



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

**THE GERSHWINS'® *PORGY AND BESS*SM COMES TO LIFE IN A NEW DVD/BLU-RAY RELEASE
FROM SAN FRANCISCO OPERA AND EUROARTS MUSIC INTERNATIONAL**

**ACCLAIMED FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO PRODUCTION STARRING ERIC OWENS AND
LAQUITA MITCHELL, CONDUCTED BY JOHN DEMAIN, TO BE RELEASED MARCH 25**



March 6, 2014 (San Francisco, CA)—George and Ira Gershwin’s quintessentially American masterpiece *Porgy and Bess* comes to life in a new DVD/Blu-ray recording from San Francisco Opera to be released by EuroArts Music International on March 25, 2014. American bass-baritone Eric Owens, in “an unforgettable performance, an ennobling, majestic performance” (*San Jose Mercury News*), and soprano Laquita Mitchell, who “dazzled the SFO audience with her purity of tone and vivid theatrical presence” (*Opera News*), headline an exceptional ensemble cast led by conductor John DeMain in director Francesca Zambello’s riveting production.

Miraculously melding classical idioms, jazz, blues and spirituals, *Porgy and Bess* is highlighted by some of Gershwin’s most recognizable melodies, including “Summertime,” “I Got Plenty O’ Nuttin’” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So.” Distributed worldwide by Naxos, the DVD (RRP \$24.99) and Blu-Ray (RRP \$39.99) releases will be available from all major retailers and the San Francisco Opera Shop. This release marks the first live recording of *Porgy and Bess* available on Blu-ray and the first new DVD release in over twenty years. The recording also features bonus material including interviews with cast and creative team members.

San Francisco Opera's The Gershwins'® *Porgy And Bess*SM was recorded live in high-definition in June 2009 at San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House, where the run received widespread critical acclaim. "...the work has returned to San Francisco Opera in splendour, leaving no doubt that this is a masterpiece of American verismo" (*Financial Times*). "*Porgy and Bess* may be the most familiar opera that people don't really know at all. The San Francisco Opera's powerfully sung production...offers a chance to correct that situation" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

A turbulent story about a crippled beggar, the headstrong woman he loves, and the community that sustains them both, the San Francisco Opera production stars bass-baritone Eric Owens and soprano Laquita Mitchell as Porgy and Bess, both in their role debuts. Eric Owens "conferred dignity, pathos and heroic stature on the crippled beggar; the bass-baritone's warm flexible tone and ample vocal reserves were deployed with impeccable musicianship" (*Opera News*), while Laquita Mitchell "gave an evocative performance as Bess, compounded of tempestuous need and penitence. The love duet 'Bess, You Is My Woman Now' was a soaring, passionate high point" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Owens, hailed for his recent performances as Alberich in the Metropolitan Opera's *Ring* cycle—including on their 2013 Grammy Award-winning recording—will take on his first *Ring* cycle as Wotan in 2016 in a new Lyric Opera of Chicago production; he will reprise the role of Porgy with that company in November 2014.

The cast is also highlighted by Lester Lynch, who "as the menacing Crown, proved a crucial catalyst in this production, with his baritone filled with brooding, booming personality" (*Sacramento Bee*), and Chauncey Packer, "a blast of an entertainer" (*San Jose Mercury News*) as Sportin' Life. Karen Slack (Serena), Angel Blue (Clara), Eric Greene (Jake), and Alteouise deVaughn (Maria) join the vibrant ensemble inhabiting the intricate world of Catfish Row. "The entire cast engaged to tell the story of an impoverished African-American community on Catfish Row in coastal South Carolina is so impossibly deep with talent—where to begin? How about with the sultry breeze of 'Summertime' sung by soprano Angel Blue, as Clara, wife of a fisherman? Or with the shattering 'My Man's Gone Now' offered by soprano Karen Slack, as Serena?" (*San Jose Mercury News*).

John DeMain, whose 1976 Grammy-winning recording of *Porgy and Bess* remains a benchmark, conducts the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Chorus (Ian Robertson, Chorus Director). "The San Francisco production, persuasively led by conductor John DeMain and sung by a strong cast headed by

Eric Owens and Laquita Mitchell in the title roles, does full justice to the musical riches of Gershwin's score" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

Francesca Zambello directs her acclaimed production, originally produced for Washington National Opera. The *San Jose Mercury News* hailed it as "spiritual transportation" and noted "the pace of Zambello's direction is dazzling." The evocative production features set design by Peter J. Davison, costumes by Paul Tazewell, lighting design by Mark McCullough, and choreography by Denni Sayers. "The virtuoso dancing—choreography by Denni Sayers—is jubilant. The sets, reflecting Zambello's decision to move the action from the 1920s to the 1950s, are remarkable..." (*San Jose Mercury News*). "It was a brilliant ensemble production...featuring Francesca Zambello's dramatic staging on Peter J. Davison's huge, picturesque sets. The chorus, under Ian Robertson's direction, was thrilling" (*San Francisco Examiner*).

George Gershwin originally conceived *Porgy and Bess* as an "American folk opera" and hoped it would have its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera, a suggestion that was refused because of the controversial nature of the subject matter. Based on the play by Dubose and Dorothy Heyward, *Porgy and Bess* was consequently reworked as a musical theater piece and opened on Broadway in 1935 with a cast of all African-American artists—an extremely bold move given the segregationist views of the era. The work went on to become a staple of the musical theater repertoire with several significant revivals, including a recent 2012 Tony Award-winning production starring Audra McDonald and Norm Lewis.

San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley restored *Porgy and Bess* to its true place in the American operatic repertoire when he presented the Gershwins' original operatic version for the very first time in 1976 with Houston Grand Opera. That landmark production, also conducted by John DeMain, established *Porgy and Bess* as one of the greatest American operas and went on to win a Tony Award on Broadway followed by a Grammy Award for the original cast recording.

Porgy and Bess is the third DVD/Blu-ray release in San Francisco Opera's new collaboration with EuroArts Music International and Naxos of America. The Company's critically lauded productions of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby-Dick*—a best DVD nominee in the upcoming 2014 International Opera Awards—and Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* featuring Renée Fleming were released in October

2013, with an additional three titles slated to be announced later this year. For more information and video clips of *Porgy and Bess*, go to sfopera.com.

This production was made possible by Company Sponsors John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn. Additional major support has been provided by the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts Philanthropic Fund.

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To request press review copies of San Francisco Opera's *The Gershwins'® Porgy And BessSM*, contact San Francisco Opera Communications at press@sfopera.com.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA / THE GERSHWINS'® PORGY AND BESSSM
By George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin

Conductor: John DeMain
Artists: Cast includes Eric Owens (Porgy), Laquita Mitchell (Bess), Lester Lynch (Crown), Chauncey Packer (Sportin' Life), Karen Slack (Serena), Angel Blue (Clara), Eric Greene (Jake), Alteouise deVaughn (Maria); San Francisco Opera Orchestra; San Francisco Opera Chorus (Ian Robertson, Chorus Director)
Stage Director: Francesca Zambello
Stage Production Team: Peter J. Davison (Set Designer); Paul Tazewell (Costume Designer); Mark McCullough (Lighting Designer); Denni Sayers (Choreographer)
Directed for the Screen by: Frank Zamacona
Recorded: Live at San Francisco Opera/War Memorial Opera House, June 2009
Running Time: 158 minutes; with additional bonus material (29 minutes) including artist and creative team interviews
Subtitles: Sung in English, with English/German/French/Korean/Japanese subtitles
Label: EuroArts Music International; distributed by Naxos of America
Catalogue Number: DVD 2059638 / Blu-ray 2059634
Release date: March 25, 2014; available at all major retailers including Amazon and the San Francisco Opera Shop (sfopera.com/OperaShop).

For further press information or to obtain *Porgy and Bess* photographs, visit sfopera.com/press or contact San Francisco Opera Communications:

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