

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE

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**Pittsburgh Opera Announces 2008-2009 Season:
“A Journey of Imagination”**

Pittsburgh, PA (2/17/08) . . . Pittsburgh Opera announces its 2008-2009 season, “A Journey of Imagination” at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts. Artistic 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. 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, dramatic tenor Mark Lundberg 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 East Coast premiere of the triumphant new American opera, *The Grapes of Wrath*, by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie. Featuring Metropolitan Opera star Elizabeth Bishop as Ma Joad and members of the original Minnesota Opera cast, as well as local favorites Craig Verm and Anna Singer.

EMBARGO until 2/17/08

- **February 7-15, 2009:** Pittsburgh Opera's nationally renowned resident artists present Donizetti's comic masterpiece, *Don Pasquale*, at 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 David Yeargan'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 Seattle 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 Mark Lundberg 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 temple priestesses.

EMBARGO until 2/17/08

- “A force of nature...Ms. Blythe’s voice is tremendous. It pulls a listener to the edge of his seat.” –*New York Times*

The annual Diamond Horseshoe Celebration on Opening Night (Saturday, October 18) culminates with the Opera Blast, immediately following the opera. The Blast includes extravagant desserts, cocktails, entertainment, and silent auction; tickets are \$60 per person.

The Grapes of Wrath

By composer Ricky Ian Gordon and librettist Michael Korie

Based on the classic American novel by John Steinbeck

November 15, 18, 21, 23, 2008

East Coast premiere

A co-production with Minnesota Opera (world premiere January 2007) and Utah Opera

Sung in English with English words projected above the stage.

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.

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 former resident artists of Pittsburgh Opera in major roles: Craig Verm (Connie Rivers), Sean Panikkar (Jim Casy), and Jason Karn (Al Joad). WQED’s Anna Singer plays Granma. New to Pittsburgh are soprano Danielle Pastin as Rosasharn and Metropolitan Opera mezzo Elizabeth Bishop in the pivotal role of Ma Joad.

The enormous cast of 18 soloists includes two children as the youngest Joads 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 to portray the different locations as the Joads travel across Route 66 to the fields and labor camps of California.

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- “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. Starring Deborah Selig as Norina, Carlos Feliciano 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)—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*

EMBARGO until 2/17/08

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 (Rossini's *Cinderella* 2002) ignites the stage in her signature role 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. Three Pittsburgh Opera resident artists take crucial secondary roles: Deborah Selig (Elvira), Katherine Drago (Zulma), and Liam Moran (Ali). 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*

Pittsburgh Opera Cabaret

March 2, 2009

Cabaret at Theater Square

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.*

ADDITIONAL EVENTS

Free pre-opera talks—a lively preview of each opera’s performers and production one hour before each performance.

Meet the Artists—Artistic Director Christopher Hahn and cast members join the audience for coffee and conversation 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
Director	TBA
Production	Hawaii Opera/Opera Memphis
Choreography	Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope for Attack Theater
Dalila	Stephanie Blythe+
Samson	Mark Lundberg+
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
Director	Eric Simonson+
Production	Minnesota Opera/Utah Opera/Pittsburgh Opera
Rosasharn	Danielle Pastin+
Ma Joad	Elizabeth Bishop+
Granma	Anna Singer
Jim Casy	Sean Panikkar**
Tom Joad	TBA
Pa Joad	<i>Peter Halverson+</i>
Uncle John	<i>Robert Orth</i>
Connie Rivers	Craig Verm**
Noah Joad	<i>Andrew Wilkowske+</i>
Grampa	Joe Frank
Al Joad	Jason Karn**
Ruthie Joad	Child: TBA
Winfield Joad	Child: TBA
Featured Ensemble	<i>Anna Jablonski+</i> <i>Greg Pearson+</i> <i>Theodore Chletsos+</i> <i>Karin Wolverton+</i> <i>Kelly Markgraf+</i>

Italics denote members of world premiere cast at Minnesota Opera

EMBARGO until 2/17/08

La bohème

Conductor	Antony Walker
Director	TBA
Production	Baltimore Opera/Pittsburgh Opera
Mimì	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
** Pittsburgh Opera Center alumni

The Italian Girl in Algiers

Conductor	Antony Walker
Director	Chris Alexander
Production	Santa Fe Opera
Isabella	Vivica Genaux
Elvira	Deborah Selig*
Zulma	Katherine Drago*
Lindoro	William Burden
Mustafà	Paolo Pecchioli+
Taddeo	Earle Patriarco
Ali	Liam Moran*

Don Pasquale

Conductor	TBA
Director	Eric Einhorn
Production	Pittsburgh Opera (new production by Cameron Anderson)
Norina	Deborah Selig*
Ernesto	Carlos Feliciano*
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 Allegheny Regional Asset District. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and WQED-FM are season media sponsors.

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