

NEAPOLITAN

Opera Naples' star year:

Netrebko, Vargas, Camarena, Calleja

Yusif Eyvazov and Anna Netrebko have been partners in a number of operas and will sing together as husband and wife here Jan. 7. KEN HOWARD

Harriet Howard Heithaus Naples Daily News USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Anna Netrebko, arguably the most admired star in opera today, brings her polished, powerfully nuanced soprano voice to Naples on Jan. 7 for Opera Naples.

The company announced its season this week, and its headliner is Netrebko, who is in demand in every major opera house in the West, has won countless awards and even showed up in one of the popular “Princess Diaries” films.

The concert, which also stars her husband, tenor Yusif Eyvazov, is at the Arthrex One presentation hall in North Naples. A frequent star at the Metropolitan Opera, she is also a top choice for the Vienna State Opera and the Royal Opera in London.

Calleja gets a return command

Joseph Calleja, who won fans with his performance at the opera’s gala and its Festival Under the Stars last year, returns for its 2022 gala. And there’s a concert starring young Mexican tenor Javier Camarena, a bel canto tenor who can hit all nine high C’s in “Ah! Mes amis” in “La Fille du Regiment.” Twice in fact, because his Metropolitan Opera audience in 2019 insisted on an encore — one of only three performed there in 70 years.

Artistic Director Ramón Tebar thinks of the coming season as an abundance of operatic riches, but he’s most proud of the talent coming in: “The biggest attraction for next season, I think, is that we are bringing the really top, top world’s opera stars,” he said.

Not only is Netrebko a marquee name, but Camarena is one of the best bel canto tenors singing today, in his estimation. Calleja was a choice even before he left the stage at the last festival, he said.

“The gala committee and the board members wanted him back for the gala. But also, we have received so many letters from opera fans, saying ‘Bring him back!’ And there is a sponsor who came for the first time to Naples (last season) and he said, look, I’m willing to sponsor it if you bring him back.”

And in its grand opera, “Tosca,” is international star Ramón Vargas. Vargas, a favorite among opera houses, has frequently been featured in “Live at the Met” theater broadcast performances, including “Eugene Onegin,” “La Boheme” and “Don Carlo.”



Joseph Calleja, whose broad repertoire and audience banter charmed Naples audiences last year, will return for Opera Naples’ gala. PROVIDED PHOTO

The same opera, different focuses

If that title rings a bell, it’s because Gulfshore Opera, the regional company, is bringing “Tosca” to Naples as well, on April 29. Both are the same Puccini tale of a jealous prima donna who inadvertently betrays her lover to the lustful chief of police, but could win his his freedom — at a horrible price. The opera is consistently in the top five

See OPERA, Page 2D

Opera

Continued from Page 1D

most performed in the world, considered one of the best introductions to the genre because of its lively pace, thriller story and music.

There are different strengths in each production:

- The Opera Naples “Tosca” will be staged for an *al fresco* performance, and its tenor is Ramon Vargas, a popular star at the Met, where he debuted, stepping in for Luciano Pavarotti in “Lucia di Lammermoor.”

- The Gulfshore Opera “Tosca” will be in Hayes Hall at Artis—Naples, and its orchestra will be the Naples Philharmonic. Star Robyn Marie Lamp is known to its audiences for her Puccini arias.

The Opera Naples season is as follows:

- **“Hansel and Gretel,” Oct. 16 and 17** at the Wang Opera Center: This is a collaboration with Florida Gulf Coast University’s Bower School of Music. “Hansel and Gretel,” one of the most successful fairy-tale operas, resonates with both adults and children. The composer,



Tenor Javier Camarena, International Opera Awards’ male “Singer of the Year,” performs in Naples next March.

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Engelbert Humperdinck, was a protégé of the great Richard Wagner, and the opera’s score is flavored with sophisticated musical ideas from the latter, yet still sunny and melodic.

- **Anna Netrebko and Yusif Eyvazov in concert, Jan. 7** at Arthrex One. Netrebko has mastered roles from coloratura and bel canto with equal facility. She has sung nearly every Donizetti heroine and a good number of Verdi and Puccini ones, as well as in the dramatic “Lohengrin.” Azerbaijani dramatic tenor Eyvazov has appeared on recordings for Deutsche Grammophon, including a

complete recording of Puccini’s “Manon Lescaut” live from the Salzburg Festival.

- **“The Pirates of Penzance,” Jan. 19-21**, at the Wang Opera Center: The comic Gilbert & Sullivan operetta roams through a landscape of patriotic pirates, Royal Navy brass who can’t even swim, cradle mixups and Victorian sweethearts looking for Mr. Right. Full of wordplay and familiar melodies, it vies with “The Mikado” as the pair’s most performed work.

- **Opera Naples annual Gala starring Joseph Calleja, Feb. 9:** Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja returns. The Caruso Competition winner has sung everything from grand opera to duets with Hayley Westenra, Michael Bolton and Zuccherò. He charmed Naples audiences with his broad repertoire and quick banter at its last gala and the first night of Festival Under the Stars.

- **II Festival Under the Stars, March:** After its four sold-out evenings last season, Opera Naples will expand the festival from four days to over a week, with more than double the performances as the inaugural series. The 2022 festival will include Puccini’s “Tosca” starring Ramón Vargas and a yet-to-be-announced soprano; a concert version of “On the Town,” by Leon-

ard Bernstein; a concert by Javier Camarena and a showcase opera, “Glory Denied.”

The last is a look into the haunted life of Col. Floyd James “Jim” Thompson, the longest held prisoner of the Vietnam War. Thompson returned home nine years after being captured to find a different world, a wife who had moved on and other realities to change an already changed life. The Tom Cipullo opera was scheduled for last season, but had to be cancelled because of COVID-19 concerns.

More details on festival dates, events and locations will be announced later.

Opera Naples season tickets are currently on sale for Millennium Club members, and will be available to the public in September. Millennium Club information: Development Director Carla Calavitta at CCalavitta@operanaples.org.

For additional information, contact 239-963-9050 or visit www.OperaNaples.org.

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