

SEATTLE OPERA.

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Seattle Opera joins city-wide Shakespeare Festival

**First-of-its-kind collaboration with ACT Theatre and Seattle
Symphony**

**Seattle Opera presents Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*
February 24-March 10, 2018
McCaw Hall**

SEATTLE—Seattle Opera teams up with both ACT Theatre and Seattle Symphony for the first time to celebrate Shakespeare in a brand-new production of Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*. The story, based on Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, delights in the "skirmish of wits" between fiery Beatrice and bombastic Benedict and their failed resolution to avoid falling in love with each other. Their merry-war-turned-love-story has proven catnip to Hollywood—there are two film versions, one directed by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* writer Joss Whedon, and the other directed by Kenneth Branagh and also starring Emma Thompson, Denzel Washington, Keanu Reeves, and Michael Keaton. Now the story is ready for the Seattle Opera treatment.

"*Beatrice and Benedict* is the perfect introduction of Berlioz's work to Seattle Opera's audiences. Given that Berlioz revered Shakespeare, we have decided to

produce the work in English and have added in some of the dialogue from Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare's elevated language works seamlessly with the music, and the orchestration is brilliant," says Seattle Opera's General Director Aidan Lang. Lang could think of no better way to re-envision this work than with Shakespeare expert John Langs, Artistic Director of ACT Theatre, and Berlioz expert Ludovic Morlot, Music Director of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

Morlot is in the midst of a season that prominently featured Berlioz's work at Seattle Symphony Orchestra. (Morlot and Berlioz also share the same birthday.) In addition to reincorporating the subplot of Don John's dark plans to ruin Hero and Claudio's wedding, three characters, and dialogue from the original play, the creative team has also added some music from Berlioz's other works to accompany the added scenes. Seattle Opera's *Beatrice and Berlioz* includes music from *La damnation de Faust*, *Benvenuto Cellini*, and *L'enfance du Christ*.

Morlot admits he was reluctant to mess with the original until he learned that Berlioz premiered the work in Germany, a production that he conducted, and on its second outing approved a German translation. Berlioz was very much a practical working artist; he made changes for the audience at hand. "Then I became interested," Morlot says. "John Langs is an expert, and it makes sense for us to do what we can, so Seattle could understand the work and embrace it." Morlot is also looking forward to a new experience with his own orchestra. Members of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra always play for Seattle Opera at McCaw Hall, but this will be Morlot's first time conducting them for Seattle Opera.

Given these changes, this *Beatrice and Benedict* production truly is one of a kind. John Langs, ACT's Artistic Director and stage director for this production says, "It's never been done before. It's unique to both theater and opera audiences. We're bringing our expertise together to create something new. It's been a grand adventure." Langs will bring with him some of Seattle's most celebrated theater actors for the non-singing roles of Leonato, Don John, Borachio, Messenger, Friar

Francis, and Margaret. Among ACT Theatre's performers are Christine Marie Brown, Avery Clark, Marvin Grays, Brandon O'Neill, and Chip Sherman.

The singing cast includes several singers staying on from their successful performances of *Così fan tutte*, including Hanna Hipp, Laura Tatulescu, Craig Verm, and Kevin Burdette. In the opening cast, Daniela Mack and Alek Shrader, who are married in real life, will be playing the part of a couple resisting love and then falling for it.

Seattle Opera, ACT Theatre, and Seattle Symphony are among the nearly two dozen Seattle-area arts organizations to be taking part in the Seattle Shakespeare Festival. This is the second iteration of the "Seattle Celebrates" festivals. The first was Seattle Celebrates Bernstein in 2010. The motivating idea behind these festivals has been to celebrate an artist and a body of work that can inspire collaboration across artistic mediums while also highlighting the quality and depth of Seattle's arts organizations.

Beatrice and Benedict opens Saturday, Feb. 24, and runs through Saturday, March 10. Tickets are available online at seattleopera.org, by calling 206-389-7676, or in-person at the box office located at 1020 John Street (two blocks west of Fairview). Box office hours are Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Groups save at least 20 percent: 206.676.5588 or groups@seattleopera.org.

Beatrice and Benedict

Music and Original Libretto by Hector Berlioz

English translation of French lyrics by Amanda Holden

English dialogue by William Shakespeare

In English with English captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall

Performed at Marion Oliver McCaw Hall: February 24, 25, 28, and March 3, 7, 9,

and 10, 2018

Evening performances 7:30 p.m. Matinee 2:00 p.m.

Approximate Running Time: 148 minutes, including one 30-minute intermission

Premiere: Baden-Baden, Germany 1862

Seattle Opera Premiere

Cast (in order of vocal appearance)

Leonato	Marvin Grays [†]
Messenger	Chip Sherman [†]
Beatrice	Daniela Mack [†] (Feb. 24, 28; Mar. 7, 10)
	Hanna Hipp (Feb. 25; Mar. 3, 9)
Hero	Laura Tatulescu
Don Pedro	Daniel Sumegi
Benedict	Alek Shrader (Feb. 24, 28; Mar. 7, 10)
	Andrew Owens (Feb. 25; Mar. 3, 9)
Don John	Brandon O'Neill [†]
Claudio	Craig Verm
Borachio	Avery Clark [†]
Somarone	Kevin Burdette
Margaret	Christine Marie Brown [†]
Ursula	Avery Amereau [†]
Friar Francis	Chip Sherman [†]
Conductor	Ludovic Morlot [†]
Stage Director	John Langs [†]
Scenery Designer	Matthew Smucker [†]
Costume Designer	Deborah Trout
Lighting Designer	Connie Yun

[†] Company Debut

Production Sponsors: Nesholm Family Foundation; Marks Family Foundation;
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About Seattle Opera

Seattle Opera is a leading opera company, recognized both in the United States and around the world. The company is committed to advancing the cultural life in the Pacific Northwest with performances of the highest caliber, and through innovative education and community programs that take opera far beyond the McCaw Hall stage. Each year, more than 95,000 people attend Seattle Opera performances and the company's programs serve more than 400,000 people of all ages (including school performances, radio broadcasts and community engagement initiatives). Seattle Opera is especially known for its acclaimed works in the Richard Wagner canon, and has created an "international attraction" in its presentation of Wagner's epic *Ring*, according to *The New York Times*. Connect with Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud and through Saturday-night broadcasts on Classical KING FM.