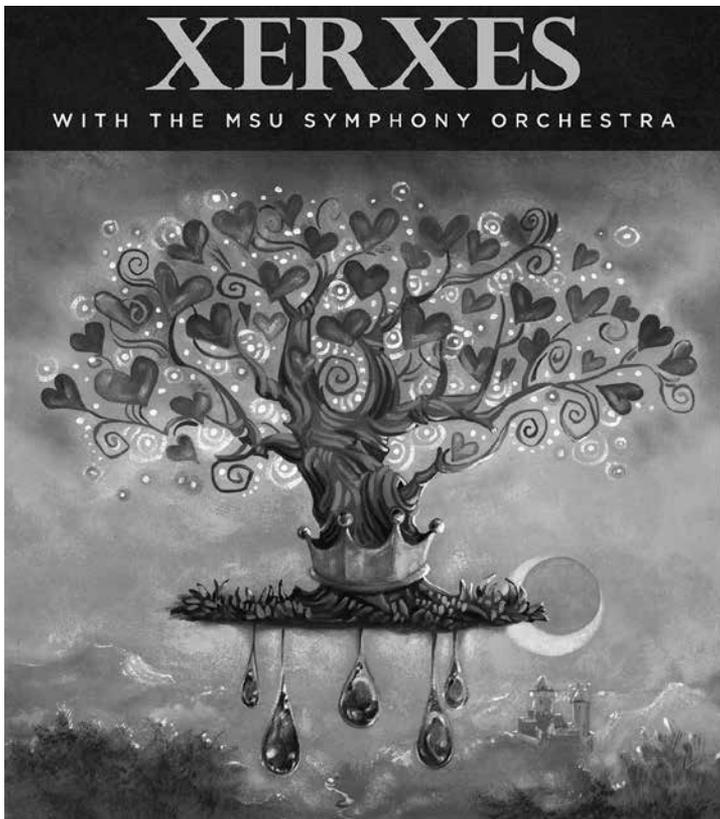


# MSU Opera Theatre

PRESENTS:



7:30 pm, Wednesday, March 25, 2015

8:00 pm, Friday, March 27, 2015

8:00 pm, Saturday, March 28, 2015

3:00 pm, Sunday, March 29, 2015

Fairchild Theatre, MSU Auditorium Building

The 2014-2015 MSU Opera Theatre season  
is generously supported by

**The Worthington Family Foundation**

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

College of Music

## A Note from the Director

*Xerxes* (or *Serse*, as it is known in Italian) is MSU Opera Theatre's first foray into the world of Baroque opera. Commissioned in 1737 by The King's Theatre, London, the first production was a complete failure. Handel was well known for his opera seria style of music drama, usually a string of long da capo arias strung together by recitative, with no comic elements. A da capo aria is in ABA form, with the return of the A usually elaborately ornamented by the singer. The now-famous musicologist Charles Burney wrote: "I have not been able to discover the author of the words of this drama: but it is one of the worst Handel ever set to Music: for besides feeble writing, there is a mixture of tragic-comedy and buffoonery in it, which Apostolo Zeno and Metastasio had banished from serious opera." Despite Mr. Burney's scorn, it is the mixture of tragedy and comedy that makes *Serse* so popular with audiences today. It's really a comedy of manners and social status, as well as a story of familial jealousy that ends in a somewhat contrived happy ending.

Because the castrati were highly in vogue in Handel's day, the title role was assigned to Gaetano Majorano, a "mezzo-soprano castrato." Majorano apparently was considered a fine singer, although notorious in his onstage behavior, openly mocking colleagues as they sang and conversing with the audience in the boxes. The other "pants" roles were taken by women, a tradition that continues today. We have one soprano and one mezzo-soprano sharing the role of *Serse*. Although Handel lists the role of Amastre as a "dark soprano," it is actually the lowest of the female singing roles. The only men actually playing men are Ariodate, the general, and Elviro, the servant. Both serve as comic foils very much in the *opera buffa* style.

This style of singing presents many challenges to singers, especially students encountering it for the first time. We are delighted to have Maestro Daniel Beckwith back with us for the third time. He

has crafted the ornaments to suit each student's strength as to range and flexibility. He has also paid close attention to the nature of the character in crafting the musical ornamentation, as well as tempi and articulation. He also has been working intensely with the orchestra on accurate period playing style. We are so lucky to have him! We are also very happy to welcome Kevin Payne, playing the theorbo (a Baroque lute) in the orchestra and Martha Ruskai for hair and makeup. You can read their very impressive bios in the program.

In choosing a concept for the production, the immensely popular *Downton Abbey* came to mind. That period of *Titanic*/pre WWI was probably the last time in the west where class was defined so strictly. Arsamene, the lover of Romilda, remonstrates with King *Serse* that Romilda is not high-enough born to be the wife of a king, and it is a legitimate point. There is also an upstairs/downstairs component of the opera with the servant Elviro that lends itself well to that period.

Our 2015-2016 season will be an exciting trip around the world, beginning in Italy with Robert Nelson's *A Room with a View*. Many of you will remember the famous Merchant-Ivory film featuring the music of Puccini. The opera score is lush and reminiscent of early 20th century Italian music, and is a wonderful romantic comedy about expatriate Brits in Italy. In the spring, we will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of our collaboration with Chinese conservatories. With the China Conservatory from Beijing, we will be presenting a double bill of a Chinese one-act, *The Savage Land* along with a rollicking revue of the music of Leonard Bernstein. These two shows will have mixed casts of Chinese and MSU students, and will be performed both in Beijing and on our East Lansing campus.

## Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Serse (Xerxes), Emperor of Persia                                    | Katie Bethel*<br>Katharine Nunn**          |
| Arsamene, his brother  | Anne Todey*<br>Jessica Glaser**            |
| Elviro, Arsamene's servant   | Andrew Breuninger*<br>Tyler Martin**       |
| Romilda, a local noblewoman  | Schyler Sheltroun*<br>Alina Tamborini**    |
| Atalanta, her sister   | Leah Bryzski*<br>Sydney Rostar**           |
| Amastre, jilted fiancée of Serse                                     | Katherine deYoung*<br>Rachel Shaughnessy** |
| Ariodate, general of Serse's army,<br>father of Romilda and Atalanta | Zaikuan Song*<br>Tyler Frisbie**           |

### **Ensemble:**

|                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| David Anderson (butler) | Cody Davis   |
| Keane Garcelon          | Jay Gummert  |
| Kalli Allen             | Jung-An Chou |
| Anna Doering            | Ariel Doucet |
| Suzanna Feldkamp        | Annika Pell  |
| Bailey Shepard          |              |

Conductor  
**Daniel Beckwith\*\*\***

Stage Director  
**Melanie Helton**

\*Friday, March 27 & Sunday, March 29

\*\*Wednesday, March 25 & Saturday, March 28

\*\*\*Guest Artist

## Staff for MSU Opera Theatrerers

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Music Director                              | Daniel Beckwith                                   |
| Producer                                    | Melanie Helton                                    |
| Scenic Design                               | Kirk Domer  |
| Set Construction                            | Mark R. Willoughby                                |
| Lighting Design                             | Brent Wrobel*                                     |
| Costume Design                              | Cathy McKenzie*                                   |
| Hair and Makeup Design                      | Martha Ruskai*                                    |
| Makeup and Wig Assistants                   | Jenna Buck, Gedeane Graham,<br>Melissa Mercieca   |
| Production Stage Manager                    | Ashley Ault                                       |
| Technical Director                          | Mark Willoughby                                   |
| Musical Preparation                         | Daniel Beckwith*, Elden Little                    |
| Assistant to the Music Director             | Gretchen Renshaw                                  |
| Logo artist                                 | Barbara Hranilovich                               |
| Costume Mistress                            | Cathy McKenzie                                    |
| Chorus Master                               | Holly Lewis                                       |
| Assistant Stage Manager                     | Sarah Reed  |
| Head Electrician/Light Board Operator       | Michael Wright                                    |
| Head Carpenter                              | Dustin Peiffer                                    |
| Head Flyman                                 | Chris Guardiola                                   |
| Fairchild Theatre Stage Manager             | Ron Fenger  |
| Rehearsal Accompanists                      | Kisun Lee, Yoomin Jung                            |
| MSU College of Music:<br>Recording Services | Jennifer Shangraw, Jon Whiting,<br>Steve Boughton |
| Publicity                                   | Michael Sundermann,<br>Kathleen Adams             |
| Budget Officer                              | Debra Galehouse                                   |
| *Guest artist                               |   |

### **Grateful Acknowledgments**

James Forger, Dean, College of Music  
MSU Vocal Arts Area Faculty:  
Richard Fracker (Chair), Melanie Helton, Harlan Jennings, Peter Lightfoot, Elden Little, Anne Nispel, David Rayl, Jonathan Reed, Sandra Snow  
Kevin Noe, Director of Orchestras, College of Music  
Deborah Moriarty, Chair, Piano Area  
MSU Department of Theatre, Kirk Domer (Chair)  
Wharton Center, Sandy Thomley, Production Manager  
Rebecca Surian, Director of Development, College of Music  
Gregg Bloomfield, Christine Babiak-Smith, Shawn Mahorney, Amy Rivard, College of Music

# The Story

Location: A Stately English Manor, circa 1914

## Act I

The Emperor Serse (Xerxes) is wandering around his new estate when he discovers a magnificent tree. Serse immediately feels at home in the shadow of the familiar branches. His brother, Arsamene, returns from a journey abroad with his servant, Elviro. Arsamene loves the lady of the house, the noblewoman Romilda, and she loves him in return. Arsamene overhears Romilda singing to herself, as does Serse. Little do they realize that she is poking fun at Serse's obsession with trees, noting that he talks to the trees, but they only rustle in return. To Arsamene's chagrin, Serse falls in love with Romilda at first sight and declares that he will take her for a mistress. Arsamene avows that this is not proper, so Serse says he will take her to wife. Arsamene tries to dissuade Serse from this action, saying that a king should marry only a queen on his own level. Serse replies that he is king, so he makes the rules. Serse exits and Romilda and Arsamene swear their fidelity to one another. Romilda's sister Atalanta enters, sneering at her sister's so-called fidelity and making a play for Arsamene, who she secretly desires. Serse approaches Romilda, proposing immediately. She demurs, saying she doesn't aspire to such heights. Arsamene interrupts, saying he is his brother's rival for Romilda. Serse banishes Arsamene, although he will not force him to leave if he agrees to leave Romilda alone. Arsamene leaves, sulking, saying that Serse can enjoy his freedom while he goes to his own death. Romilda continues to shy away from Serse, and he calls her cruel. At his exit, she states again her commitment to fidelity. The scene shifts to a train bench. On it sits Amastre, Serse's Egyptian fiancée. She has been searching for him, assuming that the engagement is still on. However, in order to observe the situation anonymously, she has disguised herself as a man, thinking to find the truth of what's happening by lurking near Serse. As Amastre arrives at the manor, Serse receives a phone call from one of his generals, Ariodate, on the battlefield. Ariodate is the father of Romilda and Atalanta, and phones to report a great victory in the name of the king. As the servants rejoice and praise the king, Serse tells Ariodate that his daughter Romilda will be betrothed to "a husband of a royal line, equal to Serse." Ariodate rejoices, thinking that Serse refers to Arsamene, not himself. The general delights in all of the wonders a royal marriage will secure for him. Serse believes that the victories bode well for his new love life. Amastre is eavesdropping, and is shocked when she hears Serse say that she will be put aside

in favor of Romilda. When Amastre exclaims that Serse is a liar, Serse discovers the eavesdropper, challenging "him." Amastre stumbles through a stupid explanation, and Serse calls "him" a fool, dismissing his unrecognized fiancée and rhapsodizing about how he burns for Romilda. Arsamene enters with a letter for Romilda. Elviro is confused by the entire scenario but takes the letter, promising to deliver it. In their bedrooms, Atalanta and Romilda fight over which of them should have Arsamene. Romilda challenges her to go ahead and try, that Atalanta is vanity indeed and will not be successful. Atalanta says to herself that if love is not enough to snare Arsamene, she will try deceit.

## Act II

Amastre is miserable, having found out that Serse will reject her. Elviro enters, drunk, on his way to sell some flowers and deliver Arsamene's letter to Romilda. Amastre pressures him into telling the story of how Serse came to want Romilda. Amastre is left with no hope and sinks into despair. Atalanta enters and quickly tricks him into allowing her to deliver the letter. As Elviro exits, Serse enters and Atalanta flaunts the letter in front of him. He asks her to read it to him, and she does, but admitting that Arsamene has written professing his love for her. Serse is not sure he believes Atalanta, but it does make him more hopeful of Romilda. Atalanta begs him to wed her to Arsamene, and they will all be happy. She tells Serse that Arsamene will probably not tell the truth, so Serse should not believe him. Serse keeps the letter and shows it to Romilda. Although she feels betrayed, she swears continuing love to Arsamene. Serse has had enough and says that if she scorns him, he will scorn her in return, even though he doesn't know how. Serse exits and Romilda explodes with jealousy. Amastre runs into Elviro, saying that if grief doesn't kill her, her own dagger will. Elviro says that life can be great, with good food and drink. Amastre has decided instead to confront Serse with his treacherous ways. Elviro then meets up with Arsamene and explains to him that he gave the letter to Atalanta. Elviro tells him that Romilda loves the king and is writing him, and Arsamene despairs that she is no longer his. Serse enters happily, having heard the news from Atalanta that Romilda wants him. He tells Arsamene that all is well, and they will both be married on the same day: Serse to Romilda, and Arsamene to Atalanta. Arsamene tells him in no uncertain terms that he wants Romilda and will fight for her. Atalanta returns, and Serse tells her that Arsamene swears he does not love her. He counsels her kindly to stop loving

him, but Atalanta says he is too lovely to give up. Serse is terribly confused by the world of women, asking himself what they really mean when they say “yes” and “no.” Elviro enters, drunker than before, and is frightened by an upcoming storm. He declares that he is afraid of water, but that wine is his friend. Serse and Amastre sing separately of how they have been scorned. Romilda enters and Serse pressures her. Amastre steps in to shield Romilda and is taken by the servants. As Serse exits, Romilda dismisses the servants, thanking the “proud warrior” for saving her. Because Amastre knows the truth, she tells it to Romilda, making them both uncomfortable. Romilda explains to herself that her fidelity will change her pitiful fate.

### Act III

Romilda and Arsamene are arguing over each other’s faithfulness or lack thereof. Atalanta enters, realizing that she has been found out. Romilda is furious over her lies, but realizes that Arsamene is blameless. As the lovers reconcile, Atalanta snidely tells them that she knows how to find another lover. Serse approaches and Arsamene hides. Serse threatens Romilda both emotionally and physically, and she says that whatever happens, she will obey him. Arsamene, overhearing, accuses Romilda of betraying him once and for all. She leaves, sadly, realizing she is caught between king and brother with no solution. Serse once again reminds Ariodate (back from war) that Romilda will have a bridegroom equal to him. He tells Ariodate to go to Romilda’s room and wait for the bridegroom. Again, Ariodate assumes that the bridegroom is Arsamene, and hurries to tell the arguing lovers that Serse has granted their wish to be married. They are quickly wed. Serse bumps into Ariodate, asking him where Romilda is. Ariodate responds, “with her husband.” Serse, confused, repeats the question, and Ariodate responds in the same fashion. Serse erupts in fury, claiming vengeance on everyone. As the household gathers around the ranting Serse, they are stunned by his rampage. He accuses Romilda and Arsamene of treachery, but they turn the tables by saying they had his permission. Finally, Amastre steps forward and reveals herself. She asks Serse if he wants to kill the traitorous one, and he replies yes. She puts her dagger to his throat and says that he himself is the cad who betrayed her. Serse, stunned and overwhelmed, looks at Amastre and realizes what he has done. He begs her forgiveness and promises to love her. Arsamene and Romilda and Serse and Amastre form happy couples, and all is forgiven.

## MSU Symphony Orchestra

Kevin Noe, Director of Orchestras

### Continuo:

Daniel Beckwith, harpsichord

Kevin Payne, theorbo

JinHyun Kim, cello

### Violin I

Hayne Kim\*

Daniela Diaz

Allison Holden

Anna Khalikova

Hsin Ju Yu

### Violin II

Lena Seeger\*

Catalina Barraza

Piaras Kent

Ying-Li Pan

### Viola

Chi-Jui Lee\*

Kyle Krause

Alyssa Moskowitz

### Cello

JinHyun Kim\*

Min Hsuan Chu

### Bass

Matthew Gibson

### Recorder

Jay Gummert

Alex Kindel

### Oboe

Woo Jung Kim\*

Amelia Van Howe

### Bassoon

Hannah Reilly

### Trumpet

Carlot Dorve

Michael Block (Friday performance)

\*denotes principal

## Guest Artists

**Daniel Beckwith**, hailed as one of the most exciting conductors of his generation, has enjoyed an international career that has taken him to The Metropolitan Opera, The New York City Opera, The Lyric Opera of Chicago, The San Francisco Opera, and the opera companies of Houston, Fort Worth, Miami, Cincinnati, Cleveland, St. Louis and Utah; The Canadian Opera Company, Calgary Opera, Vancouver Opera; the UK's Glyndebourne Festival and Opera North; Le Grand Théâtre du Genève and The Australian Opera. Mr. Beckwith served as assistant to James Levine for six seasons at the Metropolitan Opera and was given his conducting debut with Don Giovanni in 1995 after Mr. Levine observed his conducting of a stage rehearsal. On the strength of these performances, Daniel Beckwith was engaged for several important debuts conducting the works of George Frideric Handel, both nationally (Serse, Seattle Opera) and internationally (Rinaldo, Grand Théâtre du Genève, Theodora, The Glyndebourne Festival). A frequent partner with soprano Renée Fleming, they have performed in concert at Carnegie Hall, Spain's Santander Festival and television appearances on Good Morning America, The View and Martha Stewart Living. He has accompanied a "who's who" of important singers, including Benita Valente, Carol Vaness, Nancy Gustafson, Marilyn Horne, Frederica von Stade, Jennifer Larmore, Denyce Graves, Susanne Mentzer, Jerry Hadley, Ben Heppner, Richard Leech, Nathan Gunn and Samuel Ramey.

**Kevin Payne**, theorbo, has been praised for his "graceful" playing by the *Washington Examiner* and is active as a recitalist, accompanist, and continuo player in the New York area. Kevin is a member of Juilliard 415, the Buxtehude Consort, and the Peabody Consort, with whom he recently completed a tour of Taiwan. Recent ensemble work includes performances with the Yale Schola Cantorum, Bard College Opera, Juilliard 415, and Hesperus, and he has worked with noted conductors including William Christie, Monica Huggett, Jordi Savall, and Masaaki Suzuki. Performance venues include Alice Tully Hall and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan. Kevin was chosen to represent the Lute Society of America for their 2011 Emerging

Artist Recital series at the Boston Early Music Festival. Kevin holds both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland, where he studied Renaissance lute with Mark Cudek and theorbo with Richard Stone. Kevin has had additional studies with Ronn McFarlane, and performed in master classes for Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs, and Hopkinson Smith. He is the first lutenist to be accepted to the prestigious Juilliard School, where he is pursuing a Graduate Diploma in Historical Plucked Instruments with Pat O'Brien.

**Martha Ruskai**, wigmaker, makeup artist and designer, began her career working with such legendary singers as Jerome Hines and Dame Joan Sutherland. During her 30-year career she has designed more than 200 productions at more than 25 companies. Career highlights include TV ads for Miller Light Beer; styling properties wigs for the motion picture "Sleeping with the Enemy;" building Bryn Terfel's wig for his U.S. debut; and making her NYC design debut in 2009 with *Tartuffe* at The Pearl Theater. She earned a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and an M.F.A. in Theatre Design from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music. Ms. Ruskai served on the faculty at UNCSA for 23 years and has presented master classes at Indiana University, The Cleveland Institute of Music, UNC-Greensboro, Ohio University and University of Alabama. Ms. Ruskai co-authored *Wig Making and Styling; A Complete Guide for Theatre & Film* with Allison Lowery, published by Focal Press.

## MSU Opera Theatre Graduates

Heather Benson, MM 2015 (student of Melanie Helton), *The Magic Flute*, *La Bohème*, *Così fan tutte*; Jenna Buck, MM 2015 (student of Melanie Helton), *The Magic Flute*; Katie Bethel, BM 2015, (student of Richard Fracker), *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *A Little Night Music*, *La Bohème*, *Xerxes*; Nicholas Kreider, BM 2015 (student of Richard Fracker), *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Weill 2012*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Magic Flute*, *La Bohème*, *Così fan tutte*; Jonathan Oakley, BM 2015 (student of Richard Fracker), *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Weill 2012*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Magic Flute*, *La Bohème*, *Così fan tutte*; David Moul, BM 2015, (student of Richard Fracker), *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *The Magic Flute*, *La Bohème*; Joshua Gronlund, BM 2015 (student of Richard Fracker), *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Weill 2012*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Magic Flute*; Kate Berry, BM2015 (student of Anne Nispel) *The Tales of Hoffmann*; Jeremiah Garrigues-Cortelyou, BM 2015 (student of Harlan Jennings), *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *La Bohème*.

## Student News

MSU had a great run at the National Association of Teachers of Singing auditions, both at the state and regional level. Students who won prizes included Isaac Frishman, Nicholas Kreider, Zaikuan Song, Stephen Martin, Jenna Washburn, Quinn Rulison, Joshua Gronlund, David Moul, Annika Pell and Keane Garcelon (students of Richard Fracker); Jenna Buck, Kate deYoung, Caite Lenahan, Rachel Shaughnessy, Angela Lee, Kyle White, Mary Garner (students of Melanie Helton); and Suzanna Feldkamp and Kara Ann Potter (students of Anne Nispel). Heather Benson (student of Melanie Helton) took second place in the Harold Haugh Light Opera Competition, and Kyle White won the Young Artists Award. Stephen Martin won the Tennessee District MET auditions. Jessica Glaser (student of Peter Lightfoot) was a finalist in the American Choral Directors Association national conducting competition for undergraduates. MSU Opera Theatre's production of *The Magic Flute* won first prize in Division IV of the National Opera Association College Production Competition.

## Alumni News

Johnathan Riesen (MM 2014), student of Richard Fracker, is a young artist at Shreveport Opera, where he just sang Frederick in *The Pirates of Penzance* opposite the Mabel of Sarah Bauer (BM 2008), student of Melanie Helton. Johnathan won the Southern District MET auditions, and received an encouragement award at the Regionals. He will be returning to Chautauqua Opera to sing the role of Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* this summer. Jonathan Palant (DMA 2007), student of Dr. David Rayl, recently led the Dallas Street Choir, a choir of homeless and severely disadvantaged singers, in a standing-room only performance at the Dallas City Performance Hall. Mezzo-soprano, Frederica von Stade was the guest soloist for STREET REQUIEM, a work to remember those who died living on the street. Matthew Scollin (BM 2008), student of Richard Fracker, returns to Glimmerglass Opera after a season at Virginia Opera. He will be an emerging artist with Pittsburgh Opera next season.

## Mark Your Calendars

### MSU Opera Theatre's 2015-2016 Season of Around the World and Back Again!

Robert Nelson and Buck Ross

**A Room with a View**

November 18, 20-22

**Celebrating the 10th Anniversary  
of the MSU-China Exchange**

**The Savage Land/Bernstein Sings America**

March 23, 25-27

## MSU Opera Society Donors 2014 – 2015 Season

MSU Opera Society is the community support organization of the MSU Opera Theatre. We are grateful to our members for their generous contributions.

*The 2014-15 MSU Opera Theatre season is generously supported by the Worthington Family Foundation*

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