



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sarasota Opera Announces Casting for Winter Opera Festival

Sarasota, FL— Victor DeRenzi, artistic director and principal conductor, and Richard Russell, general director, have announced casting for Sarasota Opera’s 2025 Winter Opera Festival. The season opens Saturday, Feb. 15, and will feature Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, Gioachino Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Giuseppe Verdi’s *Stiffelio*. The casts of internationally recognized artists include some company favorites, along with singers making their company debuts. Single tickets for the 2025 Winter Opera Festival go on sale Tuesday, Sept. 3.

Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, two verismo operas of love and betrayal and often referred to as *Cav/Pag*, will feature four Sarasota Opera veterans. Lisa Chavez, who last performed the title role in Massenet’s *Thérèse*, and Fidalma in Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto*, will return as Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana*. This is her ninth principal role with the company. She has also sung with Opera Tampa and Knoxville Opera, among others. Tenor Rafael Dávila, celebrating his 21st season with Sarasota Opera, will sing the roles of Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* as well as Canio in *Pagliacci*. Dávila recently completed his sixth season with the Metropolitan Opera where he performed the roles of Ismaele in Verdi’s *Nabucco* and Don José in the company’s new production of *Carmen*. Baritone Jean Carlos Rodríguez will sing the roles of Alfio in *Cavalleria rusticana* and Tonio in *Pagliacci*. He sang Enrico in last season’s production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and will sing in *The Music of Giuseppe Verdi* this November. He also performed Germont in *La traviata* and the title role in *Gianni Schicchi* with Opera Tampa. Soprano Ashley Milanese will sing the role of Nedda in *Pagliacci*. Last season she made her Sarasota Opera debut in the title role in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and joined Opera in the Heights as Mimi in Puccini’s *La bohème*.

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Cav/Pag will be conducted by Sarasota Opera artistic director and principal conductor Victor DeRenzi, directed by Martha Collins, with set design by David P. Gordon. Costumes and lighting for all this season's productions are by resident costume designer Howard Tsvi Kaplan and resident lighting designer Ken Yunker. *Cav/Pag* will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for 10 performances through March 29.

Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, one of the most beloved comedic works in the operatic repertory, will open Saturday, Feb. 22. Mezzo-soprano Lisa Maria Rogali will make her Sarasota debut as Rosina. She has sung Hansel in Opera Birmingham's *Hansel and Gretel* and will sing the title role in *Carmen* with Virginia Opera this fall. Baritone Filippo Fontana will return to Sarasota Opera to reprise the role of Figaro and has sung the role of Lescaut here in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Tenor Minghao Liu will make his Sarasota debut as Count Almaviva, who is determined to win the heart of the beautiful Rosina. Liu has sung Almaviva with Gulfshore Opera and Don Ottavio in Opera Tampa's production of *Don Giovanni*. Bass-baritone Stefano de Peppo will sing the role of Doctor Bartolo. He has a long history with Sarasota Opera and last sang the role of Leporello in the company's 2023 production of *Don Giovanni*. Internationally acclaimed, de Peppo has sung throughout United States, Europe, United Kingdom, and Australia. Bass Young Bok Kim, marking his 21st year with Sarasota Opera, will sing the role of Basilio. In Sarasota, he has sung the title role in Verdi's *Attila*, Sparafucile in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and Raimondo in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, among others. A native of Korea, he has also sung Don Alfonso in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the National Opera of Korea and the Seoul Metropolitan Opera.

The Barber of Seville will be conducted by Marcello Cormio, directed by Marco Nisticò, with set design by Jeffrey W. Dean. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for 10 performances through March 29.

Continuing the story of *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* opens Saturday, March 8. Baritone Jake Stamatis will sing the role of Count Almaviva. Formerly a Sarasota opera studio artist, he has also been a fellow at the Music Academy of the West and an artist in residence with Tri-Cities Opera and Opera Memphis. Soprano Michelle Johnson will return to sing the role of Countess Almaviva. She has sung the title role in the company's 2016 production of Verdi's *Aida*. Johnson has performed the title role in Puccini's *Tosca* with Opera on the James, Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème* with Nashville Opera, and Bess in Gerhwin's *Porgy and Bess* with Des Moines Metro Opera. Soprano Virginia Mims will sing the role of Susanna. She has sung the role of Zemfira in Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* and Cleopatra in Händel's *Giulio Cesare* with IU Opera Theater, and Susanna in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Brevard Music Center. Bass-baritone Mattia Venni will make his Sarasota debut as Figaro. He most recently performed as Suplice in the Parnassus Society's February 2024 production of Donizetti's *La Fille du Regiment*. He has been awarded both the first-place and special prize Giuseppe Taddei Awards at the International Lyric Competition in Genova, Italy. Mezzo-soprano Tessa Fackelmann will make her Sarasota Opera debut as the Cherubino. Ms. Fackelmann was heard at Santa Fe Opera in Gregory Spears and Tracy K. Smith's *The Righteous* and as in Dvořák's *Rusalka*. Bass Brian Kontes will return to Sarasota to sing Bartolo. Previously, he sang the role of Sarastro in Sarasota's 2019 production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. He recently sang the role of Don Basilio in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at Pittsburgh Opera and covered the role of the Bonze in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* at the Metropolitan Opera.

The Marriage of Figaro will be conducted by Louis Lohraseb and directed by Tom Diamond, with set design by J. Michael Wingfield. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for seven performances through March 28.

Last seen in Sarasota in 2005, Verdi's opera about infidelity and forgiveness, *Stiffelio*, opens Saturday, March 15. "Written by Verdi at the same time as *Rigoletto* and *Il trovatore*, *Stiffelio* was only rediscovered in 1968 after more than 110 years of neglect due to religious censorship." Maestro DeRenzi said. "We are presenting it this season for the second time in our company's history. It can be placed alongside Verdi's great operas not only chronologically, but musically in many ways as well as how Verdi presents the lives of the characters."

Tenor Victor Starsky will sing the title role. He will perform in the company's fall concert *The Music of Giuseppe Verdi* and made his Sarasota debut last season as Don José in Bizet's *Carmen*. He has sung the roles of the Duke of Mantua in Verdi's *Rigoletto* with Opera Modesto, Radamès in Verdi's *Aida*, and Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* with Charlottesville Opera. Soprano Aviva Fortunata will be back in Sarasota to sing the role of Lina. She made her Sarasota debut in 2023 as Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani* and sang the title role in Verdi's *Luisa Miller* here in 2024. She has sung Donna Anna in Pacific Opera Victoria's production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the title role in Bellini's *Norma* with Dallas Opera. Baritone Ricardo José Rivera will return to Sarasota, singing the role of Count Stankar. He performed the role of Miller in Verdi's *Luisa Miller* in 2024 and Don Carlo in the company's 2023 production of Verdi's *Ernani*. He was recently heard in Teatro Nuovo's production of Carolina Uccelli's *Anna di Resburgo* and Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* at Opera San Jose. Bass Youg Bok Kim will sing the role of Jorg. He also is performing in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

Stiffelio will be conducted by Sarasota Opera artistic director and principal conductor Victor DeRenzi and directed by Stephanie Sundine, with set design by Steven C. Kemp. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for six performances through March 30.

Sarasota Opera's 2025 Winter Opera Festival

Cavalleria rusticana by Pietro Mascagni and *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

February 15, 20, 23 (m), 26

March 1(m), 7, 11, 19(m), 22, 29

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Cavalleria rusticana

Santuzza: Lisa Chavez

Turiddu: Rafael Dávila

Alfio: Jean Carlos Rodríguez

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Pagliacci

Canio: Rafael Dávila
Nedda: Ashley Milanese
Tonio: Jean Carlos Rodríguez
Conductor: Victor DeRenzi
Stage Director: Martha Collins
Scenic Designer: David P. Gordon
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

The Barber of Seville by Gioachino Rossini

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

February 22, 25, 27

March 2 (m), 5, 9 (m), 14, 21, 27 (m), 29

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Rosina: Lisa Maria Rogali
Figaro: Filippo Fontana
Don Bartolo: Stefano de Peppo
Basilio: Young Bok Kim
Conductor: Marcello Cormio
Stage Director: Marco Nisticò
Scenic Designer: Jeffrey W. Dean
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

The Marriage of Figaro by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

March 8, 13, 16 (m), 19, 22 (m), 25, 28

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Count Almaviva:	Jake Stamatis
Countess Almaviva:	Michelle Johnson
Susanna:	Virginia Mims
Figaro:	Mattia Venni
Cherubino:	Tessa Fackelman
Bartolo:	Brian Kontes
Conductor:	Louis Lohraseb
Stage Director:	Tom Diamond
Scenic Designer:	J. Michael Wingfield
Costume Designer:	Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer:	Ken Yunker

Stiffelio by Giuseppe Verdi

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

March 15, 18, 20, 21, 23 (m), 26, 30

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Stiffelio:	Victor Starsky
Lina:	Aviva Fortunata
Count Stankar:	Ricardo José Rivera
Jorg:	Young Bok Kim
Conductor:	Victor DeRenzi
Stage Director:	Stephanie Sundine
Costume Designer:	Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer:	Ken Yunker

ABOUT SARASOTA OPERA

Sarasota Opera is entering its 66th Season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984 the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater—now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive Youth Program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, which underwent a \$20 million renovation and rehabilitation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi and administrative leadership of General Director Richard Russell since 2012. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

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www.SarasotaOpera.org

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