

ARTS

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A scene from the Birmingham Royal Ballet production of Jessica Lang's "Lyric Pieces" which she created for the company. She is staging a new production for The Sarasota Ballet. ROY SMILJANIC/PROVIDED BY SARASOTA BALLET

CHOREOGRAPHER PLAYS WITH MOVING OBJECTS IN  
*‘LYRIC PIECES’*

Jay Handelman Sarasota Herald-Tribune | USA TODAY NETWORK

Choreographer Jesica Lang is becoming a more familiar presence around The Sarasota Ballet for both dancers and audiences. • She choreographed the world premiere of “Shades of Spring” for the company in 2022, and last fall was named Artist in Residence in a three-year partnership that will include a world premiere to kick off the new season in October. • But for now, she is focused on staging the company premiere of her “Lyric Pieces,” set to music by Edvard Grieg, which she created in 2012 in a commission for the Royal Birmingham Ballet. • It is part of a triple bill that closes The Sarasota Ballet season along with Christopher Wheeldon’s 2001 “The American,” which it first performed in 2010, and Frederick Ashton’s “Sinfonietta,” first performed here in 2014. See **LYRIC**, Page 2E



Jessica Lang

Venice Symphony is  
expanding programs and  
range for its 51st season

April 26-27 concerts the  
biggest ever for group

Jay Handelman  
Sarasota Herald-Tribune  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Music Director Troy Quinn is leading The Venice Symphony to an explosive end to the orchestra’s 50th anniversary season, while planning for more growth and expansion as it heads into a busy 2024-25 season. “The Crown Jewel Finale” concerts on April 26 and 27 in the Venice Performing Arts Center will be the biggest the orchestra has ever put together, with about 160 musicians, including members of the Key Chorale chorus and soloists. The concerts will feature Ralph Vaughan Williams’ “Dona nobis pacem,” which Quinn calls a “great work that needs to be heard. It’s timely for the world we’re living in today. The title means to grant us peace, which is apropos in our turbulent times.” It calls for an expanded brass section with extra trombones, trumpets, tuba and an optional organ. “It’s a man-

agement issue, masking sure of the sound balance, but it gives it such great sonority. He only utilizes the entire orchestra at pivotal moments,” Quinn said. Part of the text is from poems by Walt Whitman about a father and son going off to war and the grave. “It was very influenced by Vaughan Williams working as an ambulance driver in the war. He wrote film scores as part of his duties,” Quinn said. It inspires the theme of “all things English and royal,” including Hans Zimmer’s popular theme to the hit Netflix series “The Crown,” as well as William Walton’s “Crown Imperial March,” which was written for King Edward VI-II. The concerts feature guest vocalists soprano Deanna Breiwick and bass-baritone Dashon Burton. It closes a 50th anniversary season that Quinn says tells the community that “we’re here to perform these bold and challenging works, and that we’re very lucky to have this type of an orchestra in Venice. It is a crown jewel in our community. This is the kind of mu-

See **SYMPHONY**, Page 2E

A lighter touch: FST  
celebrates musical hits  
and new plays in summer

Jay Handelman  
Sarasota Herald-Tribune  
USA TODAY NETWORK

As the weather heats up, Florida Studio Theatre lightens up the tone of the plays and musicals it presents. “We found out many years ago when we had put in a drama every summer that they were not being well attended,” said Richard Hopkins, the theater’s producing artistic director “We decided we were going to stop wasting those great dramas in the summer when people just want to have fun in the summer, and save them for the winter months.” But that doesn’t mean there’s nothing to the three mainstage shows that Hopkins has picked to run from June into September. “It’s just a lighter approach to what is happening,” he said, like the non-partisan political comedy “The Outsider” and the songs John Kander and Fred Ebb created for more than a dozen musicals dealing with a world of issues and conflicts. They are both part of the theater’s summer season. Here’s a look at the summer mainstage season and the three touring cab-

aret shows.  
**Mainstage**

**‘The World Goes ‘Round’**

*Begins June 5, Gompertz Theatre*  
FST will stage its third production of this off-Broadway revue that celebrates the songs of John Kander and Fred Ebb, creators of such shows as “Cabaret,” “Chicago” and “Kiss of the Spider Woman.” The last production was staged in 2013. “They’re just so good,” Hopkins said of the songwriting team. “They are always writing material that is thoughtful and meaningful and mostly universal.” It will be staged by Ben Liebert, who has directed or choreographed several past shows for the company and will be joining FST as an associate artist.

**‘Ken Ludwig’s Dear Jack, Dear Louise’**

*Begins July 3, Keating Theatre*  
See **FST**, Page 3E



# Lyric

Continued from Page 1E

The busy weekend for the company also includes its annual gala on April 28. In a review of “Lyric Pieces” in 2019 when it was performed by her former company Jessica Lang Dance, the San Francisco Chronicle said it “achieved what great dance should. The work invoked a singular world of its own design. Everything contributed to a feeling of exuberant liberation, the communal bond that forms when people are free to be themselves, to connect and separate and recombine in new ways.”

The piece has “had its own life elsewhere,” Lang said. “But Sarasota is the right company to be performing it now because of their technique and reverence to style.”

The title came from Grieg’s own composition, which totaled 66 short pieces for solo piano that were published in 10 volumes over 34 years from 1867 to 1901. Lang chose 10 of them and said she picked the Grieg pieces for their sound and style but also because she “wanted to work with a pianist when I created it. That makes the transition from the studio to the stage easier. I don’t have to waste time on when to start or stop.”

She describes the work as “very classic in its steps and its investigation of movement lies in the ballet technique. Those are the dancers I made it on, the



From left, Amy Wood, Victoria Hulland and Christine Windsor in a scene from a past Sarasota Ballet production of Christopher Wheeldon’s “The American.” MORAH GEIST/PROVIDED BY SARASOTA BALLET

Royal Birmingham Ballet. I’m a choreographer who uses the technique they use every day as a launching point. I wouldn’t do something there that I would do on Alvin Ailey dancers. They practice in a different way every day.”

The Birmingham dancers inspired what she created, just as The Sarasota Ballet dancers informed her work on “Shades of Spring,” after she observed them in classes and rehearsals.

The piece was created during a period when Lang was exploring the use of inanimate and moving objects with dance in “Lyric Pieces.”

The MOLO interior design company created pieces made of paper. “They’re about an inch and a half wide and come in different sizes, like one foot, three feet, six feet and they accordion out. When you travel with them, they’re small, but they’re heavy and they can

## ‘Inspirations’

The Sarasota Ballet presents “The American” by Christopher Wheeldon, “Sinfonietta” by Frederick Ashton and “Lyric Pieces” by Jessica Lang. 7:30 p.m. April 26, 2 and 7:30 p.m. April 27. Sarasota Opera House, 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. Tickets are \$35-\$125. 941-359-0099; sarasotaballet.org

make these huge designs. The dancers manipulate the designs in space and use them in ways they weren’t meant to be used. At home, you could use them as a space divider.”

Lang came to her new relationship with The Sarasota Ballet after creating more than 100 original works for a range of dance companies, including American Ballet Theatre, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Pacific Northwest Ballet, the National Ballet of Japan and Joffrey Ballet, along with her own company which closed in 2019.

As she continues working with the Sarasota dancers, Lang said she wants to “push them as dancers and the company, push the boundaries without turning people off, or going against my signature. This is my 25th year as a choreographer. That’s a long time to know myself and my work. My essence is in there. Now I have the trust of the organization, the dedication of the organization and then we’ll have time to work and hone our craft together.”

# Symphony

Continued from Page 1E

sic-making you would expect to get in a major metropolitan city.”

The program also indicates that “we’re growing. We’re not just plateauing. We haven’t reached our pinnacle.”

The orchestra will return outdoors on May 25 for the annual Patriotic Pops Concert at Cool Today Park, ahead of the October start of a new season that will include added performances to meet what Quinn describes as a growing demand from the Venice audience. He said the organization is looking for ways to expand, possibly adding a fourth performance at the Venice Performing Arts Center.

“We are going in that direction, but rather than give four performances in the same venue, we are looking to do more outreach and run our concerts on those Sundays,” he said. “We started a chamber series in Wellen Park. We are trying to diversify our audience and get the music out to the people.”

Most of the orchestra’s performances were sold out this season. “We’re expanding to be one of the premiere part-time regional orchestras. That is not happening anywhere else.”

Here’s a look at what’s coming in the new season

## ‘A Symphony Spooktacular’

*Oct. 11-12*

The concert promises to be a “not-so-scary” pre-Halloween program that includes Bernard Herrmann’s “Psycho: A Short Suite for String Orchestra” and music from “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice.”

## ‘Instrumental Influencers’

*Nov. 15-16*

This concert explores the common connections between Beethoven, Vivaldi, Haydn and Brahms, and who influenced their music. Quinn describes this as a “very classical concert, sort of a hierarchical teacher-mentor situation.” It includes Brahms’ Variations on a Theme by Haydn and Beethoven’s “Egmont” overture. Principal Viola Rafael Ramirez will perform Vivaldi’s Mandolin Concerto.

## ‘Home for the Holidays’

*Dec. 20-22*

The symphony is adding an extra Sunday performance for this concert that will feature Tony and Grammy award-nominated singer Liz Callaway performing holiday favorites and selections from the animated film “Anastasia,” for which she provided the voice of the title character. Concertmaster Marcus Ratzenboeck will play the electric violin on “Miraculum.”

## ‘Sports Orchestrated’

*Jan. 10-11*

Quinn admits the title of this concert may be a “little misleading. It’s not just sports music or pop music.” It features Strauss’ Olympic Hymn, an all-star suite featuring Beethoven and Respighi, and music from sports-related films like “Rocky” and “Rudy.”

## ‘A Salute to Pops’



Pianist Conrad Tao performs in The Venice Symphony’s “Crazy for Gershwin” concert. BRANTLY GUTIERREZ/PROVIDED BY SARASOTA ORCHESTRA



Bass-baritone Dashon Burton is a guest vocalist for The Venice Symphony’s “The Crown Jewel Finale.” PROVIDED BY THE VENICE SYMPHONY



Tony and Grammy nominee Liz Callaway will join The Venice Symphony for a holiday concert in December. PROVIDED BY VENICE SYMPHONY



Suzanne Waters who has a busy career as a background singer for films and television, will be a featured soloist with The Venice Symphony in the 2024-25 season. PROVIDED BY THE VENICE SYMPHONY



Rafael Ramirez, principal viola for The Venice Symphony, will be a soloist during the orchestra’s 2024-25 season. PROVIDED BY THE VENICE SYMPHONY

*Jan. 31-Feb. 1*

This concert is a tribute to Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops Orchestra and some of their best arrangements, Quinn said. It will include the “Boston Pops March,” “Bugler’s Holiday,” Leroy Anderson’s arrangement of “Yankee Doodle,” John Williams’ arrangement of “That’s Entertainment” and “Seventy-Six Trombones.”

## ‘Hollywood in Venice’

*Feb. 21-22*

Audiences may not know the name of Suzanne Waters, “but she is one of the

most recorded female background singers of all time, and a dear colleague,” Quinn said. “She has one of my favorite voices on the planet.” The program will include music from “A Summer Place,” “Ben-Hur,” “Mary Poppins,” “Thor,” “Top Gun: Maverick” and “Madagascar.”

## ‘Crazy for Gershwin’

*March 14-15*

Pianist Conrad Tao joins the symphony for a tribute to George Gershwin in a program that includes “Rhapsody in Blue,” “An American in Paris” and “Girl Crazy.”

## Tickets

Concerts are at the Venice Performing Arts Center, 1 Indian Ave., Venice. For subscriptions and single ticket information: 941-207-8822; thevenicesymphony.org

## ‘The Rat Pack is Back’

*March 22*

This special event, not part of the regular subscription series, is a new addition to the lineup featuring the Venice Symphony Jazz Orchestra and singer Michael Andrew (bandleader of the Rainbow Room in New York) celebrating the hits of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and more. Pete Baranbregge leads the ensemble.

## ‘Cosmic Worlds’

*April 25-26, 2025*

The symphony takes off into space with Gustav Holst’s “The Planets” inspiring a program that includes themes by John Williams and Franz Waxman. Classical saxophonist Kenneth Radnofsky is a guest artist.

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