

SAVANNAH TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL OPERA WEEK

WITH PREMIER OF NEW AMERICAN OPERA

- INTERNATIONAL OPERA STAR RETURNS TO THE STAGE

SAVANNAH, GA – September 22, 2015 To celebrate National Opera Week, which runs from Oct. 23-Nov. 2, the Savannah Voice Festival has teamed up with several area nonprofits, musical ensembles and businesses to commemorate the occasion with some unforgettable performances.

Undoubtedly, the most sensational addition to the event line-up is the staging of a contemporary opera performed and sung in the English language, specially commissioned by the Savannah Voice Festival and VOICEexperience, which will see the return to the stage of world-renowned baritone and SVF co-founder Sherrill Milnes as “ghost tour guide” in his celebratory 80th birthday year and 50th anniversary of his debut at the Metropolitan Opera.

Alice Ryley will debut during Halloween weekend, which is fitting given the opera’s deliverance of a woeful ghost story peppered with murder, passion and history. On Oct. 30 at 4 and 6 p.m., Milnes’ legendary speaking voice will lend the already-stellar production a dramatically rich quality, conveying the kind of emotion and excitement that keeps audiences riveted.

The show, which will premiere at Savannah’s historic Charles H. Morris Center, centers on the tragic story of Alice Ryley, an Irish indentured servant in the 1700s who, along with her lover, is accused of killing her master. The production begins with a tongue in cheek introduction by Milnes, playing the part of tour guide and inviting the audience to climb aboard the touring trolley. It then travels back in time to the early days of Savannah when General Oglethorpe founded Georgia as a colony to protect the interests of the British against Spanish Catholics in Florida. Setting an ominous and foreboding tone, the opera intertwines beautiful moments with haunting melodies to take form as a musical journey through the history of Savannah while telling the story of one of its most famous ghosts who is believed by many to still haunt Wright Square, searching for the child she birthed while waiting her execution.

The opera was penned by American composer and librettist, Michael Ching, and was inspired by the book, *Historic Haunts of Savannah*, by Savannah-based authors Michael Harris and Linda Sickler. In addition to Milnes, the show features several well-known and celebrated VOICE Festival Artists, including Jessica Best, Ashley Dannewitz, Ann Louise Glasser, James Wright and Cody Austin. Ching will conduct a chamber orchestra featuring members of Velvet Caravan and the ensemble will feature members of the Savannah Philharmonic Chorus. Savannah VOICE Festival co-founder Maria Zouves, Milnes’ wife and operatic soprano, will direct the production along with Joachim Schamberger, who was also an operatic tenor. “Joachim & I bring a sensitivity of a singer to the direction and I as a woman and mother, felt I could bring Alice’s emotion to the surface in a very personal way.” states Zouves, “we make a great team and his virtual set design was a big part

of our success in our past collaboration with Savannah Music Festival and “Suor Angelica/Gianni Schicchi”. Maria continues, “the ghostly theme of this melodic work lends itself to projected images in the Morris Center. It will be both approachable and ethereal.”

Ching commented “Like Savannah, *Alice Ryley* has many layers: it is an accessible and enjoyable 55 minute performance which is very emotional. The tragedy of this young Irish woman, her lover and her baby is extremely moving. It also captures the political and socio-economic pressures of the early years of Savannah’s history and the time I have spent in Savannah and the insights I have been privileged to share with the authors of *Historic Haunts of Savannah* and the VOICE Festival founders and faculty has been invaluable. Savannah deserves to have this great vocal tradition -- which gives a platform to emerging talents in the singers -- and we are committed to keep writing and performing opera to honor this unique historical city. We hope that our Alice Ryley opera becomes an enduring part of Savannah culture.”

The production uniquely pays tribute to its hometown roots in many ways – it’s based on a book written by Savannah authors; it’ll premiere at a historic local venue; and it incorporates the talent and expertise of many area singers who, thanks to the Savannah VOICE Festival, have become part of the opera fabric of the city’s offerings. Adding to the production’s explosion of talent, the chorus will be comprised of a half-dozen members of the Savannah Philharmonic Chorus and Milnes’ cooperation on the project is an extraordinary artistic touch.

“Few cities are able to lay claim to a world-renowned operatic talent, but as a result of the trails blazed by the Savannah VOICE Festival, our community can proudly demonstrate its ties to Sherrill Milnes and his VOICEexperience organization. His willingness to direct and participate in area productions and events throughout the year – in addition to his own festival every August which is now in its fourth year – is an incredible honor for the Savannah arts community and a big draw for opera supporters and music lovers from the world over,” Visit Savannah President Joe Marinelli said. “The *Alice Ryley* debut is a very big deal for Savannah and a great way to pay homage to our friend, Sherrill Milnes and his illustrious career.”

The World Premier will offer two shows, 4 and 6 p.m. followed by a talkback after each performance with the cast, on Friday, Oct. 30 at The Charles H. Morris Center at Trustees Garden, 10 E. Broad St. in Savannah. Refreshments are available for purchase at the door. Tickets are currently available at a discounted price of \$47 to VOICE Society members only by calling 855-76-OPERA or by emailing patronservices@savannahvoicefestival.org. General admission tickets, \$53 each, will go on sale Oct. 1.

For more information on “Historic Haunts of Savannah,” the book that serves as the basis and inspiration for “Alice Ryley, visit www.facebook.com/historichauntsofsavannah.

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Editor’s Notes

National Opera Week 2015 takes place from **October 23 – November 2** during which organizations and individuals throughout North America will lend their voices to a powerful chorus, demonstrating the strength and vitality of our art form today.

Savannah VOICE Festival is a new 501 (c) 3 tax exempt non-profit arts organization in the state of Georgia. The Festival 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.



its educational programs.

VOICEexperience Foundation is an educational non-profit 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

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. Donations to both organizations are tax-deductible.

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