

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

LA DONNA DEL LAGO

CONDUCTOR
Michele Mariotti

PRODUCTION
Paul Curran

SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER
Kevin Knight

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Duane Schuler

PROJECTION DESIGNER
Driscoll Otto

STAGE DIRECTOR
Gregory Keller

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR
James Levine

PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR
Fabio Luisi

Opera in two acts

Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola,
based on the poem *The Lady of the Lake*
by Sir Walter Scott

Tuesday, December 15, 2015
7:30–10:40PM

The production of *La Donna del Lago* was
made possible by a generous gift from the
Betsy and Edward Cohen/Areté Foundation,
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The Metropolitan Opera

2015–16 SEASON

The 10th Metropolitan Opera performance of
GIOACHINO ROSSINI'S

LA DONNA DEL LAGO

CONDUCTOR
Michele Mariotti

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

ELENA, DAUGHTER OF DUGLAS D'ANGUS
Joyce DiDonato

GIACOMO V, KING JAMES OF SCOTLAND, DISGUISED AS UBERTO
Lawrence Brownlee

MALCOLM GROEME, IN LOVE WITH ELENA
Daniela Barcellona

SERANO, SERVANT TO DUGLAS
Eduardo Valdes

DUGLAS D'ANGUS, SCOTTISH NOBLEMAN,
FORMER TUTOR OF KING JAMES
Oren Gradus

RODRIGO DI DHU, CHIEF OF THE HIGHLANDERS
John Osborn*

ALBINA, ELENA'S CONFIDANTE
Olga Makarina

BERTRAM, SERVANT AT THE COURT OF KING JAMES
Gregory Schmidt

Tuesday, December 15, 2015, 7:30–10:40PM



Joyce DiDonato as
Elena in Rossini's
La Donna del Lago

Chorus Master **Donald Palumbo**
Musical Preparation **Gregory Buchalter, Joshua Greene,
Liora Maurer, and Jonathan C. Kelly**
Assistant Stage Director **Sara Erde**
Stage Band Conductor **Gregory Buchalter**
Italian Coach **Hemdi Kfir**
Prompter **Joshua Greene**
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DON PASQUALE • L'ELISIR D'AMORE • SIMON BOCCANEGRA
DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL (The Abduction from the Seraglio)

Aleksandrs Antonenko as Otello

PHOTO: KRISTIAN SCHULLER/METROPOLITAN OPERA

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Synopsis

Act I

Loch Katrine, Stirlingshire, Scotland. Elena, the Lady of the Lake, makes her daily crossing while shepherds watch their flocks and men hunt in the woods. She sings of her love for Malcolm Groeme, but comes across King James, who has disguised himself as "Uberto," hoping to meet the legendary beauty Elena. Believing the king to be a hunter who has lost his way, she offers him hospitality and they depart for her home, while the king's men search for their disguised leader.

King James learns that Elena's father is Douglas d'Angus, his former tutor, who has since joined the Highland Clan that is opposed to James's rule. He also learns of Elena's betrothal to Rodrigo di Dhu, the chief of the Highland Clan and enemy of the king, but his jealousy is assuaged by Elena's lukewarm reaction to the prospect of her marriage. Malcolm, the suitor whom Elena loves, arrives shortly after James departs. Hidden, Malcolm must endure overhearing Douglas order his daughter to marry Rodrigo, as he commands. After Douglas has left, Malcolm and Elena pledge their love.

The Highland warriors gather to welcome their leader, Rodrigo, who introduces Elena as his future bride. Malcolm has now resolved to join the clan against the king, but his secret bond with Elena is perceived by Douglas and Rodrigo when they meet. When news arrives of an attack by the king's army and the omen of a meteor passing in the sky, Rodrigo and his warriors depart for battle. Scotland is at war.

Intermission (AT APPROXIMATELY 9:05 PM)

Act II

Still disguised as "Uberto," James searches desperately for Elena, hoping to protect her from the coming bloodshed. When he finds her he once again declares his love, but she rejects his advances. He then gives her a ring which he claims was given to him by the king and will secure her protection from the king's forces. Rodrigo, who has overheard the conversation, attempts to have his soldiers kill the stranger, but Elena intercedes. Rodrigo vows to duel with "Uberto" himself.

Meanwhile, Malcolm has left the battle in the hopes of finding Elena, but is informed she has followed her father to Stirling Palace to seek peace. Rodrigo is reported to have been killed and the Highlanders now face certain defeat. Malcolm declares that he will save Elena or face his own death. Elena enters the castle, determined to save the lives of her father and Malcolm. Using the ring given to her by "Uberto" she gains access to the king's chambers.

Elena is surprised to see nobles surrounding "Uberto," who soon reveals his true identity. His feelings for her soften his attitude towards her father, and he pardons both Douglas and Malcolm. Elena and Malcolm are finally united, and all rejoice as a new peace reigns in Scotland.

Gioachino Rossini

La Donna del Lago

Premiere: Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 1819

Featuring one of Rossini's most beautiful and expressive scores, *La Donna del Lago* was a success in its premiere season and quickly travelled the world's operatic stages. The extraordinary vocal writing—a rare combination of lyricism and virtuosity that requires high levels of musicality and stamina—attracted the best singers of the day. The story itself provided additional interest for audiences: *La Donna del Lago* was the first opera by a major composer to be based on the works of Sir Walter Scott, whose literary imagination would become hugely influential in the emerging artistic movement we now know as the Romantic era. Scott's idealized vision of old Scotland was instrumental in the development of a national consciousness among his own people as well as in creating a fantasy landscape for foreigners, a wild and windblown land almost untouched by "civilization." A staple of the repertoire for several decades after its premiere, *La Donna del Lago* disappeared from the stage in the mid-19th century, along with many other works of the period. With the recent resurgence of interest in bel canto, these operas are once again being recognized for their sophisticated music and dramatic insights, embraced by a new generation of singers and by audiences around the world.

The Creators

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) was the world's foremost opera composer in his day. Over the course of just two decades he created more than 30 works, both comic and tragic, before retiring from opera composition in 1829, at the age of 37, after his success with the grand *Guillaume Tell* (best known today for its overture). Andrea Leone Tottola (d. 1831) was poet to the Royal Theaters in Naples. He began writing librettos in 1802 and worked with Rossini on several operas, including *Mosè in Egitto* (1818) and *Zelmira* (1822). Among his other collaborators were Donizetti and Bellini. Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) was an advocate, legal administrator, novelist, and poet whose stories of adventure and intrigue, set in a largely mythical Scotland, were wildly popular with contemporary audiences throughout Europe.

The Setting

The story takes place in Scotland in the first half of the 16th century, during the reign of King James V, who is anecdotally said to have traveled throughout his kingdom in disguise as a commoner. His reign was filled with civil strife and war with neighboring England. He was the father of Mary Stuart, who

succeeded him as Queen of Scots when she was six days old. The Scotland of the 19th-century Romantics' imagination was a wild land where the usual rules of decorum didn't apply. This imaginary place was to inspire generations of artists and musicians, including Donizetti (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Mendelssohn (*The Hebrides Overture*), and many others.

The Music

Containing a wealth of rapturously beautiful melody, the score of *La Donna del Lago* is also an evocative reflection of the imagery of Scott's poem. The semi-mythical setting is captured from the very first scene, with a chorus of peasants and hunting horns heard in the distance. Rossini uses the chorus in new and surprising ways in this opera, most notably toward the end of the first act, from the striking music of the bards (with male voices, harp, and pizzicato lower strings depicting a romantic vision of ancient Celtic sounds) to the finale, in which chorus, soloists, orchestra, and onstage band come together to create a scene of warlike wildness. The writing for the soloists is highly virtuosic: the trio in Act II, Scene 1 demands high Cs from both tenors as well as a pair of Ds from Uberto. Less expected in an opera of this period is the revelation of character inherent in much of the music: Elena's introductory song, as she appears by the lake, is written in 6/8 time, reminiscent of the "barcarolle" genre of boating song. It is later taken up by Uberto and recalled in his reminiscences of her—a convincing suggestion that there may be an erotically dangerous affinity between the two. Elena's duet with Malcolm in the following scene is equally lovely but clearly in a more comfortable, even conventional vein. Beyond the inventive vocal writing in choruses, ensembles, and solos throughout the opera, the supreme moment is reserved for the title character, who dominates the final scene in the brilliant "Tanti affetti." It represents a fitting climax to Elena's journey, a revelation of exuberant joy that would be inexpressible in words alone.

Met History

La Donna del Lago had its Met premiere in Paul Curran's production on February 16, 2015, with Joyce DiDonato and Juan Diego Flórez in the leading roles and Michele Mariotti conducting.

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Program Note

Though Rossini is today most beloved for his unsurpassed comic operas—works that, like the operatic equivalent of champagne, balance sophistication and elegance with delightful, buoyant frothiness—the great Italian composer was equally talented, and even more prolific, in the realm of opera seria and in the development of styles combining serious and comic elements. These aspects of Rossini’s art became especially prominent beginning in 1815, when he was offered a lucrative position with Naples’s Teatro San Carlo. The proposed workload would be strenuous and include not only composition but also rehearsal direction for his own operas and other composers’ works as well as some administrative responsibilities, but the theater boasted one of Europe’s most extravagant budgets, an outstanding professional orchestra (a rarity at the time), Italy’s finest chorus, and an excellent roster of singers with whom to work. It was too good for Rossini to pass up. Though he still found time to freelance when opportunities presented themselves (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, written in 1816, was the result of one such), he spent much of the next seven years at the San Carlo. During that time, he wrote nine new operas for the company, all of which, to fulfill the expectations of the virtuoso singers and the theater’s cultivated but conservative clientele, were opere serie.

These Neapolitan operas capture a crucial period of Rossini’s development, as he was clearly inspired by the San Carlo’s impressive resources and marshaled them in innovative ways. His writing for chorus became more prominent, more accomplished, and more varied. The dramatic flow in these works became more organic; he did not abandon the traditional pattern of set pieces (recitative–aria–ensemble, and so on) expected in Italian opera, but the boundaries became increasingly blurred. He took advantage of the large orchestra, allowing it a more independent role and employing more ambitious and more varied instrumentation to create for each opera its own distinct coloring. In some cases (*La Donna del Lago* among them), he omitted the expected overture, and in all of them he displayed an affinity for and mastery of “Germanic” counterpoint. It is in these works that we begin to see Rossini embarking down the path that would ultimately lead to the shockingly forward-looking *Guillaume Tell*, his valedictory operatic statement.

Yet despite their quality and importance, these fascinating works have largely fallen out of the repertoire. There are several reasons for this, chief among them the lack of modern audiences’ enthusiasm for the opera seria genre in general. But another significant obstacle is Rossini’s unusual casting and combination of voice types, as well as the often Herculean technical demands of the individual roles. To understand the reasons behind this, one must look to the impressive roster of soloists that impresario Domenico Barbaja had assembled for his Teatro San Carlo. First and foremost was Naples’s reigning prima donna—and Barbaja’s mistress, later Rossini’s second wife—Isabella Colbran. Renowned

for her dramatic abilities, Colbran was referred to in contemporary accounts as a soprano but seems to have excelled, at least by the time Rossini arrived in Naples, in the lower register of her voice—possibly reflecting the beginning of her instrument's early deterioration due to overexertion. As a result, the tessitura for the female leads in Rossini's San Carlo operas tends to fall somewhere between the comfort zone of a soprano and a mezzo-soprano, yet makes demands that are challenging for either. Colbran also evidently required a bit of time to get going: In place of the customary floridly showy entrance arias, Rossini was careful to provide her with lovely yet subdued introductory numbers. On the male side, Rossini was writing for tenors Andrea Nozzari and Giovanni David, both of whom were superb coloratura singers. They offered timbral contrast, as well, as Nozzari's voice was richer and more baritonal while David's was lighter, higher, and more pure, allowing the composer to deploy them in tandem, often in dramatic, dueling duets. Rossini's bespoke writing for these extraordinary artists—not to mention smaller roles for coloratura bass and contralto, always rare but nearly nonexistent today—make the Neapolitan opere serie some of the most difficult operas to cast in the entire repertoire. Happily, these works now seem to be experiencing the beginning of a renaissance with the emergence of singers who specialize in and whose voices are well-suited to these challenging roles—including those featured in this production at the Met.

Dating from roughly the midpoint of Rossini's tenure with the Teatro San Carlo, *La Donna del Lago* was composed hastily between June and October 1819. Having been away in Venice, Rossini was not scheduled to write anything new for the theater until spring 1820, but upon his return to Naples in June he found the administration scrambling to fill a gap in programming caused by the withdrawal of Gaspare Spontini from a commitment to write two new operas. To help solve the problem, Rossini agreed to write something on short notice for the fall season. Despite the time crunch, Barbaja wanted a work with a brand-new libretto; the early English Romantic poetry of Sir Walter Scott was popular throughout Europe at the time, and so Rossini decided to base his new opera on *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), set in the exotically atmospheric (for an Italian) moors of the Scottish highlands. The long-form narrative poem, which tells of highland clans rebelling against King James V of Scotland and of the competition between three men for the affections of the beautiful Ellen Douglas, had not yet been given an Italian translation, but the composer was familiar with a French version and had it made into an Italian libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola, a sort of staff poet and librettist of the Neapolitan theaters. Tottola's libretto necessarily omits much and changes numerous elements of the original, but the opera nonetheless retains the Romantic spirit of the poem. Rossini's decision to write an opera on Scott's work, making him the first significant composer to do so, proved prescient: *La Donna del Lago* acted as a proof of concept for using

Scotland as an effective operatic setting, and by 1840, there were more than 25 operas based on Scott's writings in Italy alone, including what would become the most famous among them, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Musically, *La Donna del Lago* will of course never be confused with something authentically Scottish, but Rossini adds a number of evocative elements to spice his own Italianate style with Scottish flavor. This is especially obvious in the choral numbers, which are frequently accompanied by harp and often incorporate the so-called Scotch Snap rhythm—familiar to anyone who has heard traditional Scottish bagpipe music—in which very short accented notes precede longer notes (as in the pronunciation of the words *fitting* and *rhythm*). The incisive martial music in the call-to-arms ensemble numbers and the prominent role played by hunting horns also evoke the Scottish highlands. All of the hallmarks of Rossini's Neapolitan style are here, as well: the restrained opening aria for the leading lady (Elena's meltingly beautiful cavatina "O mattutini albori") as well as the show-stopping virtuosic one later on ("Tanti affetti," the closing number); the impossible-to-cast number for dueling tenors (Act II's "No! Più non so frenarmi" for Uberto and Rodrigo, with contributions from Elena and the chorus) as well as impassioned coloratura arias for each separately (Rodrigo's "Ma dov'è colei, che accende" and Uberto's "Oh fiamma soave"); prominent roles for bass and contralto, the latter of which has the added difficulty of being a pants role and therefore needing to be clearly differentiated vocally from the mezzo-soprano heroine so as to sound like a plausible male love interest; creative instrumentation, including the aforementioned "Scottish" touches and a 30-piece onstage band; and the incorporation of sophisticated counterpoint (most notably in the Act I finale). But in the end, *La Donna del Lago* deserves to be heard more often not because of its important place in Rossini's development or because of its innovative compositional touches, but because it is simply one of the most ravishingly beautiful scores from one of opera's greatest melodists—and it is, from start to finish, a delight to listen to.

—Jay Goodwin

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The Cast



Michele Mariotti

CONDUCTOR (PESARO, ITALY)

THIS SEASON *La Donna del Lago* at the Met and Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival, *I Due Foscari* at La Scala, *La Traviata* at the Paris Opera, and *Attila* at Bologna's Teatro Comunale.

MET APPEARANCES *Carmen* (debut, 2012), *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Rigoletto*, and *I Puritani*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He is Music Director of the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, where, since his 2007 company debut leading *Simon Boccanegra*, he has conducted *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *I Puritani*, *La Gazza Ladra*, *Idomeneo*, *Carmen*, *La Cenerentola*, *La Traviata*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Norma*, *Nabucco*, and *Così fan tutte*. Recent performances include *I Puritani* with the Paris Opera, Leoncavallo's *Zingari* at the Montpellier Festival, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with the Los Angeles Opera. He has also led *La Traviata* at Naples's Teatro San Carlo, *La Donna del Lago* at Covent Garden, *Norma* at Turin's Teatro Regio, *Matilde di Shabran* at Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at La Scala. He made his operatic conducting debut in 2005 leading *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Salerno's Teatro Verdi.



Daniela Barcellona

MEZZO-SOPRANO (TRIESTE, ITALY)

THIS SEASON Malcolm Groeme in *La Donna del Lago* at the Met, Eboli in *Don Carlo* in Bilbao, Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, The Princess in *Adriana Lecouvreur* at Brussels's La Monnaie, and Amneris in *Aida* at the Paris Opera and in Naples.

MET APPEARANCES Maddalena in Act III of *Rigoletto* in a Verdi Gala that opened the 2001-02 season (debut) and Adalgisa in *Norma*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff* in Florence, Santuzza in Bilbao, and Orfeo in *Orfeo ed Euridice* in Naples. She has also sung Dido in *Les Troyens* at La Scala and the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Mistress Quickly at La Scala and the Netherlands Opera, and Malcolm Groeme at Covent Garden. A specialist in the bel canto repertoire, she has sung Maffio Orsini in *Lucrezia Borgia* and Marquise Melibea in *Il Viaggio a Reims* at La Scala, Romeo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* at the Paris Opera, Isabella in *L'Italiana in Algeri* in Geneva, and the title role of *Tancredi*, Arsace in *Semiramide*, Falliero in *Bianca e Falliero*, and Ottone in *Adelaide di Borgogna* at Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival.



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Joyce DiDonato

MEZZO-SOPRANO (KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI)

THIS SEASON Elena in *La Donna del Lago* at the Met, Arden Scott in the world premiere of Jake Heggie's *Great Scott* at the Dallas Opera, Charlotte in *Werther* at Covent Garden, and Romeo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* at Barcelona's Liceu.

MET APPEARANCES Sycorax in *The Enchanted Island*, the title role of *Maria Stuarda*, Isolier in *Le Comte Ory*, Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (debut, 2005), Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Stéphanie in *Roméo et Juliette*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include *Maria Stuarda* at Covent Garden, Houston Grand Opera, and in Barcelona, the title role of Massenet's *Cendrillon* in Barcelona, Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Romeo with the San Francisco Opera and in Kansas City, Elena at Covent Garden and the Santa Fe Opera, and Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* and Elena at La Scala. She has also sung at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Vienna State Opera, Salzburg Festival, and Paris Opera, and was the 2007 recipient of the Met's Beverly Sills Artist Award.



Lawrence Brownlee

TENOR (YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO)

THIS SEASON Uberto in *La Donna del Lago* at the Met, Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola* for his debut at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Paris Opera, and Arturo in *I Puritani* at the Zurich Opera.

MET APPEARANCES Arturo, Rinaldo in *Armida*, Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment*, Don Ramiro, and Count Almaviva (debut, 2007).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* with Seattle Opera, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with Munich's Bavarian State Opera, the Italian Tenor in *Der Rosenkavalier* in Baden-Baden, and Tonio and the title role in the world premiere of Daniel Schnyder's *Charlie Parker's Yardbird* with Opera Philadelphia. He has also sung Tonio with the Seattle Opera, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* for his debut with the Los Angeles Opera, Nemorino at the Vienna State Opera, Don Narciso in *Il Turco in Italia* and Don Ramiro in Munich, Uberto at the Santa Fe Opera, Lindoro in *L'Italiana in Algeri* with Houston Grand Opera, and Count Almaviva at the Vienna State Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, La Scala, and in Seattle, San Diego, Hamburg, Dresden, and Baden-Baden.

The Cast CONTINUED



Oren Gradus

BASS (BROOKLYN, NEW YORK)

THIS SEASON Douglas d'Angus in *La Donna del Lago* at the Met, Don Diègue in Massenet's *Le Cid* at Boston's Odyssey Opera, and Zaccaria in *Nabucco* with Pittsburgh Opera.

MET APPEARANCES Colline in *La Bohème*, Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Publio in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Jake Wallace in *La Fanciulla del West*, Zuniga in *Carmen*, Giorgio in *I Puritani*, Timur in *Turandot*, Garibaldi in *Rodelinda*, the Old Hebrew in *Samson et Dalila*, the King in *Aida*, Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, and the Guardian in *Elektra* (debut, 2002).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS In recent seasons he has made debuts with Washington National Opera as Henry VIII in *Anna Bolena*, Barcelona's Liceu as the Four Villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Canadian Opera Company as Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Switzerland's Avenches Opera Festival as Zaccaria. He has also sung with opera companies in Houston, San Francisco, St. Louis, Seattle, Dallas, New Orleans, Rome, Lausanne, and Dresden.



John Osborn

TENOR (SIOUX CITY, IOWA)

THIS SEASON Rodrigo di Dhu in *La Donna del Lago* at the Met, Arnold in *Guillaume Tell* in Geneva, Pollione in *Norma* in Zurich, the title role of *Benvenuto Cellini* in Barcelona and Rome, Elvino in *La Sonnambula* at Paris's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the title role of Rossini's *Otello* at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, Fernand in *La Favorite* in Venice, and Léopold in *La Juive* in Munich.

MET APPEARANCES Goffredo in *Armida*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and the Fourth Jew in *Salome* (debut, 1997), among others.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Arnold at Covent Garden and the Netherlands Opera, Rossini's *Otello* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Pollione in *Norma* at the Salzburg Festival and in Vienna, the title role of *Werther* in Frankfurt, Benvenuto Cellini in Amsterdam, Hoffmann in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* in Lyon and Tokyo, Des Grieux in *Manon* in Buenos Aires, Romeo in *Romeo et Juliette* in Salzburg, Léopold in Paris, Don Ottavio and Rodrigo di Dhu at La Scala, the title role of *Roberto Devereux* in Zurich, and Arturo in *I Puritani* at the Netherlands Opera. He is a graduate of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.