

The Modesto Bee

modbee.com

Posted on Tue, Apr. 07, 2009

San Francisco performers will get TOP billing at Modesto opera

By Lisa Millegan

lmillegan@modbee.com

Townsend Opera Players has partnered with the San Francisco Opera to bring accomplished singers to Modesto.

TOP will bring the San Francisco group's prestigious Adler Fellows to its September season-opening gala and will cast them in lead roles starting in the 2010-11 season.

"It's fantastic," said TOP Artistic Director Joseph Wiggett. "The Adlers are some of the best up-and-coming singers in the world. These are people who will be making a mark in the opera world in future years."

The Adler Fellowship is an intensive two-year program to train promising young singers. There are only 10 fellows at any one time, and some 800 people from around the world audition for the five spots that come open each year.

Local audiences might know them from when some served as soloists for the Modesto Symphony Orchestra in 2006.

Chris Bragg, administrative director of the San Francisco Opera Center, said she is excited that the Adler Fellows will get to work with TOP. They perform small roles at the San Francisco Opera, but the singers will get to perform lead roles at TOP.

"We do believe the best training is doing," she said. "Being in a role is the best training you can get."

TOP Executive Director Matthew Buckman said a bonus is that the Adler Fellowship program will subsidize the singers' pay. TOP will pay them its usual fee, and the Adler Fellowship program will pay them an additional amount up to their San Francisco Opera fee.

The move to use the Adler Fellows is part of TOP's drive to bump up the quality of its productions, Buckman said, but doesn't mean Modesto area singers will be shut out.

As it has done in the past, TOP will continue to use community singers for some lead roles and chorus parts. "We're always going to try to use the regional talent first," Wiggett said.

Bee arts writer Lisa Millegan can be reached at 578-2313 or lmillegan@modbee.com.