VCU Opera presents
Tangled Webs
A gala of opera scenes
$53
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About VCU Opera

Founded in 1950 by L. Wayne Batty, VCU Opera has been directed by Melanie Kohn Day since 1983. In 2008, Dr. Kenneth Wood joined the VCU voice faculty and additionally assumed the position of Stage Director for VCU Opera. Between November 2011 and November 2015, VCU Opera was the recipient of four national awards from the National Opera Association: second place for Humperdinck's *Hansel & Gretel*, first place for Menotti's *The Old Maid & The Thief*, third place in the opera scenes competition for the opening duet of Act IV from Puccini's *La Bohème* and first place for Gilbert & Sullivan’s *The Gondoliers*.

VCU Opera has the longest-running tradition of annual full-scale productions in the state of Virginia and is proud of its outstanding reputation as an opera training program. Each year there is a fully-staged production of opera scenes as well as a full-scale production featuring scenery and costumes and presented in collaboration with the VCU Symphony.

VCU Opera’s mission is to cast undergraduate students in appropriate roles from the mainstream repertoire. We specialize in traditionally styled productions utilizing where possible our extensive collection of costumes, wigs and props.

With a significant emphasis on the holistic training of the complete “singer-actor,” VCU Opera has prepared numerous students for scholarships to the nation’s finest conservatories and university graduate programs, as well as for prestigious summer festivals in the USA and abroad and for Resident Artist positions with regional opera companies throughout the USA. Many VCU Opera alumni have gone on to enjoy highly successful careers performing in the world’s greatest opera houses.

VCU OPERA
CELEBRATING 69 YEARS
PRESENTS

TANGLED WEBS
A GALA OF OPERA SCENES

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2019 AT 5 P.M.
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2019 AT 4 P.M.

CO-DIRECTORS
MELANIE KOHN DAY & KENNETH WOOD

LIGHTING DESIGNER
CURT BLANKENSHIP

vcuarts | music
DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE (THE MAGIC FLUTE)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Act II Duet “Bist du mir nun ganz ergeben” (in German)
Papageno Jonathan Carr
Old Lady/Papagena Kelly Adam

L'ELISIR D'AMORE (THE ELIXIR OF LOVE)
Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)
Act I, scene VI Duet “Ardiri! Ha forse il cielo“ (in Italian)
Nemorino Evan Heiter
Dr. Dulcamara Shyheim Hinnant

PETER GRIMES
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
Act III Duet “Is the boat in?”
Ellen Orford Jasmin Ward
Captain Balstrode Ricky Williams

DON PASQUALE
Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)
Act III, scene 1 Duet “Cheti, cheti immantinenti” (in Italian)
Don Pasquale Jonathan Carr
Dr. Malatesta Kevin Mann

MADAMA BUTTERFLY
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
Act II The Flower Duet (in Italian)
Suzuki Catherine Pelletier
Cio-Cio-San/Madama Butterfly MengXin Zhang
VCU visiting scholar/guest artist from Shandong University of the Arts, China

Baritone ALEXANDER HARPER graduated from VCU in 2015. He then completed his master's degree in Cincinnati at the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) in 2017. Professional engagements during and since include work as a Young Artist with Cincinnati Opera, Dayton Opera and The Dayton Philharmonic, most recently as a featured soloist for the latter during a Memorial Day Concert. Other recent engagements include The First Nazarene and Cappadocian in Salome, Dayton Opera, and Marullo in Rigoletto, Dayton Opera.

AARON JONES obtained his Master of Music degree from Arizona State University in Opera Performance. While there, he performed the roles of Tammio from Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, Le Fils from Poulenc's Les Mamelles de Tirésias and Vašek from Smetana's The Bartered Bride. Aaron spent the summer of 2017 performing the role of Don Ottavio from Mozart's Don Giovanni with Hawaii Performing Arts Festival under maestro Paul Floyd. Currently, Aaron is portraying the role of Frederic in Gilbert & Sullivan's The Pirates of Penzance at Mesa Encore Theater. Over the last three years, Aaron has been a member of the chamber ensemble Solis Camerata. With Solis, he has performed in the national tour of Game of Thrones: the live concert experience conducted by the composer himself, Ramin Djawadi. Solis has also performed the music of popular video games Zelda and Final Fantasy with the Phoenix Symphony. Aaron is a new member of the Grammy Award winning Phoenix Chorale, under the direction of former King Singer, Christopher Gabbatis. In 2018, Aaron released his first solo pop album and has been performing in the Los Angeles and Phoenix areas. It is available on all streaming websites. Aside from music, Aaron has diligently been studying the craft of method acting for stage and film and currently works every week at the Arizona Actors Academy, under the instruction of Brandy Hotchner. He is also currently writing his first full-length feature film. Aaron lives by the quote “What would you attempt, if you knew you could not fail?”

TESS OTTINGER, soprano, is a second year Master of Music student at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University pursuing a degree in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy. At Virginia Commonwealth University, Ms. Ottinger received both a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and also in Vocal Music Education. This summer, she performed the role of Lauretta in Opera Susquehanna's production of Puccini's Gianni Schicchi. Recently, Ms. Ottinger performed the role of Nella in Gianni Schicchi with Peabody Opera Theatre in 2019, and Susanna in Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro as a Guest Alumni Artist at VCU, in 2018. Her previous operatic roles include Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi, Suor Genovieffa in Puccini's Suor Angelica, Fiametta in Gilbert and Sullivan's The Gondoliers, she also covered the role of Hanna Glawari in Lehár's The Merry Widow. This Fall, Ms. Ottinger was a semifinalist in the Camille Coloratura Competition in Baltimore, Maryland. In past years, Ms. Ottinger performed as a member of the Richmond Symphony Chorus and was a featured soloist with the Richmond Symphony Orchestra in 2016 and 2018. Ms. Ottinger has also performed as a soprano soloist with the Williamsburg Choral Guild for Mozart's Requiem, and Bach's Magnificat in 2017 and 2018.
ZARAH BROCK, soprano, recently performed the soprano solos in Carl Orff's 
Carmina Burana with The Richmond Ballet and The Richmond Symphony. In 
the summer of 2019, she completed her time as a Young Artist with The National 
Arts Centre in Ottawa, Canada and as a fellow at the CoOperative Program in 
Princeton, New Jersey. Zarah has performed the roles of Annio/La Clemenza di 
Tito, Soeur Constance/Dialogues des Carmelites, Hanna Glawari (The Widow)/ 
The Merry Widow, Casilda/The Gondoliers, and First Spirit/Die Zauberflöte. She 
has covered the role of Euridice in Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice and created the 
roles of the Chamberlain in an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Young King and 
Coretta Wilkins in Town Hall. Zarah trained at the late Lorin Maazel's Castleton 
Festival for three consecutive summers and also had the privilege to travel to 
Oman with the Castleton Festival to sing in La Bohème at The Royal Opera House 
in Muscat. In the summer of 2017, Zarah sang Zerlina/Don Giovanni with The 
Hawaii Performing Arts Festival and returned home to Virginia to sing Belinda/ 
Dido and Aeneas with The Stafford Opera Troupe, where she also served as a 
member of the faculty. Other roles include Lucy/The Telephone and Don Ettore/ 
La Canterina with Olde Towne Opera. She has also been an Emerging Artist with 
Bel Canto Opera in Tuscany, Italy as well as for The Harrower Summer Opera and 
Atlantic Music Festival. Zarah is a native of Fredericksburg, Va. and is a proud 
graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University. She earned her Master of Music 
In Opera Performance form The University of Maryland, where she was a member of 
the prestigious Maryland Opera Studio.

Lebanese-American mezzo-soprano and stage director JESSICA HARIKA is 
currently based in NYC where she splits her time working both on and off the 
stage. Described as "a riveting and expressive performer" and "truly a delight 
to see and hear", she is currently singing in Friday After Friday, a new work by 
Leanna Kirchoff (winner of Opera America's Grant for Female Composers). Ms. 
Harika has been seen in productions around the country with dell'Arte Opera 
Ensemble, Natchez Festival of Music, Opera Theatre St. Louis, Shreveport Opera, 
Opera Maine, and The Janiec Opera Company/Brevard Music Festival. Jessica has 
also been heard in concert with Opera in the Heights, the Brevard Music Festival 
Orchestra, and The NEC Philharmonia. In 2017 she was named a Semi-Finalist in 
the Mary Jacobs Singer of the Year Competition and has sung in Masterclasses 
with Marilyn Horne, Stephanie Blythe, and Jane Eaglen. As an opera stage 
director, Jessica has most recently been working with playwright Justin McDevitt 
to bring his new work, Honey Fitz, to life. Recent productions include: La Bohème 
- Capitol Opera Richmond, Tell Me How I Did - Cloudbusting Productions, L'elisir 
d'amore - City Lyric Opera, Roméo et Juliette: an Opera[sh] - City Lyric Opera, 
Gianni Schicchi - City Lyric Opera, and Some Enchanted Evening, A Rodgers & 
Hammerstein Review - Janiec Opera Company. Ms. Harika has recently served as 
Assistant Director for Orpheus & Eurydice with the Baroque Aria Ensemble at The 
Manhattan School of Music; A Midsummer Night's Dream, Die Zauberflöte, Falling 
Angel, La Tragédie de Carmen, HMS Pinafore, and Falstaff with The Janiec Opera 
Company; and Madama Butterfly with Shreveport Opera. This fall Jessica will 
direct and produce The Wagner Project, a re-imagining of Wagner's Wesendonck 
Lieder with soprano Lacey Jo Benter. She is also thrilled to be joining The Blue 
Hill Troupe in the spring of 2020 to direct their production of Gilbert and Sullivan's 
The Sorcerer. She holds degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University and The 
New England Conservatory.
PRODUCTION CREDITS

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR OF VCU OPERA & PIANIST FOR THE GALA
Melanie Kohn Day

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
Kristen Melzer

CO-DIRECTOR/STAGE DIRECTOR OF VCU OPERA & NARRATOR
Dr. Kenneth Wood

COSTUME COORDINATOR & HAIR/WIGS
Melanie Kohn Day

LIGHTING DESIGNER/SUPERVISOR/PROJECTIONS
Curt Blankenship

COSTUME DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION FOR TWO PIECES
Leslie Winn & Ivy Austin

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR/PROPS CONSTRUCTION/PROJECTIONS/SCENIC CONSTRUCTION
Roland Karnatz

SUPERSTITES CREATORS
Shyheim Hinmann & Dr. Kenneth Wood

PRINCIPAL STAGE MANAGER & ASSISTANT TO DIRECTORS
Catherine Pelletier

SCENIC PAINTING ASSISTANCE
Mercedes Schaum

SUPERSTITES OPERATOR
Lida Bourhill

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Dr. Terry Austin, Interim Chair of VCU Arts; Curt Blankenship; Roland Karnatz; Linda Johnston; Catherine Pelletier; Kristen Melzer; Anne Marie Dumain; Marcia Hailey/Virginia Repertory Theatre; Kevin McGranahan/VCU Arts; Emerson & Kathy Hughes; Dr. Velimir Luketic; Dr. Sonja Vlahovic; Brian Donovan.

WE INVITE YOUR SUPPORT!

If you have an interest in assisting VCU Opera with student scholarship funding, sponsoring a guest artist for masterclasses/workshops, or offering financial assistance for costumes and scenic production, we would welcome your much-needed support! Please contact Linda Johnston, Administrative Director for the Department of Music at 804.827.4542, lsjohnst@vcu.edu.

ABOUT OUR GUEST ARTISTS

FORREST GLASS graduated from VCU in Voice Performance and just completed a MM from Temple University in Choral Conducting. He is currently completing a second MM in Voice Performance at Temple. While at VCU, Forrest sang important roles in Gianni Schicchi, La Cambiale di Matrimonio, The Medium, and The Gondoliers. Through the auspices of the VCU choral department, he was invited to perform a featured solo with the Richmond Symphony for a performance that was broadcast statewide for Public Television. At Temple, Forrest received the Elaine Browne Tribute Award for outstanding musicianship and commitment to humanitarianism through music. In addition, he received the William Singer Memorial Award from the Dean's Office for academic excellence. Forrest is Director of Music at a large Methodist Church in Germantown, and he also sings professionally as a core member of the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia and for the Philadelphia Symphony Choir. During the summer of 2019, Forrest was selected as a Summit Conductor of the highly competitive Wintergreen Festival's Conductor's Summit. At Wintergreen, he also sang baritone solos with their orchestra and chorus. At Temple this fall, Forrest is cast as Sergeant Belcore in The Elixir of Love, and in the spring, he will sing the role of John Brooke in Mark Adamo's Little Women. Forrest is an avid believer in the uniquely unifying power of music and its potential to create compassion, understanding, and solidarity among people of diverse and disparate backgrounds. His goal as a conductor is to bring classical music into traditionally underserved communities.

VANESSA NAGHDI, soprano, is from Washington, D.C. She recently completed an 8-month residency with Opera Colorado as an Artist in Residence. Ms. Naghdi performed Nannetta in Falstaff, created the role of Mrs. Soep and covered Ina Soep in the world premiere opera Steal a Pencil for Me (Cohen), performed Adina in The Elixir of Love and debuted Clorinda in the premiere of Cinderella (touring productions), and covered Musetta in La Bohème. She toured as Pamina/1st Lady in The Mini-Magic Flute, performing over 100 times with Arizona Opera. Ms. Naghdi was Suor Genovieffa in Suor Angelica and Solo Angel in Die Jungfrau von Orléans with the Mittelsächsisches Theater and Philharmonic in Freiburg, Germany. She has also portrayed Amy March in Little Women and Belinda in Dido and Aeneas, among others. Ms. Naghdi received her Bachelor of Music degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in Vocal Performance in 2012. While at VCU, she portrayed Amelia in Amelia Goes to the Ball, Dew Fairy in Hansel and Gretel, Lay Sister suor Angelica, performed in three opera scenes programs and three choirs. Ms. Naghdi received her Master of Music from Arizona State University in Opera Performance in 2015.

MENGXIN ZHANG, soprano, is a visiting scholar at VCU from Shandong University of the Arts in JinNan, China. Ms. Zhang has performed extensively in Shanghai as a soloist, in opera, and in ensembles. Professor Zhang has won important vocal competitions in China: the 11th Chinese Central TV station vocal competition and the 8th Shandong TV Professional Singer competition.

OPERA ALUMNI NEWS

Baritone RYAN BLEVINS graduated from VCU in Vocal/Choral Music Education. Upon graduation, he began teaching in Williamsburg at Berkeley Middle School and also taught private lessons in piano and voice at The Music Tree. Ryan was invited by SPARC to direct the music for Aladdin Kids for their August Adventure Camp. This led to a position for the past four years as Music Director for SPARC's 8-12th grade touring ensemble. Following appointments in Henrico County at Glen Lea Elementary and Donahoe Elementary, Ryan was awarded a faculty position at The Collegiate School, where he has developed a very successful program for the past two years. While at VCU, Ryan participated in the following VCU Opera productions: The Magic Flute, Amelia Goes to the Ball, and The Merry Widow. “I could not be happier with my career or more grateful to VCU for the invaluable education and experiences they provided in helping to shape me into my best self.”