

# OPERA SAN JOSE

Press Kit: *Anna Karenina*

Press Release

David Carlson Bio

Stewart Robertson Bio

Synopsis

Images:

*Anna Karenina*

*Jasmina Halimic*

*Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste*

**Press contacts:**

Virginia Perry, 408.437.4463 or 650.799.1341 [perry@operasj.org](mailto:perry@operasj.org)

Elizabeth Santana, 408.437.2229 [santana@operasj.org](mailto:santana@operasj.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

July 14, 2010

### **Bold and Beautiful: *Anna Karenina***

#### ***Opera San José presents West Coast premiere of new David Carlson opera***

SAN JOSÉ, CA—**Opera San José** proudly launches its 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season with the West Coast premiere of ***Anna Karenina***, an American opera by composer **David Carlson** with libretto by the late **Colin Graham**. Eight performances are scheduled from **September 11 through 26** at the **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street in downtown San José. Opera San José will present ***Anna Karenina*** with a new scene added by the composer following the opera's 2007 world premiere at Florida Grand Opera. Tickets are on sale at the Opera San José Box Office, by phone at **(408) 437-4450** or online at **[www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)**. ***Anna Karenina*** is sponsored by a grant from the **Carol Franc Buck Foundation** and is made possible, in part, by a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José.

*Anna Karenina* - beautiful, wealthy, aristocratic—is nonetheless vulnerable, unhappy, and caught in a rigid society that crushes anyone who does not follow the rules of the game. Her deeply personal, tragic story has long been familiar through the practically perfect novel by **Leo Tolstoy** and the two most memorable film versions starring Greta Garbo and Vivien Leigh. Told with compassion and unsentimental observation, the story follows an upper-class woman in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia through a loveless marriage, burning love affair, wrenching heartbreak, and finally her sudden death. Yet more than a terminal end to an unfortunate existence, ***Anna Karenina*** concludes with the transcendent beginning of new life underscoring both the tragedy and the happiness of Tolstoy's masterpiece. It is opera at its most affecting, combining Tolstoy's very human drama with powerfully expressive American music that draws on Tchaikovsky for its orchestral models while utilizing arching melodic utterances unique to composer **Carlson's** personal style.

In collaboration with noted British librettist and stage director **Colin Graham**, Florida Grand Opera commissioned **David Carlson** to compose *Anna Karenina* in celebration of the 2007 opening of the Ziff Opera House in Miami, with a co-production by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. The premiere production attracted sold-out audiences and received wide critical acclaim. *The New York Times* applauded Carlson's "well-crafted lyrical score" and "romantic and luxuriantly textured music." *Opera News* praised the "powerful, entertaining, and moving" orchestrations and *The Toronto Star* lauded the production as one of Graham's "major successes."

*Anna Karenina* at **Opera San José** is the third production of the opera, presented with a new scene written by **Carlson** and **Mark Streshinsky**, director of the world premiere in Florida. "Both director Mark Streshinsky and I felt that [the character] Vronsky needed further fleshing out, to have it make sense that Anna would fall for him, and we both saw that a new scene could fix that to some degree." Carlson remarked. "It's only four minutes long, but it seems to fill the missing link. I had a lot of fun with this new scene, evoking for a few moments the style of Tchaikovsky."

**David Carlson**, a native of California, has composed successfully in many genres including orchestral music, chamber music, and opera. His works have been performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, and the Tanglewood Festival, among others. In addition to symphonic works, **Carlson** has written three operas, *The Midnight Angel* (1993), *Dreamkeepers* (1996), and *Anna Karenina* (2007). Carlson has received an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as awards from Meet the Composer and Chamber Music America. His most recent work, *The Promise of Time*, was written through the Bay Area's Magnum Opus commissioning program, with performances by the Marin Symphony Orchestra, Oakland East Bay Symphony, and Santa Rosa Symphony.

**Opera San José** is pleased to welcome renowned music director and conductor **Stewart Robertson** to conduct *Anna Karenina*. Maestro Robertson conducted the premiere production in Florida and has long been associated with composer **Carlson**, having conducted the premieres of *The Midnight Angel* in 1993 and *Dreamkeepers* in 1996. Robertson was music director of Glimmerglass Opera from 1988 to 2006, and from 1998 until 2009 he was music director and principal conductor of the Florida Grand Opera. He has also served as music director of the Zurich Ballet and Scottish Opera Touring Company and conducted New York City Opera productions broadcast on *Live From Lincoln Center*.

Award-winning stage director **Brad Dalton** returns to **Opera San José** to direct ***Anna Karenina***. "I am thrilled to be staging this lush, highly emotive score in a new production that moves nimbly and evocatively through its many locations," says Dalton. "Rarely does an opera take us so many places." Dalton's previous credits with the company include *Così fan tutte* and *Madama Butterfly* for which he received critical acclaim. He has directed productions for opera companies throughout the United States and abroad, including San Francisco Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, Washington Opera, and the State Opera of South Australia.

Dalton is joined by a **distinguished creative team** to bring ***Anna Karenina*** to the opera stage - choreographer Lise La Cour, set designer Steven C. Kemp, costume designer Elizabeth Poindexter, lighting designer Kent Dorsey, and wig and makeup designer Jeanna Parham.

Alternating in the role of the beautiful and passionate Anna are sopranos **Jouvancia Jean-Baptiste** and **Jasmina Halimic**, two new members of **Opera San José's** resident company. Jean-Baptiste made her mainstage debut with Florida Grand Opera in the role of The Abbess in *Suor Angelica* and has been a semi-finalist in The Jensen Foundation Vocal Competition. Halimic received accolades for her Opera San José debut as Magda in the company premiere of Puccini's *La rondine* during the 2009 - 2010 season. Other recent performances include the Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for the Intermezzo Foundation in Belgium and Mimì (*La bohème*) with Amore Opera in New York City.

Three former artists from **Opera San José's** resident company return as guest artists for ***Anna Karenina***. Soprano, **Khori Dastoor** (resident company member 2007-2010) performs the role of the beautiful, yet vulnerable Kitty Scherbatsky. Dastoor thrilled Opera San José audiences during the 2009-2010 season with her performance as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* and the title role in *Manon*. Recent performances featured Dastoor as Blondchen (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) in her debut with the Midsummer Mozart Festival. Appearing in the role of Anna's elder brother Stiva Oblonsky will be tenor **Christopher Bengochea** (resident company member 2005-2008). During Opera San José's 2009-2010 season Bengochea received praise for his performance of Ruggero in Puccini's *La rondine*. His previous roles include Rodolfo in *La bohème*, the title role in *Roméo et Juliette*, and Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*. In addition to Opera San José, Bengochea has appeared with Opera Idaho, Atlanta Opera, and Opera Saskatoon, to name a few, and was a featured soloist with the San Juan Symphony and Modesto Symphony. Bass, **Kirk Eichelberger** (resident company member 2001-2003, 2005-2006) takes on the role of Alexei Karenin, Anna's husband and a highly placed politician. Eichelberger

has performed numerous roles with Opera San José including Frere Laurent in *Romeo and Juliette*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and Colline in *La bohème*. He was recently seen as The Emperor in Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia and sang the roles of Timur in *Turandot* and Mephistopheles in *Faust* with The Festival Opera of Walnut Creek.

### About Opera San José

**Opera San José**, performing at the historic **California Theatre** in downtown San José, is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States. Maintaining a resident company of professional artists, Opera San José specializes in showcasing the finest young professional singers in the nation. In addition to mainstage performances, Opera San José maintains extensive educational programs in schools and in the community at large, and offers *Preview* lectures and *Introduction to Opera* talks for all mainstage productions.

## ***Anna Karenina***

*West Coast premiere of new David Carlson opera*

In English with English Supertitles

|                               |                                 |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Cast:                         | <u>September 11, 14, 19, 25</u> | <u>September 12, 17, 23, 26</u> |
| <i>Anna Karenina</i>          | Jasmina Halimic•                | Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste•*        |
| <i>Kitty Scherbatsky</i>      | Khori Dastoor                   | Khori Dastoor                   |
| <i>Dolly Oblonsky</i>         | Betany Coffland•                | Tori Grayum                     |
| <i>Princess Betsy</i>         | Megan Stetson*                  | Megan Stetson*                  |
| <i>Countess Lydia Ivanova</i> | Kindra Scharich*                | Kindra Scharich*                |
| <i>Agafia Mihailovna</i>      | Heather McFadden                | Heather McFadden                |
| <i>Konstantin Levin</i>       | Michael Dailey•                 | Alexander Boyer•                |
| <i>Stiva Oblonsky</i>         | Christopher Bengochea           | Michael Mendelsohn              |
| <i>Alexei Vronsky</i>         | Krassen Karagiozov•             | Torlef Borsting•*               |
| <i>Prince Yashvin</i>         | Paul Murray                     | Paul Murray                     |
| <i>Alexei Karenin</i>         | Kirk Eichelberger               | Isaiah Musik-Ayala•             |

• Resident Company \* Company debut

What: **Opera San José** proudly launches its 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season with the West Coast premiere of ***Anna Karenina***, an American opera by **David Carlson**.

Who: Composer - David Carlson; Librettist - Colin Graham  
Conductors - Stewart Robertson, Bryan Nies (2 performances – September 25, 26)  
Stage director - Brad Dalton  
Choreographer - Lise La Cour

Designers - Steven C. Kemp (sets); Elizabeth Poindexter (costumes); Kent Dorsey (lighting); Jeanna Parham (wig/makeup)

Dates: September 11, 12m, 14, 17, 19m, 23, 25, 26m; 2010

Time: "m" indicates matinee at 3pm; all other performances are at 8pm

Location: **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street between San Carlos and San Salvador streets, downtown San José

Tickets: \$51–\$101 (includes city facility usage fee) from **Opera San José Box Office**, 2149 Paragon Dr., San José, CA 95131; **408-437-4450**; 408-437-4455 fax; [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)  
Available 90 minutes prior to curtain at the California Theatre box office only: Seniors (65 and older) 10% discount; Students (25 and under, with student ID) \$11

Photos: <http://www.operasj.org/kareninahires.html>

Press Room: <http://www.operasj.org/pressroom.html>

*Anna Karenina* is sponsored by a grant from the **Carol Franc Buck Foundation** and is made possible, in part, by a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José.

To learn more about *Anna Karenina*, please visit [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org) and consider these opportunities:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Gallery Exhibit: August 3 through August 30, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor exhibit area. 'Anna Karenina – The Making of a Modern American Opera.' Featuring composer David Carlson's personal collection of orchestral manuscripts. Free admission; open to the public all library open hours. [www.sjlibrary.org](http://www.sjlibrary.org)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Film Screening: August 14, 2:00pm. Screening of *Anna Karenina*, 1948 film starring Vivien Leigh followed by a guided tour of the *Anna Karenina* exhibit by General Manager, Larry Hancock. Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Room 255/257. Free admission.

Preview at Noe Valley Chamber Music with David Carlson: August 29, 4:00pm. Tickets in advance and at the door, \$25. Call 415-648-5236 or visit [www.nvcm.org](http://www.nvcm.org).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Public Preview/Panel Discussion with David Carlson: August 30, 12 noon. *Anna Karenina* preview performance by members of the cast and panel discussion with composer, David Carlson; moderated by San Jose State Professor, Arlene Okerlund. Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Room 225/229. Free admission.

Subscriber Preview with David Carlson: August 31, San Jose Woman's Club. Doors open at 6:30pm for wine and light hors d'oeuvres; program 7-8pm. Vocal preview with members of the cast, followed by a lecture by General Manager, Larry Hancock. For tickets (\$25), call 408-437-4450.

Gala Opening Night Dinner: September 11, 5:00pm. Reception with *Anna Karenina* composer, David Carlson, followed by a three-course meal; Arcadia Restaurant, Marriott Hotel. For tickets (\$125) call 408-437-4450.

Stanford Theatre Film Screening: September 11-14; 7:30pm (plus 3:55 pm Sat/Sun). Screening of 1935 film *Anna Karenina* starring Greta Garbo. For information call (650) 324-3700 or visit [www.stanfordtheatre.org](http://www.stanfordtheatre.org).

Introduction to Opera: Before each performance (except opening night), General Manager, Larry Hancock, will present a free 45-minute talk about the opera at the California Theatre, beginning at 6:30pm prior to evening performances and at 1:30pm prior to Sunday matinees. No reservations required.

Meet the Composer: Meet the composer, members of the cast, the stage director, and the conductor immediately after the close of the opening Sunday matinee, September 12, at the California Theatre. Free for matinee attendees.

Amici Night: September 23. Members of Opera San José's Amici Club (young professionals 35 and younger) are invited to the VIP Lounge at the California Theatre for wine and light hors d' oeuvres at 7pm, prior to attending the 8pm performance.

# # #

## Biography:

### David Carlson, Composer



Born on March 13, 1952 in Ventura, California, David Carlson has composed successfully in many genres including orchestral music, chamber music and opera. His works have been performed by such ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Tanglewood Festival, and many others.

Carlson's operas have received international acclaim and numerous performances. In collaboration with librettist/author Peter Beagle, Carlson was commissioned by Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Glimmerglass Opera and Sacramento Opera in 1993 to compose *The Midnight Angel*. In 1996, *Dreamkeepers* was commissioned by Utah Opera and given a new production by the Tulsa Opera in 1998. *Anna Karenina*, in collaboration with the late British librettist/director Colin Graham, was commissioned by Florida Grand Opera in 2007, with a co-production by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Mr. Carlson is currently at work on a large piece, *The Promise of Time*, as part of the Magnum Opus commissioning program, with upcoming performances scheduled with three SF Bay Area orchestras.

The recipient of a number of awards and honors, he has received commissions from Chamber Music America, the a cappella vocal group Chanticleer, and received an Academy Award in composition by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1995. Carlson studied theory and composition with Alan Chaplin at Los Angeles High School of the Arts, and with Leonard Stein at the California Institute of the Arts.

## Biography:

### Stewart Robertson, Conductor



During the 2010 - 2011 season, Stewart Robertson conducts the West Coast premiere of *Anna Karenina*. Born in Scotland, Mr. Robertson thrives on a wide range of musical interests. He has become particularly associated with the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Britten and his close involvement with new music has led to him having conducted over 100 orchestral and operatic world premieres. Maestro Robertson is Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Atlantic Classical Orchestra in Florida and has been recently named Music Director Emeritus of Glimmerglass Opera in recognition of the phenomenal musical growth the company has achieved under his direction over the last two decades.

Mr. Robertson gained his early experience in opera at the opera houses of Cologne and Zurich and at Scottish Opera, where he was Music Director of the touring company. Subsequently in the USA he became Music Director of the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra and the Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra, where he was champion of new music and a frequent broadcaster on National Public Radio. Additionally, he has enjoyed two highly successful periods as Artistic Director of Opera Omaha, and Music Director of Florida Grand Opera in Miami.

Equally at home in opera and the concert hall, Robertson has led performances with orchestras as diverse as the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Louisville Orchestra, Netherlands Symphony Orchestra, Mecklenburg Staatskapelle, Buenos Aires Philharmonic, Sicily Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica Nacional of Mexico, the North German Philharmonic, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Highlights include performances at the Lille Festival in France with the Orchestra of Maastricht, Igor Oistrakh, soloist, and at the Concertgebouw with the Ukraine State Philharmonic. He has also led this

orchestra both in Kiev and on tour in Holland and has recorded with them symphonies of Shostakovich, and Prokofiev. Recently Robertson made a highly successful debut with the Arturo Toscanini Philharmonic Orchestra and the chorus of the Maggio Musicale Florence conducting

the closing concert of the 2009 season of Italy's famed Festival of the Nations in Citta di Castello, Umbria.

In the realm of opera Maestro Robertson's appearances include New York City Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the companies of Montreal, Detroit, Philadelphia, the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Dusseldorf, the Norwegian National Opera, the Jesi Festival in Italy, the Wexford Festival and Opera Ireland in Dublin.

Robertson's performances with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Utah Symphony, Ukraine State Philharmonic and Glimmerglass Opera can be heard on the Chandos, Naxos, New World and Verdi/ EMI labels while his recording of Sir Richard Rodney Bennett's opera *The Mines of Sulphur* was recently nominated for a Grammy Award. His world premiere recording of David Carlson's *Anna Karenina* with the St. Louis Symphony has recently been released on the Signum label, and his interpretation of Puccini's *La bohème* at the Puccini Festival in the composer's hometown of Torre del Lago gained the unique distinction of becoming the first performance of the work by a non-Italian conductor to be released by the Festival as a commercial DVD. In the USA, Robertson's performances have been televised by PBS on both the "Great Performances" and "Live from Lincoln Center" series.

Future plans include a return to Orchestra London, Canada, concerts with the New Jersey based virtuoso string ensemble ARCO, L'Opera de Montreal, the Wexford and Fort Worth opera festivals, and a production of Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* at Glimmerglass.

A native of Glasgow, Scotland, Mr. Robertson is a graduate of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music. He studied piano with Denis Matthews, conducting with Otmar Suitner at the Mozarteum, Salzburg and with Hans Swarowsky in Vienna.

## **ACT ONE**

Anna travels by train to visit her brother Stiva and his wife Dolly in Moscow, hoping to help save their marriage. Just after she arrives at the station, a man throws himself under her train and dies in front of her. Later, Anna persuades Dolly to forgive Stiva's infidelity.

At a New Year's ball at Princess Betsy's in St. Petersburg, Kitty, Dolly's sister, is infatuated with Vronsky and refuses Levin's proposal of marriage. Vronsky's too-obvious attentions compromise Anna and, although she is attracted, she resists him. Anna's husband, Karenin, insists that she try to maintain appearances, but discovers that her heart is locked against him.

An intoxicated Vronsky appears at Anna's bedroom window, begging her to let him in. Against her better judgment, she agrees. Vronsky confesses his love and despite her pleas to be left alone, she succumbs to the passion.

The following spring, Dolly tries to persuade her sister Kitty that Vronsky is not worthy of her, and asks about her feelings for Levin. Levin himself is unable to take comfort, even from life as reborn in the spring. Stiva brings him news of Kitty and of Vronsky's dangerous infatuation with Anna.

At the Karenin's country house, Anna reveals to Vronsky that she will bear his child. He tries to persuade her to leave her husband, but she refuses because the law would take away her son Serioja.

Vronsky suffers a severe accident at the races and Anna is distraught, but Karenin insists that she behave properly. She tells him that she cannot bear the sight of him - she loves Vronsky.

Karenin still hopes to preserve his marriage; he must at all costs preserve his reputation. He insists that she return to him and continue as before. He will not consider a divorce.

Anna must choose between her lover and her son. She tells Vronsky of her recurring death-dream, connected with the accident at the station. He cannot comfort her, and she suspects him of selfishness when he again urges her to go away with him. She begs Karenin to give her her son, but - consumed with rage - he refuses.

## **ACT TWO**

In the Admiralty Gardens in St. Petersburg, Levin cannot reconcile the ironies of life and longs for death. Dolly insists that he meet Kitty at their house. Stiva learns with horror from Karenin of his impending divorce from Anna and begs him to talk to Dolly. Yashvin tries to persuade Vronsky to give up Anna for the sake of his career, but he refuses.

Meeting at the Oblonskys' for the first time since Betsy's ball, Levin and Kitty are both very moved. Karenin is angered by talk of unfaithful wives and luckless husbands, and Dolly cannot persuade him to forgive. Levin and Kitty declare their love during a game of solitaire and Stiva is delighted. Karenin comes home to find Anna near death after a miscarriage. He is reconciled to Vronsky at her bedside and promises forgiveness.

Levin is now happily married to Kitty, who is pregnant, but he remains dissatisfied with his useless and unproductive life - exemplified by news from Dolly that Anna, now recovered, has left Karenin for Vronsky and that Serioja is being looked after by his aunt Lydia.

Anna asks Karenin's permission to see Serioja one last time on his birthday. Lydia urges Karenin to forbid this and, against his better judgment, he does so. Anna forces her way into her son's

bedroom. He had been told she was dead, and is overjoyed to see her. He cannot know that this is the last time he will see her; he is distraught when she has to leave.

In her room at a hotel Anna, now addicted to opiates, is at the end of her tether. She doubts Vronsky's fidelity and is haunted by death. She is like a train hurtling to destruction. When Dolly and Stiva bring Levin to meet her, they are appalled at her condition; Levin is moved by this beautiful, sad woman. Left alone with Vronsky, her jealousy leads to a desperate quarrel. Vronsky leaves to visit his mother, and Anna fears he is leaving her forever. She contemplates an overdose of morphia and instead decides to follow him to the station to beg forgiveness.

At the station everything passes like a dream. Having missed Vronsky, Anna waits to follow him on the next train. She reviews the tortured life before her and realizes, as if a light had suddenly illumined her soul, that death would release her from its pain and responsibility. When the train arrives, she throws herself beneath it.

Later, after Anna's death, Levin at his country estate in the spring cannot come to terms with the irony of life. Then through the wisdom of his old nurse, he at last understands the reason for living: To live, love, and be loved; not to judge or envy others, nor to bewail their suffering; to accept life is everything in itself. His blind eyes have been opened.





