

SAVANNAH VOICE FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FOURTH SEASON

SAVANNAH, GA, MAY 20, 2016 – In keeping with its 2016 theme, the “Summer of Romance,” the Savannah VOICE festival flirted with fans during the May 17 “Prelude to the Festival” concert, teasing them with just enough information about the coming season to entice and enthrall.

The 90-minute concert – which was directed by SVF co-founder Maria Zouves and featured singers Carlton Moe, Shana Grossman, Paulo Lapa, Chad Sonka and Savannah’s own budding artist – Ashley Roper – drew an impressive crowd to Skidaway Island United Methodist Church. The enthusiastic attendees were treated to inspirational performances designed to provide “sneak peeks” of the thrilling concerts, classes, operas and other events slated to unfold in August. During the prelude concert, the 2016 season lineup was officially unveiled.

The fourth annual festival, which will be staged Aug. 7-21 in and around Savannah, offers music from opera, musical theatre and popular song. Once again, the Savannah VOICE Festival is partnering with the Westin Savannah Harbor for the fourth year. The four-star resort and spa, conveniently situated atop Hutchinson Island on Savannah’s historic riverfront, plans to 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 and II,” a showcase, free masterclasses and two of the festival’s highly anticipated three operas.

The yearly vocal celebration with over 100 artists gets under way at 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 7 with the first opera, Charles Gounod’s “Roméo et Juliette” at Asbury Memorial Theatre, located at 1008 Henry St. in downtown Savannah. The performance, sponsored by Mrs. Helen Downing, will be directed by the internationally acclaimed Fabrizio Melano and Argentine conductor Jorge Parodi. Meechot Marrero and Santiago Ballerini return in the title roles, and the opera will be sung in French with supertitles projected above the stage.

On Monday, Aug. 8 in the Westin ballroom, Melano will lead a master class from 1-3 p.m., sharing his expertise and dramatic insights. An established figure on the international opera scene, he has worked with renowned houses around the world for over 40 years.

Also on Aug. 8, “Death, by Aria, Parts I and II” will provide an up-close and personal introduction to festival artists. In addition to those featured in the aforementioned “Prelude” concert and “Roméo et Juliette,” the 2016 SVF will showcase the talents of Festival favorites including Jessica Ann Best, Ashley Dannewitz, Tiago Matos, Scott Russell, Kristen Schwecke and James Wright. New talent being introduced to Savannah includes Jennifer Lindsay, Megan Cleaveland Michael Colman Staged in a casual café setting, attendees will enjoy opera arias, musical theatre and song in the Westin’s ballroom. The evening, sponsored by Jan and Sam Durham, will afford guests the chance to meet VOICE studio artists who are beginning their journeys of self-discovery during the two week intensive training during the Festival.

At 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 9, SVF fans who missed the first performance of “Roméo et Juliette” will be thrilled with a second opportunity to catch the elegant opera. The classic love story will again unfold within the stunning sanctuary of Asbury Memorial Theatre.

On Wednesday, Aug. 10 in the Westin ballroom, legendary baritone Sherrill Milnes – who co-founded the Savannah VOICE Festival along with his wife, Zouves – will conduct the first of five free master classes, during which he will share the process of exceptional singing with audiences while working with the 2016 artists. The other master classes, which are free and open to the public, are Friday, Aug. 12; Saturday, Aug. 13; Monday, Aug. 15; and Friday, Aug. 19. Each one runs from 1-3 p.m. in the Westin ballroom, except for the Aug. 19 class, which will be conducted from 1-3 p.m. in Armstrong State University’s Fine Arts Auditorium. These masterclasses and other extensive outreach and education that SVF undertake in the community are sponsored by Savannah Friends of Music, and in part by Gulfstream Aerospace, Savannah Harbor Foundation and Schneider Logistics

Roméo tenor Ballerini, accompanied by pianist Justina Lee, will wow audiences with a recital titled “From Argentina, with Love” from 6:30-8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 11. The performance, sponsored by Middy Larson, will be held at St. John’s Episcopal Church, located at 1 Macon St. in Savannah.

On Friday, Aug. 12, the Salon Series: “Opera in the Baroque” will include a concert and opportunities for attendees to meet the artists during an elegant champagne reception. The event, which runs from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Green Meldrim House, will feature early music by composers such as Handel and Purcell – a show designed to take the audience back to where it all began. It is sponsored by St. John’s Episcopal Church, is exclusive to VOICE Society members. 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. VOICE Society membership helps to support the SVF educational and outreach programs in the community.

The American Music Concert: Give My Regards to Broadway is slated for 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 13 at Savannah’s First Presbyterian Church on Washington Avenue. This festival favorite, sponsored by The Salt Table, offers artists a platform for presenting a review of some of American musical theatre’s most beloved moments.

Back for a fourth season, Savannah’s own Timothy Hall and this season’s artists present VOICES in Sacred Song at 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 14 at Savannah’s First Presbyterian Church. The collaboration, sponsored by Katie and Les Anderson, will feature music from oratorio, liturgical music and inspirational song.

The SVF’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, allows them to shine after spending a week singing and learning from the Milnes VOICE Studio experts and instructors. The event, sponsored by Marianne and T. Mills Fleming, is at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 15 in the Westin’s ballroom.

The VOICE Festival’s 2016 centerpiece event, a specially commissioned Savannah-centric opera that combines thrilling local lore with hauntingly beautiful melodies, will be staged twice on Tuesday, Aug. 16. Michael Ching’s “Alice Ryley – A Savannah VOICE Story” first debuted in October 2015 to sold-out hometown audiences. Fans’ overwhelmingly positive reception of the work, which was inspired by the book “Historic Haunts of Savannah” by Savannah-based authors Michael Harris and Linda Sickler, led SVF organizers to designate it as this season’s crown jewel.

The first 55-minute performance is set for 5:30 p.m. in the Westin ballroom. The evening's second event begins at the Westin at 6:30 p.m. with a wine reception and will be served before the opera is performed with a chamber ensemble and the composer conducting "Alice Ryley". Reservations for the Festival Opera Gala Dinner may only be made in advance and seating is limited.

"Mission: Audition," an offshoot of VOICE Experience's audition project, returns to Savannah's Christ Church at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 17 after proving immensely popular last year. SVF singers perform in a mock audition for professional opera company directors, who will share the thoughts that run through their minds during auditions.

On Thursday, Aug. 18, the VOICES Around the World concert will take audience members on a journey around the world from European art songs to South American tango, as festival artists share their favorite international songs. The performance, sponsored by Toby Hollenberg, runs from 6:30-8 p.m. at Savannah's Christ Church on Johnson Square.

The Salon Series continues at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 19 with "Goodnight, My Love – Lullabies and Cradle Songs." It will include a concert and an opportunity for attendees to meet the artists during another champagne reception ending the working week with a soothing and intimate evening. The event, which will be held at the Green Meldrim House, is sponsored by St. John's Episcopal Church and is open to VOICE Society members.

The VOICE Studio artists will dazzle the region's classical music lovers on Saturday, Aug. 20 with their first opera production, Mozart's "The Magic Flute" - Die Zauberflöte. Attendees are invited to a studio production of this magical timeless piece, which will be sung in German with English dialogue and supertitles. The opera, directed by Joachim Schamberger, is sponsored by Arlene and Allan Ratner. The curtain rises at 5:30 p.m. in the Westin's ballroom.

Zouves said "The 45 students who are here to learn have the opportunity to experience a full operatic role. This lighthearted and often dramatic opera lends itself to emerging artists who are discovering performing in a full opera for the first time."

The final day of the 2016 Savannah VOICE Festival will leave a lasting impression on audiences with two unforgettable events. At 1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 21, guests are invited to enjoy an afternoon of music as the Milnes VOICE Studio

artists present an *Opera Scenes and Songs Showcase* in the Westin ballroom.

Later that evening, the season will conclude with a flourish thanks to a stellar festival finale: “A Summer of Romance.” The show, which starts at 6:30 p.m. at the Charles H. Morris Center on Broad Street, will feature the beautiful voices of the Festival as they come together to coming to illustrate and share some of music’s most romantic and dramatic moments. This crescendo will leave fans counting the days until the 2017 festival.

Some festival events will be free with other individual events offering tickets from \$25-\$145. Tickets are now on sale to the general public and special packages for 2016 season are available. For dedicated Festival lovers these packages offer diverse and exciting options:

- **Festival Five Package:** \$195

This includes five ticketed, non-member events of the purchaser’s choice, but does not include the Salon Series, Opera Gala Dinner or any VOICE Society events.

- **Non-Member Festival Pass:** \$625 (\$710 value)

Purchasers may enjoy all 15 ticketed, non-member events, including one “Roméo et Juliette” performance (ticket holder’s choice) and both “Alice Ryley” performances, including dinner. It does not include Salon Series or any VOICE Society Event

- **Voice Society Festival Pass:** \$775 (\$860 value)

This package includes all SVF events, one “Roméo et Juliette” performance, Voice Society events and the “Alice Ryley” dinner show.

- **Friend of the Festival Package:** \$1,000

This full-access package gives the purchaser an up-close glimpse of what goes into making an artist. This option comes with a special, non-transferable all-access badge, early and premium seating, tickets for all events, one “Roméo et Juliette” performance, Both “Alice Ryley” performances and Gala Dinner, Voice Society events, Milnes VOICE Studio auditing and observation in the Westin rehearsal spaces (auditing window times will be pre-arranged in the Festival Schedule).

As the Savannah VOICE Festival is a nonprofit, a maximum of \$140 of the total amount of tickets purchased is tax deductible.

Other than seating preferences given to package purchasers, all tickets are general admission. Tickets will be at Will Call at door of events unless otherwise requested. At each event, the doors open 30 minutes prior to show time for the general public and 40 minutes prior for all VOICE Society members and all-access badge holders with proper ID. The show times, venues and concerts are subject to change. All pricing is per person and includes 7 percent sales tax. Military, student and child discounts are any ticket for \$15 at the door with valid ID.

To join the VOICE Society, buy tickets for the 2016 Savannah VOICE Festival or for more information about the Savannah VOICE Festival, visit www.savannahvoicefestival.org, email patronservices@savannahvoicefestival.org or call 855-76-OPERA (67372).

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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.

VOICExperience Foundation is the festival's educational, nonprofit partner organization, 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 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.