

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For Tickets: [kcopera.org](http://kcopera.org) or 816.471.7344

Lyric Opera of Kansas City Kicks Off  
61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary 2018-2019 Season with  
*NEW PRODUCTION* of  
***West Side Story***

*Celebrating Leonard Bernstein's Centenary*

*Leonard Bernstein's daughter, Jamie, to speak at Plaza Library Event on Sept. 13*

*Lyric Opera debuts*

*Soprano Vanessa Becerra, Mezzo Soprano Gabrielle McClinton, Baritone Brian Vu  
Baritone DJ Petrosino, and Director Francesca Zambello;  
Tenor Andrew Bidlack and Conductor David Charles Abell return to Lyric Opera*

**Kansas City, MO (August 27, 2018)** – Lyric Opera of Kansas City opens its 2018-2019 season with the award-winning work that transports *Romeo & Juliet* to the streets of New York City, a **NEW PRODUCTION** of ***West Side Story***, featuring the original **Jerome Robbins** choreography and the original orchestral score. Created by artists **Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins**, who set out to surpass the expectations of musical theater, this production will give audiences the rare opportunity to experience *West Side Story* at the scale at which it was originally conceived.

The production runs September 22, 23, 26, 28 and 30 at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. and will be sung in English with English subtitles. High-res production and artist photos can be downloaded [here](#).

This production is a co-production of Houston Grand Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Director **Francesca Zambello** of Washington National Opera and Glimmerglass Festival will make her Lyric Opera debut. **David Charles Abell** (Conductor/*Carmen*, 2016, *Rigoletto*, 2018) will return to Lyric Opera. **Vanessa Becerra**, also making her Lyric Opera debut, will sing Maria, after appearing in the role at Glimmerglass in July-August 2018 and as Johanna/*Sweeney Todd* at Atlanta Opera. **Andrew Bidlack**, who recently debuted with Lyric Opera in the Lyric's critically-acclaimed *Everest* (2017), will sing Tony. **Brian Vu**, in the role of Riff, will also debut here, after appearing as Riff with Houston Grand Opera and Glimmerglass. Detailed bios available at <https://kcopera.org/performances/west-side-story-18/>.

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KANSAS CITY

**General Director and CEO Deb Sandler** stated, “I am thrilled to open our 61st season with *West Side Story*. This production honors the diverse repertoire of Lyric Opera, which, early in its history, produced *Most Happy Fella*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Man of La Mancha*, and Kander and Ebb’s *The Happy Time*. In 1971, the Company appeared on the cover of LIFE magazine for its production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It is to this commendable list that we will add *West Side Story*. As we observe the centenary of Bernstein’s birth, it seems entirely fitting to celebrate our quintessential American composer and conductor with the performance of this remarkably moving and transcendent work.”

### Three things about *West Side Story* and Leonard Bernstein:

1. Music lovers like to debate whether *West Side Story* is a musical or an opera. It is both; it is neither. *West Side Story* transcends musical boundaries and defies categorization: there are arias (“Maria,” “Somewhere”) and there are musical theater numbers (“Gee, Officer Krupke,” “Something’s Coming”), and there is some amazing, athletic dancing (“Cool,” “America”). Our advice? Just enjoy it.
2. While most of the combat in *West Side Story* is dance-fighting, the real gangs of New York provided the model for the Jets and the Sharks. Gang warfare in the late 1950s was a source of morbid fascination for New Yorkers. There were elaborate rules of conduct, war councils, rumbles over girls and “turf,” and even a summer gang-fighting “season.”
3. Leonard Bernstein responded to monumental events with compassion – and passionate music-making. When President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, he led a broadcast performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 2, “Resurrection,” and uttered the famous quote, “This will be our response to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.” When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, he conducted a multinational performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, “Ode to Joy,” broadcast from the newly reunified city.



### ***West Side Story* (1957)**

Based on a conception by Jerome Robbins

Music by Leonard Bernstein

Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by Arthur Laurents

Entire original production directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins

Lyric Opera Kicks off 61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary with NEW PRODUCTION of *West Side Story*, Sept. 22 – 30

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

- Sung in English with English subtitles
- Five performances at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts
- NEW PRODUCTION from Houston Grand Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, and Lyric Opera of Chicago

## Performances of *West Side Story*

- Saturday, September 22 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, September 23 at 2:00 p.m. (Sunday Subscriber performance)
- Wednesday, September 26 at 7:30 p.m.
- Friday, September 28 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, September 30 at 2:00 p.m.

## Overview of *West Side Story*

*West Side Story* defies labels, and has since the beginning: legendary Broadway producer/director George Abbott wrote to Bernstein in 1945, “When I talk of opera, I am talking about a new form which does not now exist: I am talking about something which I expect you to create...unhampered by tradition.” The Romeo & Juliet concept for *West Side Story* came to Jerome Robbins first, and he insisted that it be cast with singers who could dance. Arthur Laurents suggested that Tony and Maria would be associated with rival street gangs, which were in the news then. In November 1955, a young Stephen Sondheim joined the team and witnessed the “no borders, no boundaries” collaborative dynamic of Bernstein and Robbins. “The fusion of forms would be as snug as a switchblade,” writes Laura Jacobs in the February 2018 issue of *Vanity Fair*.

Less than two years later, *West Side Story* opened on Broadway and ran for 732 performances, spurring thousands of performances outside New York City. *West Side Story* has been on video, in schools, in a punk rock version, in a one-woman version by Cher, and at La Scala opera house, proving that this gritty, big-city retelling of a 16th-century play can bloom, and burn, and become a true American phenomenon that shakes off any simple categorization.

## Cast and Artistic Team: *West Side Story* (bios available at [www.kcopera.org](http://www.kcopera.org))

Maria	Vanessa Becerra*
Tony	Andrew Bidlack
Riff	Brian Vu*
Anita	Gabrielle McClinton*
Bernardo	D.J. Petrosino*

See the most up-to-date cast list at [www.kcopera.org](http://www.kcopera.org)

Conductor	David Charles Abell
Director	Francesca Zambello*
Choreographer	Julio Monge*
Set Designer	Peter Davison*
Costume Designer	Jessica Jahn*
Lighting Designer	Mark McCullough*
Hair & Makeup	Dave Bova*
Associate Director	Eric Sean Fogel

\* Lyric Opera of Kansas City debut

Tickets start at \$29 and availability varies by performance. To purchase tickets, call Ticketing & Patron Services (816) 471-7344. Patrons can select their own seat and print their tickets at home

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## KANSAS CITY

by visiting [www.kcopera.org](http://www.kcopera.org). Limited student rush tickets are available for \$15 starting 90 minutes before the performances, with a valid student ID. Student rush tickets are subject to availability.

## Related Events

### Fan Fiction Contest

Deadline for submissions: Friday, Sept. 7, 5:00 p.m. at [fanfiction@kcopera.org](mailto:fanfiction@kcopera.org)

Lyric Opera invites submissions Fan Fiction celebrating the immortal love story that underpins both *Romeo & Juliet* and ***West Side Story***. “Fanfic” writers typically explore new relationships, storylines and settings; it can be argued that ***West Side Story*** is a Fan Fiction homage to *Romeo & Juliet*, as Bernstein, Robbins, Sondheim and Laurents recast Romeo and Juliet as Tony and Maria, and the two warring houses as the Jets and the Sharks.

The contest is open to writers aged 18 and up, in two categories: short story and poetry. Entries should conform to K, T, or M guidelines (the Fanfic equivalent of the MPAA rating PG-13).

Contest judges are Kaite Stover, Director of Readers’ Services for the Kansas City Library, and Helen Hokanson, Reference Librarian at Johnson County Library. One grand prize package will be awarded that includes two tickets to Lyric Opera’s ***West Side Story*** plus dinner and parking at the Kauffman Center, and an autographed copy of *Famous Father Girl*, a new book written by Leonard Bernstein’s daughter Jamie.

There is no fee to enter the contest. An entry form must accompany every submission. More details and the downloadable entry form are at <https://kcopera.org/fan-fiction>.

### Explore the Score

Thursday, Sept. 6 at 7:00 p.m.

Join conductor **David Charles Abell** (*Carmen*, 2016, *Rigoletto*, 2018) for a personal introduction to the music and characters of this masterpiece at the Michael & Ginger Frost Production Arts Building, 712 E 18<sup>th</sup> St., KCMO 64108. **FREE** Event, RSVP required at <https://kcopera.org/performances/west-side-story-18/> or by phone at (816) 471-7344.

**First Friday**, Sept. 7, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. Presented by Lyric Opera of Kansas City at the Beth Ingram Administration Building (1725 Holmes St., KCMO 64108). Lyric Opera’s *West Side Story* First Friday event features the Resident Artists in selections from the production, refreshments, and the Teens in Transition Mural\* on display. More information available here:

<https://kcopera.org/performances/west-side-story-18/>.

### ***West Side Story* “At Ease with Opera” Presentations:**

**Monday, Sept. 10 at 7:00 p.m. at the Kauffman Foundation** (4801 Rockhill Road, KCMO 64110). **Free to the public.** Panel discussion led by Dr. William Everett on the many versions of WSS – movie, Broadway, European Tours, and more.

**Monday, Sept. 17 at 7:00 p.m. at MRI Global Auditorium** (425 Volker Blvd., KCMO 64110) **Free to the public.** **Dr. Paul Laird: A preview of *West Side Story*.** Laird, the author of *Critical Lives: Leonard Bernstein* (2018), drew on 30 years of research for his engaging new biography on the life and work of a prodigiously talented, endlessly enthralling, and controversial musician.

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

## **Kansas City Public Library- Plaza Library Special Event**

Thursday, Sept. 13 at 6:30 p.m.

Kansas City Public Library – Plaza Branch (4801 Main St., KCMO 64112)

Lyric Opera co-sponsors an appearance by **Jamie Bernstein**, daughter of Leonard Bernstein, for a rare look at her father on the centennial of his birth, in her deeply intimate and evocative book *FAMOUS FATHER GIRL: A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein*. David Charles Abell, a student and assistant to Leonard Bernstein, joins in the discussion, and Lyric Opera's Resident Artists and Apprentice Artists perform selections from the Bernstein canon. Afterward, Ms. Bernstein will sign copies of her book, which will be available for purchase through Rainy Day Books. The event is free, although registration is required: <https://www.kclibrary.org/signature-events/famous-father-girl-memoir-growing-berstein>.

## **\*Teens in Transition Mural Display**

September 22 – 30, beginning 90 minutes before each *West Side Story* performance

Kauffman Center for the Arts, Brandmeyer Great Hall

Lyric Opera's mural art project with Teens in Transition and Arts Tech culminates in a display of the finished murals, not only at Lyric's First Friday on September 7, but at the Kauffman Center during the entire run of *West Side Story*. Not planning to attend *West Side Story*? The Kauffman Center is open on Friday, September 21 and Friday, September 28, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., at which time the murals may be viewed.

## **Pre-Show Brunch with Young Friends of The Lyric**

Sunday, September 23 at 11:00 a.m.

The Westside Local (1663 Summit St., KCMO 64110)

Young Friends of The Lyric invites YFL members, the membership-curious, and *West Side Story* fans to join them in a pre-show brunch at The Westside Local, celebrating farm-to-table cuisine.

Topics of discussion may include opera, *West Side Story*, and Rita Moreno's Oscars dress.

Tickets to *West Side Story* sold separately. RSVP at [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com) by Friday, September 21 at 4:00 p.m. For more information, contact Shannon Rolle at (816) 471-4933, ext. 134.

***West Side Story* is underwritten in part by the Enid and Crosby Kemper Charitable Foundation, UMB Bank, n.a., Trustee, and the Hall Family Foundation. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, and supported in part by the City of Kansas City, Missouri Neighborhood Tourist Development Fund.**

## 2018-2019 Season at a Glance:

### ***NEW PRODUCTION***

#### ***West Side Story***

Leonard Bernstein, 1957

Sung in English with English subtitles

Based on a conception of Jerome Robbins

Composer: Leonard Bernstein | Book: Arthur Laurents | Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim

Entire original production directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins

**Saturday, September 22, 2018      7:30 p.m.**

**Sunday, September 23, 2018      2:00 p.m.**

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KANSAS CITY

Wednesday, September 26, 2018 7:30 p.m.

Friday, September 28, 2018 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 30, 2018 2:00 p.m.

Conductor: David Charles Abell ☒ Director: Francesca Zambello\*

## *Madama Butterfly*

Giacomo Puccini, 1904

Sung in Italian with English subtitles

Saturday, November 3, 2018 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 7, 2018 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 9, 2018 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 11, 2018 2:00 p.m.

Conductor: Ryan McAdams ☒ Director: Ron Daniels\*

## *Così fan tutte*

Wolfgang A. Mozart, 1798

Sung in Italian with English subtitles

Saturday, March 16, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 20, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 22, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 24, 2019 2:00 p.m.

Conductor: Jane Glover \* ☒ Director: James Alexander

## *The Pearl Fishers*

Georges Bizet, 1863

Sung in French with English subtitles

Saturday, April 27, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 1, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Friday, May 3, 2019 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 5, 2019 2:00 p.m.

Conductor: Antony Walker\* ☒ Director: Andrew Sinclair\*

\* Lyric Opera of Kansas City debut

## **About Lyric Opera of Kansas City**

Lyric Opera of Kansas City was founded in 1958; it is one of the nation's premier regional opera companies and brings high quality live operatic performances to the people of the Kansas City area and a five-state region. Repertoire choices encompass original language performances of standard repertory as well as contemporary and American operas. The Company mounts productions that enrich the community it serves, as well as reflect the highest artistic standards of the profession. Lyric Opera offers innovative and award-winning programs designed to further music and arts education both in schools and in the community, and serves more than 18,000 students and educators each year.

Opera lovers can be fans of Lyric Opera of Kansas City on Facebook or follow us on Twitter at @kcopera or on Instagram @kcopera.

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Lyric Opera of Kansas City is a member of OPERA America and this season is made possible with funding from Richard J. Stern Foundation for the Arts, and the Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation.

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