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MINNESOTA OPERA TO OPEN 2024-2025 SEASON WITH GOUNOD'S *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Operatic adaption of Shakespeare's classic to feature in-demand tenor and MN native Evan LeRoy Johnson in company debut opposite audience favorite Jasmine Habersham in title roles

MINNEAPOLIS (October 1, 2024) – Minnesota Opera will open the 2024-2025 season, the 62nd in company history, with a production of Charles Gounod's paragon of French grand opera, *Romeo and Juliet*. Adapted from William Shakespeare's original tragedy, this enduring tale of star-crossed lovers will be brought to life on the operatic stage at the **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts** in downtown Saint Paul, running from **Saturday, November 2 through Sunday, November 10**. Gounod's evocative score, paired with libretto by Jules Barbier and Michael Carré, tells the musical story of Romeo and Juliet, two young lovers who long to be together despite a raging feud between their respective families.

When MN Opera originally staged this production in 2016 under the direction of **Matthew Ozawa**, it was noted for its minimalistic yet powerful design. Cincinnati Opera re-staged *Romeo and Juliet* in 2019 after coming onboard as a co-producer, hiring Ozawa and his team to expand upon their concept by creating additional scenic elements while remaining committed to the understated elegance that attracted audiences to the original. Since then, this production has become one of MN Opera's most popular rentals by other opera companies around the United States.

"*Romeo and Juliet* has endured the test of time because it tells a deeply human story of love, division, and tragedy that feels eternally relevant for all of us," says President and General Director **Ryan Taylor**. "This haunting and moving production, which is near and dear to our company, explores those themes in a powerful way."

Singing the role of Romeo will be tenor, Minnesota native, and Project Opera alum **Evan LeRoy Johnson**, making his company debut opposite soprano **Jasmine Habersham** (*Edward Tulane*), singing Juliet. They will be joined by two former MN Opera Resident Artists baritone **Charles H. Eaton** (*La bohème*) and mezzo-soprano **Victoria Vargas** (*Edward Tulane*) as well as bass **Adam Lau** in his company debut as Friar Laurent, **Nathan Romportl** (*The Song Poet*) as Benvolio, and baritone **Philip Zawisza** (*The Manchurian Candidate*) as the Duke of Verona. *Romeo and Juliet* will also showcase the MN Opera debuts of incoming Resident Artists, with Minnesota native and mezzo-soprano **Kara Morgan** singing Stephano, bass **John Mburu** singing Count Capulet, baritone **Ángel Vargas** as Tybalt, and baritone **David Wolfe** as Gregorio.

Composer Charles Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* premiered in 1867 at the Théâtre Lyrique during the Paris Exposition Universelle and was extremely well received, selling out several performances. It was the second major operatic success for Gounod, who had collaborated with librettists Jules Barbier and Michael Carré on several works during the previous decade, including *Faust*, *Philémon*

et Baucis, and *Mireille*. Considered to be a prime example of French grand opera, *Romeo and Juliet* will feature the largest contingent of the MN Opera Chorus and MN Opera Orchestra of the entire season and will be led by Principal Conductor **Christopher Franklin**. Associate Stage Director and Company Artist **Margaret Jumonville** will stage Matthew Ozawa's original production, which features scenery by **William Boles**, costumes by **Sarah Bahr**, lighting by **Paul Whitaker**, and choreography by the **James Sewell Ballet**.

In addition to the performances at the Ordway, MN Opera will host an Offstage Event at MetroNOME Brewery in Saint Paul's Lowertown on Wednesday, October 30. The event will feature Jasmine Habersham sharing wisdom and stories from her history with MN Opera and her career more broadly. Additionally, Joseph Li (VP, Artistic) will present Opera Insights in the Ordway's Target Atrium one hour prior to each performance, exploring Gounod's musical approach to the human inclinations toward love and violence as well as what the composer's work has to say about the forces that both drive us apart and bring us together.

Tickets for *Romeo and Juliet* start at \$30 and are available at mnopera.org/romeo-and-juliet.

Quick facts:

- What:** *Romeo and Juliet*
Music by Charles Gounod
Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michael Carré
- The opera will be sung in French with English captions projected above the stage.
- Where:** Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, 345 Washington Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102
- When:** Saturday, November 2, 2024 at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, November 7, 2024 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, November 9, 2024 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, November 10, 2024 at 2 p.m.
- Tickets:** \$30-\$249. Call Minnesota Opera Patron Services at 612-333-6669, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., or purchase online at mnopera.org/romeo-and-juliet.
- Run Time:** Two hours and 50 minutes with one intermission
- Media:** Digital assets are available on our [Online Press Room](#).
- Learn More:** Offstage Event at MetroNOME Brewery
Wednesday, October 30 at 6:30pm
385 Broadway Street, Saint Paul, MN 55101

Opera Insights - one hour prior to the show in the Target Atrium at the Ordway



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Creative Team

Principal Conductor | Christopher Franklin
Original Stage Director | Matthew Ozawa
Associate Stage Director | Margaret Jumonville
Scenic Designer | William Boles
Costume Designer | Sarah Bahr
Lighting Designer | Paul Whitaker
Choreographer | James Sewell Ballet
Fight Director | Mason Tyer
Intimacy Director | Tom Ringberg

Cast

Romeo | Evan LeRoy Johnson[†]
Juliet | Jasmine Habersham
Mercutio | Charles H. Eaton[°]
Friar Laurent | Adam Lau
Count Capulet | John Mburu*
Tybalt | Ángel Vargas*
Stephano | Kara Morgan*
Gertrude | Victoria Vargas[°]
Gregorio | David Wolfe*
Benvolio | Nathan Romportl
Duke of Verona | Philip Zawisza
Paris | Yuran Liu

[†] Project Opera Alum

[°] Resident Artist Alum

* Resident Artist

To learn more about *Romeo and Juliet*, please visit mnopera.org/romeo-and-juliet.

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Minnesota Opera advances the art of opera for today and for future generations
by expanding the circle of musical storytelling.