



For Immediate Release

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Opera Birmingham Presents Gounod's Faust

Birmingham, AL - **Opera Birmingham**, Alabama's largest opera company will produce Charles Gounod's grand opera, *Faust*, on Friday, January 28 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, January 30 at 2:30 p.m. at Samford University's Wright Center. Gounod's masterpiece, which features one of the most thrilling finales in all of opera, is one of the world's most frequently performed operas, but has not been heard in Birmingham in over three decades.

"Faust is truly one of the grandest of grand operas," said John D. Jones, General Director of Opera Birmingham. "It's full of familiar tunes and is a work I've wanted us to produce for over a decade. It's a timeless story with a shattering finale. I can guarantee an exciting and moving night at the theater!"

Faust tells the story of the aged scholar, Faust, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for youth; and, in doing so, causes the tragic downfall of a virtuous young girl, Marguerite. *Faust* debuted at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris on March 19, 1859. It was *Faust* with which the Metropolitan Opera in New York City opened for the first time on October 22, 1883.

The **Opera Birmingham** cast will be led by tenor Bryan Hymel as Faust, and will feature a host of the opera world's best and brightest stars including soprano Mary Dunleavy as Marguerite, mezzo-soprano Millinee Bannister as Siebel, bass Kirk Eichelberger as Mephistopheles, baritone Michael Mayes as Valentin, mezzo-soprano Gloria Parvin as Marthe, and baritone Daniel Siegel as Wagner. This production will be conducted by Israel Gursky and will be directed by Dona D. Vaughn.

Hymel has performed as Rodolfo in *La bohème* with the **Atlanta Opera** and in the title role of *Werther* at the **Royal Opera House (Covent Garden)**. His **Opera Birmingham** roles include Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and the Duke in *Rigoletto*. He was the winner of the 2003 Opera Birmingham Vocal Competition and is a Louisiana native. This will be his role debut as Faust, and he will conclude his season with a reprisal of *Faust* with **Santa Fe Opera**.

Dunleavy's gallery of operatic heroines is led by her signature role, Violetta in *La traviata*, seen in venues including the **Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts, Glimmerglass Opera, New York City Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, the Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest**, and others. This will be her debut with **Opera Birmingham** and her role debut as Marguerite. She will reprise the role of Marguerite with the **North Carolina Opera** later in the season.

Bannister's previous roles include Siebel with **Nashville Opera**, Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with **Utah Festival Opera Company**, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* with **Amarillo Opera**, and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* with **Opera North**. She has performed with **Opera Birmingham** as Kate Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*.

Eichelberger has performed as Leporello in *Don Giovanni* with **Opera San Jose**, as the title role in *Le Nozze de Figaro* for **Opera Memphis**, and as The Emperor in *Tea: A Mirror of Soul* with the **Opera Company of Philadelphia**. This will be his debut with **Opera Birmingham**. He performed the role of Mephistopheles previously with **Opera San Jose** and **Festival Opera** of Walnut Creek, CA. Of his performance with the **Festival Opera**, Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, "The devil gets the best lines in many circumstances, but rarely so definitively as when he's portrayed by a singer like bass Kirk Eichelberger. His performance as Mephistopheles combined tonal suavity and power with a dark, sardonic edge that bespoke all sorts of demonic undercurrents; the duet with Marguerite in the cathedral scene was a tour de force of fiery bravado."

Mayes sang the title role in *Don Giovanni* with **Connecticut Opera**, Conte Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* with **Des Moines Metro Opera**, and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* with **Arizona Opera**. This will be his debut with **Opera Birmingham** and his role debut as Valentin.

Parvin has performed in oratorio performances throughout the south with the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Asheville Symphony Orchestra, Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, Chattanooga Symphony and Louisville Orchestra. Her operatic experience includes numerous productions. This will be her debut with **Opera Birmingham** and her role debut as Marthe.

Seigel has performed previously with **Opera Birmingham** in *La traviata* and *Barber of Seville*. He has also performed *Andrea Chénier* with **Mobile Opera** and *Albert Herring* with **Opera North**. This will be his role debut as Wagner.

Gursky has led performances of *Don Giovanni* for the **Washington National Opera**, *The Fly* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* for the **Los Angeles Opera**, and *Hänsel und Gretel* for **PORTopera**. He has also conducted in several concerts with the orchestra of the **Washington National Opera**, including performances with Plácido Domingo and Andrea Bocelli. This is his debut conducting for **Opera Birmingham**.

Vaughn is the Artistic Director of Opera Programs at Manhattan School of Music and also serves as Artistic Director of **PORTopera**. She began her career as a performer in the original Broadway productions of *Company*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *Seesaw*. Her directing credits include **New York City Opera** and the Kennedy Center. This is her debut directing for **Opera Birmingham**.

In addition to the principals, the production will feature the **Opera Birmingham** Chorus, and the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. It will be sung in the original French with projected English translations. **The Opera Birmingham Chorus** is made up of local businessmen, attorneys, ministers, teachers, as well as students from numerous area colleges and schools.

Tickets are available to both performances of *Faust* and may be purchased by phone at 205-322-6737, online at www.operabirmingham.org, or by visiting the **Opera Birmingham** office at 3601 Sixth Avenue South. Single tickets range from \$25 (balcony) to \$90 (center front orchestra), and student tickets may be purchased for \$12 with a valid ID. Season subscriptions are also still available and offer significant savings over single ticket prices, as well as great benefits like priority seating, ticket exchanges, and invitations to exclusive events.

The **Opera Birmingham** season continues with Donzetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* on March 18 and 20, and *The Great Wagner Concert* on April 16. Additional information may be found at www.operabirmingham.org. Follow **Opera Birmingham** on Twitter @operabham or on Facebook at Opera Birmingham. **Opera Birmingham**, Northern Alabama's only professional, regional opera company, has entertained audiences in the region for over 55 years.

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