



**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PRESENTS THE GERSHWINS®
*PORGY AND BESS*SM STARRING ERIC OWENS AND LAQUITA MITCHELL
JUNE 9-27 AT THE WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE**

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT 415.864.3330 OR SFOPERA.COM

SAN FRANCISCO (May 21, 2009) – San Francisco Opera presents George and Ira Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, based on the play by Dubose and Dorothy Heyward, June 9-27 at the War Memorial Opera House. Bass-baritone Eric Owens and soprano Laquita Mitchell headline the cast as Porgy and Bess, an unlikely couple who manage to find love amidst the squalor of Catfish Row. San Francisco Opera Artistic Adviser Francesca Zambello’s acclaimed production, previously presented by Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and Chicago Lyric Opera, is conducted by John DeMain.

A turbulent story of love found and lost, *Porgy and Bess* is a quintessentially American masterpiece highlighted by almost a dozen of Gershwin’s most recognizable melodies, including “Summertime,” “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’,” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So.” Zambello’s production brings to life the hardships, hopes and resiliency of a troubled community through the story of Porgy, a crippled beggar, and Bess, the beautiful and headstrong woman he loves. General Director David Gockley, whose long association with *Porgy and Bess* has made it a mainstay of the operatic repertoire, brings Gershwin’s beloved opera to San Francisco for the first time in more than a decade.

American bass-baritone Eric Owens and 2002 Merola Opera Program alumna Laquita Mitchell both make their role debuts as Porgy and Bess. Owens’ previous appearances at San Francisco Opera

include Lodovico in *Otello*, Don Fernando in *Fidelio*, and most recently as the King of Scotland in *Ariodante*. He also created the role of General Leslie Groves in the world premiere of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic*, a role he subsequently sang at Netherlands Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Opera. Soprano Laquita Mitchell makes her San Francisco Opera mainstage debut with this production. This season, she also made her Lyric Opera of Chicago debut as Clara in *Porgy and Bess*, a role she has also sung at Los Angeles Opera and Washington National Opera and will reprise this summer on the Opéra Comique European tour.

Baritone Lester Lynch sings the role of Bess' womanizing, gambling boyfriend Crown, a role he has also performed to great acclaim at Lyric Opera Chicago, Los Angeles Opera and Washington National Opera. Former Adler Fellow Karen Slack, who has recently appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia and Lyric Opera of Kansas, returns to San Francisco Opera in her role debut as Serena, a widow mourning the loss of her late husband. The colorful drug-dealing pimp Sportin' Life is sung by tenor Chauncey Packer, who has garnered rave reviews for his portrayal of the role in performances with Atlanta Opera, Opera Pacific, Tulsa Opera, and the Nashville Symphony. Baritone Eric Greene is a fisherman named Jake, a role he also performed this season at Lyric Opera Chicago, Baltimore Opera and the Grand Théâtre Luxembourg; soprano Angel Blue makes her role debut as his cautious wife Clara, who attempts to soothe their baby with the memorable lullaby "Summertime." Mezzo-soprano Alteouise deVaughn sings the role of Bess's spunky friend Maria.

George Gershwin originally conceived *Porgy and Bess* as an "American folk opera" and hoped it would have its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera, a suggestion that was refused because of the controversial nature of the subject matter. *Porgy and Bess* was consequently reworked as a musical theater piece and opened on Broadway in 1935 with a cast of all African-American artists—an extremely bold move given the segregationist views of the era. The work enjoyed more than 40 years in the musical theater repertoire, with several significant revivals and a film version starring Sydney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge in the title roles. Houston Grand Opera (HGO), under the leadership of David Gockley and conducted by John DeMain, presented Gershwin's original operatic version for the very first time in 1976. The production established *Porgy and Bess* as one of the greatest American operas and earned HGO a Tony Award, a Grammy Award and the Grand Prix du Disque. San

Francisco Opera presented the HGO production in 1977, with subsequent performances in 1987 and 1995.

San Francisco Opera Guild presents an Insight Panel Discussion featuring members of the cast and production team on Wednesday, June 3 at 6 p.m. in the Herbst Theatre. Insight panels are free for Opera members and \$5 for the general public; tickets can be purchased at the door 30 minutes prior to the discussion

Sung in English with English supertitles, the seven performances of *Porgy and Bess* are scheduled for June 9 (8 p.m.), June 12 (8 p.m.), June 14 (7:30 p.m.), June 18 (7:30 p.m.), June 21 (2 p.m.), June 24 (7:30 p.m.) and June 27 (8 p.m.), 2009. San Francisco Opera's Summer 2009 Season will also include Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* (June 2-26) and Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (June 13-July 5).

Tickets and Information

Tickets for *Porgy and Bess* range from \$15 to \$290 each and may be purchased online at www.sfopera.com or from the San Francisco Opera Box Office either in person or by phone at **(415) 864-3330**. Standing Room tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. on the day of each performance; tickets are \$10 each, cash only.

All performances will feature an informative Opera Talk by educator and education consultant Dr. Marcia Green. Talks begin fifty-five minutes before each performance in the orchestra section of the War Memorial Opera House and are presented free of charge to patrons with tickets for the corresponding performance.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue at Grove Street. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and the F Market Street. For more public transportation information, visit www.bart.gov and www.sfmuni.com.

For further information about *Porgy and Bess* and San Francisco Opera's 2008-2009 Season, please visit www.sfopera.com.

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2008–09 Season Sponsor

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This press release and downloadable 2008–09 Season photographs are available at www.sfopera.com/press. For further press information, please contact:

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THE GERSHWINS® *PORGY AND BESS*SM: PRODUCTION INFORMATION

All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House.

* San Francisco Opera Debut

THE GERSHWINS® *PORGY AND BESS*SM
by George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward,
and Ira Gershwin
Washington National Opera production

Production new to San Francisco Opera
June 9 (8 pm), **12*** (8 pm), **14*** (7:30 pm), **18*** (7:30
pm), **21** (2 pm), **24** (7:30 pm), **27** (8 pm), **2009**
War Memorial Opera House

First performance: New York, October 10, 1935

Approximate running time: 3 hours, 15 minutes

Sung in English with English supertitles

Cast:

Porgy

Bess

Crown

Serena

Sportin' Life

Clara

Jake

Maria

Eric Owens

Laquita Mitchell*

Lester Lynch*

Karen Slack

Chauncey Packer*

Angel Blue*

Eric Greene*

Alteouise deVaughn*

Production Team:

Conductor

Director

Associate Director

Choreographer

Set Designer

Costume Designer

Chorus Director

Lighting Designer

John DeMain

Francesca Zambello

Rita D'Angelo Tikador*

Denni Sayers

Peter J. Davison*

Paul Tazewell*

Ian Robertson

Mark McCullough

Opera Guild Insight Panel Discussion

Wednesday, June 3, 6 p.m.

Herbst Theater, 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

* OperaVision Performance. San Francisco Opera introduced OperaVision in 2007 as an innovative way to give balcony audiences a better view of the stage. OperaVision screens, hung from the ceiling of the balcony section, provide close-up and mid-range ensemble shots in high-definition video. Supertitles are shown at the bottom of each screen.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

American soprano **LAQUITA MITCHELL** (*Bess*) makes her San Francisco Opera debut this season. She is a 2002 alumna of the Merola Opera Program, where she sang the role of Mimì (*La Bohème*), and she presented a Schwabacher Debut Recital in 2007. Ms. Mitchell has performed the role of Clara (*Porgy and Bess*) in recent and upcoming performances with Los Angeles Opera, Washington National Opera, at Paris's Opéra Comique, and on tour in Luxembourg. Career highlights include Mimì at Cincinnati Opera; Leonora (*Il Trovatore*) with Nashville Opera; Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) with Florentine Opera and Portland Opera; Micaëla (*Carmen*) with Opera Pacific and New York City Opera; and Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) and Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*) at Wolf Trap Opera. As a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, she created the roles of Orquidea (Daniel Catán's *Salsipuedes*), Myhrriine (Mark Adamo's *Lysistrata*), and the Water (Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince*), and she sang the roles of Valencienne (*The Merry Widow*) and Javotte (*Manon*). Ms. Mitchell has performed in concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, and the Princeton Symphony Orchestra; she also made her debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as the soprano soloist in Wynton Marsalis's *All Rise*. In 2003 she won first prize at the Vienna Chamber Opera's Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, making her the first American to win in more than twenty years. She is a former winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Sara Tucker Award, both in 2004.

ERIC OWENS (*Porgy*) made his San Francisco Opera debut as Lodovico (*Otello*) in 2002. He returned to the Company as Don Fernando (*Fidelio*) and the King of Scotland (*Ariodante*), and he created the role of General Leslie Groves in the 2005 world premiere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*. Owens recently toured Vienna, San Francisco, Berlin, and London as the Storyteller in Adams's *The Flowering Tree*, a role written expressly for him. Other Adams performances include *The Wound Dresser* at the BBC Proms and with the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall; *El Niño* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra; and Leslie Groves at Netherlands Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Opera. Recent credits include Oroveso (*Norma*) at Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Ghost of Hector (*Les Troyens*) in concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Owens has appeared throughout Europe in roles such as Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*) at Opera Angers in Nantes; Lodovico in Geneva; Oroveso at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; and Zebul in Handel's *Jephtha* at the Salzburg Festival. He is an alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and former winner of the 1999 ARIA award, the 2003 Marian Anderson Award, the *Operalia* Competition, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and the Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition. The bass-baritone can be heard on disc with Donald Runnicles and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in the Mozart Requiem (Telarc) and as Aristotle Onassis in the Houston Grand Opera world premiere of *Jackie O* (Argo).

American baritone **LESTER LYNCH** (Crown) makes his San Francisco Opera debut in a role he has performed at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and New York City Opera. His recent engagements include Count di Luna (*Il Trovatore*) with the Minnesota Opera, Nashville Opera, and Kentucky Opera; Giorgio Germont (*La Traviata*) with the Houston Grand Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Opera Cleveland; Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*) with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; Tonio (*Pagliacci*) with Pittsburgh Opera; and the title role of *Macbeth* with Dayton Opera. Other career highlights include Marcello (*La Bohème*) with New York City Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; Count di Luna with Deutsche Oper am Rhein and Seattle Opera; Flint (*Billy Budd*) with Canadian Opera Company; the title role of *Rigoletto* with the Dayton Opera; The Bartender in Conrad Susa's *Black River* with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; Paolo Albiani (*Simon Boccanegra*) with the Santa Fe Opera; and Renato (*Un Ballo in Maschera*) with Michigan Opera Theater. Lynch is the recipient of many distinguished awards, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, the George London Vocal Competition, and the Sullivan Awards, and his work with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis earned him the prestigious Richard Gaddes Award.

CHAUNCEY PACKER (*Sportin' Life*) makes his San Francisco Opera debut in a role he has performed at Atlanta Opera, Opera Pacific, and Tulsa Opera. He sings the role of Mingo in *Porgy and Bess* with Paris's Opéra Comique and on tour with that company in Caen and Luxembourg. Packer was recently engaged by Utah Festival Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, and Des Moines Metro Opera in such roles as Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), the title role of *Werther*, Pong (*Turandot*), Sam (*Susannah*), Ruggero (*La Rondine*), Dr. Blind (*Die Fledermaus*), Tamino (*Die Zauberpflöte*), Arturo (*Lucia Di Lammermoor*), and Beppe (*Pagliacci*). The tenor has also performed concerts with Edmonton Opera, Baton Rouge Symphony, Mobile Symphony, Gulf Coast Opera, Shreveport Opera, and Pensacola Symphony in such works as Haydn's Mass in C Major, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Bruckner's *Te Deum*, Schubert's Mass in G Major and Handel's *Messiah*. Mr. Packer received his bachelor's degree from University of Mobile and pursued his master's degree from University of New Orleans.

American soprano **ANGEL BLUE** (*Clara*) makes her San Francisco Opera debut this season. She is currently a second year member of the Domingo-Thornton Young Artist Program at Los Angeles Opera. Ms. Blue has performed the roles of Musetta (*La Bohème*) and Suzy (*La Rondine*) with that company. She recently made her orchestral debut with the Redlands Symphony. Other career highlights include the title role of *Sour Angelica*; the Mother (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*); Jenny (*The Threepenny Opera*); Helena and Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); Giulietta (*The Tales of Hoffmann*); Belinda and Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*); and Ruggiero

(*Alcina*). Recent and upcoming engagements include Suor Osmina (*Suor Angelica*) and Micaëla in student performances of *Carmen* at Los Angeles Opera.

Baritone **ERIC GREENE** (*Jake*) makes his San Francisco Opera debut in a role he has performed at Opera Company of Philadelphia, Washington National Opera, and Los Angeles Opera. He has performed Ping (*Turandot*) with Opera Company of Philadelphia and Opera Carolina as well as Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*) with Eugene Opera. Other career highlights include Escamillo (*Carmen*) with Virginia Opera and Amarillo Opera, and the roles of Marcello (*La Bohème*), King Melchior (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Count Almaviva (*La Nozze di Figaro*), Samuel (*Un Ballo in Maschera*) and Angelotti (*Tosca*). Mr. Green won first place in the NAACP ACT-SO Competition and received the Maryland State Scholarship, the Gluck Foundation Scholarship, and the Highly Grant. Recent and upcoming engagements include roles at Paris's Opéra-Comique, the Granada International Festival in Spain, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Baltimore Opera, and Luxembourg Opera.

A former Adler Fellow and Merola Opera Program alumna, **KAREN SLACK** (*Serena*) has previously appeared with San Francisco Opera as Agnès Sorel (*The Maid of Orleans*) and Henrietta M. (*The Mother of Us All*). Ms. Slack's recent career highlights include the title role of *Luisa Miller* at the Metropolitan Opera, which was broadcast nationally. She recently returned to the Met for their production of *Turandot* and made her Carnegie Hall debut with the Collegiate Chorale in a concert performance as Agnès Sorel. Other credits include Desdemona (*Otello*) with the Melbourne Symphony; Clara (*Porgy and Bess*) with Opera Company of Philadelphia; and the title role of *Aida* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City. She has apprenticed with the Santa Fe Opera and Opera Company of Philadelphia, where she sang Pamina (*The Magic Flute*). Ms. Slack is a former winner of the Jose Iturbi Competition, the Portland Lieber Award, and the Florida Grand Opera Competition. Recent and upcoming engagements include a debut with Michigan Opera Theater as Cinna (*Margaret Garner*) and the Verdi Requiem with the Madison Symphony.

Mezzo-soprano **ALTEOUISE deVAUGHN** (*Maria*) makes her San Francisco Opera debut this season. She made her professional debut with the Rochester Philharmonic and later at Carnegie Hall as the alto soloist in Handel's *Messiah*. Career highlights include Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the Atlanta Symphony and *Orfeo and Euridice* at Opera Theater of St. Louis, as well as appearing in New York City Opera's nationally televised production of *Carmen*. She has also performed roles with Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, Virginia Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Hawaii Opera Theater, and Cincinnati Opera. Ms. deVaughn is a former winner of the Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition, the George London Career Grant Silver Medal, the Stanley Tausend Award, and the Leontyne Price Award.

JOHN DeMAIN made his San Francisco Opera debut as conductor and chorus master for *Porgy and Bess* in 1977 and returned to lead the work in 1987. During his distinguished tenure as music director and principal conductor at Houston Grand Opera, he led a history-making production of *Porgy and Bess*, which he subsequently recorded for RCA, and won the Grammy Award, Tony Award, and France's Grand Prix du Disque. DeMain currently serves as artistic director of Madison Opera and music director of the Madison Symphony. For ten years, he also served as artistic director for Opera Pacific. He is a regular guest conductor at Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, and New York City Opera and has also conducted productions for the State Opera of South Australia, Opera Queensland, Aspen Music Festival, Baltimore Opera, the Bregenz Festival, Cleveland Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Florentine Opera Company of Milwaukee, Glimmerglass Opera, Edmonton Opera, Juilliard Opera Center, Teatro Belles Artes of Mexico City, Opera de Nice, Opera Omaha, Opera Theater of St. Louis, San Diego Opera, Seattle Opera, and the Wexford Festival. Notable recent engagements include productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Porgy and Bess*); Los Angeles Opera (*Porgy and Bess*, *A Little Night Music*, and *The Merry Widow*); New York City Opera (*Dead Man Walking*, *Tosca*, and *Porgy and Bess*); State Opera of South Australia (*Dead Man Walking*); Rome's Festival Euro Mediterraneo (*Candide*); and Washington National Opera and Portland Opera (*A View from the Bridge*). Upcoming productions include a debut with Vancouver Opera (*Nixon in China*), Madison Opera (*Der*

Fliegende Hollander, Carmen, The Turn of the Screw) and concerts with the Madison Symphony and Dayton Philharmonic.

San Francisco Opera Artistic Adviser **FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO** (*Original Director*) began her long association with the Company in 1983 as assistant stage director for *Ariadne auf Naxos* and has since been involved in seventeen productions here. The Company produced the first installment of her “American” *Ring* cycle, *Das Rheingold*, this past summer and will present *Die Walküre* in 2010 and the complete cycle in 2011. Among Zambello’s most recent operatic productions are the world premiere of *An American Tragedy*, *Cyrano*, and *Les Troyens* for the Metropolitan Opera; *Porgy and Bess*, *Siegfried* and *Die Walküre* for Washington National Opera; *La Bohème* at London’s Royal Albert Hall; *The Fiery Angel* for the Bolshoi Theatre; *Salome* at Lyric Opera of Chicago; *Carmen* and *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; and *Boris Godunov*, *War and Peace*, *Billy Budd*, and *William Tell* at the Paris Opera. Zambello was awarded the title of *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government for her contribution to French culture and the Russian Federation’s medal for service to culture. Recent musicals include Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* on Broadway; *Showboat* at the Royal Albert Hall and Carnegie Hall; *The Little House on the Prairie*, by Rachel Portman and Rachel Sheinkin at the Guthrie Theater; and the world premiere of *Rebecca* at Vienna’s Raimund Theater. She directs *The First Wives Club*, a musical by Rupert Holmes and the Motown Kings, later this year at San Diego’s Old Globe Theater.

RITA D’ANGELO TIKADOR (*Associate Director*) assisted Francesca Zambello on the original Washington National Opera production of *Porgy and Bess* in fall 2005 and its subsequent appearances at Los Angeles Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. A veteran of over two-hundred performances of *Porgy and Bess* throughout Europe, she currently serves as a production stage manager for both Orlando Opera and Disney Creative Entertainment. For Disney, she supervises and trains stage management to take over and maintain Disney’s long-running theatrical productions. While not in rehearsal, she and her husband run A Better Life-Pet Rescue—a non-profit, no kill animal rescue located in Orlando, Florida.