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Graffiti art by RETNA pops in Seattle Opera's *Aida*

New-to-Seattle production includes Jessica Lang choreography

**May 5-19, 2018
McCaw Hall**

This May, two different artistic genres—street art and opera—are coming together for Seattle Opera's *Aida*. Acclaimed stage director **Francesca Zambello** was looking to create something unique when she asked the graffiti artist **RETNA** (born Marquis Duriel Lewis) to collaborate with her on a new production of Verdi's masterpiece. RETNA created the bold visual backdrops for *Aida* with his same distinct style, a type of graphic lettering and illuminated script that has earned him commissions from Usher and Justin Bieber.

Inspired in part by ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, RETNA seems like a natural fit to design for an opera originally set in Egypt. And in fact, he describes the role of a graffiti artist as similar to that of a scribe.

“In ancient times, scribes were always part of working with the government with music, with the hieroglyphics on the wall, promoting who was in power, what the culture was like.”

The word “graffiti” comes from the Italian word *graffiato*, which means “scratched.” And while some may dismiss it today as a practice that’s against the establishment, the word “graffiti” in art history books often refers to pictures that were “scratched” onto a surface, be it a rock, a church—or perhaps an ancient Egyptian temple or wall.

RETNA’s eye-catching visuals are not the only instance of artistic collaboration in *Aida*. The creative team includes visionary contemporary-dance leader **Jessica Lang**, whose work Seattle audiences may recognize from Pacific Northwest Ballet or Meany Center for the Performing Arts.

Like these modern-day collaborators, Verdi was also a groundbreaking contemporary artist of his time. Whether pointing out moral hypocrisy in *La traviata*, or questioning patriotism and the relationship between church and state in *Aida*, Verdi was committed to telling stories about the time in which he lived. It’s a tradition that continues at McCaw Hall with this *Aida*, the story of a princess who has been taken as a prisoner of war by a rival nation. When she falls in love with a military commander on the opposing side, her inner struggle between love and duty will lead to a tragic end.

“We are living in a politically-charged time,” said **General Director Aidan Lang**. “We all know what it’s like to have certain loyalties—whether it’s to a country, to a political belief, or to a cause—and then have our personal lives complicated by those beliefs.”

Aida includes performances by **Leah Crocetto** in her company debut as Aida—a role shared with **Alexandra LoBianco**. Additional company debuts include **Milijana Nikolic** and **Elena Gabouri** as Amneris; as well as **Brian Jagde** and

David Pomeroy as Radames. Returning artists include **Gordon Hawkins** and **Alfred Walker** (who share the role of Amonasro), and **Daniel Sumegi** (Ramfis). The opera also includes performances by **Eric Neuville** (The Messenger), **Clayton Brainerd** (The King), and **Marcy Stonikas** (High Priestess).

Aida opens Saturday, May 5, and runs through Saturday, May 19. 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.

Aida

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni
In Italian with English captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall
Performances: May 5, 6m, 9, 11, 12, 13m, 16, 18, 19, 2018

Approximate Running Time: 3 hours including one intermission
Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., matinees at 2:00 p.m.
Premiere: Dec. 24, 1871, Cairo Opera House
Previous Seattle Opera Performances: 1962, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1992, 2008

Cast:

Aida	Leah Crocetto* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19) Alexandra LoBianco (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Amneris	Milijana Nikolic* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19) Elena Gabouri* (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Radames	Brian Jagde* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19) David Pomeroy* (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Amonasro	Gordon Hawkins (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19) Alfred Walker (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Ramfis	Daniel Sumegi (All dates)
Messenger	Eric Neuville (All dates)
The King	Clayton Brainerd* (All dates)
High Priestess	Marcy Stonikas
Original Stage	Francesca Zambello

Director
Stage Director E. Loren Meeker
Conductor John Fiore
Artistic Designer RETNA*
Set Design Michael Yeargan
Costume Design Anita Yavich*
Lighting Design Mark McCullough
Choreographer Jessica Lang*

* Company Debut

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