

'South Pacific' at Florida Atlantic



"South Pacific" in concert with Maestro Aaron Kula's 40-member orchestra, cast and chorus. (Courtesy/Aaron Kula / Forum Publishing Group)



By **Marci Shatzman · Contact Reporter**
mshatzman@tribpub.com

JUNE 19, 2016

Fresh off great notices for her Bessie Smith at the Arts Garage, Avery Sommers will morph into Bloody Mary. Julliard schooled baritone Graham Fandrei becomes Emile de Becque, the French planter. Throw in soprano Rebekah Diaz-Fandrei as Nellie Forbush, members of the Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida as the sailors and Marines and mix with Aaron Kula's 40-musician orchestra. "South Pacific" the concert version comes to life at 3 p.m. June 26 in the Carole and Barry Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium on the **Boca Raton** campus of **Florida Atlantic University**.

Rodgers and Hammerstein would have loved it.

"I wanted this production to have a rainbow coalition of participants," said Kula, maestro of his 11th annual Spirit of America Concert by the KCO orchestra of professional musicians he has directed for 19 years.

"It's one of the most profound and emotionally powerful musicals in American musical theater," he added about the 1949 Broadway musical starring Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza that tackled the sensitive subjects of race and prejudice. The James Michener short stories "Tales of the South Pacific" won a Pulitzer Prize and was made into the show and 1958 movie co-starring Mitzi Gaynor and Rossano Brazzi.

As Bloody Mary, Sommers reprises a part she played years ago on Long Island when she was probably too young, she said. She can't wait to inhabit the role as a more mature actress.

"Bloody Mary is the mother of a beautiful girl, and she tries to entice this man, Lt. Cable, to marry her daughter sight unseen," she said. "So 'Bali Ha'i' is that song. Let me show you where life could be better than Philadelphia. All the guys know her and think she's an opportunist, but she's very sweet and doesn't have larceny in her heart.

"I'm looking forward to hearing this orchestra and the chorus and to be part of all that's coming behind us, a wonderful wall of music," said Sommers, performing with a long list of Broadway and more recent regional musical theater credits and awards.

As Emile, Fandrei gets to sing the iconic ballads "Some Enchanted Evening" and "This Nearly Was Mine."

"I'm out of performing much to spend more time with my family, but doing such an iconic character and probably the most classic musical theater baritone role there is, I just said, 'let's do it,'" said the Miami native and director of the Young Artist Program at Florida Grand Opera. This will be his fifth performance with Kula.

Will he do a French accent? Undecided so far, he said. "I'm comfortable with accents. When you're an opera singer you take acting. I can't see any performer worth their weight not being invested in the character."

Daniel Bates, who just finished two years as a Young Artist with Florida Grand Opera, will play Lt. Cable.

The concert version was created for the 2006 Carnegie Hall benefit concert and broadcast on PBS' "Great Performances."

"I'm doing the official licensed version," said Kula, conductor and director of music performance and education at FAU Libraries.

"South Pacific" in concert, 3 p.m. June 26, Florida Atlantic University Carole and Barry Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton. Tickets \$20 to \$42; group prices available at fauevents.com or 800-564-9539. Free for current FAU students; \$5 for ages 18 and younger only at FAU Box Office.

Marci Shatzman can be reached at marcibshatzman@tribpub.com.