

# MAGIC, MYTHOS, & MADNESS

AN EVENING OF STAGED OPERATIC SCENES



SATURDAY, MAY 3RD

7:00 PM

THE FREDGREN STUDIO THEATRE

AT BALLETNOVA

3443 CARLIN SPRINGS RD,

FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA 22041



Dear Friends,

Welcome to Magic, Mythos, & Madness. Tonight's program brings together three operatic masterpieces—Handel's *Alcina*, Gluck's *Ifigenia in Tauride*, and Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*—each centering on a woman standing at the edge of reality, unraveling under the weight of love, fate, and illusion. Though these works span different eras and styles, they share a deep fascination with transformation—emotional, spiritual, and psychological.

In *Alcina*, enchantment serves as both weapon and weakness, as the sorceress loses herself in the illusions she creates. *Ifigenia* confronts divine cruelty with human compassion, trapped in a world ruled by myth and blood. And *Anna Bolena*, torn between memory and madness, faces the collapse of identity in a court where love and power are mortal enemies. Each heroine is undone by forces beyond her control—whether supernatural, mythic, or political—but through their downfall, we glimpse profound human truths.

Thank you for joining us in this exploration of the sublime and the shattered. We hope you leave tonight stirred by the echoes of these stories and the timeless emotional terrain they reveal.

Warmly,  
Matteo & Nicholas  
Little City Opera





OVERTURE from *Alcina*

Georg Friederich Händel  
(1685 - 1759)

Ah! Ruggiero crudel...Ombre pallide from *Alcina*

INTERMEZZO

SUITE in D minor for keyboard, HWV 437

Präludium

I. Allmand

II. Corrant

III. Saraband

IV. Jigg

INTRODUCTION from *Ifigenia in Tauride*

Christoph Willibald Gluck  
(1714 - 1787)

Sommi Dei...O sventurata Ifigenia from *Ifigenia in Tauride*

INTERMEZZO

SONATA in G major for keyboard

Baldassare Galuppi  
(1706 - 1785)

SONATA in A minor for keyboard

Domenico Cimarosa  
(1749 - 1801)

GIGA in B-flat major for keyboard

Baldassare Galuppi

ALLEGRETTO from the overture of *Anna Bolena*

Gaetano Donizetti  
(1797 - 1848)

Piangete voi?...Al dolce guidami from *Anna Bolena*

# HISTORY



George Frideric Handel's *Alcina* was composed in 1735 during his prolific period writing Italian operas for the London stage. The libretto, adapted from *L'isola di Alcina* by Riccardo Broschi (and ultimately derived from Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso*), tells the story of the sorceress Alcina who seduces and then transforms her lovers into animals or objects. Handel composed *Alcina* specifically for the famed castrato Giovanni Carestini and soprano Anna Maria Strada del Pò, tailoring the music to showcase their extraordinary vocal abilities. The opera is notable for its expressive arias, intricate ornamentation, and masterful use of orchestral color, all hallmarks of Handel's mature style.

*Alcina* was created at a time when Handel was exploring more fantastical and emotionally nuanced themes in his operas. Premiering at the Covent Garden Theatre in London, it was part of a series of operas Handel composed for the new venue, which allowed for more elaborate staging and dance sequences, including performances by the celebrated French dancer Marie Sallé. While *Alcina* initially enjoyed success, it later fell into obscurity until its 20th-century revival, when it was reappraised for its dramatic depth and musical brilliance. Today, it stands as one of Handel's most beloved operas, offering a rich blend of enchantment, psychological complexity, and vocal virtuosity.

## SYNOPSIS

Bradamante, disguised as her brother Ricciardo, arrives at the island of the sorceress Alcina to rescue her fiancé, Ruggiero, who is under her enchantment. While exploring the island with her tutor Melisso, they encounter Morgana, Alcina's sister, who becomes infatuated with Ricciardo and leaves her lover, Oronte. At Alcina's palace, they find Ruggiero, who has lost all memory of his past, and suspect that many of Alcina's former lovers have been transformed into animals. Oronte, furious over Morgana's betrayal, stirs jealousy in Ruggiero by telling him about Alcina's former lovers and fabricating a romance between Alcina and Ricciardo. Confused, Ruggiero confronts Alcina but is reassured by her, while Bradamante reveals her true identity to him, only for Melisso to prevent him from believing her to protect her secret. Morgana warns Ricciardo that Alcina plans to turn him into an animal, but Ricciardo refuses to leave, convinced he loves someone on the island.

Disguised as Ruggiero's former tutor, Melisso uses a magical ring to reveal the truth of Alcina's enchantments to Ruggiero, advising him to feign love for her until he can escape. Bradamante reveals herself again, but Ruggiero remains conflicted, unsure of what is real. Determined to keep Ruggiero's affection, Alcina plans to transform Ricciardo into an animal but is persuaded against it. Ruggiero asks for permission to go hunting, and Oronte uncovers the plot. Morgana refuses to believe the rumors until she sees Ruggiero and Bradamante together, prompting Alcina to plot her revenge. However, Alcina's magical powers falter as true love breaks her illusions. In the final act, Ruggiero declares his love for Bradamante, and when he and Melisso destroy the magical urn powering Alcina's enchantments, her magic is shattered. All her former lovers are restored to their human forms, and the island celebrates the triumph of love over magic.



# HISTORY



Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, composed in 1779, represents one of the crowning achievements of his operatic reform movement, which sought to strip opera of excessive ornamentation and focus instead on dramatic truth and emotional clarity. The libretto, by Nicolas-François Guillard, is based on Euripides' tragedy and follows the story of Iphigenia, who, after being saved from sacrifice in Aulis, serves as a priestess in Tauris and is unknowingly reunited with her brother Orestes. Gluck's score is marked by its intense dramatic pacing, unified structure, and the seamless integration of music and text. Arias, choruses, and recitatives flow into one another to serve the narrative, avoiding the showy da capo (i.e., Ombre pallide from *Alcina*) form that dominated earlier opera seria.

Composed late in Gluck's career, *Iphigénie en Tauride* was premiered in Paris at the Académie Royale de Musique, and it exemplifies the culmination of his ideals developed in earlier works such as *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Alceste*. Gluck, working within the aesthetic of French tragédie lyrique, emphasized the expression of noble emotions and moral conflict over vocal display. His collaboration with the Parisian stage brought a more theatrical and visually unified approach to opera. *Iphigénie en Tauride* was both a critical and popular success, praised for its emotional power and classical restraint, and it exerted a strong influence on composers like Berlioz and Wagner, who admired Gluck's commitment to dramatic integrity and musical economy. The Italian version of *Iphigénie* heard here - a translation by Lorenzo daPonte - was first performed in Vienna in 1783.

## SYNOPSIS

Fifteen years after Ifigenia's near-sacrifice, a storm rages at the temple of Diana, where she and other Greek captives pray for peace. Ifigenia shares a dream of her family's destruction: her mother, Clytemnestra, murdered her father, Agamemnon, and forced Ifigenia to kill her brother, Orestes. While the priestesses comfort her, the Scythian king, Thoas, tormented by ominous prophecies, orders Ifigenia to sacrifice two Greek captives —Orestes and his friend, Pylade. Oreste, haunted by the Furies for killing his mother, and Pylade, who pledges to die with him, are imprisoned, while Ifigenia prays for release from her suffering.

As Ifigenia learns Orestes' identity, they share a deep bond, and she vows to save one of the captives. She helps Pylade escape, but Orestes, determined to die, threatens suicide if Ifigenia does not spare his friend. Unable to perform the sacrifice, *Iphigénie* is moved by Orestes' pleas and, in a moment of revelation, recognizes him as her brother. Thoas discovers her plan and orders Orestes's death, but Pylade returns with Greek soldiers to save his friend. In the ensuing chaos, Thoas is killed, and Diana intervenes to pardon Orestes, release the Greek captives, and send the siblings back to Mycenae, bringing an end to their long suffering.

# HISTORY

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Gaetano Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, composed in 1830, marked a turning point in his career, establishing him as a leading figure in the world of Italian opera. With a libretto by Felice Romani, the opera is based on the tragic downfall of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII. It belongs to the *bel canto* tradition, emphasizing vocal beauty, expressive phrasing, and virtuosic technique. The role of Anna is especially demanding, requiring a soprano capable of conveying both regal strength and emotional fragility. Donizetti's score is rich in dramatic contrasts and lyrical beauty, with arias and ensembles that heighten the psychological depth of the characters.

*Anna Bolena* was composed during a period of growing interest in historical and tragic subject matter in opera, aligning with the Romantic era's fascination with doomed heroines and intense personal drama. Premiering at Milan's Teatro Carcano, it was Donizetti's first major international success and helped solidify the trend of operas based on Tudor England, later continued by Donizetti himself with *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*. The opera reflects the political and emotional tensions of its time, using the story of Anne Boleyn's fall as a lens through which to explore themes of power, betrayal, and psychological collapse.

## SYNOPSIS

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In 1536 England, Queen Anne Boleyn, once the beloved wife of Henry VIII, finds herself abandoned by the king, who is now enamored with Jane Seymour. Despite Anne's hopes for a male heir, she has failed to provide one, and rumors swirl about Henry's shifting affections. Tensions rise at the court as Anne's despair deepens. Her former lover, Richard Percy, returns from exile, and a meeting between them, coupled with Anne's complex emotions, leads to her arrest when Henry accuses her of adultery, based on the evidence of a miniature portrait that was found in the possession of Anne's servant, Mark Smeaton.

Anne is imprisoned and faced with the prospect of a trial where her survival hinges on confessing her supposed crimes. Jane Seymour, now Henry's lover, urges Anne to plead guilty to avoid execution, but Anne refuses, blaming the king, not Jane, for her downfall. Despite Anne's resistance, her fate is sealed when false testimonies, including one from Smeaton, lead to her conviction. In her final days, Anne relives her past, from her marriage to Henry to her earlier love for Percy. As her execution looms, she curses the king and his new bride, Jane, before facing her death at the Tower of London.



## MATTEO MANGIALETTI | ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

After hearing a radio broadcast of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at age 10 – Matteo Mangialetti was smitten! From that moment his passion for opera has remained an obsession. He became an avid recording collector in his teen years, collecting every voice of opera's illustrious Golden Age: from Luisa Tetrazzini, Claudia Muzio, Rosa Ponselle, Enrico Caruso, Tita Ruflo to Renata Tebaldi, Maria Callas, Franco Corelli, Dame Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti, Aprile Mollo, Leontyne Price. Discovering the operas of Verdi and subsequently the bel canto Greats of Bellini, Donizetti & Rossini was a revelatory experience that left him forever changed...

Matteo is a sought-after ballet pianist throughout the Washington metropolitan area. After piano studies with Leilani Fenick and then Sonia Vlahcevic, he began a career at the Richmond Ballet. He has played for and with Virginia Commonwealth University Dance, BalletNova, The Washington School of Ballet, Maryland Youth Ballet, George Mason University Dance, Chamber Dance Project, and The Kennedy Center among others. Joining The Washington Ballet for their 2018/2019 season, he rehearsed Fokine's *Les Sylphides*, Balanchine's *Serenade*, and Kent's *The Sleeping Beauty* all under the direction of acclaimed ballerina Julie Kent. Inaugurating The REACH at The Kennedy Center, Matteo played in a series of masterclasses with New York City Ballet principal dancer Tiler Peck. He has worked with Victor Barbee, Julie Kent, Connor Walsh and played for the ballet classes of Ethan Brown, Elaine Kudo, Victoria Simon, Irina Dvorovenko, and others.

In 2021, he made his musical directing & conducting debut in performances of the 1970 version of Sondheim's *Company* with DreamWrights Theatre followed by Menotti's opera *The Telephone* in performances with Opera Susquehanna. Matteo also co-created *The Divas in Drag* Italian Opera Company, a YouTube opera 'company' which seeks to promote the giants of the Golden Age through drag as medium. Inspired by Ira Siff's *La Gran Scena* Opera Company and the series *Who's Afraid of Opera?*, *The Divas in Drag* Italian Opera Company seeks to reach, create, and educate a new generation of opera lovers.

Currently, Matteo is the founding artistic director of Little City Opera (previously *Opera D'Oro*) which commences with inaugural performances of Donizetti's masterwork *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2023.

Nicholas Cowden has always been captivated by the magic of the theatre and its ability to express our human experience. Whether it be through dancing, directing, choreographing, costuming, or producing, he has found himself drawn to the artistic process.

In opera, Mr. Cowden is most known for his co-creation of *The Divas in Drag* Italian Opera Company, which showcases brilliant costumes against digital sets, and superb acting. The drag performers bring to life excerpts of classic recordings such as Maria Callas' 1953 *Cetra La Traviata*, the 1930 recording of *Rigoletto* featuring Mercedes Capris, the 1940 *Lina-Bruna Rasa Cavalleria Rusticana*, and many more. The work of *The Divas in Drag* has been called, "a true Gaysamtkunstwerk," by *parterrebox's* La Cicca. Mr. Cowden has directed *The Telephone* for Opera Susquehanna in York, PA and choreographed the overture of Verdi's *La forza del destino* for the Washington Ballet performed at The National Cathedral. He also coaches opera singers on movement, acting, and expression.

Currently, Mr. Cowden is a Company Dancer at The Washington Ballet. In his time with the company he has performed a variety of classical and neoclassical ballets including Fredrick Ashton's *Birthday Offering*, George Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante*, and Merce Cunningham's *Duets*



## NICHOLAS COWDEN | ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



**FRANCESCA AGUADO-BENNER**  
| SOPRANO

American soprano Francesca Aguado has earned praise from The Washington Post for her voice's confident precision and articulation, and most recently by South Florida Classical Review (as Carmen) for her vocal delivery's "immediacy and intensity," and a "dark and opulent tone."

Last season she made several significant solo concert work debuts including Strauss' 4 Last Songs and Mahler Symphony No. 4.

Other past credits include: Mimi (La Bohème); Rosina (Il barbiere di Siviglia); Muscetta (La Bohème), Mother (Amahl and the Night Visitors); Ma Joad (suite version of The Grapes of Wrath, accompanied by composer Ricky Ian Gordon); Dorabella (Cosi fan tutte); Dinah (Trouble in Tahiti); Maurya (Riders to the Sea); Zweite Dame (Die Zauberflöte).

The 2022/23 season includes the title role of Carmen, Donna Elvira (Don Giovanni), as well as various guest soloist appearances in concert and recital series (with another notable debut performing the soprano solo for the Brahms Requiem) throughout both the United States as well as abroad in Italy and Austria.

In addition to an active performance calendar, Ms Aguado proudly maintains a robust online and in person voice studio throughout the year.

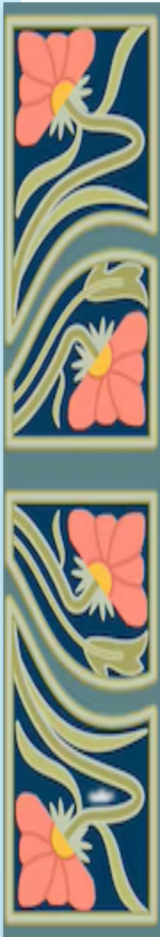
Rachel found a love for theatre in high school after her gymnastics career came to an end. Over the years, that love has expanded to include more forms of live entertainment including ballet and, of course, opera. Whether in the audience or backstage, Rachel enjoys new, experimental works, as well as the standard repertory.

Rachel was resident Assistant Stage Manager and Assistant Company Manager for The Washington Ballet. She has been stage managing professionally since 2018, and is grateful for all the friends, lessons, and experiences it has brought and will continue to bring.

Notable productions she's worked on include Tony-award winning director Marcia Milgrom Dodge's staging of Evita, and prima ballerina Julie Kent's stagings of Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty. Some of her favorite productions/events to have been a part of include the full-length production of Matilda the Musical (Stage Manager, Riverside Theatre), Busch Gardens Tampa Bay's annual Howl-O-Scream (Tech Manager), and The Nutcracker (Deck Stage Manager & Calling Stage Manager, The Washington Ballet)."



**RACHEL SCHERER**  
| PRODUCTION MANAGER



## *Special thanks to...*

BalletNova Artistic Director..... Matthew Powell  
BalletNova Associate Artistic Director..... Constance Walsh  
BalletNova Development Manager & Education Outreach  
Coordinator..... Elizabeth Spatz  
BalletNova Managing Director..... Carmita Signes  
BalletNova Program Manager..... Lisa Medici  
Soprano..... Francesca Aguado-Benner  
Pianist..... Matteo Mangialetti  
Lighting Designer..... Rachel Scherer  
Costumes Design & Execution..... Nicholas Cowden  
Subtitles Operator..... Susan McQuade

