

OPERA RETURNS!

JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY TO PERFORM *DON GIOVANNI*

Jacksonville, FL (January 4, 2019) --- As a part of the first-ever *Midwinter Mozart Festival*, the Jacksonville Symphony will perform Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's legendary opera, *Don Giovanni*. A part of the *Florida Blue Masterworks Series*, there will be two productions of the opera that close the Festival on January 25 & 26.

Considered by some to be the greatest opera ever written, the Symphony will bring a fully-staged version of Mozart's dark tale to the concert hall. A world-class cast, including singers directly from the Metropolitan Opera stage, custom projection art and a contemporary take on costumes will bring this timeless tale to life for Jacksonville. For the first time ever, the full length opera will be fully-staged in Jacoby Symphony Hall. Usually tucked away in a pit for operas, the orchestra will be on stage surrounded by custom platforms and three 30-foot projection screens, providing 2,700 square feet of space for high definition graphics, making this performance visually and audibly stunning.

Jacksonville Symphony Music Director Courtney Lewis wrote this of *Don Giovanni*:

"Mozart described his masterpiece *Don Giovanni* as an *opera buffa*: a comedy. Yet the work bristles with the political issues of the day, see-sawing between farce and deep seriousness. The Don Juan myth first appeared in European literature in 1630, when Tirso de Molina published *The Trickster of Seville*, a tale of an irresistibly handsome aristocrat who spends his days seducing and ruining women. Untethered by conventional morality, he escapes retribution for years until finally he is dragged into hell by the ghost of a victim. Over the coming centuries the themes of sexual power, class and privilege, male chauvinism, and, ultimately, justice appealed to artists as diverse as Molière, Byron and Richard Strauss.

As in all his operas, Mozart creates characters with whom we fall in love. His music imbues each with emotions we understand. We empathize with the conflicted Donna Elvira, who seeks Don Giovanni's destruction while also longing for him to return to her bed. We bubble with fury alongside the peasant Masetto when the Don steals his bride on his wedding day. We laugh as Leporello, Don Giovanni's servant, patters off a list of all the women (large and small, old and young) his master has slept with. But most intriguingly of all, we revel in Don Giovanni's hedonism – his thrill of the chase – in a way that helps us understand the motivations of a narcissistic autocrat. He fascinates and appalls us in equal measure."

Cast:

Conductor	Courtney Lewis
Stage Director	Krzysztof Biernacki

Donna Anna	Emily Birsan
Donna Elvira	Sofia Selowsky
Zerlina	Jessica Pray
Don Ottavio	Jonathan Johnson
Don Giovanni	Joseph Lattanzi
Leporello	David Kravitz
Masetto	Rhys Lloyd Talbot
The Commendatore	Soloman Howard

Projection Designer	Yuki Izumihara
Stage Designer	Johnny Pettegrew
Costume Designer	Hallie Dufresne
Lighting Designer	Shamus McConney
Chorusmaster	Donald McCullough

Baritone **Krzysztof Biernacki** maintains a busy schedule as a performer, university professor and opera stage director. Born and raised in Poland, his professional credits include opera, oratorio, concert and art song recital performances in North America and Europe.

Since 2005 Biernacki holds the position of Professor of Voice and Director of Opera at University of North Florida. As a stage director he has directed over 30 opera productions at UNF, University of British Columbia and European Music Academy in the Czech Republic where he directs full opera productions in professional opera theaters every summer. He is a graduate of University of Manitoba (B. Mus.), University of Western Ontario (M. Mus.) and University of British Columbia (D.M.A). He is the recipient of numerous grants, teaching awards and serves as the Artistic Director of Cummer Family Foundation Chamber Music Series at UNF School of Music.

American soprano **Emily Birsan** is a critically acclaimed recitalist and well known for her prominent interpretations of concert and operatic repertoire. The 2017-2018 season included a concert performance with the Liverpool Symphony, Violetta in *La traviata* with Indianapolis Opera, Handel's *Messiah* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Mahler's Fourth Symphony with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and her debut with Welsh National Opera as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*.

Other recent highlights include her return to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as the Italian Singer in *Capriccio*, Leila in *The Pearl Fishers* with Florida Grand Opera, Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* with the Edinburgh International Festival, Elgar with the Bergen Philharmonic in Norway, Verdi and Puccini with the Knoxville Symphony and her Carnegie Hall debut singing Mozart's *Mass in C minor*.

Maryland native **Sofia Selowsky** made a noteworthy role debut as Rosina in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Houston Grand Opera in the 2017-2018 season. Of her performance, *Opera News* said, "The brightest light of the performance was mezzo-soprano Sofia Selowsky as Rosina, whose singing featured a honey-rich sound with a silvery top end, even projection throughout her range, and amazingly clear passagework." In the 2018-2019 season, Selowsky continues to take on leading roles in her repertoire, including the title role in Handel's *Agrippina* alongside a cast of rising American stars for Ars Lyrica Houston and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* with the Jacksonville Symphony. Additional performances in the season include Handel's *Messiah* for her debut with Kansas City Symphony and Mozart's *Requiem* with Charlotte Symphony.

Jessica Pray, soprano, has been noted for her "indomitable spirit" and "sweet, clear quality" by *The Day*, and for her "exquisite control and warm vocal timbre" by *The Florida Times-Union*. Her recent opera credits include the roles of Polly in *The Threepenny Opera* with Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, Despina in *Così fan tutte* and Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both with Yale Opera.

Concert and Oratorio soloist credits include Cunegonde in *Candide* with the Eastern Connecticut Symphony, Faure's *Requiem* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Bach's *Mass in B minor* with Orchestra

Iowa, *Messiah* with the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with the Yale Symphony Orchestra and Gabriel in *The Creation* with the Yale Philharmonia Orchestra. Pray also recently performed as a guest artist at Carnegie Hall and The Greene Space in NYC.

Jessica earned a Master of Music in Voice from the Yale School of Music, where she studied with Doris Yarick-Cross, and was the 2017 winner of the David L. Kasdon Memorial Prize. She also earned a Bachelor of Music from the University of Iowa, where she studied with Dr. Rachel Joselson.

This season, American tenor **Jonathan Johnson** makes his debut in the title role of *Candide* with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Utah Symphony Orchestra and Des Moines Metro Opera and returns to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Lurcanio in *Ariodante*. He also returns to Jacksonville Symphony as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and as the tenor soloist in *Messiah*, which he also performs with Kansas City Symphony Orchestra.

A graduate of the Patrick G. & Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, the Lyric Opera of Chicago's professional artist-development program, he appeared in the house's main productions of *Les Troyens*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *The Merry Widow*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Capriccio*, *The Magic Victrola* and Mieczysław Weinberg's Holocaust opera *The Passenger*. Other recent engagements have included his debut at Canadian Opera Company in a production of *Anna Bolena*, Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance* and Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. He also enjoys a touring relationship with Chris Botti, which has taken him to many cities in the US and abroad.

Hailing from Macon, Georgia, Johnson holds a master's degree and Professional Artist Certificate from the A.J. Fletcher Institute of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

A 2017 recipient of a top prize from the Sullivan Foundation, **Joseph Lattanzi** established himself as a singer to watch with his portrayal of Hawkins Fuller in the world premiere of Greg Spears' *Fellow Travelers* with Cincinnati Opera, followed by further performances for his debut with Lyric Opera of Chicago. Praise for his performances included *The New York Times* saying "Joseph Lattanzi was splendid as Hawk, his buttery baritone luxuriant and robust." *Opera News* described him as a "confident, handsome presence, and a resonant baritone suggesting wells of feeling that the character might prefer to leave untapped." In the 2018-2019 season, Lattanzi joins the roster of The Metropolitan Opera for the first time for their production of Nico Muhly's *Marnie* and returns to Arizona Opera for the central role of Lt. Auderbert in Kevin Puts' *Silent Night*.

He makes his Jacksonville Symphony debut in the title role of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, sings a concert celebrating the music of Bernstein with Atlanta Symphony and returns to Cincinnati Opera as Count Almaviva in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. Recent performances include his New York debut as Hawkins Fuller at PROTOTYPE Festival; his debut with Virginia Opera as Sonora in *La fanciulla del West* followed by performances of Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Hailed as "a charismatic baritone" by the *New York Times*, "magnificently stentorian and resonant" by *Opera News* and "a first-rate actor" by *Opera* (UK), **David Kravitz**'s recent opera engagements include lead roles at Washington National Opera, Chautauqua Opera, Skylight Music Theatre, Opera Santa Barbara, Grand Harmonie, Opera Saratoga, Charlottesville Opera and the Boston Lyric Opera.

Recently, Kravitz created the lead role of De Sade in Nicola Moro's *Love Hurts* at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, Italy, and at Symphony Space in New York. His many concert appearances include the Boston

Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony, the Virginia Symphony, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and Boston Baroque. In the 2018-2019 season, Kravitz returns to Odyssey Opera for Gounod's *La Reine de Saba*, he performs Rachmaninoff's *The Bells* with the New England Philharmonic, he presents the Defiant Requiem Foundation's *Hours of Freedom* in New York City's Zankel Hall and he reprises Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles* with mezzo-soprano Sandra Piques Eddy.

An exceptionally versatile artist, Kravitz's repertoire ranges from Bach to Verdi to Sondheim to cutting-edge contemporary composers such as Matthew Aucoin, Mohammed Fairouz, Paul Moravec, and Elena Ruehr. Kravitz has recorded for the Naxos, BIS, Sono Luminus, Koch International Classics, BMOP/sound, Albany Records, and New World labels. His distinguished legal career has included clerkships with the Hon. Sandra Day O'Connor and the Hon. Stephen Breyer.

Bass **Rhys Lloyd Talbot** hails from Cedar Falls, Iowa. He received his bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Northern Iowa where he studied voice with Dr. John Hines, and his master's degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Missouri-Kansas City where he studied with Vinson Cole. Talbot's recent roles include Grandpa Moss in Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* with Des Moines Metro Opera, Colline at the Glimmerglass Festival, Masetto in Lyric Opera of Kansas City's production of *Don Giovanni* and Garibaldo in University of Missouri-Kansas City's *Rodelinda*.

A former apprentice artist with Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Talbot is an alumni of young artist programs across the country including the Merola Opera Program in San Francisco, The Glimmerglass Festival, Des Moines Metro Opera, Houston Grand Opera Young Artist Vocal Academy and the studio program at Wolf Trap. Placing in the top three of the Sun Valley International Opera Competition, Shreveport Opera Mary Jacobs Smith Singer of the Year Competition and the Opera Birmingham Vocal Competition, Talbot has also competed as a regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, The Sara Tucker Study Grants as well as the Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition.

A recent graduate of Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, a program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, **Soloman Howard** garners high praise from the press for his vivid performances on the great opera and concert stages of the world. Howard's voice is described as "sonorous" by *The New York Times*, "superhuman" by *The Denver Post* and "a triumph" by *The Guardian*.

Soloman Howard's 2018-2019 season features returns to the Metropolitan Opera as The King in *Aida* conducted by Nicola Luisotti; to Los Angeles Opera as the Frate in *Don Carlo*; Santa Fe Opera as Colline in *La bohème*; and to Washington National Opera to reprise the title role he created for the company in *The Lion, The Unicorn, and Me* by Jeanine Tesori and J.D. McClatchy. He makes a Canadian operatic debut on the stage of Opéra de Montréal as Fafner in *Das Rheingold* under the baton of Michael Christie. Howard brings the roles of Somnus and Cadmus into his repertoire in an international tour of *Semele* with Harry Bicket leading The English Concert and makes a debut with the Handel & Haydn Society in performances of Mozart's Requiem conducted by Music Director Harry Christophers.

Last season international opera house debuts were celebrated on three continents: at San Francisco Opera in *Turandot*, at the Teatro Real in *Aida* and at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago, Chile in *Don Giovanni*. Other notable opera performances included *Aida* at the Washington National Opera,

Rigoletto at North Carolina Opera and *Madama Butterfly* at Santa Fe Opera. In concert, Soloman Howard gave his first performances of Hunding in *Die Walküre* at the Miami Music Festival. He also sang Beethoven's Ninth Symphony both with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic on a European tour and with Christian Arming and the Vienna Chamber Orchestra on tour in Asia.

The Anti-Defamation League presented Soloman Howard with their "Making a Difference Award" in the summer of 2016 for raising awareness of voting rights through his performances of *Appomattox* at the Kennedy Center and for bringing opera into the larger community. Soloman Howard is a proud graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and of Morgan State University.

###

The Jacksonville Symphony is North Florida's leading music nonprofit offering live performances at Jacoby Symphony Hall in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and other venues throughout the area. In addition, the Symphony provides music instruction for youth and operates the Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestras. For more information about the Symphony, visit JaxSymphony.org, like them at facebook.com/JaxSymphony; follow them on @jaxsymphony, on Instagram at JaxSymphony and on YouTube at JacksonvilleSymphony.