

Paris, 07 January 2024

Press Release

Villa Hegra, as part of its launch, collaborates with the Opéra national de Paris for a major artistic event in AIUla.

As part of the launch of the preopening program of Villa Hegra, Saudi-French Villa in AIUla, in the northwest of Saudi Arabia, the Opéra national de Paris and Villa Hegra announce their partnership. This collaboration will make it possible to host, for the very first time in AIUla, an artistic performance by the prestigious French institution, amidst an exceptional natural and cultural heritage. This partnership embodies Villa Hegra's mission: to foster a creative dialogue between cultures, between Saudi Arabia and France. It also illustrates the Villa's commitment to promoting the performing arts.

An Exceptional Event at the Heart of AIUla

On the evening of January 17, AIUla will host artists from the Opéra national de Paris, along with an invited Saudi soprano. The event will take place within the exceptional performance venue, Maraya, the world's largest mirrored building, at the heart of this new global cultural destination.

The Opéra national de Paris invites the audience in AIUla to explore the great pages of the lyrical repertoire and a choreographic creation, as well as an exhibition featuring some of the most beautiful opera and ballet costumes crafted by its workshops.

This evening will mark the encounter between the new generation of opera singers trained at the Paris Opera Academy and the young Saudi singer Sawsan Al Bahiti, with the collaboration of the Prima Ballerina from the Opéra national de Paris, Alice Renavand.

This highlight of cultural cooperation between the two countries will bring together numerous French and Saudi personalities, including H.R.H. Prince Badr bin Farhan, Minister of Culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mr. Ludovic Pouille, French Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, President of the French Agency for the Development of AIUla.

Fostering Creative Dialogue: A Central Objective of the Partnership.

The partnership between Villa Hegra and the Opéra national de Paris marks a significant milestone in the artistic, cultural, and creative dialogue between France and Saudi Arabia to promote lyrical and choreographic art. With this inaugural concert, the Saudi soprano Sawsan Al-Bahiti will benefit from a week-long intensive training at the Opéra national de Paris.

This partnership will also result in a program introducing music, singing, and dance, led by artists from the Opéra national de Paris, in collaboration with AIUla's Music Hub. Around fifteen young musicians from the local community, currently in training, will have the opportunity to attend a presentation on the history and activities of the Opéra national de Paris, enhanced by inspiring testimonials from guest artists who will share their experiences and the challenges of their professions.

Setting the place for a longer-term partnership

This initial phase marks the beginning of a long-term partnership between Villa Hegra and the Opéra national de Paris. This collaboration will encompass both artistic performances and training programs, facilitating the transfer of expertise from the prestigious institution to AIUla.

Practical information

17th January 2024 at 20h30

Maraya, AIUla

[Link to book](#)

About Villa Hegra: Villa Hegra is a Saudi-French institution dedicated to arts and culture, conceived as a space for artistic, cultural, and creative dialogue. The Villa is set to open its doors in 2026, housing artist residencies and a cultural center. A comprehensive preopening program is planned leading up to the official opening.

About the Opéra national de Paris: With a history spanning over 350 years, the Opéra national de Paris is renowned for the quality and diversity of its programming at the Palais Garnier and the Opera Bastille, as well as the unique architecture of its two theaters. Hosting over 400 performances annually, the Opéra national de Paris offers a repertoire of ballets, operas, and concerts, along with specialized programming for young audiences. It attracts approximately 900,000 spectators each year. Additionally, the Paris National Opera plays a role in shaping the new generations of artists, including dancers, singers, and musicians, through its Academy and School of Dance.

ARTISTS BIOGRAPHY



Alice Renavand – Prima Ballerina of the Opéra national de Paris

Born in Paris to a Vietnamese mother and a French father, Alice Renavand enrolled at the age of 8 in the Saint-Cloud Conservatory of Dance. The teacher and choreographer Atilio Labis recognized the potential in the young girl during a dance workshop and encouraged her parents to enter her into the entrance competition for the Opéra national de Paris Ballet School. She joined the ballet school in 1990 and became a member of the Opéra national de Paris Ballet corps in 1997 at the age of 17. She was promoted to Coryphée in 2004, Sujet in 2005, and First Dancer in 2012, showing a particular attachment to the contemporary repertoire of the ballet corps. She received the AROP prize in 2008. Alice Renavand was named Prima Ballerina on December 20, 2013, after a performance of Angelin Preljocaj's "Le Parc." During the "Black City Parade" tour of the band Indochine, she danced in the video for the song "Wuppertal," which was projected on a large screen during concerts, and performed on the stage of the Stade de France during two concerts organized by the band. She bid farewell to the Opéra national de Paris on May 28, 2023, in Maurice Béjart's "Boléro" but continues to perform on international stages or at events such as the opening ceremony of the Rugby World Cup alongside actor Jean Dujardin.



Marianne Croux - Soprano

Marianne Croux, a Franco-Belgian soprano trained at the CNSM (National Conservatory of Music and Dance) in Paris, is a rising star in the opera world. Recognized as a Lyric Revelation by ADAMI in 2017, she was a member of the Opéra national de Paris Academy until 2019. Awarded at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2018, she was honored in Belgium as an Officer of the Walloon Merit. Marianne also shone at the Aix-en-Provence Academy in 2021 and the Belvedere Hans Gabor Competition in 2022. Renowned for her performances at the Opéra national de Paris, she has appeared in Stravinsky's "Les Noces," Ravel's "L'enfant et les Sortilèges," and Strauss's "Elektra." Her debuts at the Rome Opera as Zerlina and her Micaëla at the Capitole were acclaimed.

Passionate about contemporary music, she has sung in works by Betsy Jolas and Gilbert Amy and served as the muse for Damien Lehman's "Hansel et Gretel." Recently, she excelled at the Dijon Opera in "The Turn of the Screw" and performed in concerts in Munich and Bordeaux.



Sawan Albahiti – Soprano

Sawsan Albahiti, an artist, a coach and a pioneer. Referred to as the first Saudi opera singer, she performed on various stages globally and locally in London, Berlin, Riyadh, AlUla, and more. She founded her vocal coaching institute, The Soulful Voice, that specializes in training professional and amateur singers in Saudi Arabia. Also, she worked as an arts manager at the Saudi Music Commission in the Ministry of Culture and established the Saudi National Orchestra & Choir. She is currently enrolled at a specialized opera program at the Conservatorio di Milano while continuing her professional artist career.



Farrah El Dibany - Mezzo

Farrah El Dibany, born in 1989 in Alexandria, Egypt, is a renowned mezzo-soprano. She began studying piano at the age of 10 before turning to singing. Trained in Egypt and at the Hanns-Eisler Academy of Music in Berlin, she earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in lyrical singing. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in architecture from the Technische Universität in Berlin. Farrah has excelled in solo alto roles in classical pieces such as Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater" and Mozart's "Requiem." She participated in the recording of Sherif Mohie El Dins' "The Book of the Dead," sung in hieroglyphs. Since 2011, she has studied with renowned singers and participated in numerous masterclasses. She has sung in various European operas, portraying diverse roles from Handel to Strauss. Her performance as Carmen in Berlin earned her the title of Best Young Promising Lyric Artist by Opernwelt Magazine. Since 2016, she has been in residence at the Opéra national de Paris Academy, interpreting

various roles. She has received several awards, including the "AROP Lyric Prize," and was appointed a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by France. Farrah is also active on the international stage, performing in prestigious venues and collaborating with major institutions. She has participated in major events such as the Beiteddine Art Festival and performed the Marseillaise during historic moments, including the FIFA 2022 final match.



Yu Shao - Tenor

Yu Shao, a Chinese tenor trained at the Shanghai Conservatory, earned his music degree in 2008. He continued his studies in France, refining his skills with Eléonore Jost and Leontina Vaduva, and later at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Belgium under the direction of Jose Van Dam. Winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2014, he joined the Opéra national de Paris Academy, performing roles in "Iphigénie en Tauride" and "Cosi fan tutte." Yu Shao distinguished himself at the Opera Bastille in "Aïda" and "Lucia di Lammermoor," as well as in recitals at the Bastille Amphitheatre. He has sung in "Tristan et Isolde" in Montpellier and "Der Fliegende Holländer" at several French operas. In 2021, he reprised the role of Ferrando in "Così fan tutte." Recently, he performed in "L'Elisir D'Amore" in Bordeaux and in "Stiffelio" and "Manon" in Aix-La-Chapelle. In 2023, he made his

debut at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. Upcoming roles include Don Jose in "Carmen," and in 2024, he will perform in Israel under the direction of Jérémie Rhorer.



Vladimir Kapshuk, Baritone

Vladimir Kapshuk, a Franco-Ukrainian baritone, graduated from the National Music Academy of Kiev and furthered his training at the Lyric Workshop of the Opéra national de Paris and the "Young Singers Project" at the Salzburg Festival. A winner of several international awards, including the Art of the 21st Century and the Lyric Prize from the Association for the Promotion of the Opéra national de Paris, he has performed in recitals and operas in France and internationally. His repertoire includes roles such as Eugene Onegin, Prince Eletsy in "The Queen of Spades," Malatesta in "Don Pasquale," and the title role in "Don Giovanni." Recently, he portrayed Don Carlos in "The Betrothal in a Monastery" in Toulouse and made his debut at the Berlin Philharmonie in Rachmaninov's "Aleko" and

Tchaikovsky's "Iolanta." At the Opéra national de Paris, Kapshuk has participated in several productions and collaborates with the Opera Academy, particularly in the "Recited Recitals" series at the Bastille Amphitheatre in 2022.



Benjamin Laurent, Piano

Benjamin Laurent, a versatile French artist, is recognized as a pianist, vocal coach, conductor, arranger, composer, and actor. A graduate of the National Conservatories of Music in Paris and Lyon, he has worked at the Opéra national de Paris and performed in prestigious operas internationally, collaborating with renowned conductors and directors. Since 2018, he has been frequently sought after by the Opéra national de Paris

for musical direction and arrangements for various productions. The 2021/2022 season saw him create the "Recited Recitals" at the Opéra national de Paris, where he performs as a pianist, actor, and lecturer. With a passion for theater, he

collaborates with the Idiomécanic Théâtre company and gained recognition as an actor at the Avignon Festival in 2022.

As a composer, Benjamin Laurent has created music for documentaries, short films, a children's opera, and numerous vocal pieces. He is also a presence on the radio, participating in the program "Les actualités chantées" on France Musique. Holder of the Certificat d'Aptitude, he teaches musical accompaniment.