

Haymarket *Opera company*



George Frideric Handel

Serse

Saturday, September 29 – Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Studebaker Theater | Chicago, Illinois

Dear Friends,

We begin our eighth season with another masterwork by George Frideric Handel. To date we have given Chicago staged premieres of his Neapolitan serenade *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* (our 2011 debut), the Roman cantata *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno*, and one of his lesser-known “magic” operas *Amadigi di Gaula*. This last was his fifth opera for the King’s Theatre in London’s Haymarket district and was written shortly after he had taken the city by storm with *Rinaldo*. The English craze for Italian opera lasted for nearly three decades, but by the time of *Serse* (1738) tastes had begun to change. More than a few xenophobic Londoners grew weary of the vain antics of expensive Italian divas and wanted to hear music sung in English. John Frederick Lampe’s *The Dragon of Wantley*, a burlesque parody of Handel’s serious opera *Giustino*, had caused a sensation, running for a record 69 performances in its first season alone. Fortunately for us, Handel (who reportedly enjoyed *The Dragon* and admired Lampe’s music) was not to abandon Italian opera altogether for a few more years. Set in ancient Persia (as seen through an 18th-century looking glass), *Serse*’s story of deception, abuse of power, and redemption through forgiveness sparked the master’s imagination and is certainly relevant today.

Our season continues in March 2019 with music of another German-born master, J.S. Bach. Superstar counter-tenor Iestyn Davies will join the Haymarket Opera Orchestra for a Lenten concert of sacred cantatas at Old St. Patrick’s Church in the West Loop. You won’t want to miss the chance to hear this world-famous artist sing some of Bach’s most hauntingly beautiful vocal music. On a much lighter note, Telemann’s intermezzo *Pimpinone* is back by popular demand to close our opera season in April at the Studebaker Theater. This riotous tour de force was among Telemann’s most popular works and features one of opera’s greatest comic brawl scenes. On May 9, our Early Opera Cabaret fundraiser will showcase Haymarket’s superb company artists in a program of arias and ensembles. We close the season in June with scenes from Purcell’s semi-opera *The Fairy Queen*, performed by the young artists of our fourth annual Summer Opera Course.

Now I invite you to settle into your chair and open your ears and eyes to the splendor of *Serse*. The score is a treasure trove of Handel’s most deftly characterized and ageless music. Enjoy!

—Craig Trompeter, *Artistic Director*



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Haymarket Opera Company enriches the musical community of Chicago and the Midwest with performances of 17th- and 18th-century operas and oratorios using period performance practices. HOC seeks to engage audiences of all ages with passionate performances of familiar as well as forgotten works, staged intimately and guided by close attention to details of the libretti and scores.

Serse

Music by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)



Cast in order of vocal appearance

Serse, King of Persia Suzanne Lommler
Arsamene, Brother of Serse, in love with Romilda Megan Moore
Elviro, Servant to Arsamene David Govertsen
Romilda, in love with Arsamene Katelyn Lee
Atalanta, sister of Romilda, in love with Arsamene Erica Schuller
Ariodate, General in Persian Army, father of Romilda and Atalanta Ryan de Ryke
Amastre, betrothed to Serse Angela Young Smucker
Soldiers in Serse's army Joseph Caruana and Andrew Erickson

Stage Direction Sarah Edgar
Stage Direction Assistant Julie Brumfiel
Musical Direction Craig Trompeter

Costume Designer & Supervisor Meriem Bahri
Costume Construction Chicago Custom Costumes and Meriem Bahri
Wardrobe Mistress Victoria Carot
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Wig & Make-up Runners Alice Salazar and Dyllan Miller

Production Manager Alaina Bartkowiak
Stage Manager Adrienne Bader
Assistant Stage Manager Jonathan S. Campbell
Assistant Stage Manager Isaac Frishman

Set Design Sarah JHP Watkins
Lighting Designer Lindsey Lyddan
Lighting Assistant Neal Javenkoski
Supertitles Operator Harrah Friedlander
Supertitle Preparation Alessandra Visconti

Orchestra

VIOLIN

Jeri-Lou Zike
Vernon and Cille Swaback
Endowed Chair
Wendy Benner
Adriane Post
Marty Davids
Ann Duggan
Lori Ashikawa

VIOLA

Liz Hagen
Susan Rozendaal

CELLO
Paul Dwyer
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VIOLONE

Jerry Fuller

OBOE AND RECORDER
Katheryn Montoya
Sung Lee

BASSOON

Sally Jackson

HARPSICORD
Jory Vinikour

THEORBO
Deborah Fox

Synopsis

BY SARAH EDGAR

Baroque opera often involves romantic entanglements that would make anyone's head swim. I'll begin this synopsis with a quick cheat sheet:

- Serse loves Romilda.
- Romilda and Arsamene love each other. Arsamene is the brother of Serse.
- Atalanta, the sister of Romilda, also loves Arsamene.
- Amastre still loves her unfaithful betrothed, Serse.
- Elviro, servant to Arsamene, loves drinking.
- Ariodante just wants the best for his daughter Romilda.

Don't forget about the cross-dressing!

- Amastre is dressed as a man in order to spy on Serse.
- Elviro disguises himself as a woman so that he can deliver a letter from Arsamene to Romilda.

Now that you have the basics, let's get to it!

ACT I

Away from his palace during his military campaigns, Serse finds a moment to sit under a beautiful plane tree near a summerhouse and give vent to his romantic longing. Arsamene, Serse's brother, and Elviro, Arsamene's servant, soon enter the same courtyard looking for Arsamene's secret love, Romilda. From inside the summerhouse, both Arsamene and Serse hear Romilda's lovely singing. Serse falls in love at first listen, and Arsamene feels a pang of despair. Although he and Romilda love each other, his brother is the king, and he cannot openly oppose Serse's romantic choices.

After Serse leaves and Arsamene is finally able to speak to Romilda, he tells her that Serse is going to "tempt her faithfulness". Romilda proclaims her steadfast love to Arsamene, but Arsamene already doubts her. Meanwhile, Atalanta, who is secretly in love with Arsamene, sees the possibility of pushing her sister Romilda toward the king and snatching Arsamene for herself. Serse soon comes back, forcing Arsamene and Elviro to hide. Serse makes his first overture to Romilda, and she begins to skillfully decline him, but Arsamene cannot control himself and pops out of his hiding place. Serse promptly banishes Arsamene, then Serse turns back to Romilda and declares his love for her. Knowing the king's power and quick temper, Romilda remains silent, neither accepting nor rejecting him. Alone at last, she declares her unwavering love for Arsamene and leaves the stage.

Amastre enters dressed as a man, curious to find her betrothed, Serse, and learn about the latest military campaign. From a hidden spot, she hears the good news as Ariodante, a general and Romilda's father, tells Serse of their victory over the Moorish king. Amastre's joy is cut short as she soon discovers that Serse has a new love. Meanwhile, Arsamene has written a letter to Romilda asking her to meet him. He orders Elviro to deliver the letter, but Elviro is hesitant because they have been banished, and he fears Serse's temper. Luckily, Elviro comes upon a brilliant solution and runs off to prepare.

Next we find Amastre fuming over the unfaithful Serse and planning her vengeance. As she thunders off, Romilda and Atalanta enter. Atalanta probes Romilda to see if she could be persuaded to switch her passion to Serse, but Romilda does not waver in her love for Arsamene.

ACT II

Elviro enters the city dressed as a woman flower peddler in order to avoid detection while delivering Arsamene's letter to Romilda. He runs into the "stranger" Amastre, and Elviro tells her that Serse intends to marry Romilda and that Romilda doesn't love Serse. Amastre is devastated and plans to commit suicide. Next, Elviro runs into Atalanta who takes his letter for Romilda. Since Serse is coming, Elviro scurries away. Atalanta tells Serse that Arsamene wrote the letter to her and that Serse should marry her to Arsamene right away. She adds that Serse should not be fooled if Arsamene protests that he never loved her.

As Atalanta skips away, hoping that her ruse is successful, Serse meets Romilda. Serse shows her the letter and tells her that it was written to Atalanta (remember, the letter is written to Romilda, but it seems that Arsamene didn't see the need to actually write her name on the letter). Romilda still declares her love for Arsamene without hesitation. After Serse leaves, though, Romilda gives vent to her disappointment.

INTERMISSION

Amastre tries to kill herself, but Elviro stops her just in time. She runs out, and Arsamene enters. Elviro tells Arsamene that Atalanta took the letter and that it seems that Romilda is now in love with Serse. Arsamene believes the story and is despondent. Serse happens upon the unhappy Arsamene, and Serse tries to placate him by offering to marry Arsamene to Atalanta.

Arsamene makes it abundantly clear that he only loves Romilda, and so the impasse between the two brothers over Romilda continues. When Serse sees Atalanta, he breaks it to her that Arsamene really doesn't love her. Atalanta and Serse both muse on the capricious nature of love.

Soon Serse and Amastre find each other on opposite sides of a square. Serse believes Amastre to be a wounded warrior, but before Amastre can do anything, Romilda appears and Serse sends Amastre away. Romilda once again tries to gently rebuff the king's advances, but Serse begins to press harder. Amastre has been listening, and she jumps in to Romilda's defense. Serse orders Amastre to be taken away by his guards and leaves. Amastre fights the guards, and Romilda steps in to pardon her.

ACT III

Arsamene, Romilda, Atalanta, and Elviro meet each other, and Atalanta confesses to her deception with the letter. Romilda and Arsamene are reconciled, and Atalanta decides to just give up on Arsamene and go find a new lover somewhere else. Before they can revel in their love, Serse enters, and Arsamene has to hide. Serse does not want to hear any more stalling from Romilda, and demands her hand in marriage.

Staging Notes

BY SARAH EDGAR

Romilda has another option to forestall the wedding: she requests that Serse get permission from her father first. Serse cannot deny such a reasonable final request, and he leaves to find Ariodate. Arsamene, who has overheard everything, is once again seized by unwarranted jealousy. Romilda now thinks suicide is a better option than dealing with these ridiculous brothers.

When Serse finds Ariodate, he asks that Ariodate consent to a royal marriage for Romilda, but Serse never tells Ariodate that Serse himself is the intended bridegroom. Ariodate naturally imagines that the bridegroom is Arsamene, the king's brother, and is very happy for his daughter's good fortune.

Serse rushes to Romilda, full of good cheer, but Romilda is now desperate to stop this marriage. Her new tactic is to tell Serse that she and Arsamene have already kissed. This backfires, sending Serse into such a rage that he orders Arsamene to be killed. Romilda finds her new friend Amastre and begs the "warrior" to go and tell Arsamene of Serse's plan to kill him. Amastre agrees readily and asks Romilda to deliver a letter to Serse.

When Romilda and Arsamene once again come face-to-face they argue with each other, but Ariodate stops their argument short. He believes that he is supposed to marry Arsamene and Romilda by order of Serse, and this unexpected good luck wipes away all of their troubles. After the marriage is performed, Ariodate once again meets Serse, and Serse decides to finally tell him that he wants to marry Romilda. Ariodate has to confess to the king that he has already married Romilda to Arsamene, but just as Serse erupts in a rage, he is handed a mysterious letter. The letter is from his estranged betrothed Amastre, and this only infuriates Serse more. As he is about to leave, Arsamene, Romilda, Amastre, and Elviro enter. Serse would dearly love to see someone slain, but Amastre brings him to his senses by threatening to kill him and then her. Serse finally relents and agrees to marry her again.

All of the problems are solved!

Read Robert Kendrick's historical essay on Serse at haymarketopera.org



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior: facsimile reprint of the unique edition of 1737 by Francis Nivelon. London: Paul Hoberton Publishing, 2003.



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

A deceiving sister, brothers in love with the same woman, a love-letter that gets passed around, and a drunken servant: it's a classic baroque opera story, but is it really so crazy? Behind all of the convoluted twists and turns of the plot is at least one timeless human problem: the all-too-common experience of falling in love with the wrong person. Likewise, if you think about it, it's not difficult to find parallels between the domineering Serse and the powerful men who can't take rejection from women today. By making these connections between the 18th-century and today, I want to build a bridge between my historical staging practices and the modern audience.

What are historical staging practices? As a stage director, I am continually fascinated by the possibilities of applying 18th-century movement and acting techniques to baroque operas. I see the work of the staging rehearsals as a collaborative process designed to find the most honest way for each performer to express their character within the stage conventions of the period.

The first step in this process is to help the performer find their "18th-century body." As Louis Bonin wrote in 1712, "...when I know how to control my whole body and limbs with their correct gracefulness, then I can act without looking affected." Naturally, to have such control of the body requires quite a bit of kinesthetic awareness. Etiquette manuals, dancing treatises, and aesthetic principles of the period have been my sources in creating exercises designed to help performers find both the grace and control of the body that was so prized.

I also work with the performers to find the emotional landscapes of the characters. What are the characters' motivations? What causes them to express themselves through an aria? By answering these questions, I hope to clarify the complicated love triangles that advance the plot of many operas. Of course, it's not enough to just understand who is love with whom and why they are consumed with rage at any given moment.

Through this kind of work on character motivation, I hope to help the singers create multi-dimensional characters that the audience can relate to. We've all been unlucky in love at one time or another, right?

Once the motivations are clear, we can circle back to 18th-century acting. One of the goals for actors in the eighteenth-century was to move the emotions of the audience. To do this, they often studied the bodily expression of the passions. For example, in *The History of the English Stage* (1741), it states:

Thus when a man speaks in anger, his imagination is inflamed, and kindles a sort of fire in his eyes, which sparkles from them in such a manner, that a stranger, who understood not a word of the language, or a deaf man, who could not hear the loudest tone of his voice, would not fail of perceiving his fury and indignation. And this fire of their eyes will easily strike those of their audience which are continually fixed on yours; and by a strange sympathetic infection, it will set them on fire too with the very same passion.

Cont'd next page

Staging Notes, Cont'd

The gesture and acting treatises of the period help with some landmarks for specific emotions; for example, “aversion,” as illustrated in the Rev. Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia* (1806) (see photo #4 on previous page).

The general idea for 18th-century actors (at least according to *The History of the English Stage*) was to walk a fine, tasteful line between movement and stillness while always being mindful of the public’s love for a pleasing variety of movements. Above all, the action should illuminate the poetry of the music and the text.

I use kinesthetic practices with the singers to help them find their own expressive bodies so that their actions on stage amplify the passions of their character. Once the emotions of the character are layered onto a full-bodied expression of gesture and movement, period acting becomes a world that we create in the service of telling a beautiful and truthful human story.

Soloists and Production

DAVID GOVERTSEN “handsomely replaced the ill Peter Rose as the producer La Roche” opposite Renée Fleming and Anne Sophie von Otter in *Capriccio* at Lyric Opera Chicago. He sang Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande* with the Chicago Symphony and as a soloist in James MacMillan’s *Quickening* with the Grant Park Orchestra. He is an alumnus of both the Santa Fe Opera and Central City Opera apprentice programs and holds degrees from Northwestern University, Northern Illinois University, and the College of DuPage.

RYAN DE RYKE has performed at the Aldeburgh Festival in the UK and the festival at Aix-en-Provence in France. *The Baltimore Sun* hailed him as “a talent that seems to defy labels, for without pretense or vocal tricks he delivers a naturally beautiful sound that penetrates to one’s inner core in every conceivable range.” He appears regularly as an oratorio soloist and has worked with the Orchestra of the 17th-century, the Baltimore Handel Choir, the Bach Sinfonia, and the American Opera Theater.

Mezzo-soprano **MEGAN MOORE**, praised for her “theatrical spark” and “attractive mezzo timbre,” is a diverse performer and effective arts advocate. Favorite operatic roles include Cenerentola, Rosina, Nicklausse, Cendrillon, Blanche de la Force, and Hansel. Megan is from Cincinnati, Ohio where she remains a leader in arts advocacy. Lynx Project, an art song initiative she co-founded, has received acclaim for commissioning works featuring texts by Cincinnati-area youth with non-verbal autism.

ANGELA YOUNG SMUCKER returns to Haymarket Opera Company with her “luscious mezzo” (*Chicago Tribune*) and “powerful stage presence” (*The Plain Dealer*). A highly versatile and sought-after artist, her performances range from intimate chamber recitals to grand concert halls across the country, with repertoire spanning genres from Renaissance madrigals to modern pop tunes. In addition to performing, she is currently pursuing a doctorate at Northwestern University and serves as executive director for Third Coast Baroque.

Mezzo-soprano **SUZANNE LOMMLER**’s recent performances with the Haymarket Opera Company garnered great critical acclaim. *The Chicago Tribune* described her voice as “dark and alluring” in the role of the sorceress Melissa (Handel’s *Amadigi*) and wrote that “Lommer’s assured technique allowed her to turn on a dime from fury to pathos and back again. Her sorceress all but burned up the stage.” In 2018 she appears in the title roles of both *Carmen* for Opera Kelowna (British Columbia) and *Serse* for Haymarket. Other recent engagements include: University of

British Columbia’s *Minds and Music* concert series; Orchestra Iowa for Bach’s *Mass in B minor*; Great Lakes Baroque; Indianapolis Symphonic Choir and Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra; and in the woodcut motion picture *Kharmen*, by Jay Bolotin. She has appeared with Pittsburgh Opera, Hamburger Kammeroper, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Cincinnati May Festival, The Edinburgh Quartet, and the Kansas City Symphony, among others. Her New York City debut was as Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito*, conducted by Julius Rudel.

Recognized for her flexibility and warmth of tone, soprano **KATELYN LEE** is making her mark in Chicago and across the United States. She has appeared at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Symphony Center, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Indianapolis Symphony, Cedar Rapids Opera, and Springfield Regional Opera. She is an accomplished performer of opera, musical theatre, and concert works with a particular affinity for Baroque repertoire. She is thrilled to be making her Haymarket debut!

Praised for her “lively personality, abundant charm, and luscious vocalism” (*Chicago Tribune*), and “warm, agile soprano” (*Chicago Classical Review*), soprano **ERICA SCHULLER** is a versatile performer, bringing committed artistry to a broad musical repertoire. She has performed leading roles with the Boston Early Music Festival, Haymarket Opera Company, Apollo’s Fire, Florentine Opera Company, Opera Siam (Bangkok) and Skylight Opera Theatre, among others. As a concert soloist, Erica has appeared with Ars Lyrica Houston, the Lincoln Trio, New Trinity Baroque, Great Lakes Baroque, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, and the San Francisco Bach Choir. She holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

MERIEM BAHRI has been praised by the *Chicago Tribune* for her “sumptuous array of period-perfect costumes.” After completing a PhD in science, she turned to her great passion for costumes and art history. She collaborates regularly with two groups specializing in baroque opera: as costume designer for Haymarket and as assistant to the costume designer for the Boston Early Music Festival.

SARAH EDGAR began her professional career as a dancer with The New York Baroque Dance Company under Catherine Turocy, and since then she has voraciously studied and experimented with the stage conventions of the period. In Cologne she created new works with The Punk’s Delight, while pursuing her MA in Tanzwissenschaft (dance studies) from the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln. She is associate director of The New York Baroque Dance Company.

LINDSEY LYDDAN has worked all over Chicago with Silk Road Rising, Roosevelt University, University of Illinois at Chicago, Drury Lane Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Steppenwolf, the Goodman, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. She received her MFA in lighting and scenic design from Northwestern University.

CRAIG TROMPETER has performed with Second City Musick, Music of the Baroque, the Chicago Symphony, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Chicago Opera Theater. He has performed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Glimmerglass Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Valletta International Baroque Festival in Malta. As soloist he has appeared at the Ravinia Festival, the annual conference of the American Bach Society, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and with Music of the Baroque. Trompeter directs the Early Music Ensemble at the University of Chicago.

SARAH JHP WATKINS is a scenic designer, photographer, and educator. She works as a design studio assistant for scenic designer Daniel Ostling, and has worked on *The Hounds of Baskerville*, *Hard Times*, *Title & Deed* to name a few. She is Assistant Professor of Theatre in Northeastern Illinois University’s Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre, where she is the Managing Artistic Director of The Stage Center Theatre and resident scenic designer.

To learn more about all our artists, please visit haymarketopera.org/meet-the-artists.

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Iestyn Davies
From Fear to Faith

March 9, 2019 | Old St. Patrick's Church

Experience the genius of Bach as internationally renowned countertenor Iestyn Davies sings some of the master's most daring and inventive music. You'll hear the gorgeous strings of the Haymarket Opera Orchestra with guest oboist Stephen Bard and organist/harpsichordist Andrew Rosenblum. Artistic Director Craig Trompeter leads the ensemble and takes a turn as soloist in Telemann's delightful *Suite in D Major for viola da gamba and strings*.



Pimpinone
By Georg Philipp Telemann

March 30 - April 2, 2019 | Studebaker Theater

HOC presents a fully-staged revival of Georg Philipp Telemann's comic intermezzo *Pimpinone*. This mini-opera was one of Telemann's most beloved works from its first performances in 1725. It tells the story of a wealthy merchant, Pimpinone, who is in search of a chambermaid to help run his estate. The enterprising and sly Vespetta (Italian for "little wasp") shows up just in time to take the job and Pimpinone's heart. See what happens as her ambition and his ardor collide.

Tickets and details at haymarketopera.org

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