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Sarasota Opera announces 2026-27 season

Sarasota, FL – After celebrating the 2026 centennial of the Sarasota Opera House during its current season, Sarasota Opera announces today the five mainstage productions of its [2026-27 season](#): *Hansel and Gretel*, *La traviata*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Jenůfa*, plus the Sarasota Youth Opera’s revival of *Rootabaga Country*. The upcoming 68th season at Sarasota Opera will mark the first for Richard Russell serving as General and Artistic Director. Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Victor DeRenzi, whose visionary leadership over his 44-year tenure leaves a legacy unmatched in American opera, will depart the company at the end of May 2026.

“Maestro DeRenzi’s musical values—his reverence for the human voice, his insistence that singers give everything to their performances, his focus on the text, and his deep respect for the works themselves—have shaped me and countless singers and musicians over the past 44 years. I’m committed to carrying that approach forward, because it remains essential to opera’s future,” Sarasota Opera General Director Richard Russell said.

Five guest conductors return to lead the Sarasota Opera mainstage productions in the 2026-27 season: Anthony Barrese, Marcello Cormio, John Spencer IV, Jessé Martins, and David Neely.

The fall season will open on October 30, 2026, with Engelbert Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, followed by the Sarasota Youth Opera’s production of Rachel J. Peters’ *Rootabaga Country* on November 7 and 8, which first premiered in Sarasota in 2017. The Winter Festival will open on February 6, 2027, with a brand-new production of Verdi’s *La traviata*, followed by the company’s inaugural presentation of an operetta by Gilbert & Sullivan, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, opening February 13. Richard Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos* opens next on February 27, and a new production of Janáček’s *Jenůfa* opens March 6, starring famed Finnish soprano Karita Mattila in the pivotal role of the Kostelníčka. The season runs through March 21, 2027.

“I’m thrilled about the repertoire we’re bringing next season. We’re presenting Gilbert and Sullivan for the first time, returning to *La traviata* with a new production and an exciting young soprano, and welcoming one of the great singing actresses of our time, Karita Mattila, in one of her signature roles,” said Russell. “My goal for the upcoming season is to present a diverse and balanced repertoire that offers our audiences real variety while introducing new experiences.”

Another new highlight of the 2026–27 Season will be the launch of Sarasota Opera’s new Artist-in-Residence program, inaugurated by internationally acclaimed soprano Karita Mattila. As the company’s first Artist in Residence, Mattila will work closely with Sarasota Opera’s Apprentice and Studio Artists, offering mentorship, artistic guidance, and individualized coaching throughout the season. Her presence will bring an extraordinary level of artistry and experience to the company’s professional training initiatives.

This season will also introduce the Emerging Artists Showcase, an exciting new end-of-season concert featuring the talents of the Apprentice and Studio Artists in performance with a full orchestra. Designed to highlight the next generation of operatic voices, the concert will also include a special appearance by members of the Sarasota Youth Opera.

[Artwork for the 2026-27 season](#) was created by Ukrainian-born illustrator and painter Tori Abramov, who earned a degree in illustration from Ringling College of Art and Design and now resides in Sarasota.

Signature events slated for the 2026-27 season include the annual Food and Wine Festival on September 26, the annual gala on January 30, and Salute to the Stars Awards Luncheon on March 9.

Subscriptions for all five operas will go on sale March 16. Single tickets to individual operas will be on sale online only on August 1, 2026, and at the Box Office and via phone beginning on September 1, 2026. For more information, visit <https://www.sarasotaopera.org/2026-27-season-announcement>

FALL SEASON 2026

Hansel and Gretel

Music by Engelbert Humperdinck

Libretto by Adelheid Wette

The Fall Season opens with Engelbert Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, an opera about youthful wonder, courage, and strength in an enchanted forest. Inspired by the Brothers Grimm fable, the story follows two siblings who stray into the forest, encounter a beguiling Gingerbread Witch, and find courage in the face of peril. Musically sophisticated but accessible for all ages, *Hansel and Gretel* blends rich orchestration with folk like melodies. The opera conveys a journey from hardship and temptation to wonder and homecoming, offering a timeless reflection on innocence, resourcefulness, and the power of family. Kerrigan Bigelow makes her debut with Sarasota Opera in the role of Gretel, alongside returning cast member Lisa Chavez as the Witch, and Lindsey Polcyn as Gertrude. Spencer Reichman will make his company debut as the Father. *Hansel and Gretel* will be conducted by Anthony Barrese. Set design is by Steven C. Kemp. This production continues Sarasota Opera’s longstanding partnership with the Sarasota Orchestra.

Sung in English with English surtitles projected above the stage. Six performances — Oct. 30, Nov. 1 (m), Nov. 4, Nov 10, Nov. 12, Nov. 14 (m)

2027 WINTER OPERA FESTIVAL

La traviata

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

The 2027 Winter Opera Festival opens with a new production of *La traviata* designed by Steven C. Kemp, directed by Marco Nisticò, and conducted by Marcello Cormio. One of the most enduring works in the repertoire, *La traviata* is the moving story of Violetta Valéry, a celebrated courtesan in 19th century Paris whose unexpected love for Alfredo Germont conflicts with her world of parties and pleasure and forces her to make the ultimate sacrifice. Verdi's music seamlessly weaves elegance and drama, underscoring the timeless tale of Violetta's love and selfless devotion. Soprano Virginia Mims and tenor Luke Norvell – both recently seen in Sarasota Opera's *Così fan tutte* as Despina and Ferrando – play the romantic leads of Violetta and Alfredo.

Sung in Italian with English surtitles projected above the stage. Eleven performances — Feb. 6, Feb. 9, Feb. 11, Feb. 14 (m), Feb. 20 (m), Feb. 26, March 3, March 11, March 13, March 17, March 20.

H.M.S. Pinafore

Music by Arthur Sullivan

Libretto by W.S. Gilbert

Marking Sarasota Opera's inaugural staging of a Gilbert and Sullivan work, *H.M.S. Pinafore* is a cornerstone of Victorian comic operetta, where questions of love and social rank spark humor and delight. At the center of this story, set aboard a British Navy ship, is the earnest sailor Ralph Rackstraw and Josephine, the captain's daughter, whose affection challenges the strict hierarchies of their world. This uproarious satire includes witty patter songs and memorable melodies that make it a perennial favorite for audiences of all ages. Sarasota Opera favorite soprano Hanna Brammer (Fiordiligi, *Così fan tutte*, 2025; Susannah, *Susannah*, 2026) stars as Josephine, with baritone Jake Stamatis as Captain Corcoran, tenor Derrek Stark, in his Sarasota Opera debut, as Ralph Rackstraw, and Alissa Anderson as Little Buttercup. The conductor will be John Spencer IV.

Sung in English with English surtitles projected above the stage. Nine performances — Feb. 13, Feb. 16, Feb. 18, Feb. 21 (m), Feb. 24, Feb. 28 (m), March 5, March 12, March 19

Ariadne auf Naxos

Music by Richard Strauss

Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

A dazzling operatic fusion of myth and comedy, *Ariadne auf Naxos* begins with a lively backstage prologue in which an opera troupe and a comedy ensemble are forced to perform together. The resulting spectacle sets the mythical, mournful Ariadne – here performed by Mary Evelyn Hangley – alongside the playful Zerbinetta (Abigail Raiford) and her band of comedians. The opera showcases Strauss's gift for intertwining emotional depth with theatrical spectacle, masterfully balancing lush lyricism and clever playfulness. The Composer – whose famous aria

“Sein wir wieder gut” celebrates music as a sacred art – will be performed by Tessa Fackelmann. Sarasota Opera mainstay Martha Collins directs, and Jessé Martins conducts.

Sung in German with English surtitles projected above the stage. Six performances — Feb. 27, March 2, March 4, March 7 (m), March 10, March 13 (m)

Jenůfa

Music and Libretto by Leoš Janáček

Presented at the Sarasota Opera for the first time in three decades, this Czech opera is a landmark work of realism and emotional depth, following young Jenůfa as she endures hardship, love, and the unyielding expectations of her village. Soprano Kathryn Henry will make her company debut in the title role. Central to the drama is the Kostelnička, Jenůfa’s stepmother – played by world-renowned soprano Karita Mattila in her Sarasota Opera debut – whose desperate attempt to protect her stepdaughter leads to tragic consequences. Janáček’s score heightens the opera’s psychological intensity, with standout moments including Jenůfa’s poignant prayer and the Kostelnička’s electrifying monologue at the opera’s climax. Tenor Victor Starsky will be Steva and tenor Christopher Oglesby sings Laca. The opera will be conducted by David Neely, with stage direction by Katherine M. Carter and set design by Steven C. Kemp.

Sung in Czech with English surtitles projected above the stage. Five performances — March 6, March 9, March 14 (m), March 18, March 21 (m)

All performances are at 7:30 p.m. except where matinee (m) performances are indicated, which are at 1:30 p.m. For more information on the 2026-2027 season, visit SarasotaOpera.org, call 941-328-1300, or visit the box office at 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota.

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 67th 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 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. In June 2026 Maestro DeRenzi will be stepping down from the company and Mr. Russell will add Artistic Director to his responsibilities. 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