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A TASTE OF  
TRAVIATA



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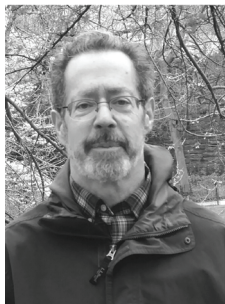
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FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

# ELLIOT LEBOV



2020 was supposed to be a year of transition for Opera Western Reserve. David Vosburgh, our production director since OWR debuted in 2004, retired and Scott Skiba was hired in his place. We eagerly awaited Scott's production of *La Traviata*.

Then the world changed. Performances of opera, theater and concerts have been cancelled worldwide. Performing arts organizations have lost their main purpose: presenting live productions to large audiences by large forces. Everyone has spent the past nine months adapting to the new [temporary] virtual world.

Fortunately, Opera Western Reserve's production team did not remain idle. Our annual summer cabaret was canceled but was replaced with Marian Vogel's beautiful *OWR Presents: Summer Songs* recital, which was presented online and remains available for viewing. Stambaugh Auditorium has produced reprise recordings of most past OWR operas which have been streamed from the OWR website.

Big booming operatic voices, full orchestras and large audiences are a recipe for spreading a contagion. So today, you are viewing our unique *OWR Presents: A Taste of Traviata*, an online presentation developed by Scott Skiba and featuring five soloists supported by a string quartet and piano, filmed at various locations in and around Stambaugh Auditorium. Thank you to Dean Buck, our guest conductor.

You, our donors, have been amazingly supportive. Our corporate campaign was our best ever. We raised funds through our first ever GoFundMe effort. Our foundation donors have come through at their usual very generous levels.

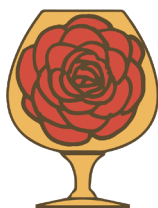
Thank you all.

Sit back before your big screen TVs, your computer screens, or your cell phones and enjoy the show. Next year we hope we all join together for real at Stambaugh Auditorium. Stay well everyone!



OPERA  
WESTERN  
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2020  
*digital season*



# A TASTE OF TRAVIATA

Music by Giuseppe Verdi  
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

DEAN BUCK  
GUEST CONDUCTOR

SCOTT SKIBA  
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

## CAST IN ORDER VOCAL APPEARANCE

Alfredo Germont (Tenor).....Mackenzie Whitney  
Violetta Valery (Soprano).....Karen Barraza  
Giorgio Germont (Baritone).....Brian Keith Johnson  
Annina (Soprano).....Sierra McCorvey\*  
Dottore Grenvil (Bass).....Jason Budd

\*OPERA Western Reserve Young Artist

## SYNOPSIS

A consumptive young courtesan, Violetta Valery, decides to leave her life of revelry and live her final days devoted to one man, Alfredo Germont. Alfredo's genuine love rejuvenates Violetta's health until Alfredo's father visits Violetta and convinces her to forsake Alfredo and return to her former life.



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Amram Joseph Kromholz

### VIOLA

Caitlin Hedge

### CELLO

Kellen Degnan

### BASS

Jeffrey W. Bremer

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Benjamin Malkevitch

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## PRODUCTION STAFF: A TASTE OF TRAVIATA

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Assistant Director.....	Courtney Greene
Guest Conductor.....	Dean Buck
Production Manager.....	Robert Pierce
Director of Photography.....	Courtney Greene
Associate Producers.....	Matt Pagac
	L. Dani Dier
	Jamie Marshall
	Courtney Greene
Editor.....	Courtney Greene
Supertitles.....	Scott Skiba
	Robert Pierce
Camera Operator.....	Courtney Greene
Audio Engineer.....	Matt Pagac
Assistant Audio Engineer.....	Travis Beatty
Audio Recording Deck Hand.....	Courtney Greene & Travis Beatty
Post Production Audio.....	Matt Pagac
	Brandon Ritchie
	Marleen Ocheltree
Rehearsal Accompanist.....	Benjamin Malkevitch
Props.....	L. Dani Dier
	Courtney Greene
	Lynn Ohle
	Robert Pierce
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## PRODUCTIONS

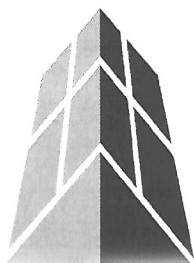
2004	I PAGLIACCI Ruggiero Leoncavallo
2005	LA BOHÈME Giacomo Puccini
2006	LE NOZZE DI FIGARO Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2007	RIGOLETTO Giuseppe Verdi
2008	MADAMA BUTTERFLY Giacomo Puccini
2009	CARMEN Georges Bizet
2010	LA TRAVIATA Giuseppe Verdi
2011	TOSCA Giacomo Puccini
2012	BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA Gioacchino Rossini
2013	LA BOHÈME Giacomo Puccini
2014	DON GIOVANNI Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2015	THE ELIXIR OF LOVE Gaetano Donizetti
2016	CARMEN Georges Bizet
2017	LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR Gaetano Donizetti
2018	MADAMA BUTTERFLY Giacomo Puccini
2019	MACBETH Giuseppe Verdi
2020	A TASTE OF TRAVIATA Giuseppe Verdi

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LA BOHÈME Giacomo Puccini

ROMÉO ET JULIETTE Charles Gounod

CARMEN Georges Bizet



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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

## SCOTT SKIBA

*Taste of Traviata* was borne out of current necessity with roots in an earlier conceived idea.

As the impact and realities of the pandemic set in, it became clear that it would not be possible to bring the Mainstage production of *La Traviata* to life on the magnificent Stambaugh Auditorium stage November 13, 2020 as previously planned. Believing that it is more vital now than ever for the arts to serve as an uplifting beacon amidst our challenging times, it became important to us as a company to devise a way to use our voice, safely, to bring the transformative experience of opera to our community.

To make this possible, we turned to an idea that had been discussed earlier as a potential future program offering. This original idea (which is still in the works for the future - something to which we look forward with hope and anticipation) involved the following: invite an intimate audience to an immersive opera theater experience in and around historic Stambaugh Auditorium. Each act or scene would play in a different location throughout the majestic venue making use of the stunning architecture as the "sets" for the performance. The audience would travel throughout the building for the different scenes with brief intermissions to refresh drinks and journey to the next immersive location. The production design and concept could be "site-specific" in which locations on-site at Stambaugh would match locations called for in the plot of an opera, or lean into the "alternative-venue" style of production to devise a concept that would leverage interesting architecture to add dynamic physical dimension to the storytelling.

Starting in May, 2020, the OWR team and the Stambaugh Auditorium staff collaborated to adapt this prototype idea into a reimaged production of *La Traviata* that would be produced on-site at Stambaugh Auditorium in a way that would be safe for the artists and deliverable to you, our audience during the pandemic in an engaging way.

The story of *La Traviata* unfolds in several specific locations: a ballroom, a garden, an elegant location for a party, and a mostly vacant room in Violetta's home where she is literally on her deathbed. Stambaugh Auditorium has all of these assets in abundance. Those discovering Stambaugh Auditorium for the first time through this production

will be taken by the immense grandeur and beauty of the historic venue, and those already familiar will experience it's majesty like never before as the action unfolds throughout the glorious architecture. As a stage director, it was a pleasure to lean into the tremendous architectural resources. For instance, the opportunity to direct a scene set in a ballroom in a *literal* ballroom was a real treat. Throughout the location research, staging, and filming process, Stambaugh did not disappoint in offering a veritable feast for the eyes at every turn in the midst of which the drama unfolds in an authentic and powerful way.

Virtual planning sessions, production meetings, and site visits began in May, 2020 with several in-person site visits scheduled throughout the summer and fall as we planned the logistics and minute details of the project. OWR Music Director, Susan Davenny-Wyner and I made some initial cuts to the opera. At its core, *La Traviata* is a human-scale drama centered on a selfless sacrifice out of love for another. This drama unfolds between three central characters: Violetta, a courtesan, Alfredo, a young man in love, and his father, Germont, who seeks to protect his family. Although this intimate story is set amidst the grandeur of large Chorus and Dance numbers, the story does not rely on the larger chorus or ensemble scenes to maintain authenticity or continuity, as is true for much of the middle-period Verdi operas. With this in mind, we reduced the music (which typically runs around 135 minutes) into a distilled 90-minute version that honors the drama while intensifying the action and dramatic pace. Due to safety precautions, Maestra Davenny-Wyner was not able to join us in person to conduct this production. We were fortunate to engage Maestro Dean Buck to lead this unique venture on the ground. Maestri Davenny-Wyner and Buck collaborated to refine the musical cuts and the details of the reduced musical forces that could be assembled considering social distance and safety protocols.

The process of musical rehearsal and recording ran with Swiss-watch-like precision adhering to a strict protocol of rehearsal time, break time for safety air exchange and ventilation, and recording time. After a Monday music rehearsal, held outside with singers and piano only for safety, there were only 4 days to rehearse and record the entire project. For the audio recording, the instrumentalists were spaced out on the cavernous Stambaugh stage, while the singers, masked for safety, were spread out into the Auditorium itself to maintain safety. Each scene had only a few minutes to rehearse before then having barely more time than the length of the scene itself to record. Considering these constraints and the strangeness of the process, Maestri, the Stambaugh

staff, the instrumentalists, the singers, and our stalwart Stage Manager, Robert Pierce, cannot be congratulated enough on the success of their efforts. It is truly amazing and inspiring that this group of artists was able to create a recording of beauty and nuance in the midst of such compromise necessitated by the compressed and stressful process. What's more, this amazing team worked overtime to choose final tracks and create raw audio backing tracks in a quick 48 turn around period so that these tracks could be used for the video recording phase of the project that began two days after the audio recording process had ended.

The video recording process was similarly structured into a rigorous schedule. Two days were dedicated to staging the entire opera. We methodically worked through each scene moving from location to location as carefully planned and storyboarded in the months and weeks before. We began filming on Monday, one week to the day from the first music rehearsal. We adjusted for weather, held for the perfect lighting, and captured each scene from various angles. We made happy discoveries along the way such as opportunities to feature unique camera angles, especially exploring the possibility of reflections in mirrors, windows, and water, as the character of Violetta confronts her steadily declining physical state. We manipulated perspective to create the illusions of looking in through windows from the outside, and to connect visually separate rooms and corridors with tactics blending the contemporary high tech with old-fashioned magical-illusion-based perspective and ingenuity.

A major challenge regarding this project is that in order to maintain safety, all singing, regardless of the physical distance, must be done with the singer(s) masked. We purchased masks specially designed for singing that were used for the audio recording process. As you can imagine, singing and recording while masked created additional challenges for our team, and this is again a testament to their undaunted efforts. We switched to more aesthetically pleasing masks for the filming process, but how would we be able to create the intimate moments between Violetta and Alfredo while maintaining the health and safety of all involved? This challenge was solved by engaging the dynamic duo of Karen Barraza, soprano and Mackenzie Whitney, tenor as Violetta and Alfredo respectively.

I had the pleasure of working with Mackenzie first a number of years ago in Italy, then more recently in 2018 at Pensacola Opera, and in 2019 at Cleveland Opera Theater. I had met his wife, Karen, and al-



though I had not yet had the pleasure of collaborating with her in a production, I knew of her tremendous talent and beautiful voice. I reached out to the couple in early May '20 with this idea. Happily, this husband and wife team accepted, and their participation made it possible to film the two characters together, interacting without social distance and without masks, which is essential to telling this story as devised. We carefully filmed the pair with our crew safely masked and distanced throughout the process. We also managed to sneak their dog, Frida into one of the shots! I'd like to share an "insider detail" of which I was not fully aware until the last day of filming: This was Ms. Barraza's first time singing the role of Violetta. She prepared in isolation, and recorded the final takes used in the film just days into the rehearsal process. This is extraordinary! That we have the opportunity to experience her very first performance of Violetta in this unique way and in these unprecedented times, along with the tremendous work of all of the singing actors involved is a real treat.

When it came time to film Barraza and Whitney in scenes with other actors, we solved the challenges with physical distance, outside air, and masks. At all times during the filming, the singers were lip syncing to the backing tracks so that we reduced the risk of aerosol production created through the act of opera singing. During the garden scenes, we utilized the generous space of the outdoor courtyard to enable us to film Brian Johnson, baritone (Germont) and Sierra McCorvey, soprano (Annina) in the vicinity of Violetta (Barraza) and Alfredo (Whitney) while still maintaining the safety of physical distance and fresh air for these scenes filmed without a mask.

The nature of the final scene, in which Violetta is on her deathbed, lent itself to the other characters being masked when in her presence. For additional safety, we filmed this scene in two locations: the Stambaugh Board Room, and the Stambaugh Stage itself. When filming in the smaller Board Room we filmed takes with Germont (Johnson) alone, then filmed a brief interaction with Violetta (Barraza) and Annina (McCorvey) in small bursts of time enabling us to limit the total contact time and allowing for air exchange and room ventilation between takes. We had more freedom to film Violetta and Alfredo within this location while still maintaining safety protocols for the crew. For filming the moments of longer duration and for any moments in this scene with more than two people, we switched perspectives and filmed on the Stambaugh Stage, which allowed generous physical distance and greater air volume so that we could film all five characters at once, including Jason Budd, bass-baritone as Dr. Grenvil, whose character appears only

in this scene in our adaptation.

The entire process was a journey of exploration, creativity, and discovery. The work of the team was tremendous, impressive, and inspiring throughout. In a time where most interactions are virtual, it was a wonderful gift to collaborate (mostly) in-person. Despite the physical distance, the strangeness of the process, and the artistic compromises made along the way to ensure safety, I am immensely proud of everyone's work. Throughout, I was inspired by the energy, passion, and spirit that David Vosberg's brought to every OWR production he led, and by the dedication and stewardship of the Board of Directors to see this project through. The project evolved into an aesthetic that is part film, part reality TV, and part music video. I hope that we have done justice to what Maestri Verdi and Piave had in mind when they created *La Traviata*, their operatic adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias*. Verdi and Piave aspired to set the story of the opera in contemporary times. We have remained authentic to that purpose in every way imaginable from the contemporary clothing and props, to the very process of recording and editing, to the incorporation of COVID-19 safety protocols. I hope that the experience is one of timeless beauty, truth, and love woven into a story that only opera can tell. In the spirit of the "Brindisi" that opens our production and occupies the status as one of the most recognizable moments in opera,

I raise a toast to you all:

May you each enjoy A Taste of Traviata, may it be, truly, a "taste" of the ingenuity and creativity that is to come, and until such time that we may again gather together to celebrate opera in-person, be well, and be safe! On behalf of us all, thank you for your support, and thank you for the opportunity to serve you through the inspiring beauty of opera.



Scott Skiba, Production Director, Opera Western Reserve

# FROM THE GUEST CONDUCTOR

## DEAN BUCK

*OWR is delighted to welcome Dean Buck as guest conductor for this special Taste of Traviata project*

Typically when I sit down to write such thoughts on a piece of music, my goal is to give the audience a reference point from which to enter the opera. It could be something as simple as a dramatic idea, a musical motif, or a pivotal moment for which to look out. There is always someone seeing *La Traviata* or *La Bohème* for the first time, and to discover a piece like this is such a remarkable feeling. My goal is not to give them a study guide, or to make a concert feel like an assignment. Rather, I hope to encourage them to let their guard down, and welcome them into this strange and wonderful world which we all love so fervently.

On Monday, October 5th, we walked into the courtyard at Stambaugh Auditorium for our one rehearsal. We had set up as minimal a schedule as possible; putting the health and safety of everyone first. One rehearsal outside, four days to record, breaking to clear the room every 30 minutes, safe distances between instrumentalists and singers, and masks for everyone. The adjustment of course was difficult. It was challenging for anyone to hear each other and many times themselves, and we often felt that as soon as we were warmed up and in the groove, we had to break for a half hour. Working within this framework did not eclipse the joy we felt in being able to perform again. After six months of not being able to practice our art, our craft, our livelihood, we could do it again. The restrictions, although at times frustrating, felt good, because we knew we were looking out for one another.

Through the past seven months, we have seen how the world needs art. Between a deadly pandemic, racial injustices, rising poverty numbers, and countless other issues, people are losing hope and we need to be there to help restore it. The arts have always been informed by their times. We musicians look to the likes of Mozart, Sibelius, Nina Simone, Miles Davis, Leonard Bernstein, and Joan Baez who were unafraid not only to address the difficult issues, but to provide hope where it was desperately needed. In preparing for this production, I found myself

thinking of Violetta's line toward the end of Act III, "Gran Dio! Morir si giovine, io che penato ho tanto." (Dear God, to die so young, I who have suffered so much.) How many millions of people, who a year ago were living their lives as normal, have had that exact thought throughout the past seven months? And how many continue to feel that every day?

This is my frame of reference for this production. We are witnessing suffering and tragedy on a global scale the likes of which most of us have never seen. As artists, our industry has been almost entirely shut down, but we are not going anywhere. We will always be here, performing for you, singing with you, and doing our best to offer hope to those who need it. Our industry will need considerable help in the coming years, as it will take time for things to go back to normal, but we will not give up. Whether virtually, on the stage, at the movie theater, or anywhere else, we will not cease in looking forward, because looking in any other direction only delays us.

*La Traviata* has been called the first verismo opera, as it deals with the emotions of everyday people instead of the conquests and complications of royals and aristocrats. We are living in a very verismo time. Every person either has experienced or knows someone who has experienced an opera's worth of suffering in the past several months. So as we watch and listen to *OWR Presents: A Taste of Traviata*, let us experience the journey together. The beauty, the pain, the love, the suffering, the fellowship, the perseverance. Let us experience all of it together, as that is the only way we can go forward.



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## YOUNG ARTISTS

Opera Western Reserve's Young Artists, under the direction of Robert Pierce and Jon Simsic, began 2020 on a high note. In the early spring, the YA troupe toured their version of *The Three Little Pigs* to the Youngstown area, giving over 1500 young people a taste of opera in their very own schools. Then, our current pandemic forced us to halt all performances and take some time to regroup. As we move into a new season, we are pivoting toward virtual programming and hope to have on-demand digital performances for young audiences available in the near future. Contact OWR on Facebook to keep informed of our upcoming activities!

### 2020-2021 YOUNG ARTISTS

Sopranos

Erika Walker Duderstadt

Rebecca Enlow

Sierra McCorvey

Tenors

Emilio Santiago

Bass/ Baritone

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## OWR MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR



Susan Davenny Wyner has received international acclaim for her conducting. The Library of Congress featured her in its 2003 "Women Who Dare" Engagement Calendar, and the MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour and WGBH Television have presented documentary features on her life and work. Her conducting credits include the Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Odense Danish Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Lyric Opera, Cleveland Orchestra members in benefit concerts, concerts at the Hollywood Bowl, and recordings for Bridge and Albany Records. Yo-Yo Ma, André Previn, Lynn Harrell, Claude Frank, Peter Serkin, and Emanuel Ax, have been among her guest soloists.

She has conducted repertoire from the 15th through 21st century—premiering over 40 new works, working with period instruments, and conducting 30 operas. The New York Times called her conducting, "rapturous, richly textured and emotionally compelling." Opera News Online praised the "terrific lyrical moments under Susan Davenny Wyner's baton," The Los Angeles Times praised her "sensitive and thoughtful leadership," The Boston Globe wrote, "Under her baton the music breathes, lilts, romps, sighs, and sparkles," and four times selected her conducted performances among the "Best Musical Events of the Year." She has been Music Director and Conductor of Boston Midsummer Opera since 2007, the Warren Philharmonic Orchestra since 1999, and Opera Western Reserve since its creation in 2004. From 1999-2005, she was Music Director and Conductor of The New England String Ensemble in Boston, which she brought to national prominence.

Initially trained as a violinist and violist, Susan Davenny Wyner went on to an international career as a Lyric Soprano—singing with the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, London Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony, and other major orchestras. She often premiered works written especially for her and recorded for Columbia Masterworks, Angel/EMI, Naxos, New World, CRI and Musical Heritage,

winning both a Grammy and a Grand Prix du Disc. After a hit and run accident destroyed her singing voice, she began her career as a conductor.

She has held conducting positions at New England Conservatory, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Wellesley College, Brandeis and Cornell Universities, and has conducted numerous lecture demonstrations and master-classes for the National Conductors Guild, the Shanghai Conservatory, and Harvard and Yale Universities among many others.

Susan Davenny Wyner graduated summa cum laude from Cornell University with degrees in both comparative literature and music, then continued her studies at Yale and Columbia Universities, at the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals, and at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute. In 1998, The American Orchestra League named her a Catherine Filene Shouse Conductor – a first-time award given by a national panel of conductors and orchestral managers to a conductor poised for a major career.

## OWR PRODUCTION DIRECTOR



Scott Skiba, an award-winning Stage Director, has led more than 70 new productions, earning recognition for his imaginative stage direction and dynamic physical approach to storytelling that is “masterful, ingenious, first-rate...vivid and emotionally charged.” Scott serves as Executive Artistic Director of Cleveland Opera Theater, where his recent production of *La Traviata* was named, “The best professional opera production Cleveland has seen in years.” Additional credits for the company include new productions of

*Madama Butterfly*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *La Bohème*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Tosca*, *La Rondine*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Il Tabarro*, *Pagliacci*, and *The Threepenny Opera*.

Scott has made multiple company debuts in recent years including *Roméo et Juliette* for Pensacola Opera, *Macbeth* for Opera Tampa, *The Ballad of Baby Doe* with Toledo Opera, *Faust* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

with Natchez Festival of Music, *The Student Prince* at Opera Grand Rapids, *Carmen* for Opera Western Reserve, *Suor Angelica* and *La Bohème* for Mobile Opera, and *Don Giovanni* and *La Tragédie de Carmen* for the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival. Upcoming engagements include *Don Giovanni* for Indianapolis Opera; *The Threepenny Opera* for the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival; the Cleveland premiere of Evan Mack and Joshua McGuire's *The Ghosts of Gatsby* for The National Opera Association and Baldwin Wallace Conservatory; the world-premiere production of Griffin Candey and Caridad Svich's *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*; and a new adaptation of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

A proponent of new opera, Scott launched {NOW} Fest, Cleveland Opera Theater's annual event to create, develop, and produce new opera works, and he serves on the Chamber Opera Composition Committee for the National Opera Association. A pioneer in exploring contemporary approaches to producing opera, Scott's work includes directing and producing interdisciplinary collaborations in alternative venues to promote civic engagement and provide gateways to develop new audiences. Such projects include the professional premiere of Griffin Candey's *Sweets By Kate*, which was produced by Marble City Opera and performed in Sugar Mama's Bakery in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee. Scott was the visionary behind The New Opera Project, which developed and premiered six Micro-Operas in collaboration with Interlochen Arts Academy, Parallel 45 Theatre Company, and Inside Out Gallery in Traverse City, Michigan. Scott also created the iLyric project - an installation of nine different operas throughout the historic piazze of Arezzo, Italy in collaboration with the ICASTICA Festival and the city of Arezzo, Italy.

An advocate of arts education, Scott serves as Director of Opera Studies for Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, whose spring 2017 production of *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and spring 2019 production of *The Rake's Progress* won first place and second place respectively in the National Opera Association Collegiate Opera Competition. Additional university directing credits include *La Finta Giardiniera* with University of Tennessee Opera Theater; *Carmen* for University of Texas at Rio Grand Valley, *Tobermory*, *Trouble in Tahiti*, and *Roman Fever* for Oberlin Opera Theater, *Serse* and *La finta giardiniera* for Oberlin in Italy, *The Crucible*, and *Falstaff* for Martina Arroyo's Role Preparation Program at the

Indiana University Jacobs School of Music; and *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Dido & Aeneas*, *The Spider and Orpheus in The Underworld* for Interlochen Opera Theater. Scott serves as Assistant Artistic Director for the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival, and Movement & Acting Instructor for Music Across the Pond (MAP). Previous appointments include: Executive Director of the Oberlin in Italy opera training program, Instructor of Voice and Opera Theater, Interlochen Arts Academy; Production Designer, East Carolina University Opera Theater, and Associate Instructor of Voice, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

## GUEST CONDUCTOR



Dean Buck is a Cleveland-based conductor, now serving his fourth season as Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master with Cleveland Opera Theater. His conducting has been described as “fearless and firm,” (ClevelandClassical.com,) and “maintaining a constant, flexible rapport with singers.” (New York Observer.) With Cleveland Opera Theater, he has worked as assistant conductor/chorus master on their productions of *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and *The Threepenny Opera*. He has

additionally served as Music Director for Cleveland Opera Theater’s {NOW} Fest for the past two seasons, supervising premiers, workshops and performances of works by such composers as Evan Mack, Dawn Sonntag and Griffin Candey. Previously, Dean served as principal conductor of the New York City-based company LoftOpera. With LoftOpera, he conducted eight productions including their critically-acclaimed stagings of Puccini’s *La Bohème*, Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*, and Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*. Dean has recently served as guest conductor for Heights Chamber Orchestra and Suburban Symphony Orchestra, and assistant conductor for the Mediterranean Opera Studio and Festival in Caltagirone, Sicily. He holds a masters degree in orchestral conducting from the Cleveland Institute of Music.

## PRODUCTION MANAGER



Robert Pierce is entering his eleventh year of working with Opera Western Reserve and his sixth year as the company's Educational Outreach Director. In addition to directing and performing in annual "mini-mainstage" and children's operas with the Young Artist Program, he has also sung roles in past mainstage productions of *La Bohème*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Tosca*, and *La Traviata* and served as stage management for *Porgy and Bess*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Carmen*, *The Elixir of Love*, and *Don Giovanni*. A native of the

Cleveland area, Robert is an experienced performer of opera and musical theater on other local stages, such as Cleveland Opera Theater, Valley Lyric Opera, Great Lakes Light Opera, Nightingale Opera Theater, Lakeland Civic Theater, Blank Canvas Theater, and Beck Center for the Arts. Opera credits include: *Tosca*, *Street Scene*, *La Vida Breve*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*. Musical theater credits include *The Little Mermaid*, *Floyd Collins*, *Billy Elliot*, *Violet*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. He was also the production stage manager for recent productions of *The Barber of Seville*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *The Marriage of Figaro* at Cleveland Opera Theater, as well as the Midwest premiere of Tom Cipullo's *Glory Denied* at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory. Robert holds degrees in vocal performance from Otterbein University and Cleveland Institute of Music.

## VIOLETTA VALERY KAREN BARRAZA



Mexican Soprano Karen Barraza made her debut with New Orleans Opera as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in 2019. This season she is engaged to debut Carnegie Hall with a performance of Poulenc's *Gloria* and to debut the role of Mimi at Charlottesville Opera.

The soprano is a 2017 graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts. While at AVA, Karen performed

the role of Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, directed by Tito Capobianco. Additional roles at AVA include Lauretta in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Musetta in Puccini's *La Bohème*, Elvira in Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri*, and Poussette in Massenet's *Manon*. Prior to the Academy of Vocal Arts Ms. Barraza attended Taller de Ópera de Sinaloa, where she performed the role of Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Other roles performed include Juliette in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, and Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* with Teatro Pablo de Villavicencio.

In vocal competitions, Ms. Barraza has earned many accolades. In 2017 she received the Bellas Artes Award Concurso Nacional de Canto Morelli, which also includes a future debut at Teatro de Bellas Artes. In 2016, the soprano received an Encouragement Award in the Giulio Gari Foundation, along with First Prize in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Vocal Competition. 2015 awards included an Encouragement Award in the Giulio Gari Foundation International Vocal Competition, in addition to the Artistic Society of Sinaloa Fellowship. In 2014, the soprano garnered the Pepita Serrano Prize in the Carlo Morelli Singing Competition, and the Concurso Internacional de Canto Sinaloa Audience Award in the Sinaloa International Singing Competition. Earlier years saw Ms. Barraza awarded the Amigos de La Opera Scholarship, the Semi-Finalist Award in the Carlo Morelli Singing Competition, and the Young Artist Prize in the Sinaloa International Singing Competition.

## DOTTORE GRENIVIL JASON BUDD



Hailed as a "buffo with a legitimate voice," Jason Budd has garnered a reputation for being a consummate singer-actor. Having received accolades for his performances across the United States and Europe, Jason recently made his South American debut with the title role in Verdi's *Falstaff* in São Paulo, Brazil. He has also had much success in vocal competitions over the years including wins at the Opera Columbus Competition, the Heinz Rehfuss competition with Orlando Opera, the Mary Jacobs Smith Singer of the Year competition with Shreveport Opera, and the Meistersinger Competition in Graz, Austria,



which was broadcast on Austrian television. Recent engagements include performances with the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC, Boston Midsummer Opera, Toledo Opera, Fremont Opera in California, Opera Project Columbus, and Cleveland Opera Theater.

## GIORGIO GERMONT BRIAN KEITH JOHNSON



Brian Keith Johnson has performed many roles in opera from Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* to Ford in *Falstaff*. As a member of Actors' Equity Association, he has also performed a variety of musical theatre roles ranging from Jim in *Big River* to Father/God in *Children of Eden*. His concert repertoire includes most of the major baritone works such as Carmina Burana, Elijah, The Verdi Requiem, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, The Brahms Requiem and The Faure' Requiem. He has performed operatic and musical theatre roles

across the United States including performances with the Cleveland Orchestra, Akron Symphony Orchestra, Canton Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Opera, Lyric Opera Cleveland, Blossom Festival Orchestra, Opera Theatre of Pittsburgh, Opera Western Reserve, Carolina Master Chorale, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra and Porthouse Theatre. Mr. Johnson received his BM Degree from The University of Akron and has also studied abroad at The New Opera Academy of Rome in Rome, Italy and The American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. Brian is currently in his 31st year of teaching music in The Akron Public School System.



## ANNINA SIERRA MCCORVEY

Sierra McCorvey (soprano) has been featured with the Youngstown Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Packard Band, and Mahoning Valley Chorale. McCorvey has sung several roles including: Iris in Marc Blitzstein's *The Harpies* (Kent State University), Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (Youngstown State University),

The Fairy in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, (Youngstown State University), Lily/ Strawberry Woman in *Gershwin's Porgy and Bess* (Cleveland Opera and Opera Western Reserve), 2nd Witch in Verdi's *Macbeth* (Opera Western Reserve) and Suor Angelica in *Suor Angelica* (Youngstown State University).

Sierra holds a bachelor's degree from Youngstown State University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in voice performance with Dr. Misook Yun. When not performing, Sierra enjoys teaching in the community and singing with her church choir at Holy Family Parish in Poland, Ohio.

## ALFREDO GERMONT MACKENZIE WHITNEY



Mackenzie Whitney is originally from Janesville, Iowa and is gaining recognition nationwide for his expressive lyric tenor voice. He studies with Bill Schuman at the Academy of Vocal Arts where he received his Artist Diploma. He most recently performed with Madison Opera in the role of Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. Additionally, he performed Rodolfo with both the Lakes Area Music Festival and the Academy of Vocal Arts, for which Philly.com reported "Mackenzie Whitney, who sang Rodolfo, has an appealing lyric tenor voice,

his upper tones free and of lovely quality. This role suits him well both vocally and dramatically."

His 2018-2019 season saw the revival of his Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance* with Intermountain Opera, Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette* with Pensacola Opera, joining the Great Falls Symphony in concert, and the Rapides Symphony Orchestra as Alfredo in *La Traviata*. His 2019-2020 season includes *La Bohème* with Cleveland Opera Theater, *La Traviata* with Madison Opera, *Roméo et Juliette* with Knoxville Opera, and a holiday concert with the Madison Symphony.

In the 2017-2018 season, Mackenzie made debuts with San Diego Opera as Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance*, Annapolis Opera as Alfredo in *La Traviata*, returned to Madison Opera as Arcadio in *Florencia en el Amazonas*, and joined the Glyndebourne Festival as the cover of

Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*. His 2016-2017 season saw debuts with Hawaii Opera Theatre as Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, Opera on the James as the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Utah Opera as Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Opera Maine as Alfredo in *La Traviata*. Engagements for the 2015-2016 season included Avito in *L'amore dei tre re* and the title role in *Werther* at AVA, along with a company debut with Mill City Summer Opera as Anthony in *Sweeney Todd* and a return to Lakes Area Music Festival to debut the role of Lysander in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Concert appearances included debuts as the Tenor Soloist in Haydn's *Creation* and the Tenor Soloist in Dubois' *Seven Last words of Christ*. He made his company debut with Des Moines Metro Opera in 2015 as Giovanni in *Rappaccini's Daughter*. For this performance, Opera Today reported "young Mackenzie Whitney made a strong case for the infatuated lad with his pliable, impassioned tenor. Throughout the evening, Mr. Whitney revealed fine variety in his declamations, be they defiant, entranced, romantic or delusional, and his handsome figure lent credence to the story. His mezzo forte caressed some key phrases with creamy tone".

At AVA, Mr. Whitney performed Rodolfo (*La Bohème*), the title role in *Faust*, Des Grieux (*Manon*) and Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*). Other roles performed include Tamino (*The Magic Flute*) Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) and Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*). In addition, he was the tenor soloist in Handel's *Messiah*, the Mozart *Requiem*, and the Brahms *Liebeslieder Waltzes*. He was awarded the encouragement award in the Philadelphia District of the 2013 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and was granted an Encouragement Award from the Gerda Lissner Competition. He has participated in young artists programs at Opera New Jersey, Central City Opera, and Oberlin in Italy and holds an Artist Diploma from the Academy of Vocal Arts and a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Northern Iowa.

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