

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY CONCERT SERIES

Love Songs and Dances

An Evening of Liebeslieder ~ November 20, 2021

John Churchwell began serving as head of music for San Francisco Opera in August 2011. Prior to this appointment, he served as an assistant conductor for both the Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera for 14 years. Mr. Churchwell has worked on more than 125 productions with such conductors as James Levine, Nicola Luisotti, Donald Runnicles, Nello Santi and Sir Charles Mackerras. A champion of American music, Mr. Churchwell prepared the world premieres of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Stewart Wallace/Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Philip Glass' *Appomattox*, and Tobias Picker's *Dolores Claiborne*. More recently he led the preparation for John Adams' world premiere *The Girls of the Golden West* and the West Coast Premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*.

On the recital stage, Mr. Churchwell has partnered with some of today's most sought-after vocalists, including appearances at the Hollywood Bowl with Ellie Dehn, San Francisco Symphony with Michael Fabiano, and recitals with Lawrence Brownlee, Lisette Oropesa, Joyce DiDonato, James Westman, and Isabel Leonard.

Mr. Churchwell spends his summers at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, CA, where he is the Director of Music for the Vocal Institute. While there, in addition to chamber music performances and public masterclasses, Mr. Churchwell is instrumental in the training of young singers and apprentice coaches.

Mr. Churchwell earned his doctorate from the University of Minnesota and holds a bachelor's degree in piano from the New England Conservatory, a bachelor's degree in French from Tufts University, and a master's degree in accompanying from the University of Minnesota. Mr. Churchwell attended the Merola Opera Program and is a graduate of the Lindemann Young Artists Program at the Metropolitan Opera.

Esther Tonea, soprano

Praised for her "powerful, gleaming tone, effortless precision and expressive immediacy," Romanian-American soprano Esther Tonea has appeared in concert and recital across North America and Europe. As Diana in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *If I Were You*, Tonea stunned audiences and critics alike with "magnificent singing — an ardent, tonally plush performance." She performed *Fiordiligi* with "gleaming tones and impeccable dynamic control."

In 2021, she performed in "The Adlers: Live at the Drive-In" and "The Adler Fellows in Concert" with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. No stranger to sacred music, Tonea has appeared as soloist in Nelson's *Missa in Angustiis*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mahler's Symphonies No. 4 and 2, and Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate* and *Requiem*. Tonea is a Richard F. Gold Career Grant recipient and an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera. She holds a Master of Music in Voice from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in Vocal Performance and Cello Performance from the University of Georgia. To follow Ms. Tonea's future performances, visit www.esthertonea.com.

Victor Cardamone, tenor

Praised for his "bright" voice and "perfect" tone quality (Butler Eagle), tenor Victor

Cardamone has garnered much attention and critical acclaim over the last decade. His "sweet tenor" is equally known for its "power and ringing high notes". In response to his diverse acting skill set he has been described as "a perfect foil" "hilarious", "ideal in romantic moments", and "the stuff of nightmares".

Originally from the northeast outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Victor earned his Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Youngstown State University, with a double major in applied voice and French horn. He took additional coursework at Ball State University, where he served as a graduate teaching assistant in the voice department, before transferring to the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music and earning his Master of Music in Vocal Performance. He has trained exclusively with Misook Yun, Jon Truitt, and Tom Baresel. He has coached primarily with Hyery Hwang, Kathy Kelly, and Marie-France Lefebvre. He has studied Schubert lieder extensively (including the songs of 1817, *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise*, and *Schwanengesang*) with Ken Griffiths. Victor is a three-time Central Region Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and sole recipient of the Regional Encouragement Award in 2017 as well as a three-time Corbett Competition award winner and a finalist for Washington National Opera's Cafritz Resident Artist Program.

Victor has bowed with Opera Western Reserve, the Warren Philharmonic (Warren, Ohio), New Castle Lyric Opera (New Castle, Pennsylvania), Asheville Lyric Opera, Brevard Music Center, Cincinnati Opera, the Charleston Symphony (Charleston, South Carolina), Wolf Trap Opera, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Dayton Philharmonic, Dayton Opera, Opera Project Columbus, Opera Columbus, and Merola Opera Program. His major role credits include Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), Ramiro (*La Cenerentola*), Jenk (*The Bartered Bride*), Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), and Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*). His major cover assignments and independent role studies include Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Almaviva (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Belmonte (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), Nemorino (*L'Elisir d'Amore*), and Tonio (*La Fille du Régiment*). An advocate and champion of new music, he has lent his voice to a number of significant projects over the past few years. As a member of Opera Fusion: New Works, he was part of the first workshops/studio recordings for *Eurydice* (co-commissioned by The Metropolitan Opera and Los Angeles Opera), *Blind Injustice*, and *The Hours* (co-commissioned by The Metropolitan Opera and the Philadelphia Orchestra). In other genres, he feels equally at home with operetta, musical theater, and popular music.

Robert Cassidy has received widespread acclaim for his performances and recordings of both solo piano repertoire and chamber music. *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* review of his eponymous solo recording noted, "Cassidy demonstrates a keen grasp of varied styles on his new recital disc, which spans three centuries. with delicate and expressive sensitivity, savoring the magical atmospheres." In March 2016, Dr. Cassidy released his second solo disc "Pathways" which includes works by Chopin, Debussy and Joel Feigin.

He received his Bachelors and Masters degrees in Piano Performance from the Manhattan School of Music; and Doctor of Arts in Piano Chamber Music and Accompanying/Piano Performance from Ball State University. A sought after soloist, chamber musician, as well as teacher and coach, Dr. Cassidy has recently performed with Almeda Trio, Cleveland Orchestra and Mari Sato of the Cavani String Quartet. In addition to his performances, Dr. Cassidy continues his active teaching career based at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara. Dr. Cassidy has been Artistic Director of the Santa Ynez Valley Concert Series since 2019. For more information visit: www.robertcassidy pianist.com