



For Immediate Release

**FESTIVAL OPERA ANNOUNCES 2024 SEASON
A DOUBLE BILL OF TWO ONE-ACT OPERAS ABOUT LOVE & LOSS
FRANCIS POULENC'S GRIPPING 1958 FRENCH DRAMA, *LA VOIX HUMAINE* and
HENRY PURCELL'S 17TH CENTURY BAROQUE MASTERPIECE, *DIDO & AENEAS*
JULY 12 & 14, HOFMANN THEATRE, LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

**SEASON INCLUDES TWO POPULAR OPERA IN THE PARK CONCERTS
ORINDA COMMUNITY PARK, JUNE 20 & WALNUT CREEK CIVIC PARK, JUNE 23;
PLUS, ARTIST RECITAL SERIES SEPT/OCT/NOV, PIEDMONT CENTER FOR THE ARTS;**

www.festivalopera.org



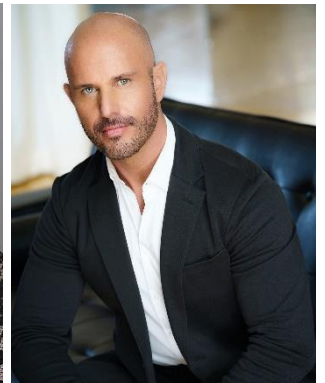
Carrie Hennessey



Kindra Scharich



Sara Couden



Zachary Gordin

Walnut Creek, Calif. (May 2, 2024) — **Festival Opera** today announced details of the company's 2024 season highlighted by an innovative double bill of two one-act operas that are centered on the theme of love and loss: French composer **Francis Poulenc's** gripping monodrama *La voix humaine* (*The human voice*) for soprano with text by poet **Jean Cocteau**, and Baroque English composer **Henry Purcell's** masterful *Dido & Aeneas* with text by **Nahum Tate** after Book IV of Virgil's celebrated heroic poem, the *Aeneid*. Two performances will be given Friday, July 12 at 7.30 p.m. and Sunday, July 14 at 2 p.m. at the Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts.

Festival Opera General Director **Zachary Gordin** said, "For the company's 33rd season, we've landed on a double bill of two landmark operas, three hundred years apart in their creation, but both focused on the extraordinary emotions of love and loss, betrayal and destiny. I believe our Festival Opera audience will truly resonate with these stories and revel in the glorious music. To interpret these works, I'm honored to bring together a principal cast of favorite Bay Area artists with national and international credits directed by the immensely creative **Céline Ricci**. This production also marks a return to my Baroque roots, conducting *Dido & Aeneas* from the harpsichord in a historically informed musical performance juxtaposing a very modern stage production.

"La voix humaine", composed by Poulenc in 1958, is a gripping one-act opera that delves into the complexities of love, loss, and human emotion. Originally set in Paris, the opera follows a woman's intense telephone conversation with her

former lover, revealing the depths of her despair and longing as she learns of their breakup. Cocteau's brilliantly conceived libretto is revealed solely by the one-way conversation the audience hears from the distraught woman, Elle.

Following intermission, Festival Opera will offer Purcell's acclaimed *Dido and Aeneas*, a 17th century Baroque-era masterpiece renowned for its stunning music and tragic storyline. Set in ancient Carthage, the opera portrays the ill-fated love affair between Queen Dido and the Trojan hero Aeneas. With its exquisite arias and intricate ensemble pieces, *Dido and Aeneas* is an epic tale of love and betrayal. The work is further distinguished by Dido's famous and poignant aria that concludes the opera, "When I am laid in earth," popularly known as Dido's Lament.

Casting for *La voix humaine* features critically acclaimed artist, **Carrie Hennessey** in the solo role of Elle, with onstage conducting and accompaniment by pianist, **Robert Mollicone**. For *Dido and Aeneas*, highly praised mezzo-soprano **Kindra Scharich*** will make her company debut as Dido along with the debut of the greatly sought-after contralto, **Sara Couden*** as the Sorceress. The cast features Festival Opera veterans **Matthew Lovell** as Aeneas, **Lila Khazoum** as Belinda, **Lily Bogas** as an Attendant, **Taylor Thompson** as a Sailor, and as the two witches, **Courtney Miller*** and **Reuben Zellman***. The company's **Zachary Gordin** will conduct from the harpsichord leading members of the Festival Opera Orchestra and Chorus. The production will mark the company debut of artists from the **Diablo Ballet**. The double bill promises a visually stunning and emotionally resonant production entirely staged by the immensely talented director, singer and founder of the esteemed company, **Ars Minerva**, French-Italian artist **Céline Ricci***.

Festival Opera will present Poulenc's *La voix humaine* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* for two performances, Friday, July 12, 2024 at 7.30 p.m. and Sunday, July 14, 2024 at 2 p.m., Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. Tickets are \$45 - \$110; Student Tickets \$20 (age 25 and younger). To purchase tickets, call the Leshar Center Box Office: (925) 943-7469 or online at <https://www.festivalopera.org>.

Earlier in the 2024 summer season, Festival Opera will return for two popular community engagements with Opera in the Park concerts on tap beginning with **Orinda's Community Park** Thursday, June 20 at 6 p.m., 28 Orinda Way and sponsored by the **Orinda Rotary Club**; and **Walnut Creek's Civic Park**, Sunday, June 23 at 4 p.m., sponsored by the **Walnut Creek Civic Pride Foundation**. Both opera al fresco concerts will feature Festival Opera singers (**Lila Khazoum**, soprano; **Courtney Miller**, mezzo-soprano; **Taylor Thompson**, tenor; **Liam Daley**, baritone) performing favorite works from grand opera, Broadway and the Great American Songbook. **Zachary Gordin** will host along with pianist **Chun Mei Wilson**. Both concerts are free to the public and offer ample lawn seating.

The Festival Opera season will continue into autumn with a trio of Sunday afternoon artist recitals at the intimate **Piedmont Center for the Arts**, 801 Magnolia Avenue, Piedmont. The series will launch September 22 at 4 p.m. with *Lucky in Love* with **Kindra Scharich**, mezzo-soprano and **Jeffrey LaDeur**, pianist; continue on October 27, 2024 at 4 p.m. with *Nothing to Fear* featuring **Sara Couden**, contralto and **Derek Tam**, pianist; and conclude November 17, 2024 at 4 p.m. with *Muses and Musings of an Impresario* - a birthday celebration with special guest artists to be announced - showcasing **Zachary Gordin**, baritone and **Daniel Lockert**, pianist.

Tickets for the Festival Opera Artist Recital Series at the Piedmont Center for the Arts are \$40 pp for each concert and go on sale beginning May 8. To purchase online, visit www.festivalopera.org.

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Please connect for interviews, artwork and press credentials.

Programming and casting subject to change. For complete details, visit www.festivalopera.org

Current as of May 2024

***Festival Opera Debut**

NB: Zachary Gordin was a harpsichord student of the late and highly acclaimed Lurette Goldberg, who founded *MusicSources*, the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Chaired the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Baroque Music program and more. Concurrent with his work as Festival Opera General Director, Zachary Gordin maintains an active singing career of both opera and concert repertoire, piano accompanist and builder of harpsichords.

