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**LYRIC THEATRE
OF OKLAHOMA**

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Lessons from a Legend

Lyric Theatre Returns to Myriad Gardens for *Master Class*

OKLAHOMA CITY — July 22, 2021 — Patrons are invited to take a seat in the classroom of an opera legend this fall, as Lyric returns to the Myriad Botanical Gardens Water Stage to present the Tony Award-winning play *Master Class*. Performances are slated September 15 through October 3.

Written by American playwright Terrence McNally, the production is presented as a fictional master class taught by larger-than-life opera singer Maria Callas near the end of her life, in the 1970s. Alternately dismayed and impressed by the students who parade before her, Callas retreats into recollections about the glories of her own life and career. Featuring excerpts from famous operas sung live by her students, Callas shares with us the rewards and sacrifices taken in the name of art. *Master Class* will be directed by Lyric's Producing Artistic Director **Michael Baron**.

"It is an honor to direct *Master Class* by one of America's greatest playwrights, Terrence McNally, who passed away last year due to Covid. His plays and musicals are some of the highlights of my theatrical career, both as an audience member and director," Baron said. "In 1995, I was introduced to his work on Broadway seeing *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, a beautiful and groundbreaking work about the loves, lives, and losses experienced by gay men. This followed by seeing the powerful original production of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and directing the musical masterpiece, *Ragtime*, in which Terrence wrote the book. I was fortunate to work with him on a production of *The Visit* starring Chita Rivera. This relationship led to the legendary Chita Rivera coming to Lyric to perform in 2012. *Master Class* is a stunning portrayal of a great artist grappling with the challenges of her career, her legacy, and the importance of teaching the next generation of artists."

Starring as the esteemed opera singer is **Natalie Cordone**, who is making her Lyric Theatre debut. Cordone has headlined concerts with the Colorado Symphony and Orlando Philharmonic, performed with Orlando Shakespeare Theatre and Winter Park Playhouse and starred in the Off-Broadway production of *Tony 'N Tina's Wedding*.

"Natalie and I are alumni of the Wake Forest University Theatre Department and share the same love of live theatre, its power to bring us all together through storytelling, and the importance of teaching," Baron said. "Plus, she has a glorious singing voice of her own and allows this version of *Master Class* to soar like none other. I am also excited to welcome a trio of new opera 'students' to our production each week, showcasing the next generation of great musical artists."

Lyric's production will include three, rotating casts of actors portraying students in Callas' class – one for each week of the three-week run. Starring as students in *Master Class* are: **Jennie Rupp, Viviana**

Goodwin and Anh-Mai Kearney (as Sophie De Palma); **Macey Trussell, Julianne Reynolds** and **Tessa McQueen** (as Sharon Graham); and **Christopher Richie, Kyle D. Rudolph** and **Troy Freeman** (as Anthony Candolini). The cast also features **Jan McDaniel** as Manny and **Josiah Brooks** as Stagehand.

Cordone has been a fan of Callas' since she began studying opera. "Delving into her life, career and the character that McNally has created in his play, has given me a whole new appreciation for her determination, artistry and work ethic," she said. "I've loved reading about Callas and watching her in interviews and live performances. There's so much controversy surrounding not only her voice, but her personal life, that I feel like I'm learning about her in layers. Just when I think I have a handle on her point-of-view, I'll read something new that gives me a whole new perspective on why she carried herself the way that she did."

Callas, born in 1923 and died in 1977, is recognized as one of the most influential opera singers of the 20th Century. Her musical and dramatic talents led her to being hailed as *La Divina* ("the Divine one.") Composer Leonard Bernstein called her "the Bible of opera."

"I fall in love with the real Callas, and the one McNally created, more every day that I work on this piece," Cordone said. "Being an acting and vocal coach myself, I must admit that I've said most of the things that Callas says in this play to my students, in one form or another. Technique is vitally important, but that's what the rehearsal room is for! I firmly believe that connecting to your material and to your fellow performers must come first in performance."

Master Class is Lyric's fourth show of the 2021 season, running September 15 to October 3, with performances at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday; Saturday at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. The production contains adult language and content. The *Master Class* creative team also includes musical direction from **Jan McDaniel**, **Jeffrey Meek** (resident costume designer), **Uldarico Sarmiento** (set designer), **Corey Ray** (sound designer), **Fabian J. Garcia** (lighting design) and **Adam Brand** (technical director.)

Additionally, Lyric will present a world-premiere staged reading of the play *Concerto* by Alan Olejniczak on Tuesday, September 28, at 7:30 p.m. on the Myriad Botanical Gardens Water Stage. The free event, which chronicles the professional and personal struggles of Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, will be presented on stage by Baron, Olejniczak and Alexander Mickelthwate of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

Support for *Master Class* includes Lyric sponsors: The Chickasaw Nation, Devon Energy, Express Employment International, *The Oklahoman*, the Inasmuch Foundation, the Kirkpatrick Foundation, the Shubert Foundation, the E.L. and Thelma Gaylord Foundation, Braum's Ice Cream & Dairy Stores, Globe Life, Allied Arts, Oklahoma Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Tickets are available online at www.LyricTheatreOKC.org or by phone at (405) 524-9312.

About Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma

Founded in 1963, Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma is the state's leading professional theatre company. Lyric produces classic and contemporary musicals, new works, and plays featuring artists from Oklahoma and around the nation. Lyric's Thelma Gaylord Academy is the premier professional theatre training ground, offering classes in all aspects of the performing arts. Lyric is a nonprofit member theatre of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre and Allied Arts. For more information, visit www.LyricTheatreOKC.org.

**** PUBLICITY PHOTOS OF NATALIE CORDONE ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST ****