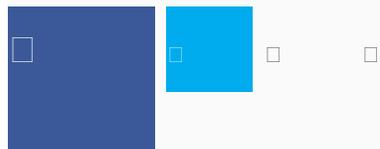


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Texas baritone ready to perform in Wagner's 'bottomless' classic with Opera San Jose



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Baritone Noel Bouley has understudied the role of Wagner's "Flying Dutchman" before, but his performance with Opera San Jose marks his actual stage debut.

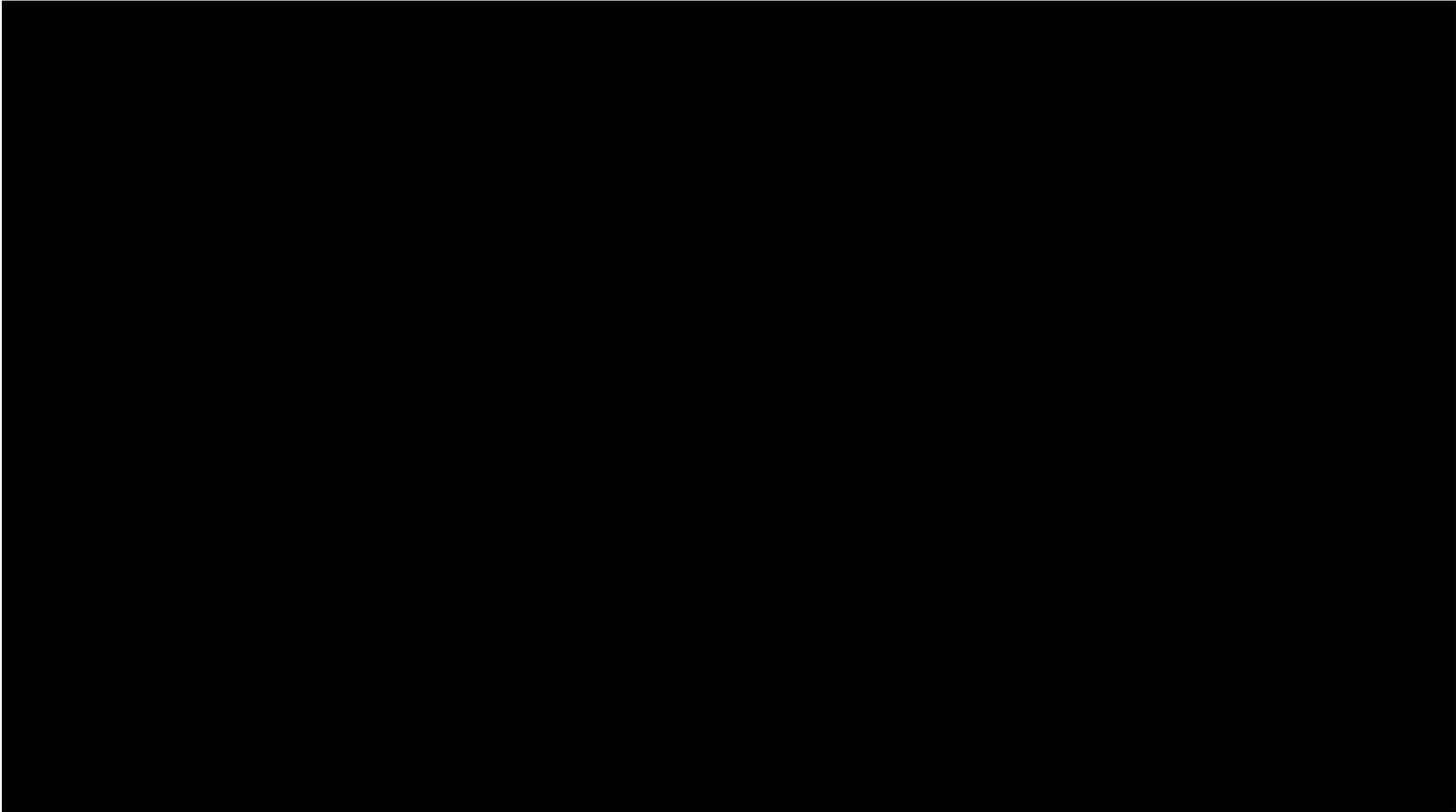
By **GEORGIA ROWE** | Correspondent, Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: February 5, 2018 at 9:00 am | UPDATED: February 5, 2018 at 9:24 am

When Noel Bouley steps onstage Saturday night at the California Theatre to sing the title role of "The Flying Dutchman," it will be a moment of firsts — his Bay Area debut, his first appearance at Opera San Jose and his first time in the title role of Wagner's opera.

"It's a lot of firsts," admits Bouley. But he doesn't sound worried. The American baritone has charted a steady path to the new production, which is scheduled for six performances, though February 25. The opera is directed by Brad Dalton, and Joseph Marcheso conducts.

Operagoers who haven't heard of Bouley needn't be surprised. Born in Tomball, Texas, a suburb of Houston, he has done much of his previous singing in Europe.



He comes from a musical family — several close relatives are choir conductors – and in a recent phone conversation, Bouley said he did a lot of his early singing in ensembles. “But I really liked singing as a soloist,” he said.

In college, at Louisiana State University and the University of Cincinnati, he sang in choirs, musical theater productions and other genres, until a professor heard his robust baritone and suggested opera. “I didn’t know much about opera, but he put me in the chorus of ‘The Barber of Seville,’” he recalls. Until then, Bouley says he had only heard excerpts from Rossini’s score in cartoons and movies. “It was a big surprise to hear it that way,” he says with a laugh. “But I had a great time.”

After completing degrees in education and performance, Bouley was awarded a Young Artist residency at New York’s Glimmerglass Festival, where he covered (i.e., understudied) the role of Wagner’s Dutchman.

A representative from German’s Deutsche Oper Berlin heard him there – “and that launched my career,” says Bouley.

He went to Germany in 2013. Now 34, he’s been at Deutsche Oper Berlin for five seasons, racking up appearances in nearly 40 roles, including Verdi’s Falstaff and Wagner’s Donner (one of his mentors in Berlin has been conductor Donald Runnicles, the former music director of San Francisco Opera, who is now Deutsche Oper Berlin’s general music director.) From there, Bouley became a frequent presence at

Oper Köln in Cologne.

But “Dutchman,” the mythical story of an immortal sea captain doomed to sail the seas in search of a woman who will love him until death, has been in his sights all along.

“I’ve been studying it for a long time,” says Bouley. “Like all Wagner operas, it seems bottomless – you just keep digging and digging into this role.”

The music sits easily in his voice, says Bouley, whose role models for the Dutchman include the late, great George London and the contemporary German baritone Michael Volle. “But the challenge is not letting the passion of the music affect my voice. It’s a long role, and it’s so intense.”

The production features another Opera San Jose debut: soprano Kerriann Otaño, making her first company appearance in the role of Senta, the woman who seeks to redeem the Dutchman. “She’s wonderful,” says Bouley, “an excellent singer with a great stage presence.”

Bouley’s also impressed with Dalton’s production, which uses projections to suggest the icy Norwegian seas central to the opera. “These Wagnerian folklore stories can be hard to show onstage,” he says. “But the projections really enhance the opera and bring another level to it.”

After this production, Bouley will return to Berlin — and more Wagner. He’ll sing Biterolf in the composer’s “Tannhauser”; in 2020, he’ll reprise the title role of “Dutchman.”

But as he looks forward to opening night, Bouley says he’s excited to have the opportunity to sing his first Dutchman in San Jose. “I’ve been waiting for this for quite a while,” he said. “It’s such an intense work, and discovering the layers in the text and the poetry of this opera has been so moving. You know, Wagner was always obsessed with these legends – and it all started with ‘Dutchman.’”

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‘THE FLYING DUTCHMAN’

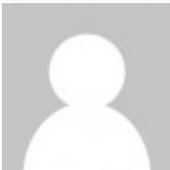
Presented by Opera San Jose, in German with English supertitles

When: Feb. 10-25

Where: California Theatre, 345 S. 1st St., San Jose

Tickets: \$61-\$181; 408-437-4450, www.operasj.org.

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Georgia Rowe

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A+E Calendar: Peninsula Things To Do, Feb. 9 and beyond

February 09, 2018, 11:04 am

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John Legend on Phone Charger Gate: 'These outrageous allegations are simply false'

February 09, 2018, 9:41 am

Chrissy Teigen says he did it. Legend says he didn't. And, really, what does Mindy Kaling think about the whole matter. We dive right into the heated controversy.

Country star Miranda Lambert delivers powerful message to fans: "I'm back"

February 09, 2018, 12:22 pm

The country star, whose latest album is emotionally fueled by her breakup with Blake Shelton, wowed fans with her Livin' Like Hippies tour at the Golden 1 Center in Sacramento.

The Four' season finale: And the winner is ...

'The Four' season finale: And the winner is ...

February 09, 2018, 7:27 am

Memphis soul singer Evvie McKinney was declared the Season 1 winner of "The Four: Battle for Superstardom" singing contest on Fox Thursday night. McKinney, 20, beat out Candice Boyd of Rancho Cucamonga in the night's final one-on-one battle. The show's other finalists, Vincint Cannady and Zhavia, were eliminated earlier in the two-hour finale. Evvie was late to the game, entering the competition in Week 5,...

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