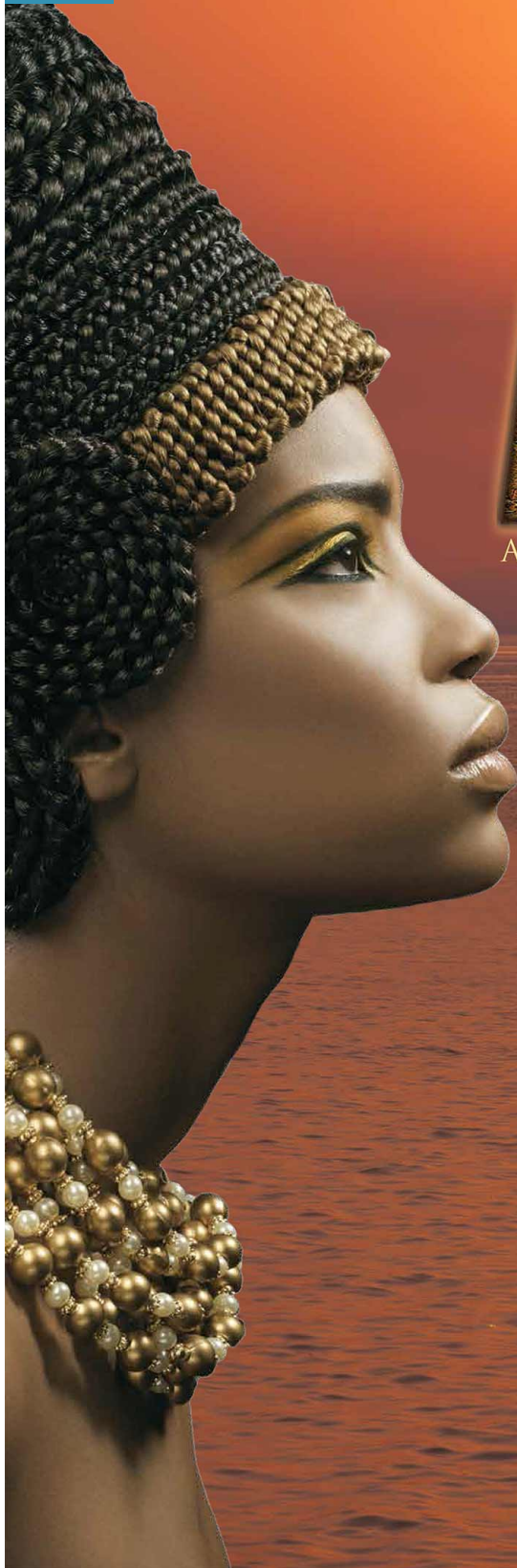


ARTS



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# AIDA

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# Q&A with Brian Asher Alhadeff, Artistic Director at Opera San Luis Obispo

By #ShareSLO Staff | Arts | October 1, 2014



The Egyptians have enslaved an Ethiopian princess. An Egyptian military commander has fallen in love with her, but struggles between his feelings for her and his loyalty to the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh's daughter loves the commander, but he does not return her feelings. Just your typical love triangle...plus five dance companies, a 50 person orchestra and a 60 person chorus.

Opera San Luis Obispo brings Giuseppe Verdi's, *Aida*, to the Performing Arts Center on October 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>. This production is a Citywide Arts Collaboration with the Ballet Theatre San Luis Obispo, Central Coast Children's Choir, Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo, CORE Dance Company, Deyo Dances, Opera San Luis Obispo and Studio @ Ryan's American Dance. We sat down with Opera San Luis Obispo's Artistic Director and *Aida* Conductor, Brian Asher Alhadeff to get an inside look at this Grand Opera –

Q: What makes *Aida* unique compared to other operas?

*Aida* is unique in that it is a "Grand Opera". Grand opera is a sort of super opera. Unlike smaller operas, *Aida* features a large 50+ person orchestra and a large 60+ person chorus that is divided into several smaller groups and also comes together in a few explosive wonderful moments. *Aida* features the addition of several formal ballet sections. Finally *Aida* requires "dramatic" voices. In opera, the term "dramatic" means the loudest type of voice – a sort of super singer who can create a sound that can clearly cut through the thick sound textures which exist when you put a large chorus together with a large orchestra.

Q: What is your favorite part of the opera? What are you excited for people to see/hear?

*Aida* has not just one favorite part, but three of my ALL TIME favorite moments in music!!! The first is the grand act II finale – twenty minutes of sheer glory, spectacle, and genius. The act II finale is probably the largest moment in opera history with full chorus, full orchestra, all the leading roles, a parade of extras, and even a full ballet. The ticket is worth just that scene alone. My next favorite is the father-daughter duet between Amonasro and Aida which takes place in act III, and my third favorite is the final duet between Aida and Radames. Both of these duets feature amazing melodies accompanied by brilliant orchestration. They are what I live for as a conductor.

Q: What sets Opera San Luis Obispo apart from other opera companies?

Opera San Luis Obispo is unique in that we are a full production opera company. Our productions offer an un-cut operatic experience featuring full orchestra, complete ballet segments (when applicable), full choruses, and complete sets, costumes, and props. We are also special in that our performance venue is a grand opera house that offers unlimited possibilities for the future. Many opera companies have to cut their orchestras and choruses, and even implement limitations on set designs due to available theater space. This is not so in San Luis Obispo. Our opera house can produce any opera or ballet in the repertoire without limitation.

Q: How does a production like this enhance the arts & culture community in San Luis Obispo for locals and visitors, alike?

Grand opera allows us to create an outstanding artistic event that weaves San Luis Obispo's classical arts community together in a celebration of how amazing we can be when we all hold hands and imagine together. Grand Opera is that playground where large-scale casts, choruses, orchestras, and ballets harmoniously collide with lavish and spectacular set designs, costumes and stage effects. *Aida* is one of those special works that can showcase the abundant outstanding talent of San Luis Obispo. Grand opera serves as a spotlight to our arts and cultural demographic – it's important and special because it serves as an entire community unifier – bringing together not only all of the arts, but all of the patrons too.

Q: What makes San Luis Obispo the ideal location for opera and other performing arts?

Grand Opera is a tailor-made art form perfect for San Luis Obispo; and, Opera San Luis Obispo's Citywide Arts Collaboration has proven to be the most successful model for producing opera here. Grand Opera can happen only in a very special kind of city that has strong roots in orchestra, chorus, and dance, and most importantly a Grand Opera House where real magic can happen. We are very lucky to have outstanding support for all of those key ingredients.

Q: What is your advice to first-time opera attendees?

My advice to first-time opera attendees is to "believe all of the publicity" and arrive with an expectation to be thrilled. I am very concerned about delivering on my publicity promises – they are not just to inspire ticket sales, but more importantly, to build

trust with the community. I believe one of the most important responsibilities I'm charged with is creating productions that remind people how wonderful opera is, and/or introduce to newcomers this wonderful, timeless, uniquely human experience. Not every opera is right for a first time experience, so it's important that I choose works and production guidelines that satisfy the first time newcomer as well as the seasoned operagoer.

Q: When you're not conducting opera, what's your favorite San Luis Obispo hang-out?

I love hiking Montana De Oro, tennis with friends, great Mexican food in Morro Bay, and getting away to wine country.

For tickets to *Aida*, click [here](#).



*Brian Asher Alhadeff has been the Artistic Director and Conductor of Opera San Luis Obispo since 2011. He is also Principal Conductor for Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo and State Street Ballet, Santa Barbara. Alhadeff specializes in both producing and conducting large staged productions exceeding 200 artists. He has expanded awareness of classical music in SLO through his "Citywide Arts Collaboration" strategy weaving together numerous local performing arts organizations for large-scale civic productions. An internationally acclaimed opera, ballet and symphonic conductor, Alhadeff was Artistic Director and founder of the Hradec Kralove International Summer Opera Festival (Czech Republic), and conducted the Albanian premier of American composer Howard Hanson's symphony The Romantic with the Albanian National Radio and Television Orchestra. Alhadeff studied conducting at the Peabody Conservatory of Music and Janacek Academy in Brno, the Czech Republic. He holds a BA from Loyola Marymount University and Masters of Music from California State University, both in Los Angeles, and Doctorate of Musical Arts from UCLA.*

To read Brian's full biography, click [here](#).

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