



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PRESENTS WEST COAST PREMIERE OF
COMPOSER POUL RUDERS AND LIBRETTIST PAUL BENTLEY'S
THE HANDMAID'S TALE
BASED ON THE BESTSELLING NOVEL BY MARGARET ATWOOD



John Fulljames' production of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Photos: Camilla Winther

Karen Kamensek conducts cast led by Irene Roberts, Lindsay Ammann,
Sarah Cambridge, John Relyea in production by director John Fulljames



Karen Kamensek (conductor), Irene Roberts (Offred), Lindsay Ammann (Serena Joy),
Sarah Cambridge (Aunt Lydia), John Relyea (The Commander)

Ancillary Activities include Book Club with San Francisco Public Library and
Panel Discussion at The Commonwealth Club

Tickets available at (415) 864-3330 and [sfopera.com](https://www.sfopera.com)
September 20 performance will be livestreamed

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 5, 2024) — San Francisco Opera presents the West
Coast premiere of composer Poul Ruders and librettist Paul Bentley's opera *The*

Handmaid's Tale, based on the bestselling novel by Margaret Atwood. Originally scheduled for the 2020–21 Season and delayed by the pandemic, this new co-production of San Francisco Opera and the Royal Danish Theatre, performed in English, opens September 14 for seven performances through October 1.

The two-act opera, which had its 2000 world premiere in Copenhagen in Poul Ruders' Danish translation, is set in a post-American theocracy called Gilead in 2030, with flashback memories of "the time before." Presented from the perspective of the handmaid Offred, a woman who is torn from her family and forced into reproductive servitude, the opera follows her bleak situation and courageous attempt to escape.

Ruders' score, which mirrors and propels the intense, emotional story, utilizes a wide array of instruments including a sampler keyboard, digital piano and organ in addition to a large orchestra. The five percussionists in the pit play a variety of instruments including bass drum, wood block, glockenspiel, crotales, thunder sheet, sizzle strip, xylophone, anvil, tubular bells, vibraphone, snare drum, Bali gong, mark tree, rototom, tam-tam, metal chain, Chinese cymbal, guiro, hi-hat and basler drum.

Known for her commitment to championing 20th and 21st-century composers both in opera houses and on concert stages internationally, Grammy Award-winning American maestro **Karen Kamensek** returns to conduct Ruders' haunting score, which includes echoes of "Amazing Grace," a hymn from before the Gilead revolution. Kamensek made her San Francisco Opera debut in 2014 leading the Company premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. **John Fulljames**, formerly Director of the Royal Danish Opera and Associate Director of London's Royal Opera, stages a large cast, most of whom are making their role debuts.

Irene Roberts is known to San Francisco audiences for her acclaimed performances as the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, Bao Chai in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber* and as Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* for which OperaWire said, "Her voice was abundant, the tonal leaps from high to low, low to high, amply displayed her command of the music, as well as conveying emotional oscillation." The American mezzo-soprano portrays Offred, *The Handmaid's Tale's* central character, for the first time.

Lindsay Ammann makes her Company debut as Serena Joy, a former Gospel singer who is the barren wife of Offred's Commander in Gilead. Aunt Lydia, who indoctrinates Offred to

life as a handmaid, is performed by soprano and former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow **Sarah Cambridge**, last seen on the War Memorial Opera House stage as the Foreign Princess in the 2019 production of Dvořák's *Rusalka*. **John Relyea**, a leading bass on the world's opera stages and also a former graduate of the Merola and Adler Fellowship training programs, returns to San Francisco Opera after a 14-year absence for his role debut as The Commander. Relyea made his Company debut as Colline in *La Bohème* in 1996 and has performed many roles with the Company, including Figaro in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Méphistophélès in Gounod's *Faust*.

Mezzo-soprano and former Adler Fellow **Simone McIntosh** is the pre-revolution Offred, seen in flashbacks. Tenor **Christopher Oglesby**, who also performs in this fall's productions of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Carmen*, is Luke, Offred's husband from the before times. **Brenton Ryan** portrays her love interest, Nick. **Rhoslyn Jones**, **Katrina Galka** and current Adler Fellow **Nikola Printz** are the handmaids Ofglen, Janine/Ofwarren and the new Ofglen, respectively. Current Adler Fellow and soprano **Caroline Corrales** is Offred's friend Moira; **Gabrielle Beteag** is Offred's Mother; and **Sara Couden** and **Matthew DiBattista** make their Company debuts as Rita and the Doctor. Members of the San Francisco Chorus will perform solo roles of Handmaids, Wives, Aunts, Eyes (secret police) and guards, among others.

The creative team collaborating with director John Fulljames includes associate director **Lucy Bradley**, set designer **Chloe Lamford** (whose work for Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence* was seen here this past summer), associate set designer **Helen Hebert**, costume designer **Christina Cunningham**, lighting designer **Fabiana Piccioli**, projection designer **Will Duke**, sound designer and mixing engineer **Rick Jacobsohn** and movement director **Colm Seery**. Maestro **John Keene** prepares the San Francisco Opera Chorus.

Along with Ruders' opera, Canadian author Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, has inspired many adaptations for stage and screen, including a 1990 film starring Natasha Richardson as Offred, a ballet by Lila York (2013) and the popular Hulu original series led by actress Elizabeth Moss, which is expected to release its sixth season next year. Atwood's sequel, *The Testaments*, was published in 2019.

In recognition of San Francisco Opera's opening night performance of *The Handmaid's Tale* on Saturday, September 14, San Francisco City Hall will be lit in the red and white, the colors of the famous Handmaid uniform of red cape and white "wings" headdress.

Content Advisory: This opera closely follows the themes and narratives of the original novel with imagery and scenes of sexual and physical violence reflective of the dystopian setting (including depictions of rape and hanging). Viewer discretion is advised.

Sung in English with English supertitles, the seven performances of *The Handmaid's Tale* are scheduled for September 14 (7:30 p.m.), 17 (7:30 p.m.), 20 (7:30 p.m.), 22 (2 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 29 (2 p.m.); October 1 (7:30 p.m.), 2024.

LIVESTREAM: THE HANDMAID'S TALE, Friday, September 20

The Friday, September 20 evening performance of *The Handmaid's Tale* will be livestreamed at 7:30 p.m. PT. The opera will also be available to watch on demand for 48 hours beginning on Monday, September 23 at 10 a.m. PT. Tickets for the livestream and limited on-demand viewing are \$27.50. For tickets and more information about livestreams, visit sfopera.com/digital.

PRE-OPERA TALKS

San Francisco Opera Educational Development Manager **Christabel Nunoo** will provide a 20-minute overview of the opera 55 minutes prior to each performance in the Opera House auditorium for ticketholders. An audio recording of the talk will be available at sfopera.com/handmaid.

ANCILLARY EVENTS

PAGE TO STAGE: THE HANDMAID'S TALE BOOK CLUB

San Francisco Opera's Department of Diversity, Equity and Community presents ***Page to Stage: The Handmaid's Tale Book Club***, in partnership with San Francisco Public Library. Participants will receive a free copy of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel (while supplies last) and an invitation to attend the final dress rehearsal of the West Coast premiere of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The free book club sessions will explore this captivating story and engage in discussions revolving around the novel's timely themes and the operatic production presented by San Francisco Opera.

Participants choose to attend their preferred session at San Francisco Public Library branches:

- Richmond Branch, Thursday, September 5 at 5 p.m.
- Visitacion Valley Branch, Wednesday, September 11 at 5 p.m.
- Ocean View Branch, Saturday, September 14 at 2 p.m.
- Noe Valley Branch, Friday, September 20 at 3 p.m.
- Marina Branch, Sunday, September 22 at 2 p.m.

NOTE: All sessions are currently full; interested parties may sign up for the waitlists. For more information, visit sfpl.org/events.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE: OPERA OF SEARING CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

On Monday, September 30, The Commonwealth Club, in association with San Francisco Opera, will host *The Handmaid's Tale: Opera of Searing Contemporary Resonance*. In this whirlwind 2024 political election year, public affairs issues include gender consideration, reproductive rights and governing boundaries. The central concepts of *The Handmaid's Tale* opera—based on Margaret Atwood's bestseller—are that women are subordinate to men and must take on domestic and subservient roles including ritualized rape.

Dr. Anne W. Smith hosts and San Francisco Opera General Director **Matthew Shilvock** moderates a panel of speakers including **Carol T. Christ**, 11th Chancellor and Provost of the University of California, Berkeley and Former President of Smith College; **Katherine Snyder**, Associate Professor, University of California, Berkeley and Director of Berkeley Connect; and **Karen Kamensek**, conductor of San Francisco Opera's production of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The event will take place at The Commonwealth Club, 110 The Embarcadero, San Francisco, CA 94105. In-person tickets are \$22 and online livestream tickets are also available for \$5. Doors open at 5 p.m. and the program is from 5:30–6:30 p.m. Tickets and information: commonwealthclub.org

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *The Handmaid's Tale* range from \$28 to \$426 and are available at the San Francisco Box Office (301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco), by calling (415) 864-3330 and online at sfopera.com. San Francisco Opera Box Office hours are Monday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (Saturdays phone only). A \$2 per-ticket facility fee is included in Balcony 1, 2 and 3 zone prices; all other zones include a \$3 per-ticket facility fee.

Tickets for the September 20 livestream of *The Handmaid's Tale* are \$27.50. For more information, visit sfopera.com/digital.

Subscriptions for the Company's 102nd season start from \$146 for the Full Series (6 productions), and \$52 for the Half Series (2–4 productions) and a Design Your Own (DYO) option (minimum three operas). For information about subscriber benefits and special series subscriptions, including the Student & Teacher Series offering 50% off select Full and Half Series, visit sfopera.com/subscribe.

Rush tickets are available for select performances to those who register at sfopera.com/rush. Rush tickets are available from 11 a.m. until midnight of the day before the performance or until the allotment of rush tickets is sold out. Registration in advance is required to receive notices about Rush ticket availability. Standing Room tickets will be sold for mainstage opera performances in the War Memorial Opera House. Standing room tickets are \$10 and sold on the day of performance only, beginning at 10am. Cash only and limit of two tickets per person.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART/Muni Station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and F Market Street. For further public transportation information, visit bart.gov and sfmta.com.

Gifts of all sizes help create San Francisco Opera's programs and are appreciated. To donate visit sfopera.com/donate.

All casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about San Francisco Opera's 2024–25 Season, visit sfopera.com.

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THE HANDMAID'S TALE CASTING AND CALENDAR

US debut *San Francisco Opera Debut †Role Debut

†Current Adler Fellow ◇Adler Fellowship and Merola Opera Program Graduate +Merola Opera Program Graduate

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House (301 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco)

WEST COAST PREMIERE

THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Poul Ruders

September 14 (7:30 p.m.), 17 (7:30 p.m.), 20 (7:30 p.m.), 22 (2 p.m.), 26 (7:30 p.m.), 29 (2 p.m.);
October 1 (7:30 p.m.), 2024

Libretto by Paul Bentley

Co-production of San Francisco Opera and The Royal Danish Theatre

Approximate running time: 2 hours, 50 minutes including one intermission

Sung in English with English supertitles

World Premiere:

Copenhagen; March 6, 2000

Cast:

Offred

Irene Roberts ♪

Serena Joy

Lindsay Ammann * ♪

Aunt Lydia

Sarah Cambridge ♪◇

Offred's Commander

John Relyea ♪◇

Offred's Double

Simone McIntosh ♪◇

Luke

Christopher Oglesby ♪◇

Ofglen

Rhoslyn Jones ♪◇

Nick

Brenton Ryan ♪

Moira

Caroline Corrales * ♪†+

Janine/Ofwarren

Katrina Galka * ♪

Offred's Mother

Gabrielle Beteag ♪◇

Rita

Sara Couden * ♪

Doctor

Matthew DiBattista * ♪

New Ofglen

Nikola Printz ♪†+

Handmaid 3

Jesslyn Thomas ♪

Warren's Wife

Courtney Miller ♪

Echo

Crystal Kim ♪

Econowife

Edith Dowd * ♪

Widow

Whitney Steele ♪

Handmaid 1

Jacque Wilson * ♪

Handmaid 2

Mary Rauh * ♪

Moir's Aunt
Commander X
Guard 1
Eye
Girl
Man
Guard 2

Silvie Jensen ♪
Kevin Gino ♪
Chester Pidduck ♪
Wilford Kelly ♪
Sarah Nadreau * ♪
Michael Jankosky ♪
William O'Neill ♪

Creative Team:

Conductor
Production
Associate Director
Set Designer
Associate Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Projection Designer
Sound Designer & Mixing Engineer
Movement Director
Chorus Director
Fight Director
Intimacy Coordinator

Karen Kamensek
John Fulljames *
Lucy Bradley #
Chloe Lamford
Helen Hebert *
Christina Cunningham #
Fabiana Piccioli #
Will Duke *
Rick Jacobsohn
Colm Seery
John Keene
Dave Maier
Maya Herbsman

San Francisco Opera Orchestra and San Francisco Opera Chorus

San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by: Julie Dickson, Jerome & Thao Dodson; The Dolby Family, Bertie Bialek Elliott; Keith & Priscilla Geeslin; Gordon P. Getty; John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn; Elizabeth B. Jamieson, in memory of Burgess Jamieson; Franklin & Catherine Johnson; Edmund W. & Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund; Steven M. Menzies; Bernard & Barbro Osher; Barbara Oshman; Jeff & Marieke Rothschild; Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem; Dianne & Tad Taube; Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds; Diane B. Wilsey; Barbara A. Wolfe; and Anonymous (2).

The Handmaid's Tale is made possible, in part, by Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for New Productions; Marcia Barinaga & Corey Goodman; Bob Ellis; Louise Gund; and John A. & Cynthia Fry Gun.

Karen Kamensek's appearance is made possible by the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Conductors Fund, with additional support provided by the Marineau Family Foundation.

Simone McIntosh & Lindsay Ammann's appearances are made possible by a gift to the Emerging Stars Fund by Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem.

This project is supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts



San Francisco Opera livestreams are made possible, in part, by George and Leslie Hume.

San Francisco Opera is supported, in part, by a grant from Grants for the Arts.



San Francisco Opera is a member of



PRESS PHOTOS: Artist headshots and production images for *The Handmaid's Tale* are available at sfopera.com/press.

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