

Bellissima Opera *presents*

Mozart's Marriage of Figaro

1786 Vienna.

Mozart and librettist Da Ponte
must convince Emperor Joseph
to greenlight Beaumarchais'
revolutionary play into an opera.

Get the scoop.
Hear the opera.

Concept & Script by Christine Steyer
Directed by Carl Ratner

Thursday, July 30 & Friday, July 31, 7PM
Nineteenth Century Charitable Association
178 Forest Ave, Oak Park



Information Bellissimaopera.com

Revealed &
Unwrapped

Romantic
Progressive
Enlightening
Incendiary
Revolutionary
Comedic
Timeless

From Play to Opera: Reimagining The Marriage of Figaro

When *The Marriage of Figaro* premiered in Vienna on May 1, 1786, it was far more than a brilliant new comedy. Based on Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's controversial play, the opera carried ideas about privilege, social class, and individual freedom that challenged the established order of eighteenth-century Europe. Although Emperor Joseph II ultimately permitted the work to reach the Imperial stage, he insisted that some of the play's most politically provocative elements be softened.

The extraordinary journey from Beaumarchais's play to Mozart's opera is unusually well documented. Letters, memoirs, contemporary accounts, and Mozart's surviving score reveal the challenges faced by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte as they transformed a politically charged drama into a masterpiece of musical theater.

Bellissima Opera Artistic Directors Christine Steyer and Carl Ratner were drawn to this story because of its remarkable relevance today. The questions surrounding Figaro and the relationship between art and power, the limits of censorship, and the ways artists preserve bold ideas in difficult times felt both historically fascinating and strikingly contemporary.

We wondered: Could a new theatrical framework illuminate this journey while still honoring Mozart's extraordinary music?

As we explored the historical record more deeply, a concept emerged. What if Mozart and Da Ponte had to make their case directly to Emperor Joseph II? What arguments would they present? What concerns would the Emperor raise? What if the opera itself became their most persuasive response?

Once this framework was established, Steyer created the script, drawing upon the historical record and the personalities of these extraordinary figures. Ratner collaborated in examining the traditional recitatives, identifying moments where their narrative function could be transformed into spoken dialogue and woven into the dramatic storytelling of the production.

This production imagines those conversations among Mozart, Da Ponte, Beaumarchais, and Emperor Joseph II. While the dialogue is our own, it is inspired by the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of the opera. The imagined exchanges unfold between the musical numbers, replacing most of the traditional recitatives, as Mozart and Da Ponte use the music itself to demonstrate why this work deserves to exist. From afar, Beaumarchais, receiving reports through his network of court informants, cannot resist occasionally breaking the fourth wall to share his own witty and often irreverent observations.

The result is not a reconstruction of history, but a theatrical exploration of one of opera's greatest creative transformations. At the heart of this production lies a timeless question: How do artists preserve bold ideas when confronted with resistance?

Mozart and Da Ponte's answer was not to abandon Beaumarchais's revolutionary spirit, but to cloak it in dazzling music, irresistible comedy, and characters of extraordinary humanity.

Nearly two and a half centuries later, the political battles surrounding *The Marriage of Figaro* have faded into history. Mozart's music has not. We invite you to experience this beloved masterpiece through the lens of the remarkable artists who created it—and to rediscover the enduring conversation between creativity, power, and the freedom to speak the truth through art.

We sincerely hope you will enjoy tonight's performance!

Christine Steyer & Carl Ratner,
Artistic Directors of Bellissima Opera



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Over his short lifetime, Mozart composed more than 600 works, including concertos, symphonies, string quartets, operas, masses, and numerous other compositions. Following *The Marriage of Figaro*, he continued his collaboration with Lorenzo Da Ponte, creating *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *Così fan tutte* (1790). Mozart died in Vienna on December 5, 1791, at the age of 35. Today, he is regarded as one of the greatest composers in the history of Western music.



Pierre Beaumarchais (1732–1799)

Beaumarchais completed his famous Figaro Trilogy: *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Guilty Mother*. He also secretly supplied arms and financial support to the American Revolution on behalf of the French government. Living through the French Revolution, he witnessed ideas of liberty and equality that echoed many of the social themes explored in Figaro. He is remembered as one of France's greatest playwrights.



Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749–1838)

After leaving Europe, Da Ponte settled in New York, where he operated a grocery store while rebuilding his career. He helped introduce Mozart's operas to American audiences and became one of opera's earliest champions in the United States. He later became America's first professor of Italian literature at Columbia University.



Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790)

Joseph II continued introducing sweeping reforms throughout the Habsburg Empire. He expanded religious tolerance, reduced censorship, promoted education, and sought greater equality before the law. Historians remember him as one of Europe's leading Enlightened Monarchs, a ruler whose commitment to reform helped shape the cultural world in which *The Marriage of Figaro* was created.



Figaro
July 30-31
Oak Park



ADULT CAST & MUSICIANS (left to right)

José Luis Maldonado, Nini Marchese, Caden Cole, Christine Steyer, Maria Molter
Dominique Frigo, Brad Schuller, Alex Honzen, Karissa Burkhardt, Carl Ratner
Peter Lorenzo, Christina Ray, Aaron Grace, Phil Frigo
Peter Stigdon, Brandon Burkhardt, John B. Boss, Thomas M. Shea & Nathan Eck

The Enduring Legacy of The Marriage of Figaro

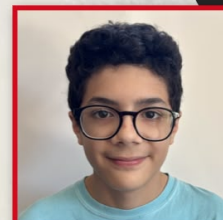
Since its premiere in 1786, *The Marriage of Figaro* has been performed tens of thousands of times around the globe.

Today it is considered one of the greatest comic operas ever written and remains a cornerstone of the operatic repertoire. Every opera company small or large, and every music program in the world has produced *The Marriage of Figaro*, many times over.





Figaro
July 30-31
Oak Park



Youth Ensemble Members (left to right)

Yzabella Anderson, Max Bozman, Gwenna Kelley, Marty O'Connor
Michael O'Connor, Lorena Izquierdo
Noah Madrigal, Noemi Flores, Lucas Madrigal, Gigi Lufrano

OPERA CAMP PARTICIPANTS

As part of Opera Camp, our young artists learned period dance, sang in Italian, created and handled props and scenery, and explored the history of eighteenth-century Europe, the events leading to the French Revolution, the remarkable journey of *The Marriage of Figaro* from play to opera, and the genius of Mozart's music. A special thank you to the Illinois Youth Employment Grant, awarded to our interns Gwenna and Noemi.

Special Thanks

Woody Linton, Jeanne Schultz Angel, Christy Akinsanmi, and Mark at the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association, Barbara Landis, Chamber Opera Chicago, Tom Tropp, Judy Gaietto-Grace and Terry Grace, Donna Sadlicka, Susan Dennis, Cappy Kidd, Theatre Cedar Rapids, Juan Ayala and Sons, Peter Frigo, Laura Kelley, Charles Kouri, Jeffrey Skender, Jeffery Lyle Segal, Mila Tellez, Laurie Wallach, Barb Smith, Christina Ray, Jethra Kapp, Hilary Rubio from Broadway Costumes, Ushers from The Saints Volunteers for the Performing Arts, and the Illinois Arts Council and Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events for their grant support.

Working In Concert Staff

Claudia Hommel, Executive Director
Katie Rub, Executive Assistant
Veronica Samiec, Office Assistant
Kathryn Hahn, Administrative Assistant
Juliana Engel Storms, Social Media Coordinator
Lauren Lassen, Assistant

Script Consultants

Carl Ratner, Nick Sandys,
Kerri Burkhardt, Paul Geiger

ADDITIONAL THANKS

Ascension Catholic School for their incredibly generous use of rehearsal space.
Chicago College of Performing Arts for use of rehearsal space
Concordia University for printing our programs.
Nineteenth Century Charitable Association for supporting opera and live music.

PLAYBILL

CAST

José Luis Maldonado	Figaro
Nini Marchese	Susanna
Caden Cole	Count
Christine Steyer	Countess
Maria Molter	Cherubino
Karissa Burkhardt	Barbarina & Susanna cover
Dominique Frigo	Marcellina
Alex Honzen	Doctor Bartolo
Brad Schuller	Don Basilio
Carl Ratner	Antonio
Peter Lorenzo	Don Curzio
Peter Stigdon	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Brandon Burkhardt	Lorenzo Da Ponte
John B. Boss	Pierre Beaumarchais
Thomas M. Shea	Emperor Joseph II

ADULT ENSEMBLE

Phil Frigo, Aaron Grace, Christina Ray

YOUTH ENSEMBLE

Yzabella Anderson, Max Bozman, Noemi Flores,
Lorena Izquierdo, Gwenna Kelley,
Gigi Lufrano, Lucas Madrigal, Noah Madrigal,
Marty O'Connor, Michael O'Connor

PIANO & MUSICAL DIRECTION Nathan Eck

HARPSICHORD & CONDUCTOR Peter Stigdon

CONCEPT & SCRIPT Christine Steyer

DIRECTOR Carl Ratner

STAGE MANAGER Em Clausing

LIGHTING Giau Truong

PROPS Kerri Burkhardt, Christine Steyer

COSTUMER Kerri Burkhardt

COSTUME RENTAL Broadway Costumes

SETS Brandon Burkhardt, Brian Burkhardt

HARPSICORD provided by Dr. Tom Tropp

CREW Evalynn Berg, Aaron Grace, Phil Frigo

MUSIC CONSULTANT Dana Brown

DRAMATIC CONSULTANT Nick Sandys

CHOREOGRAPHER Karissa Burkhardt

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER Nick Sandys

YOUTH CAMP COORDINATOR Christine Steyer

YOUTH MUSIC PREPARATION Brian Burkhardt

GRAPHICS, PROGRAM, SOCIAL MEDIA Christine Steyer

SUPERTITLES Brian Burkhardt

ARTISTIC ADMINISTRATOR Kerri Burkhardt

BELLISSIMA OPERA ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Christine Steyer & Carl Ratner

PRODUCER Working In Concert for Bellissima Opera:
Claudia Hommel, Executive Director

About Bellissima Opera & Song

Founded in 2010, Bellissima Opera & Song, an initiative of Working In Concert, uses the power of opera to inspire, educate, and build community. Through innovative productions and collaborations with emerging and established artists, Bellissima makes opera accessible, engaging, and relevant to today's audiences.

Its signature programs include an annual fully staged opera, an International Women's Day concert celebrating women composers, librettists, and performers, themed vocal concerts, and *In the Classroom*, an educational outreach program that has introduced more than 26,000 Chicagoland students to the beauty and excitement of live opera since 2010.



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SOLOISTS

Soprano Christine Steyer (Countess, Concept and Script Creator) is the 2020 Honored Artist of The American Prize for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts and a recipient of the 2026 Illinois Creative Accelerator Grant. She has earned acclaim for her portrayals of Madama Butterfly and Violetta and has appeared in more than 40 productions with Lyric Opera of Chicago. An avid recitalist, producer, and librettist, Steyer is passionate about championing contemporary works, particularly those by women composers and poets. In 2021–22, she premiered roles in *On Call: COVID-19* and *Future Perfect*, part of an award-winning opera series for which she also served as librettist. Recent performances include *Elijah*, *Speed Dating Tonight*, *Le dernier sorcier*, and works by Jake Heggie and Florence Price. She and French pianist Jean-Claude Orfali have also released videos featuring original songs and music by legendary French composer Henri Betti. As Artistic Director of Bellissima Opera and co-founder of Working In Concert, Steyer has brought live music to more than 26,000 young people through Bellissima Opera's *In the Classroom* program. She also teaches at Concordia University and Ascension in Oak Park and is delighted to share her love of music with the next generation.

Carl Ratner (Antonio, Stage Director) learned his craft assisting stage directors, including composer Gian Carlo Menotti, at the world's major opera houses including the Royal Opera in London, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Bavarian State Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, and the Spoleto Festival in Italy. He studied *The Marriage of Figaro* with internationally known director John Copley at the New York City Opera. As a baritone, he then received a Doctorate in Vocal Performance from Northwestern University. He has performed the title roles in Verdi's *Falstaff* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, as well as Papageno in *The Magic Flute* and John Proctor in *The Crucible*. A frequent soloist in oratorio, concert and recital, he has sung in 15 languages and performed in 10 states and 6 European countries. He served as Artistic Director of Chicago Opera Theater from 1994-1999 and Chamber Opera Chicago from 1985-1993. From 2001-2022, he was Director of Opera at Western Michigan University. He is now Associate Artistic Director of Bellissima Opera, for which he has staged *Madama Butterfly*, *On Call: COVID-19*, *Speed Dating Tonight!* and *Le dernier sorcier* and performed many roles.

International vocalist **Dr. Josè Luis Maldonado (Figaro)**, hailed by Opera News as a “seemingly unlimited baritone,” attended Manhattan School of Music (MM), and Michigan State University (DMA), where he received his Doctorate in Music/Vocal Performance. Maldonado's roles include Don Alfonso, Escamillo, and the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *Falstaff*. He performed with Maestro Anthony Parnter in Anthony Davis' *Central Park Five* with Long Beach Opera. In 2022, he covered Bryn Terfel as Falstaff at the Aspen Music Festival. Maldonado was a District winner in the Metropolitan Opera Competition, Audience Prize winner in the Opera Ithaca Competition, and a finalist in the Tenor Vinas Competition in Spain. Maldonado has toured with OperaMaya in Cancún, Mexico and in Aspen, he performed a Zarzuela concert with world-renowned Metropolitan Opera star Ana Maria Martinez and studied with legendary sopranos Carol Vaness and Renee Fleming. In 2025, he sang and rapped in Opera Grand Rapid's *Hip Opera* tour; made his Lincoln Center debut as Escamillo in

La Carmencita, an adaptation in Spanish of Bizet's *Carmen*; and made his title role and company debut to acclaim in *Rigoletto* with Indianapolis Opera. In 2026, he made his role debuts as Dr. Dulcamara in *Elisir d'amore* with Angels Lyric Opera (Los Angeles) and Tonio in *Pagliacci* with Opera Birmingham. www.BaronJoe.com

Coloratura soprano **Nini Marchese (Susanna)** has been praised for her “bright, supple soprano” (San Diego Story). She recently sang Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* with Painted Sky Opera and as Soprano Soloist with Baroque Artists Champaign-Urbana (Bach *Magnificat*), Bach Cantata Vespers (BWV 137), and Taylor Festival Choir (*Messiah*). She is featured on an album of Regency era music, “Let us the Fleeting Hours Enjoy!” (Navona Records). Nini premiered the role of The Computer in *Shara Nova* and Matthew Ritchie's interdisciplinary choral opera, *Infinite Movement*. In concert, she has performed “Gläubige Seele” in Handel's *Brookes Passion* (Bach Society Houston), the title role in Charpentier's *Esther* (Denton Bach Society), and Soprano Soloist in György Ligeti *Aventures* (NOVA Ensemble) and works by J.S. Bach. Nini was an Emerging Artist with Opera Idaho, Young Artist with Confidencen Opera and Music Festival (Sweden), Apprentice with Opera NEO, Vocal Fellow with Spoleto Festival USA, and toured as Adina in *Elixir of Love* with Dallas Opera Outreach. In Chicago, she has performed with Music of the Baroque, Chicago Symphony Chorus, Bella Voce, and Consonance.

Caden Cole (Count) is a Chicago-based baritone with a Master of Music in Classical Vocal Performance from Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts and a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Music Education from Southern Illinois University. An active performer, Caden has portrayed leading roles including most recently Marcello in *La Bohème*, Marquis de la Force in *Les Dialogues des Carmélites*, Sid in *Albert Herring*, and Charlie in *Three Decembers*. With multiple portrayals of Mozart's most celebrated baritone roles, including Don Giovanni, Il Conte, and Papageno, Caden has developed a particular specialization in Mozartian repertoire. Equally comfortable in the musical theatre repertoire, he has performed leading roles including the Phantom in Yeston's *Phantom* and Billy Bigelow in *Carousel*. He also teaches voice as an adjunct instructor at Kaskaskia College and maintains a private studio.

Maria Molter (Cherubino) is excited to make her debut in this role after performing with Bellissima Opera last summer as Prince Lelio in *Le dernier sorcier* and Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Other credits include Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw*, the Old Baroness in *Vanessa* (Lyric Theatre @ Illinois), La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica* and Bridesmaid in *Trial by Jury* (Western Michigan University). Maria performed as a soloist in Handel's *Messiah* with St. Augustine's Schola (2024). She appeared in concerts such as “Carnival!” and “Lyric Under the Stars” at Allerton Sunken Garden as Maddalena in *Rigoletto* and Old Lady in *Candide*, “Spanish Song Festival” in Madrid with La Escuela Superior Canto De Madrid, and “Viva España” and “Broadway in Love” with the American Institute of Musical Studies. Maria debuted new sacred music works with the Deus Ex Musica Project and the Bayview Music Festival. She holds a MM in Vocal Performance and Literature from the University of Illinois and a BM in Vocal Performance from Western Michigan University. Maria is a student of Emily Birsan.

Karissa Burkhardt (Barbarina, Susanna cover, Choreographer) is excited to sing with Bellissima Opera after performing in the “Under 30” showcase. She is majoring in Vocal Performance, Theatre (with a Musical Theatre certificate), and Dance at the University of Iowa. Her previous roles include Elisetta/*Il Matrimonio Segreto* and Josephine/*HMS Pinafore* with UI Opera Theatre; Sarah/*Guys and Dolls*, Esther/*Meet Me in St. Louis*, Mrs. Anderssen/*A Little Night Music*, Babette/*Beauty and the Beast*, Frenchie/*Cabaret*, Andrina/*Little Mermaid*, Tammy/*Hairspray*, Mary Delgado/*Jersey Boys*, Queen Iduna/*Frozen*, and Ensemble/Featured Dancer/Dance Captain in *Carrie*, *Light in the Piazza*, *Something Rotten!*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Mamma Mia*, and *Cinderella* with Theatre Cedar Rapids; Bewick/Winter Soloist in *Honk!* with Revival Theatre; Maria/*Sound of Music*; Johanna/*Sweeney Todd*, Agnes/*She Kills Monsters* with Theatre West; and Amahl/*Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Abby/*Miracle*, and Cassandra/*Persuasion* with Chamber Opera Chicago, which toured to England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and NYC. In concert, Karissa has performed as soprano soloist for the Haydn *Lord Nelson Mass*, Mozart *Requiem*, and Eric Whitacre’s *Goodnight Moon* for Soprano and Orchestra.

Dominique Frigo (Marcellina), mezzo-soprano, has sung for many venues in the Midwest. She recently sang in the premiere of *Future Perfect* with Bellissima Opera. She has performed frequently in New York with the Botti Opera Showcase. Her repertoire includes contemporary, Baroque and classical music, and she has performed the alto solos for Handel’s *Messiah*, the Vivaldi *Magnificat*, the Vivaldi *Gloria*, the Bach *Magnificat*, and the Bach *B Minor Mass*, among others. She was a finalist with the Bel Canto Chorus, a semi-finalist with the Lotte Lehman Foundation’s art song competition, and a semi-finalist with the Center for Contemporary Opera’s International Opera Singer competition. She has also performed in numerous operatic roles in regional opera companies, including La Principessa in *Suor Angelica*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*, Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, and Maddalena in *Rigoletto*.

Alex Honzen (Bartolo) has appeared as Tevye (*Fiddler on the Roof*) with Music Theatre Works (formerly Light Opera Works), as well as principal and featured roles in that company’s productions of *Yeoman of the Guard*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Iolanthe*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado* and *Oklahoma*, among others. Other lyric stage credits include DuPage Opera Theatre (Scarpia in *Tosca*), Chamber Opera Chicago (*Man of La Mancha*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *The Consul*), DaCorneto Opera (Melitone in *La Forza del Destino*), American Opera Group (Escamillo in *La Tragedie de Carmen*) and Bowen Park Opera (Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*). He has also appeared as a soloist with orchestras both in the US and abroad in Brahms’ *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, the Bach *B-minor Mass*, the Mozart *Requiem*, and other works. Non-singing work has included roles with the Around the Coyote Festival, Mammals Theatre Co. and the Studio Theatre in Washington, DC as well as voiceover and television credits.

Tenor **Bradley Schuller (Basilio)** has performed in over three dozen operatic productions in Italy, Germany, Colorado, and throughout the Midwest. Favorite leading roles include Rodolfo in *La Boheme*, Lt. Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Canio in *I Pagliacci*, the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Don Jose in *Carmen*, and Tamino in *Magic*

Flute among others. Around Chicago, Schuller has performed with Verismo Opera Theater, DuPage Opera Theater, L’Opera Piccola, and Chamber Opera Chicago, along with many seasons in the Lyric Opera Chorus. In concert, Schuller has performed as soloist in Beethoven’s 9th *Symphony* with the Oak Park and River Forest Symphony, Verdi’s *Requiem* Mass, Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*, Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, and Mozart’s *Requiem*. He created an “Opera Showcase” series in collaboration with the Church of Beethoven– Midwinter Concert (in Swedish as homage to Jussi Bjorling), Springtime Serenade, and an evening of Spanish song and the opera *Carmen*. As a producer, Schuller was the Founder and Artistic Director for Verismo Opera Theater in Oak Park for four years and became Artistic Director of the Church of Beethoven in Oak Park in 2018.

Peter Lorenzo (Curzio), tenor, is a Miami-born second-generation Cuban American and recent graduate of Music at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, where they studied with Professor Mark Crayton. Recent performances include the Prologue in CCPA’s production of *The Turn of the Screw* and L’Aumonier Du Carmel in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Previous stage credits include Le Remendado in *Carmen* with Chicago Opera Productions, Graf/Gaston in *Die tote Stadt* with Chicago City Opera, and Basilio and Don Curzio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, with Don Curzio later reprised in CCPA’s own production. Before moving to Chicago for graduate study, Peter completed a Bachelor’s degree in Music at Stetson University. Stage credits during that time included Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, the Schoolmaster in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and the First Sailor in *Dido and Aeneas*. Outside of academic and performance responsibilities, Peter is an avid reader with particular interest in cozy mysteries, often paired with tea as a way to unwind from rehearsal and study. Cooking also remains a central pursuit, especially Cuban-style cuisine rooted in family traditions.

ACTORS AND CREATIVE STAFF

Peter Stigdon (Mozart, Conductor, Harpsichordist) is a multi-instrumentalist who performs regularly around the Chicago suburbs. Peter received his BA in Music from Concordia University Chicago in 2022, with concentrations in organ, harp, and composition. Mentors at Concordia included Dr. Steven Wente, Julie Spring, and Dr. Jonathan Stahlke. Peter serves as the Director of Music Ministries at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Hinsdale, IL, where he directs vocal and instrumental ensembles and programs concerts throughout the year. At Concordia, he is the musical director for the theater department, with recent seasons including Lionel Bart’s *Oliver!* and Lerner & Loewe’s *My Fair Lady*. When not at the keyboard, Peter is also the Harpist with the Symphony of Oak Park and River Forest. This is his fourth production with Bellissima Opera, appearing as Kai in *Future Perfect* and accompanying *Outside the Ring* and *Midsummer Dream Fairies and Fables*.

Brandon Burkhardt (Da Ponte) was featured in Bellissima’s “Under 30” showcase. He is a recent graduate of the University of Iowa, with degrees in Vocal Performance, Theatre (with a Musical Theatre certificate), and Music Education. His roles include *A Little Night Music* (Henrik), *Frozen* (Hans), *Hairspray* (Corny Collins), *Beauty and the Beast* (Gaston), *Carrie* (Tommy), *Something Rotten!* (Nick Bottom), *Wizard of Oz* (Tin Man), *Bright Star* (Billy Cane), *Light in the Piazza* (Giuseppe), *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Lon), *Sound of Music* (Rolf), *Cinderella*

(Prince), *Newsies* (Race) with Theatre Cedar Rapids; *Merrily We Roll Along* (Frank), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Perchik), *Eliot Ness in Cleveland* (Eliot), *La Cage Aux Folles* (Jean-Michel), *Parade* (Young Soldier), *Titanic* (Charles Clarke/Stevedore), *Honk!* (Greylag) with Revival Theatre; *HMS Pinafore* (Captain Corcoran) and *Sunday in the Park...* (Soldier) with UI Opera Theatre; *Camelot* (Lancelot), *Beauty and the Beast* (Beast), *Side Show* (Terry) for Coralville Center for Performing Arts; and Young Charles in a musical adaptation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* with Chamber Opera Chicago tours to UK, Canada, and NYC. He was also a soloist in *An Evening of Rodgers and Hammerstein* with Orchestra Iowa and Broadway stars.

John B. Boss (Beaumarchais) is thrilled to make his debut with Bellissima Opera in this new adaptation of a classic. This June, he played Roger Debris in Brightside Theatre's production of Mel Brooks' *The Producers*. He has traveled all over the US, Canada and U.K. as Sir Walter in *Persuasion: A Musical Drama*, Roger in *The Producers*, Warbucks in *Annie*, Genie in *Aladdin*, and Uncle Barnaby in *Babes in Toyland*. Other roles include Thenardier in *Les Miserables*, Pulitzer in Disney's *Newsies*, Jud in *Oklahoma*, George and Albin in numerous productions of *La Cage aux Folles*, Don Quixote and Padre in several productions of *Man of La Mancha*, Emcee and Herr Schultz in several productions of *Cabaret*, Applegate in *Damn Yankees*, Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Mary Sunshine in *Chicago*, Man in Chair in *Drowsy Chaperone*, Daddy Murphy in *Brightstar*, Michael in *I Do, I Do*, Buffalo Bill in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Nathan in *Guys and Dolls*, Julian Marsh in *42nd Street*, Kromov in *Merry Widow*, and numerous roles in *The Fantasticks*. Boss is also very active in independent film, commercials, TV shows and corporate entertainment.

Thomas M. Shea (Emperor Franz Joseph) comes to Bellissima straight from appearing as Joe Boyd/Welch in Theo Ubique's *Damn Yankees* and Music Theater Works' production of *West Side Story*. Tom has worked extensively with MTW since their founding as Light Opera Works in 1981, as a chorister, featured player, lead, director, assistant director, and talk-back lecturer. He's been seen in productions as diverse as *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Producers*, from *One Night in Venice* and *The Beggar Student* to *Pippin* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. He has toured the UK extensively with Chamber Opera Chicago's production of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, and has been seen throughout Chicagoland for over forty years with companies like Second City Theatricals, Drury Lane Oakbrook, the Mercury Theatre, and City Lit. Tom is also the author of a book, *Broadway's Most Wanted*, which you can find popping up on the interwebs now and then. He is represented on screens by Talent Group, and on stage by his own damn self.

Nathan Eck (Pianist, Assistant Music Director) is an emerging pianist distinguished for his expressive depth and versatility across genres. He is currently pursuing a performance diploma in solo piano at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University under Grammy-nominated pianist Adam Neiman and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music and Philosophy from Luther College. Nathaniel has performed throughout the United States and internationally in France, Italy, Slovenia, and Austria. His repertoire spans from Renaissance to contemporary works, including jazz and full operatic scores, reflecting both stylistic breadth and his artistic curiosity. He has served as répétiteur for major operatic productions such as Poulenc's

Dialogues des Carmelites at CCPA and Bizet's *Carmen* at the Bay View Festival, where he was awarded a piano fellowship for the 2025 season. He continues to develop a compelling artistic presence. Committed to continual artistic growth, Nathaniel seeks projects that challenge conventions and deepen audience connection. He is now based in Chicago as an active performer, teacher, and collaborator.

Nick Sandys (Script and Dramatic Consultant) is an award-winning director, actor, fight choreographer, producer, and educator, having received 24 Joseph Jefferson Nominations for his work, a regional Emmy, a 2019 Audie Nomination for audiobook narration, and a 2011 Meier Foundation Award. He was Producing Artistic Director for Remy Bumppo Theatre Company from 2012-2021, producing 29 shows and directing *Howards End*, *Puff: Believe It Or Not*, *Great Expectations*, *Pirandello's Enrico IV*, *Life of Galileo*, *Travesties*, *Our Class*, and Albee's *Seascape*, receiving 3 'Jeff' Nominations for Outstanding Direction. Other recent direction includes *Shaw vs. Tunney* (Grippo Stage/Theater Wit), *Elektra* (Dallas Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera), and *Future Perfect*, a world premiere for Bellissima Opera. Nick holds four degrees in English Lit from Cambridge University and Loyola University Chicago, and has been adjunct faculty at The Theatre School @ DePaul since 1995. www.nicksandys.com

Dana Brown (Music Consultant) is Professor of Opera at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. As a pianist, he has been heard many times on 98.7 WFMT Radio, in addition to performances at the Ravinia Festival, the Tanglewood Festival, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Grant Park Music Festival, and the Chicago Humanities Festival. His recent CD with soprano Michelle Areyzaga *Were I With Thee* received rave reviews: ... "One of the finest art song CDs ever, a tour-de-force of expression ... remarkable collection of American songs ...accompanied by Mr. Brown who has been a superb collaborator in this 74-minute musical exploration." —John Campbell, Artsong Update. Mr. Brown has musically directed over fifty operas at Roosevelt University, and just recently won the Innovative Course Design Award for his course, The Met Live in HD. For ten years, he was Chair of the Board of Directors of Chicago's Fourth Coast Ensemble, a professional vocal quartet. His playing with Fourth Coast Ensemble is featured on the group's CD 2021 release, *Human to Human*, which features world premieres written for the ensemble by Andrea Clearfield and Wayland Rogers.

ADULT AND YOUTH ENSEMBLE

Soprano **Christina Ray (Ensemble)** earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Concordia University, as well as an MBA in Information Technology Management and a degree in Information Systems Security. Christina currently works as an IT Helpdesk Manager and Technology Specialist at Concordia University. She has served as a cantor for Catholic liturgies for more than ten years and has performed with the Oak Park Community Choir, CUC's Kapelle Choir, Queen of the Rosary/St. Julian Parish Choir, and other ensembles throughout Chicago, and has studied voice with Christine Steyer for many years. She previously appeared in Bellissima Opera's *Future Perfect* (2022) and *Outside the Ring* (2023), and this marks her third production with the company.

Baritone **Phil Frigo (Ensemble)** a *cum laude* graduate of the Lawrence Conservatory of Music in Appleton, Wisconsin, has performed with a variety of ensembles throughout the Chicago area since 1980. Equally at home as a bass and trombonist, he currently sings with the *Schola Cantorum* at St. Odilo Parish in Berwyn and performs jazz at local open mic events on trombone. Recent choral performances include Liszt's *Missa Solemnis* at Symphony Center and Brahms' *Schicksalslied* with the OPRF Symphony at Concordia University.

Tenor **Aaron Grace (Ensemble)** began his musical journey at the age of six, studying multiple instruments throughout his youth. He played violin until age 21, performing with several youth orchestras, and later played bass in the Triton College Jazz Ensemble. Aaron began singing with the Unity Temple Choir in 2009 and has also appeared in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*. A frequent soloist on Christine Steyer's Voice Studio Recitals, Aaron is delighted to return to Bellissima Opera. He previously appeared in *Outside the Ring* (2023), and this marks his second production with the company.

For **Noemi Flores (Bellissima Opera Youth Intern)**, the performing arts have been a meaningful part of her life for many years. She studied ballet for a year and participated in Trinity Theater Camp for two years. One of her favorite experiences was being a part of Trinity's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. She has participated in both the Ascension Band and Choir for one year and performed in her school's Christmas concert and a musical concert, as well as Festival Hispano for two years in Spanish. As an intern for *The Marriage of Figaro*, Noemi writes, "This experience has given me valuable insight into the professional world of opera and has deepened my appreciation for the teamwork, preparation, and artistry that take place behind the scenes as well as on stage."

Gwenna Kelley (Bellissima Opera Youth Intern) is honored to be an intern for this year's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. She is so excited for the opportunity to perform in this show and feels very grateful to work alongside very talented musicians. She is 14 years old and heading into her freshman year at Fenwick High school. She has performed in several productions through Actors Garden, Ovation, Bellissima Opera, Ascension's Aspiring Actors, and Trinity High School. She takes cello lessons and has played for nine years. She also takes private voice lessons at the Oak Park School of Music.

Yzabella Anderson started dancing at Stairways to the Stars for three years before moving to TranscenDance Studios. At both dance studios, she studied contemporary, jazz, and lyrical dance. Gymnastics has also been a part of her life for almost as long as she can remember. She also plays basketball, runs track, and went to a volleyball camp this summer. She has traveled to many places including the Bahamas, Mexico, Florida, North Carolina, and even been on a few cruises. Yzabella writes, "I really enjoy being in the Bellissima Opera summer camps. I have so much fun with my friends every year, and Ms. Steyer always makes it a great experience. I love working with so many amazing people. I go to Ascension School, where the teachers and staff are kind and help me learn new things every day."

Max Bozman is 11 years old and is thrilled to make his stage debut in this opera production. He loves music and dance, and he also enjoys expressing his creativity through drawing. When he's

not singing, dancing, or sketching, Max stays active with taekwondo, soccer, and swimming, where he has developed discipline, confidence, and teamwork. He is excited to be part of this talented cast and has loved every moment of the process. Max is grateful to his family, teachers, and directors for their encouragement and support as he begins this exciting theatrical journey.

Lorena Izquierdo will be in 7th grade this fall and is excited to be part of the summer opera camp for a third year! Lorena has been singing and dancing since she was little. She is a member of choristers and a cantor for school Masses. Lorena has taken several different kinds of dance classes over the years. She was in the school drama club and plans to participate again. At home, Lorena loves to do crafts and spend time with her cat. She is also working on writing her own song now.

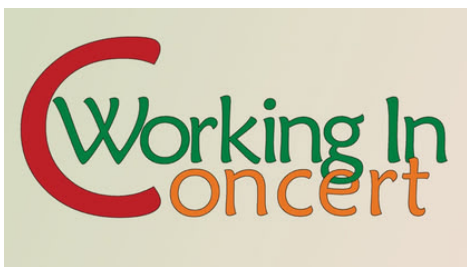
Gigi Lufrano is singing in her third opera this summer with Bellissima. Gigi enjoys performing and singing onstage. She is currently a gymnast competing in Optionals Gold. She has also been in the youth cast for musical productions at Trinity High School, where she has performed in *High School Musical* and *Cinderella* and participates in Theater camps. Gigi has been in the Bellissima Opera camp for three years and has performed in productions of *Outside the Ring*, *Midsummer Dream Fairies and Fables* (where she was a fairy), and currently in *The Marriage of Figaro*, where she enjoys playing a peasant and a servant working in the castle.

Lucas Madrigal is performing in his third summer opera with Bellissima. He previously performed in *Outside the Ring* and *Midsummer Dream Fairies and Fables*. He enjoys being on stage and participating in all parts of the production and is looking forward to this year's performance as well. Lucas loves all things music and plays piano and violin in addition to singing with the opera. Lucas is entering middle school this upcoming year and is looking forward to participating in other performances as well.

Noah Madrigal is making his debut stage performance with Bellissima this summer. He has previously watched his older brother participate and is excited to be following him this year! Noah has previously sung with Ascension Choristers. He enjoys learning to play the violin and singing. He is very happy to be involved with the group and is looking forward to his stage debut!

Marty O'Connor is 11 years old and entering sixth grade at Ascension Catholic School. This is his third show with Bellissima Opera, following appearances in *Outside the Ring* (2024) and *Midsummer Fairies & Fables* (2025). Marty also plays piano and plays the trombone in the Ascension band. He loves dancing, singing, baseball, and basketball. This spring, his baseball team went undefeated and won the championship. Marty also enjoys movie nights and cuddling with his dog, Toby.

Michael O'Connor, who also goes by Mike, is 7 years old and entering second grade at Ascension Catholic School. This is Michael's first show, and he is already loving the experience. He enjoys having dance parties at home with his brother and is currently learning Michael Jackson dance moves. Mike plays tee-ball and basketball and is excited to start soccer this fall. His tee-ball team was undefeated through the season and finished in second place after the championship game. Michael is thrilled to be part of the show.



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BELLISSIMA OPERA & SONG, led by Christine Steyer and Carl Ratner, creates intimate concert events and operas. Video features from our award-winning *Tales of Transcendence* opera series and the annual International Women's Day concert celebrating women in the arts are also available. BellissimaOpera.com



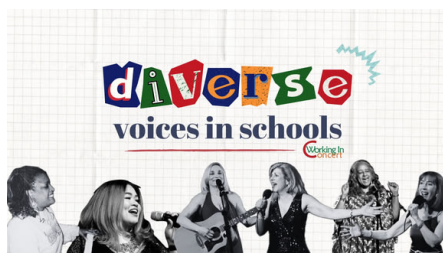
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CHICAGO PARIS CABARET CONNEXION Advancing together the intimate art of cabaret, this international exchange brings together cabaret performers from around the world. The conferences have been held in Paris, Lyon, Dordogne, and Chicago, giving singers a chance to exchange knowledge and create a more connected community of cabaret performers. Cabaret fans are invited to join us for evening concerts while artists meet for masterclasses, workshops, and roundtables during the day. CabaretConnexion.org

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Cabaret Connexion artists with Brass Tracks
Jazz Orchestra in Tinley Park. Coming soon:
Aug 5 Robin Watson | Aug 26 Swingin Sisters
Aug 12 Ava Logan | Sept 2 Patricia Mosley
Aug 23 - Sean Harris performs at Le Piano
Aug 30 - Garden Concert Fresh Air, Airs & Arias
Aug 30 - Sean Harris performs at PianoForte
Sept 14 - Video premiere of new opera "And I
Said Nothing"

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UPCOMING EVENTS with BELLISSIMA & FRIENDS

A Potpourri of Fresh Air, Airs and Arias a garden concert benefit for *Working In Concert*

Sunday, August 30, 2026

5pm garden concert in River Forest

Helene Alter-Dyche
Roxane Assaf
Gerald Bailey
Valerie Chestnut
Susan E. Dennis
Ken Fobs
Christian Halvorsen
Rae-Myra Hilliard
Claudia Hommel
Alison Issen
Staci Kelley
Gaye Klopach

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Works in Progress

Virtual on Zoom

Monday, September 14

7:00–8:30PM

Hosted by Christine Steyer, this informal online gathering showcases new works in progress by Chicago composers, musicians, and artists.

Join us for an evening of creativity and conversation, including previews of Christine Steyer and David Shenton's newest opera *And I Said Nothing* inspired by German pastor Martin Niemöller's postwar WWII confessional.

International Women's Day Concert March 2027 Oak Park

Celebrate International Women's Day with an inspiring afternoon of music featuring an all-female cast performing works by women composers, librettists, and performers.

Join Bellissima Opera for this annual celebration of extraordinary women in the arts.

The War Between the Houses June 24–25, 2027 Nineteenth Century Oak Park

In partnership with the Dickinson Ensemble, the world premiere of *The War Between the Houses*, a new opera based on an event in the life of Emily Dickinson.

Featuring music and libretto by Don Skoog, this exciting collaboration brings history, poetry, and music together in a powerful new work.

Hansel and Gretel July 22–23, 2027 Nineteenth Century Oak Park

Bellissima Opera presents Engelbert Humperdinck's beloved *Hansel and Gretel* in a fresh, haunting new production inspired by the Grimm Brothers' timeless fairy tale.

Beautiful music, unforgettable characters, and a touch of darkness await.