# University of North Texas College of Music

**Ensemble Concert | Friday, October 30, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.**
**Lyric Theater – Murchison Performing Arts Center**

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## University of North Texas Opera Theatre presents

## *Florencia en el Amazonas*

**Stephanie Rhodes-Russell, conductor**
**JJ Hudson, stage director**

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Florencia en el Amazonas (1996) .....Daniel Catán
*An opera in two acts, presented in two parts with one intermission* (1949-2011)

Libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Beráin

Sung in Spanish with English supertitles

**Other live performances**

Friday, October 30th, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 1st, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

Friday, November 6th, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 8th, 2026, 3:00 p.m

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***Program one hundred thirty-one of the 2026–2027 season***
***Photography and videography are prohibited***

**Synopsis**

Written by Arizona Opera

## Act I

The title character, Florencia Grimaldi, is a famous opera soprano returning to her homeland to sing at the opera house in Manaus with the hope that her performance will attract her lover Cristóbal, a butterfly hunter who has disappeared into the jungle. She boards the steamboat El Dorado for a trip down the Amazon River, along with several passengers who are traveling to hear her sing. The passengers, however, are unaware of her identity. One of them, Rosalba, is a journalist planning to write a book about Grimaldi and hoping to interview her. In preparation, Rosalba has compiled a notebook for two years with information about the diva.

Florencia spends her time on the boat brooding about Cristóbal. She does not interact much with the other passengers initially, and the thread connecting the subplots in the story is provided by the ship's mate, Ríolobo, who also is the focus for the elements of magical realism. Ríolobo functions as a narrator, one of the characters, and the intermediary between reality and the mystical world of the river.

Meanwhile, Rosalba is beginning to fall in love with the steamboat captain's nephew, Arcadio, who rescues her notebook when it falls overboard. The two play a game of cards with Paula and Álvaro, a bickering couple who are also looking forward to Grimaldi's performance. After the game, a storm develops and Álvaro saves the boat but is thrown overboard. With the captain knocked unconscious and Ríolobo having disappeared, Arcadio takes the helm but the ship runs aground. Ríolobo reappears in the form of a river spirit and the storm stops after he calls upon the river gods.

## Act II

The characters recover from the storm. Florencia seems to feel Cristóbal's presence and is unsure whether she is alive or dead. Rosalba, focused on her objective, resists the attraction she and Arcadio feel for each other. Meanwhile, Paula, in spite of their constant fighting, recognizes that she still loves Álvaro and mourns his loss. Again Ríolobo appeals to the river and Álvaro is suddenly returned to the ship.

In the storm, Rosalba's precious notebook has been lost again, and when it is recovered again it has been ruined by the water. Distraught, Rosalba argues with Florencia about the meaning and value of its contents when suddenly she discovers that the woman she has been arguing with is the very singer she has been longing to interview. Realizing how Florencia draws inspiration from love, Rosalba decides to give in to her feelings for Arcadio.

The boat arrives in Manaus, but a cholera outbreak keeps the passengers quarantined aboard the ship. Florencia despairs of a reunion with Cristóbal, but in the end she is magically transformed into a butterfly, to represent her spirit going off to be reunited with her lover.

**Soloists**

| Role | Voice Type | Performer |
|---|---|---|
| **Florencia**<br>*The diva* | soprano | Tatiana Morales |
| **Rosalba**<br>*A young journalist* | soprano | Chandlar Head |
| **Paula**<br>*An unhappy wife* | mezzo-soprano | Dongxu Ding |
| **Arcadio**<br>*The captain's nephew* | tenor | Genghong Cai |
| **Álvaro**<br>*An unhappy husband* | baritone | James Wright III |
| **Ríolobo**<br>*A river spirit* | baritone | Heedo Park |
| **Capitán**<br>*The captain of the El Dorado* | bass-baritone | Ryan Kuster |

**Understudies:**
Chelsea Day (Florencia), Andrea Gomez (Rosalba), Ris Kemp (Paula)

## Opera Chorus Personnel

**Soprano**
Ary Bocksnick
Christen Caldwell
Elliot Cook
Raelyn Cudd
Grace Gamel
Grace Glaser
Keira Hinton
Ty Holcomb
Qiyi Li
Lauren VanAuker

**Alto**
Anya Guidry
Elena Menasco
Ed Schultz
Pepper Visser

**Tenor**
Alek Gonzalez
Davide Gucciardi
John Guess

**Bass**
Eli Barreto
Landon Beaty
Hezekiah Mayers

## Orchestra Personnel

**Flute**
Hsiang-Yen Chiu
Emma Martin

**Oboe**
Brenda Espinosa
Emma Berg

**Clarinet**
Morgan Magnoni
Hayen Grier

**Bassoon**
Joaquin Soto
Raul Rodriguez

**Horn**
Evan Littleton
Deija Nunn
Nathan Laurel

**Trumpet**
Jacob Burnham
Joseph Marta

**Trombone**
Gianluca Castro
Zachary Close

**Tuba**
Xavier Gauthier

**Harp**
Eliza Fichialos

**Bass**
Jacob O'Toole
Savannah Hilterbrandt

**Percussion**
Taylor Bowen
Lorraine Macharia

**Marimba**
Matthew Chovanec
Nic Dunn

**Violin I**
LinTing Tseng
Arsenio Pena
Chloe Svadlenka
Hongrui Wang
Karen G.Castrejon

**Violin II**
Chien Chou
Phoebe Tang
Ray Hsu
Ziyang Lyu
Travis Pota-Birkhoff

**Viola**
Britteny Geurink
Samuel Yi
Angel De Hoyos
Kseniya Kluykina

**Cello**
Paul Trainor
Jonathan Scoggins
Chase Teague
Maya Huber

**Artistic Team**

Stage Director.....JJ Hudson
Conductor.....Stephanie Rhodes Russell
Music Director.....Stephanie Rhodes Russell
Vocal Coach.....Sharon Bjorndal Lavery
Diction Coach.....Stephen Dubberly
Chorus Master.....Sharon Bjorndal Lavery
Costume Designer.....Michael Robinson
Lighting Designer.....Audrey Reed
Assistant Director.....Genevieve Cardos
Collaborative Pianists.....Joohee Jeong, James Monson, Molly Smith

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**Production Team**

Production Manager.....Julie Hohman
Resident Stage Manager.....Emma Gulovsen
Production Stage Manager.....Andrew Riedel
Assistant Stage Managers.....Anabelle Parra, Cody Weaver, and Jackson Whitmire
Supertitles.....Chelsea Day and Emma Gulovsen
UNT Opera TA's.....Emma Davis, Emma Gulovsen, and James Monson

**Biographies (Artistic Team)**

**JJ HUDSON** is delighted to begin this year as the Senior Lecturer of Opera Directing at the University of North Texas. Hudson comes to UNT from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he was the Interim Artistic Director of Opera between 2023-2026. Prior to this position, Hudson served as the Valerie Adams Professor of Opera at Georgia State University (2021-2023), where he was also the Artistic Director of the Harrower Summer Opera Workshop. Hudson began full-time work in academia after more than fifteen years of freelance work as a stage director.

Hudson's recent professional productions include *West Side Story* (Wichita Grand Opera), *Becoming Santa Clause* (Opera Lousiane), *Rita* and *Il Segreto di Susanna* (Sarasota Opera), *La bohème* (Mississippi Opera), *Così fan tutte* (Opera Tampa), *Tosca, Il barbiere di Siviglia, La bohème* (Tri-Cities Opera), *Bastianello* (Rochester Lyric Opera), *West Side Story* (Asheville Lyric Opera), *La Cenerentola* (Opera Roanoke), *La traviata* (Berkshires Theater Group), *Ariadne auf Naxos, La belle Hélène*, A*Midsummer Night's Dream, Carmen*, and *The Rake's Progress*, and *La bohème* (Lakes Area Music Festival), and *South Pacific* and *Cenerentola* (Opera Roanoke). Upcoming productions include *La traviata* with the Helena Symphony in Spring 2027, and *Falstaff* and *Carousel* with Opera in the Ozarks in Summer 2027.

Hudson is an in-demand guest director with young-artist program and university opera-theaters. In 2013, JJ served on the directing staff of the Aspen Opera Theater, where he worked on productions of *Suor Angelica, Gianni Schicchi,* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. Recent university and young-artist productions include *Candide*, *Le nozze di Figaro, I pagliacci*, *Il tabarro, Carmen, A Little Night Music* (Opera in the Ozarks), *Albert Herring* and *Susannah* (Harrower Summer Opera Workshop), *Le nozze di Figaro* (Miami Music Festival), *The Turn of the Screw* (Stony Brook University), *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Don Giovanni*, *L'Étoile,* and *Alcina* (Cleveland Institute of Music), *Lucio Silla, Werther, Così fan tutte* (Temple University), *The Impresario* and *The Medium* (University of Kansas), *La finta giardiniera*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors, Le nozze di Figaro* (Columbus State University), and *Our Town*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *La serva padrona* (Georgia State University).

**STEPHANIE RHODES RUSSELL** recently completed a residency as Conducting Fellow with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra where she appeared regularly with the ensemble leading education, family, and community concerts while serving as cover conductor for the symphonic subscription series. She is the recipient of a 2019 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award, designed to aid outstanding young conductors in developing their talents and careers. She has served on the music staff of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia, The Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, LA Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Washington National Opera, amongst others, and her extensive operatic experience in the roles of assistant conductor, prompter, chorus master, rehearsal pianist, and diction coach, brings a comprehensive understanding to her work. Other recent engagements include concerts with the American Festival Chorus and Orchestra, performances of Handel's Alcina at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, an engagement with Washington National Opera's forum for new works, the American Opera Initiative, and The Magic Flute and Dido and Aeneas with the Miami Music Festival.

**SHARON BJORNDAL LAVERY** began her career as an Assistant Chorus Master at New York City Opera. She went on to serve as Chorus Master and Assistant Conductor for productions at the Bard Summerscape Festival, Opera Philadelphia, and Utah Opera. Dr. Lavery has served as coach, conductor, pianist, and singer for opera companies and symphonies around the country, including Wolf Trap Opera, San Diego Opera, San Diego Symphony, Kentucky Opera, Louisville Orchestra, American Symphony Orchestra, Juilliard Orchestra, Waco Symphony, Vox Seraphim Choir and Orchestra, and McLennan Opera. She has worked closely with living composers Jake Heggie, Marc Adamo, Deborah Drattell, Lisa DeSpain, and Daron Hagen, as well as the late Stephen Sondheim, interpreting premieres and reviving classics. Upcoming engagements include serving as Pianist/Coach for Forth Worth Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and conducting Handel's *Messiah* for the Winston-Salem Mozart Club.

**EMMA GULOVSEN,** soprano, found a love of opera in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since her first (masked) performance of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Emma has performed in over 20 operas from chorister to lead roles such as the title roles in Handel's *Alcina* with Missouri State University and *Agrippina* with Chicago Summer Opera, the Fox in Portman's *The Little Prince* and Laurie in Copland's *The Tender Land* with Ozarks Lyric Opera, Elisetta in Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto* with FIO ITALIA, and performed the role of Sherry in the world premiere of Despain's *That Hellbound Train* on less than 36 hours notice with UNT.

Emma has received degrees from Missouri State University and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Vocal Performance at the University of North Texas, where she is the recipient of the Competitive Graduate Voice Performance Scholarship and studies with Carol Wilson. Outside of opera, Emma has sung with the internationally acclaimed MSU Chorale, MSU Women's Chorus, and the UNT A Cappella Choir. Emma will sing Laurie Moss in UNT's spring production of *The Tender Land*.

**ANABELLE PARRA** is a soprano studying voice performance with Stephen Morscheck. This summer she attended Tokyo Opera Studio in Tokyo, Japan. Recent roles include Frasquita (*Carmen*) with Tokyo Opera Studio and Breck (*That Hellbound Train*) with UNT Opera. Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Beth Moss (*The Tenderland*) and understudy Laurie Moss (*The Tenderland*).

**JOOHEE JONG** is a pianist and doctoral student in Piano Performance at the University of North Texas, where she serves as an Opera Teaching Assistant. She is active as both a solo and collaborative pianist, with extensive experience working with singers and opera productions. Before coming to UNT, Joohee worked with the University of Notre Dame Opera from 2016 to 2022 as an accompanist for opera productions and rehearsals. During her time at Notre Dame, she also served as Adjunct Piano Faculty, teaching private piano lessons. Her professional experience includes solo performance, collaborative piano, opera, and teaching. Joohee earned a Master of Music in Collaborative Piano from Illinois State University and both Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in Piano Performance from Indiana University South Bend. She currently studies with Liudmila Georgievskaya at the University of North Texas.

**JAMES MONSON** pianist, is a first-year master's student from Bellevue, Washington studying collaborative piano at UNT. He is currently a teaching assistant and collaborative pianist for UNT Opera; this is his first experience in an operatic production. He is also an avid tenor and currently sings in the A Cappella choir at UNT. James received his B.S. in Chemistry from Brigham Young University, where he sang at various times with BYU Singers, BYU Concert Choir, and the BYU Men's Chorus. In 2025, he participated in the Source Song Festival in Minneapolis, MN. James is a recipient of the Eastman Piano and Organ Scholarship, the Winspear Opera Scholarship, and the Cecelia Cunningham Box Choir Scholarship.

**MOLLY SMITH** is a pianist whose passion lies in operatic work and collaborative performance. This is her second year as a master's student at the University of North Texas, where she studies collaborative piano with Dr Puccinelli, and Dr Harlos. Her awards include being a winner of the Brigham Young University concerto competition, selection as a Signature Artist at the Oracle Chamber Music Festival, and first place in the Young Collaborative Pianists Competition. Molly has served as the Collaborative Piano Teacher's Assistant at the Brevard Music Center, performing in orchestras and chamber groups as well as working alongside individual young artists to present concerts across Brevard campus and beyond. Her recent work as a rehearsal pianist, coach, and orchestral keyboardist has included *Alcina, Le nozze di Figaro, The Medium, Aleko*, and *Gianni Schicchi.*

**ANDREW RIEDEL** is a third-year undergraduate Vocal Performance major from Estacada, Oregon. He began singing tenor only a couple years ago and has had opportunities to study multiple roles, as well as perform them on stages around the world. Since he started his Bachelor's degree at the University of North Texas, he has been studying with his voice teacher, and world-renowned tenor, William Joyner. In the last season, Andrew performed the role of Tamino in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte with the UNT Summer opera and then performed the role of Don José in Bizet's Carmen with the Tokyo Opera Studio. He is set to make his professional role debut as Rodolfo in La Bohème this fall with the new opera company, Operaon75. Last year he won the Portland Opera competition in Portland, Oregon, and was a finalist for the Schmidt Vocal Arts Undergraduate Competition. He has high aspirations for both of those competitions again this year. Andrew has the honor of singing with the UNT Acapella Choir and has been awarded two scholarships from the choral faculty.

**CODY WEAVER,** tenor, is a first-year transfer student from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, currently studying voice under the tutelage of Jennifer Lane. As an ensemble artist with the Hawaii Opera Theatre, his performance credits include Bizet's *Carmen, Riot Grrl on Mars,* and the world premiere of Herb Mahelona's *Kamelehua: The Sheltering Tree*.

**JACKSON WHITMIRE** is a tenor from Austin, Texas, currently in his third year as a Music Performance major. He studies voice with William Joyner and participates in a cappella choir. This season, he has performed in the chorus of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* and serves as Assistant Stage Manager for UNT Opera's production of *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Outside of school, Jackson also works professionally.

**CHELSEA DAY,** soprano, earned a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of North Texas and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts in vocal performance, studying with Mary Mills. Chelsea is working on her first DMA recital, "Songs for Children." This upcoming January, she will perform as the First Witch in *Dido and Aeneas* with Opera Arlington. This fall, Chelsea will understudy the title role in *Florencia en el Amazonas* at UNT. This past April, she performed the role of Ma in UNT's world premiere of *That Hellbound Train* by Lisa DeSpain. She previously performed the roles of Marie (*If I Loved You…*), Chocholka (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), and Edith (*The Pirates of Penzance*). Chelsea previously attended the Opera in Concert study abroad program, in Urbino, Italy. She performs with DFW Opera Underground and OperaOn75. Chelsea is also a staff singer at First Presbyterian Church of Plano.

**EMMA DAVIS,** soprano, is a graduate student at the University of North Texas, pursuing a Master of Music in Vocal Performance with a related field in Composition. At UNT Opera, she will perform the title role of Florencia (*Florencia en el Amazonas*) this season. Most recently, Emma performed the title role of Alcina (*Alcina*) with UNT Opera and was a soprano soloist in Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* with the UNT Symphony and Grand Chorus. Other recent performances include Theodora (*Newton*), Lucy (*The Telephone*), and soprano soloist in Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* with the Two Rivers Chorale. Emma holds Bachelor of Music degrees in Vocal Performance and Music Composition and a Bachelor of Science in Media Production from the University of Northwestern – St. Paul, where she studied voice with Carol Eikum. She has received first-place awards from the Minnesota NATS State Student Auditions, Schubert Club Competition, and Thursday Musical Competition.

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**Biographies (Soloists, in Alphabetical Order)**

**ELI BARRETO,** baritone, is a third-year Vocal Performance and Music education from Gregory, South Dakota. This season, he is singing in the choruses of *Florencia en el Amazonas* and *I Capuleti e i Montecchi,* as well as the role of Mr. Jenks in *The Tender Land.* He will also be a featured soloist in the scenes program this spring.

**LANDON BEATY,** bass-baritone, is a third year Vocal and Bassoon Performance Major from Klamath Falls, Oregon.

**ARY BOCKSNICK,** soprano, is a sophomore from Manor, Texas studying a Bachelor of Arts degree in music with Chandler Head. Ary has been part of a small choir with the Austin Civic Orchestra performing the song "Make our Garden Grow" from *Candide*. Upcoming roles with UNT opera is an Ensemble member in *Florencia en el Amazonas*.

**GENGHONG CAI,** tenor, China, is a second-year Doctor of Musical Arts student in Vocal Performance at the University of North Texas, where he studies with Mark Tempesta. He earned his Master of Music from California State University, Northridge (2025) and has performed roles including Rinuccio from *Gianni Schicchi* (UNT 2025), Chevalier in Dialogues des Carmélites (CSUN, 2024), Goro in *Madama Butterfly* (Mission Opera, 2024), the First Armed Man in *Die Zauberflöte* (CSUN, 2023), and Comte Barigoule in *Cendrillon* (Arkansas State University, 2023). In 2024 summer, he participated in the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, where he worked in masterclasses with Mariusz Kwiecień, received coaching from Wagner soprano KS Linda Watson, and appeared in performance with baritone Thomas Hampson. His distinctions include the Toulouse Graduate School R.B. Toulouse Scholarship (2025), Helen Houle Scholarship (2024), First Place at the NATS State Auditions (2024), Julia Lansford Scholarship (2022), and recognition as both a Certificate of Academic Achievement recipient and Honors Recital Performer (2021–2022).

**CHRISTEN M. CALDWELL**, soprano, is a Junior from Dallas, Texas studying voice with Dr. Stephen Morscheck. Christen's range of performances include, Morgana (*Alcina*), Sister Angelica (*Suor Angelica*), Elena (*Paride ed Elena*), Carnegie Hall Featured Small Chorus, Witch (*Into the Woods)*, Norma Valverde (*Hands on a Hardbody)*, and Central Texas JazzFest's featured artist. Christen's awards include a Downbeat Award for Best Performing Arts Vocal Ensemble (Lab Singers), Jazz Vocalist of the Year (Central Texas A&M) and is a second-place winner in the NATS Vocal Competition (Intermediate Adult Division). She was most recently First Lady in UNT's Summer Opera performance of Die Zauberflöte by Mozart.
Christen is currently on opera scholarship at the University of North Texas and will complete her undergraduate degree Spring '27.

**ELLIOT COOK,** a soprano from Houston, Texas, is a first-year undergraduate Music Education student, studying under Professor Mills. They are a member of the UNT Camerata and UpFront! Choirs. They are performing as a chorus member in Florencia.

**RAELYN CUDD,** soprano, is a 2nd-Year Transfer from Mission Viejo, California, pursuing Vocal Performance and Music Education, studying with Jennifer Lane. Raelyn performs with UNT A Cappella Choir. Upcoming roles are Chorus (*Florencia en el Amazonas*) and Production Stage Manager (*The Tender Land*). Recent roles include Bakery Woman, Grand Chorus (*That Hellbound Train*), and Assistant Stage Manager (*Aleko & Gianni Schicci*).

**DONGXU DING**, mezzo-soprano, is a second-year DMA student from China studying with Molly Fillmore. In 2026, She performs the role of Ruggiero (*Alcina*). In 2025, she performs King David with Grand Chorus& Symphony Orchestra. In 2024, Dongxu performs the role of Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) and chorus (*Die Fledermaus*). She received her Master degree from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen). She performed in several Opera Scenes productions while at CUHK, portraying roles such as Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*), Carmen (*Carmen*), Charlotte (*Werther*), and Marthe (*Faust*). In 2020, she received her bachelors degree from Tianjin Conservatory of Music. She performed in several Opera as ensemble while at TCM, such as '*Turandot*', '*La Bohème*'. She is the recipient of TGS Academic Achievement scholarship and Winspear Scholarship Award. Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Paula (*Florencia en el Amazonas*) and Romeo (I *Capuleti e i Montecchi*).

**GRACE GAMEL,** soprano, is a freshman from Katy, TX studying voice performance with Mary Mills. Her previous credits include chorus (*La Boheme*) and chorus (*The Little Prince*) with Opera in the Heights. Last year, she was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Bauer Family High School Voice Studio. This is her first season with UNT Opera.

**GRACE GLASER**, soprano, is a sophomore from Katy, Texas. She is studying vocal performance and music education under Mary Mills. She is a member of the University Singers choir at UNT. Her upcoming role is Chorus (*Florencia en el Amazonas*), and she will also serve as Assistant Stage Manager (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*).

**ALEK GONZALEZ, t**enor, is a sophomore from Fort Worth, Texas, studying a BA with a vocal concentration under Richard Novak. His recent roles include chorus in *Die Zauberflöte, Sweeney Todd*, and *Pirates of Penzance* with TCU Opera, as well as Chorus for UNT Opera's *Aleko*, *Alcina*, *That Hellbound Train*, and Martin's Son in *That Hellbound Train*. Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Chorus in *Florencia En El Amazonas*.

**DAVIDE GUCCIARDI,** tenor, is a second-year undergraduate music education major from Houston, Texas. He currently studies with Daniel Bubeck. This season with UNT Opera, he will be performing in the opera choruses for *Florencia en el Amazonas*, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi,* and *The Tender Land.*

**JOHN GUESS,** tenor, is a sophomore vocal performance major from Flower Mound, Texas. He is studying under Richard Novak, and is a recipient of the Harold Heiburg Vocal Scholarship. He made his operatic debut as Monostatos (*The Magic Flute*) with UNT Summer Opera in May, and he is reprising the role again this season with Opera Arlington. This season with UNT Opera, John will be in the chorus of *Florencia en el Amazonas.*

**ANYA GUIDRY,** soprano, is a Junior from Cedar Hill, Texas studying voice performance with Daniel Bubeck. This past summer, she participated in various gospel performances and workshops. Her incoming opera roles include both an ensemble/chorus role and a role playing as a water spirit in *Florencia en el Amazonas.*

**CHANDLAR HEAD** is a compelling soprano praised for her emotional depth and luminous tone. She is currently pursuing her Doctorate of Music at the University of North Texas, following a Master of Music from Texas Tech University and a Bachelor of Music from Eastern New Mexico University. Her notable operatic roles include the title role in Suor Angelica, Rosalinde in Die Fledermaus, Adina in L'elisir d'amore, and Pamina in Die Zauberflöte. Chandlar has captivated audiences as a soloist at renowned venues such as Carnegie Hall, St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican and La Madeline in Paris. A winner of the TTU Symphony Concerto Competition, she has also performed in masterclasses with Patricia Racette. She premiered the role of Sherry in the world premier of Lisa Despain and David Simpatico's That Hellbound Train in 2026. Additionally, she debuted the role of Lauretta in Puccini's Gianni Schicchi in the inaugural season for Atchley Opera in Ft. Worth, TX. Her artistry is shaped by collaborations with distinguished conductors and directors, and she has contributed to community engagement through past performances with Amarillo Opera Theatre. In addition to performing, she also enjoys teaching a private studio of students.

**KEIRA HINTON**, soprano, is a first-year Vocal Performance major coming from San Marcos, TX. She's studying under Richard Novak, as well as Jessica Nápoles at the University of North Texas for the Fall 2026 semester. She's excited to join her first opera, playing as a soprano in the ensemble of UNT's production of *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Additionally, she'll be working several crew roles throughout the season.

**TY HOLCOMB,** a soprano from Harker Heights Texas, is a fourth-year undergraduate studying choral music education at the University of North Texas. In addition to her involvement with UNT Opera, Ty studies voice with Chandlar Head and sings in the university's top choral ensemble, A Cappella. Her performance in the chorus of *Florencia en el Amazonas* is her UNT Opera debut.

**RYAN KUSTER**, bass-baritone, has had an extensive career, appearing with leading companies including San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Opera Colorado, and San Diego Opera. Acclaimed for his Escamillo in *Carmen*, Kuster has also performed Don Giovanni, Figaro, and Lysiart in *Euryanthe*. His concert work includes appearances with the National Symphony Orchestra and Milwaukee Symphony, and he is featured on San Francisco Opera's *Lucrezia Borgia* DVD.

A former Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera, Kuster performed 59 mainstage roles over two seasons. His honors include first place in the Igor Gorin Award, Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition semifinalist, and prizes from the Gerda Lissner and Licia Albanese-Puccini competitions. He has participated in young artist programs at Wolf Trap, Chautauqua, and Spoleto Festival USA.

Kuster now maintains a thriving private voice studio. He is a 2nd year DMA student in Vocal Performance, studying with Stephen Morscheck. He holds an Artist Diploma from the Academy of Vocal Arts, an MM from Boston University, and a BM from Westminster Choir College.

**QIYI LI** is a soprano from Beijing, China, currently pursuing her Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of North Texas, where she studies with Molly Fillmore. She holds a graduate degree from the Manhattan School of Music and an undergraduate degree from the China Conservatory of Music. Li has participated in the Shiyijie Music Festival and was awarded a gold medal in the Chinese Excellent Talented Students Competition. Her operatic credits include the Spirit and Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Musetta in Puccini's *La Bohème*, female soldiers in *Jiang Jie* and *Honghu Red Guards*, and chorus in Dvořák's *Rusalka*. She is also a member of the Riverside Church Choir.

**HEZEKIAH MAYERS,** baritone, is a sophomore Illinois native currently residing in Katy, Texas. He's currently studying voice performance with Dr. Stephen Morscheck. He is vocally active in UNT's University Singers and will be performing in UNT Opera's *Florencia En El Amazonas* and *The Tender Land* as a member of the Chorus during the 2026-2027 opera season.

**ELENA MENASCO** is a Mezzo-Soprano from Cypress, Texas. She is a second-year double major in Vocal Performance and Choral Music Education at the University of North Texas. She currently studies with Professor William Joyner and is a member of the UNT Acapella choir.

**TATIANA MORALES,** soprano, from Copperas Cove, Texas, is pursuing a Graduate Artist Diploma in Vocal Performance at the University of North Texas, where she studies with Dr. Stephen Morscheck. She holds a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where she studied with Jane Dutton, and a Bachelor of Music from East Texas A&M University - Commerce, where she studied with Dr. Barrett Radziun. This season, Tatiana makes her UNT opera debut as Florencia Grimaldi in Daniel Catán's Florencia en el Amazonas. Her performing experience includes Countess Almaviva in Le nozze di Figaro by Mozart (English), as well as scenes and partial roles as Marguerite in Faust by Gounod, Nedda in Pagliacci by Leoncavallo, Mimì in La bohème by Puccini, Ellen Orford in Peter Grimes by Britten, and Echo in Ariadne auf Naxos by Strauss. She has also appeared as the soprano soloist in Orff's Carmina Burana. Tatiana has earned multiple first-place finishes at NATS–DFW in both classical and musical theater categories and has been a semifinalist in the Classical Singer Competition and NATS–TEXOMA.

**HEEDO PARK,** baritone, is a second-year master's student at the University of North Texas from South Korea. He studied vocal performance at Yonsei University and earned a Graduate Diploma from the Cleveland Institute of Music. He is a voice student of Mary Mills at the University of North Texas. His roles with CIM Opera include Ruggiero in *Alcina* and Tapioca in *L'Étoile*. With UNT Opera, he most recently performed Betto in *Gianni Schicchi*. His upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Ríolobo in *Florencia en el Amazonas* and Lorenzo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi.*

**ED SCHULTZ,** mezzo-soprano, is a second year choral music education and vocal performance major from Keller, Texas. At UNT, they study under Carol Wilson and are a member of University Singers and UpFront! Last spring, they sang with Voces8 in London as part of their Vox Anima program; In their debut with UNT Opera, they will be joining the chorus of *Florencia en el Amazonas.* This Spring, they are looking forward to performing in the chorus of *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*.

**LAUREN VANAUKER,** soprano, is a sophomore from Galena, Kansas, studying with William Joyner. Lauren has been involved in theater since 2018. In performance with UNT Opera, they will perform as chorus (*Florencia en el Amazonas*). Lauren is currently performing with the Camerata choral ensemble.

**PEPPER VISSER,** mezzo, is a senior vocal performance major studying at the University of North Texas under Daniel Bubeck. Upcoming Opera roles are Chorus in *Florencia en el Amazonas.*

**JAMES WRIGHT III,** baritone, is a second-year Vocal Performance master's student at the University of North Texas, studying under Dr. Stephen Morscheck. Originally from Monroe Louisiana, James has portrayed many roles in Operas and Musicals portraying Shrek (Shrek: The Musical), Aeneas (Dido and Aeneas), Mr. Mushnik (Little Shop of Horrors) throughout his undergrad years, and is the recipient of the 2024-2025 Harry M. Lemart award winner for Outstanding Music Student, at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. His most recent roles at UNT include Marco (*Gianni Schicchi*), Melisso (*Alcina*), and Grand Chorus, Boxing Crowd, Chain Gang, & Random Hobo (*That Hellbound Train*). When not performing at UNT, James is a constant attendant of the Savannah Voice Festival founded by baritone Sherrill Milnes, performing multiple Classical and Broadway concerts. He aspires to become a worldwide crossover performer in Opera and Broadway, while maintaining a small career in private voice teaching, to spread knowledge to other artists like himself.

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to make this production possible.