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Sarasota Opera Announces Cast for the 2026/2027 Season *Single Tickets on Sale Now*

Sarasota, FL — General and Artistic Director [Richard Russell](#) is pleased to announce the cast for Sarasota Opera's 68th season. The company's Fall Season opens with Engelbert Humperdinck's [Hansel and Gretel](#) on October 30 and will also include the Sarasota Youth Opera's production of Rachel J. Peters' [Rootabaga Country](#) on November 7 and 8. The Winter Festival opens on February 6 with Giuseppe Verdi's [La traviata](#), followed by the company debut of Gilbert & Sullivan's [H.M.S. Pinafore](#) on February 13, Richard Strauss' [Ariadne auf Naxos](#) on February 27, and Leoš Janáček's [Jenůfa](#) opening March 6.

The cast of artists includes Sarasota Opera favorites as well as company debuts. Humperdinck's [Hansel and Gretel](#) opens Sarasota Opera's Fall Season on October 30, offering a musically sophisticated stage work that is appropriate and accessible for all ages. The role of Hansel will be performed by mezzo-soprano [Kara Morgan](#). Of her previous performance in the role, *Opera News* stated, "The major energy driving the action came from mezzo soprano Kara Morgan, who has a warm, attractive voice fully expressive of confidence and ease with the world." Morgan will be joined by recent Juilliard master's program graduate and Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition Regional Finalist [Kerrigan Bigelow](#) in the role of Gretel.

Following her recent portrayal of Azucena in Sarasota Opera's 2026 production of *Il trovatore*, mezzo-soprano [Lisa Chavez](#) – commended by *OperaWire* for "commanding the stage at every moment" – returns to play the Witch. The cast will also include [Lindsey Polcyn](#) as the Mother, who returns this season after an "unforgettable" (*Sarasota Observer*) turn as Mrs. McLean in

Susannah last season, and the debut of baritone [Spencer Reichman](#) in the role of Peter; with Studio Artists [Sarah Stembel](#) as The Dewman and [Kira Neary](#) as The Sandman.

Hansel and Gretel will be conducted by longtime Sarasota Opera collaborator [Anthony Barrese](#). The original production, first presented at New Orleans Opera, is by **E. Loren Meeker** and [Felicity Stiverson](#), who will direct and choreograph Sarasota Opera's production with associate director **Nora Winsler**. **Steven C. Kemp** is the scenic designer, and costumes are designed by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. **Ken Yunker** is the lighting designer. *Hansel and Gretel* will be sung in English with English supertitles for six performances from October 30 through November 14.

The Sarasota Youth Opera's [Rootabaga Country](#) is a whimsical journey of imagination, family, and self-discovery inspired by Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*. The performance will star returning Sarasota Opera Studio Artists including tenor [Dylan Schang](#) in the role of Gimme the Ax and baritone [Riley Findley](#) in the role of Potato Face Blind Man. Youth Opera casting will be completed later this month. The hour-long opera will be conducted by **Jessé Martins** and directed by **Martha Collins**, with scenic design by **Sheryl Liu**, costumes designed by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. *Rootabaga Country* will be sung in English for two performances on November 7 and 8.

Verdi's [La traviata](#) opens Sarasota Opera's Winter Festival on February 6. Starring in this story of sacrifice and romance in 19th century Paris is soprano [Virginia Mims](#), a Sarasota favorite who has charmed audiences and critics alike in recent seasons with her stage presence and "crystalline voice" (*Classical Voice North America*) as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Despina in *Così fan tutte*, and Musetta in *La bohème*.

Tenor [Luke Norvell](#) – last seen as Ferrando in Sarasota's production of *Così fan tutte* – returns to sing the role of Alfredo. Norvell has been lauded for his "luscious spinto voice" by *Parterre Box* and his "beautifully flowing, lyrically warm tenor voice and deeply felt emotional expression" by *Klassik Begeistert*. [Luke Sutliff](#) – who was recently cited by *The New York Times* for his "thoroughly assured interpretation and stage presence" – will take on the role of Giorgio Germont. A top prize winner in the Metropolitan Opera's 2025 Laffont Competition and second prize winner in the 2023 Operalia Competition, this will mark the baritone's debut with Sarasota Opera.

Studio Artists, soprano **Mary Burke Barber**, tenor **Dylan Schang**, baritone **Matthew Cossack**, and bass **Younggwang Park** will perform the roles of Flora, Gastone, Marquis d'Obigny, and Doctor Grenvil, respectively, while frequent Sarasota performer, baritone **Alexander Boyd** will be seen as Baron Douphol.

This new production of *La traviata* will be conducted by **Marcello Cormio** and directed by Sarasota Opera's Director of Artistic Operations **Marco Nisticò**, with scenic design by **Steven C. Kemp**, lighting design by **Ken Yunker**, and costumes by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. *La traviata* will

be sung in Italian with English supertitles for eleven performances from February 6 through March 20.

Comic opera [H.M.S. Pinafore](#) opens on February 13, marking the first season in Sarasota Opera's 68-year history that the company will present a work from the legendary Victorian-era dramatist and composer partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan. The production will feature the "dynamic" bass-baritone (*The New York Times*) [Hans Tashjian](#) as The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter. Tashjian was last seen with the company as Alcindoro in *La bohème*.

After "dazzling in the title role" (*Classical Voice North America*) in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* and singing the role of Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* in the 2025-2026 season, soprano [Hanna Brammer](#) returns once again to Sarasota to sing the role of Josephine. Contralto [Alissa Anderson](#) – who performed with Sarasota Opera as a Studio Artist in the 2010-11 season – will play the role of Little Buttercup.

Baritone [Jake Stamatis](#) performs the role of Captain Corcoran, following acclaimed appearances as Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Danilo in *The Merry Widow*. The *Sarasota Observer* praised his portrayal of Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, citing "his appealing well-grounded voice, slick persuasion and unflappable confidence." Also appearing on the G&S ship are the "sweet, pleasing tenor" (*Cincinnati Business Courier*) [David Walton](#) in the role of Ralph Rackstraw and returning Studio Artist, bass-baritone [Gabriel Lockheimer Toso](#) in the role of Dick Deadeye.

H.M.S. Pinafore will be conducted by [John F. Spencer, IV](#) and directed by Sarasota Opera veteran [Mark Freiman](#), with a new scenic design by **Ryan Howell**, lighting design by **Ken Yunker**, and costumes by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. [H.M.S. Pinafore](#) will be sung in English with English supertitles for nine performances from February 13 through March 19.

Richard Strauss' [Ariadne auf Naxos](#) opens on February 27, showcasing the composer's gift for intertwining emotional depth with theatrical spectacle. The story's plotline follows two troupes of musicians – one a commedia dell'arte group led by the comedienne Zerbinetta and the other a serious opera company – who are forced to perform simultaneously at the behest of the richest man in Vienna.

The opera seria company is led by soprano [Mary Evelyn Hangle](#), playing the role of The Prima Donna/Ariadne. A 2023 Sullivan Foundation Career Grant recipient and former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow, Hangle has been praised by *Opera News* for her "poise and vocal purity" and by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "a marvel." Tenor [Jeremy Brauner](#), celebrated by *OperaWire* for "a voice of unbridled power, with a spine-tingling squillo," returns to Sarasota after singing Sam in last season's production of *Susannah* to play The Tenor/Bacchus, while former

Sarasota Apprentice and Studio Artist [Abigail Raiford](#) – cited as a “standout” by *The New York Times* – will play the role of Zerbinetta.

Mezzo-soprano [Tessa Fackelmann](#) returns after her charming turn as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* to perform the role of The Composer while baritone [Alexander Boyd](#) sings the role of A Music Master.

Sarasota Opera Studio Artists will fill the roles of the commedia dell’arte troupe and supporting characters, with tenor [Dylan Schang](#) as a Dancing Master, soprano [Melanie Spector](#) as Naiad, soprano [Agnese Gallenzi](#) as Echo, mezzo-soprano [Emily Harmon](#) as Dryad, tenor [Andrew Bearden Brown](#) as Brighella, tenor [David Freides](#) as Scaramuccio, baritone [Matthew Cossack](#) as Harlequin, bass [Younggwang Park](#) as Truffaldin, and tenor [Nathan Schafer](#) as An Officer.

Ariadne auf Naxos will be conducted by **Jessé Martins** and directed by **Martha Collins**, with lighting design by **Ken Yunker** and costume design by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. [Ariadne auf Naxos](#) will be sung in English and German with English translations for six performances February 27 through March 13.

The final opera in Sarasota’s 2026-27 season is Leoš Janáček’s [Jenůfa](#), opening March 6. Presented at the Sarasota Opera for the first time in three decades, the landmark Czech opera follows the story of young Jenůfa and her protector and stepmother, Kostelnička, who will be played by world-renowned Finnish soprano [Karita Mattila](#). Mattila was long associated with the title role of Jenůfa, which she performed at many of the world’s greatest opera houses before she took on the role of Kostelnička. About Mattila, *The New Yorker* once wrote, “Her voice is a complete instrument, a thing of beauty and power. She sails over the orchestra without effort, retaining the honeyed warmth of her tone even at the highest volume.” Mattila will also serve as Sarasota Opera’s first ever **Artist in Residence** throughout the 2026-27 season, working closely with Sarasota Opera’s Apprentice and Studio Artists to offer mentorship, artistic guidance, and individualized coaching.

Soprano [Kathryn Henry](#) makes her Sarasota Opera debut as Jenůfa, a role she previously performed when stepping in for Lise Davidsen at the Lyric Opera of Chicago under the baton of Jakub Hrůša. Lauded for her “flawless sense of line and the shimmering warmth of her sound” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*), Ms. Henry makes her European debut at Theater Bonn this season, and has recently performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and Santa Fe Opera.

Tenor **Victor Starsky**, who “delivered a ripe and passionate ‘Di quella pira’” (*EarRelevant*) last season as Manrico in *Il trovatore*, will return to sing Števa Buryja, while tenor **Christopher Oglesby** will bring his “vibrancy and charisma” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) to the role of Laca

Klemeň. Studio Artists will round out the cast, with **Riley Findley** in the role of Starek, bass-baritone **Gabriel Lockheimer Toso** as The Mayor, soprano [Sarah Stembel](#) as Karolka, soprano **Kira Neary** as Jano, and mezzo soprano Lauryn Nelson as the Stařenka Buryjovka (Grandmother).

Jenůfa will be conducted by [David Neely](#) and directed by [Katherine M. Carter](#), with a new scenic design by **Steven C. Kemp**, lighting design by **Ken Yunker**, and costumes by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**. *Jenůfa* will be sung in Czech with English translations for five performances March 6 through March 21.

Single tickets for all performances are available online at sarasotaopera.org, by phone at 941-328-1300, or at the Box Office at the historic Sarasota Opera House at 61 N. Pineapple Ave, which celebrated its centennial last season.

Sarasota Opera's 2026-2027 Season Casting

Hansel and Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck
Sung in English with English supertitles above the stage
October 30, November 1(m), 4, 10, 12, 14

Artists:

Peter, a broom maker: Spencer Reichman
Gertrud, his wife: Lindsey Polcyn
Hansel, their son: Kara Morgan
Gretel, their daughter: Kerrigan Bigelow
The Witch: Lisa Chavez
The Sandman: Kira Neary
The Dewman: Sarah Stembel
Conductor: Anthony Barrese
Original Production by E. Loren Meeker and Felicity Stiverson
Director/Choreographer: Felicity Stiverson
Associate Director: Nora Winsler
Scenic Designer: Steven Kemp
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

Rootabaga Country by Rachel J. Peters
November 7, 8 (m)
Sung in English

Artists:

Gimme the Ax: Dylan Schang
Potato Face Blind Man: Riley Findley
Conductor: Jessé Martins
Director: Martha Collins
Scenic Designer: Sheryl Liu
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

La traviata by Giuseppe Verdi

February 6, 9, 11, 14 (m), 20 (m), 26, March 3, 11, 13, 17, 20 (m)
Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

Artists:

Violetta Valery: Virginia Mims
Alfredo Germont: Luke Norvell
Giorgio Germont: Luke Sutliff
Gastone: Dylan Schang
Baron Douphol: Alex Boyd
Marquis d'Obigny: Matthew Cossack
Doctor Grenvil: Younggwang Park
Flora Bervoix: Mary Burke Barber
Conductor: Marcello Cormio
Director: Marco Nisticò
Scenic Designer: Steven C. Kemp
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

H.M.S. Pinafore by Gilbert & Sullivan

February 13, 16, 18, 21(m), 24, 28(m), March 5, 12, 19
Sung in English with English supertitles above the stage

Artists:

The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter: Hans Tashjian
Captain Corcoran: Jake Stamatis
Ralph Rackstraw: David Walton
Dick Deadeye: Gabriel Lockheimer Toso
Josephine: Hanna Brammer
Mrs. Cripps (Little Buttercup): Alissa Anderson
Conductor: John F. Spencer, IV

Director: Mark Freiman
Scenic Designer: Ryan Howell
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

Ariadne auf Naxos by Richard Strauss

February 27, March 2, 4, 7 (m), 10, 13

Sung in English and German with English translations above the stage

Artists:

A Music Master: Alex Boyd
The Composer: Tessa Fackelmann
The Prima Donna/ Ariadne: Mary Evelyn Hangle
The Tenor/ Bacchus: Jeremy Brauner
Zerbinetta: Abigail Raiford
A Dancing Master: Dylan Schang
Naiad: Melanie Spector
Echo: Agnese Gallenzi
Dryad: Emily Harmon
Brighella: Andrew Bearden Brown
Scaramuccio: David Freides
Truffaldin: Younggwang Park
Harlequin: Matthew Cossack
An Officer: Nathan Schafer
Conductor: Jessé Martins
Director: Martha Collins
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

Jenůfa by Leoš Janáček

March 6, 9, 14 (m), 18, 21(m)

Sung in Czech with English translations above the stage

Artists:

Jenůfa: Kathryn Henry
Kostelnička Buryja: Karita Mattila
Števa Buryja: Victor Starsky
Laca Klemeň: Christopher Oglesby
Stárek: Riley Findley
The Mayor: Gabriel Lockheimer Toso

Karolka: Sarah Stembel
Stařenka Buryjovka (Grandmother): Lauryn Nelson
Jano: Kira Neary
Conductor: David Neely
Director: Katherine M. Carter
Scenic Designer: Steven C. Kemp
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 68th season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast and 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 in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Richard Russell has served as General Director since 2012 and added the role of Artistic Director in June 2026. 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