

## NEWS RELEASE

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Opera New Jersey, Inc.  
PO Box 3151, Princeton, NJ 08543 \* (609) 799-7700 \* www.Opera-NJ.org



Contact: Dan Bauer, Public Relations Consultant  
(609) 258-6524 \* DBauer@Opera-NJ.org

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### INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED CHILEAN SOPRANO VERÓNICA VILLARROEL

AND

### FAST-RISING YOUNG AMERICAN TENOR JAMES VALENTI

### TO HEADLINE OPERA NEW JERSEY'S FOURTH ANNUAL CELEBRATE OPERA GALA

PRINCETON, NJ – Opera New Jersey is thrilled to announce that internationally renowned Chilean soprano **Verónica Villarroel** and the fast-rising young American tenor **James Valenti**, fresh off his La Scala debut, will headline Opera New Jersey's Fourth Annual Celebrate Opera Gala on November 1.

Former New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean has been named Honorary Chair and longtime Princeton resident Marie L. Matthews will serve as the Gala Patron Committee Chair of the Fourth Annual Celebrate Opera Gala. The black-tie event, which will benefit Opera New Jersey's upcoming season and educational outreach, will be held at the Princeton Marriott at the Forrester.

"It's an honor to gather such world class talent at Opera New Jersey's Celebrate Opera Gala, this evening is a wonderful opportunity to not only hear great singing in an intimate environment but to kick off our next exciting season!" said General and Artistic Director, Scott Altman.



**Verónica Villarroel** is one of Chile's proudest cultural exports. As a world class operatic soprano, her sensational voice and regal beauty regularly grace the leading operatic stages around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Stuttgart Opera, Lyon Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and many others. She has sung leading roles in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*; Puccini's *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*; and Verdi's *La traviata* and *Il trovatore* opposite such names as Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Jose Cura, Plácido Domingo and Renata Scotto.

Ms. Villarroel's rise to international stardom reads like a classic fairy tale. Looking for work to support her family, she auditioned for the opera chorus of the Teatro Municipal in her native Santiago. Without previous vocal training, Ms. Villarroel immediately impressing everyone was cast as Musetta, opposite Renata Scotto as Mimi in *La bohème*. Ms. Scotto recognized the talent in her young co-star and advocated that government officials and private

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## **Opera New Jersey Fourth Annual Gala Headliners - continued**

foundations send Ms. Villarroel to New York's Julliard School. Shortly after arriving in New York, she won the Pavarotti International Voice Competition. Ms. Villarroel made her professional debut in 1990 in Barcelona, quickly followed by her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1991. *The Accidental Diva*, a documentary film about the life and rise to international stardom of Chilean world-class soprano Verónica Villarroel has won numerous international awards and has been screened at leading film festivals including Los Angeles International Latino Film Festival, Boston Latino International Film Festival and Chicago Latino Film Festival, among many others.



**James Valenti**, a New Jersey native, is currently performing the title role in Gounod's *Faust* directed by internationally acclaimed stage director Bernard Uzan at Opera Carolina. This past summer he made his very successful La Scala Opera debut as Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Maestro Gustavo Dudamel at the podium. In March 2008, Valenti performed Lt. Pinkerton in Mark Lamos' *Madama Butterfly* at New York City Opera which was nationally televised on "Live from Lincoln Center" on PBS. In 2007 he made his San Francisco Opera debut as Lt. Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and sang the same role with Maestro James Conlon, soprano Patricia Racette and The Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival. In 2006 he made his much anticipated New York City Opera as Rodolfo in James Robinson production of *La bohème*, performed *Madama Butterfly* at Teatro Carlo Felice in Genova directed by Renata Scotto, and made his London recital debut. In 2005, he made his debut at the prestigious Salzburg Festival, performing in Willy Decker's production of *La traviata* with Anna Netrebko, Thomas Hampson and the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Carlo Rizzi. Mr. Valenti made his professional debut in the summer of 2003 at age 25 as Rodolfo in *La bohème* directed by Franco Zeffirelli at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Mr. Valenti studied at the prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia.

Individual tickets start at \$250 and include the auction, live opera entertainment, cocktails, dinner and wine.

Sponsorships begin at \$500 and include a private champagne reception to with the artists, recognition in the Gala program book, and other privileges.

For information on sponsorships, individual tickets, or to request an invitation, please contact Carrie Houtz, Development Coordinator, at 609-799-7700 x106 or at [CHoutz@Opera-NJ.org](mailto:CHoutz@Opera-NJ.org).

### **About Opera New Jersey**

**Opera New Jersey** is recognized nationally as a leader among regional opera companies, providing high quality opera performances and exceptional educational offerings. OperaNJ seeks to stimulate, promote and satisfy interest in opera, build a strong and diverse audience base for the art form and foster the development of emerging artists. **Opera New Jersey** recently received its third straight prestigious Citation of Excellence from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA). The Citation is NJSCA's highest honor and recognizes arts organizations that "exhibit the highest standards of excellence in artistry, operations, governance, public benefit and fulfillment of areas of Council priority." OperaNJ received its first citation in 2006, during their first year of eligibility.

This season is made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

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