



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA



John Keene (Photo: Philip Newton)

JOHN KEENE APPOINTED CHORUS DIRECTOR OF SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (December 7, 2021) — San Francisco Opera today announced the appointment of John Keene as Chorus Director, effective January 2022. Keene succeeds Ian Robertson who will retire at the end of this year following a distinguished 35-year tenure.

Keene will be responsible for the preparation and artistic standard of the acclaimed San Francisco Opera Chorus, working closely with Caroline H. Hume Music Director Eun Sun Kim, guest conductors and music staff to achieve the Company's artistic goals. His appointment comes after a search process led by Tad and Dianne Taube General Director Matthew Shilvock, Artistic Managing Director Gregory Henkel and Eun Sun Kim, which included rehearsal sessions with the Opera Chorus.

Keene, who is currently Head of Music Staff and Chorus Master at Seattle Opera, will work remotely starting in January before relocating to the Bay Area to begin rehearsals for the Company's summer season productions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber* and a Verdi concert led by Eun Sun Kim. He will also begin preparing the Opera Chorus for the Company's upcoming 2022-23 Centennial Season.

John Keene said:

I could not be more excited to join San Francisco Opera as Chorus Director. It is a great honor and privilege to be given the trust of carrying on the exceptional legacy built by Ian Robertson within this great company. I was inspired by the immediate connection I felt with the Chorus when we rehearsed together recently, and I am so looking forward to our work of bringing the highest possible artistic standard onstage for our audiences. Working closely with Music Director Eun Sun Kim is another aspect of this new challenge which fills me with eagerness to get started. With deep respect and gratitude for the many shoulders on which I stand, I am ready to help bring great opera to life with the gifted San Francisco Opera Chorus.

Music Director Eun Sun Kim said:

I have been consistently impressed by John's vision—he is a big-picture thinker who understands how things function both on stage and between departments. His sense of collaboration and his skill in music-making will enable our chorus to perform to the highest artistic standards, and I am excited for our future work together.

General Director Matthew Shilvock said:

As we move into the Company's second century, I am thrilled to be welcoming John Keene to the Opera as our next Chorus Director. Seeing John rehearse with the Chorus recently was a joy. The connection, respect, wisdom and energy that he shared with the Chorus over just a few hours gave us great excitement for the possibilities ahead. John will carry forward the extraordinary legacy of Ian Robertson, partnering with Eun Sun Kim to keep San Francisco Opera on the leading edge of musical and theatrical excellence.

American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) representative and San Francisco Opera Chorister Sally Mouzon said:

We are very excited to welcome Maestro Keene as our new Chorus Director. He has big shoes to fill, but I have every confidence that he can fill them. We felt an immediate connection with him: his style, his humor and his professionalism meshed very well with our group. In working with us, he demonstrated terrific musicality and a great ear, he was clear and easy to follow, and he showed a clear respect for us, as well as an ability to work with us as experienced professionals. I definitely look forward to what the San Francisco Opera Chorus will be in our next era.

Keene made his Seattle Opera debut in 2012 preparing the company's chorus for Beethoven's *Fidelio* conducted by Asher Fisch. With Seattle Opera he also conducted the company premiere of Laura Kaminsky's *As One* and was assistant conductor for Wagner's four-part *Der Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung)* and acted as musical consultant for the recording of the *Ring* cycle issued on the Avie label. Previously he served as Head of Music Staff and Chorus Master with Florida Grand Opera where he worked with Plácido Domingo, Marcello Giordani, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Sherrill Milnes, Renata Scotta and Bryn Terfel, among others. His operatic resume includes affiliations with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, New Orleans Opera and San Francisco Opera Center with whom he conducted the touring production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in 1996 to celebrate Western Opera Theater's thirtieth anniversary,

Well known for his collaborative spirit and profound love of the art form, Keene has made many deep, life-long impacts throughout the operatic field:

Greer Grimsley, bass-baritone

What wonderful news about John Keene being appointed the new Chorus Director for San Francisco Opera. I've known John for quite a few years and the gifts which San Francisco will be getting, to name a few, are his amazing musicality and insights, his impeccable professionalism and his unrelenting focus at the task at hand. All this combined with his humanity, kindness and sensitivity only serve to amplify and imbue the music John makes and inspires others to do the same. I'm fortunate to call him my friend! To San Francisco Opera and John a huge 'toi, toi, toi!'

Daniela Mack, mezzo-soprano

John has been in my life for the past twenty years as a teacher, coach, conductor, mentor, collaborator and dear friend. My years as a student were guided by his gentle and incredibly informed counsel. He has an extraordinary well of knowledge and experience in this art form and a true love of opera and the human voice. His support of my artistry was instrumental in paving the way for my personal success, and I can still hear his voice coaching me through repertoire and sharing his wisdom with me all these years later. He is a brilliantly sensitive and giving musician and a beautiful soul, and I have no doubt that he will lead and support the San Francisco Opera Chorus with integrity and kindness.

Lisette Oropesa, soprano

John Keene was one of the earliest musical mentors I had in my life, when he joined the voice/opera faculty at Louisiana State University. He gave coachings, played rehearsals and prepared us, taught us about style and nuance and also conducted operas. As a coach he always worked at a high level and managed to inspire the best in me with his knowledge, patience and thoughtful way of communicating. We worked on so much together, from Mozart to bel canto, and he truly was a wealth of knowledge but also humble enough to believe in the need for intense preparation. He made me want to always be improving but to not lose myself in the process. We have collaborated on recitals, and he is a beautiful pianist to work with as well! I know that everywhere he goes he brings a beautiful, jovial energy, as well as an immense respect for the work he does. I cannot wait to hear what wonderful things his musical leadership will inspire at San Francisco Opera.

Russell Thomas, tenor

I'm incredibly excited to learn of the appointment of Maestro John Keene as Chorus Director of the San Francisco Opera. I've known John for several years and have had the honor to perform in productions with his chorus in Seattle. They are always prepared extremely well and with such a high quality of musicality and drama. John is a kind, patient and steady leader that I'm proud to have gotten to know over the years. The union of the phenomenal musicians of the San Francisco Opera Chorus and the dedicated leadership of John Keene will be a force to reckon with for years to

come. I can't think of a better person to fill the legendary shoes of Maestro Robertson. San Francisco is so lucky!

ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CHORUS

The San Francisco Opera Chorus was formally established in 1927 by Company founder and General Director Gaetano Merola, who also served as the ensemble's director through 1943. As part of General Director Kurt Herbert Adler's development of the Company, the Chorus became full-time in 1981. Today, the Chorus consists of a Regular Chorus and an Extra Chorus, which can expand the ensemble to 100 singers or more in larger operas. The Opera Chorus was the subject of the 1991 Academy Award-winning feature-length documentary *In the Shadow of the Stars* and has been featured in numerous video presentations, beginning in 1979 with an international live telecast of *La Gioconda* and continuing with DVD releases of *Mefistofele*, *Porgy and Bess* and *Show Boat*. The Opera Chorus is proudly represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

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Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera.

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PRESS PHOTOS: High-resolution, downloadable photos of John Keene and the San Francisco Opera Chorus are available at sfopera.com/press.

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