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RESERVE  
*presents*

# La Traviata

By Giuseppe Verdi

Friday, November 22, 2024

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DeYor Performing Arts Center

Susan Davenny Wyner, Music Director and Conductor  
Scott Skiba, Production Director

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RESERVE

PRESENTS

## La Traviata

By: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

**SUSAN DAVENNY WYNER**  
MUSIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

**SCOTT SKIBA**  
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

### CAST

#### MAIN STAGE

Violetta.....	Alisa Jordheim
Alfredo.....	Jose Simerilla Romero
Germont.....	Luis Ledesma
Flora.....	Rachael Pavloski
Annina.....	Sarah Joyce Cooper
Gastone.....	Jaehyuk Choi
Barone.....	Brian Keith Johnson
Dottore.....	Jason Budd
Marchese d'Obigny, Flora's Servant, Commissioner.....	Aiden Eddy
Giuseppe.....	Benjamin Burney



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# La Traviata

## SYNOPSIS

### Act I Scene 1

A party at the lavish mansion of Violetta Valéry, a wealthy and famous Parisian Courtesan. The young outsider, Alfredo Germont catches the attention of his hostess with a toast to love and pleasure. Later at the party, a coughing spell led Violetta to seek solitude. Her illness is taking a toll and her complexion grows paler by the day. Concerned for her well being, Alfredo encourages Violetta to leave the fast-paced life that is leading to her physical decline. He professes his earnest love for her. After the party guests have departed, Violetta reflects on Alfredo's words. She confronts her illness, lifestyle, and freedom, while she hears Alfredo singing from outside her window.

### -BRIEF PAUSE-

### Act I Scene 2

Violetta has abandoned Parisian society, choosing a more simple life in the country. Alfredo revels in the pleasure of their new life together. Violetta's friend Flora has sent an invitation to a grand party, but Violetta is no longer interested in that society. Violetta has been selling off her property for financial support since leaving her Courtesan lifestyle. Expecting a business associate regarding a real estate transaction, she is instead greeted by Alfredo's father, Giorgio Germont. His daughter is to be married soon, but the family of his daughter's fiancée disapproves of Alfredo's scandalous relationship with Violetta. Germont is intent on changing the situation but he is surprised to learn the truth about Violetta. Violetta has acquiesced to Giorgio's plea. She decides to accept Flora's invitation to join the party and asks her housekeeper, Annina to send the RSVP. She then writes a goodbye letter to Alfredo. Alfredo discovers Violetta in the garden. She evades his questions and after professing her unending love for him, she runs off. Alfredo reads Violetta's goodbye letter and is distraught. Giorgio returns to offer consolation and implores Alfredo to return to his home and to his family. Alfredo runs off after Violetta.

### - INTERMISSION -

### Act II Scene 1

The news of Violetta and Alfredo's separation is the focus of the gossip at Flora's party. Violetta and her new lover, Baron Douphol, arrive and soon after, Alfredo crashes the party and wins a fortune at the gambling table embarrassing the Baron in a game of cards. Violetta asks Alfredo for a moment alone. Alfredo begs Violetta to come away with him. She refuses, falsely claiming to love the Baron. In a fit of rage, Alfredo calls the guests to bear witness that he intends to repay Violetta. He publicly shames her then throws his gambling winnings at her as payment for her Courtesan services. Everyone is shocked and Giorgio Germont, who has witnessed the scene, rebukes his son for his behavior. The Baron challenges his rival to a duel.

### -BRIEF PAUSE-

### Act II Scene 2

Months later, Violetta is destitute and near death. She has received a letter from Giorgio explaining that Alfredo fled after wounding the Baron in the duel, but that he is returning to be at her side after Giorgio told his son the truth about Violetta's sacrifice. Violetta confronts her mortality while she clings to life and hope. Dr. Grenvil, Violetta's lone remaining society friend, checks on her then quietly informs Annina that she has little time to live. Alfredo returns and soon after Giorgio arrives as well. Alfredo's return and the thought of a return to their happy life seem to fill Violetta with renewed euphoric energy, but it is too late... after a mere surge of terminal lucidity, death claims Violetta's life.

## CREATIVE TEAM

Scott Skiba, *Production Director*  
Susan Davenny Wyner, *Music Director and Conductor*  
Dean Buck, *Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master*  
Brittany Powell Merenda, *Projection Designer*  
Steve Shack, *Lighting Designer*  
Brian Palumbo, *Costume Designer*

Robert Pierce, *Production Stage Manager*  
Joseph Spurio, *Assistant Chorus Master*  
Joyce Jones, *Stage Manager*  
Colleen Sabeh, *Assistant Stage Manager*  
Leah Altiero, *Hair Tech*  
Katie Markielowski, *Supertitle Operator*



Allison Maher, *Box Office Coordinator*  
Antˆonio Dent, *Operations Staff*  
Brendan Burke, *Production Staff*  
Brian Stanley, *Operations Manager*  
Chuck Kettering, *Production Staff*  
Courtney Greene, *SA Production Coordinator*  
Dani Dier, *Chief Business Officer*  
Dave Walsh, *Operations Staff*  
Denise Cintavey, *Box Office Assistant*  
Emily Palmer, *Production Staff*  
Isa Foltz, *Production Staff*  
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## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR **DENISE BAYER**



Welcome to Opera Western Reserve's production of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*! On behalf of the entire Opera Western Reserve Board, please enjoy the rich melodies and intense drama as we take you to 19th Century Paris to explore the themes of love, honor, and redemption.

An adaptation on of Alexandra Dumas's, novel, *La Dame aux Camélias*, *La Traviata*'s premier in 1853 at la Fenice Opera House in Venice, Italy, was famously a failure, causing Verdi to write in a letter the next day "Was the fault mine or the singers? Time will tell." As *La Traviata* has proved to be one of the most popular and frequently performed operas, time certainly fell in Verdi's favor.

Verdi knew then, as did audiences in the decades following, that with the right casting the opera was a masterpiece. Tonight, Production Director Scott Skiba and Musical Director Susan Davenny Wyner have assembled a cast of world-class performers to our stage. Opera Western Reserve is thrilled to welcome both celebrated soprano Alisa Jordheim as the famed courtesan Violetta and rising young Argentinian-Spanish-American tenor Jose Simerilla Romero as Alfredo, making both their Opera Western Reserve debuts.

After last year's successful staging of *Carmen*, our production is again presented from the beautiful and historic Powers Auditorium. We are thankful for the collaboration between Opera Western Reserve, Stambaugh Auditorium, and the Youngstown Symphony which provides us with the ability to perform here tonight.

Opera Western Reserve continues to thrive with the generous support of our audience members, individual and corporate sponsors, as well as foundational and governmental support. We are extremely grateful that our mission and the caliber of our productions continues to generate such support. Our arts community thrives because of you, and it is only because of this support that we are able to bring professional opera to the Mahoning Valley.

Enjoy!



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## NOTES FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

### SUSAN DAVENNY WYNER

*La Traviata* emerged from Verdi's pen in white heat—all the more amazing because he was simultaneously working on *Il Trovatore*—its polar opposite. Whereas *Trovatore* deals with fiery, grand heroic proportions, *La Traviata* stuns us with its subtle, intimate delving into the workings of the heart.

Its genesis was not easy. Verdi had agreed to write an opera for carnival season (March 1853) at Venice's La Fenice but became increasingly desperate to find the right subject matter. By the beginning of October, even the theatre managers were getting worried, especially since they were being pressed by the police and censors who needed to give it their approval. Finally, the managers sent the poet Francesco Piave with his mostly completed libretto to Verdi's home. Verdi hated what Piave brought, but as they talked, Piave wrote, "Suddenly Verdi got carried away by another idea, and I had to throw away everything I'd done and start all over again! I think that Verdi will write a fine opera now that I've seen him so worked up."

The new subject was of course *La Dame aux camélias*. Both men had seen the play in Paris, and Verdi quickly dispatched a synopsis to the Venetian censors, which was accepted – though Verdi was forced to change his original title *Amore e morte* (*Love and death*). Verdi's two-page synopsis already shows clearly the overall shape of the drama as well as the music. The extraordinary first act is right there—starting with the party scene and ending with a single character alone on stage. Verdi was creating seismic shifts as he moved opera away from separate numbers to real musical flow and drama, searching for "la parola scenica" (*the word of action*)—which he described as "sculpting" the meaning of a situation vividly, simply, and clearly.

Even when he does use an expected operatic form, he turns it to dramatic purpose. Violetta's famous aria "Sempre libera" (*Always free*), which closes the first act, becomes a *coup de theatre* because Verdi uses her dazzling virtuosity and high-flying rousades to reveal her inner turmoil. The music expresses Violetta's desperate attempts to convince herself that her life of gaiety is fulfilling, that it would be folly to open her heart to the dreams of a true love.

What is so remarkable about this opera is how intimately Verdi lets us know his characters. The music reveals things they are not telling us with words—the emotions, the urgency, the unease, the compassion, the transformations. Highly charged dramatic situations evolve and resolve in real time. Verdi's manuscript sketches all show him compressing and going more deeply into his characters. Although Verdi claimed publicly that he changed nothing after *Traviata*'s opening fiasco, in fact the musical changes he made were important and telling. They always led to clearer, more subtle, and richer revelations of character.

From the very opening Prelude we know that we are entering a special world. Instead of the usual festive opera overture, Verdi begins delicately, quietly, mysteriously. Only later do we realize that it is a beautifully etched portrait of Violetta—the martyr, the passionate lover, and the charming and cultured courtesan. In *La Traviata*, Verdi has left us an embodiment of love as moving as anything ever composed.

## Opera Western Reserve Musicians

Susan Davenny Wyner - *Music Director/Conductor*

La Traviata 2024

### Flute

Kathryn Thomas Umble\*

### Oboe

Martin Neubert\*

### Clarinet

Alice Wang\*

Marissa Smith

### Bassoon

Janice Pylinski\*

### French Horn

Heather Johnson\*

Rob Cole

### Trumpet

Christopher Krummel\*

### Bass Trombone

Peter Sapkowski\*

### Percussion

Don Yallech\*

### Violin I

Rachel Stegeman - *Concertmaster*

Jay Koziorynsky+

Mary Price

Natalie Machala\*\*

### Violin II

Brendan Considine\*

Gloria Slocum

Carrie Singler

Karen Considine

### Viola

Michael Strauss\*

Charlie Alves

Amber Rogers

### Cello

Jeff Singler\*

Cathleen Partlow Strauss

### Bass

Jeffrey Bremer\*

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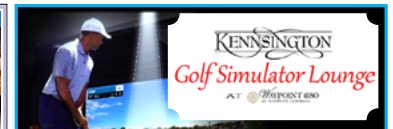
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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

SCOTT SKIBA

### **La Traviata – Timeless, Contemporary, and Based On a True Story?**

*La Traviata* translates as “The Fallen Woman.” The eponymous fallen woman of the opera is Violetta Valéry, a beautiful courtesan who finds escape from her former life through the love of a handsome stranger, Alfredo Germont. The character of Violetta is based on Marie Duplessis, a lover of author Alexandre Dumas Fils, who becomes the character Alfredo Germont in the opera.

The story is timeless, the music is gorgeous, and the drama is heartbreaking. The passionate love story has inspired blockbuster films such as *Pretty Woman* and *Moulin Rouge*. It maintains the top spot of the most performed operas in the world, has one of the most recognizable tunes in all of opera that can be heard in beer commercials and concert halls alike, and has inspired designers such as Valentino to create a gown, titled *La Valse de Violetta* and worn by Katy Perry at the 2014 Grammy Awards, featuring notes from Verdi's score that took more than 1,600 hours to embroider!

### **One of the most believable love stories ever told? Not so hard to believe after all, it is inspired by a true story!**

Duplessis was born Alphonsine Rose Plessis in 1824. In her late teens she discovered certain men of the well-to-do society elite would pay for the pleasure of her company. She added the prefix “Du” - a faux signifier of nobility – to her name to become Marie Duplessis, a prominent Parisian courtesan. At 20 years of age, she and Dumas Fils began a brief but passionate love affair. Duplessis quickly moved on to other lovers such as Franz Liszt. She later died of consumption (now known as Tuberculosis) in 1847, at the age of 23. Dumas Fils attended Duplessis estate sale and purchased a necklace as a memento of their time together. Duplessis became the inspiration for Dumas fils' novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of Camellias) published less than a year later. Duplessis became “Marguerite Gautier” and Dumas fils “Armand Duval” in the novel.

The novel became a bestseller and was soon adapted into a stage play of the same name for Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris in 1852. It is believed that Verdi, being already familiar with the novel, attended a performance of the play. Verdi lived periodically in Paris from 1847 to 1852 with Giuseppina Strepponi, the soprano that was to become his lifelong partner following the death of his wife (and daughter of his benefactor) Margherita Barezzi.

Barezzi herself died June 18, 1840 at the age of 26 in her father's arms with Verdi and a doctor present in the room. There are parallels between Violetta's death scene in the opera and that of Barezzi in real life. In fact, Verdi initially titled the opera “Margherita” after the name Dumas fils gave to the heroine in his novel and later adapted play. When Verdi later changed the character's name to Violetta Valéry, it was thought that perhaps the story hit too close to home with art imitating life. 40 years after Duplessis' death, her childhood friend from Normandie, Romaine Vienne wrote *La vérité sur la Dame aux camélias* (Marie Duplessis) in hopes of providing

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

(Cont.)

a more accurate account of her life than that which had be immortalized by the work of Dumas fils.

### **So much drama and we've barely gotten to the opera itself!**

*La Traviata* premiered in Venice and La Fenice Opera House in 1853. It was rare for an opera to be based on such contemporary subject matter. Called a Melodramma in Three Acts (our production is presented in two acts), the Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave stays close to the story of the play. Verdi wished for the opera to be produced in the contemporary clothing of the time to highlight the true-to-life story and focus on the characters drawn not to the larger-than-life scale the likes of queens and kings, or gods and goddesses, but rather on a more human scope of the Bourgeoisie, artists, politicians, and society of the time. To this end, the OWR production aims to capture opulence and grandeur with a slightly modernized visual aesthetic that recalls “La Belle Époque,” the era renowned for its multi-layered worldview that celebrated progressive social change, advances in technology, and new developments in the arts while also embracing the nostalgic beauty of days past. The production design reflects the ethos of the era through juxtaposing layers of flowing soft-edged fabric with strong angular lines of metal that are sculpted and melded visually through the magic of theatrical lighting and digital projections, and in costume design that captures “La Belle Époque” silhouettes. From the design elements and the influences of fashion, to a love affair that is based on a true story from the late 19th century, we hope to honor Verdi's intention to present a relevant and contemporary tale that might be found on TV, in films, and at society and celebrity parties of today just as easily as it might have been found in late 19th century Paris by celebrating the innovation of the present, while embracing the nostalgia of the past.

*La Traviata* was planned for the OWR 2020 Season. 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 as previously planned. Believing it more vital 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. Out of that belief, perseverance, and the support of so many, was created *A Taste of Traviata*, a condensed cinematic opera production featuring the historic Stambaugh Auditorium as the on-location set. Four years later, we are thrilled to bring a fully-staged live production *La Traviata* to the stage of the magnificent Powers Auditorium!

Ohio Arts  
COUNCIL



## CHORUS

Dean Buck, Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master  
Joseph Spurio, Assistant Chorus Master

Amanda Beagle  
Amanda Bertilacci  
Elizabeth Crowll  
Charone Frankel  
Rachel Gardener  
Carla Gipson  
Gerri Jenkins  
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- 2007 RIGOLETTO *Giuseppe Verdi*
- 2008 MADAMA BUTTERFLY *Giacomo Puccini*
- 2009 CARMEN *Georges Bizet*
- 2010 LA TRAVIATA *Giuseppe Verdi*
- 2011 TOSCA *Giacomo Puccini*
- 2012 IL 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 OWR PRESENTS: A TASTE OF TRAVIATA *Giuseppe Verdi*
- 2021 ROMEO + JULIET *Charles Gounod*
- 2022 LA BOHÈME *Giacomo Puccini*
- 2023 CARMEN *Georges Bizet*
- 2024 LA TRAVIATA *Giuseppe Verdi*



**OWR Music Director & 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.

The New York Times has called her conducting “rapturous, richly textured and emotionally compelling.” Opera News Online praised the “terrific lyrical moments under Susan Davenny Wyner’s deft baton,” the Cleveland Plain Dealer called her “a galvanizing presence,” the Los Angeles Times praised her “sensitive and thoughtful leadership,” and The

Boston Globe wrote: “Under her baton the music breathes, lalts, romps, sighs, and sparkles,” and four times selected her conducted performances Best Musical Events of the Year.

She has conducted a wide range of repertoire from the 15th through 21st centuries—symphonic, opera, oratorio and choral—premiering over 40 new works, working with period instruments, and conducting over 30 operas. 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, Emanuel Ax, Lynn Harrell, Claude Frank, Peter Serkin and Lawrence Brownlee have been among her guest soloists.

She has been Music Director and Conductor of Opera Western Reserve since its creation in 2004, was Music Director and Conductor of Boston Midsummer Opera from 2007-2022, and the Warren Philharmonic Orchestra from 1999-2024. 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, the New York City Opera, the London Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, and the New York, Los Angeles, Israel Philharmonics, among many others. She performed regularly with conductors Leonard Bernstein, Erich Leinsdorf, Colin Davis, André Previn, Lorin Maazel, Helmut Rilling, Michael Tilson Thomas, Robert Shaw, Seiji Ozawa, and Neville Marriner, and often premiered works written especially for her. Recording for Columbia Masterworks, Angel/EMI, Naxos, New World, CRI and Musical Heritage, she won 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 since 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 masterclasses for the National Conductors Guild, the Shanghai Conservatory, and Harvard and Yale  
(*bio continued on next page*)

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 major career.

She is married to Pulitzer Prize winning composer and pianist Yehudi Wyner, whose music she has often performed, recorded, and premiered.

**OWR Production Director**

**Scott Skiba** (Director of Production/Stage Director) Award-winning Stage Director, has led 100+ new productions with companies including Indianapolis Opera, Mobile Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Pensacola Opera, Opera Tampa, and Toledo Opera. Scott serves as Executive Artistic Director, Cleveland Opera Theater; Production Director, Opera Western Reserve; and Assistant Artistic Director, Hawaii Performing Arts Festival.

Scott is a pioneer in producing interdisciplinary collaborations in alternative and site-specific venues, and a proponent of new opera. Scott launched {NOW} Fest, Cleveland Opera Theater's annual festival to create, develop, and produce new opera, serves on the Chamber Opera Composition Committee for the National Opera Association (NOA), and collaborates to develop and premiere 18 new operas and counting.

An advocate of arts education, Scott serves as Director of Opera Studies for Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, and as Interim Director of Opera Theatre, University of Tennessee.

Scott's work has received numerous national awards including The American Prize for Opera Performance, The Charles Nelson Reilly Prize in Stage Direction, 1st Place in the NOA Collegiate Opera Production Competition, and the 2023 Award for Digital Excellence in Opera from Opera America (University/Conservatory Project). Additional university directing credits include The Curtis Institute, Oberlin Opera Theater, University of Texas at Rio Grand Valley, Penn State University, and Interlochen Opera Theater.

Previous appointments include Executive Director of the Oberlin in Italy opera training program, Instructor of Voice and Opera Theater, Interlochen Arts Academy, and Associate Instructor of Voice, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Scott is represented by Marvel Arts Management.

**[www.ScottSkiba.com](http://www.ScottSkiba.com)**

## CREATIVE TEAM

### Assistant Conductor/Chorus Master



Award-winning Conductor **Dean Buck** has been described by Cleveland Classical as “fearless and firm,” and “precise and confident.” In September 2023, Dean was awarded Second Prize (First Prize was not awarded) at the 2nd International Italian Conducting Competition - Alceo Galliera in Bordighera, Italy.

Dean serves as opera conductor at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, where productions he has conducted have won Opera America’s Award for Digital Excellence in Opera, and First Prize at the 2023 National Opera Association Competition. He additionally is the Interim Director of Orchestras at The University of Akron, and Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master of Cleveland Opera Theater, where he

is also Music Director of [NOW]Fest, an annual festival of New Opera Works.

Dean previously served as Principal Conductor of the New York City based LoftOpera where he conducted eight productions including their critically acclaimed stagings of Puccini’s *La Bohème*, Mozart’s *Così fan Tutte*, and Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*. He additionally was Assistant Conductor for Chelsea Opera.

Dean additionally is Assistant Conductor of The Cleveland Pops Orchestra, and The Firelands Symphony Orchestra. He regularly appears with the Youngstown Symphony Orchestra, Heights Chamber Orchestra and Suburban Symphony Orchestra. A strong advocate for New Music, Dean has led over 30 premieres of new works, and has worked with such composers as Jake Heggie, Kamala Sankaram, Nkeiru Okoye, and Margaret Brouwer.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Dean holds a Masters Degree in Orchestral Conducting from The Cleveland Institute of Music.

### Projection Designer

**Brittany Powell Merenda** is a projection designer and creative director working in theatre, opera and dance throughout the country. At the onset of the pandemic, Brittany pivoted to fully virtual productions including a real-time, 6 live camera feed interactive play titled *Deja Zoom!* with Parallel 45 Theatre. She also served as the Creative Director for a state-of-the-art virtual national convention (summer 2020) and Virtual/ Live Gala for New England Conservatory.



This November, Brittany will be the Associate Projection Designer for The Washington National Opera’s Come Home Gala at The Kennedy Center. Opera productions include *The Light In The Piazza* (Columbus State University), *La Bohème*, *Barber of Seville* and *Madama Butterfly* (Cleveland Opera Theatre), *La Finta Giardiniera* and *The Marriage of Figaro* (University of Tennessee Opera Theatre), *Glory Denied* and *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (Baldwin Wallace Conservatory),

(bio continued on next page)

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## CREATIVE TEAM

*Little Women* and *Alcina* (Hawaii Performing Arts Festival), Verdi's *Macbeth* (Opera Tampa), *Carmen* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Lakes Area Music Festival), and *Tosca* (Opera Grand Rapids).

Previous theatrical works include *Sincerely, Oscar* (off-Broadway), *Shrek The Musical* with The Beck Center for the Arts (Cleveland), *Howie D: Back in the Day*, *Elf The Musical*, *The Newsies*, and *The Little Mermaid* at The Rose Theater (Omaha), *Sweeney Todd* with Hawaii Performing Arts Festival and *Oklahoma!* at The Wick (Boca Raton). She has also designed *Appalachian Spring* (St. Paul Ballet) and *Nutcracker in Wonderland* (Ballet Co.Laboratory). Brittany received her Masters of Arts in Digital Arts and Sciences from the University of Florida and received a Barbizon Award for her projection design in dark play, or stories for boys.

## Lighting Designer



**Steve Shack** is a somewhat nomadic, queer, neurodivergent human who often designs light for various performances and events. His most recent work has been in Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Hilo, Boston, Traverse City, Cleveland, and NYC.

Over the past 22 years, Steve has lit ~300 productions of Musical Theater, Opera, Dance, and Drama, in addition to a few restaurants, museums, and art installations. Steve is the Resident Lighting Designer at Dark Lumen Productions, Cleveland Opera Theater, Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, Hawaii Performing Arts Festival, and Magnificat High School.

Steve is delighted to be back at OWR lighting *La Traviata* with his dream team of collaborators. When not in a venue, Steve prefers to be in nature: hiking in jungles, body surfing in oceans, and living a thermaculture-centric life in hot springs and saunas.

## Production Stage Manager



**Robert Pierce** is entering his sixteenth year of association with Opera Western Reserve. He has sung roles in past mainstage productions of *La Bohème*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Tosca*, and *La Traviata* and served as stage management for all of the company's productions in the past ten years. He also recently completed a decade of directing and performing in annual "mini-mainstage" and children's operas as OWR's Educational Outreach Director.

Other behind-the-scenes production work has included the world premieres of Matthew Recio &

(bio continued on next page)

## CREATIVE TEAM

Royce Vavrek's *The Puppy Episode* at Oberlin Conservatory and Griffin Candey & Caridad Svich's *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, as well as travels to the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival, Kentucky Opera, and Lyric Opera of Orange County (California). A resident of the Cleveland area, Robert is also 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*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Billy Elliot*, *Violet*, and *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. Robert holds degrees in vocal performance from Otterbein University and Cleveland Institute of Music.



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## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### Alisa Jordheim - Violetta



This season soprano **Alisa Jordheim** sings Daria in *Viva la mamma* in a return to Florentine Opera, Adina in *L'elisir d'amore* with the New Philharmonic, her role debut as Violetta in *La Traviata* with Opera Western Reserve, and sings *Carmina Burana* in a return to Pacific Symphony.

Her recent credits include: Musetta in *La bohème* (Pacific Symphony); Berginella in *Songbird* (Florentine Opera); Gilda in *Rigoletto* (Pacific Symphony, Central City Opera, San Diego Opera, Amarillo Opera); Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* and Prangcharoen's *Endless Tears* (Thailand Philharmonic); Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Virginia Opera); Adele in *Die Fledermaus* (Central City Opera); First Maid in *Der Zwerger* (Enescu Festival); Clothilde in Pacini's *Maria, regina d'Inghilterra* (Odyssey Opera); Hannah in *The Merry Widow* (New Philharmonic); Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (Bach Collegium San Diego); Ninetta in Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra* (Teatro Nuovo); Mozart's *Exsultate Jubilate* (Milwaukee Symphony); Mozart's *Mass in C minor* (Bel Canto Chorus); Cunegonde in *Candide* (Palm Beach Opera); 1st Knappe in *Parsifal* (Paris Opera); Venus in *Venus and Adonis* and Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas* (Florentine Opera); and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Boston Midsummer Opera).

Ms. Jordheim holds both a Master of Music and Bachelor of Music from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

### Jose Simerilla Romero - Alfredo



This season, rising young Argentinian-Spanish-American tenor **Jose Simerilla Romero** returns to the role of Alfredo in *La Traviata* in his debuts with both Theater Basel, sings his first performances of Cavaradossi in *Tosca* in a co-production with Opéra de Limoges and Opéra de Vichy, sings his first performances of Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* in his debut with New National Theater Tokyo, returns to Staatsoper Hannover for staged performances of Verdi's *Requiem*, and joins acclaimed soprano Eric Nakamura in concert with Latvian National Opera.

Last season he made his English National Opera debut as Alfredo in *La Traviata*, joined the Neue Philharmonie München in concert, and returned to Staatsoper Hannover for his role debut as Lensky in *Eugene Onegin*, Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*, and Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*. Other recent performances include: Laërte in *Hamlet* (Komische Oper); Rodolfo in *La bohème*, Prince Gwidon in *Zar Saltan*, and Chevalier de la Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Staatsoper Hannover); Alfredo in *La Traviata* and Rodolfo in *La bohème* (Nederlandse Reisopera); Jaquino in *Fidelio* (LA Philharmonic); Rodolfo in *La*  
*(bio continued on next page)*

*bohème* (Grand Tetons Music Festival); Duca in *Rigoletto* (Florida Grand Opera); and Shepard in *Oedipus Rex* (San Francisco Symphony). Mr. Romero holds degrees from both Valencia College and Stetson University.

### Luis Ledesma - Giorgio Germont



Mexican American baritone **Luis Ledesma** has established a reputation as a “rich and well controlled baritone” (Opera News). He frequently portrays the heroes and villains of Puccini, Verdi, and the bel canto masters, as well as roles in recent new works in Spanish including *Florencia en el Amazonas* and *El pasado nunca se termina*, which featured débuts with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, San Diego Opera, and a return to New York City Opera. Recent engagements include *Scarpia* for Opera Colorado, a Founders Concert with Maryland Opera, the title role in *Gianni Schicchi* for On Site Opera in New York, the Payador in *Maria de Buenos Aires* with Kentucky Opera, Tonio in *Pagliacci* with Sacramento Symphony, and

with the Toledo Symphony, an all-Puccini concert which included the *Messa di Gloria* and *Il tabarro*. Last season, Mr. Ledesma was seen as *Rigoletto* for Portland Opera in the Park, in concert with Opera Omaha, and with South Florida Symphony for Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*. He joins Portland Opera in the Park and Opera Western Reserve this season to sing Germont in *La Traviata*. Other recent engagements include Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera Omaha and Pacific Symphony, Augustino in *El pasado nunca se termina* with Fort Worth Opera, *Carmina Burana* with the Acadiana Symphony, and the title role in *Macbeth* with Syracuse Opera.

### Rachel Pavloski - Flora



**Rachael Pavloski** is happy to be reprising her role as Flora at Opera Western Reserve. She has a master’s in vocal performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music and a bachelor’s degree in music education from the University of Toledo. Ms. Pavloski has sung professionally with Opera Cleveland, Cleveland Opera, the Akron Symphony, Akron Lyric Opera Theatre, the Canton Symphony, Opera Western Reserve in Youngstown and with the Master Singers Chorale of Northeast Ohio. Roles that she has performed in include: Alisa in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Ms. Macmillan in *Big the Musical*, Flora in *La Traviata*, Lucy in *Threepenny Opera*, Johanna in *Sweeney Todd*, Irene Molloy in *Hello Dolly*, Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and Ramiro

in *La Finta Giardiniera*.

### Sarah Joyce Cooper - Annina



**Sarah Joyce Cooper** has received praise for her “meltingly beautiful” (Opera News) singing and “passionate power” (Parterre Box). Highlights for the 2024-25 season include her debut with Seattle Opera as Minnie Tate in the world premiere of Tazewell Thompson’s *Jubilee*, the role of Tebaldo in Verdi’s *Don Carlo* with the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, and the title role in *American Jezebel*, a world premiere opera commissioned by Harvard University that tells the story of theologian, midwife, scholar, and co-founder of Rhode Island, Anne Hutchinson. Recent performances include soloist appearances at Carnegie Hall in Poulenc’s *Gloria* and John Rutter’s *Magnificat*; the roles of Eva and Gabriel in Haydn’s *Creation* with

the MIT Concert Choir and Handel and Haydn Society Chamber Choir; and her debut with the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra in Strauss’s *Vier letzte Lieder*.

Operatic credits include Adina in *L’Elisir d’amore* (Geneva Light Opera), Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette* (Opera Western Reserve), Clorinda in *La Cenerentola* (Syracuse Opera), Violetta in *La Traviata* (MassOpera) and La Charmeuse in *Thaïs* (Maryland Lyric Opera). In addition to performing,

Ms. Cooper serves as Executive Assistant for Help!ComeHome!, a nonprofit dedicated to meeting the needs of under-served communities throughout the US.

### Jaehyuk Choi - Gastone



Tenor **Jaehyuk Choi** is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts student in voice performance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he holds a Graduate Teaching Assistantship and fellowship. He has won numerous vocal competitions, including the 14th Lois Alba International Aria Competition (Robin Angly and Miles Smith Award & 1st Place Max Locher Audience Choice Award), 1st prize at the Greater Houston NATS Competition, Daegu Vocal Music Competition, and Belvedere International Competition Seoul chapter, among others.

He has performed opera roles such as Roberto in *Le Villi*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, and Tamino in *The Magic Flute*. As a soloist, he has

performed in Handel’s *Messiah*, Schumann’s *Requiem*, and Bruckner’s *Te Deum*. He has an upcoming performance of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* with the Symphony of Southeast Texas.



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**Brian Keith Johnson** - Barone

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 35th year of teaching music in The Akron Public School System. He taught 27 years at Akron Garfield High School as the Choir Director. His current assignment is teaching General Music at Findley CLC. Favorite engagements from this past season include *Sweeney Todd* and *Ragtime* (Coalhouse Walker Jr) at Weathervane Playhouse, Dvorak's *Te Deum*, Two Concerts with The Cleveland Composer's Guild, Michael Haydn's *Requiem in C Minor*, Willcocks' *From Darkness To Light: A Requiem of Hope*, *The Messiah*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and The Brahms *Requiem*. This season he will sing two *Messiahs*, *Alice and Her Adventures in Wonderland* with Nightingale Opera and Mozart's *C Minor Mass* with The Akron Symphony Orchestra and *Ragtime*, *The Concert* with The Canton Symphony Orchestra. Brian lives in Cuyahoga Falls with his wife and Akron Public Schools Kindergarten Teacher, Sue. Brian is also an avid motorcyclist.

**Jason Budd** - Dottore

Jason Budd is a seasoned singer-actor with a strong reputation for delivering high-quality performances. He has performed in various roles across the United States, Europe, and South America, including a successful debut as *Falstaff* in São Paulo, Brazil. Budd has received awards from several vocal competitions, including the Opera Columbus Competition, Heinz Rehfuß Competition, Mary Jacobs Smith Singer of the Year competition, and Meistersinger Competition in Graz, Austria. A perennial favorite at Toledo Opera, Jason just returned from their production of *Tosca* last month. Other recent engagements include

performances with Spoleto Festival, Boston Midsummer Opera, Fremont Opera, Opera Project Columbus, Cleveland Opera Theater, and Opera Western Reserve.

**Aiden Eddy** - Marchese d'Obigny, Flora's Servant, Commissioner

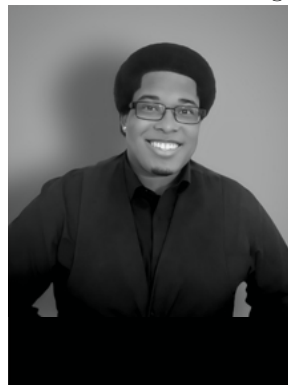
Aiden Eddy is a Junior Voice Performance major at Baldwin Wallace University and is originally from Rochester NY.

He currently studies under Dr. JR Fralick and some of his most recent credits from BW include King Tiridate in Handel's *Radamisto*, Baron Zeta in *The Merry Widow* and Curio in *Giulio Cesare*. His recent professional credits also include Smudge in *Forever Plaid* and King Triton in *The Little Mermaid* at Tibbits Opera House.

He would like to thank Scott Skiba for this opportunity and his parents and loving girlfriend for their continuous support.

**Benjamin Burney** - Giuseppe

The tenor, from Youngstown, Ohio, has performed locally in his hometown and internationally from the Caribbean Islands to Estonia.



Recently, Benjamin performed in the world premiere of *Iphigenia* by Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spalding, and went on to make his Kennedy Center debut. His operatic career began with Opera Western Reserve's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* twelve years ago.

Benjamin was a Gilman Scholarship recipient allowing him to study abroad in Milan, Italy for opera and Italian. He was named a winner of the Montpelier Arts Center Recital Competition, and a First Prize Winner for the Charleston International Music Competition. Benjamin received his M.M. at Roosevelt University CCPA, B.M. at Anderson University, and is an alumnus of the Youngstown Connection.

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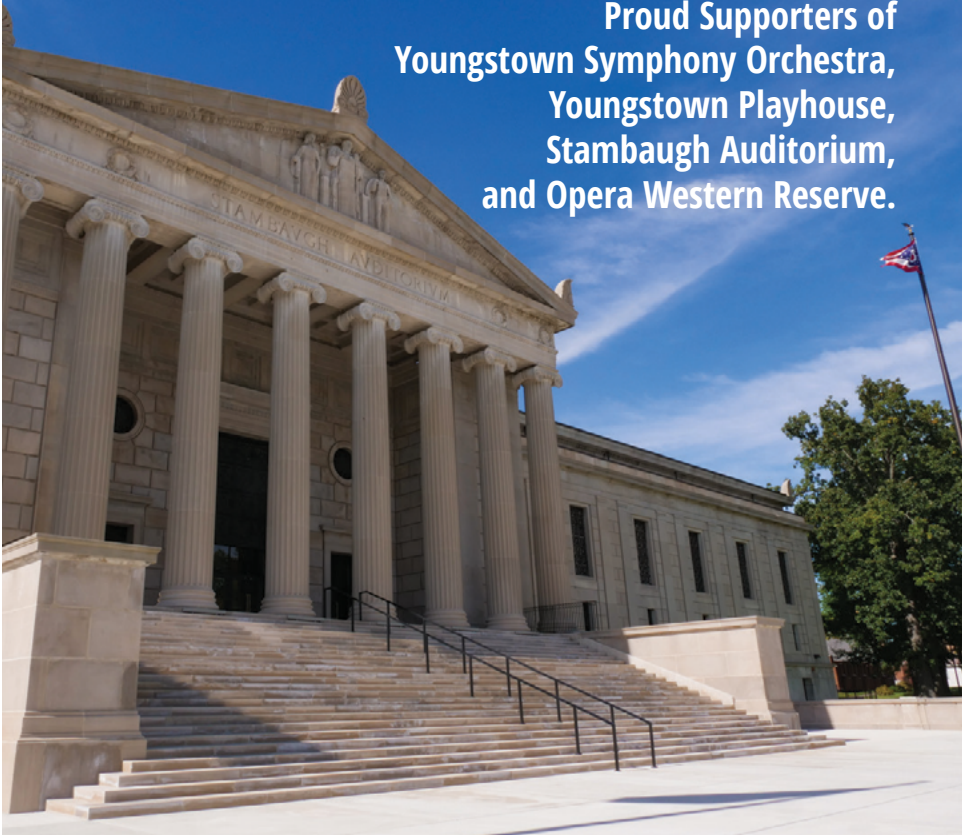
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