



For Immediate Release

**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES 2026 SEASON
HANDEL'S *ALCINA*, JUNE 13-21;
OPERA IN THE PARK FEATURING DONIZETTI'S *THE ELIXIR OF LOVE*, JULY 23 & 26;
FALL SALON SERIES AT PIEDMONT CENTER FOR THE ARTS TO PREMIERE COMMISSIONED
SONG CYCLE BY JUAN SEBASTIAN CARDONA OSPINA REGARDING WRONGFULLY DEPORTED
VENEZUELAN GAY ARTIST TO NOTORIOUS CECOT PRISON;
35TH ANNIVERSARY LAUNCHES WITH A SPRING SOIRÉE BENEFIT, MARCH 29**

**Festival Opera Continues *Opera at the Mac* Series of "First Fridays"
Point Richmond's Historic Mac Hotel, Biancoverde Restaurant
www.festivalopera.org**

Walnut Creek, Calif. (March 9, 2026) — **Festival Opera** today announced plans for its 2026 season, marking the company's 35th anniversary with a dynamic lineup that includes a major Baroque collaboration with the **San Francisco Early Music Society**, beloved community performances, and a powerful new commissioned musical work addressing contemporary issues of social justice and human rights.

The new season will officially commence Sunday, March 29 at 4 p.m. with the company's stylish annual **Spring Soirée** benefit event to be held at the Piedmont Center for the Arts. Festival Opera patrons will enjoy a convivial reception of wine and elevated bites, a live auction followed by an engaging performance with soprano **Carrie Hennessey**, baritone **Zachary Gordin** and pianist **Daniel Lockert**.

ALCINA

Festival Opera's programmatic centerpiece will be a new presentation of George Frideric Handel's magical Baroque opera ***Alcina***, presented in collaboration with the **San Francisco Early Music Society**. Two concert performances will be featured as part of the **Berkeley Festival & Exhibition** at Hertz Hall, Saturday, June 13 and Sunday, June 14, and will be presented in a fully staged production with sets and costumes at the Leshner Center for the Arts, Friday, June 19 and Sunday, June 21.

Renowned Early Music Conductor **Derek Tam** will be on the podium leading a cast of next generation singing stars including **Nikola Printz** in the title role, **Courtney Miller** as Ruggiero, **Shawnette Sulker** as Morgana and **Sara Couden** as Bradamante. *Alcina* will include the participation of the Festival Opera Orchestra performing on period instruments at Baroque pitch and the Festival Opera Chorus directed by **Zachary Gordin**.

Premiered in 1735, *Alcina* remains one of Handel's most enchanting operas, weaving virtuosic vocal writing with a fantastical story of love, deception, and transformation. Festival Opera's staging will bring together period-style musical interpretation and visually imaginative storytelling, highlighting the company's ongoing commitment to historically informed performances.

“Reaching our 35th anniversary is both a celebration and a moment to reaffirm Festival Opera’s mission,” said **General Director Zachary Gordin**. “This season reflects the spirit of our company: honoring the timeless beauty of opera’s past while engaging directly with the world we live in today. From the spellbinding artistry of *Alcina* to new works that give voice to urgent contemporary stories, we’re proud to present opera that is both inspiring and deeply germane.”

OPERA IN THE PARK/THE ELIXIR OF LOVE

Festival Opera will continue its popular **Opera in the Park** initiative this summer, offering free outdoor performances designed to bring opera to the broader community. This year’s program will feature an abridged version of Gaetano Donizetti’s 19th century delightful romantic comedy *The Elixir of Love*. The lighthearted tale of young love, mistaken identity, and comic mischief—filled with some of the most beautiful opera music ever-composed—will be presented Thursday, July 23 at 6 p.m. at Orinda Community Park, and Sunday, July 26 at 4 p.m. at Civic Park in Walnut Creek, inviting audiences of all ages to experience opera in an accessible and festive outdoor setting. The performance will run 90-minutes plus one intermission. The cast of singing artists will be announced in early May.

SALON SERIES AT PIEDMONT CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The company will also continue its successful **Salon Series** at the Piedmont Center for the Arts with three intimate Sunday afternoon concerts at 4 p.m. this fall. The series showcases exceptional singers and instrumentalists performing a diverse range of opera, art song, and contemporary repertoire in an up-close setting that emphasizes artistic connection and storytelling. Each performance includes an informal Meet the Artist reception with wine and sweets.

A particularly significant highlight of the Salon Series will occur Sunday, Nov. 22 with the world premiere of a Festival Opera commissioned song cycle by Colombian composer (and now Berkeley resident) **Juan Sebastián Cardona Ospina**. The work confronts the real-life story of Venezuelan gay artist **Andry Hernández Romero**, whose controversial deportation led to his imprisonment in El Salvador’s infamous CECOT facility.

With a libretto by **Michael Cobruno**, the song cycle transforms this story into a deeply human musical narrative exploring displacement, identity, and the resilience of artistic expression in the face of punishing injustice. The premiere will feature rising baritone **Efraín Solís**, whose dramatic and musical intensity has quickly made him one of the most compelling young singers on today’s operatic stage.

“Opera has always been a powerful vehicle for storytelling and empathy,” added Gordin. “By commissioning this work, we hope to illuminate a story that speaks to the fragility of freedom and the enduring power of art to bear witness.”

The Salon Series will begin Sunday, Sept. 27 with a concert of arias and scenes featuring an ensemble of inaugural Festival Opera Resident Artists to be announced in May. Following will be a thrilling afternoon of Operatic Mad Scenes scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 25 with sopranos **Aura Veruni** and **Lila Khazoum** performing diabolical scenes from *Idomeneo*, *Macbeth*, *The Magic Flute*, *Anna Bolena*, *Hamlet*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Noted costume designer **Marina Polakoff** will enhance the atmosphere with dazzling costumes and props. The Piedmont Center for the Arts is located at 801 Magnolia Avenue, Piedmont.

FIRST FRIDAYS, OPERA AT THE MAC

Festival Opera will maintain its residency at Point Richmond’s historic **Hotel Mac**, offering a series of “First Fridays” at the renovated and culinary hot-spot, **Biancoverde Restaurant**. Zachary Gordin shared, “The series will feel like fun and casual operatic ‘jam sessions’ for the restaurant and bar patrons, bringing favorite opera artists from the Bay Area and beyond to the Mac, performing hits from opera, Broadway, and more.”

Upcoming “First Fridays” are scheduled for 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on March 6, April 3 and May 1. Artists and programs will be announced soon. There is no cover charge, but advance reservations are suggested. The iconic Hotel Mac, which originally opened in 1911, is located at 50 Washington Avenue, Point Richmond. For more details and reservations, visit festivalopera.org/at-the-mac.

For tickets to all Festival Opera performances, visit online at www.festivalopera.org.

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FESTIVAL OPERA 2026 SEASON CALENDAR

SPRING SOIRÉE – FESTIVAL OPERA ANNUAL BENEFIT

Sunday, March 29, 2026 at 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Piedmont Center for the Arts, 801 Magnolia Ave, Piedmont
With soprano Carrie Hennessey, baritone Zachary Gordin and pianist

HANDEL’S BAROQUE MASTERWORK, *ALCINA*

Festival Opera in collaboration with San Francisco Early Music Festival

Concert Performances: Saturday, June 13, 2026 at 7.30 p.m. and Sunday, June 14, 2026 2 p.m.; presented as part of the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition, Hertz Hall, UC Berkeley, 101 Cross-Sproul Path

Theatrical Production: Friday, June 19, 2026 at 7.30 p.m. and Sunday, June 21, 2026 at 2 p.m., Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek

Cast: Nikola Printz, Courtney Miller, Shawnette Sulker, Sara Couden, Spencer Greene, Nina Jones, Isaiah Musik-Ayala; Conductor Derek Tam, Director Zachary Gordin with the Festival Opera Orchestra and Chorus.

OPERA IN THE PARK/Donizetti’s *THE ELIXIR OF LOVE*

Thursday, July 23, 2026 at 6 p.m. — Orinda Community Park, 28 Orinda Way, Orinda; this concert is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Orinda.

Sunday, July 26, 2026 at 4 p.m. — Civic Park, 1375 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek; this concert is sponsored by the Walnut Creek Civic Pride Foundation.

The Elixir of Love presented under the stars; free admission; 90-minute abridged version with one intermission.

SALON SERIES

Three intimate concerts of exceptional artistry performing a range of opera and contemporary work.

Sunday, Sept. 27, 2026 at 4 p.m.: Featuring Festival Opera Resident Artists in programming to be announced;

Sunday, Oct. 25, 2026 at 4 p.m.: Operatic Mad Scenes with sopranos Aura Veruni and Lila Khazoum performing music from *Idomeneo*, *Macbeth*, *The Magic Flute*, *Anna Bolena*, *Hamlet*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Sunday, Nov. 22 at 4 p.m.: Premiere of Festival Opera’s commissioned song cycle by composer Juan Sebastian Carona Ospina and librettist Michael Colbruno, featuring baritone Efrain Solis.

FIRST FRIDAYS: OPERA AT THE MAC

Opera and musical theater highlights on March 6, April 3 and May 1, from 7 p.m. to 8.30 p.m., Hotel Mac, Biancoverde Restaurant, 50 Washington Avenue, Pt. Richmond

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Press Contact: Jon Finck, jonfincksf@gmail.com / +1 415 577 1323

Please connect for feature stories, artwork and press credentials.