



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Sarasota Opera Announces Cast for the 2025/2026 Season** *Single Tickets Go on Sale Online Friday, August 1*

**Sarasota, FL** — Artistic director and principal conductor [Victor DeRenzi](#) and general director [Richard Russell](#) are pleased to announce the cast for the 2025/2026 season, the company's 67<sup>th</sup> and the [centennial](#) of the historic Sarasota Opera House. The Fall season features the return of the Fall opera, opening October 31 with Mozart's [Così fan tutte](#). The Winter Opera Festival opens February 14 and will feature Puccini's [La bohème](#), Lehár's [The Merry Widow](#), Verdi's [Il trovatore](#), and Floyd's [Susannah](#). The cast of internationally renowned artists includes Sarasota Opera favorites as well as company debuts. Single tickets for all performances will be available online only beginning Friday, August 1, and in the Box Office and via phone on Tuesday, September 2.

Praised by *OperaNews* as “magnificent,” soprano [Hanna Brammer](#) returns as Fiordiligi in Mozart's witty and poignant exploration of love and fidelity, [Così fan tutte](#). Brammer has interpreted many of opera's most beloved soprano roles to great acclaim, including Nedda (*Pagliacci*), Violetta (*La traviata*), and Gilda (*Rigoletto*), with companies across the country such as Opera Columbus, St. Petersburg Opera, and Opera Tampa. She will also sing the title role in Carlisle Floyd's [Susannah](#), the final production of the Winter Festival which celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the birth of its composer.

Lauded for her “theatrical magnetism,” American mezzo-soprano [Olivia Vote](#) will sing the role of Dorabella. Since joining the roster of the Metropolitan Opera in 2018, she has appeared in numerous productions including *Die Zauberflöte*, *Medea*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Akhnaten*, and has performed with companies such as Atlanta Opera and the National Lithuanian Opera and Ballet. [Soprano Virginia Mims](#), a Sarasota favorite who charmed audiences last season with her vocal agility and charming stage presence as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, will sing Despina. She will also return during the Winter Festival to sing the role of Musetta in [La bohème](#).

[Italian baritone Filippo Fontana](#), who captured audiences last season as Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* with his rich tone and charismatic stage presence, returns for his ninth season to sing the role of Guglielmo. Audiences can look forward to seeing Fontana again during the winter as

Marcello in *La bohème*. [Baritone Jake Stamatis](#) will make his role debut as Don Alfonso. Last season, Stamatis sang the role of Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* and will return in the winter to sing the role of Danilo in *The Merry Widow*.

The production will be conducted by Victor DeRenzi and directed by Stephanie Sundine, with scenic design by David P. Gordon, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, and lighting by Ken Yunker. *Così fan tutte* will be sung in Italian with English translations for five performances from October 31 through November 15.

Puccini's *La bohème* opens the 2026 Winter Festival on February 14, bringing a timeless story of love, friendship, and loss to the stage. [Soprano Ashley Milanese](#) returns with her expressive lyricism and dramatic sensitivity to sing the role of Mimì. She made her acclaimed company debut in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2024 and has since performed with Opera in the Heights, Opera Philadelphia, and Komische Oper Berlin. She sang the role of Nedda at Sarasota Opera in last season's *Pagliacci*.

[Tenor Woo Young Yoon](#) makes his Sarasota debut as Rodolfo. A rising star on the international stage praised for his "soaring high notes" by *OperaNews*, Yoon has performed with San Jose Opera and New York City Opera. [Bass Young Bok Kim](#), marking over two decades with Sarasota Opera, will sing Colline. A native of Korea who has sung with the National Opera of Korea and Seoul Metropolitan Opera, he has performed roles such as Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), and the title role in *Attila* with Sarasota Opera. Kim will also sing the role of Ferrando in *Il trovatore*. [Bass Brian Kontes](#), noted by *OperaNews* for his "dark bass and strong dramatic energy" who has appeared with Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Colorado, and the Metropolitan Opera, will perform Benoit, as well as the role of Elder McLean in Floyd's *Susannah*. [Bass-baritone Hans Tashjian](#), whose voice has been described as "rumbling and lush", will sing Alcindoro. He has performed previously with the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Baltimore, and Houston Grand Opera.

The production will be conducted by Victor DeRenzi and directed by Stephanie Sundine, with scenic design by David P. Gordon, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, and lighting by Ken Yunker. *La bohème* will be sung in Italian with English translations for 12 performances February 14 through March 28.

Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* opens Saturday, February 21, bringing elegance, romance, and Viennese charm to the stage. [Soprano Raquel González](#), who made her Sarasota debut as Cio Cio San in 2023's *Madama Butterfly*, will sing the lead role of Hanna Glawari. Hailed by *OperaNews* as a "true artist," González is a recipient of the Sphinx Organization's Medal of Excellence and has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. [Soprano Sara Kennedy](#), who has performed with Teatro Grattacielo and Florida Grand Opera, sang Lola in Sarasota Opera's *Cavalleria rusticana* last season, will sing the role of Valencienne. [Tenor Patrick Bessenbacher](#) makes his Sarasota debut as Camille. Praised by *OperaNews* for his "purity of tone and ardent, youthful stage presence", Bessenbacher has performed with Opera San José, the Florentine Opera, and Opera Birmingham.

This new production will be conducted by Anthony Barrese and directed by Katherine M. Carter, with scenic design by Steven C. Kemp, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, and lighting by Ken Yunker. [\*The Merry Widow\*](#) will be sung in English with English surtitles for nine performances February 21 through March 27.

[\*Giuseppe Verdi's Il trovatore\*](#) opens Saturday, March 7, delivering fiery passions, unforgettable melodies, and one of opera's most gripping tales of vengeance and fate. [Canadian-Italian soprano Aviva Fortunata](#), praised for her "velvety timbre" and "gleaming tone," will sing Leonora. A graduate of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio, her signature roles include Norma, Tosca, Donna Anna, and Elvira in *Ernani*, which she performed at Sarasota Opera in 2023. Returning for her 11<sup>th</sup> role at Sarasota Opera, [mezzo-soprano Lisa Chavez](#) will sing Azucena, the haunted gypsy woman at the heart of the opera's mystery. Described as possessing a "plush storm of a voice" and "commanding the stage at every moment," Chavez has performed with New York City Opera and Opera San José. She wowed audiences last season in Sarasota with her gripping performance as the shunned Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana*.

[Tenor Victor Starsky](#) will sing the role of Manrico. He returns to Sarasota Opera following acclaimed performances as Don José in *Carmen* and the title role in last season's *Stiffelio*. Starsky has also sung the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Radamès in *Aida*, and Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* with companies across the U.S. and is known for his powerful voice and dramatic intensity. [Baritone Ricardo José Rivera](#) will perform the role of Count de Luna. Lauded by The New York Times for a voice "powerful yet capable of softness," Rivera is a sought-after Verdi interpreter, debuting major roles last year as *Macbeth* at Teatro Nuovo and as Stankar in *Stiffelio* at Sarasota Opera.

The production will be conducted by Victor DeRenzi and directed by Marco Nisticò, with scenic design by Michael Schweikardt, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, and lighting by Ken Yunker. [\*Il trovatore\*](#) will be sung in Italian with English translations for seven performances March 7 through March 29.

Carlisle Floyd's [\*Susannah\*](#), a powerful American opera of innocence and judgement that premiered in the state of Florida, will open Saturday, March 14 as the final production of the Winter Opera Festival. Floyd would have celebrated his 100th birthday in 2026, along with the Opera House.

Soprano Hanna Brammer will sing the title role, bringing her expressive stage presence and vocal agility to one of the most iconic roles in American opera. [Bass-baritone Jason Zacher](#), praised for his "an alluring persona" and "resonant voice" by *OperaNews*, will portray the fire-and-brimstone preacher Olin Blitch in his Sarasota debut. [Tenor Jeremy Brauner](#), described by *Opera Wire* as having a voice of "unbridled power", returns to the Sarasota stage to sing the role of Sam.

The production will be conducted by Jessé Martins and directed by Martha Collins, with scenic design by Keith Brumley, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, and lighting by Ken Yunker. [\*Susannah\*](#) will be sung in English with English surtitles for five performances March 14 through March 28.

This season's festivities will extend into April this year as the company presents [a commemorative concert and gala dinner celebrating 100 years](#) of the historic Sarasota Opera House. The events will include an open house on April 10, a concert onstage at the Opera House on April 11, followed by a gala dinner at Michael's on the Bay at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Details will follow in a later press release. More information here: [100 Years | Sarasota Opera](#)

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances, indicated with (m), begin at 1:30 p.m. For more information, visit <https://www.sarasotaopera.org>, call 941-328-1300, or visit the Box Office at 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota.

### Sarasota Opera's 2025–2026 Season

*[Così fan tutte](#)* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage  
October 31, November 2 (m), 11, 13, 15 (m)

**Artists:**

Fiordiligi: Hanna Brammer  
Dorabella: Olivia Vote  
Ferrando: Luke Norvell  
Guglielmo: Filippo Fontana  
Despina: Virginia Mims  
Don Alfonso: Jake Stamatīs  
Conductor: Victor DeRenzi  
Stage Director: Stephanie Sundine  
Scenic Designer: David P. Gordon  
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan  
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

*[La bohème](#)* by Giacomo Puccini  
Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage  
February 14, 17, 19, 22 (m), 25, 28  
March 3, 6, 11, 20 (m), 26, 28

**Artists:**

Mimi: Ashley Milanese  
Rodolfo: Woo Young Yoon  
Marcello: Filippo Fontana  
Musetta: Virginia Mims  
Colline: Young Bok Kim  
Benoit: Brian Kontes  
Alcindoro: Hans Tashjian  
Conductor: Victor DeRenzi  
Stage Director: Stephanie Sundine  
Scenic Designer: David P. Gordon

Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

*The Merry Widow* by Franz Lehár

Sung in English with English surtitles above the stage

February 21, 24, 26

March 1 (m), 4, 8 (m), 13, 21, 27 (m)

**Artists:**

Hanna Glawari: Raquel González

Count Danilo: Jake Stamatis

Camille: Patrick Bessenbacher

Valencienne: Sara Kennedy

Conductor: Anthony Barrese

Stage Director: Katherine M. Carter

Scenic Designer: Steven Kemp

Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

*Il trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

March 7, 12, 15 (m), 18, 21 (m), 24, 29 (m)

**Artists:**

Leonora: Aviva Fortunata

Manrico: Victor Starsky

Azucena: Lisa Chavez

Count de Luna: Ricardo José Rivera

Ferrando: Young Bok Kim

Conductor: Victor DeRenzi

Stage Director: Marco Nisticò

Scenic Designer: Michael Schweikardt

Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

*Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd

Sung in English with English surtitles above the stage

March 14, 17, 19, 22 (m), 25, 28 (m)

**Artists:**

Susannah Polk: Hanna Brammer

Sam Polk: Jeremy Brauner

Olin Blich: Jason Zacher

Elder McLean: Brian Kontes

Conductor: Jessé Martins

Stage Director: Martha Collins

Scenic Designer: Keith Brumley  
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan  
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

### **About Sarasota Opera**

Sarasota Opera is entering its 67th season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast and is celebrating 100 years of the historic Sarasota Opera House. 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 opera 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 the 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. Sarasota Opera • 61 N. Pineapple Avenue • Sarasota, FL 34236 • (941) 366-8450 • [SarasotaOpera.org](http://SarasotaOpera.org)