

## News Release

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### Minnesota Opera announces its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season

Highlights of the 2012-2013 season include:

Michael Christie's debut as Music Director

Company premiere of Verdi's *Nabucco* starring Jason Howard and Brenda Harris

Tudor trilogy concludes with Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*

World Premiere of Douglas J. Cuomo and John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt*

French Grand Opera masterpiece, Ambroise Thomas' *Hamlet*

Dazzling new production of Puccini's *Turandot*

Introduction of Opera in the Park

Minneapolis—Minnesota Opera announces its 2012–2013 season, a bold 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season honoring the company's half-century commitment to opera's full spectrum and featuring classic favorites, a Bel Canto masterpiece and a world premiere. Highlights include the second commission of the Minnesota Opera New Works Initiative – the world premiere of *Doubt*, by Douglas J. Cuomo (composer) and John Patrick Shanley (librettist), based on his Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play. The season boasts five new productions – four company premieres and a powerhouse finale with Puccini's *Turandot*. Also included in the 2012–2013 season is Verdi's monumental *Nabucco*, the conclusion to Donizetti's Bel Canto Tudor trilogy, *Anna Bolena*, and Ambroise Thomas' rarely performed French Grand Opera masterpiece *Hamlet*. In a special summer encore, Minnesota Opera proudly introduces a new outdoor tradition to Minneapolis – Opera in the Park, a gift to the Twin Cities community that has nurtured the company for five decades.

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The season opens on September 22, 2012, with Giuseppe Verdi's towering biblical drama *Nabucco*, in a new production with the Minnesota Opera debut of set designer and stage director, **THADDEUS STRASSBERGER**. Baritone **JASON HOWARD** and soprano **BRENDA HARRIS** return to star with world-renown bass-baritone **JOHN RELYEA** in his company debut. Maestro **MICHAEL CHRISTIE** begins his tenure as Music Director conducting the Minnesota Opera Orchestra. In November, the Opera presents the final installment of Gaetano Donizetti's Tudor trilogy, *Anna Bolena*, with the debut of soprano **KERI ALKEMA** in the title role with bass-baritone **KYLE KETELSEN** as Henry VIII. In January, the season continues with the second commission of **MINNESOTA OPERA'S NEW WORKS INITIATIVE** – the world premiere of *Doubt*, composed by **DOUGLAS J. CUOMO** with libretto by **JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY**. Based on Shanley's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play which became an Academy Award-nominated motion picture, this highly anticipated commission features the company debut of soprano **CHRISTINE GOERKE** as Sister Aloysius with **MATTHEW WORTH** as Father Flynn and the return of celebrated mezzo-soprano **DENYCE GRAVES** as Mrs. Muller. Directed by **KEVIN NEWBURY**, Maestro **CHRISTOPHER FRANKLIN** returns to conduct. In March, Minnesota Opera stages the rarely performed French operatic masterpiece by Ambroise Thomas, *Hamlet*, in a production designed and directed by **THADDEUS STRASSBERGER**. Based on Shakespeare's unforgettable classic, this politically charged production features the company debuts of American baritone **BRIAN MULLIGAN** in the title role opposite Canadian coloratura soprano **MARIE-EVE MUNGER** as Ophelia. The season concludes in April with a dazzling new production of Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* by French-Canadian production team **RENAUD DOUCET** and **ANDRÉ BARBE**. **IRINA RINDZUNER** and **HELEN TODD** alternate in the title role with **KELLY KADUCE** as Liù. **MICHAEL CHRISTIE** conducts, completing his first season as Music Director.

“For the last half century, Minnesota Opera has been a local leader in the performing arts, as well as a pioneer in the national opera industry,” noted President and General Director **ALLAN NAPLAN**. “As we celebrate this history and look to the future, we are proud to offer a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season that features an exciting mix of ambitious and entertaining repertoire, performed by world-class artists and presented in productions that embrace the bold innovation and engaging theatricality that our audiences have come to expect from Minnesota Opera. In addition to the exciting productions that we have planned, we are also happy to announce two significant enhancements to our company profile. With the recent appointment of Michael Christie as Music Director, Minnesota Opera now has the ability to achieve even greater musical excellence through the dedicated leadership of this exciting young conductor. Additionally, with the debut of Opera in the Park – a free gift to the community – Minnesota Opera has the unique opportunity to expand our artistic and civic footprint by providing unprecedented access to the operatic art form, the Minnesota Opera company and the impressive cultural riches of the Twin Cities. As we arrive at this important milestone in the company's history, we are proud to acknowledge not only the artistic accomplishments of the past, but also our ever-growing community of donors and patrons who have generously supported us throughout the many years. With this anniversary season, we offer our gratitude and appreciation for the community's investment in and commitment to Minnesota Opera.”

“It's a grand time for a celebration, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is truly a grand celebration of the art of opera and of Minnesota Opera,” said Artistic Director **DALE JOHNSON**. “*Nabucco* is a powerhouse opera that needs a powerhouse cast, and I am happy to welcome back Brenda Harris and Jason Howard to sing Verdi's exciting and dramatic early work. *Anna Bolena* is a gorgeous opera in the late Bel Canto style and I am sure the audience will embrace this piece as strongly as they have *Roberto Devereux* and *Mary Stuart*. Minnesota Opera's calling card is the creation of new works, and the dramatic Christine Goerke is going to knock your socks off as the powerful Sister Aloysius in *Doubt*. Brian Mulligan and Marie-Eve Munger will move you to tears in the emotionally charged production of *Hamlet*, and our new production of *Turandot* is a visual feast and a brilliant way to end this splendid 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.”

## ***Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi**

September 22, 25, 27, 29 and 30, 2012

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

A new Minnesota Opera, Washington National Opera and Opera Company of Philadelphia co-production.

### **Love, power and politics collide in biblical Babylon.**

Verdi's monumental opera follows the plight of the Jews as they are conquered and exiled from their homeland by King Nebuchadnezzar (*Nabucco*). With its soaring choruses, triumphant arias and bold drama, *Nabucco* established Verdi's reputation as an operatic icon and national hero. The opera's infamous chorus, "*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate*" (also known as the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves), was considered an anthem for the patriots who sought to unify their country during the Italian Risorgimento of the mid-nineteenth century.

American stage director and set designer **THADDEUS STRASSBERGER** makes his Minnesota Opera debut with this beautiful new production, evocative of the notorious Italian opera house, La Scala, where *Nabucco* premiered. According to *Opera Now*, he is a director/designer who "... manages to straddle the sometimes very different worlds of European and U.S. opera production seamlessly ... Strassberger's productions are fresh and thoughtful, and he often presents us with modern parallels without being contrived." Baritone **JASON HOWARD** (*Salome*) stars in the title role with soprano **BRENDA HARRIS** (*Roberto Devereux*, *Mary Stuart*) as his supposed daughter Abigaille. One of today's finest bass-baritones, **JOHN RELYEA** makes his company debut as the Jewish high priest Zaccaria. Members of **MINNESOTA OPERA'S RESIDENT ARTIST PROGRAM**, mezzo-soprano **VICTORIA VARGAS** (*Wuthering Heights*) is the king's true daughter Fenena and tenor **JOHN ROBERT LINDSEY** (*Silent Night*) is Ismaele, her lover and the nephew of the King of Jerusalem. Costume designer **MATTIE ULRICH** (debut) and lighting designer **MARK McCULLOUGH** (*Madame Butterfly*) complete the *Nabucco*'s creative team. **MICHAEL CHRISTIE** (*Silent Night*) begins his tenure with the company as Music Director conducting the Minnesota Opera Orchestra.

## ***Anna Bolena* by Gaetano Donizetti**

November 10, 13, 15, 17 and 18, 2012

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

A new Minnesota Opera production.

### **A notorious life hangs precariously in the balance.**

The walls are closing in on Anne Boleyn as she fails to produce a male heir for King Henry VIII, whose affection is transferred to one of her ladies-in-waiting, Jane Seymour. In an opera based on a real-life tragedy that outdoes many fictional plots, *Anna Bolena* bursts with vocal pyrotechnics, beautiful Bel Canto arias and duets and an extraordinary sextet at the end of Act I. Donizetti's legendary masterpiece is a gripping tale of intrigue and betrayal. This sumptuous production marks the not-to-be-missed conclusion of Minnesota Opera's Tudor trilogy.

Soprano **KERI ALKEMA**, heralded as "compelling, rich-voiced" by *The New York Times*, makes her company debut in the title role of the ill-fated second wife of King Henry VIII. Bass-baritone **KYLE KETELSEN** (*Faust*) makes his long-awaited return as the mercurial English King, with mezzo-soprano **LAUREN MCNEESE** (*Casanova's Homecoming*) as Giovanna Seymour (Jane Seymour). Tenor **DAVID PORTILLO** makes his Minnesota Opera debut as Lord Percy, who seeks to win Anna back in this complicated royal love quadrangle. Resident Artist **VICTORIA VARGAS** (*Wuthering Heights*) is Anna's page, the court musician Smeton. The creative team that brought *Roberto Devereux* (2010) and *Mary Stuart* (2011) return: stage director **KEVIN NEWBURY** (*Werther*), set designer **NEIL PATEL** (*Wuthering Heights*), costume designer **JESSICA JAHN** (*Werther*) and lighting designer **D. M. WOOD** (*Werther*). **MICHAEL CHRISTIE** conducts the Minnesota Opera Orchestra.

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## ***Doubt*, a World Premiere**

**Music by Douglas J. Cuomo**

**Libretto by John Patrick Shanley, based on his play**

January 26, 29, 31, February 2 and 3, 2013

Sung in English with English captions projected above the stage.

A Minnesota Opera New Works Initiative production.

### **Did he or didn't he?**

Based on **JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY**'s one-act play, *Doubt: A Parable*, the opera is set at a Catholic school in the Bronx, circa 1964. The charismatic and progressive Father Brendan Flynn is trying to loosen the stranglehold of St. Nicholas Church School's strict customs, which are fiercely guarded by its iron-fisted principal, Sister Aloysius Beauvier. The school has just accepted its first African-American student, Donald Muller. When the young, innocent Sister James shares with Sister Aloysius her suspicion that Father Flynn may be molesting Donald, Sister Aloysius embarks on a personal crusade to find the truth and ruin the priest. With no proof besides her moral certainty, Sister Aloysius engages in a battle of wills with Father Flynn that threatens to tear the community apart.

*Doubt: A Parable* was originally staged Off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club and starred **CHERRY JONES**, **BRIAN F. O'BYRNE** and **HEATHER GOLDENHERSH**. It transferred to Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre in 2005, where it enjoyed a 525-performance run. The play won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play and was adapted for film in 2008. The film, starring **MERYL STREEP**, **PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN** and **AMY ADAMS**, was nominated for five Oscars (including Best Adapted Screenplay by the play's own author, **JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY**) and claimed 13 wins and 36 nominations in other prestigious film awards.

Soprano **CHRISTINE GOERKE**, who was recipient of the 2001 Richard Tucker Award and has established an excellent reputation with many of the world's leading opera houses and orchestras, makes her Minnesota Opera debut as the steel-willed principal of St. Nicholas, Sister Aloysius Beauvier. Appearing as Mrs. Muller, celebrated mezzo-soprano **DENYCE GRAVES** returns, having made her role debut in Minnesota Opera's 1991 *Carmen*. The role of the charismatic Father Brendan Flynn is sung by **MATTHEW WORTH** (*Così fan tutte*). **KEVIN NEWBURY** (*Werther*) directs with **CHRISTOPHER FRANKLIN** (*Così fan tutte*) returning to conduct.

## ***Hamlet* by Ambroise Thomas**

March 2, 5, 7, 9 and 10, 2013

Sung in French with English translations projected above the stage.

A Lyric Opera of Kansas City production.

### **Vengeance destroys everything – even love.**

Trapped by the horrifying truth about his father's murder, Hamlet becomes the eye of an increasingly violent storm. His focus on revenge and his suspiciousness of all those close to him drive his lover, Ophelia, to madness. Based on Shakespeare's unforgettable classic, this rediscovered treasure of French Grand Opera shimmers with luxurious melodies and searing theatricality.

Winner of the European Opera Directing Prize (2005), stage director and designer **THADDEUS STRASSBERGER** sets this production of *Hamlet* in the midst of a totalitarian regime, reminiscent of the 1950s Cold War era. The *Kansas City Star* hailed it as "virtuosic in its visual concept and its dramatic impact."

According to Strassberger, the production “... centers on Hamlet’s – and our own – inability to know clearly who is a ‘liberal’ and who is a ‘conservative’ and what that brings to bear on the world. Was Hamlet’s father a totalitarian monster who had to be brought down at any cost, or rather, a visionary thoughtfully leading his people to a future filled with prosperity and peace? Is his successor Claudius a liberator or a tyrannical war criminal?”

Fast-rising American baritone **BRIAN MULLIGAN**, who performs regularly with the leading opera houses in the United States, including the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago, makes his company debut in the title role as the distrustful Prince of Denmark. Hailed for her crystalline timbre, soaring range and moving performances, Canadian coloratura soprano **MARIE-EVE MUNGER** (debut) sings the role of Ophélie (Ophelia). One of today’s finest mezzo-sopranos, **KATHARINE GOELDNER** also makes her Minnesota Opera debut as Gertrude, Queen of Denmark. Costume designer **MARY TRAYLOR** makes her company debut. **CHRISTOPHER FRANKLIN** (*Così fan tutte*) returns to conduct the Minnesota Opera Orchestra.

## *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini

April 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20 and 21, 2013

Sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

A new Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Seattle Opera, Utah Opera and Cincinnati Opera co-production.

### Solve three riddles – or die trying.

The cold, proud princess Turandot puts her suitors to the ultimate test. This opulent new production sets the exotic legend against the mystique of an imagined imperial China, like a jewel in a lacquer box. Boasting one of opera’s most popular arias (“Nessun dorma”), inspirational choruses and richly colored orchestration, Puccini’s *Turandot* is an absolute powerhouse finale to Minnesota Opera’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

Russian soprano **IRINA RINDZUNER** makes her Minnesota Opera debut as Turandot. According to *The New York Times*, her “... account of the daunting aria “In questa reggia” from *Turandot* earned her a rousing ovation.” Ms. Rindzuner alternates the title role with soprano **HELEN TODD** (*The Handmaid’s Tale*). Alternating as the icy princess’ determined suitor Calaf are tenors **ADAM LAURENCE HERSKOWITZ** (debut) and **SCOTT PIPER** (*Orazi e Curiazi*). The role of the slave girl Liù is Minnesota favorite soprano **KELLY KADUCE** (*Madame Butterfly*) who alternates with Resident Artist **CHRISTIE HAGEMAN**. Debuting as *Turandot*’s creative team, director/choreographer **RENAUD DOUCET** and set/costume designer **ANDRÉ BARBE** are known for their integration of multiple production elements into a spectacular, dynamic whole. “Renaud and André have honored the larger-than-life scale of the opera itself, and have brought highly wrought detail to the costumes movement and presentation,” said Pittsburgh Opera’s General Director **CHRISTOPHER HAHN** of the production’s premiere. “Everything is conceived at the same time, and their productions are rich with color and imagination.” **MICHAEL CHRISTIE** conducts this final production of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

## Opera in the Park – Summer 2013

Minnesota Opera adds an encore to its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a new tradition – **OPERA IN THE PARK**. Launching in the summer of 2013, this unique outdoor celebration is Minnesota Opera’s gift to the community that has generously supported the company through its first five decades. This free, family-friendly event will feature the Minnesota Opera Orchestra and Chorus and principal singers performing opera and musical theater favorites with the stunning Minneapolis skyline and Mississippi River serving as a backdrop. Bring a picnic, family and friends and enjoy a relaxed summer night to remember. Details of date, time and location will be announced at a later date.

## Minnesota Opera appoints Michael Christie as Music Director

Minnesota Opera 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season commences the appointment of Michael Christie as Music Director, a new strategic role for the company. Maestro Christie is charged with enhancing the company's artistic product through his work with the Minnesota Opera Orchestra, as well as providing leadership by conducting a majority of each season's operas, beginning with the 2012–2013 season.

"On behalf of myself, Artistic Director Dale Johnson and Minnesota Opera's staff and our Board of Directors, I'm pleased to welcome Michael Christie to our team," said **PRESIDENT AND GENERAL DIRECTOR ALLAN NAPLAN**. "His orchestra-building success leading The Phoenix Symphony and Colorado Music Festival, his championing of new works and his excellent musical leadership of our productions of *La traviata*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Silent Night*, confirmed for us that he is the right person to fill this exciting new role."

Christie has enjoyed a successful orchestral and operatic career both nationally and internationally. His role as Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival in Boulder, Colorado began in 2000, and his contract there has recently been extended to 2017. He will conclude his tenure as the Virginia G. Piper Music Director of The Phoenix Symphony, which began in 2005, in June 2013.

"Michael rose to the top of our list after an extensive, multi-season search process, and the Minnesota Opera Orchestra really responded to his leadership in the pit," said **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DALE JOHNSON**. "His impact has been noticeable to the audience and critics alike, and his manner and approach with the musicians has fostered the start of what we know will be a very fruitful partnership for seasons to come."

"Michael Christie is a director open to adventure and challenge ... his programming is fresh and adventurous, and he has made himself as accessible as can be." (*The New York Times*)

Please visit Michael Christie's website at [michaelchristieonline.com](http://michaelchristieonline.com), where you will find his full biography, concert schedule, news and reviews, photos and other information.

## The 2012–2013 Minnesota Opera Resident Artists

Minnesota Opera is pleased to announce the 2012–2013 roster of Resident Artists. Mezzo-soprano **VICTORIA VARGAS** and tenor **JOHN ROBERT LINDSEY** return, as well as assistant conductor/chorus master **AARON BREID**, coach/accompanist **ERIC MCENANEY** and administrator **MARY-LACEY ROGERS**. New in the 2012–2013 season are soprano **CHRISTIE HAGEMAN**, baritone **MATTHEW OPITZ**, bass-baritone **RICHARD OLLARSABA**, coach/accompanist **SHELDON MILLER** and assistant director **DANIEL ELLIS**.

Minnesota Opera's Resident Artist Program offers a full season of employment for talented artists beginning their professional careers. From late August through the end of the season, Resident Artists gain valuable experience in assignments ranging from ensemble, understudy and comprimario to leading roles in mainstage performances.

## Mainstage Season Information

All productions will be staged at Ordway, 345 Washington Street, St. Paul. Sunday matinee performances begin at 2pm. All other performances begin at 7:30pm, with the exception of Opening Night on September 22, 2012 (Opera Gala 2012), and February 2, 2012 (Winter Carnival Torchlight Parade), which begin at 8pm.

Season tickets are now on sale and may be ordered by calling 612-333-6669 or online at [mnoopera.org](http://mnoopera.org). Full-season subscription packages range in price from \$80–\$800, with three- and four-opera packages starting as low as \$50. Single tickets ranging from \$20–\$200 per ticket will be on sale to the general public for all shows on July 23 and will be available by calling 612-333-6669 or online at [mnoopera.org](http://mnoopera.org).

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For ticketing services, education programming and other company information, please visit [mnopea.org](http://mnopea.org). Season-related background notes, synopses, casting updates and artist biographies will be posted as available.

The 2012–2013 Minnesota Opera season is sponsored by Ascent Private Capital Management of U. S. Bank.

The Minnesota Opera's mission is to produce opera and opera education programs  
at the highest artistic level that inspire and entertain our audiences  
and enrich the cultural life of our community.

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