

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE

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New Location for Popular Pittsburgh Opera Program in Wheeling

Pittsburgh, PA (September 25, 2008) . . . The Wheeling Opera Guild and Pittsburgh Opera have found a new location for their Fall Operalogue on Monday, September 29—St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in downtown Wheeling. For many years, the stalwart members of the Wheeling Opera Guild, under the leadership of Rosalia and Manny Viola, have invited Pittsburgh Opera artists to present previews of the upcoming operas at Temple Shalom.

Now, faculty members at both Wheeling Jesuit University and West Liberty State College are joining in the effort to increase awareness of opera in the community beyond this loyal core group of opera lovers. Robert Troeger, Director of Music Ministry for WJU, has arranged to have the Fall Operalogue in the newly-renovated parish hall at St. Matthew's.

Mark Trawka, Pittsburgh Opera's Director of Musical Studies and Chorus Master, returns to Wheeling with three Resident Artists of Pittsburgh Opera. Soprano **Danielle Pastin**, mezzo-soprano **Katherine Drago**, baritone **Jonathan Beyer**, and pianist **James Lesniak** will preview *Samson & Dalila* (opening October 18) and the exciting new American opera based on John Steinbeck's iconic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (opening November 15).

Trawka will offer commentaries and insider information about the stories and musical highlights of the operas. Refreshments will be served, courtesy of the Opera Guild.

The program takes place at 8:00 PM on Monday, September 29 at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 1410 Chapline Street. Free.

About Pittsburgh Opera Center: Chosen from among 500 applicants worldwide, this select group of artists is among the top international talent emerging from today's opera scene. Whether performing breathtaking operatic arias or the timeless classics of Gershwin and Cole Porter, the hot young artists of the Pittsburgh Opera Center bring to the stage the kind of singing and acting electricity that establish them as the stars of tomorrow.

Links:

Samson & Dalila by Camille Saint-Saëns

<http://www.pittsburghopera.org/0809season/samson.shtml>

The Grapes of Wrath by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie

<http://www.pittsburghopera.org/0809season/grapes.shtml>

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

http://www.stmatts.com/index.php?option=com_contact&Itemid=68

For more information, visit www.pittsburghopera.org

Pittsburgh Opera, now celebrating its 70th season, is one of America's leading opera companies. It offers a range of programs, from main-stage productions to free community concerts to intimate cabarets. Pittsburgh Opera's internationally renowned resident artist program is among the country's top five training centers for rising opera stars. Each year, more than 20,000 students, families, and educators participate in Pittsburgh Opera educational events. The company's newly designed administrative and rehearsal space is housed in a 140-year-old air brake factory in the city's Strip District.

Artist Biographies

MARK TRAWKA, DIRECTOR OF MUSICAL STUDIES/CHORUS MASTER

Erie, Pennsylvania native Mark Trawka is in his sixth season with Pittsburgh Opera and third season as chorus master. He continues his duties as director of musical studies for the Pittsburgh Opera Center, the prestigious resident artist training program. He coaches and performs with the resident artists of the Opera Center and has also accompanied renowned mezzo-soprano Marianne Cornetti in her Pittsburgh recital appearances. Mark has been a member of the music staff at Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, and Portland Opera (Oregon), where he was principal pianist and assistant chorus master. He has served as coach/accompanist at Chautauqua Opera and at Glimmerglass Opera for many summer seasons. In the summer of 2006 he was director of the resident artist program at Berkshire Opera. Educated at the Eastman School of Music and the University of Southern California, he began his operatic career in the Houston Opera Studio and in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program.

DANIELLE PASTIN, SOPRANO

A first-year Resident Artist, soprano Danielle Pastin makes her Pittsburgh Opera mainstage debut as Rosasharn/*The Grapes of Wrath* and sings Mimì in the *La bohème* Student Matinee. Having grown up in a Navy family that traveled and lived in many places, Ms. Pastin claims Annapolis, Maryland as her home. She received her Bachelor's in voice/opera from the University of Maryland in 2002 and has since then been a member of various young artist programs, including Central City Opera, where she played Lucinda in the world premiere of Henry Moliconone's opera *Gabriel's Daughter*, and the Intermezzo Opera Festival Training Program, where she performed Nanetta/*Falstaff*. At Capital Opera in Harrisburg, PA, Ms. Pastin has sung Nedda/*Pagliacci* and Annina/*La traviata*. Her awards include finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council regional competition and the

National Symphony Orchestra's Young Artist Competition, as well as the Audience Choice award at the Annapolis Opera Competition. She received the Fine Arts Fellowship award from Central City Opera and the Enrico Aloï Bronze Medallion of the Rosa Ponselle Foundation.

KATHERINE DRAGO, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Mezzo-soprano Katherine Drago returns for a second season with Pittsburgh Opera Center. Last season she appeared as Kate Pinkerton/*Madama Butterfly*, the Stewardess/*Flight*, and Romeo in *The Capulets & the Montagues* Student Matinee. This season she looks forward to Zulma/*The Italian Girl in Algiers* with Pittsburgh Opera and Ottavia/*L'incoronazione di Poppea* with Opera Vivente. In summer 2008 she appeared as Apprentice Artist with Santa Fe Opera in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Falstaff*, and the world premiere of *Adriana Mater*. A Chicago native, Ms. Drago holds a Master's from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) and a Bachelor's from Northwestern University. Other credits include: Broadway National Tour of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Marquise de Merteuil/*The Dangerous Liaisons* and Dinah/*Trouble in Tahiti* (CCM), Ruth/*Pirates of Penzance* (Music by the Lake), Orlofsky/*Die Fledermaus* (Rising Star Opera Theater), and Hansel/*Hansel and Gretel* (Milwaukee Opera Theater). As a featured young artist she was Venere/*L'incoronazione di Poppea* and French Mother/*Death in Venice* with Chicago Opera Theater and has sung in concert with the Lebanon Symphony (OH), Asheville Symphony, Peninsula Music Festival, Cheyenne Symphony, Erie Philharmonic, Chatham Baroque, and Berkshire Choral Festival. She has received awards from the National Association of Teachers of Singing, the Bel Canto Foundation, and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

JONATHAN BEYER, BARITONE

Baritone Jonathan Beyer has performed with Opera Santa Barbara, Chicago Opera Theater, Chautauqua Opera, Fort Worth Opera, and the Teatro Verdi. He has also appeared with the Indianapolis Symphony, Baton Rouge Symphony, Festival d'Aix en Provence, and the Châteaueville Foundation with Lorin Maazel. As a first-year resident artist with Pittsburgh Opera, he sang Prince Yamadori/*Madama Butterfly*, Belcore/*The Elixir of Love* Behind the Curtain, the Steward/*Flight*, and Lorenzo/*The Capulets & the Montagues*. For 2008-09 he appears as Malatesta/*Don Pasquale*, Schaunard/*La bohème*, and Ali/*The Italian Girl in Algiers*. In 2007 Mr. Beyer won the Marian Anderson Prize for Emerging Classical Artists. He was a national finalist in the 2006 Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition and has taken first prize in the American Opera Society, the Union Civic League Competition, and the grand prize of the Bel Canto Foundation. Prizes have also been awarded to him through the Jensen Foundation, Anna Sosenko Foundation, Mario Lanza Foundation, Irma M. Cooper, Palm Beach Opera, and Neue Stimmen competitions. Last summer he sang in Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of Mahagonny* at the Tanglewood Music Center. He completed his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and earned his Bachelor's and Master's at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. He is represented by Columbia Artists Management.

JAMES LESNIAK, PIANIST

A native of Kenosha, Wisconsin, James Lesniak is in his third season on the Pittsburgh Opera music staff. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Indiana University, where he studied with pianists Menahem Pressler, Karen Shaw, and Evelyne Brancart. While completing his degrees, he served on the music staff for Mississippi State University and the Indiana University Opera Theatre. Further studies included an apprenticeship with the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program at Washington National Opera for two seasons, where he was given his operatic debut in the non-singing/piano playing role of Lazinski in *Fedora* at the Kennedy

Center, accompanying Placido Domingo in the opera. In addition, James has served on the coaching staff of Brevard Music Center, Glimmerglass Opera, Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center, and the National Symphony. For the summer months, James returns to the music staff of the prestigious Santa Fe Opera.

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