

Curtis Opera Theatre 2024–25 Centennial Series Closes with Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*

Director Emma Griffin and conductor David Charles Abell lead an exciting cast of rising young opera stars and members of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra at The Forrest Theatre

PHILADELPHIA, PA—March 27, 2025—**Curtis Opera Theatre's** 2024–25 Centennial Series concludes on Friday, April 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m., and Sunday, April 13, 2025 at 2:00 p.m., with Curtis alumnus **Leonard Bernstein's** (Conducting '41) timeless masterpiece, ***Candide***, at the **Forrest Theatre**, Philadelphia's premier Broadway touring theatre, built in 1927 by the Shubert Organization. Filled with sparkling wit, soaring melodies, and globe-trotting grandeur, this biting clever adaptation of Voltaire's philosophical French novella is an absurdist romp across "the best of all possible worlds."

Acclaimed theater and opera director **Emma Griffin**, managing artistic director of Mannes Opera at the New School's College of Performing Arts returns to Curtis for her ninth production. Under the baton of internationally distinguished conductor **David Charles Abell**, *Candide* features the rising young stars of Curtis Opera Theatre and members of the **Curtis Symphony Orchestra**. This vibrant new production bursts to the seams with energy, featuring dynamic dance sequences by Emmy Award-nominated director and choreographer **Jeffrey L. Page**—celebrated for his work with Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, Jeanine Tesori, and Diane Paulus.

Candide follows the wildly absurd misadventures of the naively optimistic title character and his beloved Cunegonde, daughter of the Baron of Thunder-ten-tronckh, as they stumble through an endless string of comedic catastrophes. Emma Griffin's inventive staging places the madcap action of Bernstein's operetta in a large room, reminiscent of an old Marx Brothers set—visually modern yet rooted in a type of vaudeville "Borscht Belt" comedy, an influence on the work when it was written in the 1950s. Various members of the company serve as the narrator in a form of communal storytelling, and at the heart of the chaos stands Candide, an innocent thrust into an unpredictable world.

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Featuring modern musical classics such as “Glitter and Be Gay” and “Make Our Garden Grow,” *Candide*’s darkly satirical tale of youthful innocence and human folly in war-torn times of crisis is as relevant today as it was when Voltaire’s novella was first published in 1759.

“It’s an honor to be able to come back to Curtis—an institution that has been so important to my career in opera—during the school’s Centennial Season,” says director **Emma Griffin**. “This production is a celebration of these incredible students—the singers on stage and instrumentalists in a pit—all of them doing an incredibly hard thing in a very sophisticated way, with music that is both joyful and complex but also *pointed*. It’s a satire about a time of great cruelty, and it’s not out of date. It’s a celebration of these young artists exercising their craft. They are telling us a story, they are entertaining us, and they have something to say.”

Praised by the *New York Times*, the *Times* of London, and *Opera Magazine*, conductor **David Charles Abell**, former music director and principal conductor for the Philly Pops, leads the **Curtis Symphony Orchestra** and a brilliant ensemble of young singers, including tenor **Landry Allen** as *Candide*; soprano **Emilie Kealani** as *Cunegonde*, his aristocratic love interest; and baritone **Emilio Vásquez** as *Candide*’s tutor *Pangloss*, a staunch advocate of philosophical optimism. Baritone **Nathan Schludecker** is *Maximilian*, *Candide*’s entitled brother-in-law; Mezzo-soprano **Katie Trigg** portrays the *Old Lady*, *Cunegonde*’s dear companion with a tragic past; and soprano **Emily Damasco** plays *Paquette*, a chambermaid from *Cunegonde*’s household.

The talented cast is rounded out with bass-baritone **Evan Gray** as the *Baron*, *Grand Inquisitor*, *Don Issachar*, and *Cacambo*; soprano **Juliet Rand** as the *Baroness/First Sheep*; baritone **Hongrui Ren** as a *Judge* and *Crook*; baritone **Robert Frazier** as a *Judge*, *Aide*, and *Ragotski*; baritone **Ross Macatangay** as a *Judge*, *Captain*, and *Archbishop*; tenor **Jackson Allen** as the *Heresy Agent*, *Señore*, *Governor*, and *Vanderdendur*; bass-baritone **Yulin Yan** as *Señore* and *Prefect*, countertenor **Sam Higgins** as the *Priest*; mezzo-soprano **Shikta Mukherjee** as the *Second Sheep*; a *Narrator* comprised of various members of the company; and a dazzling chorus of *Curtis Opera Theatre* singers.

Candide comes to life through an imaginative set courtesy of highly sought-after scenic designer for theater, opera, and dance, **Amy Rubin**; award-winning creative producer and lighting designer **Oona Curley**; and multifaceted sound engineer and producer **Rick Jacobsohn**. Renowned New York-based costume designer **Terese Wadden**, who created

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the costumes for the Tony Award winning production of *Oklahoma!* on Broadway, brings the characters to life with the spirit of old Hollywood, while **Brittany Rappise**'s hair and makeup design add both an elegant and a scrappy, vaudevillian flair.

The 2024–25 Curtis Centennial Season continues, now through May 10. To learn more about upcoming performances, as well as the Curtis Symphony Orchestra, Curtis New Music Ensemble concerts, Curtis Recital Series, and more, visit curtis.edu/calendar.

TICKETS

Tickets for *Candide* start at \$24 and can be purchased through curtis.edu/candide.

[*Candide*](#) Curtis Opera Theatre

Leonard Bernstein (Conducting '41), music

Richard Wilbur, John Latouche, Dorothy Parker, Lillian Hellman, Stephen Sondheim, and Leonard Bernstein, lyrics

Lillian Hellman and Hugh Wheeler, book

Featuring members of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra

Friday, April 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 13, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.

The Forrest Theatre, 1114 Walnut St., Philadelphia

David Charles Abell, conductor

Emma Griffin, director

Jeffrey L. Page, choreographer

Amy Rubin, scenic designer

Terese Wadden, costume designer

Oona Curley, lighting designer

Rick Jacobsohn, sound designer

Brittany Rappise, hair and makeup designer

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CAST

In order of vocal appearance:

Pangloss	Emilio Vásquez
Candide	Landry Allen
Cunegonde	Emilie Kealani
Maximillian	Nathan Schludecker
Baron/Grand Inquisitor/ Don Issachar/Cacambo	Evan Gray
Baroness/First Sheep	Juliet Rand
Paquette	Emily Damasco
Judge/Crook	Hongrui Ren
Judge/Aide/Ragotski	Robert Frazier
Judge/Captain/Archbishop	Ross Macatangay
Heresy Agent/Señore/ Governor/Vanderdendur	Jackson Allen
The Old Lady	Katie Trigg
Señore/Prefect	Yulin Yan
Priest	Sam Higgins
Second Sheep	Shikta Mukherjee
Narrator	Various members of the company

Chorus: Sarah Fleiss, Nikan Ingabire Kanate, Kylie Kreucher, Juliette Tacchino, Maya Mor Mitrani, Shikta Mukherjee, Juliet Rand, Jeysla Rosario Santos, Kate Li, Judy Zhuo, Sam Higgins, Gabriel Feldt (guest artist), Hongrui Ren, Ross Macatangay, Robert Frazier, Evan Gray, and Yulin Yan

With members of Curtis Symphony Orchestra

Candide will be performed in English with English supertitles.

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Philanthropic Support for Curtis' 2024–25 Season

Curtis' Centennial Season is made possible through the support of Derek and Sissela Bok, the Mary Louise Curtis Bok Foundation, Deborah M. Fretz, Charles C. Freyer and Judith Durkin Freyer, Mignon and Jim Groch, Rita E. Hauser, Lisa and Gie Liem, Bob and Guna Mundheim, Judith and James Ritchings, Bob and Caro Rock, and Mark and Robin Rubenstein.

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Curtis Opera Theatre is generously supported by the Ernestine Bacon Cairns Trust and the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation.

About Curtis Opera Theatre

Through innovative productions and extraordinary musicianship, the promising young artists of Curtis Opera Theatre work alongside renowned conductors, directors, and designers to present audiences with fresh and compelling performances from across the operatic repertoire. Under the visionary leadership of Eric Owens and Miloš Repický, Curtis's voice and opera students are cast regularly throughout the season, providing a unique level of performance experience to draw upon throughout their careers with top opera companies across the United States and Europe, including La Scala, Covent Garden, the Vienna Staatsoper, Houston Grand Opera, the San Francisco Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera.

About the Curtis Institute of Music

At Curtis, the world's great young musicians develop into exceptional artists, creators, and innovators. With a tuition-free foundation, Curtis is a unique environment for teaching and learning. A small school by design, students realize their artistic potential through intensive, individualized study with the most renowned, sought-after faculty. Animated by a learn-by-doing philosophy, Curtis students share their music with audiences through more than 100 performances each year, including solo and chamber recitals, orchestral concerts, and opera—all free or at an affordable cost—offering audiences unique opportunities to participate in pivotal moments in these young musicians' careers. Curtis students experience a close connection to the most renowned artists and organizations in classical music, as well as innovative initiatives that integrate new technologies and encourage entrepreneurship—all within a historic campus in the heart of culturally rich Philadelphia. In this diverse, collaborative community, Curtis's extraordinary artists challenge, support, and inspire one another—continuing an unparalleled 100-year legacy of musicians who have led, and will lead, classical music into a thriving, equitable, and multidimensional future. Learn more at curtis.edu.
