

Lyric

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Rising Stars in Concert

50th Anniversary Celebration



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Lyric

Greetings from the leadership of the Ryan Opera Center

Welcome to this very special *Rising Stars in Concert*, which marks The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center's 50th Anniversary! We are thrilled to have you with us to celebrate the current Ensemble as well as the program's five-decade legacy.

Since its founding in 1974, the Ryan Opera Center's mission has been to nurture the talents of the next generation of extraordinary artists. Hundreds of Ensemble members have benefited from the high-level training and performance opportunities provided to them — and have then gone on to perform at opera houses and concert halls on nearly every continent.

In recent years, the Ensemble has expanded to include a pianist and, starting in 2021, a conductor, stage director, and stage manager. By encompassing the full spectrum of operatic artists, the Ryan Opera Center continues to fulfill its leadership role in ensuring opera's future.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the dozens of esteemed faculty, guest master artists, and outstanding administrators who have shared their expertise and guided the Ryan Opera Center's growth and development. Those efforts have been fueled through the incredible generosity and support of countless Board members and donors, to whom we are grateful beyond words!

We would also like to thank the thousands of audience members who have attended Ryan Opera Center performances over the years and applauded these gifted emerging artists. That encouragement also plays a vital role in helping them have the confidence to succeed.

The Ryan Opera Center has a remarkable history and legacy. For half a century it has significantly impacted and enriched our beloved art form. How proud we can all be to consider that — and how excited we can be to dream of what's to come in the next 50 years!

JULIA FAULKNER

Director of Vocal Studies

DAN NOVAK

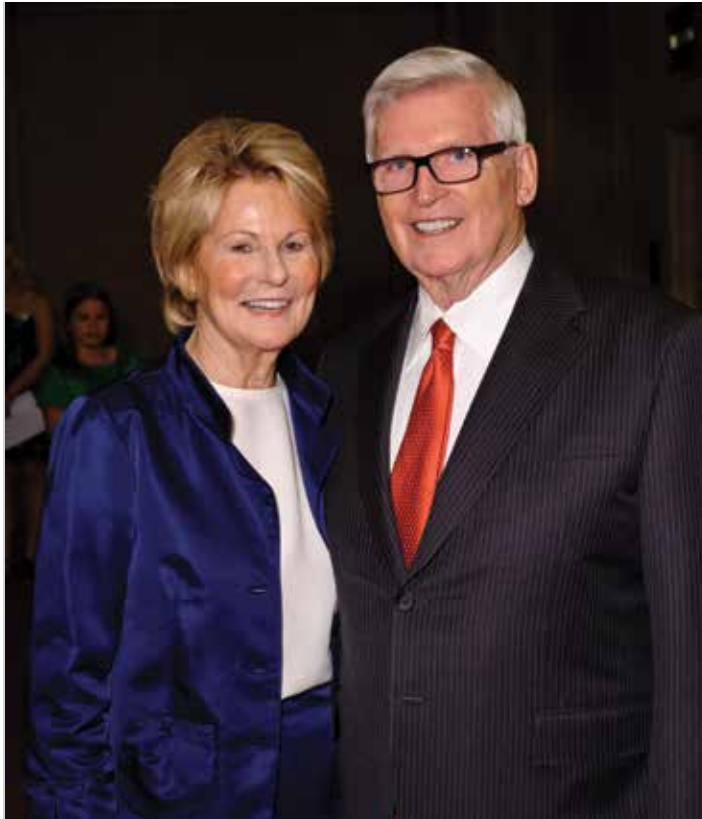
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Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan



Lyric Opera of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the extraordinary generosity of Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan and their remarkable support of our artist-development program that bears their name. We strive to honor their dedication through our ongoing efforts to maintain the Ryan Opera Center's standing among the best in the world. [L](#)



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Rising Stars in Concert

50th Anniversary Celebration

Friday, April 25, 2025 7:00 p.m.

The 2024/25 Ensemble of
The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center

Enrique Mazzola, *conductor*

Members of the Lyric Opera Orchestra

Paul Curran, *director*

Ryan Opera Center's 50th Anniversary Season is presented by **Patrick G. & Shirley W. Ryan, Lisbeth Stiffel,** and the **Donna Van Eekeren Foundation** with support from **Lead Sponsors Amy & Paul Carbone, Nancy Dehmlow, Patricia Frank, Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, Philip G. Lumpkin, Frank B. Modruson & Lynne C. Shigley, Dr. Scholl Foundation,** the **Robert and Penelope Steiner Family Foundation, Nasrin & Mark Thierer,** and **Cynthia Vahlkamp & Robert Kenyon.**

Lyric's 2024/25 Season is sponsored by **Erika Gross in loving memory of Dietrich Gross;** and **Julie & Roger Baskes.**

Maestro Enrique Mazzola is generously sponsored by **Alice & John Butler, H. Gael Neeson, Sylvia Neil & Daniel Fischel,** the **Robert and Penelope Steiner Family Foundation, Mary Stowell,** and the **Zell Family Foundation** as members of the Enrique Circle.

Rising Stars in Concert is being recorded for broadcast on 98.7 WFMT and streaming on wfmt.com on Sunday, May 18, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. CT. The ***Rising Stars in Concert*** radio broadcast is generously made possible by the **Donna Van Eekeren Foundation.**

Program

Part One

Jacques Offenbach
(1819–1880)

Orphée aux Enfers (*Orpheus in the Underworld*)
Ouverture

Scène du Conseil Municipal et Mélodrame

LUCY BAKER (Un Liseur)
CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Le Conseil)

Chanson (Couplets d'Eurydice)

EMILY RICHTER (Eurydice)

Duo (avec solo de violon)

DANIEL ESPINAL (Orphée)
EMILY RICHTER (Eurydice)

Chanson Pastorale

TRAVON D. WALKER (Aristée)

Couplets (La mort d'Eurydice)

EMILY RICHTER (Eurydice)

Final

DANIEL ESPINAL (Orphée)
SOPHIA MAEKAWA (L'Opinion Publique)
with ENSEMBLE

Duettino

SOPHIA MAEKAWA (L'Opinion Publique)
DANIEL ESPINAL (Orphée)

Chœur du sommeil et Couplets de Diane

GEMMA NHA (Cupidon)
ADIA EVANS (Vénus)
IAN RUCKER (Jupiter)
GEMMA NHA (Diane)
with ENSEMBLE

Rondo Saltarelle de Mercure

TRAVON D. WALKER (Mercure)
LUCY BAKER (Junon)
IAN RUCKER (Jupiter)

Entrée de Pluton et des Furies

Air en prose de Pluton

TRAVON D. WALKER (Pluton)

Chœur de la révolte

ADIA EVANS (Vénus)
GEMMA NHA (Cupidon)
IAN RUCKER (Jupiter)
TRAVON D. WALKER (Pluton) with ENSEMBLE

Couplets (Rondeau des Métamorphoses)

ADIA EVANS (Vénus)
GEMMA NHA (Diane)
TRAVON D. WALKER (Pluton) with ENSEMBLE

Final

TUTTI

INTERMISSION

Part Two

Jacques Offenbach	<i>Orphée aux Enfers (Orpheus in the Underworld)</i> Entr'acte	
Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)	Finale (<i>Allegro vivace</i>) from Sextet in D major, Op. 110	MICHAEL BANWARTH (Piano) ROBERT HANFORD (Violin) CAROL COOK (Viola) TERRI VAN VALKINBURGH (Viola) ANA KIM (Cello) ANDREW L. W. ANDERSON (String Bass)
Jules Massenet (1842–1912)	<i>Hérodiade</i> "Vision fugitive" "Il est doux, il est bon"	SANKARA HAROUNA (Hérode) ADIA EVANS (Salomé) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864)	<i>Dinorah</i> "Ombre légèrè"	GEMMA NHA (Dinorah) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787)	<i>Orphée et Eurydice</i> "J'ai perdu mon Eurydice"	SOPHIA MAEKAWA (Orphée) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Charles Gounod (1818–1893)	<i>Faust</i> "Le veau d'or"	CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR. (Méphistophélès) with ENSEMBLE, CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–1894)	<i>L'étoile</i> "O petite étoile"	LUCY BAKER (Lazuli) CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor)
Léo Chauliac (1913–1976) Charles Trenet (1913–1977)	"Que reste-t-il de nos amours?" ("I Wish You Love")	FINN SAGAL with ENSEMBLE CHI-YUAN LIN (Conductor) MARINETTE GOMEZ (Director)
Jacques Offenbach	<i>Orphée aux Enfers (Orpheus in the Underworld)</i>	
	Couplets du Roi de Béotie	FINN SAGAL (John Styx)
	Récit et Couplets des Baisers	GEMMA NHA (Cupidon), IAN RUCKER (Jupiter)
	Duo de la mouche	EMILY RICHTER (Eurydice) IAN RUCKER (Jupiter)
	Menuet et Galop infernal	TUTTI
	Final	TUTTI

Lighting Designer: **Bridget Williams**

Stage Management: **Katrina Bachus, Daniel Sokalski, Amy C. Thompson** with Ryan Opera Center Stage Manager **Gemma DeCetra**

Musical and Language Preparation: **Michael Banwarth, William C. Billingham, Isabelle Druc, Julia Faulkner, Laurann Gilley, Noah Lindquist, Derek Matson, Jerad Mosbey, Hugh Russell, Craig Terry**

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Orphée aux Enfers is presented by arrangement with Bote & Bock Berlin and B&H Music Publishing Inc. d/b/a Boosey & Hawkes, publisher and copyright owner.

Artist profiles



ENRIQUE MAZZOLA CONDUCTOR

Lyric's music director — only the third in the company's history — is renowned as an expert interpreter and champion of *bel canto* opera and Verdi repertoire, and as a specialist in French repertoire. The Italian conductor made his Lyric debut with Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2016/17. Mazzola is Principal Guest Conductor at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and, from 2022 to 2024, served as the first ever Conductor-in-Residence at the Bregenz Festival. He served as Artistic and Music Director of the Orchestre national d'Île de France from 2012 to 2019. Symphonic guest work has included the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, Orchestre National de France, and Oslo Philharmonic. He has conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, and the major houses of Florence, Berlin, Zurich, Moscow, and Tokyo, in addition to a historic Meyerbeer cycle for Deutsche Oper Berlin. Past major European festivals have included Glyndebourne (including DVD releases of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Poliuto*, and *Don Pasquale*), new productions in 2019 for Bregenz (*Rigoletto* and *Madama Butterfly*) and Salzburg (*Orphée aux Enfers*), Pesaro (Rossini Opera Festival), Venice, and Aix-en-Provence. Mazzola was born in Barcelona, Spain, into a musical family, and grew up in Milan, where he studied violin and piano, earning diplomas in composition and orchestral conducting at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan. *Enrique Mazzola is supported by the John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols Endowed Chair.*



PAUL CURRAN DIRECTOR

Previously at Lyric: *Lulu* (2008/09) and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (2007/08).

Recent engagements for the award-winning director include *Tristan und Isolde* (San Francisco Opera); *La fanciulla del West* (Bologna); *Il trovatore* (Torino); *Tosca* and *Otello* (Canadian Opera Company); *Carmen* (Opera Philadelphia and Seattle); *My Fair Lady* (Teatro di San Carlo); *Pagliacci* (Royal Danish Opera); *Der fliegende Holländer* (Teatro Comunale di Firenze); *Pique Dame* (The Grange Festival); and *The Bartered Bride* (Garsington Opera). Other highlights include *La donna del lago* (DVD, Metropolitan Opera), *The Tsar's Bride* (Royal Ballet and Opera), and *Tannhäuser* (Teatro alla Scala). Curran was Artistic Director of the Norwegian National Opera from 2007 to 2012. Other important projects include *Pastorale* (world premiere, Staatstheater Stuttgart); *Becoming Santa Claus* (world premiere, DVD, Dallas Opera); *Ariadne auf Naxos* (La Fenice); *Der fliegende Holländer* (Bologna, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino); *Rusalka* (New National Theatre Tokyo); *La Cenerentola* (Teatro Maestranza

Seville); *Tristan und Isolde* (La Fenice); and *Peter Grimes* (Savonlinna Opera Festival). His production of Humperdinck's *Die KönigsKinder* at Teatro San Carlo won the Italian Critics' Prize, Premio Abbiati.



LUCY BAKER MEZZO-SOPRANO

Previously at Lyric: Second Peasant Girl/*The Marriage of Figaro* (2024/25) and *Karolka/Jenůfa* (2023/24).

A second-year mezzo-soprano with the Ryan Opera Center from Wilmington, North Carolina, Baker appeared in performances as Hansel/*Hansel and Gretel* at the 2024 Aspen Music Festival. She is a recipient of the Opera Foundation Scholarship and will be joining the Deutsche Oper Berlin Stipendien for the 2025/26 Season. Baker has performed the title role/*Ariodante*, *Dorabella/Così fan tutte*, and The Hostess/Blitzstein's *Triple-Sec* with Curtis Opera Theatre. Previous roles include Cherubino/*Le nozze di Figaro* and Hansel with DePaul Opera Theatre and Justice Ginsburg (cover) in Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg* with Chautauqua Opera Company. In concert, Baker has appeared with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and Chautauqua Symphony. She received the Edith Newfield Award from the Musicians Club of Women and first prize in her category from the Chicago Chapter of the NATS competition. A 2022 fellow at Ravinia's Steans Music Institute, Baker holds a Bachelor of Music from DePaul University and a Master of Music from the Curtis Institute of Music. *Lucy Baker is sponsored by Blythe McGarvie, Pamela Crutchfield, and Ms. Gay K. Stanek.*



MICHAEL BANWARTH PIANIST

Previously at Lyric: Music staff for *Blue* (2024/25) and *Champion* (2023/24).

The second-year Ryan Opera Center pianist recently completed a Master of Music in collaborative piano at the New England Conservatory of Music. A recipient of the Dean's Scholarship and Gunther Schuller medal at NEC, Banwarth served as teaching assistant for the Song Lab program, performed frequently in the Liederabend and Sonata Night concert series, and prepared productions of *The Turn of the Screw* and *L'enfant et les sortilèges*. In summer 2022, he was invited to be a vocal piano fellow at Music Academy of the West. He has also held fellowships at the Bay View Music Festival and the Atlantic Music Festival, and served as assistant music director and harpsichordist for the Iowa State Opera Studio during his undergraduate studies. *Michael Banwarth is sponsored by Nancy Dehmlow, Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, Philip G. Lumpkin, and Richard O. Ryan.*



GEMMA DeCETRA STAGE MANAGER

Previously at Lyric: *The Listeners*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Fidelio* (all 2024/25).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center member and the second person to hold the Ensemble Stage Manager position, DeCetra is an alumna of Northwestern University's theater program, where she received a 2023 Prague Quadrennial Grant for costume construction. Recent projects include *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Chicago College of Performing Arts Opera, 2024), *Jason and the Argonauts* (Lyric Unlimited, 2023), *The Nose* (Wardrobe, Chicago Opera Theater, 2023), and *Indecent* (Wirtz Center, 2023). DeCetra was also on the stage management team at the 2023 Grant Park Music Festival. She is originally from Madison, Wisconsin, where she worked with students at Children's Theater of Madison and Shorewood Drama. *Gemma DeCetra* is sponsored by **Roberta L. Washlow & Robert J. Washlow**.



DANIEL ESPINAL TENOR

Previously at Lyric: *Don Curzio/The Marriage of Figaro* and *Jaquino/Fidelio* (both 2024/25).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center member, the Cuban-Dominican tenor from Sarasota was a national winner of the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. This summer he will take part in the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence Académie. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Espinal continued his studies at Yale University, where he recently received a Master of Musical Arts degree. His roles there included Tom Rakewell/*The Rake's Progress*, Rinuccio/*Gianni Schicchi*, and Male Chorus/*The Rape of Lucretia*. Espinal previously participated in San Francisco's Merola Opera Program for two summers, where he sang the Duke/*Rigoletto*, David/*Die Meistersinger*, and Arcadio/*Florencia en el Amazonas*. His repertoire also includes Alfredo/*La traviata* and Tamino/*Die Zauberflöte*. *Daniel Espinal* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor the J. Thomas Hurvis Endowment, in loving memory of Dick Kiphart** and cosponsors **Fred & Phoebe Boelter** and **Margo & Michael Oberman & Family**.



ADIA EVANS SOPRANO

Previously at Lyric: *Theresa Alvarez/The Listeners*, *Girlfriend 2/Blue*, and *Countess Ceprano/Rigoletto* (all 2024/25).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center soprano from Baltimore, Evans is a recipient of the 2024 Richard F. Gold Career Grant. In the 2023/24 Season, the soprano debuted at The Cliburn in Recital with Jake Heggie, the Dayton Philharmonic (Handel's *Messiah*), and Annapolis Opera (First Lady/*The Magic Flute*). Other recent highlights include Mimì/*La Bohème* with the Borderland Arts Foundation and Beethoven's 9th with the National Orchestral Institute and Marin Alsop. Evans has performed with Santa Fe Opera, Merola Opera Program, Fort Worth Opera, Dallas Opera Guild, Opera Columbus, Tulsa Opera, and Knoxville Opera,

among others. Her numerous honors include an Encouragement Award from the 2024 London Foundation Competition, third place in the 2023 and 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, Midwest Region, second place and the soprano prize in the 2023 George Shirley Vocal Competition, and first place in the 2023 Dallas Opera Guild Lonestar Vocal Competition. *Adia Evans* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor the H. Earl and Miriam U. Hoover Foundation** and cosponsors **Ron & Peggy Beata, Margo & Michael Oberman & Family**, and **Sheila & David Ormesher**.



MARINETTE GOMEZ STAGE DIRECTOR

Previously at Lyric: *La Bohème*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Fidelio* (all 2024/25).

Gomez is a first-year Ryan Opera Center member in the recently created Ensemble position of Stage Director. She was a Directing Fellow at the Metropolitan Opera in 2024, and last summer was a Young Artist Assistant Director for Glimmerglass Festival's *Pagliacci*. As part of an emerging artist team, Gomez recently received a Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize from OPERA America, for a production concept for *Breaking the Waves* (Missy Mazzoli/Royce Vavrek). The Orlando, Florida, native assisted at Rice University for *Eugene Onegin* in Fall 2023. Her most recent staging was for Bold City Opera's production of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* at St. John's Cathedral in Jacksonville, Florida. As Assistant Director for University of North Florida's opera program, she directed various opera scenes for both the 2021 UNF Opera Scenes Program and the 2020 UNF Virtual Opera Gala. Her credits there also include a double-bill of Menotti's *The Telephone* and *The Old Maid and the Thief*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Die Fledermaus*. Gomez worked with the Jacksonville Symphony for their staged concerts of *La Bohème* and *The Magic Flute*. *Marinette Gomez* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor an Anonymous Donor** and cosponsors **Donna Van Eekeren & Dale Connelly** and **Drs. Joan & Russ Zajtchuk**.



SANKARA HAROUNA BARITONE

Previously at Lyric: *Marullo/Rigoletto* (2024/25) and Benny Paret and Benny Jr./*Champion* (2023/24).

A first-year Ryan Opera Center baritone and a Chicago native, Harouna joined Portland Opera as a Resident Artist in the 2023/24 Season, where he was seen in *Le nozze di Figaro* and *The Snowy Day*. This summer he will make his company debut with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in *This House* and perform with the Grant Park Music Festival. A former apprentice artist at Des Moines Metro Opera, Harouna performed there as Morales/*Carmen* and Homecoming Soldier/Redler's *The Falling and the Rising*. Other previous engagements include Greensboro Opera, Atlanta Opera, Dayton Opera, Kentucky Opera, and Cincinnati Opera. In concert, he performed Mozart's *Missa Brevis* with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. Harouna previously participated in the artist-development programs of Atlanta Opera, Kentucky Opera, and Dayton Opera. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Music in Vocal Performance

at Kentucky State University. *Sankara Harouna* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsors Michael Steinberg & Salme Harju Steinberg** and cosponsors **Mary Ellen Hennessy** and **Virginia Tobiason**.



CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR.
BASS-BARITONE

Previously at Lyric: 3rd Policeman/*Blue*, 2nd Prisoner/*Fidelio*, and Ceprano/*Rigoletto* (all 2024/25).

Originally from Akron, Ohio, the second-year Ryan Opera Center bass-baritone has performed widely throughout his home state, including appearances with Opera Columbus, Mid-Ohio Opera, and Nightingale Opera Theatre. In Lyric's 2023/24 Season, he appeared in *Lawrence Brownlee and Friends*. Recent engagements include Boston Lyric Opera, Detroit Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, the Seagle Festival, Utah Festival Opera, and Annapolis Opera. Humbert is a former participant in the young artist programs at Palm Beach Opera (*L'elisir d'amore*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Die Zauberflöte*) and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Concert appearances include Carnegie Hall (a debut as baritone soloist in Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*) and the Erie Philharmonic. Recipient of a 2024 American Opera Society of Chicago Scholarship Award, Humbert holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, and a Master of Music degree from Boston Conservatory. *Christopher Humbert, Jr.* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor Patricia Frank** and cosponsors **Maria C. Green & Oswald G. Lewis, Mary Houston, in loving memory of James Houston** and the **Bill & Orli Staley Foundation**.



CHI-YUAN LIN
CONDUCTOR

Previously at Lyric: Music staff for *Fidelio* (2024/25).

Born in Taoyuan, Taiwan, Lin is the second artist named to the Ryan Opera Center Conductor position. She has served as a cover conductor at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Richmond Symphony Orchestra, Hartford Symphony Orchestra, and São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. The 2022/23 Season saw her assume the roles of assistant conductor, rehearsal pianist, and vocal coach with Peabody Opera Theatre. In 2023, Lin received an invitation to participate in the Fiskars Summer Festival in Finland and Taiwan National Symphony Orchestra Educational Program, and in the summer of 2021 she was honored with a conducting fellowship at the Aspen Music Festival. Lin is a mentee in the She's Connected initiative as part of the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship for 2023/24. She received her master's and bachelor's degree from National Taiwan Normal University, and she is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in orchestral conducting at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. *Chi-Yuan Lin* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor the Jeanne Randall Malkin Family Foundation** and cosponsors **David Whitney & Juliana Chyu**.



SOPHIA MAEKAWA
MEZZO-SOPRANO

Previously at Lyric: LeeAnn/*The Listeners* (2024/25), Tisbe/*Cinderella* and Herdswoman/*Jenůfa* (both 2023/24).

The second-year Ryan Opera Center mezzo-soprano from Kyoto, Japan, was a 2024 Renée Fleming Artist at the Aspen Music Festival, performing Cherubino/*Le nozze di Figaro*, a 2022 Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Artist, understudying Rosina/*Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Comrade Chin and Shu Fang/*M. Butterfly*, and a 2021 Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. This summer, she will perform at Wolf Trap Opera as a Filene Artist. She recently received her Bachelor of Music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. While there, she performed in *Ariodante* (title role), *Albert Herring*, and *L'enfant et les sortilèges*. Other roles in her repertoire include Hermia/*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Annio/*La clemenza di Tito*, Mercédès/*Carmen*, Second Woman/*Dido and Aeneas*, and Mrs. Nolan/*The Medium*. Concert appearances include the Wichita Symphony and Curtis Symphony Orchestra with Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Recipient of a 2024 American Opera Society of Chicago Scholarship Award, Maekawa also received a 2025 Musicians Club of Women Scholarship Award. *Sophia Maekawa* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsors Mark and Gale Kozloff** and cosponsors **David & Janet Fox** and **Richard W. Shepro & Lindsay E. Roberts**.



GEMMA NHA
SOPRANO

Previously at Lyric: Jess/*The Listeners*, Barbarina/*The Marriage of Figaro*, and Page/*Rigoletto* (all 2024/25).

The Korean-Australian soprano and first-year Ryan Opera Center member was a national semi-finalist for the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and a winner in the 2024 Gerda Lissner Foundation Vocal Competition. In the 2022/23 Season, Nha made her house and role debut as Barbarina/*Le nozze di Figaro* at Volksoper Wien, where she returns next season, following her debut at Wolf Trap Opera as a 2025 Filene Artist. Last spring Nha received her Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School, where she was a Toulmin Scholar and recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. Roles there included Ruth Baldwin/John Musto and Mark Campbell's *Later the Same Evening* and Florida/Cavalli's *Erismena*. Other operatic credits include Zerlina/*Don Giovanni* and Esmeralda/*Die verkaufte Braut* with the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, where she completed undergraduate studies. In concert, Nha has sung Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and *Messiah*, and she performed with Patti LuPone on her 2018 *Don't Monkey with Broadway* tour at the Sydney Opera House. *Gemma Nha* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor Peter Scheuermann** and cosponsors **Drs. George Dunea & Sally Metzler-Dunea**.


EMILY RICHTER
SOPRANO

Previously at Lyric: First Peasant Girl /*The Marriage of Figaro* (2024/25).

The first-year Ryan Opera Center soprano from Arlington, Virginia, was a national winner of the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. In 2025 she will participate in the Aix-en-Provence Festival's Académie. She recently completed two years as a Resident Artist with Pittsburgh Opera (2022-2024). Role highlights during her tenure include the title role/ *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Countess/ *Le nozze di Figaro*, Ma/ *Proving Up*, and Ginevra/ *Ariodante*. In the 2023/24 Season, she made her *Messiah* debut with the Seattle Symphony and her Verdi *Requiem* debut with the Westmoreland Symphony. Richter has spent her summers as an apprentice artist at Santa Fe Opera, Central City Opera, and the Seagle Festival. A first-prize winner of The Wirth Prize and The Mildred Miller Competition, she holds a Master's Degree from McGill's Schulich School of Music and a Bachelor's of Music in Vocal Performance from Lawrence University. *Emily Richter* is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor The C.G. Pinnell Family** and cosponsors **Amy & Paul Carbone** and **Susan M. Miller**.


IAN RUCKER
BARITONE

Previously at Lyric: Schaunard/ *La Bohème* (2024/25), Man in Bar/ *Champion* and Foreman/ *Jenůfa* (both 2023/24), Moralès/ *Carmen* and Raimbaud/ *Le Comte Ory* (both 2022/23).

The third-year Ryan Opera Center baritone from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, holds a master's degree in vocal performance from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where his roles included Count Almaviva/ *The Marriage of Figaro* and the title role/ *The Barber of Seville*. He has also appeared as Papageno/ *The Magic Flute* at Bloomington Chamber Opera and recently 4th Servant/ *Capriccio* at the Salzburg Festival. Rucker received a special award at the 2024 Neue Stimmen Competition in Germany and will sing the title role in Festival d'Aix-en-Provence's upcoming production of *The Story of Billy Budd, Sailor*. He earned his bachelor's degree in vocal performance at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where he was heard in the title roles of *Don Giovanni* and *Sweeney Todd*, as well as Officer Lockstock/ *Urinetown* and Ernst Ludwig/ *Cabaret*. Concert engagements include *Carmina Burana* with the Northwest Indiana Symphony. Rucker is a former Palm Beach Opera Apprentice Artist and a former Aspen Music Festival Renée Fleming Artist. He recently received an Encouragement Award in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Wisconsin District) and first place in the James Toland Vocal Arts Competition. *Ian Rucker* is sponsored by **Karen Pettite, Heidi Heutel Bohn, Julian Oettinger, and Jennifer L. Stone**.



FINN SAGAL
BARITONE

Previously at Lyric: A Policeman/ *The Listeners* (2024/25).

The first-year Ryan Opera Center baritone from La Cañada Flintridge, California, has performed at Lincoln Center, 54 Below, and the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas with such luminaries as Liza Minnelli, Michael Feinstein, and Kristin Chenoweth. Sagal won third prize at the 2024 Neue Stimmen Competition in Germany and first place at the 2025 Saengerbund Awards, and was awarded the 2025 Ginger and Jim Meyer Centennial Award by the American Opera Society of Chicago. He participated in the 2023 Merola Opera Program and, in 2022, the Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS Program, where he returns in 2025 as a Fleming Fellowship Artist to sing Guglielmo/ *Così fan tutte*. He recently received a master's degree at the Yale School of Music, where he performed the roles of Junius/ *The Rape of Lucretia*, the Tutor/ *Le Comte Ory*, and Nick Shadow/ *The Rake's Progress*. He holds an undergraduate degree in vocal performance from UCLA. While there he appeared as Pluton/ Charpentier's *La descente d'Orphée aux Enfers*, and the title role/ *Le nozze di Figaro*. Finn Sagal is sponsored by **Lead Sponsor the Estate of Lois Siegel** and cosponsors **Patricia A. Kenney & Gregory J. O'Leary** and **Jennifer Malpass**.


TRAVON D. WALKER
TENOR

Previously at Lyric: Parpignol/ *La Bohème*, Son/ *Blue*, 1st Prisoner/ *Fidelio*, Borsa/ *Rigoletto* (all 2024/25).

The second-year Ryan Opera Center tenor recently received his master's degree from Rice University, where he sang Sam Kaplan/ *Street Scene*. This season he debuted with Opera Philadelphia in *The Anonymous Lover* and with the North Carolina Symphony. Upcoming he will perform at Wolf Trap Opera as a 2025 Filene Artist. A native of Hinesville, Georgia, Walker completed his undergraduate studies at the Eastman School of Music. While there, he made his operatic debut in Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Walker has been a Studio Artist at Wolf Trap Opera and was invited to participate in Renée Fleming's 2023 SongStudio and Joyce DiDonato's 2024 Masterclass Series, both at Carnegie Hall, as well as the 2023 Britten Pears Young Artist Programme. Other engagements include the Erie Philharmonic and Houston Grand Opera (Jeremy Howard Beck's *Another City*, world premiere). Walker received an Encouragement Award from the Kansas City District in the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, the 2024 Best Vocal Artist Award from the American Opera Society, and the 2024 Luminarts Cultural Foundation Men's Voice Fellowship. *Travon D. Walker* is sponsored by the **Robert & Isabelle Bass Foundation, Inc., an Anonymous Donor, and the Boykins, Ford, and Mages families.** 

Fond Farewells

Outgoing Ryan Opera Center artists share reflections on their experiences — and boundless gratitude for their one-of-a-kind, world-class training.



Kyle Finkbecker

Lucy Baker performing at the 2024 *Sunday in the Park with Lyric* concert.

LUCY BAKER

Joining the Ryan Opera Center was an absolute dream come true for me. As a student at DePaul, many of my mentors were alumni of the program, and I wanted the same experience that guided them to become world-class performers and teachers. I also attended many Lyric performances — the company became an artistic home. Coming back and getting to sing on the Lyric stage, I was completely overcome with emotion. Every moment spent here, on stage with my Ensemble colleagues, in a rehearsal room with the greatest opera stars of our time, or alone in a practice room, I have learned something. Every day, I discover new artistic abilities, explore new and unexpected repertoire, and build my confidence in what makes me special as a performer. I am so fortunate that Lyric has played such an integral part in my journey, and I feel ready for the next step, thanks to everything I learned during my time with the Ryan Opera Center. Thank you to every person who makes dreams like mine come true!



Liz Lauren

This season Gemma Nha sang *Barbarina* in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

GEMMA NHA

This past year in the Ryan Opera Center, I have learned and grown so much as a singer. Working with the program's teachers and coaches helped me to step fully into my voice. I am very grateful for all the opportunities I've had to sing on the Lyric stage and be in the rehearsal room with world-class singers, directors, and conductors. I came to realize that everyone involved knows that Lyric Opera of Chicago is a special place. As an Ensemble member, I have been able to explore and utilize all aspects of my artistry and sing in venues I never would have dreamed of performing in. Most importantly, I am so blessed to have been surrounded by the most wonderful people, all of whom have supported me every step of the way. Thank you for a most extraordinary year in Chicago.



Michael Brosilow

Sophia Maekawa portrayed Tisbe in last season's *Cinderella*.

SOPHIA MAEKAWA

Since I moved to the United States for college, I've dreamed of joining the Ryan Opera Center. I still remember the Final Auditions like it was yesterday — arriving in Chicago and immediately falling in love with the city and its gorgeous opera house. Through the program's high-level training, I've gained many valuable tools and developed my artistic identity. Coming from Japan and its different culture, a major task was to come out of my shell and be more comfortable openly expressing myself. I am so thankful for the opportunities to perform on the Lyric stage, especially the role of Tisbe in *Cinderella*. It grounded me as a singer and allowed me to explore my acting — and I had the best time! I cannot express how grateful I am for the guidance and support of the Ryan Opera Center's faculty, administration, my sponsors, and my colleagues. They all have made a huge impact on my development and career path, which I hope leads me back to Chicago very soon!



Liz Lauren

Ian Rucker stepped in as the Count for *The Marriage of Figaro* dress rehearsal.

IAN RUCKER

I have always been enamored with Chicago and known that it was going to be important to me, so it's been especially meaningful to make the city my home and cultivate my artistry at Lyric. The past three years in the Ryan Opera Center have been the experience of a lifetime: the incredible training and performing activities have helped me significantly elevate my skills, and I've been encouraged to sing with MY natural and unique voice. Through the support of my colleagues, coaches, and mentors, I've felt able to be open and vulnerable. That isn't easy and can be scary, but I have never felt more comfortable in my own skin, wholly accepted as the person and artist that I am. For that and so much more that I have gained from my time here, I am thankful beyond words. [L](#)

Talent Central

This season marks the 50th Anniversary of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center. Here's a brief retrospective of highlights of this extraordinary program's evolution.

By Alana Guggenheim



As Luciano Pavarotti looks on, Ensemble soprano Marcia Cope delivers an aria during a 1983 master class.

"It's truly remarkable to look back on The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center's legacy," says Dan Novak, who has worked at the Ryan Opera Center since 2000, becoming director in 2013. Recognized globally for its standard-setting training, the Ryan Opera Center is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this season, an astonishing benchmark that speaks to its innumerable successes and ongoing impact on the field. Hundreds of artists have participated in the program's Ensemble, and dozens continue to grace stages around the globe. The roster of its instructors, mentors, and visiting artists reads as a who's-who of the opera world. The Ryan Opera Center is indeed one of Lyric Opera of Chicago's most significant calling cards.

Originally named the Lyric Opera School of Chicago, what is now the Ryan Opera Center was established in 1974 under the visionary leadership of then-General Manager Carol Fox, Music Director Bruno Bartoletti, and Assistant Manager Ardis Krainik. Their goal was to attract and nurture the country's best emerging singers by providing advanced coaching and training, along with opportunities to perform in comprimario roles on the Lyric stage. The *Chicago Tribune* hailed the program as a groundbreaking development in local opera history.

American lyric tenor Herbert Handt was named the program's first Director, and among the first future stars he enrolled was contralto Kathleen Kuhlmann. One of the early highlights was the Ensemble's own production of Domenico Puccini's *Il Ciarlatano*, performed with orchestra at the University of Chicago and at Lake Forest's Barat College, setting a precedent for excellence, collaboration, and performance opportunities that continues to define the program today.

Notable productions including Ensemble artists have become cornerstones in the Ryan Opera Center's history. Among these, the 1990 performances and recording by New World Records of Hugo Weisgall's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* stands out, showcasing the training program's dedication to contemporary opera. In fact, Lyric's Composer-in-Residence program was overseen by the Ryan Opera Center and resulted in several world premieres, among them *The Song of Majnun* (1992) by Bright Sheng, *Between Two Worlds (The Dybbuk)* (1997) by Shulamit Ran, and *Lovers and Friends: The Chautauqua Variations* (2001) by Michael John LaChiusa.

Ryan Opera Center artists have also made remarkable contributions to Lyric's mainstage productions, often performing supporting roles as well as understudying principal roles — and, quite often, stepping in to perform them. This has not only provided invaluable experience for the artists but has also enriched Lyric Opera's offerings



Former and then-current Ensemble members surround Denyce Graves, in Lyric's 2005/06 *Carmen*. Clockwise from left: Susanna Phillips, David Cangelosi, Rodell Rosel, and Lauren McNeese.

Dan Rest

with fresh and dynamic talent. Audience members won't soon forget the last-minute, remarkable substitution of Ensemble soprano Kathryn Henry into the title role of *Jenůfa* in its last performance during the 2023/24 Season.

Since its inception, the Ryan Opera Center has undergone several name changes and significant program evolutions, each reflecting a new phase in its development and mission. In 1981, the name was changed to the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists to better represent its mission of nurturing American talent who might otherwise have needed to go to Europe for post-graduate professional development. This period saw the introduction of master classes led by renowned stars like Luciano Pavarotti, Alfredo Kraus, Evelyn Lear, Sherrill Milnes, and more, enhancing the training experience for Ensemble artists.

In 2006, the program was renamed The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center in recognition of a transformative gift from the Ryans, reflecting the program's broadened mission and elevated status within the opera community. That year was significant also due to the appointment of Gianna Rolandi as the Ryan Opera Center's



Clockwise from top left: The 1993/94 Ensemble presented Maurice Ravel's 1911 one-act comedy, *L'heure espagnole*; Ensemble tenor Kenneth Gayle gets some up-close encouragement from Renata Scottio; the 2012/13 Ensemble strikes a pose.



new Director, a position she held until 2013. The coloratura soprano brought with her a wealth of experience on the world's stages, including her 1986 debut at Lyric as Dorinda in Handel's *Orlando*. "It was so beneficial for our young singers to work with Gianna," noted William Mason, Lyric's General Director from 1997 to 2012. "She truly understood what singing was all about and what it meant to have a career."

Between the tenures of Handt and Rolandi, the Ryan Opera Center enjoyed a series of visionary Directors: Lee Schaben (1977-1991), Andrew Foldi (1991-1995), and Richard Pearlman (1995-2006). The administration later grew to include a Music Director and Director of Vocal Studies, positions held today by Craig Terry and Julia Faulkner. Ensemble positions of pianist, conductor, stage director, and stage manager have recently been added to reflect the training program's leadership in nurturing the talents of artists across the full spectrum of the field. The program has also evolved to include international artists, further diversifying its talent pool.

Each season, the Ryan Opera Center attracts over 600 applicants from around the globe, competing for the coveted spots in the Ensemble. This level of interest reflects the Ryan Opera Center's reputation as one of the

premier operatic training programs in the world. Lyric Music Director Enrique Mazzola provides invaluable insights and mentorship to Ensemble members, as does Ryan Opera Center Advisor-at-Large Renée Fleming.

The achievements of the Ryan Opera Center's alumni and current Ensemble members are a testament to the program's impact. Graduates have gone on to perform in leading roles at prestigious opera houses worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Ballet and Opera, and Vienna State Opera. It's no surprise that season after season over the past five decades, Lyric has welcomed home numerous distinguished alumni to perform in the Ardis Krainik Theater.

All the success and growth stem from the unwavering support and dedicated leadership established at the very beginning. "We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the hundreds of Ryan Opera Center Board members and donors, whose generosity made everything the program has accomplished possible," says Novak. "We will always be grateful for their vision, investment, and advocacy to create the Opera Center 50 years ago and guide its growth. As we look ahead, we aim to build on this strong foundation, explore new opportunities for our artists, and ensure the Ryan Opera Center remains a beacon of excellence in artist development for the next 50 years and beyond!" 

Decade 1: Raise the Curtain!

Lyric Opera of Chicago launches one of the first training programs of its kind.



Clockwise, from top left: The Inaugural Ensemble of Apprentice Artists; the program's first Director, Herbert Handt, makes a point; Ensemble member Patricia Guthrie (1973-74) with Giulio Favario, then Lyric's chorus director; a movement class during the first decade; Ensemble soprano Trudy Hines and guest tenor Frank Little in *The Rake's Progress*; backstage at the Civic Theatre, for a 1977 performance for students of *The Barber of Seville*.

Birth of a Training Program (1974-1984)

1974

The Opera School of Chicago is first incorporated, comprising 10 Ensemble members. The *Chicago Tribune* describes the new program as "...the most exciting development to take place in local opera history since the establishment of Lyric Opera itself 20 seasons ago!"

Ensemble members perform 21 roles for Lyric's mainstage season.

General Manager Carol Fox and Music Director Bruno Bartoletti choose the multi-talented American lyric tenor and conductor Herbert Handt, formerly of the Berlin Staatsoper, to direct the program.

1975

The entire Ensemble joins the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra for its first-ever concert in the park. Repertoire includes excerpts from *Fidelio* and numerous Verdi arias.

1977

The School mounts *The Turn of the Screw* as its first-ever presentation in the 750-seat Civic Theatre.

Renowned American conductor Lee Schaenen — formerly assistant to Herbert von Karajan at La Scala and in Berlin — is appointed as Director.

1981

The program is renamed as the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists.

Decade 2: Gaining Strength

Composers-in-Residence arrive, and performance opportunities expand.



Clockwise, from left: The 1986/87 Ensemble; Ensemble bass-baritone Mark S. Doss as Jago in *Ernani* (1984); a workshop for *The Guilt of Lillian Sloan*; Paul Jacobsen and Patrick Denniston in a student matinee of *Così fan tutte* (1991); *Night of the Rising Stars*, 1990; a quartet of LOCAA members took several programs on tour to Paris in 1993; filming a McDonald's commercial on the main stage, 1986.



Increasing Opportunities (1984–1994)

1984

Director of the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists (LOCAA), Lee Schaenen (appointed in 1977), is instrumental in launching an innovative Composer-in-Residence program; it bears fruit in the 1985/86 Season with the world premiere of William Neil's *The Guilt of Lillian Sloan*, conducted by Schaenen.

1986

LOCAA artists appear in a tripartite musical television ad for McDonald's, alongside segments with Roger Miller ("King of the Road") and Gladys Knight and the Pips. Filming takes place on Lyric's main stage, with Ensemble members holding Big Macs and singing the sandwich's theme song.

1989

The tradition of *Rising Stars* concerts begins.

1991

Schaenen retires, and acclaimed bass-baritone Andrew Foldi — a hit as Schigolch in Alban Berg's *Lulu* at Lyric in the 1987/88 Season — becomes LOCAA's Director.

1993

A quartet of "Les jeunes chanteurs du Lyric" performs at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

1994

Concluding a decade of expanding performance opportunities in venues as varied as Grant Park, Highland Park High School, the Chicago Cultural Center, and the Woodstock Opera House, LOCAA singers perform an all-Mozart program to accompany an exhibition by set designer Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Decade 3: Making Some Noise

Performances with orchestra, including *Rising Stars in Concert* for the first time.



Clockwise from left: The Ensemble takes a bow at a 2001 Grant Park Music Festival concert at the Petrillo Music Shell; Ensemble soprano Kimberly Jones with Samuel Ramey in *Boris Godunov* (1994/95); the 2002/03 Ensemble; the 1997 *Rising Stars in Concert*; actor and comedian (and operaphile) Charles Nelson Reilly leads a 1996 masterclass.

Raising Their Voices (1994–2003)

1994

New World Records releases the LOCAA recording of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Hugo Weisgall.

From the mid-90s into the early 2000s, LOCAA enjoys ever-widening performance opportunities — at the Grant Park Music Festival and Chicago Humanities Festival, and with a number of regional orchestras including the Rockford Symphony Orchestra (1998), Lake Forest Symphony (1999), Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (2000), and Northwest Indiana Symphony (2002).

1995

Richard Pearlman, a veteran educator and director who made his Lyric debut with *La Bohème* in 1982, is named LOCAA Director. He helps launch numerous significant careers, including that of Matthew Polenzani, an Ensemble member from 1995 to 1997.

1996

The comedic performer (and true operaphile) Charles Nelson Reilly conducts a master class.

1997

Between Two Worlds (The Dybbuk), a work by Shulamit Ran, the first woman and Lyric's fifth composer-in-residence, receives its premiere.

1998

As part of its *WTTW Presents* series, the local television station broadcasts "The Opera-Philes," a LOCAA performance at the Ravinia Festival.

2000

In honor of LOCAA's 25th anniversary, *Rising Stars in Concert* is performed with full orchestra — a tradition that continues today.

Decade 4: Paving the Way

A transformative gift, a new name, a pianist, and exciting new leadership.



Clockwise from top left: At Lyric's 2008 Annual Meeting, Ryan Opera Center Director Gianna Rolandi and Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan (front row) joined members of the 2007/08 and 2008/09 Ensembles; Sir Andrew Davis leads the Civic Orchestra and members of the 2012/13 Ryan Opera Center Ensemble; Gianna Rolandi; the spirited 2005/06 Ensemble.

Expanding Horizons (2004–2013)

2006

After serving as Director of Vocal Studies since 2002, Gianna Rolandi is appointed Director of the program. As a performer at Lyric, the renowned soprano made her debut in the 1986/87 Season as Dorinda in *Orlando*.

In recognition of a transformative gift, the program is renamed The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center. General Director William Mason announces the news on opening night.

2011

The annual *Rising Stars in Concert* is broadcast for the first time on Chicago's classical radio station, 98.7 WFMT.

2012

Ensemble members debut with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis, the first collaborative performance between the artist-development programs.

The first season of the Ryan Opera Center Recital Series airs on 98.7 WFMT. It is the only such series of its kind in the world.

2013

Final auditions are opened to an audience of Lyric donors and subscribers, marking a milestone that provides patrons with a unique opportunity to experience the selection process.

After serving as the program's Manager since 2000, Dan Novak is promoted to Director of the Ryan Opera Center.

A member of Lyric's music staff since 2005, Craig Terry is appointed the Ryan Opera Center's first Music Director, overseeing Ensemble artists' musical development.

Maureen Zoltek is selected as the new Ensemble pianist, a position offering specialized training opportunities as a coach and assistant conductor.

Decade 5: Celebrating Success

Program alumni return as stars and, ever-innovative, the program boldly expands its roster.



Clockwise from top: The 2019/20 Ensemble after *Rising Stars in Concert*; the Ensemble tenors perform at the very first Ryan Opera Center Gala; Lunga Eric Hallam with Enrique Mazzola in *Sole e Amore*, one of several digital projects in 2020/21; Renée Fleming leads a master class.

Making History (2014–present)

2014

Renowned soprano Julia Faulkner is appointed Director of Vocal Studies.

In collaboration with Lyric and the Ryan Opera Center, the Harris Theater launches the *Beyond the Aria* series of special cabaret-style programs performed on the Pritzker Pavilion stage. Lyric principal artists are featured alongside Ensemble members with series Artistic Director Craig Terry at the keyboard.

2016

The first Ryan Opera Center Gala, *The Five Tenors*, is held at The Casino Club.

2017

Exceptional alumni Andriana Chuchman, Anthony Clark Evans, Quinn Kelsey, Matthew Polenzani, Christian Van Horn, and Amber Wagner perform starring roles across Lyric's season.

Renée Fleming leads an inspiring master class with Ryan Opera Center artists, as part of her annual involvement with the program.

2020

Amid pandemic restrictions, the Ryan Opera Center creates the innovative *Ryan Opera Center from Home* video series, connecting artists with audiences virtually.

The Ryan Opera Center is at the heart of reimagining Lyric's 2020/21 Season with seven major digital projects, netting nearly 200,000 total viewers, including *Lawrence Brownlee and Friends: The Next Chapter*, *Master Classes* with Sir Andrew Davis, *Pasión Latina* with Ana María Martínez, *Sole e Amore* with Enrique Mazzola, and *Magical Music Around the World*.

2021

Donald Lee III becomes the Ensemble's inaugural conductor/pianist, the first of three new Ensemble positions that solidify the Ryan Opera Center's leadership role in training emerging artists across the full spectrum of the field.

2022

Luther H. Lewis III is named the first Ensemble Stage Director, and Tess Naval is named the first Ensemble Stage Manager.

2023

The Factotum, co-written by Ryan Opera Center alumnus Will Liverman, is premiered and features several current Ryan Opera Center members.

2024

Lyric Music Director Enrique Mazzola leads the first public Ryan Opera Center Master Class since the pandemic.

Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center celebrates its 50th Anniversary, honoring five decades of nurturing exceptional talent.

With gratitude

A Shining Star: Renée Fleming

The stellar singer continues to offer her insight — and inspiration — to the Ensemble.



Renée Fleming leads a master class with Will Liverman in April 2013.

The world-renowned American soprano

became Lyric Opera of Chicago's first-ever creative consultant in December 2010, and three years later she was named advisor to the Ryan Opera Center — the beginning of an exceptional involvement that has immeasurably benefited the program.

Along with innovations like a partnership with The Second City comedy company, Fleming has led inspiring master classes, hosted individual coaching sessions, and provided invaluable counsel to our emerging artists. She is currently the Ryan Opera Center's Advisor-at-Large. Lyric wishes to express its deep and ongoing gratitude for her contributions. [L](#)

Good Direction: Past Leaders

These inspiring individuals served as Directors of the Ryan Opera Center, guiding the Ensemble's emerging talent and ensuring the program's world-class status.



Herbert Handt
1974–1977

Handt led the effort to enroll 10 up-and-coming American singers as the first cohort of the program, then called the Lyric Opera School. A lyric tenor and conductor, Handt had performed with great success in European houses throughout the 1950s, and debuted at Lyric as the Captain in *Wozzeck* in 1965.



Lee Schaenen
1977–1991

The renowned American conductor, formerly a principal coach at New York City Opera, debuted on the Lyric podium in 1958 with *Il trovatore*. Formerly an assistant to Herbert von Karajan at La Scala and in Berlin, Schaenen launched the center's innovative Composer-in-Residence program.



Andrew Foldi
1991–1995

The acclaimed bass-baritone — a hit as Schigolch in Alban Berg's *Lulu* at Lyric in the 1987/88 Season — becomes Director of the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists upon Schaenen's retirement. Foldi sang 22 different roles at Lyric between 1954 and 1993.



Richard Pearlman
1995–2006

Longtime director of opera at the Eastman School of Music, the veteran educator and director made his Lyric debut with *La Bohème* in 1982. His tenure is marked by the expansion of the audition process and the launch of numerous significant careers.



Gianna Rolandi
2006–2013

After serving as Director of Vocal Studies starting in 2002, Rolandi is appointed Director of the program in 2006. At Lyric, the soprano made her debut in the 1986/87 Season as Dorinda in *Orlando*. During her tenure, the program is renamed The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center in recognition of a transformative gift.

Orchestra

MUSIC STAFF

Kedrick Armstrong
Elizabeth Askren
Michael Banwarth
William C. Billingham
Kyrian Friedenberg[^]
Susan Miller Hult
Tess Jackson
Keun-A Lee
Chi-Yuan Lin^{^^}
Noah Lindquist
Francesco Miliotto
Jerad Mosbey
Laura Poe
Blair Salter
Stefano Sarzani
Madeline Slettedahl^{^^^}

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Robert Hanford, *Concertmaster*,
Mrs. R. Robert Funderburg
Endowed Chair
Emily Nebel,
Assistant Concertmaster
Eleanor Bartsch
Alexander Belavsky
Kathleen Brauer
Renée-Paule Gauthier^{**}
Laura Miller
Liba Shacht
Heather Wittels
Bing Jing Yu

Violin II

Yin Shen, *Principal*
John Macfarlane,
Assistant Principal
Diane Duraffourg-Robinson
Ann Palen
Irene Radetzky
John D. Robinson
David Volfe

Viola

Carol Cook, *Principal*
Terri Van Valkinburgh,
Assistant Principal
Patrick Brennan
Amy Hess
Melissa Trier Kirk

Cello

Calum Cook, *Principal*
Ana Kim, *Assistant Principal*
Mark Brandfonbrener
William H. Cernota
Walter Preucil

String Bass

Samuel Shuhan,
Acting Principal
Andrew L. W. Anderson,
Acting Assistant Principal
Gregory Sarchet
Collins R. Trier

Flute

Marie Tachouet, *Principal*
Dionne Jackson,
Assistant Principal
Alyce Johnson

Piccolo

Alyce Johnson

Oboe

Paul Lueders, *Principal*
Judith Zunamon Lewis,
Assistant Principal

English Horn

Judith Zunamon Lewis

Clarinet

Heesoo Kim, *Principal*
Susan Warner,
Assistant Principal

Bass Clarinet

Susan Warner,
Acting

Bassoon

Preman Tilson, *Principal*
Lewis Kirk, *Assistant Principal*

Contrabassoon

Lewis Kirk

Horn

Jonathan Boen, *Principal*
Fritz Foss, *Assistant*
Principal/Utility
Robert E. Johnson, *Third Horn*
Samuel Hamzem
Neil Kimel

Trumpet

William Denton, *Principal*
Rebecca Oliverio,
Acting Assistant Principal

Trombone

Jeremy Moeller, *Principal*
Mark Fisher, *Assistant Principal*
Will Baker

Bass Trombone

Will Baker

Tuba

Andrew Smith, *Principal*

Timpani

Edward Harrison, *Principal*

Percussion

Douglas Waddell,
Acting Principal
Eric Millstein,
Acting Assistant Principal

Harp

Lynn Williams, *Principal*

Librarian

John Rosenkrans, *Principal*

Stage Band Contractor

Christine Janicki

EXTRA MUSICIANS

Jennifer Cappelli, *violin*
Injoo Choi, *violin*
Christine Chon, *violin*
Lisa Fako, *violin*
Erik Liljenberg, *violin*
Janis Sakai, *violin*
Beatrice Chen, *viola*
Josef Fischer, *viola*
Mara McClain, *cello*
Jeremy Attanaseo, *string bass*
Amy Barwan, *oboe*
Theresa Zick, *clarinet*
Thomas Snyder, *alto sax*
Brian Goodwin, *horn*
Michael Banwarth, *piano*

* On leave, 2024/25 Season
** Season Substitute
[^] Solti Foundation U.S. Opera Residency
^{^^} Ryan Opera Center Conductor
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A Golden Celebration

An anniversary this significant deserves a proper party — and donors, artists, and one very special alum stepped up for a grand occasion.



On February 11, 2025, more than 200 Lyric supporters gathered at The Casino Club to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at the Golden Gala. A sumptuous cocktail hour was followed by fabulously entertaining performances of operatic and popular music by members of the Ryan Opera Center Ensemble and Music Director Craig Terry — and, as a special treat, alum star tenor Matthew Polenzani sang as well.

“It was a glorious evening,” says Peggy Beata, one of the event’s sponsors. “The team’s attention to detail turned the Golden Gala into the best celebration anyone could have envisioned.”

Ensemble members joined Gala attendees for dinner — a treasured chance to spend time with the artists who are honing their craft in Lyric’s world-renowned artist-development program. The Gala, the first in a series of 50th Anniversary Golden Celebrations, raised more than \$1.25 million in support of the Ryan Opera Center. [7](#)



From top row, left to right: Ian Rucker and Ensemble members perform up-close; Philip G. Lumpkin and Amy Carbone share a laugh with John Mangum; Pam Crutchfield and Margarita Chavez-Tatro dazzled in gold gowns. Ensemble pianist Michael Banwarth and Music Director Craig Terry shared piano duties; Ryan Opera Center Board President Nasrin Thierer greets the crowd; Christopher Humbert, Jr. gets operatic; Shirley W. Ryan with special guest (and program alum) Matthew Polenzani.

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and to support tonight's amazing artists.



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