

OPERA SAN JOSÉ ANNOUNCES 2021-22 RESIDENT COMPANY AND MAINSTAGE CASTING

*ALSO ANNOUNCES RESIDENT ARTIST
SHOWCASE STREAMING THIS MONTH*

SAN JOSE, CA (9 September 2021) – General Director Khori Dastoor has announced the 2021-22 Resident Company who will be cast in leading roles for **Opera San José's** upcoming season, welcoming a cohort of opera talent who will be starring in this season's California Theatre mainstage productions. In November, Opera San José returns for its first live production of the season, with Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Nov. 13-28, 2021) starring four Resident Artists: accomplished mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz** as Dido, celebrated baritone **Efraín Solís** as Aeneas, lauded soprano **Maya Kherani** as Belinda, and multi-award-winning bass-baritone **Nathan Stark** as The Sorcerer. The season continues at the California Theatre in the new year with a vibrant production of *Carmen* (Feb. 12-28, 2022), featuring Resident Artists mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz** as Carmen, tenor **Noah Stewart** as Don José, baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu** as Escamillo, soprano **Teresa Castillo** as Frasquita, and tenor **Jared V. Esguerra** as Remendado. Opera San José closes this unforgettable season with Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's classic American tale of two star-crossed lovers and the prejudices that keep them apart, *West Side Story* (April 16-May 1, 2022). Resident Conductor **Christopher James Ray** takes the helm for the company's first-ever musical, which will feature dazzling performances by three Resident Artists: soprano **Teresa Castillo** as Maria, tenor **Noah Stewart** as Tony, and tenor **Jared V. Esguerra** as Chino. The public will be introduced to this year's incoming residents via the livestreamed **Resident Artist Showcase, 2:00pm, Sunday, September 19**. For more information and a link to RSVP to the event, the public may visit www.operasj.org.

In addition to the mainstage productions, members of the resident ensemble will perform in concerts, recitals, in-conversation and Meet the Artists events, and fully-produced operas created specifically for digital broadcast.

Says Dastoor, "We are absolutely thrilled to have such an incredible cohort of nationally renowned artists joining us for Opera San José's return to in-person performances this November. OSJ's mission continues to be the support and professional development of opera's rising stars, like those joining our 2021-22 Resident Company. Over the coming months, we will share their immense talents, stories, and artistic perspectives with our community as we witness exciting role debuts and collaborations in what will truly be an unforgettable season."

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This year's selected Resident Artists include **Teresa Castillo** (Soprano), **Jared V. Esguerra** (Tenor), **Nikola Printz** (Mezzo-soprano), and **Noah Stewart** (Tenor), as well as **Tara Branham** (Director), **Eugene Brancoveanu** (Baritone), **Maya Kherani** (Soprano), **Christopher James Ray** (Conductor), **Efraín Solís** (Baritone), and **Nathan Stark** (Bass-Baritone), who will be welcomed back for a second consecutive season.

Artist bios:

Tara Branham (Resident Director)

A director of opera and theatre, **Tara Branham** returns to Opera San José for a second consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. As Resident Director last season, she directed the hit virtual productions of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers* and *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy*, and directed and co-created the musical pastiches *The Parting Glass* and *Sing For Your Supper!* She also assistant-directed *Highway 1, U.S.A.* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL). An avid supporter of the development of new work in theatre and opera, Branham assisted James Robinson on the world premiere of Terrance Blanchard's *Fire Shut up in My Bones* at OTSL – which will be the first opera composed by a Black person produced by The Metropolitan Opera. She was also the assistant director for Grammy Award-winning soprano Patricia Racette on her directing premiere of *La Traviata* at OTSL. Branham's direction of the US premiere of *Octagon*, starring Kiki Layne at Jackalope Theatre, received a sold-out extension. This was a culmination of three years of development and collaboration with Kristiana Rae Colón, playwright and television writer (Showtime's *The Chi*). Branham also directed and co-produced the sold-out world premiere of *Good Friday* by Colón.

Eugene Brancoveanu (Resident Artist Baritone, Escamillo in *Carmen*)

Growing up in Romania and Germany, baritone **Eugene 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. This season, he returns as a Resident Artist at Opera San José. Past roles with the company include Eisenstein (J. Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*), the Father (Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*), Count Di Luna (Verdi's *Il trovatore*), Stubb (Heggie and Scheer's *Moby-Dick*), Leporello (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), Stanley Kowalski (Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*), and Escamillo (Bizet's *Carmen*). He has also appeared in OSJ's digital productions of *Sing For Your Supper!* and *Love and Secrets*. Other recent engagements for Brancoveanu include Older Brother in Jabri's *Cities of Salt* with Opera Movie NY, and serving as director and performing the role of Pasha Selim in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* with Livermore Opera. 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. 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.

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Teresa Castillo (Resident Artist Soprano, Frasquita in *Carmen*, Maria in *West Side Story*)

Hailed by *SF Gate* as a “standout, bringing [vocal] power and florid elegance” and by *Opera News* for exhibiting “a clean, concentrated sound, and a lovely, intelligent musicianship,” Costa Rican-American soprano **Teresa Castillo** makes her company debut with Opera San José this season. Other debuts this season include covering the role of Königin der Nacht in Lyric Opera of Chicago’s *Die Zauberflöte*, and Lucette in Opera Lafayette’s production of Gentry’s *Silvain*. Competition highlights include an Encouragement Award from the George London Foundation, First Place and Audience Favorite at the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition, First Prize Winner in the Lois Alba Aria Competition, Finalist in Opera Columbus’ Cooper-Bing Competition, and Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, to name a few. Castillo made her Carnegie Hall debut with the New England Symphonic Ensemble in a world premiere entitled *Reflections on a Mexican Garden*, conducted by Gregory Gentry. Previous Young Artist engagements include San Francisco Opera’s prestigious Merola Opera Program, where she sang the role of #1 in Conrad Susa’s *Transformations*. Prior to her operatic training, Castillo performed as a clown and studied the flute.

Jared V. Esguerra (Resident Artist Tenor, Remendado in *Carmen*, Chino in *West Side Story*)

Filipino-American tenor **Jared V. Esguerra**’s range includes opera, concert repertoire and musical theater. After appearing as A-Rab in a sold-out run of *West Side Story* at the Edinburgh International Festival, Esguerra returned to Chicago Opera Theater (COT) in the critically acclaimed world premiere of *Freedom Ride* in 2020. He also covered the role of Giovanni in COT’s live-streamed production of Daniel Catán’s *La hija de Rappaccini* in April 2021. Other appearances include Fenton in Verdi’s *Falstaff* at the Crested Butte Musical Festival, Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* with Chicago Fringe Opera, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with the Floating Opera Company, Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd* with the Janiec Opera Company at Brevard Music Center, and the Messenger in *Il trovatore* at Sarasota Opera. On the concert stage, Esguerra has appeared as the tenor soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in its MLK Tribute Concert Series.

Maya Kherani (Resident Artist Soprano, Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*)

Lauded by *Opera News* for her “rich, soaring soprano” and “crystalline tone” in repertoire from the Baroque to the modern, soprano **Maya Kherani** returns to Opera San José as a 2021-22 Resident Artist. She made her company debut as a guest artist during the 2017-18 season, appearing as Despina in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* and Yvette in Puccini’s *La Rondine*. In Opera San José’s 2020-21 season, Kherani was seen as Beatrice in Jake Heggie’s *Three Decembers*, opposite Susan Graham; *The Parting Glass*; and *Sing For Your Supper!* Career highlights the title role of Handel’s *Partenope* with Opera NEO and Meera in the premiere of Jack Perla’s *The River of Light*, commissioned by Houston Grand Opera. Upcoming include Drusilla/Fortuna (Poppea cover) in *L’incoronazione di Poppea* at the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, and Messiah with Boston Baroque, as well as engagements with Glyndebourne and the Vancouver Symphony. She received First Place and Audience Favorite at the James Toland Vocal Competition (Tier II), the McGlone Award from Central City Opera, and two Encouragement Awards from The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Last year, Kherani was the only American soprano to compete as a Semifinalist in the International Handel Aria Competition. She graduated with honors with an MM in Vocal Performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and prior to her singing career,

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graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University with a BSE in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

Nikola Printz (Resident Artist Mezzo-soprano, Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*, Carmen in *Carmen*)

Nikola Printz was most recently seen in *La Voix Humaine* with Magic Circle Opera and in the premiere of Jake Heggie's song cycle *In tonations*, performed at Grace Cathedral with members of San Francisco Opera Orchestra as part of the Violins of Hope Festival. Recent title role debuts include *Orfeo ed Euridice* (West Edge Opera) and *Carmen* (Opera Modesto), as well as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Isabella in *L'italiana in Algeri* with Opera Memphis. It was also in Memphis that Printz became an aerialist, training in the Static and Dance trapeze medium. Printz premiered a new act singing the final aria of Strauss' *Salome* on a trapeze, and was also seen at the Opera Modesto Gala performing an original routine on dance trapeze singing Lehár's *Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß* with orchestra. Since then, Printz has cultivated several operatic aerial acts including *Carmen's* Habanera and Dido's Lament. In the summer of 2021, Printz participated in the prestigious Merola Opera Program and was featured in the opera film *Back Home: Through the Stage Door*. Printz is a 2013 graduate of the vocal program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Christopher James Ray (Resident Conductor, Conductor of *West Side Story*)

A conductor with a diverse background in both traditional and contemporary operatic works, **Christopher James Ray** returns to Opera San José for a third consecutive year in the company's resident ensemble. He is also a current assistant with the San Francisco Symphony. In place of the previously planned 2020-21 season, Ray worked with Opera San José to create a variety of filmed performances – from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* to Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers* and Tom Cipullo's *The Husbands*. Other past conducting credits with Opera San José include *Il trovatore*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Moby Dick*, and *Pagliacci*. In 2017 Ray joined the music staff of the renowned Bayreuth Festival, where he worked on productions of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Parsifal*. For the 2021-22 season, Ray will conduct performances of *Dido and Aeneas*, *Carmen*, and *West Side Story* at Opera San José, as well as a debut with the Lima Symphony Orchestra. A protégé of American composer Carlisle Floyd, Ray is a sought-after interpreter of Floyd's works. In addition to serving as the assistant to the composer, he recorded an album of Floyd's songs with the celebrated mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer, available through GPR Records on the Naxos label. Ray is a native of Sumrall, Mississippi, and is a graduate of Florida State University where he studied with Douglas Fisher and Carlisle Floyd.

Efraín Solís (Resident Artist Baritone, Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas*)

After making his company debut last season, appearing in *Love & Secrets: A Domestic Trilogy* and as Charlie in the hit virtual production of Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers*, baritone **Efraín Solís** returns to Opera San José for his role debut as Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas*. A graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship and alumnus of the prestigious Merola Opera Program, he has been applauded by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his "theatrical charisma and musical bravado." Last season, Solís also made his company debut at Florida Grand Opera, where he reprised his acclaimed

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portrayal of Charlie (*Three Decembers*); joined Opera Santa Barbara for his role debut of Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*; and returned to Utah Opera as Escamillo in *La tragédie de Carmen*. Upcoming performances include reprising his acclaimed portrayal of Charlie in *Three Decembers* (Virginia Opera), Mark in *Cruzar la cara de la luna* (Opera Santa Barbara), and Goulaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Opera Southwest). He will also join the Sacramento Choral Society and Orchestra for Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's *Stabat Mater* for the 2021-22 season. Solís has been seen with opera companies throughout the nation, including Utah Opera, Opera Carolina, Virginia Opera, Toledo Opera, West Edge Opera, Opera Saratoga, Livermore Valley Opera, and Opera Memphis.

Nathan Stark (Bass-Baritone, The Sorcerer in *Dido and Aeneas*)

Seen as a guest artist and, most recently, as a Resident Artist at Opera San José, bass-baritone **Nathan Stark** returns for the 2021-22 season. Praised by *The Washington Post* for having a voice of “unearthly power,” by the *Houston Press* as a “blow-away singer,” and *The Mercury News* as a “natural comic actor,” the award-winning artist has performed on opera, concert, and recital stages throughout the United States, Europe, and China. Stark has performed over 50 professional roles with opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, Atlanta Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Arizona Opera, Virginia Opera, Dayton Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. As a concert soloist, he has performed with the symphony orchestras of Boston, Detroit, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Holland, and San Diego, as well as with the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, Long Beach Symphony, and Chicago Philharmonic. Stark has given recitals throughout the United States and Germany, concerts at the Great Wall of China, the U.S. Colombian Embassy, U.S. French Embassy, U.S. Austrian Embassy, and the Washington National Cathedral. In 2005 he was chosen to be the featured soloist for the nationally televised opening ceremonies of the Air Force One exhibit at the Ronald Reagan Library for former First Ladies, Laura Bush and Nancy Reagan; members of the United States Senate and Congress; and President George W. Bush.

Noah Stewart (Resident Artist Tenor, Don José in *Carmen*, Tony in *West Side Story*)

Tenor **Noah Stewart** is acclaimed by London's *Independent* as “A young black tenor from Harlem with a radiantly open sound” Stewart exploded into the public consciousness in 2012 with his Classical Brit-nominated, chart-topping, debut album (*Noah*, DECCA Records), becoming a regular and welcome performer on UK screens and stages. He has performed three sold-out solo tours of the UK for Kennedy Street; toured with the John Wilson Orchestra; performed with the Royal Opera Covent Garden, English National Opera, Opera Holland Park, Opera North, and Scottish Opera; appeared twice at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod; and has been a regular guest with the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Halle, and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Stewart has forged a successful and enduring relationship with BBC, performing on Radio 2 (including several performances on *Friday Night is Music Night*), Radio 3 (*In Time*), and Radio 4 (*Desert Island Discs*, *Saturday Live*). Stewart also appeared on BBC One (*Songs of Praise*, *BBC Breakfast*) and BBC Two (*Cardiff Singer of the World 2015*). He has performed throughout the United States at opera houses, including San Francisco Opera, Atlanta Opera, Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, Glimmerglass, and Michigan Opera Theater, and with major European theatres such as the Bolshoi, Brezgenzer Festspiele, Göttesborg Operan, Teatro Real Madrid, and Wexford Festival.

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Opera San José is an opera company located in the heart of Silicon Valley. Maintaining a resident company of artists, OSJ presents four mainstage productions annually in San Jose's historic California Theatre, while regularly broadcasting fully-produced productions from its state-of-the-art Heiman Digital Media Studio. Entering its 38th season, OSJ specializes in role debuts, serving as an artistic incubator for established and emerging artists alike, producing world-class operatic performances for diverse audiences throughout the Bay Area and around the globe. More information is available at www.operasj.org.

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