

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Opera Opens Season with Preview Party at Public Museum, Oct. 14 “A Taste of Opera: P is for Puccini”

GRAND RAPIDS – Opera Grand Rapids will open its 41st season with a special event previewing its three main stage operas, and celebrating the 150th Birthday of the composer Giacomo Puccini.

“A Taste of Opera; P is for Puccini” will take place at 6pm on Tuesday, October 14th at the Grand Rapids Public Museum. This casually extravagant dinner will benefit both Opera Grand Rapids and its support organization, Friends of the Opera.

The event will include: access to museum exhibits, the sounds of the mighty Wurlitzer organ, Carousel rides, a live luxury auction, an innovative dinner menu with wine pairings, and a program sampling the upcoming opera season.

The musical program will feature arias from “Tosca,” “The Elixir of Love,” “Faust,” and a handful of Puccini favorites such as “Madama Butterfly.” On hand to sing will be Mardi Byers, who will sing the title role of “Tosca,” November 7 and 8 at DeVos Hall. Tenor Chad Johnson will also perform during the event.

“P is for Puccini” has been designed to serve not only as a kick-off for the upcoming opera season, but also as a community event meant to introduce people to the world of opera.

“This is going to be fun, fun, fun,” said Suz Schalon, chair of the Opera GR Special Events Committee. “Come after work and bring a few friends and co-workers who are opera newbies. They will fall in love with opera.”

Tickets for “A Taste of Opera: P is for Puccini” are \$100 each, and can be purchased through the Opera office at 616.451.2741.

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“A Taste of Opera: P is for Puccini” Guest Performer Biographies

Mardi Byers: (<http://www.mardibyers.com/home.htm>)

A native of Boulder, Colorado (USA), soprano Mardi Byers made her operatic debut to great **acclaim in the title role of Tosca in Lübeck, Germany.** During her contract as soloist in Lübeck (2003-2006), she also celebrated major successes as Amalia (I Masnadieri) , Marguerite (Faust) and Elisabetta (Don Carlos). In addition, her performance of the title role in Adriana Lecouvreur was hailed as "world class" by the German press (Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine)

In 2006/2007 Mardi Byers performed as Elisabetta (Don Carlos) in both Wiesbaden, Germany (4 act, Italian, stage director Dietrich Hilsdorf) and Basel, Switzerland (5 act, French, stage director Calixto Bieto), Verdi's Requiem in Lübeck and Hamburg, Germany as well as Marguerite (Faust) in Wiesbaden and Margarete in Honegger's Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher (under the direction of Cornelius Meister) in Basel. She made her debut at New York City Opera in September 2007 as Donna Anna (Don Giovanni), in Georgette and Sour Angelica (Il Trittico) with New Orleans Opera. In March of 2008 Miss Byers appeared as Marie in Wozzeck in Bern, Switzerland.

Miss Byers has also appeared as Violetta (La Traviata), in Rome-L'Aquila, Tosca in Lund, Sweden, the Contessa (Le nozze di Figaro) in Rome, and as Donna Anna (Don Giovanni) at the Bard Festival in New York.

As a concert artist, Miss Byers recently performed Strauss' Four Last Songs with the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Hansestadt Lübeck, under the direction of Marc Tardue. She has appeared with the Symphonie Orchester of Zurich, the Stadtorchester Winterthur, the Grazer Symphonie Orchester, and the Swiss Musical Orchestra, and has presented recitals in San Francisco, Zurich, Munich, Salzburg, Marbella and the Grand Camen Islands. Miss Byers has appeared on Swiss television for the Prix Wallo (the Swiss Grammys), Fête des Vignerons , and Art on Ice .

Mardi Byers is a graduate of Arizona State University. Further studies led her to Dale Fundling in Salzburg, Austria.

In the up and coming future: Mardi Byers returns to Basel in May and June 2007 for Gounods Faust. In September of 2008 she will make her debut at the Hamburg State Opera as Amelia in Verdi's Simone Boccanegra under the direction of Simone Young (production of Claus Guth). In the same season 2008/09 she can be seen as Tosca in Grand Rapids (USA), and as Aida and Marietta in Korngold's Die tote Stadt in Nürnberg (Germany).

Chad Johnson: (<http://www.chadajohnsontenor.com/biography.asp>)

Chad A. Johnson is quickly making a name for himself in the world of opera. **Born in Muskegon, Michigan, Chad** began his musical studies in the vocal music department of Mona Shores High School. He then went on to Western Michigan University, The University of Kentucky and the American Institute of Musical Studies, Opera Studio in Graz, Austria. He is a student of renowned soprano, Virginia Zeani.

In 2001, Chad joined the young artist program of the Chicago Opera Theater. Over the next two seasons he performed in the operas ensembles and covered the role of the Male Chorus in Britten's The Rape of Lucretia. That May, Chad joined the Santa Fe Opera's Apprentice Artist Program for Singers and was then invited to join the Young Artist Ensemble at the Florida Grand Opera. During the 2002/03 and 2003/04 seasons Chad sang many roles including the Second Jew in Salome, Benvolio in Roméo et Juliette, Gastone in La Traviata, Jozef in the North American premier of Ede Donath's Szulamit and Pong in Turandot. The following summer, Chad sang the role of Harry, the miner in La fancuilla del West at Glimmerglass Opera, as a member of the Young American Artists Program.

Chad has also been active as a concert soloist. He has performed with the San Diego Chamber

Symphony of the Americas and the New World Symphony. He has been a featured soloist in such works as Handel's Messiah, Mozart's Coronation Mass and Missa Brevis, Vaughan Williams' Serenade to Music, Bach's Magnificat, Orff's Carmina Burana and numerous recitals and concerts.

Chad has received prizes from the Young Patronesses of the Florida Grand Opera Vocal Competition, NATS regional and state vocal competitions, the Anna Sosenko Artist Assist Trust and the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts. Most recently, Chad won the Four Cities District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and was the Second Place Winner of the Great Lakes Region Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and first prize in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation Competition.

Chad has worked with numerous directors including Peter Sellars, Mark Lamos, Bernard Uzan, Diane Paulus and Renata Scotto. He has also worked with many of today's great conductors such as Stewart Robertson, Yves Abel, Richard Buckley and Robert Spano.

Recently, Chad sang Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) with Connecticut Opera and with the Tanglewood Music Center under the batone of Maestro James Levine. He appeared as Camille (*The Merry Widow*) with Lyric Opera San Diego and Frederic (*The Pirates of Penzance*) with Glimmerglass Opera. Other past engagements include Alfredo (*La Traviata*) with Spokane Opera, Arminio (*I masnadieri*) and Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*) with Sarasota Opera, Arthur (*Lucie de Lammermoor*) and the Glass Maker (*Death in Venice*) with Glimmerglass Opera, Nanki-Poo (*The Mikado*) with Wichita Grand Opera, Hot Bisquit Slim (*Paul Bunyan*) with the Florida Grand Opera and Opera Omaha, Count Tassilo (*Countess Maritza*) with Lyric Opera San Diego and Tenor soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana* with Opera Omaha. Chad has also been heard on NPR's *World of Opera* as Harry, the Miner (*La fanciulla del West*), Arthur (*Lucie de Lammermoor*) and the Glass Maker in (*Death in Venice*) all from Glimmerglass Opera.