



For Immediate Release

**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES NEW RESIDENT ARTIST PROGRAM
FEATURING FIVE SINGERS IN SEASON-LONG ARTISTIC INITIATIVE;
35TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON PROGRAMMING INCLUDES
HANDEL'S *ALCINA*, JUNE 13-21; DONIZETTI'S *THE ELIXIR OF LOVE* JULY 23 & 26;
AND A TRIO OF SALON CONCERTS SEPT. 27, OCT. 25, NOV. 22**

www.festivalopera.org

Walnut Creek, Calif. (May 1, 2026) — **Festival Opera** today announced the launch of its first **Resident Artist Program**, a comprehensive, season-long professional development initiative designed to support emerging opera singers at a pivotal stage in their careers. The program will provide paid performance opportunities, individualized training and vocal coaching and an array of practical business/marketing classes to help artists in their post academic training achieve a sustainable professional life in the opera industry.

For the inaugural Resident Artist Program, Festival Opera welcomes five singers—chosen from national applications—who will be fully integrated into the company's artistic and community presence: soprano **Marielle Leiboff**; soprano **Rachel Nelson**; mezzo-soprano **Phoebe Dinga**; tenor **Spencer Greene**; and baritone **Liam Daley**.

Conceived by Festival Opera General Director **Zachary Gordin**, the Resident Artist Program will offer the singers unique performance opportunities with casting in principal, supporting, and/or cover role assignments in all company presentations of mainstage operas; the Resident Artist Showcase Concert on Sept. 27 at the Piedmont Center for the Arts; and in schools, community centers, libraries, educational settings and more.

The program will emphasize rigorous artistic growth through personalized and group instruction tailored to the demands of a professional operatic career. The singers will engage in vocal coaching, language/diction coaching, acting for singers, performance strength and endurance, and audition preparation workshops.

Complementing the artistic and performance aspects, the Resident Artists will engage in a series of dedicated business and marketing classes in practical training and frameworks for career management and self-promotion. Topics to be covered will include branding and marketing basics, social media, materials creation, finance and tax basics, career planning and more.

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL OPERA RESIDENT ARTISTS

Soprano Marielle Leiboff earned her Bachelor of Music degree *magna cum laude* from the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University and completed her Master of Music degree at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Catherine Cook. Her recent operatic roles include Paquette in Bernstein's *Candide* and Le Comte Barigoule in Pauline Viardot's *Cendrillon* at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, as well as Iris in Handel's *Semele*, and the title role in Viardot's *Cendrillon* with Vanderbilt Opera Theater.

Marielle is a recent recipient of the Encouragement Award in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (San Diego District, 2025), and has been recognized as a finalist in the Orpheus Vocal Competition and a semifinalist in the CS Music Competition. An active performer with The Opus Project in San Francisco, Marielle frequently collaborates with and premieres works by living Bay Area composers. This fall, she will sing with the San Francisco Opera Chorus in *Simon Boccanegra* and *Manon*.

Soprano Rachel Nelson: Rachel is a recent graduate of San Jose State University, where she received a Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance. Recently, she covered Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* at Opera San José, in addition to singing chorus in *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*.

Rachel's previous roles include Naiad in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Chicago Summer Opera, the Governess in *Turn of the Screw* and Léontine in *L'amant anonyme* at San José State University. Her portrayal of the Governess earned her an award for "Outstanding Music Performance." Other performance credits include the soprano solo in Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* in Slovenia.

Mezzo-Soprano Phoebe Dinga: Mezzo-soprano, Phoebe Dinga, has performed on international stages in Switzerland, France, Sweden, Austria, and Italy. Since moving back to the San Francisco Bay Area from Europe in 2023, Phoebe made her mainstage debut with Pocket Opera in the title role of Métella in *La Vie Parisienne*, sung with West Edge Opera in their world premiere of *Bulrusher*, Pocket Opera's *Cunning Little Vixen* and *La Bohème*, and sang Angelina in San Francisco Opera Guild's *La Cenerentola*.

This season, she sang Rosina in San Francisco Opera Guild's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Kate Pinkerton in Pocket Opera's production of *Madama Butterfly*, and made her debut with Opera San José as Mother in *Madama Butterfly*. In the fall, Phoebe will make her debut with San Francisco Opera chorus in *Simon Boccanegra* and *Manon*. She is a regular teaching artist in many of San Francisco Opera Guild's programs including Opera Together and Sing a Story. Phoebe is also a professional Polynesian dancer.

Tenor Spencer Greene: An MM graduate of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, Spencer Greene is quickly establishing himself in the tenor repertoire after initial training as a baritone. He is a two-time award recipient of the Laffont Competition, winning the Minnesota district in 2024 and receiving an Encouragement Award at the San Diego district in 2025.

Greene was recently a member of Des Moines Metro Opera's OPERA Iowa troupe, performing as Dandini in *The Billy Goats Gruff* and Prince in *Cinderella*, as well as teaching workshops and masterclasses to students across Iowa. His outreach experience has also included work with the San Francisco Opera Guild's Opera Together program, where he performed as Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*.

His past roles have included the Tanzmeister (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Danilo (*Die lustige Witwe*), Sid (*Albert Herring*), and Nick Bottom (*The Fairy Queen*). Additionally, he has covered the roles of Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*) with Cedar Rapids Opera, and Alfredo (*La Traviata*) with Festival Opera. As a resident artist with Festival Opera this summer, he will sing the roles of Oronte (*Alcina*) and Nemorino (*The Elixir of Love*).

Baritone Liam Daley: Liam Daley is a baritone, composer/arranger, and visual artist from San Luis Obispo. He received a Bachelor's of Music from Sonoma State University with concentrations in vocal performance and composition. He has appeared in several of Festival Opera's productions such as *Norma* during the 2022 season and as Silvio in Festival Opera's 2025 Opera in the Park production of *Pagliacci*.

He has also performed roles with Lamplighters Music Theatre and Pocket Opera in San Francisco such as Strephon in *Iolanthe*, Piccia Tuccia in *The New Mikado* and Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus*. His many credits include performances with Opera San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo Master Chorale, The New World Baroque Orchestra, and Resonance Vocal Ensemble.

~~~~~ **FESTIVAL OPERA 2026 SEASON CALENDAR** ~~~~~

[www.festivalopera.org](http://www.festivalopera.org)

**\*HANDEL'S BAROQUE MASTERWORK, ALCINA**

Produced by **Festival Opera** in collaboration with the **San Francisco Early Music Festival**.

**Concert Performances:** Saturday, June 13, 2026 at 7.30 p.m. & Sunday, June 14, 2026 at 2 p.m.; presented as part of the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition, Hertz Hall, UC Berkeley, 101 Cross-Sproul Path; **Fully Staged Production:** Friday, June 19, 2026 at 7.30 p.m. & Sunday, June 21 at 2 p.m., Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek; For tickets, visit [www.festivalopera.org](http://www.festivalopera.org)

**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 performing on period instruments and Chorus.

**\*OPERA IN THE PARK/Donizetti's THE ELIXIR OF LOVE**

Donizetti's romantic comedy *The Elixir of Love* presented under the stars with a professional cast of Festival Opera singers; free admission; 90-minute abridged version with one intermission.

**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.

**\*FESTIVAL OPERA SALON SERIES**

Three intimate concerts of exceptional artistry performing a range of opera and contemporary work. Presented at the Piedmont Center for the Arts, 801 Magnolia Avenue, Piedmont.

**Sunday, Sept. 27, 2026 at 7.30 p.m.** (Note new start time): 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** with pianist **Daniel Lockert**, 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 Colombian composer **Juan Sebastian Carona Ospina** and librettist **Michael Colbruno**, featuring baritone **Efraín Solís** and pianist **John Churchwell**. The program will feature additional works to be announced.

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