



Haymarket
Opera company

MARIA MARGHERITA GRIMANI

La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista

MARCH 22, 2024 | GANNON CONCERT HALL

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Gannon Concert Hall for Haymarket's performance of *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista* by Maria Margherita Grimani, one of two works by significant women composers of the Baroque era that we are delighted to present this season. We hope you were able to attend Haymarket's fall performances of Francesca Caccini's opera *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina*, which premiered in 1625 in Florence and is the oldest surviving opera by a woman composer.

Grimani's oratorio *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista* premiered in Vienna almost a century later. The work celebrates the steadfast faith of John the Baptist as he faced death for speaking out against King Herod. John, a first-century Judaeon preacher, is revered in several faiths, including Christianity, Islam, Bahá'í, and Mandaeism. He has also been one of the patron saints of music since the Middle Ages. Indeed, we westerners owe our system of musical notation to a hymn addressed to John, which was used as a teaching tool by Guido of Arezzo as he taught monks to read music in the eleventh century. The text of the hymn *Ut queant laxis* asks John to heal colds and coughs and to make the singers' voices clear—an invocation we hope not to need for our singers in this performance!

Please enjoy Grimani's *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista* in what appears to be its first performance in over three hundred years!

Musically yours,
Craig & Chase



Craig Trompeter
Artistic Director



Chase Hopkins
General Director



Haymarket Opera Company presents

La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista

MUSIC BY **MARIA MARGHERITA GRIMANI**

LIBRETTO BY **AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR**

MARCH 22, 2024

Performance runtime: 2 hours, including one 20-minute intermission

CAST

Fleur Barron
John the Baptist

Christian Pursell
Herod

Erica Schuller
Herodias

Kristin Knutson Berka
Salome

Eric Ferring
Herod's confidant

HAYMARKET OPERA ORCHESTRA

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Leader & Cello

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Violin I

Martin Davids
Violin II

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Viola

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Violone

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About Haymarket

Haymarket Opera Company contributes to the diverse and culturally vibrant artistic community of Chicago and the Midwest through the presentation of historically informed opera and oratorio from the 17th and 18th centuries, including many Chicago and U.S. premieres.

Since its founding in 2010, Haymarket has offered more than 30 productions using period instruments and historically informed staging conventions, shining a spotlight on many lesser-known works by a wide diversity of composers, sung and played by specialists in the repertoire. The company has received glowing reviews including in the *Chicago Tribune*, Italy's *L'Opera*, *Opera News*, *Musical America*, and *Early Music America*. *The New York Times* praised Haymarket's "finely played, carefully sung, lovingly detailed period performance."

Haymarket attracted international attention by offering a season of filmed Handel operas that reached more than 800,000 households during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since 2020, Haymarket has been featured on the WFMT Opera Series, which also presents performances by the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden, and Paris Opera on Saturday afternoons, reaching over one million listeners worldwide through free broadcasts.

Following an acclaimed 2022 stage production of biracial composer Joseph Bologne's only extant opera, *L'Amant anonyme*, Haymarket released the world-premiere recording of the opera in collaboration with the Grammy Award-winning label Cedille Records. The recording is the inaugural project supported by the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Fund for Vocal Recordings.

In 2020, Haymarket was included in the "Ten Best of the Decade" by the *Chicago Sun-Times* and in 2021 was praised as offering "Chicago's finest operatic event" by *Chicago Classical Review*. In 2021 and 2022, Haymarket was listed alongside the Chicago Symphony and Lyric Opera in the *Chicago Tribune's* "Top 10 Classical and Opera Performances." In 2022 *Musical America* lauded Haymarket as "among the most impressive period-performance ensembles around today."

Haymarket Opera Company is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organization. To support Haymarket with a tax-deductible donation, please visit haymarketopera.org/donate.

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PART ONE

King Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, notices his newlywed Queen Herodias in emotional turmoil. He prompts her to reveal the source of this internal suffering, and she responds: A man living in the wilderness, named John, has been publicly criticizing the royal couple's marriage and accusing them of living in sin. She requests that he punish this man for such insolence. Herod agrees out of love for her, and the queen's spirits are raised.

John soon arrives and immediately admonishes the king for divorcing his first wife to marry Herodias, who was formerly espoused to Herod's brother. According to John, their union is therefore unholy and she is not a righteous queen. John warns that this immoral marriage will result in heavenly retribution. Sufficiently provoked, King Herod commands his confidant to arrest John, whose punishment will serve as an example for others. John holds fast to his convictions and accepts his fate.

PART TWO

As John contemplates his love for God and the reward of martyrdom, courtiers gather for the birthday celebration of King Herod. The festivities reach their peak, and Herod requests a dance from Herodias's daughter Salome. The young woman dutifully pays homage to the king with her graceful steps and strides. Herod is so impressed that he promises to grant her any wish she desires, even half of his kingdom. She prostrates herself before his throne and asks for only one thing: the head of John the Baptist.

King Herod reluctantly fulfills his promise, ordering his confidant to prepare the executioner. Queen Herodias declares her relief for John's beheading, and the confidant rushes off to obey Herod's command. The prophet yields willingly, assured that death will bring him closer to God in heaven.



Feast of Herod with the Beheading of St. John the Baptist
by Bartholomeus Strobel the Younger (1630-43)

Program Notes

AN ORATORIO FOR THE AUSTRIAN HABSBURGS

Music performed in political spaces, for monarchs and emperors, is rarely without underlying meaning or significance to those in attendance. This was especially the case within the Austrian Habsburg court, where musical entertainment marked important military victories, profound religious ceremonies, and grand celebrations for weddings and birthdays. So, in 1715, when Maria Margherita Grimani's oratorio *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista* premiered for Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, the audience would likely have paid attention to any parallels to the imperial family, perhaps linking the ancient court of King Herod Antipas to that of the Austrian Habsburg monarchy. One might especially appreciate the four separate *da capo* arias that praise and celebrate King Herod on his birthday, recognizing that Grimani's *La decollazione* appropriately honored the virtue of her royal patrons through religious allegory. What else might that eighteenth-century audience have thought about a woman composer setting the grim story of John the Baptist's beheading, which featured such prominent female characters as Herodias and her dancing daughter Salome?

The historical circumstances which led to Maria Margherita Grimani composing an oratorio for the Austrian court highlights the prominence of women in both imperial and musical circles at the time. In the early eighteenth century, the future of the Holy Roman Empire hinged on the acceptance of women's power, contrary to the traditions of patrilineal inheritance. The ruling family had not yet borne sons to inherit the throne and was plagued with the memory of the War of the Spanish Succession between France and the Holy Roman Empire. Wary of renewed war and partition of the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor Leopold I, the father of Charles VI and Joseph I, passed a pact to grant inheritance to their daughters. An obsession with securing women's right to rule beset Charles VI after both his father and elder brother had died in 1711.

He bargained for over a decade to ensure the women in his family could inherit the Habsburg dominions undivided. Thus, in 1715, when Grimani composed *La decollazione*, the Viennese would have been attentive to the idea of women's power in court.



Herodias presented with the Head of the Baptist by Salome
by Andrea Ansaldo (1630)

The young Maria Josepha (b. 1699) and Maria Amalia (b. 1701), Joseph I's daughters, were Emperor Charles VI's heirs presumptive. Grimani's oratorio—with its anonymous libretto that she may or may not have written herself—might therefore reflect some aims of the imperial court. For instance, the young female character of Salome reflects modesty and obedience, only offering a humble dance because King Herod requests her to do so. Her simple dance-song with unison violins presents her as a suitable example for young women, like the Emperor's two teenage heirs, and her power is only bestowed by the male ruler.

The narrative of *La decollazione*, however, also relies on the corrupt desires of women, beginning with Queen Herodias's provocation and reaching the climax at Salome's request. King Herod Antipas's fault, in fact, comes not from his own greed, but from his naïve acquiescence to women in his family. It would not be difficult to see a parallel between Salome, who was the biological daughter of Herod's brother, and the nieces of Charles VI, for whom he was attempting to secure the throne. The setting of *La decollazione* seems to highlight the magnitude of these women's influence: Salome is the only character accompanied by the oboe, which heightens her expressive power, while Herodias has the last triumphant moment immediately before John's concluding martyrdom.

On the other hand, Maria Margherita Grimani—of whose life we know very little—was not the first female composer to set religious musical dramas prominently featuring women.

In fact, she was the last in a line of female composers who served the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Habsburgs. Two others of Italian descent, Camilla de Rossi and Caterina Benedicta Grazianini, came before her, during the reign of Emperor Joseph I. Their most popular topics were biblical and hagiographic stories, particularly of female saints, which also contained praise for the Habsburgs and overall affirmed the emperor's connection to God.

Rossi, for example, composed an oratorio—commissioned by the emperor himself and performed in the *Hofkapelle*—about the life of Saint Beatrice d'Este,

whose devotion to God helped her withstand the pressures of an enemy's approaching military invasion. Rossi even wrote the text for one of her oratorios; perhaps the other women did as well.

After Rossi, Caterina Benedicta Grazianini composed two known oratorios, one on Saint Teresa and the other describing an aspect of Saint Geminianus (fourth-century bishop and protector of Modena). Interestingly, this second work focused not on Geminianus's more well-known intercession to save the Modenese from the Huns, but instead depicts how he exorcized a demonic force from the daughter of Byzantine Emperor Jovian. The choice to focus on this Italian saint and the service he offered to an emperor's daughter not only highlights both the Austrian taste for Italian models and imperial connection to religion, but also centralized a female character for the composer and performers. In the arias written for both Saint Teresa and Jovian's daughter,



The Head of Saint John the Baptist
by Giovanni Francesco Maineri (1502)

Grazianini used melodies that contain rhythmic syncopation and contrast against the orchestral accompaniment. In the first case, the distinct melodies draw attention to St. Teresa's mysticism, while the second highlights the young girl's demonic possession. None of Grazianini's male characters received this kind of melodic treatment. Maria Margherita Grimani likewise demonstrated a persistent focus on female characterization in her works. She composed two others before *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista*: first, an oratorio about the Virgin Mary's visit to John the Baptist's mother, titled *La visitazione di Elisabetta* (premiered in 1713 and repeated in 1718), and a second drama about the Greek gods

Program Notes continued

Pallas Athena and Mars in her *Pallade e Marte* (for the nameday of Joseph I in 1713). Both of these oratorios served the imperial family, specifically celebrating Charles VI's martial successes. While they may showcase female characters, the narratives and music generally follow the conservative attitudes and deep religiosity that was favored among the Habsburgs. The short overtures for four-part orchestra and straightforward da capo arias and recitatives resemble styles typical of her Austrian and Italian contemporaries within the court.

Grimani also does not stray from Grazianini's and other early eighteenth-century composers' precedent of using noteworthy textures, as well as instrumental timbres, as the primary means of dramatic effect and characterization.

In *La decollazione*, for example, John the Baptist's higher contralto range symbolizes his purity and faith, with his plaintive aria "Cari lacci" ("Dear shackles") even featuring long sections without bass accompaniment. The lack of lower parts helps to exhibit his lofty nature above the earthly domain. The primary female characters in each work are especially highlighted in Grimani's aria writing. In *Pallade e Marte*, similarly to *La decollazione*, oboe

obbligato accompanies the female character of Pallas Athena. Additionally, Grimani characterizes the Virgin Mary's humility through short regular phrases and slow harmonic rhythm in her oratorio *La visitazione*.

Maria Margherita Grimani and her oratorio *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista* were therefore not exactly unique to those who heard them, but part of a decades-long tradition of creative women serving the

musical and religious needs of Vienna and the imperial court. The Habsburgs were the most powerful and long-lived ruling dynasty in Europe. Thus, as some of the most important patrons of music in the early modern era, they commissioned music to reflect and support their standing. With so many powerful women in the court, many of whom were quite

musically talented, it is not surprising that they sought out music by and for women. Even though composers like Rossi, Grazianini, and of course Grimani have largely fallen out of public knowledge today, they were regular contributors to Viennese concert life in their era.

—Vanessa Tonelli



Manuscript of *La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista*



Vanessa Tonelli, Music History Lecturer at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, is the author of several publications regarding female musicians and their performances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Tonelli's scholarship includes an essay in the book *Non-Elite Women's Networks Across the Early Modern World* (Amsterdam University Press, 2023) and an edition of Domenico Paradies's *Le muse in gara* (A-R Editions, 2022), a Baroque serenata performed by women of the Venetian charitable Ospedali.

The Beheading of John the Baptist Composed by Maria Margherita Grimani

MATTHEW 14: 1-12, NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

1 At that time [when Jesus was in Nazareth] Herod the ruler heard reports about Jesus;

2 and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.”

3 For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

4 because John had been telling him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

5 Though Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod

7 so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask.

8 Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.”

9 The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he commanded it to be given;

10 he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.

11 The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who brought it to her mother.

12 His disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.

The Head of Saint John the Baptist Presented to Salome by Peter Paul Rubens (1609)





L'Amant Anonyme

BY JOSEPH BOLOGNE,
THE CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES

*Haymarket's world-premiere recording produced with
Cedille Records is receiving international praise!*



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*Haymarket
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FLEUR BARRON | JOHN THE BAPTIST

ALTO

Singaporean-British mezzo-soprano Fleur Barron recently triumphed at the San Francisco Symphony in the title role of Kaija Saariaho's opera *Adriana Mater* in a production helmed by Peter Sellars and Esa-Pekka Salonen, and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival as Ottavia in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. This season she stars as Penelope in Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* at Teatro Real Madrid and Opéra de Bordeaux and performs in George Benjamin's two-person opera *Into the Little Hill* with the Staatsoper Berlin/Boulez Saal. Orchestral engagements include Mahler's 3rd Symphony with the Czech Philharmonic and Semyon Bychkov, Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and Montsalvatge's *Cinco Canciones Negras* with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra under Ludovic Morlot, and Claude Vivier's *Wo bist du Licht* and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* with the London Symphony Orchestra under Barbara Hannigan.



CHRISTIAN PURSELL | HEROD

BASS-BARITONE

In addition to his Haymarket debut, 2024 includes three important role debuts for bass-baritone Christian Pursell: Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (Cincinnati Opera), Don Basillio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Virginia Opera), and the role of Noah at Carnegie Hall (debut) in a concert performance of Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Grapes of Wrath*. In January 2024, Pursell won Fourth Prize and "Best Baritone" at the Tenor Viñas International Vocal Competition in Barcelona, Spain. Known particularly for his performances of Escamillo in *Carmen*, he has performed the role at the Cincinnati Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Des Moines Metro Opera, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. As a concert soloist, Pursell has performed Handel's *Messiah* with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Samuel in Handel's *Saul* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, in Walt Disney Concert Hall, and a concert version of Strauss's *Salome* with Fabio Luisi and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.



ERICA SCHULLER | HERODIAS

SOPRANO

Praised for her "lively personality, abundant charm, and luscious vocalism" (*Chicago Tribune*), soprano Erica Schuller is a versatile performer, bringing committed artistry to a broad musical repertory. Credits include performances with Boston Early Music Festival, Haymarket Opera, Apollo's Fire, Odyssey Opera, Florentine Opera, Opera Siam (Bangkok), Skylight Opera Theater, Ars Lyrica Houston, Newberry Consort, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Elgin Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, and San Francisco Bach Choir. She can be heard as Jeannette in Haymarket Opera's world-premiere recording of Joseph Bologne's *L'Amant Anonyme* (Cedille Records). Schuller is the director of Cantabile School of Voice and Piano in Chicago.

Cast Biographies



KRISTIN KNUTSON BERKA | SALOME

SOPRANO

Kristin Knutson Berka is a versatile musician praised for her “sparkling, fluid soprano with admirable flexibility” (*Opera News*). Recent engagements include *Messiah* with Sheboygan Symphony, Daniele in *Susanna* and Drusilla in *L’incoronazione di Poppea* with Haymarket Opera, and a concert of J.S. Bach arias in the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra’s Bach Festival. She has appeared with Wisconsin Baroque Ensemble, Florentine Opera, Skylight Theatre, Fireside Theatre, IndyBaroque Chamber Players, Alchemy Viols, and in the New York Philharmonic’s production of *Candide*. She is a founding member of New Milwaukee Consort, with whom she sings and plays Baroque guitar.



ERIC FERRING | HEROD’S CONFIDANT

TENOR

Tenor Eric Ferring is an alumnus of Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Ryan Opera Center. The 2023-24 season featured his house debut with Opéra de Lille as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, a role he also sings in his return to Opéra de Rouen. With The English Concert, Ferring made his role and orchestra debut as Grimoaldo in Handel’s *Rodelinda*. Recent highlights include his debut at Opéra National de Paris as Lurcanio in *Ariodante*, Tamino in *The Magic Flute* at The Metropolitan Opera and Opéra National du Rhin, and an appearance with Opéra de Rouen as Lysander in Britten’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.



GET TO KNOW **Conductor Christian Curnyn**

Ahead of his double debut with the Metropolitan Opera conducting Gluck’s *Orfeo* and with Haymarket Opera Company conducting Handel’s *La Resurrezione*, we sat down with the storied British conductor and Handel specialist Christian Curnyn to learn more about him.

Favorite thing about Chicago? ***The Art Institute—it’s just staggering.***

Best advice you’ve ever received for your career? ***To maintain a happy atmosphere in rehearsals, and to remember that as the conductor, you are there to serve the players, not the other way round.***

If you could perform any role in Handel’s *La Resurrezione*, which role would you sing and why? ***Angelo—he is so spunky!***

What’s a musical highlight of the work you don’t want audiences to miss? ***“Caro figlio” (“Dear son”), an aria sung by John the Evangelist. The closing ritornello is one of the most sublime passages in all of Handel.***

Our audience will be excited to know you are debuting at the Metropolitan prior to our June concert at Haymarket. What are you looking forward to in that production of Gluck’s *Orfeo*? ***The production is directed by Mark Morris, a hero of mine. To work with him is a dream come true. It’s a beautiful staging, and to work with the Met orchestra—what a dream.***

What are you currently listening to, watching, or reading? ***I’m reading The Woman in Black by Susan Hill—I love a good ghost story! And I’m watching Revenge on TV. Great escapism!***

Haymarket
Opera company

*Vocal fireworks combine
with religious fervor in a
heroic showdown between
Heaven and Hell*

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

La Resurrezione

JUNE 14, 2024, 7:30 PM
GANNON CONCERT HALL

The harrowing of Hell and the triumph of Heaven play out on the Haymarket stage in Handel's blockbuster oratorio. Handel's score is an opera in all but name, and demands breathtaking vocal and instrumental virtuosity. Early music specialist Christian Curnyn conducts the acclaimed Haymarket Opera Orchestra, with Chicago's virtuoso violinist Rachel Barton Pine as guest concertmaster. Craig Trompeter plays Handel's ornate viola da gamba solos. With an updated nod to its visually sumptuous 1708 premiere, designer Camilla Tassi makes her Haymarket debut with lavish projections inspired by eye-witness accounts of the first performances.

FEATURING



Christian Curnyn*
Guest Conductor



Rachel Barton Pine*
Guest Concertmaster



Sarah Brailey
an Angel



Douglas Williams*
Lucifer



Scott J. Brunscheen
John the Evangelist



Hannah De Priest
Mary Magdalene



Quinn Middleman
Mary Cleophas



Camilla Tassi*
Projection Designer

*Haymarket debut

Haymarket Opera Company



Thank you!

With the generous support of individuals, organizations, and foundations, Haymarket is continually advancing our signature approach to historically informed performance. We cherish each and every audience member and donor who helps to bring treasures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the stage. Thank you!

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Haymarket champions Gregory O'Leary and Patricia Kenney are generously matching every new or increased donation up to \$50,000 before July 1, 2024. Your donation will be matched dollar for dollar, directly funding our thrilling 2024 season!

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Art Institute of Chicago Connection!

Check out this important work at our home-city and world-renowned Art Institute of Chicago!

This painting depicts Salome as she receives the head of John the Baptist on a platter, the gruesome reward she chose for having pleased her stepfather, Herod, by performing a seductive dance. This episode from the New Testament had long been popular in Italian art, thanks to its combination of religiosity, violence, and eroticism. The most famous and successful Italian painter of his day, Guido Reni, worked in Rome and then in Bologna, where his highly refined style and intensely spiritual subjects dominated. Despite its horrific subject matter, this unfinished work displays the graceful movement, delicate colors, and transparent paint application of Reni's late style.

Below is another example of the beheading of Saint John the Baptist from the Art Institute of Chicago's collection. All artworks completed by the artist Giovanni di Paolo.



Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist
by Guido Reni (1639-42) (Art Institute of Chicago)



Salome Asking Herod for the Head of Saint John the Baptist (1455-60)

La decollazione di San Giovanni Battista



The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist (1455-60)



The Head of Saint John the Baptist Brought Before Herod (1455-60)

Haymarket
Opera company

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Tamerlano

SEPTEMBER 19, 21, AND 22, 2024
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Revel in the long-overdue Chicago premiere of one of Handel's finest operas

Bravery and self-sacrifice prevail in the face of tyranny as two powerful emperors clash in a tapestry of devotion, deception, and desire.

Haymarket celebrates the 300th anniversary of Handel's 1724 masterpiece *Tamerlano*, presenting its Chicago premiere in a new, fully staged period production featuring a sensational Handelian cast, a colorful orchestra of period instruments, and sets and costumes to evoke the medieval realms of Central Asia.

FEATURING



Craig Trompeter
Conductor



Chase Hopkins
Stage Director



Ryan Belongie
*Tamerlano**



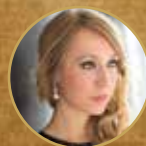
David Portillo*
Bajazet



Emily Birsan
Asteria



Kathleen Felty*
Andronico



Emily Fons
Irene



David Govertsen
Leone

*Haymarket debut

The Early Opera Cabaret

APRIL 25, 2024, 5:30-8:30PM
ARTS CLUB OF CHICAGO



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Tickets are limited—purchase now to avoid missing out!

Mix and mingle with these stars of Haymarket’s 2024 season, and hear them up close!



Ryan Belongie
countertenor



Hannah De Priest
soprano



Kathleen Felty
mezzo-soprano



Emily Fons
mezzo-soprano



David Govertsen
bass-baritone



Kristin Knutson
soprano



Quinn Middleman
mezzo-soprano



Erica Schuller
soprano