



*A traditional portrayal of Romeo and Juliet, in an 1870 painting by Ford Madox Brown.*

## Roméo et Juliette: Making an Old Story New

Few stories have been presented in such a wide a range of media as William Shakespeare's classic love story, Romeo and Juliet. In addition to stage drama, there are several operas, a ballet, traditional and modern film treatments, as well as related pieces, such as *West Side Story*. Given their popularity, it is likely there will be new versions created in this millennium.

Written more than 400 years ago, the story's elements— young, forbidden love, family feuds, political tyranny, murder and just plain bad timing—lend it a lasting allure that has proven irresistible to creators and audiences alike.

Those responsible for presenting a “new” production of this timeless story, however, face a challenging task—to present a relevant interpretation,

without changing the fundamental work. Nearly everyone in the audience has preconceptions about how the characters should look, how they should act, and how their surroundings should appear. Public response to any presentation begins there.

Perhaps never is the challenge greater than in opera, which, by its very nature, leaves less open to directorial interpretation. The music of opera imposes a prearranged structure. Through the melody, tempo, and lyrics, the composer forces singers to express specific emotions at specific times or scenes.

### Finding Universal Truth

Josemaria Condemi, director of Festival Opera's upcoming *Roméo et Juliette*, believes that the strongest approach is to provide a framework that is coherent and universally true. Condemi returns to Festival Opera following his highly acclaimed 2002 debut as the director of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. Evident in his work, both then and now, is an emphasis on stagings that allow

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## Exploring Opera

### A Conversation with Professor Philip Manwell

It is a secret that not every ticket buyer knows—come early to Festival Opera performances. An hour before the curtain rises, as the stage is being set and the orchestra warms up, opera novices and opera lovers come together in the balcony to hear more about the world of the opera they are about to see. The free pre-curtain lectures are hosted by Professor Philip Manwell, who brings to them a broad expertise in opera. Following a successful career as a performer, conductor and recording artist in New York City, Manwell turned his focus to the academic world. He holds bachelors and masters degrees from the Juilliard School and a doctorate from the University of San Francisco. Manwell has taught music and humanities for 20 years, and currently serves as Dean of Academic Services at Las Positas College in Livermore. Festival Opera talked briefly with Dr. Manwell about exploring opera.

**FO:** What do people want to hear an hour before curtain?

**PM:** *I try to talk about what will interest and excite people about the opera they're going to see. One thing I don't do is just tell them the story in detail—they can read it easily in the program or a book. I think that takes away from people being able to make their own discoveries as they sit in the theater. But I do like to talk a little about opera in general and how each particular opera fits into its time and place. One of the things it's important to remember is that when most of these operas were written,*

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## Festival Opera Board of Directors

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## From the Chair

How fortunate we are to be able to offer a true "Festival" of events this summer. We have woven together many activities at many venues – all valuable opportunities to "try on" opera. We hope you will join us for one or all of them.

If an outdoor event suits your fancy, pack your picnic basket and blanket, and join us at *Opera in the Park!* Our first of three free concerts is at Susana Park in Martinez on Sunday, June 27. We bring a concert to Orinda's Community Center Park on Tuesday, June 29, followed by Civic Park in Walnut Creek on Sunday, August 1. These popular evening events fill up fast, so be sure to get there early.

Festival Opera offers many ways to learn more about opera and the productions we present. For those new to opera and those who just want to hear more about it, we encourage you to join one of two different groups to gain insights on Verdi's beloved opera, *Rigoletto*. The Rossmoor Club offers a pre-opera discussion with chorus director John Kendall Bailey on June 24. The Aria Club, our young professionals group, will host a casual cocktail party on June 18, where a member of the production staff will share insights about the planning and preparations being made for the exciting new production. Both groups will host similar events for *Roméo et Juliette* in late July.

Opening nights offer a spectrum of events. The Aria Club hosts pre-performance dinners at a

nearby Walnut Creek restaurant. The prix fixe dinner, including award-winning wines, concludes early enough to attend the pre-curtain lecture held one hour before each performance with guest speaker, Dr. Philip Manwell of Las Positas College. After the opening night curtain comes down, stay for a no-host reception in the Rotunda with the artists and other audience members.

On Friday evenings, we will reprise our After-Opera Parties. After *Rigoletto* in July, the event will be held at Strings Restaurant across the street from the theater. Audience members join members of the cast and chorus for a special hors d'oeuvres menu and no-host drinks. After *Roméo et Juliette*, a buffet dinner will be offered at Skipolini's. For these events, your ticket stub and \$10 are all you need, although reservations are highly recommended.

Tickets for the season are already selling briskly and many events require advance reservations, so don't delay in making your plans. We strive to provide something for all ages, from formal to casual, and hope to see you during our "Festival" of opera this summer.

Whether you have just joined Festival Opera or you have been with us for a while, please accept our thanks for your support. We value you as part of a community that nurtures cultural growth.

— Susie Hanson ■

## Cast Changes for Summer Season

Two changes were recently announced for the upcoming season. Tenor Todd Geer will return to sing the role of the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, following his acclaimed debut last summer in *Aida*. Tenor Isaac Hurtado will make his first appearance with the company in the title role of *Roméo et Juliette*. Due to an exceptional and unanticipated recording contract, tenor David Miller has had to withdraw from singing the roles in this summer's productions. He has also canceled scheduled appearances in Dresden, as well as a debut with the Metropolitan Opera during their upcoming season.

Although we looked forward to David Miller's return to our stage, as a regional company our goal is to help young artists build their careers. We're thrilled to have been part of Miller's rapid rise in the operatic world and wish him every success. We're also very fortunate to have

access to many other talented artists who can step into these important roles on short notice.

Since last summer, Todd Geer has appeared in Sacramento and Sarasota, and appears this month in San Francisco Opera's production of *Doktor Faust*. In 2005 he will return to Sarasota Opera for the title role in *Stiffelio*. Isaac Hurtado greatly impressed our artistic and music director Michael Morgan during the recent West Coast Auditions, held for opera companies in the region. As Morgan said, he is "exactly the kind of young singer Festival Opera should be bringing to the stage." Hurtado has been praised in his recent appearances with Florida's Opera del Sol and Opera Circle of Cleveland for his charismatic stage presence and glorious, dramatic voice. We are very excited about the unexpected opportunity we've been given to present such a thrilling new artist this summer!

## Roméo et Juliette: Making an Old Story New . . . continued from page 1

the audience to experience the story in a fresh and personal way.

“Audience members see the opera through the lens of their own experiences, expectations and memories,” says Condemì. “Someone who was forced to leave a lover by their family, or who ran away to pursue a love interest, would have a completely different experience of the opera than someone who never experienced that. As a director, I can’t compete with that. My goal is to find the universal truth that is behind every human action and present it in such a way that anyone can relate to it,” he adds.

The medium of opera further complicates this challenge since keeping the opera to a reasonable length means sometimes the action moves implausibly fast. For Condemì, that is why finding a way to present the action in a coherent and universal way is so essential. “Most of us will never meet someone and fall in love in five minutes, but there are aspects of such an experience—the rush of adrenaline, the strong physical attraction, the infatuation—that anyone could relate to.”

### Making a Visual Connection

The power of opera is that it speaks to multiple senses. The visual aspects of a production contribute enormously in connecting the audience. “Everyone knows this story and how it ends. So playing out the events is important, but I want powerful visual images that can help take the story to a different level,” says Condemì. His partner in achieving this aim is designer Cameron Anderson, who has worked with Condemì several times, including set designs for *Susannah* in 2002.

According to Anderson, an effective set best works to immerse audiences when all design elements work together in unison, and when one design element does not dominate. For her, a good visual design works to define not only the period but helps create a visual metaphor for the opera. “This metaphor can be conveyed through color or composition,” she contends. “It can be achieved through minimalism as well. A tiny window in a huge wall could express a young woman’s yearning to be free from the oppression of her family.”

Both Condemì and Anderson look to express the freedom granted by pure love—that, in some ways, the deaths of Roméo and Juliette are a triumph, because they escape the confines of their family and are finally together.

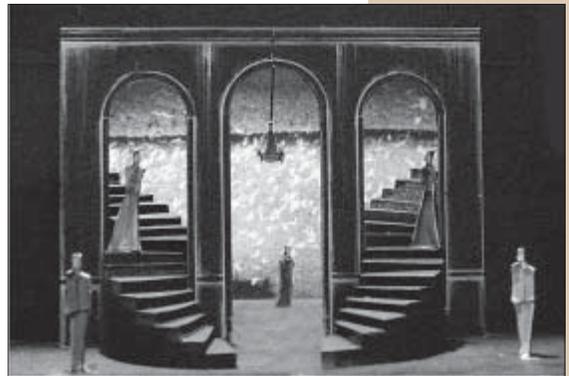
### Practical Considerations

Regardless of their artistic conceptions, directors and set designers are forced to weigh the practical issues of their art. Preparation time, theater size, materials costs, and many other factors directly impact what can be done to create a staging with which the audience can connect. Says Anderson, “[The set] needs to be at once practical and poetic, so that the balcony scene is recognizable but also surprising. We need to portray the separation and isolation that Romeo and Juliette feel, but do so in a way which reinforces the opera’s overall themes.”

Regardless of the familiarity of the story, opera offers the potential for audiences to experience and be touched differently by every production. Concludes Condemì, “The story is very simple, as are the themes of family, love and tragedy. I want to focus on what is timeless in the

*“I want to focus on what is timeless in the piece, and make it seem as if it could happen today...”*

piece, and make it seem as if it could happen today or at any given time.” Perhaps there is no better canvas for Condemì’s ability to create a beautifully, dramatically coherent, visually powerful production, than a story that has been told countless times in a myriad of ways. ■



Roméo et Juliette  
set design, Act I

## Get to Know Our Stars!

Some of our artists will need a place to stay during the productions this year. If you have an extra room, open apartment, or need a housesitter during July or August, please consider welcoming one of our artists.

This is a great opportunity to get to know our singers and learn a little more about how opera looks from the inside. It also allows Festival Opera to spend its budget on enhanced productions rather than housing. If you can help, please call Helen Sheaff at (925) 944-9610 as soon as possible. Thank you! ■

## Exploring Opera ...continued from page 1

opera was considered very ordinary, popular entertainment for the masses.

**FO:** Opera tends to have an almost elitist, “ultra-culture” reputation today.

**PM:** Which is truly unfortunate. In those days, people didn’t have many choices for entertainment. Theater or opera was for them, what films or television are today. I often say that opera was the “Jerry Springer Show” of that time! What makes opera compelling is the stories—love, sex, deceit, political chicanery—that’s what has always interested people. They shouldn’t let the language and trappings of the music and theater get in the way.

**FO:** I imagine many opera newcomers think they don’t know enough.

**PM:** It’s often implied that you have to work to get ready for opera. But that’s not true—there’s no homework necessary! Opera is the most complex, most perfect art form, but it’s the personal connection to the story that makes opera ordinary, indeed contemporary, for any listener. One of my favorite operas, *The Marriage of Figaro*, by Mozart, is a very accessible, understandable work. The people in it become people you know. Everyone has been Cherubino, infatuated for the first time, or the Countess, disappointed by someone they love. People can relate to them. And, in that opera, unlike so many others, you get both drama and a happy ending!

**FO:** So what other elements create barriers?

**PM:** Musical styles can also be a barrier if they are not familiar. I like to talk about the cultural background and musical style of the composer. Also the types of music people commonly heard at that time. When many people think of musical theater, they think about leaving a show, such as *Oklahoma* or *South Pacific*, whistling the tunes. But *Rigoletto* also has tunes that you’ll leave whistling. These days, people are introduced to quite a bit of opera without realizing it. Films and advertising often use opera as background music. While it is a different context, people think, “I’ve heard that before and I liked it.” The more ordinary and familiar we can make opera, the less intimidating it is.

**FO:** What do experienced opera attendees get from a pre-curtain lecture?

**PM:** Experienced opera-goers often come believing that they know as much or more than the

lecturer does—which certainly could be true. My aim is always to touch on an aspect or perspective that has not occurred to them before regarding the story or characters. For example, during *Aida*, I talked about the mythology behind the story, the cultural environment and the idea that the characters played out roles that were predestined by their culture.

**FO:** People who love opera are willing to watch the same opera over and over.

**PM:** But they’re hoping to see, hear or experience something different every time. Talented singing actors can contribute enormously to that. By just a turn of their head or their facial expression, they can convey a new perspective on a character or relationship. Out of necessity, opera must stretch the imagination—pieces of the story must be dropped to make it short enough to

sit through! It falls on the singers to bridge the gaps and make the characters convincing. There has been a lot of talk recently about “looking right for the part.” What I agree is essential is that singers be dramatically believable. The majority of our average audience today just won’t be engaged on the voice alone. So it’s not so much about being able to fit into the costume, it’s about being able to inhabit the role and give the audience a new experience.

**FO:** What is most important thing for people to know about opera?

**PM:** You don’t have to be a music major to appreciate it! I also tell people it’s better for them to be here [in the theater], than to watch it on video. Video is enjoyable too, but special things happen when you experience opera collectively. I first saw opera when my music teacher took us to Sacramento to see San Francisco Opera’s traveling production. It was *Carmen*, and I still remember it vividly today. Sitting in the darkened house, listening to the music, watching the singers, seeing the costumes—it was magical. Even after studying, working in, and teaching music and opera all these years, my real connection is the same as everyone else. I love to sit in the house and experience opera—that’s the passion I want to share with others. ■

Join Dr. Philip Manwell this summer at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, one hour prior to each opera performance.

# Festival Opera 2004 Preview

# Rigoletto

## Rigoletto

(in Italian with English supertitles)

Music by Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Conductor ..... Michael Morgan

Stage Director ..... David Cox

Set Designer ..... Peter Crompton

Rigoletto ..... Hector Vasquez

Gilda ..... Marnie Breckenridge

Duke of Mantua ..... Todd Geer

Monterone ..... Bojan Knezevic

### Performances:

July 10, 13, 16 • 8:00 p.m.

Matinee Sunday, July 18 • 2:00 p.m.

Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts

**Tickets:** \$31–\$61 • Call (925) 943-7469

or visit [www.festivalopera.com](http://www.festivalopera.com)

### Background:

Verdi composed *Rigoletto* at the beginning of a particularly prolific period of his career - within just two years, it was followed by two equally familiar operas, *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*. While under contract to Teatro la Fenice (Venice, Italy), Verdi became taken with the idea of an opera based on Victor Hugo's controversial play, *Le Roi s'amuse*. This was not a simple project, as the play had been banned for its morally corrupt story, and Verdi was forced to make several plot changes, including renaming the French King an Italian Duke. Nonetheless, Verdi was determined to explore the intimacy of the drama and complexity of the characters, and the opera made its debut in March 1851 to immediate success. Ironically, in Paris, where the original play had been banned, the opera became quite popular after its 1863 debut. With its tragic story and passionate, spellbinding music, *Rigoletto* remains one of Verdi's most beloved and frequently performed operas.

### Synopsis:

During court festivities, the Duke of Mantua boasts of his prowess with women. He flirts with the Countess Ceprano while the jester Rigoletto taunts her husband. Weary of the jester's acidic tongue, Ceprano and the courtiers plot revenge. When the Count Monterone accuses the Duke of dishonoring his daughter, Rigoletto mocks him and Monterone curses the horrified jester.

Rigoletto meets the assassin, Sparafucile, in the street but declines his services. Returning home to his daughter Gilda, whom he keeps secluded, Rigoletto warns her not to go out and tells the governess to admit no one. The Duke, posing as a poor student, has met Gilda. He bribes the governess and, when Rigoletto leaves, approaches Gilda, declaring his love.

Planning to abduct the woman they believe is Rigoletto's mistress, the courtiers enlist Rigoletto and blindfold him, saying they are kidnapping Ceprano's wife. When he realizes they have taken Gilda, he recalls Monterone's curse.

The Duke, distraught over Gilda's disappearance, is overjoyed to hear that she waits in his bedchamber. Rigoletto enters, searching for Gilda, but is barred by the courtiers. He curses them, then pleads for mercy. Gilda emerges and rushes into her father's arms in shame. Monterone is being led to the dungeon and Rigoletto vows to avenge both their daughters.

Outside the assassin's house, Rigoletto forces Gilda to watch as the Duke tries to seduce Sparafucile's sister, Maddalena. Sending Gilda away, he arranges for the Duke's murder. After Rigoletto leaves, Maddalena asks that the Duke be spared and Sparafucile agrees to substitute the next person to arrive. Outside the house, Gilda overhears and, resolving to sacrifice herself, knocks at the door. After claiming what he believes to be the Duke's body, Rigoletto hears the Duke's voice. He opens the sack to find his dying daughter and cries out in anguish that the curse is fulfilled.



**Hector Vasquez** (baritone) most recently appeared with Festival Opera as the Reverend Olin Blitch in *Susannah* in 2002. He made his acclaimed company debut as Baron Scarpia (*Tosca*) in 1996, with subsequent appearances as Tonio (*Pagliacci*), Germont (*La Traviata*) and Leporello (*Don Giovanni*). Since his 1991 debut with San Francisco Opera, he has performed extensively throughout the United States and recently made his European debut as Germont in Belgium. He first appeared with the Metropolitan Opera in 1995 and has returned annually since.



**Marnie Breckenridge** (soprano) made her San Francisco Opera debut as Inez in *Il Trovatore* and as Papagena in *The Magic Flute*. She recently appeared with Sacramento Opera as their Juliette and in 2002 made her Arizona Opera debut as Gretel, returning last fall as Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*.) Breckenridge is a 1999 regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and was a participant in the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Artist Program. Her debut with Festival Opera also marks her first performance in the role of Gilda.



**Todd Geer** (tenor) returns to Festival Opera following his acclaimed debut last season as Radames in *Aida*. During the past year, he has appeared as Alfredo in *La Traviata* (Sacramento Opera), Cavaradossi in *Tosca* (Sarasota Opera), and in San Francisco Opera's production of *Doktor Faust*. A former resident artist with Tri-Cities Opera (New York), he has been featured in many productions there, most recently in *Rigoletto* and *Tosca*. Geer has also appeared with Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Diego Opera.



**Bojan Knezevic** (bass-baritone) first appeared with Festival Opera in 1998 as Marcello in *La Bohème*. He has since appeared with the company in a wide variety of roles, most recently as Amonasro in *Aida*. The Belgrade native and former Adler Fellow has sung throughout the United States and abroad. The 2004 season will see him as Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* with Opera Santa Barbara, Harastra in *The Cunning Little Vixen* with San Francisco Opera, and as cover for Alberich in *Das Rheingold* with Lyric Opera of Chicago.

# Festival Opera 2004 Preview

# Roméo et Juliette

## Roméo et Juliette

(in French with English supertitles)

Music by Charles Gounod (1818–1893)

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

Conductor ..... Michael Morgan  
 Stage Director ..... Josemaria Condemi  
 Set Designer ..... Cameron Anderson

Roméo ..... Isaac Hurtado  
 Juliette ..... Rebecca Garcia  
 Mercutio ..... Brian Leerhuber  
 Frère Laurent ..... John Minagro

### Performances:

August 14, 17, 20 • 8:00 p.m.

Matinee Sunday, August 22 • 2:00 p.m.

Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts

**Tickets:** \$31–\$61 • Call (925) 943-7469  
 or visit [www.festivalopera.com](http://www.festivalopera.com)

### Background:

By the time *Roméo et Juliette* was composed, Gounod was already a highly distinguished French composer, known for his lyric and classically romantic operas. While not the first to set the classic tale to music, Gounod and his librettists did adhere more closely to Shakespeare's play. The only real deviations are the addition of the character Stephano, needed to propel the bloodshed in the third act, and Roméo's survival after Juliette's awakening. *Roméo et Juliette* made its debut on April 27, 1867, at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris, to unanimous praise. It was the peak of Gounod's success as an operatic composer. By 1870, the Franco-Prussian war forced Gounod to seek refuge in England and, in later years, he devoted himself increasingly to religious and liturgical music. Although only two of Gounod's operas, *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*, remain in contemporary repertory, they continue to delight audiences with their lyrical and haunting melodies.

### Synopsis:

Following a prologue telling of the long-standing feud between the Montagues and Capulets, the opera opens during a masked ball at the house of Capulet. The beautiful daughter of the house, Juliette, is to be introduced to her suitor Paris. When Capulet leads his guests to another room, Roméo and his friends arrive masked. Juliette returns and Roméo un masks and approaches her. Their attraction is instantaneous. The entrance of Juliette's cousin Tybalt forces Roméo to leave, but he is recognized and only Capulet's intervention prevents bloodshed.

Roméo appears beneath Juliette's balcony, singing rapturously of his love for her. Juliette's distress over her feelings for her family's enemy is dispelled by the sight of Romeo. The two ecstatically pledge their love before tenderly bidding each other goodnight. The next morning, the lovers arrive at Friar Lawrence's cell. He agrees to marry them in the hope that their union will end the families' feud.

Outside the Capulet house, Roméo's page, Stephano, provokes a fight. Mercutio defends Stephano and is challenged by Tybalt, who responds with insults when Roméo attempts to make peace. Mercutio is slain by Tybalt, who in turn is killed by Roméo. The Duke of Verona is summoned and banishes Roméo from the city.

That night, the lovers are united before Roméo's exile. In the morning, Capulet announces that Juliette will wed Paris that day. The friar gives Juliette a sleeping potion that will simulate death, promising that Romeo will be there when she wakes. The potion works just as Capulet returns.

Arriving at Juliette's tomb, Roméo believes her to be dead and, despairing, he swallows poison. When Juliette awakens, the lovers look to a new life together but the poison is already at work. As Roméo bids Juliette farewell, she stabs herself with his dagger. Praying for forgiveness, they die in each other's arms.



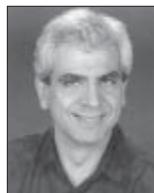
**Isaac Hurtado** (tenor) makes his Festival Opera debut with his first Roméo. He has been highly praised for his recent roles, Alfredo (*La Traviata*) with Florida's Opera del Sol, and Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) with Opera Circle of Cleveland. Hurtado has also appeared with Central City Opera, Opera Theatre of Lucca, and Opera North, where he was a member of the Young Artists Program. He is completing his Doctorate at Florida State University, under the tutelage of noted American tenor Stanford Olsen.



**Rebecca Garcia** (soprano) sings her first Juliette in her debut with Festival Opera this season. Credits for the young artist include the roles of Amina (*La Sonnambula*), Violetta (*La Traviata*) and Gilda (*Rigoletto*) with the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia; Mimi (*La Bohème*) and the title role in *Manon* with Chautauqua Opera; and Adina (*L'Elisir d'Amore*) with Oberlin Opera Theater. She is a regional winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Blanche Thebom award.



**Brian Leerhuber** (baritone) debuted with Festival Opera in 1998 as Schaunard in *La Bohème* and returned to sing both Mozart's and Rossini's Figaros. Leerhuber was a resident artist with Opera San Jose for two seasons, as well as a participant in the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists, making his 2001 debut with Lyric Opera of Chicago in *Billy Budd*. He made his European debut at the Lyrique en Mer Festival last summer as Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) and Schaunard, and was 2003 Sullivan Foundation Award winner.



**John Minagro** (bass) most recently appeared with Festival Opera in *Susannah* in 2002 and was previously heard as Fiorello in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in 2000. His credits include the roles of Méphistophélès (*Faust*), Amonasro (*Aida*) Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*) and two of the Kings in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. From 1993-1998, he appeared in the San Francisco production of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Minagro has sung with the San Francisco Opera for eight seasons and has appeared as guest soloist with the San Francisco Symphony.

# Sustaining the Art of Festival Opera

On a recent May afternoon, in the lovely Walnut Creek home of Carol and David Williams, more than 30 opera lovers gathered to enjoy the exceptional talents of baritone Brian Leerhuber and soprano Jenni Samuelson. From the first note of the Jewel Song from *Faust*, to a special arrangement of *If I Loved You* and *Some Enchanted Evening*, they charmed and delighted their audience. An exclusive event? Certainly. But one in which you would be more than welcome to join.

Festival Opera is privileged to have a special tier of donors whose long-standing commitment has been instrumental in the artistic growth of the company over the past few years. They are members of the Sostenuto Club, formed nearly five years ago and named after an Italian musical term meaning "in a sustained or prolonged manner." Sostenuto members pledge a minimum commitment of \$500 for five years in support of Festival Opera. The benefits of membership include the opportunity to purchase tickets in advance, special recognition in season programs, invitations to intimate concerts and events such as the one at the Williams' home, and other opportunities to meet Festival Opera artists and staff.

## The Heart of the Art

As Karin Eames, board member and Sostenuto Club chair, has said, "Sostenuto members are central to Festival Opera's success. These are individuals who understand how critical it is to provide a continuing level of financial support over multiple years." Opera remains the most expensive art form and ticket sales cover only half of the expenses of the season. "The sustained nature of the commitments from Sostenuto members allows us to make long-term artistic plans

knowing that we can rely on their generous support," Eames adds.

Most Sostenuto members believe the rewards go both ways. "It's exciting to hear and meet new young artists like Jenni Samuelson at a small concert. I wouldn't have had that opportunity if I hadn't been a Sostenuto," says Shirley Siljeg, who is also a long-time Festival Opera volunteer. Becoming a Sostenuto offers a more intimate connection with the world of opera, something members like Siljeg are passionate about. But not all Sostenuto members are motivated by a specific love for opera, some make the commitment out of desire to support an arts-rich environment in our community. Either way, "It's a lovely way to spend your time and your money," contends Siljeg.



*Sostenuto members enjoy an intermezzo reception at the Dean Lesher Regional Center for the Arts.*

## Benefits of the Season

Invitation-only concerts, such as the one with Leerhuber and Samuelson, take place throughout the year. Many of the other exclusive Sostenuto events center around Festival Opera's summer season. Sostenuto members are invited to staging rehearsals, pre-performance previews, and intermezzo receptions on opening nights. These exclusive privileges extend your enjoyment of the season and your involvement with Festival Opera. They are a pleasure that can be eclipsed only by knowing that your Sostenuto commitment has helped ensure the future of the art of opera in the East Bay. ■

## Enjoy Opening Night at Zio Fraedo's!

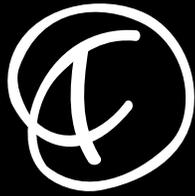
Opera patrons will be welcomed to Zio Fraedo's Restaurant on opening nights with a complimentary glass of house wine, courtesy of owner Anthony LeForte. Enjoy the excellent Italian cuisine and gracious atmosphere of this elegant new restaurant, located at 611 Gregory Lane in Pleasant Hill. Reservations advised, call (925) 933-9091.

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to our *Opera in the Park* sponsors!

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675 Ygnacio Valley Rd.  
Suite B-215  
Walnut Creek, CA 94596  
(925) 944-9610  
info@festivalopera.com  
www.festivalopera.com

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## Mark Your Calendar!

### **June 27, 6:00 p.m.**

Opera in the Park: Susana Park, Martinez  
Sponsored by Shell Oil Products USA

### **June 29, 6:30 p.m.**

Opera in the Park: Community Park, Orinda

### **July 10, 5:00 p.m.**

Aria Club: Opening Night Gala Dinner  
Location: Lark Creek Cafe, Walnut Creek

### ☆ **July 10, 8:00 p.m.**

Opening Night: *Rigoletto*  
Pre-curtain lecture in the theater: 7:00 p.m.  
No-host reception following the performance

### **July 16, 10:45 p.m.**

Post-Opera Event: "Nightlife after Death"  
Specially priced buffet with ticket stub  
Location: Strings, Walnut Creek

### **July 20, 7:00 p.m.**

Opera on the Lawn: *Rigoletto*  
Pre-opera seated or al fresco dinner  
available. Call (707) 963-3646  
Location: Meadowood Napa Valley

### **July 23, 1:00 p.m.**

Rossmoor Club: Pre-Opera Discussion  
Location: Hillside Clubhouse, Rossmoor

### **August 1, 6:00 p.m.**

Opera in the Park: Civic Park, Walnut Creek  
Sponsored by Walnut Creek Honda

### **August 14, 5:00 p.m.**

Aria Club: Opening Night Gala Dinner  
Location: Walnut Creek Yacht Club

### ☆ **August 14, 8:00 p.m.**

Opening Night: *Roméo et Juliette*  
Pre-curtain lecture in the theater: 7:00 p.m.  
No-host reception following the performance

### **August 20, 10:45 p.m.**

Post-Opera Event: "Nightlife after Death"  
Specially priced buffet with ticket stub  
Location: Skipolini's, Walnut Creek

### **September 19, 6:00 p.m.**

Festival Opera Guild: "Come to the Cabaret"  
Location: Zio Fraedo's, Pleasant Hill

### **October 9, 2:00 p.m.**

Rossmoor Club: Fall Concert  
Location: Diablo Room, Rossmoor

### **October 23, 6:00 p.m.**

Gala Fund Raising Event:  
"A Very Special Evening at the Rotunda"  
Location: Oakland Rotunda

*Roberta Emerson*  
Editor