

**SAVANNAH VOICE FESTIVAL SOLIDIFIES ITS SAVANNAH OPERA BRAND**

**SAVANNAH, GA – JULY 16, 2018 –** As the Savannah VOICE Festival (SVF) approaches its sixth season, the organization announces the launch of The Savannah Opera Company (SOC) as a new brand in the Milnes VOICE Programs. This new brand will be a growing part of the two non-profit organizations that have been producing classical vocal music in Savannah, through the Savannah VOICE Festival and the VOICExperience Foundation.  As a new entity, the Savannah Opera Company will continue the work of the SVF in staging high quality productions in the Hostess City~~.~~ This year’s season includes four operas that support the SVF 2018 theme, “Stories Great and Small". They range from classic tragedy to contemporary comedies: Verdi’s *La Traviata*, Humperdink’s *Hansel and Gretel*, Menotti’s *The Telephone*and SVF’s own composer-in-residence, Michael Ching’s *Speed Dating Tonight*.

Maria Zouves - Founder and Executive Director of The Savannah VOICE Festival said, “We serve so many levels of artists and audiences and have lots of layers to our programs: intensives, master classes, outreaches, concerts – the list is varied and eclectic. But over the last six years we have consistently presented a wide variety of operas, not just alone, but through past partnerships with Savannah Philharmonic and the Savannah Music Festival. We even have our own Composer in Residence, Michael Ching, who has written two Savannah centric operas: *Alice Ryley*and *Anna Hunter*. There aren’t many opera organizations that can say all that just five years in!  Using mostly our own Milnes VOICE Program graduates as our main stage artists, we are now at the point where our operatic output is at the same level as a small regional opera company.  The time was right for us to put a proper ‘label’ on what we offer – thus ‘Savannah Opera’ emerged.”’ Zouves explains, “The easiest way to think of it is that we have many products on the shelf in our musical store. This is not a new product for us, just a new label. We are proud to launch the Savannah Opera Company not as its own 501(c)(3), but as a brand produced by the Savannah VOICE Festival. We are the operatic resource for the Savannah area and this is a great next step. Whatever you call us, we will continue to offer operas, appropriately scaled to the size of this city, with the highest caliber of artists. Naming it just made sense.”

When asked if it could become its own entity Zouves replied, “We are varied enough. Having a title to the offerings is great, but there is no need to do more creating this brand in the organization. Savannah VOICE Festival needed to grow out of VOICExperience, but Savannah Opera, at least at this point, sits perfectly as a production of the Festival.” If anyone wants to support the operatic project, they can do so through the Savannah VOICE Festival, which produces the operas.”

“This formula is not unusual” explains Zouves, who before coming to Savannah, was a Vice President at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in Tampa, Florida. “In the Straz Center, where I worked with the Opera Tampa initiatives, it was clear that Opera Tampa was part of the Center, not its own entity. That’s how it was able to produce at such a high level and continue to grow.”

Zouves, Milnes and the SVF Board are confident that people in Savannah will be proud to say they now have their own opera company, even if only by nomenclature.

“Savannah deserves an opera company.” explains Sherrill Milnes, artistic director and namesake of the programs. “It’s an historic city in need of this historic art form. Through the past years, people have come from all over to see these operas in August and the audiences keep growing – I can see this taking off in a very healthy and collaborative way in the next decade of the Festival’s strategic planning.”

In the sixth annual festival, themed “Stories Great & Small,” events will be staged between Aug. 4-26, in and around Savannah. To mark the launch of Savannah Opera, SVF and the VOICExperience programs will stage four very different operas in very creative ways.

As the jewel in the crown of the Festival and the new Savannah Opera Company, Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*, will be presented at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 22 and Saturday, Aug. 25 at the Charles H. Morris Center, 10 E. Broad St, with English supertitles. This timeless story is staged by Metropolitan Opera’s renowned director Fabrizio Melano in its traditional Parisian setting and musically led by last season’s Barber of Seville conductor, Jorge Parodi. International artists and VOICE Alumni Micaëla Oeste, Santiago Ballerini, Jessica Ann Best, along with SVF favorite Marco Nistico, will come together to bring this gorgeous tragedy to life. This year's projection sets are designed once again by Joachim Schamberger and sponsored by Marilyn and Elliott Bardsley. Mrs. Helen Downing once again is sponsoring the SVF's main stage production.

Earlier in the Festival, at 6 and 8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 9 at the Davenport House Kennedy Pharmacy, 324 E. State St., SVF will present Gian Carlo Menotti’s comedic one-act opera, *The Telephone,*performed in English. This opera tells the story of a young woman obsessed with the new technology of the telephone, so much so that her boyfriend cannot get a word in to propose to her. Festival favorites from last year’s Barber of Seville James Wright and Meechot Marrero star in the opera and guests enjoy pre-opera entertainment with other telephone-related pieces, accompanied by the presentation of Menotti’s one act opera.

Friday, Aug 10that 7pm the work will be presented as a Gala event with a garden supper and wine meet and greet following the performance in the Kennedy Pharmacy. This is sponsored by Dr. & Mrs. Wesley Krulic and in partnership with the Davenport House Museum.

What began as a collection of songs by brother and sister Engelbert Humperdinck and Adelheid Wette is now one of the most performed children’s operas in the world. SVF will present *Hansel and Gretel*, in the English language, at 12:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 17 at the Yamacraw Center for the Performing Arts, 349 W. Jones St. This performance, which will have Savannah-Chatham County School as production collaborators as part of the SVF’s Education and Outreach initiative, will take the audience along for a journey through the forest as this fairy tale is brought to life with beautiful music in this family-friendly show presented in collaboration with Esther F. Garrison School students. The opera will be performed in English with a live orchestral ensemble. SVF will provide a second opportunity for audiences to attend *Hansel and Gretel*at 7 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 18 also at the Yamacraw Center for the Performing Arts. This event is in collaboration with the Chatham County Schools and sponsored by the Teutonic Council.

Michael Ching’s popular *Speed Dating Tonight*will be performed in modern English with supertitles at 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 17 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 19 at the Charles H. Morris Center, 10 E. Broad St. This contemporary opera is one of the most performed new operas in the nation and introduces people to all the characters you might run into at any dating scenario. From the exercise maniac, the hurt ex, the reclusive cat lady, the technology addict and the bartender, daters will take you on a virtual tour around Savannah as they meet up in well-known local backdrops for this quirky, funny, and surprisingly emotional production.  Chosen by the composer for this comic role, Zouves and Milnes’ son, baritone Theo Milnes, will make his operatic debut as the busboy character in this relevant opera.

Ticket buyers now have the option to become subscribers of the Savannah Opera season, choosing from the various performances of each opera, and opting for premium or general seating. The Savannah Opera Subscription saves patrons an average of 15% per performance and allows them to experience the art form of opera throughout the Festival.

Individual tickets for the operas start at $22 each and discounted Student, Child and Military tickets will be available at the door for $10.To purchase tickets or learn more about the Savannah Opera and the sixth Annual Savannah VOICE Festival, please visit [www.SavannahVOICEFestival.org](http://www.SavannahVOICEFestival.org) or call 855-76-OPERA.

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**Editor’s Notes**

**Savannah VOICE Festival** is a 501(c) 3 tax exempt nonprofit 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. Donations are tax-deductible.

**VOICExperience Foundation** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to pass on the traditions of great singing and develop new audiences for opera. Under the umbrella of The Sherrill Milnes VOICE Programs, VOICExperience continues its dedication to the quality, integrity and perpetuation of the vocal arts through life-changing intensives, performances, and community-enriching outreach events in New York, Georgia (with its sister organization, the Savannah VOICE Festival), Florida and Illinois. For more information, please visit [www.VOICExperienceFoundation.org](http://www.VOICExperienceFoundation.org).

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