

Valhalla Media Announces Two Live Performances Streamed on New Video Platform, Valhalla Media Live



June 26: Baritone Will Liverman and Pianist Paul Sanchez in a Program of African American Composers, Including a World Premiere by Shawn Okpebholo

June 27: Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* From the Stage of the Empty Studebaker Theater in Downtown Chicago

New York, NY (June 17, 2020) — Valhalla Media—dedicated to reenergizing the world of classical music in a new digital realm—announces the launch of its new live streaming performance platform, **Valhalla Media Live**. The first events to be streamed include a **June 26** live recital at **7:30 p.m. CDT** by baritone **Will Liverman** and pianist **Paul Sanchez** performing a program of works by African American composers that includes a world premiere by **Shawn Okpebholo**; and a **June 27** live concert performance at **8:00 p.m. CDT** of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. Both performances take place at the **Studebaker Theater** in downtown Chicago, which is currently closed to patrons. The two initial performances offered on the platform are available to stream with a “pay what you can” price structure (suggested price of \$14.99).

Central to the inception of Valhalla Media Live's digital delivery platform is a vision to re-think and exceed the current expectations audiences have for live-streamed performances. Valhalla Media Live will offer audiences across the globe a concert experience that features impeccable studio-grade sound quality, paired with a cinematic video experience—all as a live experience that can be enjoyed from the comfort of one's own home.

Of the launch of Valhalla Media Live, co-founder **Nikolas Wenzel** says, “As working singers, we devoted ourselves to building this platform to help lift up and reinvigorate our artistic community in a time of

crisis—so that we may find ways to safely get our fellow artists back to work, and to deliver the type of unparalleled remote live music experience that classical music fans the whole world over truly deserve.

What we believe will be truly revolutionary about our platform is not just the quality of the product that we offer, but that we are also able to work directly with artists to program repertoire that they are typically not offered the opportunity to perform in other recital or concert settings. This is an opportunity for us to showcase the true diversity of our community of colleagues at a time when the voices of minority and underrepresented artists must be heard. We are uniquely positioned to present underperformed and untraditional repertoire, and showcase the personalities of the artists that are on America's stages, while humanizing our art form. This platform was built by artists, for artists, and with today's modern audience in mind."

In prioritizing artist health, both of the concert events will feature artists and staff observing and exceeding CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19, principles that were central to the platform's mission. Artists appearing onstage will be properly socially distanced, with partitions placed between artists and any accompanying musicians, and masks worn wherever possible. Pre-performance health screenings will be administered to ensure artist safety.

On **Friday, June 26, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. CDT**, baritone **Will Liverman** joins forces with his collaborative partner **Paul Sanchez** for a live streamed recital featuring works by all African American composers. Program highlights include Leslie Adams' *Amazing Grace*, Margaret Bonds' celebrated song cycle *Three Dream Portraits* based on the poetry of Langston Hughes, Damien Snead's *I Dream a World*, and Robert Owens' *Mortal Storm*. The evening's performance will conclude with the world premiere of composer **Shawn Okpebholo's** new work *Two Black Churches*. The work, a musical diptych of two poems by Dudley Randall and Marcus Amaker, explores the impact of two watershed moments in the American Civil Rights Movement—the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 and the Charleston church shooting in 2015.

A live concert version of Humperdinck's vivid treatment of the classic fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* is brought to life on **Saturday, June 27, 2020 at 8:00 p.m. CDT**. The cast features artists from America's most revered opera companies, and includes **Emily Fons** (Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Santa Fe Opera, Seattle Opera) in the role of Hansel, **Emily Pogorelc** (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Bayerische Staatsoper) as Gretel, **Allan Glassman** (The Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Santa Fe Opera) as the Witch, **Alexandra LoBianco** (The Metropolitan Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, Lyric Opera of Chicago) as Mother Gertrude, **Craig Irvin** (Canadian Opera Company, Minnesota Opera, Cincinnati Opera) as Father Peter, **Annie Rosen** (The Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theater) as the **Sandman**, and **Jeni Houser** (The Metropolitan Opera, LA Opera, Dallas Opera) as the Dew Fairy. The performance is led by revered pianist and conductor **Eric Weimer** (Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago).

Program Information

Will Liverman Recital

Friday, June 26, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. CDT

Live Stream via Valhalla Media Live

Registration: <https://bit.ly/Valhalla-Liverman-Sanchez>

Performers:

Will Liverman, Baritone

Paul Sanchez, Piano

Program:

Leslie Adams – *Amazing Grace*
Margaret Bonds – *Three Dream Portraits*
Damien Snead – *I Dream a World*
Robert Owens – *Mortal Storm*
Shawn Okpebholo – *Two Black Churches (World Premiere)*
Encore Thomas Kerr Jr. – *Riding To Town*

Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel

Saturday, June 27, 2020 at 8:00 p.m. CDT

Live Stream via Valhalla Media Live

Registration: <https://bit.ly/Valhalla-Hansel-Gretel>

Performers:

Emily Fons, Hansel
Emily Pogorelc, Gretel
Allan Glassman, The Witch
Alexandra LoBianco, Mother Gertrude
Craig Irvin, Father Peter
Annie Rosen, Sandman
Jeni Houser, Dew Fairy
Eric Weimer, Piano and Music Director

Program:

Humperdinck – *Hansel and Gretel*

Tickets: Tickets for this inaugural round of performances are “pay what you can” with a suggested price of \$14.99. Pre-sale for both live events are available now at <https://www.valhallamedia.live>. After completing registration and payment for the event, attendees will be able to access the livestream through the website once it is initiated.

About Will Liverman

Called “one of the most versatile singing artists performing today” (*Bachtrack*), baritone **Will Liverman** is quickly gaining a reputation for his compelling performances, while making significant debuts at opera houses across the world. Liverman is a recipient of a 2019 Richard Tucker Career Grant and Sphinx Medal of Excellence.

Highlights of recent engagements include his performance as the first ever African American artist in the role of Papageno in *The Magic Flute* at the Metropolitan Opera; appearing as Horemhab in the Met’s highly acclaimed production of Philip Glass’ *Akhnaten*; and recent engagements with Tulsa Opera in *The Little Prince* (The Pilot); with Opera Philadelphia, Santa Fe Opera, and Dallas Opera in *La bohème* (Schaunard); and with Santa Fe Opera in *Jenůfa* (Foreman at the Mill). Liverman has performed the leading role of Figaro in Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Seattle Opera, Virginia Opera, Kentucky Opera, Madison Opera, and Utah Opera. He originated the role of Dizzy Gillespie in Charlie Parker’s *Yardbird* with Opera Philadelphia, in addition to performing the role with English National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Madison Opera, and at the Apollo Theater. Soloist engagements include performances with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Seattle Symphony, Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Las Vegas Philharmonic, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, South Dakota Symphony, and the New York Festival of Song.

Will previously received a 3Arts Award, George London Award, and a Gerda Lissner Charitable Fund Award, won the Stella Maris International Vocal Competition, and was named a Luminarts fellow in the classical division. He was a grand finalist in the 2012 Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions. Liverman was a former member of the Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and a Young Artist at the Glimmerglass Festival. He holds his Master of Music degree from The Juilliard School, and a Bachelor of Music degree from Wheaton College.

About Paul Sanchez

Praised as a "great artist" (José Feghali, 2013; Cecilia Rodrigo, 2019), pianist and composer **Paul Sánchez** has concertized in North America and Europe, and has appeared on CBS national television and in radio broadcasts nationwide. Of his recent engagements performing music of Ives and Gershwin for Joseph Horowitz' *Music Unwound: American Roots*, a program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Horowitz stated, "Sanchez's account of *Rhapsody in Blue* was original—the most bewitchingly lyric I have ever encountered."

In a *Fanfare Magazine* review of Sánchez' 2016 CD *Magus Insipiens*, featuring three of Sánchez' song cycles, Colin Clarke declares, "This is one of the most beautiful discs in my collection.... Haunting in the extreme." Sánchez is an active recording artist with six commercial releases as of 2019, and his compositions have been featured on the Soundset Recordings and Albany labels. Forthcoming CD releases include new works by composers Shawn Okpebholo and David M. Gordon, in collaboration with mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, baritone Will Liverman, and soprano Kayleen Sánchez.

Dr. Sánchez is Director of Piano Studies and the International Piano Series at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He is a co-founder of the San Francisco International Piano Festival, the Charleston Chamber Music Intensive, and the Dakota Sky Foundation. Sánchez, a Fulbright fellow from 2005–2007, earned his Master of Spanish Music degree under the legendary Alicia de Larrocha. He studied with Tamás Ungár at Texas Christian University, graduating summa cum laude, and with Douglas Humpherys at the Eastman School of Music, where he completed his Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees. Sánchez is a New Piano Collective artist.

About Shawn Okpebholo

A widely sought-after and award-winning composer, **Shawn E. Okpebholo** (b. 1981) has been described by Augusta Read Thomas as "a beautiful artist ...who has enormous grace in his music, and fantasy and color." Okpebholo comfortably composes in a variety of styles and genres, intentional in creating music that is diverse, dynamic, and genuine. His music has been performed in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and all across the U.S., including close to forty states.

Okpebholo regularly receives commissions from noted soloists, universities, and organizations, including the International Tuba and Euphonium Association, the United States Air Force, the Ohio Music Education Association, to name a few. Some celebrated performing artists and ensembles include Cadillac Moon, Fulcrum Point, Picoso, United States Army Field Band, cellist Leonardo Altino, baritones Will Liverman and Robert Sims, mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, pianists Paul Tuntland Sánchez and Mark Markham, euphonium virtuoso Steven Mead, flutists Caen-Thomason-Redus and Jenny Oh Brown, among others. His compositions can be heard on a variety of commercially released albums, including his first album solely devoted to his music, *Steal Away*, a collection of re-imagined Negro spirituals.

As an academic, Okpebholo has been in residence at many colleges and universities both in the U.S. and

Nigeria, giving masterclasses, guest lecturing, and having his music featured in concert. His compositional interests and research have been a gateway for ethnomusicological fieldwork in both East and West Africa. Okpebholo earned his masters and doctoral degrees in composition from the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati, where he also studied music theory. He completed a bachelor's degree in composition and music history from Asbury College and had additional studies in film scoring from New York University. A significant part of his music education growing up was through The Salvation Army church, where he regularly received free music lessons. Inspired by that charity, Okpebholo is passionate about volunteering his musical talents to underserved communities. Currently, he is Associate Professor of Music Composition and Theory at Wheaton College Conservatory of Music (IL), having previously taught at Union University (TN), Northern Kentucky University, and CCM. He lives in Wheaton, IL, a suburb of Chicago, with his wife, violist Dorothy, and his daughters, Eva and Corinne.

About Emily Fons

Mezzo-Soprano **Emily Fons** has made several exciting role and company debuts in recent seasons that have set her apart as a versatile, powerful, and engaging performer. Ms. Fons was hailed by *Opera News* as one of opera's rising stars and one of the best singing actresses of her generation, and received a GRAMMY nomination for her work on Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*.

Ms. Fons has been lauded for her virtuosic abilities in Baroque and Bel Canto repertoire, her winning portrayals of opera's traditional "trouser roles," and the dramatic commitment and musicality she brings to modern works. In the past few seasons, Ms. Fons has sung with Canadian Opera Company, Seattle Opera, The Berlin Philharmonic, The Santa Fe Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, The International Händel Festspiele, the Cleveland Orchestra, Dallas Opera, San Diego Opera, Opera Omaha, Boston Lyric Opera, the Florentine Opera, Madison Opera, Opéra de Lille, the Ongaku-Juku Festival, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Ms. Fons is enjoying a successful international career while also staying committed to performing in and giving back to her community and home state through master classes, recitals, a scholarship fund, and by working with the high quality opera companies that Wisconsin is fortunate to have.

About Emily Pogorelc

Praised for her "lively, incisive soprano" by *The New York Times*, **Emily Pogorelc** is currently a member of the 2018-19 ensemble of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Highlights of recent performances include engagements with the Bel Canto Chorus of Milwaukee, Madison Symphony Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, her Washington National Opera debut, and a Mozart Residency at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. Pogorelc is the recipient of The Ginette Theano Prize for Most Promising Talent, as well as being the youngest finalist of the first ever Glyndebourne Opera Cup, first prize winner in The Carolyn Bailey and Dominick Argento Vocal Competition, and first place winner in the Hal Leonard Art Song Competition. She took second place in the Upper-Midwest Region of the Metropolitan National Opera Council Auditions in 2017. She has also won first place in numerous competitions, including Classical Singer Magazine Competition, The Schmidt Competition, The American Prize, and Wisconsin Conservatory of Music Art Song Festival. She is the 2014 Gold Award winner in the Classical Voice division at NFAA YoungArts and in June 2014, she was featured on National Public Radio's, *From the Top*. She was featured as part of the Sky Arts series, broadcast all over Europe and in the United States on Medici.

As a young artist at The Glimmerglass Festival, Pogorelc starred in Handel's *Xerxes*, where she "found a tragic nobility in Romilda and her elegant, poised vocal impersonation was an aural delight" (*OperaCanada*).

She also performed as Johanna Barker in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, Berenice in Rossini's *L'occasione fa il ladro* and covered Laurey in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Passionate about performing new works, Pogorelc sang the role of Chan Parker in the New York premiere of Charlie Parker's *Yardbird* and the title role in David Hertzberg's *The Rose Elf* with Opera Philadelphia.

Pogorelc is a recent graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, under the tutelage of Mikael Eliassen and Julia Faulkner. She is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and currently resides in Chicago, Illinois.

About Valhalla Media

Valhalla Media is committed to re-energizing the world of classical music in a new digital realm—providing online performing arts content that features fresh and creative programming, while helping artists and arts organizations re-imagine the ways in which they can broaden and connect with their audiences. Together, working directly with artists and producing organizations, Valhalla Media will elevate its colleagues and help them thrive on the stage of the 21st Century.

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Image at top of release (from left to right) : Will Liverman by Jaclyn Simpson, Emily Fons by Dario Acosta, Emily Pogorelc