

OPERA SAN JOSÉ KICKS OFF SPRING WITH
LOVE & SECRETS: A DOMESTIC TRILOGY

*THREE EXQUISITE OPERAS, THREE EVOCATIVE STORIES.
75 MINUTES OF MUSIC LAUNCHES APRIL 15, 2021*

SAN JOSE, CA (11 March 2021) – Romance so often conjures images of affectionate gestures grand and small: flowers, chocolates, initials carved in bark. **Opera San José’s** latest digital offering, ***Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy***, explores what happens below the surface, with three tales of passion and yearning, as couples contend with the tumult, joys, and heartache of love. “For couples around the globe, this extended period of quarantine has forced romantic relationships into uncharted territories,” explains **General Director Khorī Dastoor**, who conceived of and curated this original collection of three chamber operas. “The rhythm of domestic life has been disrupted and challenged as never before. Despite prolonged physical closeness, feelings of isolation emerge, inviting questions about the very foundations of partnership as each person evolves, both as individuals and in relation to one another. How do we cope when we cannot escape one another, or when losses feel new again? And what do we fight to keep just for ourselves? *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy* offers a timely window, both comedic and poignant, into the lives of three couples confronting such challenges, who must navigate a path forward together.” Conducted by Music Director **Joseph Marcheso** and Resident Conductor **Christopher James Ray**, who will be leading members of the **Opera San José Orchestra**, and directed by Opera San José Resident Director **Tara Branham**, this trilogy of fully-staged works will launch its digital performances **6:00pm, Thursday, April 15** with a post-performance virtual “cast party,” and will then be available to stream on demand for a limited time. Tickets (which include 30 days of on-demand viewing access) are available on a pay-what-you-can basis at \$15, \$25, or \$40 per household. A special opening night ticket (\$50 per household) includes admission to the post-show cast party on April 15. For more information or to purchase tickets, the public can visit operasj.org or call **(408) 437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

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The three short operas to be featured in this trilogy include **Wolf-Ferrari’s *Il segreto di Susanna***, a drawing room comedy of errors in the nineteenth-century Italian opera buffa tradition, in which an innocuous secret threatens a young newly-wed couple’s chance at happiness. The 40 minute one-act opera will feature Resident Artists soprano **Vanessa Becerra** and baritone **Efraín Solís**, conducted by **Joseph Marcheso**. For the first time since the pandemic, the artists are joined by members of the Opera San José orchestra, whose safe participation was made possible with the implementation of rapid, day-of COVID-19 testing, and other extensive protocols. Irony and whimsy follow in **Ned Rorem’s *Four Dialogues***, based on the poetry of **Frank O’Hara**, in a classic “guy-meets-girl” tale marking one couple’s relationship from love’s first blush to the pangs of its bitter end, and is performed by celebrated local artist, soprano **Marnie Breckenridge** and Resident Artist tenor **Carlos Enrique Santelli**. The achingly gorgeous harmonies of **Tom Cipullo’s *The Husbands*** concludes the intimate triptych. This haunting meditation based on **William Carpenter’s** prose poem, ***Rain***, summons visions of seasons long past in a stunning rumination on widows, tenderly keeping their departed spouses forever present in their hearts. This 10 minute work featuring Resident Artists mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon** and baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu**, will be conducted by **Christopher James Ray**. *Love & Secrets* sets alight the artifices and trappings of “romantic life,” blurring past and present, as eternity beckons.

This performance was captured in the Opera San José Heiman Digital Media Studio. Every precaution was taken for the protection of the company’s members and crew, with health and safety protocols meeting or exceeding local and state guidelines set by Santa Clara county’s valued Public Health Officers. All artists and crew underwent rigorous COVID testing and wellness screenings, while all personnel on the closed set adhered to strict masking, Personal Protective Equipment, and social distancing protocols. The filming space was regularly disinfected, and the HVAC systems in the Heiman Digital Media Studio featured an active filtration system effective against all three categories of indoor air pollutants, designed to ensure continuous circulation and increased intake of filtered air from the outside. Members of the creative team included **Tara Branham** (Stage Director), **Steven C. Kemp** (Set Designer), **Alyssa Oania** (Costume Coordinator),

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David Lee Cuthbert (Lighting Designer), **Christina Martin** (Hair and Makeup Designer), and **Rapt Productions** (Video Production).

About the artists:

Vanessa Becerra

Lauded for her bold and bright singing, soprano Vanessa Becerra, an Opera San José 2020/21 Resident Artist, portrays Contessa Susanna in *Il segreto di Susanna*. Becerra made her company debut with Opera San José as Musetta in *La bohème* during its 2017-18 season before returning as the title role in the American premiere of Alma Deutscher’s celebrated *Cinderella*. Since that illustrious performance, she went on to join the roster of the Metropolitan Opera and returned to Opera Omaha for her highly-acclaimed portrayal of Lise in Philip Glass’s *Les Enfants Terribles*. Becerra’s hugely successful debut as Maria in Francesca Zambello’s production of *West Side Story* at the Glimmerglass Festival led to a string of reprisals at Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Atlanta Opera, and her international debut in the role with the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra in Latvia. Becerra enjoys a long relationship with Glimmerglass Festival, where she also returned in 2017 as a guest artist to portray Laurey in *Oklahoma!* During her time with LA Opera, Becerra’s appearances included Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, Annina in *La traviata*, and Gossip 2 in the Grammy Award-winning recording of *The Ghosts of Versailles* with maestro James Conlon. Other notable career moments include debuts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the San Francisco Symphony with Michael Tilson Thomas. She is a recent graduate of LA Opera’s prestigious Young Artist Program.

Eugene Brancoveanu

Eugene Brancoveanu is a returning Resident Artist at Opera San José, taking on the baritone role in *The Husbands*. He appeared earlier this season in the company’s digital production of *Dichterliebe*. As an Opera San José 2019/20 Resident Artist, he appeared as Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, the Father in Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, and Count De Luna in Verdi’s *Il trovatore*. Growing up in Romania and Germany, Brancoveanu studied at the Academy of Music in Transylvania, Romania and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria before pursuing a successful international career, earning critical acclaim throughout North America and Europe. Career highlights include receiving a Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre for his participation in the principal ensemble (as Marcello) in Baz Luhrmann’s innovative Broadway production of Puccini’s *La bohème*, and his performance in the title role of Shostakovich’s *Orango* with the Los Angeles Symphony under the direction of Esa-Pekka Salonen and Peter Sellers, which was recorded for Deutsche Grammophon. Known for his robust voice and superior stagecraft, Brancoveanu was an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera for two seasons, directly following his critically acclaimed summer 2004 performances of Tarquinius in Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia* with the Merola Opera Program. Discovering Opera San José’s Resident Artist program, Brancoveanu was drawn to the organization’s European style and appeared as a guest artist as early as 2014. Other roles performed for Opera San José include Stubb in Heggie and Scheer’s *Moby-Dick*, Leporello in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, Stanley Kowalski in Previn’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Escamillo in Bizet’s *Carmen*.

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Marnie Breckenridge

Soprano Marnie Breckenridge, whose compelling performances of repertoire from the Baroque to the contemporary have captivated international audiences, makes her Opera San José debut in *Four Dialogues*. She has appeared at LA Opera, San Francisco Opera, Glyndebourne, English National Opera, Indianapolis Opera, Fort Worth Opera, and Arizona Opera, among others, in such roles as Gilda (*Rigoletto*), the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Pamina and Papagena (*Die Zauberflöte*), Cunegonde (*Candide*), Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*), La Princesse (Philip Glass's *Orphée*), and Olga (*The Merry Widow*). Her passionate interpretations of contemporary works include David T. Little's *Dog Days*, Peter Eötvös's *Love and Other Demons*, Milhaud's *Médée*, Golijov's *Ainadamar*, and Luna Pearl Woolf's *The Pillar*. Concert engagements include her Carnegie Hall debut in Mozart's Coronation Mass, Mahler's Fourth Symphony, *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, *Carmina Burana*, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, and *Bachianas Brasileiras*, with such orchestras as the San Francisco, Napa, and Pacific symphonies, Philharmonia Baroque, and the Sacramento Philharmonic, as well as such festivals as Ravinia and the Bard Music Festival. Ms. Breckenridge recently made her European and Asian debuts as Cunegonde with Prague State Opera and then in Robert Carsen's production with English National Opera and on tour in Japan. She is a graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory.

Ashley Dixon

A member of Opera San José's 2020/21 Resident Artists, mezzo-soprano Ashley Dixon was featured in the company's virtual New Year's Eve celebration, *The Parting Glass*, and now appears in *The Husbands*. A Grand Finals winner of the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and 2019 alumna of San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship, Dixon made her critically acclaimed debut with Los Angeles Opera as Sara in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*, alongside bel canto veterans Ramon Vargas and Angela Meade. Her San Francisco Opera credits include roles in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Carmen*, *Rusalka*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. Her wide-ranging repertoire includes Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Gluck's *Orphée*, *Cendrillon*, Marguerite (*La damnation de Faust*), and the titles roles in *Carmen*, *Ariodante*, *Giulio Cesare*, and *La cenerentola*. Recent engagements include Copland's *The Tender Land* (Michigan Opera Theatre) and Ravel's *Shéhérazade* (Ravinia). At Ann Arbor's Hill Auditorium, she has performed the title role of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Mozart's Requiem, and Schubert's "Ständchen." Ashley Dixon earned her Bachelor of Music at Louisiana State University and holds a Master of Music from the University of Michigan, where she performed the title role of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and Sister Helen Prejean in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*.

Carlos Enrique Santelli

A member of Opera San José's 2020/21 Resident Artists, tenor Carlos Enrique Santelli portrays the Man in *Four Dialogues* and appeared earlier this season in *The Parting Glass*. Other engagements this season include Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* making his company debut with San Diego Opera and Finger Lakes Opera. In the 2019-2020 season, Mr. Santelli returned to Dayton Opera as Ramiro in *La cenerentola*. On the concert stage, he performed Handel's *Messiah* with the Boise Philharmonic. The previous season, Mr. Santelli made his Dayton Opera debut as Count

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Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* and debuted the role of Nemorino in *l'elisir d'amore* with Virginia Opera. A winner of the 2018 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Santelli is a recent graduate of Los Angeles Opera's Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program where his appearances included performances in *Salome*, conducted by James Conlon, and *Wonderful Town*, conducted by Grant Gershon. Santelli was also a member of Santa Fe Opera's distinguished Apprentice Artist Program where he worked with conductors such as Harry Bicket and Emmanuel Villaume, and made his principal role debut as Arturo in a new production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Mr. Santelli received his Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and his Master of Music from the University of Michigan, where he had the distinction of holding a Jessye Norman Graduate Fellowship.

Efraín Solís

Hailed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his “theatrical charisma and musical bravado,” baritone Efraín Solís joins Opera San José as a Resident Artist in the 2020/21 season. With the company he sings Conte Gil in this performance of *Il Segreto di Susanna* after appearing earlier as Charlie in its hit virtual production of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers* and in its online New Year's Eve celebration, *The Parting Glass*. Also this season, he reprised Charlie in *Three Decembers* with Florida Grand Opera and will return to Utah Opera as Escamillo in *La tragédie de Carmen*. Solís is a recent graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship and, while with the company, sang Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Dandini in *La cenerentola*, Schaunard in *La bohème*, Silvano in *Un ballo in maschera*, Sciarrone in *Tosca*, and Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*. Other performances include Lieutenant Audeberet in Puts's *Silent Night* (Utah Opera), Mark in Martinez's *Cruzar la cara de la luna* (Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, El Paso Opera), Mercutio in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (Utah Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Carolina, Toledo Opera), Figaro in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (Opera Memphis, Livermore Valley Opera), and El Payador in Piazzolla's *Maria de Buenos Aires* (Opera Southwest). www.efraínsolis.com

Joseph Marcheso

Joseph Marcheso, Music Director and Principal Conductor of Opera San José returns this season to conduct *Il segreto di Susanna*. He was last seen with the company during its 2019-20 season as the Principal Conductor for the family-friendly adaptation of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* and Verdi's *Il trovatore*. Over the years, Marcheso has conducted more than 20 productions for Opera San José including the company premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby Dick*, the West Coast premiere of Puts and Campbell's *Silent Night*, and the world premiere of Mark Weiser's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, among others. As staff conductor and cover at the San Francisco Opera, he has served on many productions including the San Francisco premiere of John Adams's *Nixon in China*, the world premiere of Mark Adamo's *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, and Heggie and Scheer's *It's a Wonderful Life* (cover). Prior to joining Opera San José, Marcheso was on the conducting staff for Washington National Opera's *Manon Lescaut* and served as the Music Director for the Amato Opera in New York City.

Christopher James Ray

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A conductor with a diverse background in both traditional and contemporary operatic works, Christopher James Ray is the current Resident Conductor at Opera San José and an assistant with the San Francisco Symphony. Digital projects with Opera San José this season have included Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*, Jake Heggie’s *Three Decembers*, and *The Parting Glass*, in addition to conducting *The Husbands* for the company’s latest virtual production. In 2017, Christopher joined the music staff of the renowned Bayreuth Festival where he worked on productions of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Parsifal*. Other recent performances at Opera San José have included *Il trovatore*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Die Fledermaus*, Heggie/Scheer’s *Moby Dick*, and *Pagliacci*. Christopher made his professional conducting debut leading a double bill of *Gianni Schicchi* and *Pagliacci* with the Mississippi Opera in 2014. A protege of American composer Carlisle Floyd, Christopher is a sought-after interpreter of Floyd's works. In addition to serving as the assistant to the composer, Christopher recorded an album of Floyd’s songs with the celebrated mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer, available on the Naxos label.

Tara Branham

Tara Branham is Opera San José’s 2020-21 Resident Director. In addition to directing the virtual productions of Jake Heggie’s *Three Decembers* and *The Parting Glass* earlier this season, Branham is the Director for *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy*. Prior Opera San José productions include serving as Assistant Director on *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. Branham is also the National New Play Network Producer-in-Residence with Prop Thtr in Chicago. Recent work includes assistant directing the world premiere of *Freedom Ride* under Tazewell Thompson at Chicago Opera Theatre, and assisting James Robinson on the world premiere of Terrance Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Branham also assisted soprano Patricia Racette on her directing premiere of *La Traviata* at OTSL. Branham directed the US premiere production of *Octagon*, and directed and co-produced the world premiere of *Good Friday* by Kristiana Rae Colón with Oracle Productions. She received the Puffin Ltd grant for her commitment to sponsor the development and production of underproduced work. Tara is a teacher and creator of the Unbridled Sound - a physical/vocal technique for actors. She graduated cum laude from Ball State University and is a student of Black Box Acting Studio.

Opera San José is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States.

Maintaining a resident company of artists and supporting emerging talent in role debuts, 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.

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: Romance so often conjures images of affectionate gestures grand and small: flowers, chocolates, initials carved in bark. Conducted by Opera San José Music Director Joseph Marcheso and Resident Conductor Christopher James Ray, who will be leading members of the the **Opera San José Orchestra**, **Opera San José’s** latest digital offering, ***Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy***, explores what happens below the surface, with three tales of passion and yearning, as couples contend with the tumult, joys, and heartache of love. Directed by Resident Director **Tara Branham**, this trilogy of fully-staged works includes **Wolf-Ferrari’s *Il segreto di Susanna***, an innocuous secret threatens a young newly-wed couple’s chances at happiness, in a drawing room comedy of errors in the nineteenth-century Italian opera buffa tradition; **Ned Rorem’s** song cycle ***Four Dialogues***, based on the poetry of **Frank O’Hara**, marking one couple’s relationship from love’s first blush to the pangs of its bitter end; and **Tom Cipullo’s *The Husbands***, a stunning rumination on widows, tenderly keeping their departed spouses forever present in their hearts.

WHEN: **6:00pm, April 23, 2021** – *Love & Secrets* opening with post-show cast party Available for streaming on demand for a limited time.

TICKETS: Pay-what-you-can basis per household at \$15, \$25, or \$40. Special opening night tickets (\$50 per household) include admission to the post-show cast party April 23.

ALL tickets include on-demand streaming for 30 days after date of purchase.

INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public can visit operasj.org or call **(408) 437-4450** (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm).

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MEDIA: Contact Sydney Albin, Carla Befera & Co.
sydney@cb-pr.com

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/loveandsecrets>