



HANDEL

# GIULIO CESARE

20  
YEARS

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# 25-26 SEASON AT A GLANCE

SEP	24	5 PM	Donor Quarterly	Season 20 Kickoff	Opera Central
OCT	4	8 PM	Broadway Cabaret		Opera Central
	10	11 AM	Mornings w/ Maestro	Preview Susannah	Opera Central
	17	8 PM	<i>Susannah</i>	Carlisle Floyd	Palladium Theater
	19	2 PM	<i>Susannah</i>	Carlisle Floyd	Palladium Theater
	21	7:30 PM	<i>Susannah</i>	Carlisle Floyd	Palladium Theater
NOV	15	3 PM	<i>Pinocchio</i>	John Davies	Opera Central
	16	3 PM	<i>Pinocchio</i>	John Davies	Opera Central
	22	3 PM	<i>Pinocchio</i>	John Davies	Opera Central
	23	3 PM	<i>Pinocchio</i>	John Davies	Opera Central
DEC	3	5 PM	Donor Quarterly	Holiday Mingle	Opera Central
	10	11 AM	Silver Bells	St. Petersburg Opera Guild's Annual Gala	St. Petersburg Yacht Club
	14	3 PM	Holiday Sparkle in the Park		North Straub Park
	19	7:30 PM	Holiday Sparkle		Palladium Theater
	20	7:30 PM	Holiday Sparkle		Palladium Theater
	21	2 PM	Holiday Sparkle		Palladium Theater
JAN	16	11 AM	Mornings w/ Maestro	Preview Giulio Cesare	Opera Central
	30	8 PM	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	George Frideric Handel	Palladium Theater
FEB	1	2 PM	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	George Frideric Handel	Palladium Theater
	3	7:30 PM	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	George Frideric Handel	Palladium Theater
	22	3 PM	Take Me to the Water	Celebration of the Arts	Opera Central
MAR	11	5 PM	Donor Quarterly	Season 21 Reveal	Opera Central
APR	19	5 PM	Bella Voce	SPO's Annual Gala	James Museum
MAY	15	11 AM	Mornings w/ Maestro	Preview La Bohème	Opera Central
	23	8 PM	Broadway Cabaret		Opera Central
JUN	5	8 PM	<i>La Bohème</i>	Giacomo Puccini	Palladium Theater
	7	2 PM	<i>La Bohème</i>	Giacomo Puccini	Palladium Theater
	9	7:30 PM	<i>La Bohème</i>	Giacomo Puccini	Palladium Theater
	10	5 PM	Donor Quarterly	Summer Social	Opera Central
	12	8 PM	<i>La Bohème</i>	Giacomo Puccini	Palladium Theater
	14	2 PM	<i>La Bohème</i>	Giacomo Puccini	Palladium Theater
JUL	4	6 PM	4th of July Pops Spectacular		Duke Energy Center for the Arts–Mahaffey

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NOW MORE THAN EVER.**



## SPO ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

General Director.....Mark Sforzini  
 Director of Development.....David Foote  
 Artistic Administrator.....Michael Roberts  
 Production Coordinator.....Karl W. Hesser  
 Business Manager.....Cecelia Messina  
 Housing Coordinator & Maestro's Assistant.....Susan Aspray  
 Production Assistant.....John Short

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

Principal Rehearsal Pianist.....Richard Cordova  
 Rehearsal Pianist.....Teresa Ancaya  
 Stage Manager.....Stephen M. Ray, Jr.  
 Assistant Stage Manager.....Crystal Solana Bryan  
 Technical Director.....Mike Roland  
 Head Carpenter.....Charlene McLoughlin  
 Scenic Artists.....Shelby Smotherman, Bryan Martina, Nikki Bonfiglio  
 Costume Manager.....Dawn Hyde  
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 Music Parts Preparation.....Susan Aspray, John Short  
 Surtitles Preparation.....Karl W Hesser  
 Surtitles Operator.....Chris Romeo  
 Program & Graphic Design.....David Foote  
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### SPECIAL THANKS TO

International Arts & Entertainment Group and Keith L. Arsenault  
 Christopher Spatafora and the Palladium Technical Crew

St. Pete Opera  
 presents

# GIULIO CESARE

## IN EGITTO

(Julius Caesar in Egypt)

Music by Georg Frideric Handel

Libretto by Nicola Francesco Haym

(based on an earlier libretto by Giacomo Francesco Bussani)

First performance on February 20, 1724 at the King's Theatre in London.

January 30<sup>th</sup>, February 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026

Palladium, 253 Fifth Ave. N, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Conductor.....Mark Sforzini  
 Stage Director.....Karl W. Hesser  
 Scenic Designer.....Michael Roland  
 Lighting Designer.....Keith Arsenault  
 Wigs and Makeup Design.....Ron Wolek

Costumes provided by Sarasota Opera Association, Inc.

### CAST

Giulio Cesare.....Cody Bowers  
 Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.....Holly Flack  
 Tolomeo, her brother, King of Egypt.....Ryan Belongie  
 Cornelia, widow of Pompey.....Janara Kellerman  
 Sesto, her son.....Sarah Nordin^^  
 Achilla, Tolomeo's General.....Tyler Putnam^^  
 Curio, Caesar's General.....Phillip Lopez  
 Nirena, Cleopatra's Servant.....Sarah Scofield  
 Cleopatra's Handmaidens.....Emily Lusk, Victoria Stout  
 Roman soldiers.....Patrick Constantine, Antonio Merced  
 Egyptian soldiers.....John Whittlesey, Christian Sidwell

^^ Debby McLean & Keith Kearney Sponsored Artists

Time and Place: 48 BC, Alexandria, Egypt

Our production will be presented in Two Acts with one 20-minute intermission

This production generously sponsored by Claudia McCorkle & BEAU

The taking of photographs and use of recording devices of any kind is strictly prohibited.

## SYNOPSIS

GIULIO CESARE IN EGITTO  
Alexandria, Egypt, 48 BC

### ACT 1

In pursuit of his rival Pompey, Caesar arrives in Alexandria triumphant. Cornelia, Pompey's wife, and her son Sesto approach him to ask for a reconciliation. They are interrupted by Achilla, the Egyptian commander-in-chief, who enters with a gift of tribute from Tolomeo, Egypt's co-ruler. The gift is Pompey's head. Caesar, Cornelia and Sesto are horrified. Caesar denounces the gift, sends Achilla back with the message that he will visit Tolomeo, and departs. Cornelia expresses her grief and takes her husband's head for burial. Sesto summons the courage to avenge his father.

At the palace, Cleopatra anticipates her coming glory as sole ruler of Egypt. Nirena brings the news of Tolomeo's misstep with Pompey's head. Cleopatra decides to approach Caesar by herself to win his favor. Her brother Tolomeo overhears and warns her that he will triumph. Cleopatra dismisses his threats, teasing him that he will perhaps have better luck with his sexual conquests. Cleopatra and her handmaidens leave and Achilla arrives with the news that Caesar rejected Tolomeo's gift. Achilla promises to kill Caesar if he may be granted the hand of Cornelia. Tolomeo agrees and swears vengeance.

Caesar is alone with the urn of Pompey's ashes, reflecting the fragility of life and glory. Curio brings in Cleopatra, who introduces herself as Cleopatra's handmaiden Lydia, along with Nirena. Cleopatra as Lydia begs Caesar to help her restore her family's fortune, stolen by Tolomeo. Caesar is struck by her beauty and bearing, and promises to help before he leaves. Cleopatra and Nirena hide as Cornelia enters, mourning the loss of her husband. She swears vengeance, but Sesto enters to tell her that the vengeance belongs to him. As they deliberate how to achieve their goal, Cleopatra emerges to tell them that they will have her help and that of Nirena. Sesto expresses the joy of their new hope. When Cornelia, Sesto and Nirena depart, Cleopatra remains behind to pin her own hopes on Caesar's star.

Cesare and Curio confront Tolomeo and Achilla at the palace. Cesare warns that he is aware of Tolomeo's plots and will exercise the caution of a clever hunter. As he and the Romans leave, Cornelia and Sesto arrive. Tolomeo is smitten with Cornelia himself but responds to their accusations of treachery by arresting both of them. After Tolomeo exits, Achilla tells Cornelia he is in love with her, but she rejects him. Achilla leaves in frustration, and mother and son are left to say their goodbyes to each other.

Nirena greets Caesar and tells him Lydia will be with him shortly. Music is heard. Caesar is presented with a vision of Lydia as "Virtue," singing of how much she loves him. Caesar is entranced, but the vision disappears. Nirena assures Caesar that Lydia is waiting to greet him. Caesar expresses his happiness as if it were the song of the birds among the flowers.

## SYNOPSIS

In the palace garden, Cornelia is still weeping over Pompey's loss. Achilla enters to plead his case, but Tolomeo follows him shortly to dismiss Achilla and to make his own advances on Cornelia. He angrily responds to her rejection and exits. Nirena leads in Sesto and Cornelia once more expresses her hope that they will be avenged. Cornelia and Nirena leave Sesto alone. He asserts his determination to imitate the offended serpent who is relentless in pursuit of his oppressor.

### INTERMISSION

#### ACT 2

In her room, Cleopatra prepares for Caesar's arrival. She asks for the aid of Venus, goddess of love. The handmaidens leave and Cleopatra pretends to be asleep. Caesar enters, sees the "sleeping Lydia" and wishes he could make her his wife. Hearing that, Cleopatra sits up and agrees. When questioned how she, a handmaiden, could aspire to be Caesar's wife, Cleopatra finally has to admit her true identity. Meanwhile, Curio has found Caesar to warn him of an armed uprising against him. When Cleopatra's effort to quell the conspirators is useless, both Curio and she urge Caesar to flee. Caesar's response is to call on his soldiers to battle. Caesar and Curio leave Cleopatra alone to beg the gods for pity.

On the battlefield, Achilla is frustrated that Tolomeo has betrayed him and resolves to use his sword against the king and aid Cleopatra. Tolomeo and his soldiers bring in the captured Cleopatra and put her in chains. Tolomeo gloats over his victory before leaving. Left alone, Cleopatra weeps over her humiliation, defeat and loss of Caesar.

Caesar, having escaped his enemies by diving into the sea, emerges to thank the gods for his deliverance and to relish the cool breezes. He hides as Sesto and Nirena arrive. They find the dying Achilla, who admits to having suggested Pompey's death. But driven by love of Cornelia, he offers them a signet ring which will give them leadership of a hundred men in order to rescue Cornelia. Achilla dies. Caesar emerges to claim the ring and swears to lead the men like a raging mountain torrent.

Anticipating Tolomeo's revenge, Cleopatra is bidding farewell to her handmaidens, when sounds of conflict are heard. Suddenly, Caesar rushes in to free her from her chains, but must leave to continue the fight. Cleopatra rejoices as though a storm-tossed ship has safely reached its harbor.

Cornelia enters, pursued by Tolomeo. As she is about to be overcome, Sesto, guided by Nirena, and his soldiers challenge Tolomeo. Tolomeo resists but is killed. Cornelia and Sesto are reunited. Nirena encourages them to leave.

Caesar has triumphed and crowns Cleopatra the Queen of Egypt. Sesto, Cornelia and Nirena arrive with the news of Tolomeo's death. Caesar congratulates Sesto on having avenged his father's murder. Cleopatra and Caesar pledge their love. All the characters rejoice in the love and peace that have come to Egypt.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

### GIULIO CESARE IN EGITTO

Coming up in only a few short weeks will be the 302nd anniversary of Handel's GIULIO CESARE IN EGITTO (Julius Caesar in Egypt), which premiered at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket in London, England, on February 20, 1724. Handel had assembled a star-studded cast of popular singers and given them a richly varied score which furnished them plenty of scope to explore the characters' emotional journeys. The score contains some of Handel's most ravishingly beautiful melodies and also allows the star singers plenty of opportunities for virtuosic vocal display. It was an immediate success, played thirteen times to full houses, and Handel revived it in 1725, 1730 and 1732.

The style of GIULIO CESARE is that of "opera seria," which relied on the A-B-A musical form: a main melody or theme, followed by a contrasting middle section, and then a repeat of the main theme with decorations. We have kept as many A-B-A arias as we could while still being sensible of time limitations. Our goal has been to present as much of the opera as we could within a 3-hour period. A complete GIULIO CESARE lasts in excess of four hours, which tests the limits of contemporary audiences. The "opera seria" style went out of fashion around the 1770's as the operatic reforms of Gluck transformed the public's taste and paved the way for Mozart, Haydn, Salieri, Paisiello and Cimarosa. In fact, there were no public performances of a Handel "opera seria" at all throughout the 19th century.

What made "opera seria" so popular were the vocal displays of the star singers. When GIULIO CESARE was revived in the 20th century, the role of Cleopatra was portrayed by such stars as Joan Sutherland, Beverly Sills and Montserrat Caballé. The New York City Opera production (1966) used a transformed score where roles that were originally sung by castrati were now sung by bass-baritones, such as Norman Treigle as Cesare. Some contemporary productions will cast a female mezzo-soprano in the pants roles, but the increased availability of countertenors in the last thirty years has changed how those roles are cast. Consequently, although the character of Sesto has been sung as a "pants role" since the premiere (apart from the occasional tenor), Cesare and Tolomeo are both sung by countertenors in our production and the role of Nireno (another castrato originally) has been changed to Nirena, lady-in-waiting to Cleopatra.

GIULIO CESARE IN EGITTO is now regularly produced around the globe as audiences have recognized its sumptuous musical world. It is the third Handel opera produced by St. Pete Opera.

-Karl W. Hesser

# ST. PETE OPERA ORCHESTRA

Under the Baton of Maestro Mark Sforzini

## Violins

Tamás Kocsis

*Concertmaster*

Jeffrey Smick

*Principal 2nd Violin*

Felicia Brunelle

Jaekyung Cheon

Sardor Djumaev

Teresa Fream

Melody Harbig

Merinn Jacobs

## Viola

Dan Urbanowicz\*

Rafael Ramirez

## Cello

Alfred Gratta\*

Scott Kluksdahl

## Bass

Dee Moses\*

## Flute & Woodwinds

David Tagliarini\*

## Oboe

Lane Lederer\*

Susan Aspray

## Bassoon

Mark Sforzini\*

## Horn

Mark Trotter\*

Lyndsie Wilson

## Continuo Keyboard

Richard Cordova

\*Principal



## PRINCIPAL CAST



**BRIAN SCOTT**, *Alfonso*

**Hometown:** Beaver Dam, WI; now Chicago, IL  
**Education:** Merola Opera Program and Adler Fellowship at San Francisco Opera; Northwestern University  
**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Semele* 2022, *Athamas*  
**Past Engagements:** Lyric Opera of Chicago, *Rinaldo*, *Mago*; Canadian Opera Company, *Semele*, *Athamas*; Boston Baroque, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *Ottone*



**CODY BOWERS**, *Giulio Cesare*

**Hometown:** Newnan, GA; now in New Haven, CT  
**Education:** B.M. University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (2015); M. Mus. Rice University (2017); Tanglewood Music Center Vocal Fellowship (2021), Merola Opera Program (2022); DMA Boston University (exp 2028)  
**Previous SPO Engagement:** *Alcina* 2023, *Ruggiero*  
**Past Engagements:** Boston Early Music Festival, *Don Quichotte*

(Telemann), *Basilio*; Metropolitan Opera, *El Niño*, First Countertenor; New York Philharmonic, *Israel in Egypt*, Alto Soloist

**Upcoming Engagements:** Alto Soloist: Boston Baroque 2027, *St. Markus Passion*; Alabama Symphony 2026, *Carmina Burana*; The Thirteen 2026, *Messiah*



**HOLLY FLACK**, *Cleopatra*

**Hometown:** Portland, OR; now in Washington, D.C.  
**Education:** Bachelor of Music, St. Olaf College; Master of Music, University of Kentucky  
**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Pinocchio* 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022, *Olympia*; *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* 2017, *Olympia* Cover; *Rigoletto* 2021, *Gilda*; *Semele* 2022, *Semele*; *L'Italiana in Algeri* 2023, *Elvira*; *Alcina* 2023, *Morgana*

**Past Engagements:** Theater an der Wien, *Voice Killer* (World Premiere), *Pauline Thompson & Military Cop*; Teatro Massimo, Palermo, *La Grand Macabre*, *Venus & Gepopo*; Salt Marsh Opera, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Mabel*

**Upcoming Engagement:** Wiener Staatsoper 2026, *Animal Farm*, *Mollie the Horse*



**PHILLIP LOPEZ**, *Curio / Achilla Cover*

**Hometown:** Avon, IL  
**Education/Instructors:** BM 2016, Millikin University; MM 2019, Wichita State, MMA 2021, Yale University  
**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Carmen* 2025, *Escamillo*  
**Past Engagements:** Wichita Grand Opera, *Westside Story*, *Chino*; West Edge Opera, *Dolores*, *Cesar Chavez*  
**Upcoming Engagements:** Wichita Grand Opera 2026: *Scalia/Ginsberg*,

*Commentator*; *La Fanciulla del West*, *José Castro*; Odyssey Opera 2026, *The Last Savage*, *Abdul*; St. Pete Opera 2026: *La Bohème*, *Schaunard*

## PRINCIPAL CAST



**JANARA KELLERMAN**, *Cornelia*

**Hometown:** Cedar Rapids, IA; now in Westwood, NJ  
**Education/Instructors:** Simpson College and University of Memphis  
**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Samson & Dalila* 2024, *Dalila*  
**Past Engagements:** Fort Worth Opera, *The Medium*, *Baba*; Union Avenue, *Falstaff*, *Dame Quickly*; Cedar Rapids Opera, *La Voix Humaine*, *Elle*; Choral Society of Durham 2025, *Verdi Requiem*, Alto Soloist



**SARAH NORDIN**, *Sesto*

**Hometown:** Crystal River, FL, currently in New York City  
**Education:** Lee University, BM; University of Tennessee, MM  
**Previous SPO Engagements:** *A Little Night Music*, *Charlotte*; *Così fan tutte*, *Dorebella*; *Rigoletto*, *Maddalena*; *Die Fledermaus*, *Orlofsky*; *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Komponist Cover*  
**Past Engagements:** First Coast Opera, *Carmen*, *Carmen*; Metropolitan Opera, *The Wedding Banquet Workshop*, *Susan*; South Dakota

Symphony, *Giants in the Earth*, *Sorrine Olsa*

**Upcoming Engagements:** MacBeth Concert Series, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Ruth* 2026



**TYLER PUTNAM**, *Achilla*

**Hometown:** Chebeague Island, ME; now in Bronx, NY  
**Education:** Dartmouth College and Young Artist at The Santa Fe Opera

**Previous SPO Engagements:** *South Pacific*, *Luther Billis*; *Così fan tutte*, *Guglielmo*; Numerous outreach and solo engagements including POPera and Donor Quarterly

**Past Engagements:** Gulfshore Opera, *Carmen*, *Escamillo*; Opera på Skäret, Sweden, *Norma*, *Oroveso*; First Coast Opera, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Basilio*

**Upcoming Engagements:** Macbeth Concert Series 2026, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Pirate King*



**SARAH SCOFIELD**, *Nerina / Sesto Cover*

**Hometown:** West Lafayette, IN; now in Salt Lake City, UT  
**Education:** University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music: BM 2021, MM 2023; Utah Opera Residence Artist 2023-2025

**Previous SPO Engagements:** Company debut

**Past Engagements:** Opera Philadelphia, *Il Viaggio a Reims*, *Maddalena*; Utah Opera: *Madama Butterfly*, *Kate Pinkerton*; *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Sandman*

## COVER CAST



### THEODORA COTTAREL, Cleopatra Cover

**Hometown:** Moved every four years so claims to be French/American; now in Seattle, WA

**Education:** Manhattan School of Music, Studio Artist; Florentine Opera. Studied with Michael Chiodi, Jennifer Larmore, Marlyin Horne, Lionel Sarrazin

**Previous SPO Engagement:** Company debut

**Past Engagements:** Seattle Opera, *The Meeting House*, *Temperance*; The Middlebury Opera, *La Fille du Régiment*, *Marie*; Snug Harbor Cultural Center, *La Traviata*, *Violetta*; Park City Opera, *The Gift of the Magi*, *Della*

**Upcoming Engagements:** Snug Harbor Cultural Center 2026, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Lucia*; Sun Valley Opera 2026, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Christine*



### KIMBERLY HANN, Cornelia Cover

**Hometown:** Oakton, VA; now in Chicago, IL

**Education:** Northwestern University 2014 BM; Mannes College of Music 2017 MM; student of Alexandra LoBianco

**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Alcina* 2023, *Bradamante* Cover

**Past Engagements:** Chicago Opera Theater, *The Nose*, *Attendant/Traveler*; Quisiana Resort, *The Magic Flute*, *Third Lady/Sarastro*; Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company, *HMS Pinafore*, *Little Buttercup*



### EMILY LUSK, Nirena Cover

**Hometown:** Mineola, NY; now settled in Seminole, FL

**Education/Instructors:** Florida State University, studied with Daniel Belcher, Mary Hangle, and David Okerlund

**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Susannah* 2025, *Mrs. Hayes* Cover & chorus; *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Amahl*; Numerous choruses, including *Carmen*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Turandot*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Pagliacci*, *The Merry Widow*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, and *Il Trovatore*

**Past Engagements:** *Romeo and Jovette*, *The Triumph of Spring*, *Fidelito*; Opera Tampa, *Roméo & Jovette*, Chorus

**Upcoming Engagements:** St. Pete Opera, *La Bohème*



### JORDAN RUTTER-COVATTO, Cesare Cover

**Hometown:** Jacksonville, FL; now in New York, NY

**Education:** University of North Florida, BM, studied with Krzysztof Biernacki; Manhattan School of Music, MM, studied with Joan Patenaude-Yarnell

**Previous SPO Engagements:** Company debut

**Past Engagements:** On Site Opera, *Turn of the Screw*, *Miles*; Chicago Opera Theater, *The Scarlet Ibis*, *Doodle*; Opera at the Avalon,

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Oberon*

**Upcoming Engagements:** Teatro Grattacielo 2026, *The Tempest*, *Trinculo*

## COVER CAST



### DAVID LEE SMITH, Tolomeo Cover

**Hometown:** Dallas, TX; now Cambridge, MA

**Education:** Sam Houston State University, BA; The Longy School of Music of Bard College, MM (exp 2026)

**Previous SPO Engagement:** *Semele* 2022, *Athamas* Cover; *Pinocchio* 2017, 2021, 2022, *Mr. Cat*; Chorus: *Così fan tutte*; *I Pagliacci*, *Rigoletto*, *The Merry Widow*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Il Trovatore*

**Past Engagements:** Mass Opera with Amherst, *The Onion* World Premiere, *The Onion* Cover; Opera del Sol: *Cocaine Bear* World Premiere, *The Bear*; *Hänsel und Gretel*, *The Sandman*



### JOHN WHITTLESEY, Curio Cover

**Hometown:** Monroe, OH; now St. Petersburg, FL

**Education:** Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH, BA Psychology; Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH, Masters in Hospital Administration; Vocal study: Nina Hinson, Susan Versage, James Busby, and Gwendoly, Scheffel

**Previous SPO Engagements:** *Holiday Sparkle* 2025; Chorus: *La Fille du Régiment*, *Tosca*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Carmen*, and *Susannah*

**Past Engagements:** Choral Artists of Sarasota, *On the Town*, *Ozzie*; Opera Tampa, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Notary*; Opera Fusion, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Melchior*

**Upcoming Engagements:** St. Pete Opera, *La Bohème*

4<sup>TH</sup> of July  
**Pops Spectacular**  
 DUKE ENERGY CENTER FOR THE ARTS—MAHAFFEY THEATER

Tampa Bay Times  
 JUL 4  
 6 PM  
 SPO  
 ST. PETE OPERA

## CREATIVE TEAM



**MARK SFORZINI** (General Director/Conductor) is not merely a visionary leader who established an innovative and successful nonprofit business (although he is, and he did). He is a composer whose orchestral and chamber works have been commissioned and performed by the Florida Orchestra, Tampa Bay Symphony, Alabama Symphony, Omaha Symphony, Eastern Music Festival, Toledo Symphony Orchestra and numerous others. He has written and produced several one-act opera and music programs based on operatic repertoire. Sforzini's acclaimed Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon debuted in 2018.

The Alabama native served as principal bassoon of the Florida Orchestra from 1992 to 2007. He was the artistic director of the prestigious Encore Series of chamber music at the Palladium Theater for several years. He co-founded FloriMezzo in 2003, serving as its artistic director for five years. In addition, he was Music Director of the Pinellas Youth Symphony and a composer-mentor for Hillsborough County Schools.

In 2005, he was invited to guest-conduct a one-time production of *Madama Butterfly* at the Palladium Theater. And so, St. Petersburg Opera Company was born.

Far from resting on his considerable laurels, Sforzini continues to stretch, to test the boundaries of what an opera company can and should be. Each season brings several lavishly-staged and fully-orchestrated productions of classic operas, pops and cabaret shows, a children's introduction to opera, seasonal showcases, and other vastly entertaining offerings.

In addition to his duties as St. Pete Opera's general director, chief visionary, arranger, and conductor, Maestro Sforzini is in demand as an adjudicator, clinician, and chamber music coach. Since 2012, he has been music director and conductor of the Tampa Bay Symphony and established a Call for Scores Competition to promote 21st-century works by composers worldwide. Mark Sforzini was chosen by Musical America as one of 30 international industry professionals as a "Profile in Courage." These top industry leaders have "taken a risk, spoken out where others were silent – all to the measurable benefits of their arts organizations and the field." [www.marksforzini.com](http://www.marksforzini.com)

**HOLLYWOOD LAND**

The James Museum  
Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup> 2026 5 p.m.



**KARL W. HESSER** (Stage Director, Production Coordinator) started with SPO as a German-language coach for Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (2013), in which he made his SPO debut as the Major-Domo. He has since appeared as the Steward (*Into the Woods*), Harry/Baptista (*Kiss Me, Kate*) and the Narrator (*A Soldier's Tale*). He has served as stage director for SPO productions of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Il Trovatore*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Faust*, *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Rigoletto*, *Semele*, *La Fille du Régiment*, *Fidelio*, and *Turandot*.

Karl has held the position of Production Coordinator for St. Pete Opera since 2016. His responsibilities include contracting all orchestra personnel, management of production schedules, and overseeing production personnel including crew, stage management, stage design and construction, wig/make-up and visiting stage directors.

Prior to joining SPO, Karl held the positions of Director of Artistic Administration at Florida Grand Opera for eleven seasons and Director of Education at Sarasota Opera for seven seasons. He was also an Opera America Fellow, working at three different opera companies during the Fellowship year. He has a B.A. in Theater Arts from Loyola University of Chicago and an M.B.A. from the University of Phoenix.

He also writes and has prepared the projected English titles for more than 50 operas, which have been used by regional opera companies and symphony orchestras around the country. He was married to his wife Debra for 32 years, has two children and six grandchildren.

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**Aidan R. O'Dowd**  
Financial Advisor  
[aidan.odowd@equitable.com](mailto:aidan.odowd@equitable.com)  
[www.centralflorida.equitableadvisors.com](http://www.centralflorida.equitableadvisors.com)  
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## CREATIVE TEAM



**RICHARD CORDOVA** (Continuo Keyboard) is both a conductor and a pianist. He has been associated with St. Petersburg Opera since 2019, and he has served as Chorus Master for the company's previous productions of *Semele*, *Rigoletto*, and *Fidelio*.

He made his professional debut as a conductor leading the Scandinavian Premiere of Bernstein's *Candide* in Bergen, Norway, and has conducted subsequently for Oper der Stadt Bonn, Opera

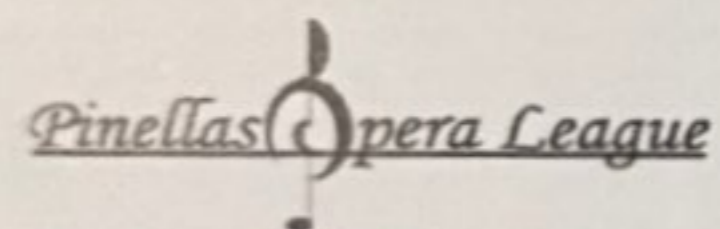
North (New Hampshire), Sarasota Opera, Opera Company of Boston, Long Beach Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Baltimore Opera, and the Martina Arroyo Foundation Prelude to Performance Program.

As Music Director of the Little Opera of New York (LOTNY), he conducted the New York Premiere of the late iconic composer Carlisle Floyd's final opera, *Prince of Players* in 2017 with the composer in attendance, which received critical acclaim from chief music critic Anthony Tommasini in the New York Times. He previously led the company's double bill of two earlier one-act operas by Mr. Floyd, *Slow Dusk & Markheim*, as well as both the Holst double bill of *The Wandering Scholar & Savitri* and the New York Stage Premiere of Mozart's *Mitridate, rè di Ponto*.

In the spring of 2019 he conducted both the first New York performances ever of Britten's *Owen Wingrave* for the same company, and the New York Premiere of the opera-comique version of Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* for the organization Amore Opera, both of were very favorably lauded in reviews in OPERA NEWS.

Mr. Cordova has been a member of the music staffs for such organizations as the Istanbul Opera, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Des Moines Metro Opera, New Orleans Opera, New York City Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Dallas Opera, Sarasota Opera and Chautauqua Opera; and has also been associated with both the Manhattan School of Music and Westminster Choir College.

As a pianist, he has collaborated with such notable singers as Martina Arroyo, Frederica von Stade, Renato Bruson and Ailyn Pérez. Having also been active in the musical theater field, he served as Music Director for the Tony award nominated production of Julie Taymor's *Juan Darién* at Lincoln Center Theater in New York, and toured internationally for twenty-six years between 1993 and 2019 with various productions of *Porgy and Bess*, conducting the work over 250 times on four continents.



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## CREATIVE TEAM



**MICHAEL ROLAND** (Scenic Designer) is a multi-skilled designer with over two decades of experience in live theatre, television, and film production. Along with his partner Charlene McLoughlin, Scenic Carpenter and Technical Theatre graduate of NYC College of Technology, Roland has built and designed sets for St. Petersburg Opera Company for numerous shows, beginning with the company's 2019 production of *Merry Widow*.

While pursuing his degree in Technical Theatre from Northwest Florida State College, Roland served as the university's resident prop master. In 2003, Roland moved to St. Petersburg to hone his skills while working in film and television. Roland is a United States Air Force veteran, has worked with local IATSE 321, and held the position of lighting designer and lead electrician for the Capitol Theatre.

When he's not building and designing for the main stage, Roland spends his time medieval reenacting and developing his skills as a heavy weapons fighter with the Society for Creative Anachronism, a non-profit.



**KEITH ARSENAULT** (Lighting Designer) has worked with The Joffrey Ballet, Opera Company of Boston, Palm Beach Opera, and Ballet Nacional de Colombia. He was General Manager for San Francisco's record-breaking *Cloud 9* and has worked across 45 states, Canada, and Latin America.

His lighting designs include 48+ St. Pete Opera productions, notably *Susannah*, released on DVD by NAXOS. His work has been seen at

Tampa Repertory Theatre, American Stage, Palm Beach Opera, Symphony Space (NYC), and Teatro Colón (Bogotá).

With 40+ years in production, management, and consulting, he runs CIRCUS NEXUS, touring nationwide. He was Stage Manager for the Youth American Grand Prix Gala at Lincoln Center. He managed Hillsborough Community College's performing arts facilities for 15 years and now oversees the New Tampa Performing Arts Center.



**RON WOLEK** (Wig & Makeup Designer) is a third-generation wig designer who began his career in 1998, apprenticing to Disney legend Janet Wolek. Other notable experience comes from his work as a wig designer for *Santa Claus Beards* (Ed Asner, Bryan Cranston, Bobby Moynihan), *War Horse* the Broadway Tour, Disneyland, *Stranger Things*, *The Walking Dead*, *Vampire Diaries*, and more.

He owns and operates Big Wig Studios Inc, a theatrical design company, as well as [mustacheparlor.com](http://mustacheparlor.com) and [captronwolek.com](http://captronwolek.com). Prior opera experience includes several seasons at Orlando Opera as a makeup supervisor, Palm Beach Opera, Vero Beach Opera, and Glimmerglass Opera.