WEST SIDE STORY
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On the cover:
The Daughter of the Regiment is among next season’s highlights. | pp. 10-13

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Lyric
From the Chair and the General Director

Welcome to the Lyric Opera House!

We are delighted you have joined us for this thrilling production of one of the great American musicals. *West Side Story* was revolutionary when it premiered on Broadway in 1957, bringing together a creative team of some of the titans of 20th century musical theater—director and choreographer Jerome Robbins, writer Arthur Laurents, composer Leonard Bernstein, and lyricist Stephen Sondheim—and their masterpiece still feels relevant and fresh onstage today.

The team we have assembled to bring it to life here is similarly distinguished. It’s a great honor to welcome back acclaimed director Francesca Zambello, internationally known and respected for her exciting vision. Our cast, too, has brought tremendous excitement to this show—especially our star pair, both making their debuts at Lyric. Our Maria, Kanisha Feliciano, is fresh from the closing run of Broadway’s *Phantom of the Opera*, where she was the first Latina actress ever to take the lead role. Her love interest, Tony, is played by Ryan McCartan, a well-known television star with leading roles on Broadway in *Frozen* and *Wicked*, among other shows.

To see these radiant performers on this, the biggest stage in the city of Chicago, provides a rare opportunity to see this show’s captivating choreography and hear its gorgeous music at a scale that truly brings it alive, with the power of the Lyric Opera Orchestra lead by our dazzling music director for this production, James Lowe.

We know that some in the audience today are making their debut here, as well. We welcome you with open arms. Whether it is your first time at Lyric or you are a longtime audience member, we trust you’ll be thrilled with the performance—and we hope to see you again for our exciting 2023/24 Season.

On behalf of everyone at Lyric Opera of Chicago, we hope you enjoy *West Side Story*. Something’s coming—something good!

*Sylvia Neil*
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Flights of fancy and soaring melodies

Lyric’s 2023/24 Season offers grand-scale masterpieces and exciting debuts both on the stage and on the podium.
Lyric Opera of Chicago’s 2023/24 Season will take audiences on a global tour of opera featuring a richly curated slate of musical events in six different languages, and debuts by some of the world’s most riveting talents.

“Lyric will present a varied and compelling 2023/24 Season that keeps our main pillars front and center: presenting the best singers in the world, bringing exciting and thought-provoking large-scale productions to the stage, and offering fresh contemporary perspectives that point to the future of our beloved art form,” says Anthony Freud, Lyric’s General Director, President & CEO.

The company’s 69th season opens on Saturday, September 23 with Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*, conducted by Music Director Enrique Mazzola, who leads his first Wagner opera at Lyric. Directed by Christopher Alden, the production stars Tomasz Konieczny in the title role, Lyric favorite Tamara Wilson as Senta, and Robert Watson in his Lyric debut as Erik.

The season continues with a pair of operas offering contrasting emotional approaches to experiencing Lyric’s signature world-class vocalism. One of opera’s most delightful comedies, Donizetti’s *The Daughter of the Regiment*—back on the Lyric stage for the first time in 50 years—features the return of Lawrence Brownlee to Lyric as Tonio and the long-awaited Lyric debut of Lisette Oropesa as Marie. The iconic Laurent Pelly production is revived by Christian Räth and conducted by Speranza Scappucci, both in their Lyric debuts.

In repertory with the lighthearted Donizetti is one of opera’s most intense dramas, Janáček’s *Jenůfa*, starring two of the world’s most sensational sopranos: Lise Davidsen in the title role for her Lyric debut and Nina Stemme in her return to Lyric as the Kostelníčka, Jenufa’s stepmother. The production is conducted by Jakub Hrůša, the celebrated music director designate of London’s Royal Opera House.
In repertory with Cinderella is Champion, the “opera in jazz” by composer Terence Blanchard (who composed last season’s hit Fire Shut Up in My Bones) and librettist Michael Cristofer. Champion tells the true story of Emile Griffith, a professional boxer from the U.S. Virgin Islands who threw a fatal punch in the boxing ring in 1962 after being taunted for his sexuality by his rival. Eric Owens is the older Emile, Justin Austin is Young Emile, and Whitney Morrison, an alumna of Lyric’s Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center artist-development program, co-stars as Emelda Griffith, Emile’s mother. Music Director Enrique Mazzola conducts his first contemporary opera at Lyric, and James Robinson directs this new Lyric coproduction with the Metropolitan Opera, where it recently opened to rave reviews.

Winter brings another diverse pairing of operas to the Lyric stage. The witty and heartwarming comedy of Rossini’s Cinderella features the Lyric debuts of Vasilisa Berzhanskaya as Angelina and Jack Swanson as Ramiro, alongside returning favorites Alessandro Corbelli as Don Magnifico and Joshua Hopkins as Dandini. Conductor Yi-Chen Lin makes her Lyric debut, and the classic production of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle is revived by Crystal Manich, also in her Lyric debut.

and one of the world’s foremost experts in the Czech repertoire, and is directed by Claus Guth, both in their Lyric debuts.

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Champion

Cinderella

EMILE GRIFFITH
Eric Owens
YOUNG EMILE GRIFFITH
Justin Austin
EMELDA GRIFFITH
Whitney Morrison
The season continues with Verdi’s majestically scaled but intimate love story Aida, conducted by Music Director Enrique Mazzola. Michelle Bradley and Russell Thomas, the star-crossed lovers of last season’s Tosca, reunite as Aida and Radamès, another of opera’s famously doomed couples. Aida also heralds the return to Lyric of Jamie Barton as Amneris. The production, directed by Francesca Zambello, has designs by the contemporary visual artist RETNA, whose work uses calligraphy, hieroglyphics, and bold colors to evoke a mythic past with a contemporary edge. RETNA’s mural work can be seen locally in Chicago on the south wall of 33 East Congress, part of the Wabash Arts Corridor. Aida also features the Lyric debut of renowned modern dance choreographer Jessica Lang.

Within his run of Aida performances, Music Director Enrique Mazzola also leads two special performances of Mozart’s Requiem, a beloved masterpiece that puts the Lyric Opera Chorus and Orchestra center stage. The soloists for these performances will be announced in the coming months.

To commemorate the 2023/24 Season, musical theater’s biggest star will headline Lyric’s Season Opening Gala: An Evening with Audra McDonald on Friday, October 6. Andy Einhorn conducts the Lyric Opera Orchestra in an evening celebrating McDonald’s unique interpretive talents in a variety of song styles.

“I am excited to be conducting such a profoundly diverse repertoire at Lyric next season: Wagner, Verdi, Mozart, and the brilliant Terence Blanchard, whose opera Champion is part of Lyric’s ongoing commitment to new works,” says Mazzola. “Stay tuned for more details about the other new and recent operas Lyric will be commissioning and producing across future seasons. This is constant, essential work for the company and includes important pieces like Omar by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, The Listeners and Proving Up by Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek, and the world premieres of the Lyric commissions of Satrangi by avery r. young and H of H Playbook by Bryce Dessner and Anne Carson. Lyric is committed to remaining at the center of exploration and innovation in opera for many years to come.”

Behind the scenes, Lyric’s work continues year-round, as the new Ryan Opera Center Ensemble begins its work, the new season’s sets arrive for extensive technical rehearsals, the costume artisans prepare all the wardrobe for the new season’s singers, the Orchestra and Chorus review the new season’s musical scores, and workshops are held for the new operas in development.

“We are keeping our carefully built pipelines strong—both in terms of the artists we continue to mentor in our recently expanded Ryan Opera Center, and the new operas by new creators we continue to commission, workshop, and produce,” explains Freud. “We have a robust 2023/24 Season ahead, and artistic excellence will continue to be Lyric’s guiding principle.”

Lyric Opera of Chicago’s 2023/24 Season is on sale now, with more than a dozen curated packages and “create your own” package options that allow you to customize every detail. Explore the season at lyricopera.org/subscribe.

Audra McDonald will perform at Lyric’s Season Opening Gala on Friday, October 6, 2023 at 7:30 PM. Concerts tickets go on sale on June 15 at lyricopera.org/audra
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Lyric’s larger-than-life production of West Side Story took Chicago by storm when it premiered and now returns with a stellar cast backed by the lush sound of the Lyric Orchestra playing the original orchestrations. Leonard Bernstein’s music and Stephen Sondheim’s lyrics once again transplant Romeo and Juliet to the streets of New York City in this timeless Broadway musical masterpiece.

Add to that the bold, iconic choreography of Jerome Robbins, smoldering and sizzling with energy, and you have an extraordinary musical theater experience you’ll never forget.
West Side Story
Based on a conception of Jerome Robbins
Book by Arthur Laurents | Music by Leonard Bernstein |
Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Original Production Directed and Choreographed by Jerome Robbins
Originally Produced on Broadway by Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince
By Arrangement with Roger L. Stevens

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Tony Ryan McCartan
Maria Kanisha Feliciano
Anita Amanda Castro

The Jets
Riff Brett Thiele
Action Nathan Keen
A-Rab Kyle Coffman
Baby John Maurice Dawkins
Big Deal Matthew Aaron Liotine
Diesel Thomas Sutter
Snowboy Steven Blandino
Gee-Tar Michael Francis McBride
Tiger Michael Olaribigbe

Jet Girls
Graziella Laura Savage
Velma Paige Fraser
Minnie Whitney Cooper
Clarice Morgan McDaniel
Pauline Julia Fleckenstein
Anybodys Ayden Pratt

The Sharks
Bernardo Yurel Echezarreta
Chino Mark Daniel Aguirre
Pepe Joseph A. Hernandez
Indio Jorge Guerra
Luis Alex Aponte
Anxious Dean De Luna
Nibbles Andres Acosta
Juano Martin Ortiz Tapia
Toro Henry Julián Gendron

Shark Girls
Rosalia Joy Del Valle
Consuelo Orianna Hilliard
Francisca Abigail Paschke
Teresita Natalia Nieves-Melchor
Estella Kiana Rodriguez
Margarita Monica Garcia Bradley

The Adults
Doc Genevieve VenJohnson
Lt. Schrank Keith Kupferer
Officer Krupke John Lister
Glad Hand Alexis Roston


Understudies: Jeffrey Kringer – Tony; Joy Del Valle – Maria; Orianna Hilliard – Anita; Kyle Coffman – Riff; Josh Zacher – Action; Steven Blandino – A-Rab; Michael Francis McBride – Baby John; Jorge Guerra – Bernardo; Alex Aponte – Chino; Whitney Cooper – Graziella; Julia Fleckenstein – Anybodys; Abigail Paschke – Rosalia; John Lister – Lt. Schrank; Alexis Roston – Doc, Glad Hand; Nikolas Wenzel – Officer Krupke

Swings: Amy Romero*, Josh Zacher*

First performed at the Winter Garden Theatre, New York, on September 26, 1957.
First performed by Lyric Opera of Chicago on May 3, 2019.
Conductor
James Lowe
Francesca Zambello
Peter J. Davison
Jessica Jahn
Mark McCullough
Mark Grey
Michael Black
Jerome Robbins
Joshua Bergasse*
Kiira Schmidt Carper*
Whitney Cooper*
Sarah Hatten
Eric Sean Fogel
Jordan Lee Braun
Alaina Bartkowiak
Katrina Bachus
Bill Walters
William C. Billingham
Jered Mosby
Brett Rowe
Chuck Coyle
Sammi Coy
Stephanie Farina

Director

Set Designer

Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Sound Designer

Chorus Master

Choreographer

Original Choreography Reproduced by

Associate Choreographer

Dance Captain

Wigmaster & Makeup Designer

Associate Stage Director

Assistant Stage Director

Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Managers

Musical Preparation

Fight Director

Diction and Dialect Coach

Sound Mixing Engineer

PRODUCTION SPONSORS

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APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

Act 1 1 hour 20 minutes

Intermission 25 minutes

Act 2 45 minutes

Total 2 hours, 30 minutes

* Lyric debut

CONTRACT CONTRACT

ORSCHETRA

Violin I
Bing Jing Yu, concertmaster
Kathleen Brauer
Alexander Belavsky
Injoo Choi
Irene Radetzky
Rika Hanford

Violin II
John Macfarlane, principal
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
John D. Robinson
Ann Palen
David Volfe

Cello
Mark Brandfonbrener, principal
Walter Preucil
Paula Kosover
Marina McClain
Robyn Neidhold

String Bass
Andrew L. W. Anderson, Principal

Flute/ Piccolo
Marie Tachouet
Dionne Jackson
Scott Metlicka

Oboe/ English Horn
Paul Lueders

Clarinet
Trevor O’Riordan, principal
Theresa Zick, clarinet/e flat clarinet
Danny Mui, clarinet/bass clarinet

Sax/Bass Clarinet
Steven Leinheiser, alto sax/bass clarinet
Scott Burns, tenor sax/bari sax/ bass clarinet
Jim Gaillorto, soprano sax/ bass sax

Bassoon
Hanna Sterba, principal

Horn
Neil Kimel, principal
Robert E. Johnson

Clarinet
Trevor O’Riordan, principal
Theresa Zick, clarinet/e flat clarinet
Danny Mui, clarinet/bass clarinet

Sax/Bass Clarinet
Steven Leinheiser, alto sax/bass clarinet
Scott Burns, tenor sax/bari sax/bass clarinet
Jim Gaillorto, soprano sax/bass sax

Bassoon
Hanna Sterba, principal

Horn
Neil Kimel, principal
Robert E. Johnson

Trumpet
William Denton, principal
Rob Parton
Eric Krumich

Trombone
Mark Fisher, principal
Jeremy Moeller, bass trombone

Percussion
Edward Harrison, timpani/ percussion
Douglas Waddell
Michael Kozakis
Jeff Handley
Tom Hipskind, drum set/ percussion

Piano/Celeste
Jo Ann Daugherty, principal

Guitar/Electric Guitar/ Mandolin
Tom Logan

Orchestra Contractor
Christine Janicki
Musical Numbers

**ACT ONE**

- Prologue ................................................................................ Orchestra (danced by Jets and Sharks)
- The Jet Song ............................................................................ Riff and Jets
- Something's Coming ............................................................... Tony
- Dance at the Gym ................................................................. Jets and Sharks
- Maria ..................................................................................... Tony
- Tonight .................................................................................. Maria and Tony
- America ........................................................... Anita, Rosalia, and Shark Girls
- Cool .................................................................................. Riff and Jets
- One Hand, One Heart ............................................................. Maria and Tony
- Tonight Quintet ................................................................. Maria, Anita, Tony, Riff, Bernardo, Jets, and Sharks
- The Rumble ................................................................. Orchestra (danced by Riff, Bernardo, Jets, and Sharks)

**ACT TWO**

- I Feel Pretty ........................................................................ Maria, Rosalia, Francisca, and Consuelo
- Somewhere ........................................................................ Maria (danced by Company)
- Gee, Officer Krupke .............................................................. Action and Jets
- A Boy Like That/I Have a Love ................................................ Anita and Maria
- Finale ................................................................................ Company
“Two households, both alike in dignity...” Thus begins Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, in which we see “ancient grudge break to new mutiny.” When Arthur Laurents first conceived a modern, musical version of the play, he imagined a rivalry between Catholic and Jewish communities on the Lower East Side; only later did he and his collaborators move the story uptown, pitting a gang of native New Yorkers against those more recently arrived.

Although America is a country of immigrants, we continue to struggle with issues around immigration and migration, which makes *West Side Story* as resonant today as it was when it was first written. The musical landed on Broadway in 1957, just as the Civil Rights Movement was gaining steam and we were collectively examining some of the divisions in our country. In many ways, we have moved forward since that time. But even in the time from the debut of this production (2018) until now, I feel I’ve witnessed the growth of hatred in our country. There are laws in place against certain kinds of discrimination, but especially with the rise of social media, I’m concerned that we are becoming more, not less, inclined to think in terms of “us” vs. “them.” The story of two warring gangs challenges all of us to look at how we define and marginalize “the other.” Perhaps we find it easy to engage with people of different cultural backgrounds. But what about differences in education? Politics? Religion? Economic means? Gender and sexuality?

The clash of cultures has been exacerbated by the increasing accessibility of firearms in this country, which has resulted in the deaths of not only those who take it upon themselves to represent and defend a particular group, but countless innocents caught in the crossfire. The original creative team’s vision of America is hardly a utopian one, but they surely never imagined a landscape like today’s, in which mass shootings are a regular occurrence in every kind of community, from urban nightclubs to suburban schoolyards.

The presence of a gun in the final moments of *West Side Story* drastically changes the dynamic in a way that is immediately recognizable. Maria’s final speech is almost unbearable to witness, in part because it is so easy to understand her state of mind. “*How do you fire this gun, Chino? Just by pulling this little trigger? How many bullets are left, Chino? Enough for you? ….and you? All of you? We all killed him; And my brother and Riff. I, too. I CAN KILL NOW, BECAUSE I HATE NOW.*”

It troubles me that we seem to have accepted an us/them view of society, just as we seem to have accepted the presence of guns in our communities. This scene in *West Side Story* holds up a mirror to the devastating path we are on. What will finally allow us to muster the collective will to change our course?

Leonard Bernstein scrawled “an out and out plea for racial tolerance” across the first page of his copy of *Romeo and Juliet*. As we approach this piece once again, I hope we can make that plea reverberate in a new way.
West Side Story’s paints an enduring, if sometimes problematic, picture of the dangers of division.

by Carla Della Gatta

West Side Story was never going to be about New York’s West Side. It was never intended to be a sociological depiction of Puerto Ricans—or of any group. Originally conceived as a musicalized Romeo and Juliet story adapted to Jews and Catholics on the Upper East Side at Passover/Easter, in the hands of Arthur Laurents and Jerome Robbins the division eventually came to be between juvenile gangs. Jewish theatre-makers and songwriters of the time rarely staged Jewish stories for wider audiences, and here the creators took on the acculturated, but not assimilated, status of Jews and transposed it to a more recent group that had migrated to the mainland United States: Puerto Ricans.

One reason for the shift was that the creators felt it was too soon after World War II to show Jews being killed on stage. (Although West Side Story premiered in 1957, its inception had begun years earlier.) Laurents was no stranger to switching one “Other” for another. His first play, Home of the Brave (1945), depicts a Jew as a member of an American platoon during World War II. When it was adapted to the screen four years later, the Jewish male character was replaced by a Black male character in order to be more relevant to shifting politics. From the very outset, then, real contemporary concerns played into decisions for creating the theatrical work, even in a genre where characters periodically break out into song and dance.

The very specificity of West Side Story’s time and place, held in ambivalent tension with its omniform origins, is part of what makes it enduringly controversial. The work shows that difference can be deadly, and shifting the divide to the Sharks and Jets can come at a cost. Paradoxically, the layers of transposition—from Jews and Catholics to the Sharks and the Jets, from tragedy to musical theatre, from Shakespeare’s famous verse and
prose to choreography, music, and lyrics now almost just as famous—are also what make the show enduringly theatrical.

And ultimately, *West Side Story* reveals that amplifying differences requires a kind of diminishment, often affecting marginalized groups. Theatricality always involves exaggeration, and the Latinx body onstage may not be immediately recognizable if it deviates from established generalizations.

Tony and Maria do not immediately register the differences that are so crucial to their familial ties. Whether those ties are biological (Maria and Bernardo are siblings) or fraternal (Tony and Riff are old friends), deviating from the group brings either a metaphorical or literal death.

Two characters most powerfully exemplify the ostracization that results from the dissolution of strong familial ties: Anita and Chino. The role of Anita has often been ethnicized and racialized in casting; Chita Rivera, who initiated the role on Broadway, and Rita Moreno in the 1961 film were the only Latinas in their respective casts. Anita has captivated audiences from *West Side Story*’s first run and proved an award-winning role for most of the actresses who have played her. African American actress Debbie Allen played the role in the 1980 Broadway revival, followed by Afro-Latinas Karen Olivo in the 2009 bilingual Broadway revival and Ariana DeBose in the 2021 film. After Anita argues with Maria, she goes to Doc’s store for Maria’s sake, but the Jets assault her and she exits both the store and the play, leaving her narrative without resolution. Anita’s disappearance signals a loss of hope, and all the music goes out with her.

If Anita’s departure signals a loss of hope, it is the role of Chino that solidifies that loss. Adapted from Shakespeare’s character of Paris, who dies inadvertently by Romeo’s hand when they both arrive at the Capulet tomb to mourn their love, Chino is the character most strikingly changed from the source text, and with greater implications for representations of Latinx men. Similar to Paris, Chino has few lines yet more stage presence due to his assimilation into gang culture; he is a character who represents the old world, Maria’s intended, and whose masculinity makes him apprehensive to enter the bridal shop. Unlike Paris who hurts no one, Chino becomes the agent of death, killing Tony (Romeo) in cold blood, and most likely going to jail for the rest of his life for it. Chino’s carceral death is the death of the American Dream for citizens who are nevertheless considered outsiders and mistreated by society.

*West Side Story* was the first adaptation of a Shakespearean tragedy on Broadway, and it fostered a creative strategy that I refer to as “the *West Side Story* effect,” the changing of any difference in Shakespeare—
familial, national, generational, and so on—into cultural-linguistic difference. Today, adapting Shakespeare to another setting is almost a cultural meme. Concept productions, musicalized adaptations, and reinventions of his works are commonplace. In an unusual pattern of influence, *West Side Story* has mapped back onto Shakespearean storytelling, with this type of division now nearly requisite in Shakespearean productions. Vocal and acting methods for performing Shakespeare are essential to actor training; in fact, speaking Shakespearean verse has been a litmus test for actors since his time. Likewise, *West Side Story*’s requirement for “triple threat” performers—those who can sing, act, and dance—became the litmus test for excellence in musical theater.

*West Side Story* was the first Broadway musical to have two dead bodies onstage at the curtain drop before intermission, making the realities of gang warfare the climactic moment. *West Side Story* is a “book musical,” a musical in which characters break out into song to express intense emotions, but its varied musical styles and absence of musical numbers in the last portion of the story also push on that very definition; indeed, it is the rare musical that does not end with a song and dance number. The book musical is an American invention, beginning with *Oklahoma!* almost fifteen years earlier, and it is *West Side Story*’s film soundtrack that would take the story worldwide. The creative team—inclusive of Laurents, Robbins, Leonard Bernstein and a then-unknown Stephen Sondheim—brought forward a new style of storytelling, not in form but in creative power. *West Side Story* has itself been adapted and translated to cultures and languages all over the world, and to various performance genres, from a late 1990s GAP marketing campaign to opera.

**One of West Side Story’s enduring appeals** is that it satisfies the modern desire for subtext. The first “Method” musical, the unexplained familial grudge from Shakespeare’s play is made explicit and based on division caused by societal status, immigration, ethnicity, and language. Although the Sharks spoke a minimal amount of Spanish in the initial production and 1961 film, the theatrical premise of linguistic division was made prominent in the 2009 Broadway revival and the 2021 film, both of which included portions entirely in Spanish without translation. Linguistic racism is just as prevalent as other forms of racism, and unfortunately *West Side Story’s* continued relevance rests on its connection to today’s politics as much as those of the past.

Typically applied to casting practices, the phrase “representation matters” has become ubiquitous. But not all representation advances understanding and empathy; it can be as dangerous and misinformed as it can be productive and inclusive. *West Side Story* reminds us that authenticity can be compatible with high theatricality, and it is this ambivalence that makes the show so moving, entertaining, and in certain moments, realistic. *West Side Story*’s ethnic division and somber ending are the most authentic thing about it. The resolution that Romeo and Juliet suggests from the outset—that the lovers’ actions will “bury their parents’ strife”—is not possible when prejudice divides the two households. Unlike many musicals, plays, and other stories which come together quickly for closure, *West Side Story*’s high point of realism is its ending, with Maria’s admission that her pain will now cause pain to others: “Now I hate too.” Neither Maria or Tony has Juliet or Romeo’s death wish, and Maria survives. Her life ahead will be filled with trauma and with the absence of her loved ones.

Dr. Carla Della Gatta is Assistant Professor of English at Florida State University. She is the author most recently of *Latinx Shakespeares: Staging US Intracultural Theater* (University of Michigan Press).
CREATORS

ARTHUR LAURENTS | LIBRETTIST
Laurents was for more than half a century one of America’s most distinguished figures in the arts. He moved in the theater between writing to directing, while also scoring great successes as a Hollywood screenwriter. Laurents began his career writing for radio, prior to the production of his first Broadway play, Home of the Brave (1945). Other plays included A Clearing in the Woods (1957) and Invitation to a March (1960). Laurents’s association with composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim includes, in addition to West Side Story, the musicals Gypsy (book), Anyone Can Whistle (direction, book), and Do I Hear a Waltz? (book). He also directed several other Broadway musicals, including I Can Get It for You Wholesale in 1962, La Cage aux Folles in 1983 (for which he won a Tony Award), the 2008 revival of Gypsy, and the 2009 bilingual revival of West Side Story. Among his screenwriting credits are Rope (for Alfred Hitchcock), Anastasia, Bonjour Tristesse, The Way We Were, and The Turning Point. He wrote two memoirs, Original Story by Arthur Laurents and The Rest of the Story. He died in 2011.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN | COMPOSER
Bernstein transformed the way Americans and people everywhere hear and appreciate music. Bernstein’s successes as a composer ranged from Broadway (West Side Story, On the Town, Wonderful Town, Candide) to major concert works, such as his three symphonies—subtitled Jeremiah (1944), The Age of Anxiety (1949), and Kaddish (1963)—and Serenade for violin, strings and percussion (1954); Chichester Psalms (1965); Mass: A Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers (1971); Songfest (1977); Concerto for Orchestra: Jubilee Games (1989); and Arias and Barcarolles (1988). Bernstein also composed two operas, Trouble in Tahiti (1952) and A Quiet Place (1983), and three ballets, Fancy Free (1944), Facsimile (1946), and Dybbuk (1975). He received an Oscar nomination for the score of On the Waterfront (1954). Bernstein conducted the world’s greatest orchestras for almost half a century. He enjoyed special relationships with the New York Philharmonic (music director, 1958-69, thereafter permanent laureate conductor), the Israel Philharmonic, and the Vienna Philharmonic. Among Bernstein’s many honors were the American Academy of Arts and Letters’ Gold Medal, a Kennedy Center Honor; 11 Emmy Awards, a special Tony Award, a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award, and the Japan Art Association’s Praemium Imperiale. Bernstein died in 1992.

STEPHEN SONDHEIM | LYRICIST
Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Anyone Can Whistle, Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, Sweeney Todd, The Frugs, Pacific Overtures, Merrily We Roll Along, Sunday in the Park with George, Into the Woods, Assassins, Passion, and Road Show, as well as lyrics for West Side Story, Gypsy, Do I Hear a Waltz?, and additional lyrics for Candide. Anthologies of his work as composer and lyricist include Side by Side by Sondheim, Marry Me a Little, You’re Gonna Love Tomorrow, Putting It Together, and Moving On. He composed film scores for Stavisky and Reds, and songs for Dick Tracy (Academy Award). Sondheim won six Tony Awards for best score for a musical, and eight of his shows won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Sunday in the Park with George received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1985. Sondheim was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1963. In 1990 he was the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University. He received a Kennedy Center Honor and the Praemium Imperiale, Japan’s highest honor, for a lifetime of artistic achievement. Sondheim died in 2021.

JEROME ROBBINS | ORIGINAL DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER
Robbins began his career as a dancer, winning particular praise as a soloist at Ballet Theatre (later known as American Ballet Theatre). Once he ended his performing career, he achieved world renown as a choreographer of ballets, as well as for directing and choreographing in theater, movies, and television. His Broadway shows included On the Town, Billion Dollar Baby, High Button Shoes, West Side Story, The King and I, Gypsy, Peter Pan, Miss Liberty, Call Me Madam, and Fiddler on the Roof. His last Broadway production, Jerome Robbins’ Broadway (1989), won six Tony Awards, including best musical and best director. Among Robbins’s more than 60 ballets are Fancy Free, Afternoon of a Faun, The Concert, Dances At a Gathering, Other Dances, Glass Pieces, and Ives, Songs, which are in the repertories of New York City Ballet and other major companies worldwide. Robbins received two Academy Awards, four Tony Awards, five Donaldson Awards, an Emmy Award, the Screen Directors’ Guild Award, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. He was a 1981 Kennedy Center Honors recipient and was awarded the French Chevalier dans l’Ordre National de la Legion d’Honneur. Robbins died in 1998.

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In the Heights and was dance captain at the Geva Theater (Rochester, NY) for Brooklyn-based company Urban Bush Women for four years, in the U.S. and abroad. She was a principal dancer of the Kansas City, Houston Grand Opera), and has appeared widely (Lyric Opera West Side Story (Ordway Center for 42nd Street (Olney Theatre), as Lorraine/ Singing in the Rain in The New Classics: Songs from the New Golden Age of Musical Festival, and in Lyric’s 2020/21 Season she appeared as a vocalist also appeared as Anita at Atlanta Opera and The Glimmerglass at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Italy. She has
Anita in West Side Story Pub with her all-female percussive trio Soles of Duende, and as
in Tobacco of Venango, as Sandino in West Side Story, and in the independent feature The Last Five Years with Anna Kendrick. Television credits include Barry on HBO, Alternatino on Comedy Central, and Odd Mom Out on Bravo. Regional credits include Pasadena Playhouse’s production of Head Over Heels, the Hollywood Bowl’s Kinky Boots, and many others.

McCartan has most recently had a recurring role on The CW network’s The Winchesters. He has appeared on Broadway in Disney’s Frozen, playing Hans; and played the male lead of Fiyero in Broadway’s Wicked. He originated the role of J.D. in Heathers: The Musical Off-Broadway. McCartan played Brad Majors, leading Fox’s The Rocky Horror Picture Show alongside Laverne Cox and Victoria Justice; and is known for his role “Diggie,” on Disney Channel’s Liv and Maddie over its four season run. He had recurring arcs on USA Network’s Royal Pains, NBC’s Midnight, Texas, and Hulu’s Freakish.

Feliciano recently originated the role of Ann/ Judith in Flying Over Sunset at Lincoln Center. She was in the closing cast of Phantom of the Opera on Broadway as a Christine understudy. Other credits include Lily from The Secret Garden at Music Circus in Sacramento, along with operatic roles such as Susanna/Le Nozze di Figaro (Shepherd School of Music), Baby Doe/The Ballad of Baby Doe (Moores Opera Center), and Blonde/Die Entführung aus dem Serail and Amy March/ Little Women (both Opera in the Ozarks)

This season, Castro has been seen at New York City Center with Ayodele Casel, at Joe’s Pub with her all-female percussive trio Soles of Duende, and as
Anita in West Side Story at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari, Italy. She has also appeared as Anita at Atlanta Opera and The Glimmerglass Festival, and in Lyric’s 2020/21 Season she appeared as a vocalist in The New Classics: Songs from the New Golden Age of Musical Theater. Castro appeared as Katey Selden/Singing in the Rain (Olney Theatre), as Lorraine/42nd Street (Ordway Center for Performing Arts), and Consuelo/West Side Story (Lyric Opera Kansas City, Houston Grand Opera), and has appeared widely in the U.S. and abroad. She was a principal dancer of the Brooklyn-based company Urban Bush Women for four years, and was dance captain at the Geva Theater (Rochester, NY) for In the Heights.

Brett Thiele has appeared in multiple Broadway productions including Miss Saigon, Escape to Margaritaville, and Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark. A native of New Orleans, Thiele has appeared Off-Broadway in Clueless, The Musical at the New Group. Regionally, he has appeared as Tulsa/Gypsy at the Maltz Jupiter Theatre, in The First Wives Club at the Oriental Theatre in Chicago, Follies at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and as Dakin/The History Boys at the Uptown Players in Dallas. He has also appeared as Riff with the St. Petersburg Opera Company and as Action at the Asolo Theatre in Florida.

Echezarreta has appeared in numerous Broadway productions, including West Side Story, La Cage Aux Folles, Matilda, Aladdin, Head Over Heels, and, most recently, Moulin Rouge the Musical. He appeared in Steven Spielberg’s West Side Story film and in the independent feature The Last Five Years with Anna Kendrick. Television credits include Barry on HBO, Alternatino on Comedy Central, and Odd Mom Out on Bravo. Regional credits include Pasadena Playhouse’s production of Head Over Heels, the Hollywood Bowl’s Kinky Boots, and many others.

Keen has been seen on Broadway in Les Miserables (Gavroche) and Hello, Dolly! (Swing, Ensemble). His many touring credits include Hello, Dolly! (Swing, Assistant Dance Captain), Finding Neverland (Ensemble), West Side Story (50th Anniversary International Tour; Jet Swing), Chicago (Swing), We Will Rock You (Ensemble), West Side Story (Big Deal, Fight Captain, u/s Action, u/s Riff). Regional appearances include A Christmas Carol (Repertory Theatre St Louis), The Cher Show (Ogunquit Playhouse), and Radio City Spring Spectacular!

Blandino is currently an Adjunct Professor at Pace Commercial Dance & Musical Theater, as well as on Faculty at Steps on Broadway, Broadway Dance Center, Peridance Center, and elsewhere. Recent performance credits include West Side Story in Italy, CATS (national tour), West Side Story (Houston Grand Opera), Newsies, Mr. Saturday Night (workshop), The Glimmerglass Festival, Dance Lab NY, Funny Girl (workshop), Mamma Mia!, Phish NYE at Madison Square Garden, Shrek: the Musical, and Titanic: Off Broadway (workshop). Blandino was recently selected as the 2023 Dance Lab New York Choreographer mentored by Ellenore Scott, curated by Josh Prince. He choreographed Ludo’s Broken Bride at the New York Musical Festival and was a 2020 Capezio ACE Award Finalist in Los Angeles. Blandino is the founder and director of treadFAST commercial dance company.
Coffman appeared as Ice in Steven Spielberg’s West Side Story film, and will be seen as Raymar in Raymar (upcoming), Brooks in Classmates (post-production), Bradley Cooper’s Maestro (upcoming), Jacob Sutton’s Desert Heart (short), and Dakin in Someday This Pain Will Be Useful... On Broadway he appeared in the original cast of Newsies (Henry), the 2009 revival cast of West Side Story (A-Rab), and the original revival cast of The Mystery of Edwin Drood with Chita Rivera and Jessie Mueller. Selected regional performances include The Artful Dodger in Oliver!, Ethan Kane in Sex with Strangers, Tommy Dijlas in The Music Man, Frank in Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, and Jerome Robbins’ Broadway.

Dawkins has been seen in Broadway tours including The Prom (ensemble and understudy for Nick) and CATS (Coricopat and understudy for Mr. Mistoffelee). Regional and ship credits include A Chorus Line (Mike), Newsies, CATS (Mr. Mistoffelee), Mamma Mia!, South Pacific, and many more. He is a proud alum of Sarah Lawrence College and LaGuardia High School.

Liotine most recently danced in Lohengrin at the Metropolitan Opera. Past credits include Greg on The National Tour of A Chorus Line, and performances at The Muny, The Rev, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, The Riverside Theatre in Vero Beach, Florida, and the Royal Caribbean line. Liotine holds his BFA in Musical Theater from Montclair State University, the Performing Arts where he graduated as the institution’s first double major, majoring in Dance and Vocal Performance.

Michael Francis McBride graduated magna cum laude from the Alley/Fordham Bachelor of Fine Arts Program in 2010 after joining the Alvin Alley American Dance Theater in 2009 under the direction of Judith Jamison. In his tenure with the Alley Company (2009 to 2019), Michael performed over 65 ballets by choreographers such as Alvin Alley, Ronald K. Brown, Garth Fagan, George Faison, Geoffrey Holder, Bill T. Jones, Jiří Kylián, Wayne McGregor, Ohad Naharin, David Parsons, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. McBride performed in Santa Fe Opera’s production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream and most recently in Portland Opera’s production of Carmen. Last summer he was seen as an Angel in Bucks County Playhouse’s Kinky Boots and as Baby John in Teatro Lirico di Cagliari’s production of West Side Story.

Olaribigbe’s Broadway credits include True Crime Obsessed (Ensemble, Helen Hayes). Regional highlights include the world premiere of The Griswolds Broadway Vacation (Ensemble, 5th Avenue Theatre), Kinky Boots (Angel, The MUNY), Spamalot (Ensemble, Ogunquit Playhouse). He appeared in the film A Jazzman’s Blues.

Sutter most recently performed the role of Diesel in Italy at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari. Regional highlights include Samson et Delilah (Kennedy Center), White Christmas (Westchester Broadway Theatre), State Fair (The Rev Theater Co.); Hot Shoe Shuffle (The Wick); Swing!, On the Town (Gateway Playhouse); West Side Story, Mamma Mia, Guys and Dolls, Man of La Mancha (Weston Playhouse); and Music City Christmas (Nashville Symphony). Film and television credits include The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (Amazon), Broadway Brightest Lights (PBS), Lady in the Lake (Apple TV), BTS, and So You Think You Can Dance. Suter is a 2012 graduate of The Allyn School.

The multi-faceted New York-based artist appeared in national tours of Hello Dolly!, Memphis, Flashdance, and The Music Man (Zaneta). She appeared Off-Broadway in Trip of Love, and at Radio City Music Hall for Christmas Spectacular and New York Spectacular. Regional credits include Jerome Robbins’ Broadway (Muny), Carousel (Louise Bigelow, MTV/Wichita) and Kiss Me, Kate (Broadway At Music Circus). Cooper appeared in the feature film Isn’t It Romantic, on television in Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin (HBO), and in the CIZE and Insanity MAX.30 videos with celebrity trainer Shaun T.
JULIA FLECKENSTEIN | PAULINE, u/s ANYBODYS
Lyric debut

Fleckenstein’s regional credits include Cabaret, Chicago Sings Broadway Pop, and Can-Can at Porchlight Music Theatre and Newsies at Casa Mañana. She holds a BFA in Musical Theater (Dance Emphasis) from the Chicago College of Performing Arts.

PAIGE FRASER | VELMA
Previously at Lyric: West Side Story (2018/19).

A graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, Fraser has danced professionally with Ailey II, Visceral Dance Chicago, and Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, and her commercial dance credits include performances with Beyoncé and Chanel Iman. A Princess Grace Award recipient (2016) and one of Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” (2017), Fraser’s other theater credits include The Lion King (Rafiki Tour 2019 and Broadway 2021-current), serving as Dance Captain/Swing. She is the Chief Artistic Officer of The Paige Fraser Foundation, and is currently getting her MA in Art Management from University of Denver.

MORGAN MCDANIEL | CLARICE
Previously at Lyric: Dancer/Carmen (2022/23).

The dancer graduated from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, where she worked with esteemed choreographers including Jae Man Joo, Francesca Harper, Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrish, and Tina Bush and performed with the Metropolitan Opera in their production of Der Fliegende Holländer. She joined South Chicago Dance Theatre as an emerging artist, and she spent a season with Visceral Dance Chicago. McDaniel had a residency with Ballare Carmel in Monterey, California, where she performed work by Noelle Kayser, Jennifer Archibald, and Ihsan Rustem.

AYDEN PRATT | ANYBODYS
Lyric debut

Pratt appeared in the national tours of Moulin Rouge! The Musical (Swing), Hello, Dolly! (Ensemble), and A Chorus Line (Tricia, China Premiere). They danced for the 2021 Met Gala. Ballet credits include The Nutcracker, Cinderella, and Serenade, and they served as associate choreographer for Cabaret (Mac, Haydn Theatre). Pratt has been a trainee with the Rochester City Ballet, and holds a BFA from Montclair State University.

LAURA SAVAGE | GRAZIELLA
Previously at Lyric: Carousel (2014/15).

Savage has been seen in dozens of shows in the greater Chicago area. Highlights include Cassie in A Chorus Line (Porchlight Theatre), Peggy Sawyer in 42nd Street, Rumplestealer in Cats (Paramount Theatre), and Dyanne in Million Dollar Quartet (Marriott Theatre). She is a Jeff nominated actress (The Spitfire Grill, Boho Theatre) and choreographer (Cruel Intentions at Kokandy Productions), and appeared on and choreographed for the Empire television program (Fox). She will be seen later this season in Gypsy at the Marriott Theatre.

THE SHARKS

ANDRES ACOSTA | NIBBLES
Lyric debut

The New York-based actor has toured with West Side Story (Bernardo), Jersey Boys (Gyp), and Flashdance (Joe). Other highlights include Nikos in Legally Blonde (Muny), Tommy Devito in Jersey Boys (North Shore), Michael in Smokey Joe’s Cafe (North Shore), Bernardo in West Side Story (Asolo Rep), Evita (Asolo Rep), In the Heights (PCLO), On Your Feet (Gateway), and A Walk On The Moon (George Street). Acosta holds a BFA from Florida State University.

MARK DANIEL AGUIRRE | CHINO
Lyric debut

Aguirre began his professional acting career fresh out of high school, making his off-Broadway debut in Disney+’s Trevor: The Musical. He recently appeared as Bennie in Collard and Rosenblatt’s Like the Wind at SoHo playhouse. His other credits include the title role in the short Mikey’s Army, which had its world premiere at the Outfest Fusion QTBIPOC Film Festival in LA earlier this year.

ALEX APONTE | LUIS, u/s CHINO
Lyric debut

Aponte’s recent credits include Kinky Boots (Angel) and 42nd Street (Ensemble) at Music Theatre Wichita, and Seusssical (Mayzie La Bird) at Texas State University. He holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Texas State University.

DEAN DE LUNA | ANXIOUS
Lyric debut

A graduate of the Boston Conservatory with a BFA in Dance and a minor in Movement Science, de Luna has numerous Broadway and international tour credits. Regional highlights include My Fair Lady, In the Heights (Philadelphia), 42nd Street, and Newsies.
Lyric Opera of Chicago

Jorge Guerra | Indio, u/s Bernardo

Lyric debut

Guerra has previously performed at Dallas Theater Center, Drury Lane Theatre, Fulton Theatre, Lyric Theatre of OK, Maine State Music Theatre, Maltz Jupiter, Marriott Theatre, Theatre Under the Stars, and ZACH. He is a graduate of Oklahoma City University.

Joseph Hernandez | Pepe

Previously at Lyric: Dancer/Florentina en el Amazonas (2021/22) and Luis/West Side Story (2018/19).

The Chicago native began his movement training with Shotokan Karate, and received his formal dance training from Western Michigan University, where he graduated magna cum laude with a BFA in Dance. His professional credits include The Metropolitan Opera Ballet, LA Opera, Opera Parallèle, ODC/Dance, Kate Weare Company, Amy Seiwert’s Imagery, LED Boise, and River North Dance Chicago, among others. Hernandez’s work as a choreographer has been presented at the NYC Blueprint Dance Festival, Trifecta Dance Festival, Midwest RAD Festival, College of DuPage Choreography Showcase and Competition, DanceChance, Hot Crowd Dance, DanceWorks Chicago, COMMON Conservatory, and Western Michigan University.

Martin Ortiz Tapia | Juano

Previously at Lyric: West Side Story (2018/19).

Tapia spent nearly a decade touring with Giordano Dance Chicago as a company member. He has appeared in productions of Saturday Night Fever, Newsies, Cabaret, Mary Poppins, and most recently A Chorus Line. He earned a BFA from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, and has trained also at Luna Negra Dance Theater and Thodos Dance Chicago.

Henry Julián Gendron | Toro

Lyric debut

Later this season, Gendron will return to The Muny for West Side Story with choreographer Parker Esse. He appeared on Broadway as Bob Fosse in MJ The Musical and Off-Broadway in Americano! Other credits include Outsiders (Workshop), and On Your Feet! (The Muny). Gendron is a graduate of Florida State University.

Monica Garcia Bradley | Margarita

Lyric debut

Bradley’s regional credits include A Chorus Line (Flat Rock Playhouse), Oliver! (Paper Mill Playhouse), West Side Story (North Carolina Theatre), Meet Me in St. Louis and CATS (Theatre Under The Stars), In the Heights and West Side Story (City Springs Theatre), Shout! The Mod Musical (Ivoryton Playhouse), and She Loves Me (Millbrook Playhouse). Televison credits include the recurring role of Alicia on Tyler Perry’s Sistas (BET), The Resident (FOX), Dopesick (Hulu), She-Hulk (Disney Marvel Studios), Macgyver (CBS), and Monarch (FOX). Bradley starred in the Discovery+ feature A Christmas Open House, and in indie features Guys at Parties Like It, Abilene, and others. She is a co-owner of the Vibe City Entertainment production company.

Joy Del Valle | Rosalia, u/s Maria

Lyric debut

Del Valle appeared on the international tour of West Side Story as Rosalia (u/s Maria). Regional highlights include Maria in West Side Story (Phoenix Theatre Company), Cinderella (Phoenix Theater Company), Once On This Island (STONC), Fiddler on the Roof (Goodspeed), and Annie Get Your Gun (Goodspeed), Bring it On (Beck Center), In The Heights (Beck Center), and A Christmas Carol (Hartford Stage).

Orianna Hilliard | Consuelo, u/s Anita

Lyric debut

Hilliard appeared on Broadway in Aladdin, and on the national tours of Aladdin and A Chorus Line. Regional credits include 9to5, In The Heights, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Legally Blonde, and CATS. She has also appeared aboard the Disney Cruise line, and holds a BS in Electrical Engineering from Santa Clara University.

Natalia Nieves-Melchor | Teresita

Lyric debut

Born in Puerto Rico and raised in South Carolina, Nieves-Melchor has appeared in On Your Feet! (Westchester Broadway Theatre and MUNY), Legally Blonde (MUNY), Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (MUNY, Swing and Assistant Choreographer), Cabaret (Asolo Repertory Theatre, Dance Captain and Associate Choreographer). Television credits include The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (choreographed by Marguerite Derrick) and
The Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (directed and choreographed by Wildabeast, Janelle Adams, and Miguel Zarate). She received a BFA in Commercial Dance from Pace University.

**ABIGAIL PASCHEKE | FRANCISCA, u/s ROSALIA**

Lyric debut

Paschke previously appeared in West Side Story as Rosalía (The Kennedy Center, Teatro Lirico di Cagliari) and Maria (The Carnegie). Recent credits include Ellie Mae Chipley/Showboat (The Glimmerglass Festival), Gossip 2/The Ghosts of Versailles (Royal Opera of Versailles), Maria/The Sound of Music (The Carnegie), Cinderella/Into the Woods (Intermountain Opera Bozeman), Valencienne/The Merry Widow (Kentucky Opera), and Sally/Die Fledermaus (Virginia Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Saratoga). Film and television credits include Alice in the Emmy Award-nominated Le Comte Ory (Des Moines Metro Opera) and Sandra Gutenberg in The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. She is an Encouragement Award Winner from The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, a National Semi-Finalist from the Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition, and the Grand Prize winner of the Orpheus Competition, and holds degrees from Carnegie Mellon University and University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music.

**LILLIAN CASTILLO | GLAD HAND**

Lyric debut

Castillo’s Chicago credits include The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, and Ride the Cyclone (Chicago Shakespeare); Hairspray and West Side Story (Drury Lane Theatre); Mamma Mia!, Sister Act, She Loves Me, and Kiss Me Kate (Marriott Theatre); The Music Man (Goodman Theatre). She appeared Off-Broadway in Ride the Cyclone (MCC). Regional highlights include Why Do Fools Fall in Love, The Nerd, and Titanic (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); Hairspray (Phoenix Theatre); Hairspray and Glorious! (Arkansas Repertory Theatre); Macbeth, Fiddler on the Roof, Lend Me a Tenor: The Musical, School for Wives, The Merchant of Venice, Private Lives, and The Taming of the Shrew (Utah Shakespeare Festival).

**KIANA RODRIGUEZ | ESTELLA**

Lyric debut

Rodriguez was recently seen as Consuelo in West Side Story at Teatro Lirico Di Cagliari. Regional highlights include Aida, Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Wizard of Oz, Mary Poppins, and A Christmas Carol. She toured nationally with Camille A. Brown & Dancers, and has workedshopped numerous productions including Oliver! and Into The Woods (NYCC Encores!). Film and television credits include Blue’s Big City Adventure (Paramount Pictures), The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, and Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. She holds a BFA in Dance, Musical Theatre Minor from Montclair State University.

**JOHN LISTER | OFFICER KRUPKE, u/s LT. SCHRANK**

Previously at Lyric: The King And I (2015/16) and Show Boat (2011/12).

Lister’s numerous local credits include The Crucible (Steppenwolf Theater); Guys and Dolls (Marriott Lincolnshire); seven seasons of A Christmas Carol as well as The Cherry Orchard and Roe (Goodman Theatre); more than a dozen productions including Richard III, Twelfth Night, The Herbal Bed, and Edward II (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); Lady Windermere’s
The Filipino-American tenor can be heard in the Haymarket Opera world premiere recording of L’amant anonyme. Other recent role debuts include Nemorino at Sarasota Opera, Tamino with Opera Maine, and Ottavio at Detroit Opera. He portrayed Jim Casy in The Grapes of Wrath in the production’s premiere at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and returned to the role at Michigan Opera Theatre. Recent highlights include a debut as Alfredo in La traviata in St. Louis, where he trained as a Gerline Young Artist and Gaddes Festival Artist. Agpalo performed with Chicago Folks Operetta in the Cousin from Nowhere and Lehar’s The Land of Smiles. He has been an artist at Chautauqua Opera and Central City Opera and is a graduate of Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music and the University of Central Florida.

Brock, a Lyric Opera Chorus member, has had solo roles in the company’s productions of La traviata, My Fair Lady, The Sound of Music, and Oklahoma! The tenor has portrayed Almaviva/The Barber of Seville with Lyric Unlimited’s Opera in the Neighborhoods program and recently appeared as Alfredo/La traviata with the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra. Brock has performed on San Francisco Opera’s mainstage (Der Rosenkavalier) and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Peninsula Music Festival, Northwest Indiana Symphony, and Grant Park Music Festival.

A longtime member of the Lyric Opera Chorus, Combs has combined opera and musical theater throughout his career. From Matt/The Fantasticks for its Soviet premiere in Moscow to the Beast/Disney’s Beauty and the Beast, the tenor has enjoyed performing in multiple genres around Chicago and the U.S. He is an active voice instructor as well as a National Board of Governors member with the American Guild of Musical Artists.

A member of the Lyric Opera of Chicago chorus, the soprano has covered numerous roles with the company. Recent performances include Bach’s B Minor mass with Chicago Bach Project (John Nelson, conductor), Violetta in La traviata with the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra, Ellen in Oklahoma! at Lyric, Kondja in The Rose of Stamboul with Chicago Folks Operetta, and soprano soloist in the Brahms Requiem; Knoxville: Summer of 1915 with the Prairie Ensemble; Vaughan Williams’ Sea Symphony; and in Haydn’s Lord Nelson Mass with the Wichita Symphony. A California native, Hassler has successfully competed at the Bel Canto Competition, Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and International Franz Liszt Competition, and is the recipient of many distinguished awards. She currently serves on the voice faculty of the Moody Bible Institute.

Sokolova has been a full-time member of the Lyric Opera Chorus since 2008, and has performed various roles and understudies at Lyric in such productions as Ernani, The Magic Flute, Hansel & Gretel, Dead Man Walking, L’elisir d’amore, Elektra, The Passenger, Die Entführung aus dem Serail, Showboat, and Lulu. She is the recipient of many awards, including a two-time regional finalist with the Metropolitan Opera National Council, and has distinguished herself as a soloist in many oratorio and concert works across the country.

The American bass-baritone has made frequent ensemble appearances at Lyric, and played the Commissioner in La traviata (2018/19) and Court Usher in Rigoletto (2017/18). Last season, he performed in the ensemble for Fire Shut Up In My Bones (2021/22) at the Metropolitan Opera. At Chicago Opera Theater, he took the roles of Sid in Albert Herring (2023), Tommie in Freedom Ride (2020, world premiere), Queequg in Moby Dick (2019), and Mr. Kofner/The Consul and Mr. Lister/Elizabeth Cree (2017/18). With Lyric Unlimited in 2016, he performed the role of Orpheus in Jason and the Argonauts.

At Lyric, Wallace-Crane has taken the roles of Shaindel/Fiddler on the Roof (2022/23), 3rd Knaben/The Magic Flute (2021/22), Sister Lilianne/Dead Man Walking (2019/20), Sprite/Cendrillon (2018/19), and Night Maid/My Fair Lady
(2016/17). She was featured with the Grant Park Music Festival as the alto soloist in Vivaldi’s Gloria in 2021 and Rachmaninoff’s Vesper in 2017. This summer she will return to the festival in Mendelssohn’s The First Walpurgis Night. Wallace-Crane trained as a young artist at the Natchez Opera Festival, Central City Opera, and Sarasota Opera.

**TARA WHEEKER | ENSEMBLE**

A chorus member at Lyric, the soprano has been a featured soloist in various concert works including Handel’s Messiah and Haydn’s Creation. Favorite operatic roles include Valencienne/The Merry Widow, First Lady/Die Zauberflöte, Saint Marguerite/Joan of Arc at the Stake, and Jessie/Mahagonny Songspiel. Wheeker won first place at the New York Lyric Opera Theater vocal competition in 2019 and was a finalist and first runner-up for the Palm Springs Opera Guild 2018 Vocal Competition. She holds a Master of Music in Voice Performance from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), and a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance and Music Education from CCM.

**MICHIELE K. WRIGHTTE | ENSEMBLE**

Previously at Lyric: Emilia/Otello (2001/02) and Mercédès/Carmen (1999/00).

Wright is an alumna of Lyric’s Ryan Opera Center, with which she created the role of Lucy Cross/ Michael John LaChiusa’s Lovers and Friends. Prominent among the mezzo-soprano’s six mainstage roles at Lyric have been Emilia/Otello, Mercédès/Carmen, and the Tango Singer/The Great Gatsby (company premiere). Other credits include Cherubino/The Marriage of Figaro (Chicago’s Opera Piccola), Isabella/L’italiana in Algeri (Pamiro Opera), Armindo/Partenope (Glimmerglass Festival), Ino/Semele (Spoleto Festival), Dinah/Trouble in Tahiti (Tampa Opera), Ramiro/La finta giardiniera (San Francisco Opera Center), and the Fox/The Cunning Little Vixen (Tulsa Opera).

**JEFFREY KRINGER | u/s TONY**

Lyric debut

The acclaimed stage performer has undertaken quintessential roles like Arthur (Camelot), Tony (West Side Story), Frederick (Pirates of Penzance), and Billy Bigelow (Carousel). This summer he’ll serve as faculty for the Open Jar Institute in NYC. Kringer earned a BFA at SUNY Fredonia.

**ALEXIS ROSTON | u/s DOC & GLAD HAND**

Lyric debut

Roston’s portrayal of Billie Holiday in Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar and Grill received widespread acclaim, including Chicago’s Jeff, Black Theater Alliance, and Black Excellence Awards. Other credits nationwide include Don’t Make Me Over: A Tribute to Dionne Warwick (Jeff Award Nomination, Black Theater Alliance Award Nomination), Mary Poppins (Mrs. Banks), Porgy and Bess (Bess), Ragtime (Sarah), Sister Act (Deloris), For Colored Girls... (Lady in Orange), Ain’t Misbehavin’ (Charlaine), Shrek: The Musical (Dragon),
The Wiz (Addaperle), The Piano Lesson (Grace), Crowns (Jeanette), Company (Sarah), Godspell (Joanne), Smokey Joe’s Café (Brenda), The Color Purple, and Hairspray. She holds a BFA in musical theatre from Howard University.

AMY ROMERO | SWING
Lyric debut
Romero recently played Velma and covered the Sharks ensemble in West Side Story at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari in Italy. Her regional credits include: the Spanish language world premiere of On Your Feet! en Español at GALA Hispanic Theatre in Washington, D.C.; On Your Feet! at North Carolina Theatre; The Wiz (Florida); and the NYC workshop of Thoughts of a Colored Man. She has also toured nationally with productions such as Legally Blonde, recording artist Lisa Lisa’s concert tour, and Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood.

JOSH ZACHER | SWING, u/s ACTION
Lyric debut
The NYC based actor, dancer, and choreographer was seen in the national tours of The Prom (1st Nat’l, Dance Captain), A Chorus Line (Larry, Mike/Mark u/s), and The Elf on the Shelf. He has performed at The Kennedy Center, North Shore Music Theatre (The Music Man), The 5th Avenue Theatre, The Ordway (West Side Story), Kansas City Starlight, The REV Theatre Co. (Footloose), Theatre By The Sea (Newsies), The Sharon Playhouse (Les Misérables), and The Wagon Wheel Center for the Performing Arts. Zacher is a guest faculty member at Broadway Dance Center and a teaching artist for New York City Center.

PRODUCTION TEAM
JAMES LOWE | CONDUCTOR
Previously at Lyric: West Side Story (2018/19) and Oklahoma! (2012/13).
Lowe made his Broadway debut conducting Gypsy, starring Patti LuPone, and was music director and conductor for the touring National Theatre production of My Fair Lady. Recent operatic engagements include La bohème (Houston Grand Opera), Jeanine Tesori’s The Lion, The Unicorn, and Me (Washington), Show Boat (Glimmerglass Festival), and Rachel Portman’s The Little Prince (Utah Opera). Lowe has also appeared at the San Francisco Opera, Tulsa, New York City, and Wolf Trap opera companies. At Houston Grand Opera he has worked on productions of works of Mozart, Bizet, Copland, Sondheim, Portman, and Heggie. Lowe has also led the Houston Symphony, Memphis Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, and American Composers Orchestra. He has performed as piano soloist with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and has given recitals at such distinguished venues as the Aspen Music Festival, the Chautauqua Institute, and the University of Texas-San Antonio New Music Festival.

FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO | DIRECTOR
Previously at Lyric: Six productions since 1999/00, most recently Florencia en el Amazonas (2021/22) and Luisa Miller (2019/20).
The internationally recognized director of opera and theater has served as the Artistic Director of Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center since 2013. She is also the Artistic & General Director of the Glimmerglass Festival, Emerita. She served as the Artistic Advisor to the San Francisco Opera from 2005 to 2011 and as the Artistic Director of the Skylight Theater from 1987 to 1992. Zambello’s U.S. directing debut took place at the Houston Grand Opera with a production of Fidelio. She debuted in Europe at Teatro la Fenice in Venice with Beatrice di Tenda and has since staged new productions at major theaters and opera houses in Europe, Asia, Australia, Russia, and the U.S. She has worked at more than 50 international opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Paris Opera, Bolshoi, Munich State Opera, Covent Garden, and Opera Australia. She has been named a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government, a Knight with the Order of the Star of Italy and received the Russian Federation’s Arts Medal, all for her service to culture. Other honors include three Olivier Awards from the London Society of Theatres and two Evening Standard Awards, and she has twice received the French Grand Prix des Critiques for her work at the Paris Opera. She also received the Medallion Society Award from San Francisco Opera, recognizing 30 years’ work for the company.

PETER J. DAVISON | SET DESIGNER
Previously at Lyric: Five productions since 2008/09, most recently Florencia en el Amazonas (2021/22) and West Side Story (2018/19).
The British designer’s productions with prestigious companies throughout Europe and the U.K. include The Marriage of Figaro (Vienna); Die Gezeichneten, Falstaff, and Die schweigsame Frau (Zurich); Capriccio (Berlin, Turin); Der Rosenkavalier, Carmen, and Mary Stuart (English National Opera); Anna Bolena (Bavarian State Opera); Mitridate, Re di Ponto and Carmen (Salzburg); The Queen of Spades (Covent Garden); Guillaume Tell (Opéra National de Paris); and Cyrano de Bergerac (La Scala), among many other productions and venues. In addition to The Rake’s Progress, The Marriage of Figaro, and Cyrano de Bergerac at the Metropolitan Opera, his work has also been seen in the U.S. at Washington National Opera (eight productions), San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, The Dallas Opera, and the Glimmerglass Festival. His theater credits include productions for Broadway (Medea, Hamlet, Deuce, Copenhagen, Democracy, Is He Dead, Blithe Spirit), the royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, London’s West End, and the Chichester Festival Theatre.
Among his many musical-theater productions are _Jesus Christ Superstar_ (U.K./U.S.A. tour; Broadway) and _Show Boat_ (Royal Albert Hall). Davison is a former Tony, Drama Desk, and Olivier Award nominee.

**JESSICA JAHN | COSTUME DESIGNER**

_Previously at Lyric:_ West Side Story (2018/19), Norma (2016/17), and Anna Bolena (2014/15).

Jahn has collaborated with directors Francesca Zambello, Diane Paulus, Tina Landau, Tommy Kail, Jessica Blank, and Kenny Leon; writers Nora Ephron, Eisa Davis, Charles Busch, Charles Fuller, Tracy K. Smith, and Mark Campbell; and some of her past projects include _Gloria: A Life_ (Daryl Roth Theatre), _Coal Country_ (The Public Theatre), _Blue (Glimmerglass Festival), Orpheo et Euridice_ (San Francisco Opera), _Monodramas_ (New York City Opera), _The Crucible_ (Glimmerglass Festival), _The Manchurian Candidate_ (Minnesota Opera, world premiere), _Dead Man Walking_ (Washington National Opera), and _Moby Dick_ (Utah Opera). She has taught at both NYU and Rutgers University, and is an Adjunct Costume Design Professor with Brandeis University’s Theater Arts Department. She is currently working toward her Masters in Cultural Anthropology at Hunter College. Jessica Jahn is supported by the Richard R. and Susan Kiphart Costume Designer Endowed Chair.

**MARK McCULLOUGH | LIGHTING DESIGNER**

_Previously at Lyric:_ Seven productions since 2008, most recently _Florencia en el Amazonas_ (2021/22) and _Luisa Miller_ (2019/20).

The lighting designer’s most notable achievements include productions at the Metropolitan Opera ( _The Marriage of Figaro_), Vienna Staatsoper ( _Macbeth_, reprised there last season), Bolshoi Theatre ( _La traviata_), Beijing’s National Centre for the Performing Arts ( _Les contes d’Hoffmann_), _La Scala_ ( _Cyrano de Bergerac_), Madrid’s Teatro Real ( _Luisa Miller_), and London’s Royal Opera ( _The Queen of Spades_); the major companies of Washington, Boston, Miami, Seattle, Dallas, San Diego, and St. Louis; and Bard College’s Fisher Center and the Glimmerglass Festival. Among McCullough’s extensive theater credits internationally are the revival of _Jesus Christ Superstar_ (Broadway and U.K. tour); _Whistle Down the Wind_ (Aldwych Theatre, London); _The White Devil_ and _Don Carlos_ (Royal Shakespeare Company); _Der Besuch der alten Dame_ (Ronacher Theatre, Vienna); _Artus_ (St. Gallen, Switzerland) and _Rebecca_ (St. Gallen, Stuttgart’s Palladium Theater); and numerous off-Broadway productions. McCullough’s regional theater work has been seen at many of this country’s most distinguished companies. Lighting designers are supported by the Mary-Louise and James S. Aagaard endowment in honor of Duane Schuler.

**MARK GREY | SOUND DESIGNER**

_Previously at Lyric:_ Eight productions since 2007/08, most recently _West Side Story_ (2018/19), and _My Fair Lady_ (2016/17).

Grey is an Emmy Award-winning sound designer and composer who made history as the first sound designer for the New York Philharmonic ( _On the Transmigration of Souls_ (2002), which also won the Pulitzer Prize in Music) and the Metropolitan Opera ( _L’Amour de Loin_ (2016), _The Merry Widow_ and _Bluebeard’s Castle/Folanta_ (both 2015), _Death of Klinghoffer_ (2014), _Nixon in China_ (2011), and _Doctor Atomic_ (2008)). His grand opera, _Frankenstein_, premiered at La Monnaie in Brussels in 2019, and his mobile chamber opera, _Birds In The Moon_, premiered with the New York Philharmonic in 2021. Grey has had several commissions from the Atlanta Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and others, and he has collaborated with composer John Adams and several others for nearly three decades. His sound designs have been heard throughout most major concert halls, HD simulcast theaters, and opera houses worldwide.

**MICHAEL BLACK | CHORUS MASTER**

The Australian chorus director is in his 11th season at Lyric, having held this position at Opera Australia in Sydney from 2001 to 2013. Black has served in this capacity for such distinguished organizations as the Edinburgh International Festival, Opera Holland Park (London), the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and, in Australia, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Choir, Motet Choir, the Cantillation chamber choir, and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Other activities include preparing _The Damnation of Faust_ chorus and Haydn’s _Creation_ at the Grant Park Music Festival, where he has worked for two seasons. He has served as chorus director for close to 140 different operas on four continents, and his work has been recorded and/or aired on ABC, BBC, PBS, for many HD productions in movie theaters and on television. Michael Black is supported by the Howard A. Stotler Chorus Master Endowed Chair.

**JOSHUA BERGASSE | ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHY REPRODUCTION**

_Bergasse won the Emmy Award for his choreography on NBC's musical drama SMASH. On Broadway, he choreographed the revival of On The Town, for which he received an Astaire Award and was nominated for TONY, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Awards. Also on Broadway, Bergasse choreographed the revival of Gigi, as well as the debut of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Off-Broadway credits include Sweet Charity starring Sutton Foster; Cagney (Drama Desk, Astaire, Outer Critics Circle Award nominations for choreography); Bomb-Itty of Errors; and Captain Louie. Josh’s other credits as a choreographer include West Side Story at_
the Stratford Festival; Little Me, and It’s A Bird... It’s A Plane... It’s Superman! at City Center Encore!; Pirates of Penzance at Barrington Stage Co, Guys and Dolls, and The Sound of Music at Carnegie Hall. He also choreographed multiple segments on television’s So You Think You Can Dance and PBS’s Sinatra: A Voice for a Century.

**KIIRA SCHMIDT CARPER | ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER**

Lyric debut.

Carper’s Broadway credits include Follies, Anything Goes, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Irving Berlin’s White Christmas, No No Nanette (NYCC), and Stairway to Paradise (NYCC). She worked on national tours of Fame, Crazy for You, and A Chorus Line, and international highlights include the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Broadway Asia’s Real to Reel. Select regional credits: Mame (The Kennedy Center), Cats (The MUNY), A Chorus Line (The MUNY), The Bandwagon (The Old Globe), Oklahoma (Papermill Playhouse), West Side Story (Barrington Stage), White Christmas (The Fox Theater), Sweet Charity (Gateway Playhouse), Chicago (Riverside Theater), Damn Yankees, Gypsy, Show Boat, and Grease. Carper assisted Josh Bergasse in recreating the work of Jerome Robbins in West Side Story at Teatro Lirico in Sardinia, Italy, Barrington Stage, The North Carolina Theater, The Fulton Theater, and for the 50th Anniversary celebration event in Times Square in 2011. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre at Syracuse University.

**SARAH HATTEN | WIGMASTER & MAKEUP DESIGNER**

Lyric’s wigmaster and makeup designer has worked in a wide repertoire at Des Moines Metro Opera, Detroit Opera (formerly Michigan Opera Theatre), Columbus Opera, Toledo Opera, the Cabrillo Music Festival, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She has also worked at The Glimmerglass Festival and the major opera companies of Los Angeles, Omaha, Cleveland, Sarasota, and Central City, as well as Wisconsin’s American Players Theatre and, in Los Angeles, the Pantages Theatre and the Geffen Playhouse. Sarah Hatten is supported by the Marlys A. Beider Wigmaster and Makeup Designer Endowed Chair.

**ERIC SEAN FOGEL | ASSOCIATE STAGE DIRECTOR**

Previously at Lyric: Florencia en el Amazonas (2021/22).

This season Fogel is directing new productions of Song Bird (Kennedy Center), The Sound of Music (Houston Grand Opera), and Love and War (Glimmerglass Festival). Recently he was the Revival Director for Norma (Metropolitan Opera), Candide! (Glimmerglass Festival), and West Side Story (Teatro Lirico di Cagliari). World premiere credits include: Klangwolke 2023, The Odyssey (Glimmerglass Festival), The Lion, Unicorn and Me (Kennedy Center), Artus, Excalibur (St. Gallen), and Princess (XSBN China). Other notable productions include: Candide! (Téâtre du Capitole, Opera National de Bordeaux), Samson and Delilah, The Little Prince (Kennedy Center), Pearl Fishers (Houston Grand Opera), Le Nozze di Figaro (Opera Philadelphia), and Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare Theatre Company). For the past 13 years Fogel has been Head of Stage Movement and Choreography at the Glimmerglass Festival, and he is also on staff as a Guest Stage Director at the Metropolitan Opera.

**JORDAN LEE BRAUN | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

Since 2016, Braun has worked on more than two dozen productions at Lyric as either an Associate Director, Assistant Director, or Stage Manager. She has collaborated with directors Richard Jones, Sir David Pountney, Sir David McVicar, Sir Graham Vick, Francesca Zambello, Arin Arbus, Barrie Kosky, Bart Sher, Jonathan Miller, and many more. She most recently directed the youth opera The Scorpion’s Sting for Lyric Unlimited’s Opera in the Neighborhoods program. Braun has also worked with the Washington National Opera, Opera Colorado, Wolf Trap Opera, The Atlanta Opera, Florentine Opera, Opera Omaha, Opera Grand Rapids, Charlottesville Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Sarasota Opera, Toledo Opera, and Opera Carolina.

**ALAINA BARTKOWIAK | STAGE MANAGER**

Alaina Bartkowiak has been a stage manager and assistant stage manager for Lyric since 2019. She has held stage management roles at Chicago Opera Theater, Music Theater Works, Florentine Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Opera Omaha, Glimmerglass Festival, and other companies across the country.

**KATRINA BACHUS | ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**

Bachus has worked for Lyric Opera of Chicago since the 2016/17 Season, during which time she has served many roles including Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager, Associate Director, and Assistant Director. Additional credits include both stage management and direction credits for the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and Houston Grand Opera. Bachus holds a degree in Stage Management from the University of Utah.
BILL WALTERS | ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER


CHUCK COYL | FIGHT DIRECTOR

A professional fight director for more than 30 years, Coyl is a three time president of the Society of American Fight Directors. Most recently at Lyric Opera he staged the fights for Don Carlos. Other recent credits include the Broadway production and national tour of August: Osage County, The Crucible and Superior Donuts at Steppenwolf Theatre Company; 2666, Another Word for Beauty, and The Upstairs Conierge at the Goodman Theatre; and Sucker Punch at Victory Gardens Theatre, for which he received a Joseph Jefferson Award nomination. He is a founding member of the Single Action Theatre Company.

SAMMI GRANT | DICTION AND DIALECT COACH

Grant is a Chicago-based dialect coach and voice/speech teacher. Chicago theater credits include Goodman Theatre, Writers Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Drury Lane, Porchlight Music Theatre, The Gift Theatre, Remy Bumppo Theatre, and many more. Film and television credits include Rescued by Ruby (Netflix), Patriot (Amazon Prime) and The Exorcist (Fox). Grant is a voice/speech teacher for The Theatre School at DePaul University.

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Photo: Kyle Flubacker
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ANN TOOMEY
This season: Witch/Into the Woods, Tulsa Opera; Woglinde/Das Rheingold, LA Phil.

“When I look back at my three years in the Ryan Opera Center (2016-2019), I am in awe of everything I learned and how much growth I experienced. The tremendous opportunities I was given—as well as the time needed to assimilate what I gained from them—allowed me to cultivate my artistic identity and be confident in expressing it. In the practice room and on the stage, I was able to work with some of the most brilliant and accomplished professionals in the business. Starting with a one-on-one coaching session with Renée Fleming in my first week to singing Musetta in four performances of La bohème in my final season, it was an incredible journey, for which I am beyond grateful!”

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Anthony Reed
The Love for Three Oranges, Des Moines Metro Opera
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Friday, October 6, 2023 at 7:30PM

Experience the inimitable talent of Audra McDonald in concert with the Lyric Orchestra, conducted by Andy Einhorn, in a spellbinding evening of songs, from theater classics to new works and seldom-heard gems.

Winner of six Tony Awards, two Grammy Awards and an Emmy Award, Audra McDonald possesses a “lustrous lyric soprano” (The New York Times) and an incomparable gift for dramatic truth-telling. This one-night only performance is not to be missed.

Tickets on sale June 15
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WHAT LED YOU TO WORK AT LYRIC?
My career in arts and culture starts with my New Orleans roots; I’ve spent the most formative years of my professional life here in Chicago. Shortly after moving to Chicago, I accepted a position with one of the city’s largest arts education organizations, where I designed and implemented programs in educational and community-based settings throughout the city and beyond, built relationships with colleagues across the country, and worked to advance racial equity in the arts. In 2022, after a bit of self-reflection, I realized it was time to carve a new path. I’m the daughter of parents who experienced segregation, and my mother and father often walked me through doors that were once closed to them. This meant weekends filled with visits to museums, theaters, myriad music venues, and so on. It remains important to me that all people, and especially people of color from the very young to the most seasoned among us, not only access artistic spaces, but lead them and see themselves reflected in them at every participatory level. Although I never anticipated working at an opera house, Lyric’s vision and values aligned perfectly with what I was seeking so, Lyric Unlimited has the capacity to change perceptions, remove barriers to participation, and engage broader audiences.

BEYOND OPERA, WHAT ARE YOUR OTHER PASSIONS?
I have a penchant for the handwritten letter with an insatiable appetite for fine stationery. While I appreciate the convenience of a quick text message, there’s nothing like putting pen to paper crafting a beautiful missive to someone.

WHAT’S THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF YOUR JOB?
I would say I am experiencing growing pains, rather than challenges. Transitioning from a mid-size arts education organization to a large institution like Lyric Opera is akin to traversing a wonderland of sorts. Nearly every day, I am discovering a new cadre of colleagues who are essential to making the magic happen. Also, opera has its own language, and that language is very new to me. I studied art history in Italy, but had I known then that one day I would be working at Lyric, I would have at least taken one course in the history of opera!

TELL US ABOUT LYRIC UNLIMITED AND HOW YOU ENGAGE WITH THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY.
In framing how Lyric Unlimited creates space for exploring opera, Lyric’s President, General Director & CEO Anthony Freud often speaks of the “creative crucible.” This is quite powerful—liberating even. From my perspective, Lyric Unlimited amplifies the elasticity of the form, whether teaching the form itself or using the form to teach and engage. From elementary school students learning to create an opera based on a storybook, to high school students attending their first performance and finding a space of belonging, to people on divergent paths discovering their shared humanity through the power of storytelling and music, these are some of the ways in which Lyric Unlimited engages our Chicago community. And by doing so, Lyric Unlimited has the capacity to change perceptions, remove barriers to participation, and engage broader audiences.

WHAT’S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?
One of the most rewarding aspects of working in the arts is how dynamic things are moment-to-moment. Rarely is one day ever the same as another. For the Learning Programs team of Lyric Unlimited, the success of our programming relies on thoughtful planning and relationship-building with our colleagues, educators, and teaching artists. Being in community with one another through meaningful exchange—listening, learning, and mapping our work together, builds the foundation for innovative programming and strong partnerships.

WHAT’S A FAVORITE LYRIC MOMENT?
For the dress rehearsal of Hansel and Gretel this season, I was in charge of welcoming student groups. While waiting in the balcony and scooping out the seats, I had the opportunity to meet two of the phenomenal ushers there, Carl and David, both of whom have been with the company for years. Both had incredible histories, with Carl formerly working as a dancer with the Joffrey Ballet, and David previously working as an opera singer and as a chorus member with Lyric. They had the most incredible stories about our space, of the experience of their own creative lives. David spoke about hearing soprano Leontyne Price for the first time, and the conversation moved him to tears. Moments like this serve as reminders that we are all just a multitude of stories. Something changes inside when we listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves.

From the balcony at Lyric, you will hear the best of the best. We listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves. Something changes inside when we listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves. Something changes inside when we listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves. Something changes inside when we listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves. Something changes inside when we listen to the stories of another, wherever we find ourselves.