

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: BETH PARKER (412) 281-0912 X 248 eparker@pittsburghopera.org

Pittsburgh Opera Announces 70th Anniversary Season in 2008-2009: “A Journey of Imagination”

Company showcases new headquarters with songs by Ricky Ian Gordon

Pittsburgh, PA (8/21/08) . . . Pittsburgh Opera announces its 70th Anniversary Season, “A Journey of Imagination” at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts. General Director Christopher Hahn says, “One of the wonderful things about opera is that it has the power to take us out of our ordinary lives into another world. This season we visit the ancient Middle East for *Samson & Dalila*, sunny Italy for *Don Pasquale*, the Latin Quarter of Paris for *La bohème*, and Jazz Age North Africa for *The Italian Girl in Algiers*.” Another important journey for the company is *The Grapes of Wrath*, a new opera by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie based on John Steinbeck’s classic American novel. In November, the Company also capitalizes on the presence of this living American composer with two concerts of Gordon’s music in the concert space of its new headquarters in Pittsburgh’s Strip District. Pittsburgh Opera’s Music Director, Antony Walker, who conducts three mainstage operas in the upcoming season, says, “This season showcases the incredible diversity of offerings that Pittsburgh Opera is now able to produce—bel canto comedies, French grand opera with all the trappings and Puccini’s huge Romantic score, as well as this wonderful new piece that so successfully fuses American popular music with grand operatic style.”

SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

- **October 18-26, 2008:** Saint-Saëns’ *Samson & Dalila* starring the incomparable mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe as Dalila, tenor Frank Porretta as Samson, and Metropolitan Opera baritone Kim Josephson as the High Priest of Dagon. Music Director Antony Walker conducts this exotic evocation of ancient times.
- **November 15-23, 2008:** the premiere of the revised version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the triumphant new American opera by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie based on John Steinbeck’s novel. Featuring Metropolitan Opera star Elizabeth Bishop as Ma Joad and members of the world premiere cast, as well as local favorites Craig Verm and WQED’s Anna Singer.

- **February 7-15, 2009:** Pittsburgh Opera’s nationally renowned Resident Artists present Donizetti’s comic masterpiece, *Don Pasquale*, at the CAPA Theater downtown in a new Pittsburgh Opera production.
- **March 28-April 5, 2009:** In Puccini’s *La bohème*, love blooms again for Pamela Armstrong and Frank Lopardo as Mimì and Rodolfo, and Rhoslyn Jones and David Adam Moore as Musetta and Marcello. Pittsburgh’s own funnyman Kevin Glavin sings the dual roles of Benoit and Alcindoro in Michael Yeagan’s gorgeous Parisian production, conducted by Antony Walker.
- **May 2-10, 2009:** Mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux sings her signature role as Rossini’s *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (L’italiana in Algeri) in a wacky 1930’s production from Santa Fe Opera conducted by Antony Walker. William Burden plays the heroine’s heartthrob, along with wanna-be suitors Paolo Pecchioli and Earle Patriarco.

Samson & Dalila

By Camille Saint-Saëns

October 18, 21, 24, 26, 2008

Note: The Saturday, October 18 Opening Night performance begins at 7:00 pm.

Sung in French with English translations projected above the stage.

French grand opera meets ancient Israel as Hebrew warrior Samson faces his greatest opponent—the Philistine temptress Dalila. As Samson’s rejected lover, she’s only too happy to bring the Hebrew rebellion to an end by seducing Samson and robbing him of his strength—his magnificent hair. Even though blinded and chained, Samson destroys the Temple of Dagon and puts an end to the wickedness of the Philistines.

Spectacular mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe (Amneris in *Aida* 2007) weaves her spell as Dalila in an exotic production that evokes Biblical times. Dramatic tenor Frank Porretta brings down the house as Samson, Metropolitan opera baritone Kim Josephson schemes against him as the High Priest of Dagon, and Harry Dworchak thunders as the despised ruler Abimélech. Music Director Antony Walker leads the sumptuous orchestra and chorus, and Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope bring the talents of Attack Theater to the erotic *Bacchanale*, Saint-Saëns’ famous dance of the Philistines.

- “A force of nature...Ms. Blythe’s voice is tremendous. It pulls a listener to the edge of his seat.” –*New York Times*
- “...an Amneris for the ages...” –Robert J. Croan in *Opera News*

*The 54th annual Diamond Horseshoe Celebration on Opening Night (Saturday, October 18) consists of **An Evening in Three Acts.***

Act 1 – Cocktails and dinner at the Hilton Hotel Ballroom at 4pm; tickets start at \$350.

Act 2 – Samson & Dalila at 7pm (opera tickets purchased through box office).

Act 3 – OperaBLAST! Following the performance, dance the night away at the afterparty featuring hors d'oeuvres, extravagant desserts, cocktails, live band, and silent auction; tickets \$60 per person. Event begins at 10pm.

Events may be purchased singly or as a package at www.pittsburghopera.org.

The Grapes of Wrath

Music by Ricky Ian Gordon and libretto by Michael Korie

Based on the classic American novel by John Steinbeck

November 15, 18, 21, 23, 2008

Premiere of the revised version

A Pittsburgh Opera co-production with Minnesota Opera/Utah Opera/Opera Pacific

Sung in English with English words projected above the stage.

A Pittsburgh 250th Event

America's greatest epic comes to the stage in a new opera that's taken audiences and critics by storm. *The Grapes of Wrath* follows the Joad family as they pursue the American Dream from the Oklahoma Dustbowl to the orchards of California. Obie-winning composer Ricky Ian Gordon (for *Orpheus and Euridice* 2005) and Tony-nominated librettist Michael Korie (for *Grey Gardens* 2007) fuse the traditions of opera and Broadway with blues, Appalachian music, and echoes of Copland and Gershwin.

Pittsburgh Opera's production reflects the substantial revisions Gordon and Korie have made to the score since the world premiere at Minnesota Opera in January 2007, including a reconfigured first act and expanded choral writing.

Conductor Richard Buckley (most recently *Pagliacci* 2006) takes the podium for a fifth time to lead members of the original Minnesota Opera cast, as well as former resident artists of Pittsburgh Opera in major roles: Craig Verm (Tom Joad), Sean Panikkar (Jim Casy), and Jason Karn (Al Joad). WQED's Anna Singer plays Granma. New to Pittsburgh are soprano Danielle Pastin as Rosasharn, Jesse Blumberg as Connie Rivers, and Metropolitan Opera mezzo Elizabeth Bishop in the pivotal role of Ma Joad.

The enormous cast of 19 soloists includes three children and an ensemble of crackerjack bit players who—along with the impressive chorus—portray waitresses, truck drivers, politicians, field hands, and townspeople along the way.

As co-producer of this unforgettable new opera, Pittsburgh Opera presents *The Grapes of Wrath* in its imaginative and innovative set by opera and Broadway veteran designer Allen Moyer (*Grey Gardens* on Broadway; Pittsburgh Opera productions *The Elixir of Love*, *Carmen*, *The Flying Dutchman*). Moyer uses a vintage Ford truck and a series of animated front and rear projections by Wendall K. Harrington to portray the different locations as the Joads travel across Route 66 to the fields and labor camps of California.

- “The great American opera? *The Grapes of Wrath* might be it.” —*Opera Today*
- “A sweeping panorama filled with passion, drama, and poignancy.” —*Deseret Morning News*
- “Smart, funny, touching, harrowing”—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

Pittsburgh Opera Center Production at CAPA Theater

Don Pasquale

By Gaetano Donizetti

February 7, 10, 13, 15, 2009

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

In *Don Pasquale*, Donizetti’s sunny *opera buffa* masterpiece, true love wins out when the old skinflint Pasquale tries to force his nephew to marry for money—and gets a lesson he’ll never forget. It’s a delightful romp with infectious melodies, a moonlit tryst, and virtuoso singing from the resident artists of Pittsburgh Opera. Conductor Glenn Lewis leads the musical forces, featuring Deborah Selig as Norina, Carlos Feliciano and Dean Kokanos alternating as Ernesto, Jonathan Beyer as Dr. Malatesta, and Liam Moran in the title role. Metropolitan Opera assistant stage director Eric Einhorn (*Xerxes* 2005) collaborates with designer Cameron Anderson on a new Pittsburgh Opera production for CAPA Theater.

La bohème

By Giacomo Puccini

March 28, 31; April 3, 5, 2009

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

It’s Christmas Eve in Paris, and a young poet meets the love of his life in *La bohème*, Puccini’s evergreen story of romance, friendship, and the struggle for survival among the starving artists of the Latin Quarter. Pamela Armstrong (Elvira in *Don Giovanni* 2001) and Frank Lopardo (Pinkerton in last

season's *Madama Butterfly*) headline as Mimì and Rodolfo, with David Adam Moore (who replaced Nathan Gunn in two performances of last season's *Billy Budd*) as Marcello, and Rhoslyn Jones making her Pittsburgh Opera debut as Musetta. Kevin Glavin adds a comic spin as the landlord Benoit and as Musetta's "protector," Alcindoro. Antony Walker leads the magical production, designed by Tony-winner Michael Yeargan (for *Light in the Piazza* 2005)—portraying late 19th-century Paris in its vigor and charm.

- "Frank Lopardo showed effortless, virile, Italianate sound and seamless acting ability."
—*Cincinnati Enquirer*
- "For those who turn to the opera for grand spectacle, this production rewards with Michael Yeargan's impressive sets." —*Baltimore City Paper*

The Italian Girl in Algiers

(L'italiana in Algeri)

By Gioachino Rossini

May 2, 5, 8, 10, 2009

Company premiere

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

Behind the beaded curtain of this wacky harem is Rossini's effervescent comedy, *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. Vivica Genaux (Romeo in *The Capulets & the Montagues* and Rossini's *Cinderella*) ignites the stage in one of her signature roles as the feisty Isabella—reincarnated as an Amelia Earhart-style aviatrix of the 1930s. From the moment she crash-lands on the Algerian coast, we know she'll outfox the gullible Mustafà—and rescue her beloved Lindoro. With the amazingly handsome tenor William Burden (Narraboth in *Salome* 2001) as Lindoro, Earle Patriarco (Rossini's Figaro 2003 and Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* 2007) returning to his comic roots as the bumbling Taddeo, and—in his Pittsburgh debut—rising Italian bass Paolo Pecchioli as Mustafà. Two Pittsburgh Opera resident artists take crucial secondary roles: Deborah Selig (Elvira) and Katherine Drago (Zulma). Music Director Antony Walker presides in the pit, and Chris Alexander, acclaimed for his Pittsburgh stagings of *Fidelio* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*, directs.

Reviews from recent Minnesota Opera performances of this production starring Vivica Genaux:

- "The brash, self-assured heroine is one of Rossini's greatest creations and Genaux's performance is simply spellbinding." —Rochester *Post-Bulletin*
- "...a superb, playful staging...David Woolard's costumes amid Robert Innes Hopkins' inventive oversized toy box of a set prove the ideal frosting for this tasty cake of a production."
—*Pioneer Press*

ADDITIONAL EVENTS

Meet the Composer: Two Evenings with Ricky Ian Gordon

A Double Bill: “Orpheus and Euridice” and “Green Sneakers”

November 1, 2008 at 8:00 PM
Pittsburgh Opera in the Strip
2425 Liberty Avenue

Pittsburgh Opera showcases its intimate new Strip District performance space with a double bill of dramatic works with words and music by Ricky Ian Gordon: *Orpheus and Euridice* and *Green Sneakers*. Written for soprano, clarinet, and piano, *Orpheus and Euridice* is a song cycle in two acts that uses the clarinet as the voice of Orpheus, who says a poignant farewell to his beloved Euridice. Pittsburgh Opera’s production features Resident Artist soprano Deborah Selig, clarinetist Michael Dee, and pianist Scott Dunn, who also played in the world premiere. The hour-long staged song cycle played at Lincoln Center in 2005, garnering several Special Citations at the 2006 OBIE awards.

Gordon scored *Green Sneakers* for “baritone, string quartet, and empty chair.” Premiered in July of 2008 by baritone Jesse Blumberg, *Green Sneakers* is an hour-long set of songs with instrumental interludes. The title poignantly refers to a Christmas gift Gordon gave his partner Jeffrey, who later died. Jesse Blumberg, who also sings Connie Rivers in *The Grapes of Wrath*, returns for this second performance of the work, partnered by the Starling String Quartet from Carnegie Mellon University. At the post-performance reception, audience members will have the opportunity to meet Gordon and the artists.

Bright Eyed Joy: The Songs of Ricky Ian Gordon performed by Pittsburgh Opera’s Resident Artists with Ricky Ian Gordon at the piano

November 19, 2008 at 7:00 PM
Pittsburgh Opera in the Strip
2425 Liberty Avenue

Before *The Grapes of Wrath* became a sensation, Ricky Ian Gordon was best known as a songwriter. Pittsburgh Opera presents an evening of Gordon’s songs performed by the Resident Artists of Pittsburgh Opera. A gifted raconteur and lyricist in his own right, Gordon will accompany the singers

and talk about his music. His songs have been performed and recorded by some of American's greatest singers—Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Audra McDonald, and Kristin Chenoweth—among others.

- “Gordon creates masterpiece in *Green Sneakers*” –*Opera Today*
- “Gordon’s music is...bursting with effervescence... sophisticated even by the standards laid out by Bernstein and Sondheim. It’s caviar for a world gorging on pizza.” –*New York Times*

General admission tickets: \$25 for either *Orpheus and Euridice/Green Sneakers* or *Bright Eyed Joy*; \$40 for tickets to both concerts when purchased together. Student tickets \$15 for each concert. Receptions included in admission price. Tickets available after Sept. 5 through www.pittsburghopera.org. For more information contact 412-281-0912 or tickets@pittsburghopera.org.

Pittsburgh Opera Cabaret

March 2, 2009 at 6:30 PM
Pittsburgh Opera in the Strip
2425 Liberty Avenue

Leave your opera glasses at home and get up close and personal with the resident artists of Pittsburgh Opera. This uproarious evening of songs and comedy at the intimate Cabaret at Theater Square benefits Pittsburgh Opera Center. Get your tickets *NOW*—the Cabaret always sells out! Tickets: \$200, \$150, \$100, and \$50. *Prices based on seating location and include dinner and drinks.*

Free pre-opera talks— One hour before each performance, General Director Christopher Hahn and “Opera Lady” Beth Parker give a lively 30-minute preview in the Orchestra level of the Benedum Center. Free for ticket-holders.

Meet the Artists—Christopher Hahn and cast members meet the audience for refreshments and repartee in the Lower Lobby of the Benedum Center following each Tuesday evening performance.

For more information, call 412-281-0912 x248 or visit www.pittsburghopera.org

2008-2009 SEASON CAST LIST

Samson & Dalila

Conductor	Antony Walker
Stage Director	Stephen Pickover
Production	Purchased from Opera Memphis and reconfigured by Pittsburgh Opera
Set Designer	Peter Dean Beck
Costume Designer	Michael Scott for Washington National Opera
Lighting Designer	Cindy Limauro
Choreography	Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope for Attack Theater
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Dalila	Stephanie Blythe
Samson	Frank Porretta +
High Priest of Dagon	Kim Josephson+
Abimélech, satrap of Gaza	Harry Dworchak
An Old Hebrew	Liam Moran*

+ Pittsburgh Opera debuts
* Pittsburgh Opera Center artists
** Pittsburgh Opera Center alumni

The Grapes of Wrath

Conductor	Richard Buckley
Original Stage Director and Dramaturg	Eric Simonson+
Original Choreographer	Doug Varone+
Production	Co-Commissioned by The Minnesota Opera and Utah Opera
Orchestrations	Ricky Ian Gordon+ and Bruce Coughlin+
Set Designer	Alan Moyer
Costume Designer	Kärin Kopischke+
Lighting Designer	Robert Wierzel
Video Designer	Wendall K. Harrington+
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Rosasharn	Danielle Pastin+*
Ma Joad	Elizabeth Bishop+
Granma	Anna Singer
Jim Casy	Sean Panikkar**
Tom Joad	Craig Verm**
Pa Joad	<i>Peter Halverson+</i>
Uncle John	<i>Robert Orth</i>
Connie Rivers	<i>Jesse Blumberg+</i>
Noah Joad	<i>Andrew Wilkowske+</i>
Granpa	Joseph Frank
Al Joad	Jason Karn**
Ruthie Joad	Michelle Coben+
Winfield Joad	Joseph Serafini+
Starving Boy	Maliq Cunningham+

Featured Ensemble

Anna Jablonski+
Greg Pearson+
Theodore Chletsos+
Karin Wolverton+
Kelly Markgraf+

Italics denote members of world premiere cast at Minnesota Opera

Original scenery and costumes are jointly owned by Pittsburgh Opera, The Minnesota Opera, Utah Symphony & Opera, and Opera Pacific and were constructed at The Minnesota Opera and Utah Symphony & Opera shops.

La bohème

Conductor	Antony Walker
Stage Director	Crystal M. Manich+
Production	Pittsburgh Opera co-production with Baltimore Opera, Florida Grand Opera, and Palm Beach Opera
Set Designer	Michael Yeargan
Costume Designer	TBA
Lighting Designer	Cindy Limauro
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Mimi	Pamela Armstrong
Musetta	Rhoslyn Jones+
Rodolfo	Frank Lopardo
Marcello	David Adam Moore
Schaunard	Jonathan Beyer*
Colline	Liam Moran*
Benoit/Alcindoro	Kevin Glavin**

+ Pittsburgh Opera debuts
* Pittsburgh Opera Center artists
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The Italian Girl in Algiers

Conductor	Antony Walker
Stage Director	Chris Alexander
Production	Santa Fe Opera
Set Designer	Robert Innes Hopkins
Costume Designer	David C. Woolard
Lighting Designer	TBA
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Isabella	Vivica Genaux
Elvira	Deborah Selig*
Zulma	Katherine Drago*
Lindoro	William Burden
Mustafà	Paolo Pecchioli+
Taddeo	Earle Patriarco
Ali	TBA

Don Pasquale

Conductor	Glenn Lewis
Director	Eric Einhorn
Production	Pittsburgh Opera (new production)
Set Designer	Cameron Anderson
Costume Designer	Toni West
Lighting Designer	Stevie O'Brian Agnew
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier

+ Pittsburgh Opera debuts
* Pittsburgh Opera Center artists
** Pittsburgh Opera Center alumni

Norina	Deborah Selig*
Ernesto	Carlos Feliciano*/Dean Kokanos* alternating performances
Dr. Malatesta	Jonathan Beyer*
Don Pasquale	Liam Moran*

Pittsburgh Opera, celebrating 70 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 the Allegheny Regional Asset District.

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