



For Immediate Release

**CASTS & CREATIVE TEAMS ANNOUNCED FOR 2023-24 SEASON
THE EMISSARY, OCTOBER 27-28, WORLD PREMIERE;
BIRDS & BALLS: VINKENSPORT, OR THE FINCH OPERA & BALLS,
APRIL 5-7, A WORLD PREMIERE DOUBLE BILL;
FELLOW TRAVELERS, JUNE 21-23, WEST COAST PREMIERE**

operaparallèle.org/23-24

SAN FRANCISCO (September 14, 2023) — Opera Parallèle, the Bay Area’s distinguished producer and champion of contemporary opera, today announced casting and creative teams for the company’s upcoming 14th anniversary season repertoire including the commissioned World Premiere of *The Emissary*, October 27-28; a World Premiere Double-Bill, *Birds & Balls: Vinkensport, or The Finch Opera & Balls*, April 5-7; and the West Coast Premiere of *Fellow Travelers*, June 21-23. Critically acclaimed as “a small company with huge ambition and exceptional daring,” today’s season update was revealed by the company founder, General & Artistic Director **Nicole Paiement** and Stage & Creative Director **Brian Staufenbiel**, both highly regarded as “among the bravest people in the music world.” (*San Francisco Classical Voice*)

Nicole Paiement said, “I am delighted to present Opera Parallèle's new season, a captivating journey that weaves together compelling narratives from different eras, shedding light on pressing climate issues (*The Emissary*), comedic explorations of competition (*Birds & Balls*), and profound human connections amidst adversity (*Fellow Travelers*). This season's focus on living creators and world/west coast premieres underscores our commitment to innovation, as we continue to bring thought-provoking and resonant stories to our audiences.”

Paiement continued, “The season will bring together a powerful array of singers from regular collaborators such as mezzo-soprano **Nikola Printz**, tenor **Nathan Granner** and projection designer **David Murakami**, but will also showcase new talent including baritone **Joseph Lattanzi**, tenor **Jonathan Pierce Rhodes**, stage director **Yayoi Kambara**, associate conductor **Jaco Wong**, and guest conductor **Jaymes Kirksey**.”

Brian Staufenbiel commented, “I am very excited about returning to SFJAZZ for *Birds & Balls* to transform the space into a 360-degree competitive arena, with some of the audience seated onstage

and in a live tennis court. We're also looking forward to collaborating with our new venue partners at the Presidio Theatre and ODC Theater — two beautiful spaces for Bay Area audiences to enjoy opera."

THE EMISSARY, October 27-28, 2023

For its seventh iteration of the company's "Hands-On-Opera" initiative, Opera Parallèle has commissioned multi-faceted Japanese composer **Kenji Oh*** for his first opera along with prolific librettist **Kelley Rourke*** to create an adaptation of *The Emissary*, a new family opera based on the award-winning novel by celebrated Japanese author **Yoko Tawada**, featuring an English translation by **Margaret Mitsutani**. *The Emissary* audience will journey through a fractured future, a dystopian satire that addresses the alarming environmental angst of today, and the ever-increasing psychological stress on the younger generation.

The cast features **Angela Yam*** (Mumei), **Bradley Kynard** (Yoshiro) and the **Lick Wilmerding High School Chorus**. **Nicole Paiement** will conduct two performances on Friday, October 27 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, October 28 at 4 p.m.; **Jaco Wong** will be on the podium for the October 28 at 1 p.m. performance. The creative team includes director **Yayoi Kambara**; chorus director **Tony Asaro***; scenic and costume designer **Matthew Linzer***; and lighting designer **Spense Matubang***. All three performances will be sung in English with projected English supertitles, and presented at ODC Theater, 3153 17th Street.

BIRDS & BALLS, April 5-7, 2024

Opera Parallèle's spring season will offer the World Premiere Double-Bill of *Birds & Balls*, a novel pairing of two one-act chamber operas where competition meets comedy in a theatrical spectacle of sportsmanship, tennis balls and the 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Vinkensport, or The Finch Opera composer **David Little*** and librettist **Royce Vavrek's*** "chamber opera with wings," was originally commissioned by soprano Dawn Upshaw in 2010 for the Graduate Vocal Arts Program at the Bard Conservatory of Music. In 2017, *Balls*, by composer **Laura Karpman*** and librettist **Gail Collins***, was initially heard in a workshop conducted by The Industry in LA and though incomplete at the time, the work has now been finished and will debut anew with Opera Parallèle. At the suggestion of **Nicole Paiement**, both composers will collaborate on a sonic transition between the two works so they may be performed together seamlessly without interruption.

The operatic fun begins with *Vinkensport, or The Finch Opera*, a hilarious sendup of the obscure 400-year-old Flemish folk sport of professional Finch-Calling, where the contestants battle it out to see who has the most melodious bird. Coaxed by their owners, trained finches race to sing the most "susk-e-wiets" over the course of an hour, where every tweet is noted in chalk on a long stick. The winner, of course, is the finch who has tweeted the most, but beware of the trainers, some noble, some not. Cheating can get you banned for life.

Balls is a multimedia opera dramatizing the famed tennis game between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. The celebrated match changed not only the perception and treatment of women in sports, but significantly advanced the women's rights movement. The opera features a live tennis match as a central narrative device, along with actual commentary from the 1973 broadcast.

Casting for *Vinkensport, or The Finch Opera* includes **Jamie Chamberlain*** (Holy St. Francis' Trainer); **Daniel Cilli** (Atticus Finch's Trainer); **Nathan Granner** (Hans Sachs' Trainer); **Mark Hernandez** (Butler/Referee); **Chelsea Hollow*** (Farinelli's Trainer); **Shawnette Sulker** (Sir Elton John's Trainer); and **Chung-Wai Soong** (Prince Gabriel III of Belgium's Trainer).

Casting for *Balls* features **Tiffany Austin** (Marilyn, jazz singer); **Daniel Cilli** (Larry King); **Nathan Granner** (Bobby Riggs); **Mark Hernandez** (Howard Cosell); **Gabriela Linares** (Rosa Casals); **Nikola Printz** (Billie Jean King); and **Shawnette Sulker** (Susan B. Anthony).

The creative team for the double-bill includes conductor **Nicole Paiement**; assistant conductor **Jaco Wong**; stage and creative director **Brian Staufenbiel**; associate stage director **Erin Neff**; projection designer **David Murakami**; costume & hair and makeup designer **Y. Sharon Peng**; and lighting designer **Mextly Couzin**.

Opera Parallèle and SFJAZZ will present *Birds & Balls* Friday, April 5 at 7.30 p.m.; Saturday, April 6 at 2 and 7.30 p.m.; Sunday, April 7 at 2 p.m. for four performances at SFJAZZ, Miner Auditorium, 201 Franklin Street. Sung in English with projected English supertitles.

FELLOW TRAVELERS, June 21-23, 2024

Opera Parallèle will conclude the '23-24 season with the West Coast premiere of *Fellow Travelers* by composer **Gregory Spears*** and librettist **Greg Pierce***. Based on a novel by **Thomas Mallon**, *Fellow Travelers* was developed and co-commissioned by G. Sterling Zinsmeyer and Cincinnati Opera where it received its world premiere in June 2016. Since then, the opera has garnered widespread critical and popular acclaim at New York's 2018 Prototype Festival, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Minnesota Opera, and Boston Lyric Opera.

Fellow Travelers follows the story of Hawk and Tim who become clandestine lovers at the height of the McCarthy Era in 1950s Washington, D.C. Recent college graduate Timothy Laughlin is eager to join the crusade against communism, and a chance encounter with handsome State Department official Hawkins Fuller leads to Tim's first job—and his first love affair with a man. Drawn into a maelstrom of deceit, Tim struggles to reconcile his political convictions and his forbidden love for Fuller. The piece uses the love affair of Laughlin and Fuller to shed light on the "lavender scare," an often-overlooked period of McCarthyism that resulted in the mass firings of suspected homosexuals from the United States government.

"[A] heart-wrenching yet musically lucid drama ... The opening act is a near perfect example of fast-flowing musical drama ... With its smart music and sharp-edged romantic drama, *Fellow Travelers* seems assured of lasting appeal." (*The New York Times*)

"*Fellow Travelers* is one of the most accomplished new American operas I have encountered in recent years. It deserves to travel widely." (*Chicago Tribune*)

The cast features **Jonathan Pierce Rhodes*** (Timothy Laughlin); **Joseph Lattanzi*** (Hawkins Fuller); **Maya Kherani** (Mary Johnson); **Kurt Winterhalter** (Tommy McIntyre); **Elena Galván*** (Miss Lightfoot); **Cara**

Gabrielson (Lucy); **Daniel Cilli** (Estonian Frank/Interrogator/Senator McCarthy); **Bradley Kynard** (Senator Potter/General Arlie/Bartender); and **Matthew Lovell*** (Potter's Assistant/Bookseller/Technician/French Priest).

The creative team includes conductor **Jaymes Kirksey**; stage and creative director **Brian Staufenbiel**; scenic designer/props **Jacquelyn Scott**; costume & hair and makeup designer **Y. Sharon Peng**; and lighting designer **Mextly Couzin**.

Opera Parallèle and Presidio Theatre will present *Fellow Travelers* Friday, June 21 at 7.30 p.m.; Saturday, June 22 at 7.30 p.m.; Sunday, June 23 at 3 p.m. at the Presidio Theatre, 99 Moraga Avenue. Sung in English with projected English supertitles.

SEASON SUPPORT AND PRODUCTION SPONSORS

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Support for *The Emissary* is provided, in part, by **The Sam Mazza Foundation, The Shenson Foundation, Akiko Yamazaki & Jerry Yang, OPERA America's Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors & Conductors** supported by the **Marineau Family Foundation, UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, and the George and Sakaye Aratani CARE Award.**

Vinkensport, or The Finch Opera received funding from **OPERA America's Next Stage** program which is funded in part by the **Mellon Foundation** and gifts from OA's 50th Anniversary Campaign, including a leadership gift from **Frayda B. Lindemann**. Support for *Birds & Balls* is provided, in part, by the **Amphion Foundation.**

Support for *Fellow Travelers* is provided in part by **Robert Ripps & Steven Spector.**

Funding for *The Bullhorn* is provided, in part, by the **Bill Graham Memorial Foundation** and the **Henry W. Robinson & Nettie Robinson Foundation.**

For more information, visit operaparallèle.org/23-24.

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Please connect for feature interviews, artwork and press credentials.

All operas sung in English with projected English supertitles.

Programming subject to change.

Current as of September 14, 2023

***Opera Parallèle Debut**