

Detroit Opera

Fast-rising American countertenor Key'mon Murrah to star in *Xerxes*, Handel's darkly comic masterpiece, conducted by Dame Jane Glover

"It's got love stories, and it's got great heart and wonderful comedy—what more do you want from an opera?"—Dame Jane Glover



Key'mon Murrah photo by Jeremy Kramer

DETROIT, February 7, 2023—The sensational American countertenor **Key'mon W. Murrah** sings the title role in Detroit Opera's **March 4 to 12** performances of *Xerxes*, George Frideric Handel's tongue-in-cheek 1738 masterpiece, led by renowned conductor and scholar **Dame Jane Glover**. **James Blaszko** directs this revival of **Tazewell Thompson's** vivid, color-soaked production, which debuted at the Glimmerglass Festival in 2017. The opera tells the story of the ancient King Xerxes, who may be the most powerful man in Persia but can't get Romilda to marry him.

These will be Detroit Opera's first performances of *Xerxes* (Serse), which is best known for the aria "Ombra mai fu," commonly known as "Handel's Largo." *Xerxes* will be performed in Italian with English translation. The stellar cast includes soprano **Lauren Snouffer** as Romilda, mezzo-

soprano **Sun-Ly Pierce** as Arsamene (Romilda's lover, brother of Xerxes), mezzo-soprano **Vanessa Cariddi** as Amastre (betrothed to Xerxes), soprano **Elizabeth Sutphen** as Atalanta (Romilda's sister), bass-baritone **Nicholas Newton** as Ariodate (Romilda's father), and **Michael Sumuel** in the comic role of Elviro. British conductor Dame Jane Glover, longtime music director of Chicago's Music of the Baroque, is one of the world's foremost interpreters of 18th-century music and is author of the critically acclaimed books *Mozart's Women* and *Handel in London*.

The role of Xerxes represents a major debut for Key'mon Murrah, a native of Louisville, Kentucky who is rapidly gaining notice in the U.S. and internationally for his stunningly wide range and vocal agility. Recent career highlights include Leonardo in San Diego Opera's world premiere of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego (The Last Dream of Frida and Diego)* by Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz; Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo and Eurydice* at Seattle Opera; and the Sorceress in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* at the Bavarian State Opera. In 2021, he won first place in Houston Grand Opera's 33rd Annual Concert of Arias and was a finalist in the Operalia Competition. His 2019 performances as Asprano in Vivaldi's *Montezuma* at American Baroque Opera Company were "astounding—equal in both technical prowess and drama" (*Theater Jones*). As Bertarido in Aspen Music Festival's 2021 performance of Handel's *Rodelinda*, "Murrah traced a remarkably vivid dramatic arc" with "ringing high-C's that would do a dramatic soprano proud" (*Aspen Times*).

Xerxes promises an evening of glorious singing in an opera that includes satirical elements (like Xerxes singing an aria to a plane tree) but also offers a more serious reflection on love and the limits of power. The production features stunning sets by John Conklin, costumes by Sara Jean Tosetti, and lighting by Robert Wierzel. "The sharp abstraction of this production's design is the perfect fit for an opera that defied so many constructs of its time," says revival director James Blaszko. "What could have become a standard dramatization of an obsessive King and his court was transformed by Handel through the use of humor and musical brevity. There's a unique balance of beauty, brutality, and wit to *Xerxes* that I think this production emphasizes so well with its vivid costumes and striking stage pictures."

PERFORMANCE DETAILS

Music: George Frideric Handel

Libretto: Silvio Stampiglia

Xerxes (Serse): Key'mon W. Murrah (countertenor)

Romilda: Lauren Snouffer (soprano)

Atalanta: Elizabeth Sutphen (soprano)

Arsamene: Sun-Ly Pierce (mezzo-soprano)

Amastre: Vanessa Cariddi (mezzo-soprano)

Ariodate: Nicholas Newton (bass-baritone)

Elviro: Michael Sumuel (bass-baritone)

Conductor: Dame Jane Glover

Director: Tazewell Thompson

Revival director: James Blaszko
Set designer: John Conklin
Costume designer: Sara Jean Tosetti
Lighting designer: Robert Wierzel

Saturday, March 4, 7:30pm

Friday, March 10, 7:30pm

Sunday, March 12, 2:30pm

Run time: two hours and 30 minutes, with one intermission

Pre-concert talks will take place at Detroit Opera House one hour before each performance.

Detroit Opera House
1526 Broadway Street, Detroit
Tickets from \$29 at detroitopera.org or 313.237.7464
Group sales: groupsales@detroitopera.org

For images of *Xerxes* cast members, click [here](#).

For images from 2017 Glimmerglass Festival *Xerxes* presentation, click [here](#) (photo credit: Karli Cadel).

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit the [Detroit Opera website](#).

About Detroit Opera

Detroit Opera (formerly Michigan Opera Theatre), one of the nation's most vibrant nonprofit arts organizations, aspires to influence the future of opera and dance with a goal of invigorating audiences through new and re-imagined productions, relevant to current times. It is creating an ambitious standard for American opera and dance that emphasizes community, accessibility, artistic risk-taking, and collaboration. Founded in 1971 by the late Dr. David DiChiera, Detroit Opera is led by President and CEO Wayne S. Brown; Yuval Sharon, Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director; Associate Artistic Director Christine Goerke; Music Director Roberto Kalb; and Board Chairman Ethan Davidson. For more information, visit www.detroitopera.org. Follow the company on Facebook and Instagram (@DetroitOpera), LinkedIn (Detroit Opera), as well as Twitter (@DetOperaHouse).

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