For Immediate Release

OPERA PARALLÈLE ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR 2026-27 SEASON
SALT & SPIRIT, NOVEMBER 14-21,
THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY, MARCH 11-14,
TAKING UP SERPENTS, MAY 8-16

www.operaparallele.org

SAN FRANCISCO (Aug. 4, 2026) — **Opera Parallèle** today announced casting, creative teams, performance dates and venues for the company's upcoming 2026-27 season of three bold contemporary operas including the World Premiere of *Salt & Spirit*, Nov. 14-21, followed by the West Coast debuts of **Joby Talbot** and **Gene Scheer's** *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly,* March 11-14, and **Kamala Sankaram*** and **Jerre Dye's*** *Taking Up Serpents*, May 8-16.

The impressive artist roster includes mezzo-soprano **Sasha Cooke;** tenors **Victor Ryan Robertson** and **Richard Croft;*** baritones **Jarrett Porter*** and **Matthew Worth**; bass-baritone **Philip Skinner**; and sopranos **Christabel Nunoo** and **Aisha Campbell.**

“Opera Parallèle was founded on the belief that opera can illuminate the complexity of contemporary life while creating transformative artistic experiences,” said Company Founder and Artistic Director **Nicole Paiement**. “This new season reflects that mission in three very different but equally compelling works that speak to identity, resilience, spirituality, and the enduring power of human connection. We are honored to lift up these stories and showcase the extraordinary talent of these singers, composers and librettists.”

***SALT & SPIRIT* – WORLD PREMIERE**
November 14–21, 2026 at Z Space
The company’s 17th anniversary will open Nov. 14–21, with the world premiere of ***Salt & Spirit*****,** a new theatrical work rooted in the musical traditions of the Gullah-Geechee people of the Carolinas. This evocative production draws on a rare collection of resurfaced Gullah spirituals from the late nineteenth century, reimagining ancestral songs through a contemporary theatrical lens that blends classical, jazz, and traditional influences.

Developed and performed by tenor **Victor Ryan Robertson**—who debuted with the company in 2016 with Terence Blanchard’s *Champion*—in collaboration with Opera Parallèle Creative Director **Brian Staufenbiel**, *Salt & Spirit* brings these powerful songs into a richly theatrical world. This moving tribute to cultural memory, resilience, and storytelling honors the enduring spirit carried through Gullah-Geechee song. The on-stage pianist and musical arranger for this program will be announced this fall.

The Gullah-Geechee people are descendants of enslaved Africans who worked on rice, indigo, and cotton plantations along the lower Atlantic coast. The unique nature of their enslavement on islands and in isolated coastal areas allowed them to retain many aspects of their ancestral culture in ways which are clearly visible in their contemporary arts, cuisine, music, and language.

Four performances are scheduled at Z Space, 450 Florida Street: Saturday, Nov. 14 at 7.30 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 15 at 3 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 19 at 7.30 p.m., and Saturday, Nov. 21 at 7.30 p.m. Pre-show talks will be held one hour prior to curtain for all performances. Tickets: General Admission: $70; Youth/Pay What You Can: $40; and Pay It Forward: $113; operaparallele.org

***THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY* — WEST COAST PREMIERE**
March 11–14, 2027 at Blue Shield of California Theater Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
Following the company’s great success with *Everest*, Opera Parallèle reunites with the creative team of composer **Joby Talbot** and librettist **Gene Scheer** for their poignant opera, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, set for March 11-14, 2027. This West Coast debut will feature a newly created chamber orchestration by **Ben Foskett**—in collaboration with the composer—and commissioned by Opera Parallèle.

Based on the true story of journalist and editor of French *Elle* magazine, Jean-Dominique Bauby, this powerful work explores resilience, memory, and the triumph of the human spirit. Following its highly successful 2023 world premiere at The Dallas Opera, the creative team sought to bring this story to more intimate settings, deepening the audience's connection to Bauby's journey. With this reorchestration for chamber ensemble, Opera Parallèle enhances the story's authenticity and emotional impact, bringing Bauby's voice even closer.

The opera follows Jean-Dominique Bauby, who, after suffering a massive stroke, is left with "locked-in syndrome"—fully conscious but unable to move or speak, except for blinking his left eye. Trapped inside his own body, as if in a diving bell under water, Bauby embarks on an astonishing journey of resilience, dictating his memoir of 1997, letter by letter through blinks.

The extraordinary story inspired a French biopic in 2007, directed by **Julian Schnabel** that garnered four Academy Award nominations and multiple international awards. As in the film, the opera vividly captures Bauby's struggle, memories, and imagination, weaving an emotional and immersive musical tapestry that explores the force of individual courage and the victory of communication against all odds.

Opera Parallèle's award-winning conductor Nicole Paiement will be on the podium and highly praised Brian Staufenbiel will direct this new production. The distinguished cast will feature baritone **Jarrett Porter*** in his company debut as Jean-Dominique Bauby; GRAMMY-winning mezzo-soprano **Sasha Cooke**, who last sang with the company in the graphic novel opera *Everest*, will reprise her moving portrayal as Sylvie; world renowned tenor **Richard Croft,*** will recreate his dramatic role as Abbé Faria; and stalwart Opera Parallèle veteran, bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** joins the cast as Papinou.

Three performances are scheduled: Thursday, March 11 at 7.30 p.m., Saturday, March 13 at 7.30 p.m., and Sunday, March 14 at 3 p.m. This two-act opera will be sung in English with English supertitles and will be presented at the Blue Shield of California Theater at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 700 Howard St., San Francisco. Pre-opera talks with the composer and creative team will be held one hour prior to each performance. The March 14 matinee will offer a pre-show Haptic Tour by Gravity Access Services at 1:30 p.m.

Tickets will go on sale in November via operaparallele.org.

***TAKING UP SERPENTS* — WEST COAST PREMIERE**
May 8-16, 2027 at Z Space
Taking Up Serpents explores themes of faith, superstition, morality, kinship, and destiny with an eclectic folk-inspired score by critically acclaimed Indian American composer **Kamala Sankaram**, and an original story informed by librettist **Jerre Dye**'s family roots in the Deep South.

From "one of the most exciting composers in the country," (*The Washington Post*), **Kamala Sankaram's** one-act chamber opera ***Taking Up Serpents***, will have its West Coast debut following an initial presentation at Washington National Opera, and subsequent productions at the Glimmerglass Festival and Chicago Opera Theater.

The story regards Kayla, a 25-year-old young woman who works at Save-Mart in Gulf Shores, Alabama, and gets a phone call from her estranged mother informing her that her father, a fire-and-brimstone Pentecostal snake handling preacher, has been dangerously bitten by one of his snakes and lies dying in a hospital. Kayla's journey home forces her to confront her troubled upbringing in this dramatic story.

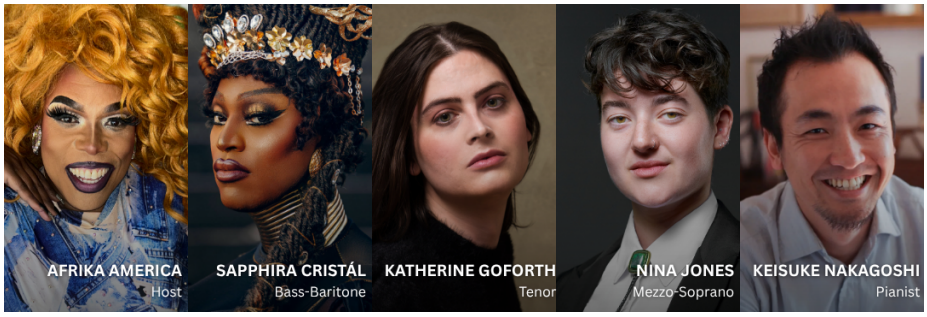
Nicole Paiement will guide the orchestra and singers in this new production created and directed by Brian Staufenbiel. The cast will be led by GRAMMY-winning baritone **Matthew Worth**, recently featured in the company's presentation of *Doubt*, as Daddy; and *Hello, Star* veterans, soprano **Christabel Nunoo** as Kayla; and soprano **Aisha Campbell** as Nelda.

Taking Up Serpents will be presented at Z Space, 450 Florida St., San Francisco: Saturday, May 8 at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, May 9 at 2 p.m.; Wednesday, May 12 at 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, May 13 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, May 15 at 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, May 16 at 2 p.m.

The chamber opera is performed in one act without intermission and sung in English with English supertitles. Pre-show talks will be held one hour before each performance. On Sunday, May 16, a pre-show Haptic Tour will be offered to the public at 12:30 p.m. Tickets for all six performances will go on sale in November via operaparallele.org.

For complete cast and creative teams for the 2026-27 season, please see the accompanying calendar.

COMING UP NEXT AT OPERA PARALLÈLE …..



***EXPANSIVE* -- 5th Annual Showcase of Transgender & Nonbinary Artists**
Presented by Opera Parallèle in collaboration with the SF Transgender District as part of Transgender History Month
Revolution is Just the Beginning! – honoring the 60th Anniversary of the Compton Cafeteria Riot
Featuring singers **Sapphira Cristál,* Katherine Goforth** and **Nina Jones,** with host **Afrika America** and Opera Parallèle resident pianist, **Keisuke Nakagoshi**
Thursday, August 27, 2026 at 7.30 p.m.
A.C.T.'s Strand Theater, 1127 Market Street, San Francisco

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Please connect for interviews, artwork and press credentials.
All programs subject to change.

***Opera Parallèle Debut**

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