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2023-2024 Season



LA BOHÈME
December 30 and 31, 2023



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Curtis Tucker, General and Artistic Director

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Gala Tickets

From the President



This is an exciting and full season for First Coast Opera! We are celebrating Curtis Tucker's tenth season with FCO with the biggest and most creative season ever.

La Bohème, by Giacomo Puccini, is one of the most popular and best-loved operas of all time. We're glad you're here to ring in the New Year with this timeless story of love, passion, and loss. Director Helena Binder has chosen to set the opera in 1960's Bohemian Paris, so be surprised at how timeless the story is in this creative setting.

For the first time we are including a second main stage production at Lewis Auditorium, March 15 and 17. This is the rollicking, zany *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan. What a fun way to celebrate part of the St Augustine heritage. Laugh and be enchanted by this fanciful romp of an operetta with catchy tunes and whimsical characters.

Our special fundraising Gala this year will be a Roaring 20's Gala Ball at the Lightner Museum on February 14, Valentine's Day. Dust off your Roaring Twenties flapper/gangsta costumes and join us for dancing to the Raisin Cake Band, sumptuous food and drinks, and a live auction.

Don't miss any of the wonderful events of the opera season. We are ever grateful for your continued support by your attendance and your generous giving to keep Opera alive in Northeast Florida.

Kerry Fradley

Kerry Fradley, President



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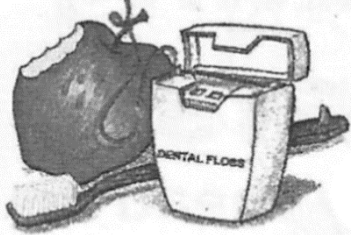
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'ART'

by Yasmina Reza
Translated by Christopher Hampton
Directed by David Buchman
How much would you pay for a white
painting? Would it matter who the
painter was? Would it be art?

November 3, 2023

For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls

by Christopher Durang
Directed by Dawn Knipe
In this parody of *The Glass
Menagerie*, a fading Southern
belle tries to prepare her hyper-
sensitive, hypochondriacal son for
"the feminine caller."

February 9, 2024

Salon de Paris

by Amy Lauer Goldin
Directed by Grace Reed
An original play. Cultures collide
amid the faded elegance of a salon
catering to a refined "mature"
clientele, to the consternation of
the cantankerous staff.

January 12, 2024

Other Desert Cities

by John Robin Baitz
Directed by Hazel Robinson
Brooke returns home after a 6-year
absence to celebrate Christmas with
her family, when she announces she's
about to publish a memoir dredging
up a pivotal event in the family's
history they don't want revisited.

April 12, 2024

Main Productions at The Waterworks



by Lauren Gunderson
Directed by Michael Lipp
December 1-10, 2023



by Willy Russell
Directed by Cindy Alexander
featuring Francesca Bellavista
March 1-10, 2024



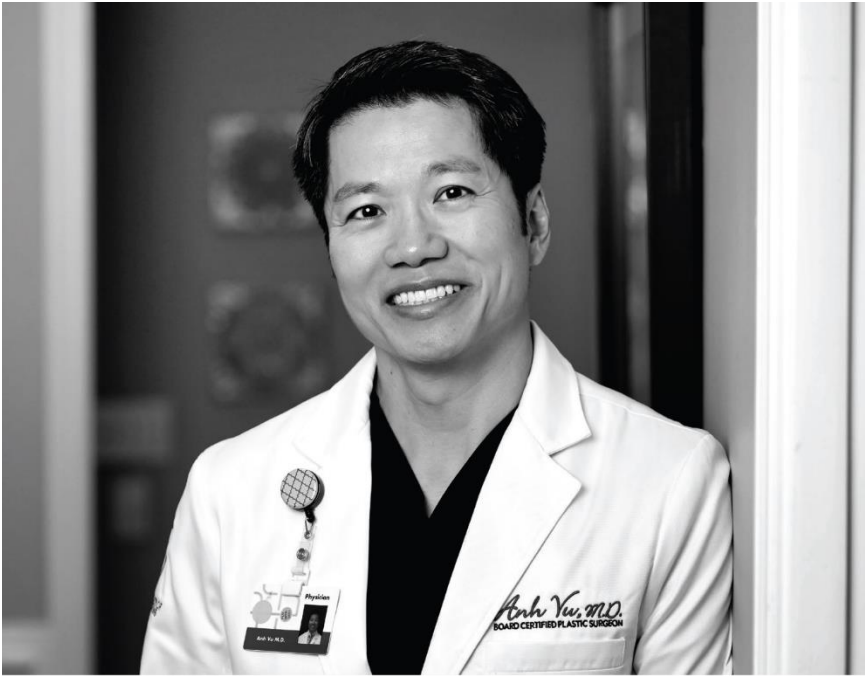
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Pirates

La Bohème

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

Mimi Julia Radosz
Musetta McKenna Slack
Rodolfo Ganson Salmon
Marcello..... Steve Valenzuela
Schaunard..... Thomas Gunther
Colline Edwin Jhamaal Davis
Benoit and Alcindoro Paul Houghtaling
Parpignol Jack Sumrall, III
Child Wanting Trumpet Lila Donnelly
Waiters Charles Ross, Christina Santos
Chorus of vendors, shoppers, and holiday revelers

Conductor Curtis Tucker
Stage Director Helena Binder
Scenic Designer Tony Cisek
Costume Designer Alan Michael Smith
Lighting Designer Patrick W. Mathis
Hair & Makeup Designer Gina Makarova
Props and Set Pieces Manager Jean Rahner
Stage Manager..... Jennifer Collins Hard

There will be one twenty-minute intermission between Acts 2 and 3.

Why a 1960s La Boheme?



By Helena Binder, Director -- When I saw this photo in the New York Times Book Review some years ago, of the poet Allen Ginsberg, I thought, “This is my *La Boheme*”. It felt natural to set the story in the age of the Beat Generation. I imagined the tale of the young poet and his friends, on the roof of a tenement building, still holding inner dreams and ideals. Bohemians if you will, perhaps American ex-pats who, in a quest for inspiration, free love and no doubt, escape from the looming escalation of the Vietnam War, move to Paris to pursue art and romance.

At the time I recalled a film I had seen called “Next Stop Greenwich Village” about a group of friends, all artistic types, living in lower Manhattan in 1960, and as I rewatched it, I was astounded by the parallels to the story of *La Boheme*, in which a poet and a painter are friends and roommates. With the film in mind, I started researching Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and the painters of the era, Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko and others.

But the reimagining of any opera must be supported by the libretto, the text. Although the original opera was set in 1830 and was first performed in 1896, there are always young, poor artists living in Paris. But what about the parade of soldiers in Act II? The Border patrol in Act III? Would the libretto allow for updating to the early 60’s and how does it connect with us today?

In 1962 France granted Algeria, a French colony, its independence, which began a massive wave of immigration into France. Charles De Gaulle was a major force in this which made him very unpopular with certain French Nationalists. There was a

lot of dissension and unrest and several attempts were made on De Gaulle's life. The whole notion of who was a Frenchman and who was not, was called into question and many were suspicious of the Algerian people. This seemed to align with the nationalism of the Act II parade and the opening of Act III when presumably, guards are checking identification papers.

And what was happening here in the United States? John Glenn orbited the earth, the Cuban Missile Crisis threatened nuclear war, Marilyn Monroe was found dead, and the U.S. commitment to Vietnam, begun in '61, deepened. I could imagine our group of Bohemian ex-pats living in the midst of these events, searching for a little joy on Christmas eve, struggling with a virulent disease, making art on their meager funds and navigating love in a difficult world. Our Rodolfo writes his poetry on a typewriter and our Marcello paints in the abstract, but much has not changed in the world since 1830 or 1896 or 1962. Which is why the story of La Boheme still resonates today.



Synopsis

ACT I

The poet Rodolfo lives in a shabby garret in Paris with his friends and other ex-pats, the painter Marcello, the philosopher Colline and the musician and part-time gigolo Schaunard. On Christmas eve they are having difficulty staying warm but after tricking the landlord to forgo the rent, they go off to the Café Momus to celebrate. Rodolfo lags behind to finish writing an article when his neighbor, a shy seamstress named Mimí, comes by looking for a light for her candle. Despite her obvious frail

condition, the two are drawn to each other and after pledging their love, go off to join the others at the Café Momus.

ACT II

The Bohemians are enjoying the Christmas eve festivities and the outdoor café when Musetta, Marcello's former lover, arrives on the arm of her new, older companion, Alcindoro. She taunts Marcello with her popularity but ultimately, still very much in love with him, feigns an aching foot and sends Alcindoro running off in search of another pair of shoes. Musetta and Marcello embrace as a parade comes by and all the Bohemians join in the celebratory atmosphere.

INTERMISSION

ACT III

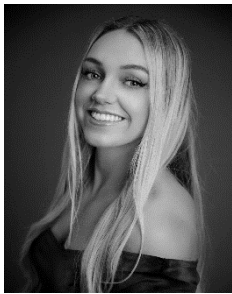
Well into winter, Musetta and Marcello are living above a tavern where he paints and she gives singing lessons. They can't stop fighting, mostly because of Musetta's flirting and Marcello's jealousy. Mimí arrives, much sicker than before, looking for Marcello's help. Rodolfo has broken up with her and left under the pretext that she is unfaithful to him. He has been staying at the tavern and when he comes out, Mimí hides. She overhears the real reason Rodolfo has left her. He can see that Mimí is getting sicker and he is wracked with guilt and shame that he hasn't the money to provide better care for her. Mimí, shocked and distraught at news of the truth, makes her presence known and she and Rodolfo agree to stay together until the spring. Meanwhile, Marcello and Musetta fight bitterly and she leaves him.

ACT IV

As spring blooms, Rodolfo and Marcello are back living in the garret with Colline and Schaunard, lamenting how much they miss Mimí and Musetta. Some lively antics are interrupted when Musetta arrives unexpectedly to say that the failing Mimí is waiting outside and wants to see Rodolfo one last time. Rodolfo carries her in and they recall their love and happy times together as the others contemplate how to pay for some medicine. Musetta and Marcello reconcile and Colline and Schaunard each bid Mimí farewell. In a quiet moment, Mimí dies leaving Rodolfo distraught.

Artist Biographies

Julia Radosz (Mimi) began the 2022-2023 season with a debut with Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište Split (National Croatian Theater of Split) as Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera*. Other engagements included 18 performances of *La Bohème* (Musetta) throughout theaters in Spain and France, including Madrid, Paris, Segovia, and Carcassonne. The 2020-2021 season, included a debut with the National Moravian-Silesian Theater in Czech Republic as Marietta/Marie in Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, a gala with the Metropolitný Orchester Bratislava, an opera gala in Prešov, Slovakia, and solo recitals at The University Club in Orlando, The Palfy Palac in Bratislava, and the Peterskirche in Vienna.



McKenna Slack (Musetta) performed with First Coast Opera in their 2023 spring gala 'Evening of Arias: Diva Edition.' Some of her notable performance credits include Susanna, *Le nozze di Figaro*; Rosalinde, *Die Fledermaus*; Fiordiligi, *Così fan tutte*; Rusalka, *Rusalka*; Musetta, *La bohème*; Laetitia, *The Old Maid and the Thief*; Gretel, *Hänsel und Gretel*; Dido, *Dido and Aeneas*; Noémie, *Cendrillon*; Chloé, *Daphnis et Chloé*; Yum-Yum, *The Mikado*; Elena, *Il cappello di paglia di Firenze*. She holds a Bachelor

of Arts degree in music from Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California, and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of North Florida.

Ganson Salmon (Rodolfo) has appeared as Prince Karl Franz in *The Student Prince* with Regina Opera. Last summer, Salmon appeared as Don José in *Carmen* and jumped in as Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Tel Aviv Summer Opera. Other recent performances include Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* with the Ball State Symphony Orchestra and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Indianapolis Opera. In 2021, Mr. Salmon was a Vocal Fellow at Ravinia's Steans Music Institute, and a Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theater of St. Louis. An Indiana native, Ganson Salmon received his Master's degree from Mannes School of Music in NYC.

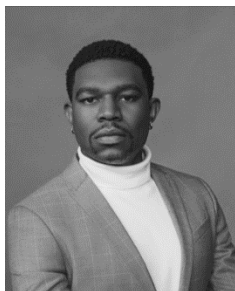


Steve Valenzuela (Marcello) has performed standard and contemporary opera, musical theater, concert and oratorio work, as well as a few stints in commercial acting. He has performed with many nationally recognized opera companies



including Opera Project Columbus, Shreveport Opera, Utah Opera, Utah Festival Opera, and Florentine Opera, including the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Conte Almaviva and Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Samuel in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Howard in David T. Little's *Dog Days*, and Sam in *Trouble in Tahiti*. He received his Master of Music degree from Louisiana State University and his Bachelors of Music from Western Connecticut State University.

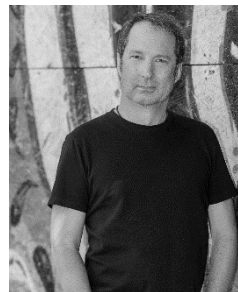
Thomas Gunther (Schaunard) was most recently seen with First Coast Opera as Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* (2023) and *The Golden Age of Opera* (2022). He has appeared as Scarpia in *Tosca* and Marcello in *La Bohème* with Soo Opera Theater. He has performed with Union Avenue Opera, the Schenectady Symphony, Winter Opera of St. Louis, Soo Opera Theatre, Opera in the Heights, the Dominican Republic National Symphony, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and the Merola Opera Program. Gunther completed his doctoral coursework from the University of Kentucky and is currently Professor of Voice at The Omaha Conservatory of Music in Nebraska and Adjunct Professor at Doane University.



Edwin Jhamaal Davis (Colline) debuts the role of Colline with First Coast Opera, Amelia Island Opera, and Intermountain Opera Bozeman. In the current season, he performed the role of Bass 2/Pilgrim in *X: The Life & Times of Malcolm X* at both the Metropolitan Opera and Seattle Opera. This past summer, he joined San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Opera Program where he performed Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* as well as excerpts as Banquo in *Macbeth*. In the 2022-2023 season, he

appeared as Bass 2 in *X: The Life & Times of Malcolm X*; Masetto and Il Commendatore, *Don Giovanni*; the King, *Aida*; and made his Carnegie Hall debut in Verdi's *Requiem*. Edwin is a proud native of Utica, MS.

Paul Houghtaling (Benoit and Alcindoro) is a bass-baritone and stage director who has performed and directed a wide variety of repertoire through the U.S. and abroad. Career highlights include a highly lauded debut with the Central City Opera as the comic lead in Friml's *Rose Marie*;

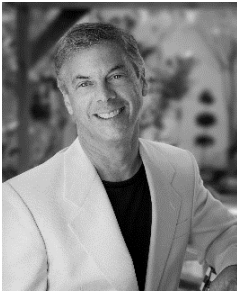


featured vocalist on the Philip Glass soundtrack to Reggio's film *Naqoyqatsi* for SONY; and the Laughing Sun in the Glass/Beni Montresor collaboration, *The Witches of Venice*. He boasts several Carnegie Hall solo appearances with Cecelia Chorus of New York, American Composers Orchestra, and others. He is Professor of Music and Director of Opera at the University of Alabama.

Jack G. Sumrall III (Parpignol) makes his debut with First Coast Opera. A conductor, tenor, and composer, he holds degrees in conducting from Stetson University and the University of North Florida, where he is an Academic Advisor for music and fine arts students. As a champion for new music, he has premiered several works by voice and by baton. As a composer, Jack is published on J.W. Pepper.



Artistic Team



Curt Tucker celebrates his tenth season as General and Artistic Director with First Coast Opera. During his tenure, the company has expanded its performances and budget and been recognized as a Professional Company Member of Opera America. This season he directs *Copland's America*, conducts *La Bohème*, and sings Major General Stanley in *The Pirates of Penzance*. Elsewhere, he has led concerts and productions for Cincinnati Opera, Opera Memphis, Opera Saratoga, Syracuse Opera, Mobile Opera, University of Mobile, and the University of North

Florida. His original family opera, *The Trial of B. B. Wolf*, was performed at the annual conference of the National Opera Association, and his opera *The Stranger's Tale* recently received a performance grant from United Arts of Central Florida.

Helena Binder (Stage Director) returns to FCO where she directed *Opera Mystique* (2023), *La Traviata* (2021) and *Madama Butterfly* (2017). A theatre professional for more than 40 years, Helena Binder was an actor and director of plays and musicals before focusing her career on opera, allowing her to bring her wit and warmth to many of the finest companies in the United States. Her innovative and imaginative productions

have been seen at New York City Opera, Dallas, Minnesota, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Portland, Anchorage and Palm Beach Opera, Wolf Trap, Opera Saratoga, Opera Omaha, Opera Idaho, Opera North, Chattanooga Symphony and Opera, Syracuse, Roanoke and Toledo Opera among many others.

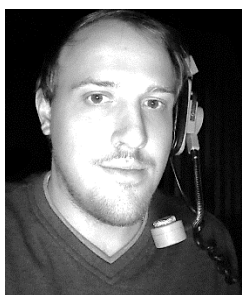




Tony Cisek (Scenic Designer) previously collaborated with Ms. Binder on *La Bohème* and *Macbeth* at Opera North, and *The Elixir of Love* with Wolf Trap Opera. Other recent productions include *Blue* (New Orleans Opera), *Ink* (Round House Theatre), *The Color Purple* (Denver Center), *Selling Kabul* (Signature), *Thurgood* (Peoples Light), and *Choir Boy* (ACT). Other credits include Roundabout, Guthrie, Goodman, South Coast Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse, Ford's, Folger, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Baltimore Center Stage, Milwaukee Rep, Indiana Rep, Syracuse Stage, New

York Theatre Workshop, Cleveland Play House, Woolly Mammoth, Studio, The Kennedy Center.

Alan Michael Smith (Costume Designer) Smith's work has been seen on the First Coast Opera stage in *Opera Mystique* (2023), *HMS Pinafore* (2020), *The Marriage of Figaro* (2019), *Madame Butterfly* (2017), and *La Vie Parisienne* (2016). Smith has worked as a freelance Costume Designer on Broadway and for various regional theaters in and around New York. As a member of the Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Alan has been associated with over 15 Broadway shows in the last 30 years. He had the pleasure of being the Resident Costume Designer for 8 years at Opera Saratoga and currently for 7 years at First Coast Opera. Mr. Smith is also the Resident Costume Designer at Wagner College for the past 15 years.



Patrick W. Mathis (Lighting Designer) Patrick holds an MFA in Theatre Design and Technologies from Utah State University and a BS in Information Science and Technology from Mercer University. He has worked in theatre and live entertainment across the nation and internationally in the areas of technical theatre, as well as lighting and media design. Patrick is a member of CITT/ICTS, USITT, and Actors Equity. He currently proudly serves as Assistant Professor of Design and Technology at Flagler College.

ina Makarova (Hair & Makeup Designer) has worked with Opera Orlando on *Frida Kahlo* and *the Bravest Girl in the World*, *Baseball: A Musical Love Letter*, *King for a*



Day and Lizbeth, while as an assistant she worked on *The Secret River*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Carmen* and many others. She is working with Orlando Ballet's new production of *The Nutcracker*, and was the hair and makeup artist for productions such as *Dracula*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and she will be returning this season for *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Casanova*. Gina is also the Makeup Consultant for *Phantasmagoria Orlando* and has designed a handful of productions at Winter Park Playhouse and Valencia College.

Jennifer Collins Hard (Stage Manager) is the Production Manager and a faculty member at Williams College in Williamstown, MA and has also served on the faculty of Missouri State University and Dartmouth College. Jennifer has worked as a Stage Manager with Virginia Opera, Opera Omaha, Opera North, Omaha Symphony, Kansas City Ballet, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, McLeod Summer Playhouse, Dartmouth College and Williams College. Jennifer received an MFA in Stage Management from the University of Missouri Kansas City and is a proud member of Actors Equity.



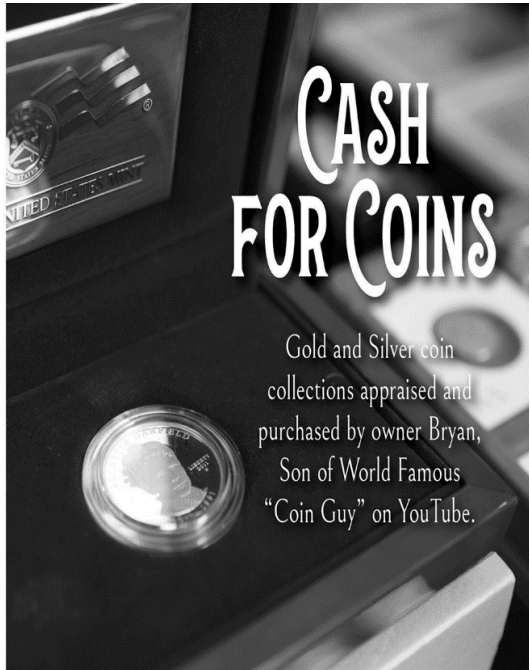
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Susan Nowell
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Steven Rich
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Jack Sumrall, III
Laura Weiss

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Christina Santos

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Victoria Stjerna, Concertmaster

Flute

Don Gottlieb

Oboe

Kristin Kusic

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Horn

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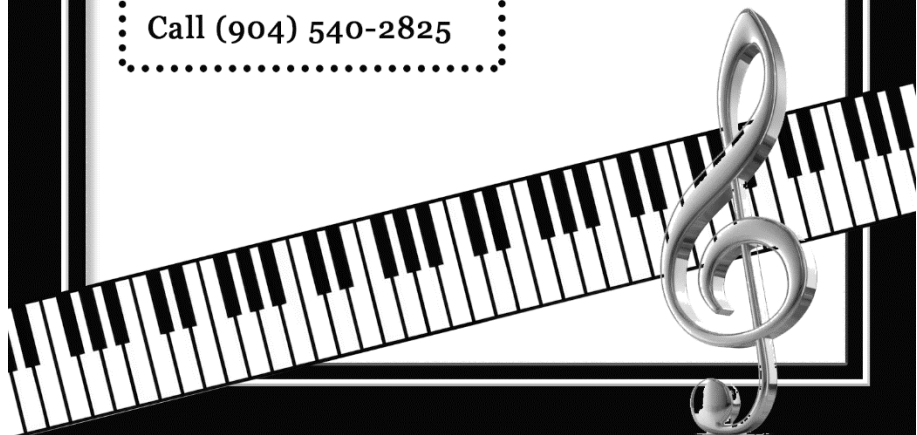
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Stage Manager Jennifer Collins Hard
Assistant Stage Manager Marinette Gomez
Rehearsal Accompanist..... Yelena Kurdina
Chorus Master Kerry Fradley
Chorus Accompanist Keith Teppen
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..... Thomas Rahner, Andrew Schirmacher, Kathy Schirmacher
Stage Crew Wyatt Matlock, Charles Ross, Ryan Stark
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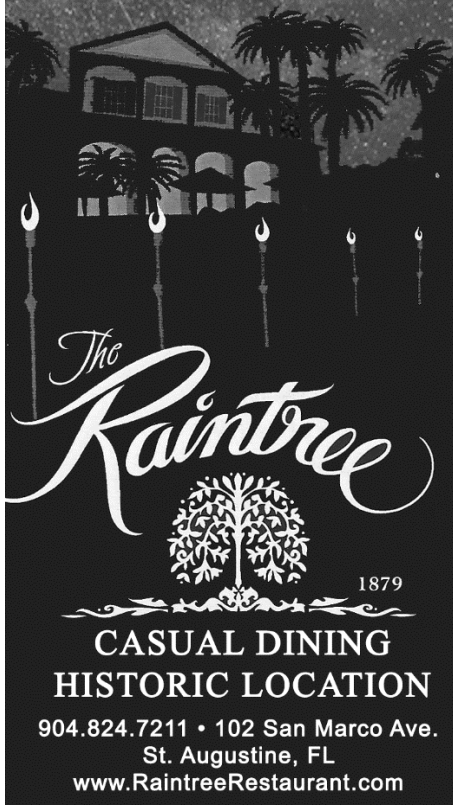
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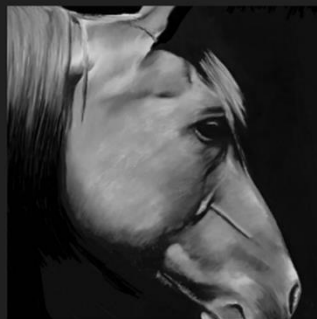


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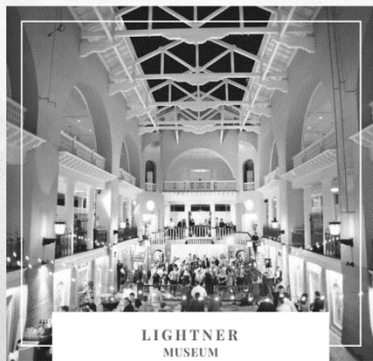
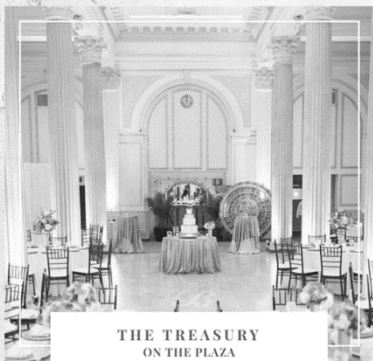


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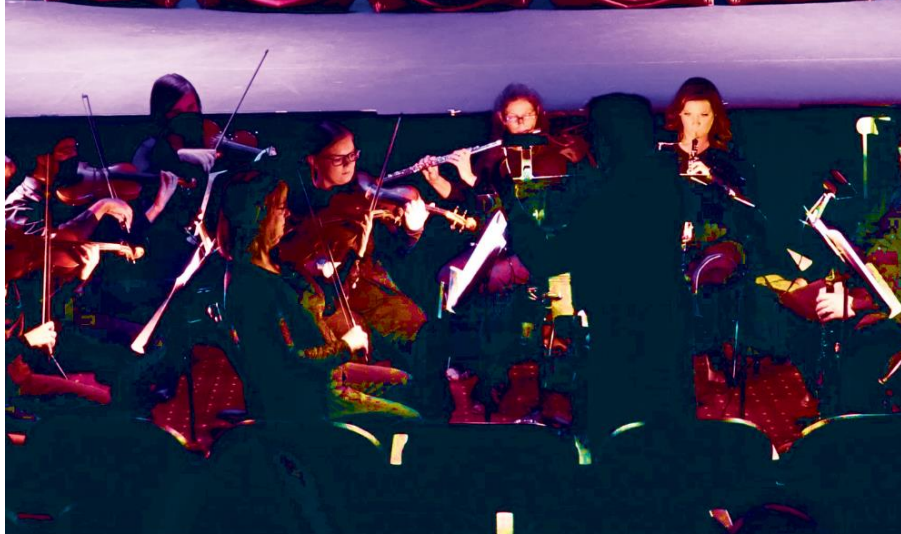
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