



**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA OPENS 96TH SEASON WITH
CELEBRATORY WEEKEND INCLUDING TWO SOLD-OUT OPENING NIGHT GALAS,
DOUBLE BILL OF *CAV/PAG*, *ROBERTO DEVEREUX* AND FREE *OPERA IN THE PARK***



Opera Ball 2018 organizers Shannon Cronan, Jane Mudge and Kathy Huber ©Drew Altizer Photography;
Opening night ©Drew Altizer Photography; Russell Thomas and Sondra Radvanovsky in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* ©Cory Weaver;
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SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 10, 2018) — San Francisco Opera opened its 2018–19 Season with a weekend of celebratory events and performances beginning Friday, September 7 with two galas—***Opera Ball 2018: ¡Viva La Noche!*** and the ***BRAVO! CLUB Opening Night Gala***—and a performance of the famous operatic double bill of Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Ruggero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (or *Cav/Pag*). Opening weekend continued Saturday, September 8 with the highly-anticipated premiere of Gaetano Donizetti's bel canto drama *Roberto Devereux* and on Sunday, September 9, nearly 15,000 people flocked to Golden Gate Park for the annual *San Francisco Chronicle Presents Opera in the Park* concert on a beautiful, 71-degree day with blue skies.

The new season of opera was formally inaugurated with the sold-out *Opera Ball 2018: ¡Viva La Noche!*, San Francisco Opera Guild's opening night celebration. Opera Guild President **Jane Mudge** and gala co-chairs **Shannon Cronan** and **Kathy Huber**, adorned in unique pieces crafted by official jewelry sponsor **Shreve & Co.**, welcomed the 700 attendees on a gold carpet at the Grove Street entrance of the War Memorial Opera House. Guests included civic leaders, philanthropists, captains of industry and a long list of distinguished individuals such as House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, San Francisco Mayor London Breed, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, former Secretary of State George Schultz and his wife Chief of Protocol for the State of California Charlotte Schultz; and musical artists John Adams,

Mason Bates, Michael Tilson Thomas, soprano Carmen Giannattasio and tenor Brian Jagde. The mission behind the evening, with all proceeds benefiting the Opera's education programs, was expressed by Mayor Breed. "Exposure to the arts is crucial for students," she said remembering her time playing horn in the Benjamin Franklin Middle School band. "These kinds of opportunities provided by our arts organizations open up entire new worlds."

Ball attendees, resplendent in couture gowns and evening wear that was both elegant and creative, enjoyed a cocktail reception in the foyer before processing to the tented pavilion adjacent to the Opera House for a dinner by **McCalls Catering and Events**, prepared by executive chef **Josip Martinovic**, and sponsored by **Neiman Marcus**. Debuting at this year's event, **Chalk Hill Estate Vinyards and Winery** was the official Opera Ball wine sponsor, joining **Roederer Estate** as the sparkling wine sponsor. Within the pavilion, designer **J. Riccardo Benavides** created an atmosphere of Italianate elegance and the distinctly Argentine flavor of the La Boca quarter of Buenos Aires, complete with the seductive sounds of live tango music.

Following dinner, guests returned to the Opera House for the *Cav/Pag* double bill which carried forth the theme as the two Italian works were reset in La Boca by the production's original director and acclaimed Argentine tenor **José Cura**, mounted for San Francisco Opera by fellow countryman **Jose Maria Condemí**. Italian conductor **Daniele Callegari** led the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and the *Cavalleria Rusticana* cast of **Ekaterina Semenchuk** as Santuzza, **Roberto Aronica** as Turiddu and **Dimitri Platanis** in his United States debut as Alfio. *Pagliacci* featured **Lianna Haroutounian** as Nedda, **Marco Berti** as Canio, **Platanias** as Tonio and **David Pershall** as Silvio. The double bill was followed by more festivities in the tent, including dancing to the sounds of **Pop Rocks** and a milonga tango lounge where couples expressed themselves on the dance floor into the early morning hours.

San Francisco Opera's BRAVO! Club, a dedicated and dynamic group of young professionals throughout the Bay Area, hosted their own sold-out opening night gala. BRAVO! President **Shannon Eliot** and gala co-chairs **Xanadu Bruggers** and **Anjali Menon** organized a festive evening that included a pre-performance reception on the outdoor loggia of the Opera House and an after party in the Green Room of the Veterans Building. The BRAVO! gala was designed by **Kate Siegel Fine Events** with catering provided by **Paula LeDuc** and a Bourbon and Rye tasting by **Wright & Brown Distilling Co.**

Following the Argentine-flavored staging of the verismo double bill, Gaetano Donizetti's bel canto masterpiece *Roberto Devereux* opened on Saturday, September 8, in a production by **Stephen Lawless** which the *San Francisco Chronicle* hailed as a "marvel of thoughtful precision." Italian conductor and Donizetti champion **Riccardo Frizza** conducted the San Francisco Opera, Chorus, and the cast led by **Sondra Radvanovsky** in her acclaimed portrayal as Elisabetta and three distinguished artists making role debuts: **Jamie Barton** as Sara, **Russell Thomas** in the title role and **Andrew Manea** as the Duke of Nottingham. *Roberto Devereux* features some of Donizetti's most dramatic and challenging music and

is the culmination of the composer's fascination with Tudor England. Renowned for her portrayal of Elizabeth I, Radvanovsky impressed the opening-night audience with her "extravagant vocal majesty and theatrical intelligence" (*Chronicle*), earning a thunderous response after her first aria. *Roberto Devereux* continues with five more performances through September 27.

The annual *San Francisco Chronicle Presents Opera in the Park* concert on Sunday, September 9, was presented in Robin Williams Meadow and featured artists from the Company's 2018 Fall Season performing selections with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, including mezzo-soprano Ekaterina Semenchuk, soprano Lianna Haroutounian, tenor Marco Berti and baritone Dimitri Platanius from the *Cav/Pag* double bill; soprano **Carmen Giannattasio** and tenor **Brian Jagde** from the cast of the upcoming new production of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*, along with sopranos **Sarah Cambidge** and **Toni Marie Palmertree**, mezzo-soprano **Ashley Dixon**, tenor **Pene Pati** and bass-baritone **Christian Pursell**. This was Giannattasio's first appearance with San Francisco Opera.

Conductors **Daniele Callegari**, **Riccardo Frizza** and **Leo Hussain** took turns on the podium leading a program of works by Boito, Handel, Gluck, Verdi, Strauss, Leoncavallo, Mascagni and Gounod. The climax of the afternoon was a pair of encores featuring the three tenors of Berti, Pati and Jagde singing the Neapolitan song "O sole mio" followed by the entire group of soloists singing the traditional *Opera in the Park* closer, "Libiamo" from Verdi's *La Traviata*. KDFC host **Dianne Nicolini**, *Chronicle* columnist **Leah Garchik** and San Francisco Parks Alliance CEO **Drew Becher** gave opening remarks and San Francisco Opera General Director **Matthew Shilvock** served as master of ceremonies for the concert. The 2018 *Opera in the Park* concert was dedicated to the memory of David Wiegand, former *San Francisco Chronicle* Assistant Managing Editor and devoted champion for the arts in San Francisco.

San Francisco Opera's 2018 Fall Season repertory includes the double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*, Puccini's *Tosca*, Strauss' *Arabella* and the west coast premiere of Jake Heggie's *It's a Wonderful Life*, which is based, in part, on the beloved Frank Capra film. The Company's 96th season continues in the summer of 2019 with a trio of thrilling and diverse works: Bizet's *Carmen*, Handel's *Orlando* and Dvořák's *Rusalka*. For tickets, visit sfopera.com, call (415) 864-3330 or visit the San Francisco Opera Box Office at 301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco.

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