

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## New Jersey Symphony Orchestra presents *Romeo and Juliet* program

*Opening program of 2015 Winter Festival: Sounds of Shakespeare*



**Members of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey to perform scenes from Shakespeare tragedy**

**Program includes trio of *Romeo and Juliet*-inspired works by Tchaikovsky, Gounod and Prokofiev**

**Music Director Jacques Lacombe conducts**

**Fri, Jan 9, at NJPAC in Newark**

**Sat, Jan 10, at State Theatre in New Brunswick**

**Sun, Jan 11, at NJPAC in Newark**

NEWARK, NJ (December 8, 2014)—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Jacques Lacombe present a trio of works inspired by *Romeo and Juliet* from Tchaikovsky, Gounod and Prokofiev January 9–11 in Newark and New Brunswick. The program opens the 2015 Winter Festival: Sounds of Shakespeare—the first year of a two-season Winter Festival cycle showcasing music inspired by the Bard.

Actors from The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey will perform scenes from the Bard's great tragedy interspersed with selections from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. "I always find that collaborating with other art forms for musicians is very inspiring and exciting," Lacombe says. "We had a wonderful experience with The Shakespeare Theatre for *The Tempest* [during the 2013 Winter Festival] experience. The actors can build on the energy of hearing the sound of an orchestra, and the musicians can hear the words that inspired the composer—it helps us give more character to the music we're making."

“The program has an interesting structure,” Lacombe says. “It opens with Tchaikovsky, who weaves elements of the dramatic texture of the play into his [*Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture], rather than trying to tell the story from beginning to end. Then, we have vocal soloists who will perform arias and a duet from [Gounod’s] *Romeo and Juliet* to give the audience musical scenes from the play.”

In a partnership entering its 15th season, the NJSO annually features the Curtis Institute of Music’s finest student musicians. On this program, the NJSO welcomes soprano Rachel Sterrenberg and tenor Mingjie Lei, who perform the selections from Gounod as the annual Curtis Artists.

Lacombe says: “The second half of the program brings in the actors, and we combine with the words of Shakespeare and the music of Prokofiev, which is a very powerful way to tell the arc of the story. We all know *Romeo and Juliet* so deeply; it’s one of the main dramas of our civilization. To present that work in an original way will be very exciting.”

The 2015 Winter Festival, which runs January 9–25, encompasses three concert programs led by Lacombe. The remaining two programs feature renowned violinist Sarah Chang, who performs Bernstein’s *West Side Story* Suite in all six NJSO venues statewide in a two-week residency generously sponsored by Bank of America.

For more information on the Winter Festival and related events, visit [www.njsymphony.org/winterfestival](http://www.njsymphony.org/winterfestival).

### **TICKETS**

Tickets start at \$20 and are available for purchase online at [www.njsymphony.org](http://www.njsymphony.org) or by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

**Make it a date at NJPAC!** For the January 9 and 11 concerts at NJPAC in Newark, patrons can purchase a date-night package for two that includes a pair of concert tickets and a three-course prix-fixe dinner at NJPAC’s NICO Kitchen + Bar. Dinner and a pair of C-section concert tickets are \$128; dinner and A-section seats are \$198. Patrons must purchase the package in advance through the NJSO; current ticketholders for the January 9 and 11 can add on the dinner by calling Patron Services at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

### **THE PROGRAM**

#### **Lacombe Conducts *Romeo and Juliet***

Friday, January 9, at 8 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Saturday, January 10, at 8 pm | State Theatre in New Brunswick

Sunday, January 11, at 3 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Jacques Lacombe, conductor

Rachel Sterrenberg, soprano

Mingjie Lei, tenor

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey | Bonnie J. Monte, artistic director

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

TCHAIKOVSKY *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture

GOUNOD Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*

PROKOFIEV Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*

*Sponsored by Herbert & Evelyn Axelrod. The January 10 concert is sponsored by The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey.*

Full program information is available at [www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/lacombe-conducts-romeo-juliet](http://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/lacombe-conducts-romeo-juliet).

## **THE ARTISTS**

### **Music Director Jacques Lacombe**

A remarkable conductor whose artistic integrity and rapport with orchestras have propelled him to international stature, Jacques Lacombe has been Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra since 2010 and Orchestre Symphonique de Trois-Rivières since 2006. He was previously Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Music Director of orchestra and opera with the Philharmonie de Lorraine.

Lacombe has garnered critical praise for his creative programming and bold leadership of the NJSO. *Time Out New York* has named Orchestra's acclaimed Winter Festivals "an eagerly anticipated annual event" for the innovative concert experiences that have included a realization of Scriabin's "color organ," collaborations with theater and dance troupes and presentations of Tan Dun concertos in which clay pots and water become solo instruments. *The New York Times* wrote that "It was an honor to be in the hall" for Lacombe and the NJSO's performance of Busoni's Piano Concerto at the 2012 Spring for Music Festival at Carnegie Hall.

Recently, Lacombe helmed a pair of unique initiatives through the New Jersey Roots Project: the NJSO launched the inaugural NJSO Edward T. Cone Composition Institute for young composers—a week of intense compositional evaluations and consultations that culminated in a live performance of the participants' works—and gave the world premiere of Cone's Symphony in a special lecture-concert. Other 2014–15 NJSO highlights include the "Sounds of Shakespeare" Winter Festival, featuring collaborations with violinist Sarah Chang and the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

In July, Lacombe made his Tanglewood Music Festival debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra; this season, he returns to the Deutsche Oper Berlin for productions of *Carmen*, *The Damnation of Faust* and *Samson and Delilah*; L'Opera de Monte Carlo for Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and Vancouver Opera for *Carmen*.

He has appeared with the Cincinnati, Columbus, Québec, Toronto, Vancouver and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras and National Arts Centre Orchestra of Ottawa. He frequently conducts in France, Spain and Australia and has led tours and recordings with the National Youth Orchestra of Canada.

Opera highlights include all-star productions of *La Bohème* and *Tosca* at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden and numerous productions with the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Metropolitan Opera, as well as engagements at opera houses in Marseille, Strasbourg, Turin and Munich. He has recorded for the CPO and Analekta labels; with the NJSO, he has recorded Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Janáček's Suite from *The Cunning Little Vixen* and released a new recording of Verdi's *Requiem*. His performances have been broadcast on PBS, the CBC, Mezzo TV and Arte TV, among others.

Born in Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Québec, Lacombe attended the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal and Hochschule für Musik in Vienna. He was named a Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec in 2012 and a Member of the Order of Canada in 2013—among the highest civilian honors in the country.

### **Rachel Sterrenberg, soprano**

American lyric soprano Rachel Sterrenberg is a native of Madison, Georgia, and currently studies at the Curtis Institute of Music. In the 2014–15 season, she will sing the title role in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Anne Trulove in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at Curtis. She makes her debut with Opera Philadelphia in June 2015 in the newly commissioned opera *Yarbird* and also appears with the Curtis Chamber Orchestra on its North American tour.

Past roles include Adina in *The Elixir of Love*, Blanche de la Force in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Pamina in *The Magic Flute* and Armida in *Rinaldo*, as well as Contessa Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* with the Princeton Symphony Orchestra and Ada Monroe in the workshop of Pulitzer Prize winner Jennifer Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*.

Other credits include La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*, Mary Warren in *The Crucible* and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with the Chautauqua Music Festival. While attending the University of Kentucky, she appeared as the First Lady in *The Magic Flute*, Musetta in *La Bohème* and the title role in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Mingjie Lei, tenor**

Born in Hengyang, China, tenor Mingjie Lei is a second-year Professional Studies Certificate candidate at the Curtis Institute of Music, studying with Mikael Eliassen and Marlena Malas. He made his Carnegie Hall debut as a soloist in Handel's *Messiah* with the Cecilia Chorus and Orchestra of New York. Other credits include soloist in Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and the role of Tamino in a production of *The Magic Flute* at the Music Academy of the West, under the tutelage of Marilyn Horne and Warren Jones.

He holds a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music, where he performed the roles of Leon in *The Ghosts of Versailles* and Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and also sang as Uriel in *The Creation* with Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kent Tritle. Other credits include Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* at the Banff Centre Opera, Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas* at Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love* and Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola* with the Curtis Institute of Music.

**The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey | Bonnie J. Monte, artistic director**

Founded in 1963 as the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the leading Shakespeare theaters in the nation, and the longest running on the East Coast. The 2015 season marks Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte's 25th year at the helm of the renowned company, the state's largest professional theater company dedicated to Shakespeare's canon and other classic masterworks.

Through exceptional theatrical productions and dynamic education programs, the Theatre strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The Theatre's ambitious annual Main Stage season includes six productions as well as an adored outdoor theater production that runs each summer at a nearby one-of-a-kind Greek amphitheater.

In addition to being an acclaimed producer of classic plays, the Theatre is New Jersey's preeminent provider of transformative theater education programs, including performances and workshops in underprivileged schools, free community performances, in-school residencies and classes for theater lovers of all ages and experience levels.

Bonnie J. Monte, now in her 25th season as artistic director of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, has garnered national recognition for her highly successful revitalization of the institution, her outstanding commitment to arts education and professional training and her bold and ambitious presentations of both well-known and rarely produced classics.

Prior to arriving in New Jersey, Monte worked with many prestigious theaters including the Manhattan Theatre Club and the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts, where, as associate artistic director, she worked closely with the renowned theater producer and director Nikos Psacharopoulos for almost a decade.

Monte has directed more than 50 productions for The Shakespeare Theatre and has authored a number of original translations and adaptations for the company. In addition to establishing a training ground at The Shakespeare Theatre, she also has taught and directed at universities across the nation. She obtained her bachelor's degree from Bethany College in West Virginia and a graduate degree from The Hartman Conservatory; she has received honorary doctorates from Drew University and the College of Saint Elizabeth.

**UPCOMING WINTER FESTIVAL PROGRAMS**

**Sarah Chang Plays Bernstein**

Friday, January 16, at 8 pm | Richardson Auditorium in Princeton

Saturday, January 17, at 8 pm | Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank

Sunday, January 18, at 3 pm | Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown

Full program information is available at [www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/sarah-chang-plays-bernstein](http://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/sarah-chang-plays-bernstein).

### **West Side Story with Sarah Chang**

Thursday, January 22, at 7:30 pm | bergenPAC in Englewood

Saturday, January 24, at 8 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Sunday, January 25, at 3 pm | State Theatre in New Brunswick

Full program information is available at [www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/west-side-story-with-sarah-chang](http://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/west-side-story-with-sarah-chang).

### **THE NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Named “a vital, artistically significant musical organization” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra’s superb musicians.

Under the bold leadership of Music Director Jacques Lacombe, the NJSO presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at the State Theatre in New Brunswick, Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra’s statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include the three-ensemble NJSO Youth Orchestras, school-time Concerts for Young People performances and multiple offerings—including the El Sistema-inspired NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project)—that provide and promote in-school instrumental instruction as part of the NJSO Academy. The NJSO’s REACH (Resources for Education and Community Harmony) chamber music program annually brings original programs—designed and performed by NJSO musicians—to a variety of settings, reaching as many as 17,000 people in nearly all of New Jersey’s 21 counties.

For more information about the NJSO, visit [www.njsymphony.org](http://www.njsymphony.org) or email [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org). Tickets are available for purchase by phone 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra’s website.

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