Theatre School, *The Brothers Karamazov* for Lookingglass, and *The Ox Herder's Tale* for Blair Thomas and Company. Ms. Binder has received 2 Jeff Citations for her work with Redmoon Theatre, (*Frankenstein* and *Frankie and Johnny*) and has been nominated for Jeff Awards for her work with the Court Theatre, Northlight Theatre and Lookingglass Theatre Company. She is an Artistic Associate with Lookingglass Theatre Company and is the Head of Lighting for The Theatre School at DePaul University.

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