

## Third Savannah VOICE Festival's 2015 Season Announced

**(SAVANNAH, GA – embargoed until May 3, 2015)** – To the delight of the Coastal Empire's music lovers the Savannah Voice Festival unveiled its 2015 season lineup May 3 during a Prelude to the Festival Brunch and Concert at the Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort and Spa. The third annual festival, which will be staged Aug. 2-16 in and around Savannah, offers music from opera, musical theatre and popular song.

The Savannah Voice Festival is again partnering with the Westin Savannah Harbor, making it the Festival's home for the third consecutive year. The Westin, perched majestically atop Hutchinson Island on Savannah's historic riverfront, will transform an area of the hotel into a vocal conservatory for the duration of the festival and will host events, including the return of "Death, by Aria I & II," a showcase and master classes under the direction of world-renowned musical artists.

The yearly vocal celebration gets under way at 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug 2 with Death, by Aria Part I in the Westin's ballroom. The evening, sponsored by Jan and Sam Durham, is designed to provide an up-close and personal introduction to festival artists. Attendees will enjoy opera arias, musical theatre and song in a casual cafe setting. The second installment of the festival's introductory affair, also sponsored by the Durhams, continues Monday evening, Aug. 3, at 6:30 p.m. with Death, by Aria Part II in the Westin ballroom. Guests again will have the opportunity to meet VOICE studio artists as they relax amid the melodies and harmonies of various musical genres.

Also on Monday in the ballroom, legendary baritone Sherrill Milnes, who co-founded the Savannah VOICE Festival along with soprano Maria Zouves, will conduct the first of three free master classes, during which he will share the process of exceptional singing with audiences while working with the 2015 artists. The other master classes are Monday, Aug. 8 and Saturday, Aug. 10. Each one, sponsored in part by Savannah Friends of Music and Gulfstream, runs from 1-3 p.m. and is free and open to the public.

Soprano and festival alum Amy Shoremount Obra, who has recently made her Metropolitan Opera debut, will thrill audiences when she appears in recital at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4. The evening's festivities, sponsored by Middy Larson, will unfold at St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah.

Back for a third season, Savannah's own Timothy Hall and this season's artists present VOICES in Sacred Song at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 6 at Savannah's First Presbyterian Church. This event favorite will feature music from oratorio, liturgical music and inspirational song.

Composer and inspirational motivator David Friedman will direct his own master class, dubbed "Thought Exchange," at 4 p.m. Friday, Aug. 7. During the session, held in the Westin's ballroom, Friedman will work with artists as they explore the art of song.

On Friday, the Salon Series: VOICES Around the World will include a concert and an opportunity for attendees to meet the artists during an elegant wine reception. The event, which runs from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Green Meldrim House and designed as a musical tour of international song in a boutique setting which is sponsored by St. John's Episcopal Church and is open to VOICE Society members only. The VOICE Society offers patrons

the opportunity to support the arts in Savannah and enjoy exclusive events such as the Salon Series, early booking privileges, discounts with local businesses and a regular newsletter. Membership for the VOICE Society is \$175 for individual members, \$275 for couples and \$350 for families

The American Music Concert – slated for 4 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 8 at Savannah’s First Presbyterian Church – offers artists a platform for presenting a musical review of American musical traditions, from Broadway to opera to popular song, through beloved songs and popular tunes.

Rocketing the already-stellar 2015 season into the stratosphere is the previously announced selection of Bizet’s “Carmen” as this year’s Savannah VOICE Festival opera. The opera will be presented at the Asbury Memorial United Methodist Church on the afternoon of Sunday, Aug. 9 at 4 p.m. and the evening of Tuesday, Aug 11 at 6:30 p.m. The festival opera will again be made possible by The Ford Plantation Club, which sponsored the 2014 Festival opera, “Don Giovanni.” “Carmen,” one of Bizet’s most popular operas, boasts a sensationally juicy plot and many memorable, widely recognized songs. Savannah audiences will be treated to a slightly abridged two-hour version of the 19th century French opera presented with a small musical ensemble. The 2015 Festival opera tells the story of a naïve soldier, Don Jose, who is seduced by the beautiful gypsy, Carmen.

The talented trio who ensured the success of “Don Giovanni” in 2014 is returning to Savannah in 2015, and Zouves, VOICE Festival Executive Director, is confident the production will be well-received.

“The talent and expertise that Edwin Cahill brings to directing our operas combined with the excellence of our conductor, Andrew Bisantz, and our pianist, Christopher Cano, means that Savannah audiences will once again be thrilled by a unique operatic experience in August,” she said.

The cast includes Metropolitan opera artists in the leading roles, including Jennifer Johnson Cano as Carmen, Marco Nistico as Escamillo, Sam Levine as Don Jose and Matthew Anchel as Zuniga. Festival favorite artists who enchanted audiences in 2013 and 2014 return to star in Carmen with Meechot Marrero as Frasquita and Phoenix Gayles as Micaela.

Festival’s Camp VOICE Showcase gives audiences a sneak peek at tomorrow’s stars. A concert comprised of Savannah’s most talented youth, ages 15-19, lets them shine after spending a week singing and learning from Milnes and Jorge Parodi, a vocal coach and Director of College Preparatory Division of the Juilliard School. The event is at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 10 at the Westin’s ballroom.

Jennifer Johnson Cano, the leading lady of SVF’s “Carmen,” will lead an Artist in Residence Master Class at 1 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 13 in the ballroom. As she works with studio artists in a public format, she’ll share her experiences as a professional.

The VOICE Experience’s audition project from last season morphs this summer into a fun evening of “How did I do?” During the “Opera Idol – Mission: Audition,” event sponsored by The Salt Table. SVF singers perform in a mock audition for directors of professional opera companies. What will they have to say? And who will be chosen as a favorite? We let the audience decide at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 13 at Savannah’s Christ Church.

Another master class, “Opera as Drama,” will proceed under director Fabrizio Melano, who has worked with legendary artists including Callas and Pavarotti. During the workshop – at 4 p.m. Friday, Aug. 14 at the Westin in Ballroom B – Melano will share his dramatic insights and focus on the text of opera and how it impacts the music.

Before its world premiere this Halloween eve, Oct 30, Voice Society members only will be the first to hear the famous ghost, Alice Ryley, come to life in a new operatic work. This uniquely Savannah piece was commissioned by the Milnes VOICE Programs and written by Michael Ching. The Salon Series: New Ghost Opera, “Alice Ryley” Preview – hosted and sponsored by St. John’s Episcopal Church – also will feature an

elegant wine reception, enabling attendees to meet the artists from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 14 at the Green Meldrim House. This exclusive performance is another compelling reason to join the Voice Society.

During Saturday's Studio Showcase I: "Concerta Lirica" from 1-2:30 p.m. on Aug. 15, the Milnes VOICE Studio artists will present a flavor of the Mediterranean in the Westin's ballroom with Spanish and Italian music. It will be followed by Studio Showcase II: "Scenes & Songs" at 4 p.m., also in the ballroom.

After two weeks of beautiful high notes, exciting performances and a few tears of joy, the festival will close its public performances with an electric final concert, "Festival Finale: Divas & Divos." The performance, sponsored by the Italian Society of Savannah, will amaze guests at 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 16 at Christ Church.

Fans who just aren't quite ready to say goodbye to this year's festival are invited to attend the Opera Gala Dinner, immediately following the finale, at 6 p.m. in the Westin's ballroom. After two weeks of emotional performances, dinner guests can relax, mingle with the 2015 festival artists and enjoy a sumptuous meal. Proceeds benefit the VOICE programs.

Some festival events will be free with other events offering tickets from \$25-\$145. Tickets go on sale to the general public on May 3 2015 and special packages for 2015 begin at \$175 for the *Festival Five Package* to the *Friends of the Festival Package* for \$1,000 which allows patrons to get up close and personal with the making of an artist. Zouves said "We decided to introduce this opportunity which not only gives automatic access to every Festival event and dinner but also includes the exclusive invitation to observe the Milnes VOICE Studio lessons and coaching. This allows people to experience the process with us as they follow the unique growth of artists. This process is what makes us unique as a Festival, so we wanted to share it with our audience".

To join the VOICE Society, buy tickets for the 2015 Savannah VOICE Festival or for more information about the Savannah VOICE Festival, visit [www.savannahvoicefestival.org](http://www.savannahvoicefestival.org), email [info@savannahvoicefestival.org](mailto:info@savannahvoicefestival.org) or call 855.76.OPERA.

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### Editor's note

**Savannah VOICE Festival** is a nonprofit arts organization founded in 2013 that brings classical vocal excellence to the Savannah area through a two-week celebration of concerts, events and educational presentations during the month of August and throughout the year. Focusing on arts awareness and audience development in the performing arts, it offers music from opera, musical theatre and popular song.

**VOICEexperience Foundation** is an educational nonprofit partner organization to the festival, helping young artists pursue their careers in the performing arts. It provides crucial outreaches to the communities it serves and perpetuates excellence in the art of singing with its educational programs.

Both organizations were founded by opera legend Sherrill Milnes and soprano Maria Zouves. They work together to serve the community by providing the highest level of education and quality performances by talented artists for all to enjoy.

For more information, please visit [www.savannahvoicesfestival.org](http://www.savannahvoicesfestival.org), [www.voicexperiencefoundation.com](http://www.voicexperiencefoundation.com) or call 855.76.OPERA.

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