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SAN FRANCISCO GAY MEN'S CHORUS CONCLUDES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON WITH UNBREAKABLE

Written by Tony Award-nominated composer Andrew Lippa, this groundbreaking world premiere work takes audiences on a musical journey through the gay experience in America over the last 12 decades

Special guests include Andrew Lippa, internationally acclaimed soprano Lisa Vroman, Broadway's Britney Coleman and rising tenor Marcus J. Paige

JUNE 22–23, 2018
NOURSE THEATER

SAN FRANCISCO (April 25, 2018) – The **San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus (SFGMC)**—under the leadership of **Dr. Tim Seelig, Artistic Director** and **Christopher Verdugo, Executive Director**—concludes **Season 40: Unstoppable** with **UNBREAKABLE**, a groundbreaking world premiere work by Tony Award-nominated composer **Andrew Lippa** (*I Am Harvey Milk*, *The Addams Family*, *Big Fish*, *The Wild Party*), on **Friday, June 22 (8 p.m.)** and **Saturday, June 23 (2:30 p.m. & 8 p.m.)** at San Francisco's **Nourse Theater** (275 Hayes Street). Tickets range in price from **\$25–\$99** and are available now by visiting www.sfgmc.org or by calling City Box Office at 415-392-4400.

Starring **Andrew Lippa**, internationally acclaimed soprano **Lisa Vroman**, Broadway's **Britney Coleman** and rising tenor **Marcus J. Paige**—and backed by the 250-member San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus and a 10-piece chamber ensemble—this new musical presents an historical arc to the experiences of LGBTQ people over the last 12 decades, illuminated by four characters drawn from real-life stories from throughout LGBTQ history. These stories include: Jane Adams, the first woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 and an open lesbian activist; Lem Billings, JFK's best friend, a closeted gay man seated at the side of the most powerful man on Earth; Sylvia Rivera and the transgender community she nurtured; and AIDS and its impact on a generation. Told in four scenes, the 70-minute work weaves together the themes of awareness and activism and seeks to illuminate decades of setbacks and progress in the United States.

Commissioned by SFGMC member **Eddie Reynolds** in loving memory of his longtime partner, **Ed Jones**, UNBREAKABLE features direction by **Robert Kelley** (Artistic Director of Silicon Valley's TheatreWorks), book by Academy Award winner **Dustin Lance Black** ("Milk," "8," "When We Rise,"), orchestrations by **Peter Seibert**, choreography by **Steve Valdez**, and multimedia by **Andrew Lazarov**. UNBREAKABLE is produced by **Bruce Cohen** ("Milk," "When We Rise").

Says **Verdugo**: "I am honored that Andrew Lipa has, once again, created a monumental world premiere for SFGMC. UNBREAKABLE is a piece that speaks deeply to the LGBT experience and, in many ways, is a road map of our untold history. I can't think of a better way to wrap up our wildly successful Season 40 than by celebrating the rich diversity of the LGBTQ community and commemorating those whose shoulders we stand upon in our ongoing fight for inclusivity, equality and acceptance."

"Among the many commissions SFGMC has done over the years, this is like no other," adds **Seelig**. "It is an epic view of the LGBTQ journey beginning in 1900 right up to a look at the future. It is a massive undertaking that could not be in more qualified hands than the amazing Andrew Lipa."

"Following up on the worldwide success of *I Am Harvey Milk* I wanted to tackle something even larger: The 20th Century and the evolution of Gay Rights since 1900," said **Andrew Lipa**. "Taking my cue from playwright August Wilson who wrote a cycle of 10 plays, each representing a decade in 20th Century America, I was inspired to write *Unbreakable*: a multi-movement work for men's chorus, soloists and orchestra that chronicles, from 1900 to now the gay stories you might not know—the people who suffered and soared, the LGBTQ community and how we evolved, triumphed and yet, still face bakers who won't bake for us, lawmakers who won't make laws for us, conservative minds who won't wake for us. *Unbreakable* is not only a statement of how we have reacted in the past. It's a statement of how we must go forward."

Seelig continues, "Andrew Lipa has brought an amazing arsenal of musical tools and expressions to the fourteen-movement work. He has been able to capture the feel and sounds of a huge variety of stories. The gamut of emotions has never been broader. You will swell with pride to the story of Jane Addams in the early 20th century, marvel at the courage of those in the 1950's purge, weep at our shared losses in the 1990's, laugh at how we usurped the word 'gay' and cheer as we face the future together. With four amazing lead actors, a spectacular chamber ensemble, 250 singers, breathtaking multi-media, it is going to be epic."

"No one was a bigger supporter of me and my singing in SFGMC than my recently-deceased husband, Ed," says **Eddie Reynolds**. "When Tim Seelig announced last year the commission with Andrew Lipa to write a major work dealing with gay history for SFGMC's 40th Anniversary, I immediately knew that this was how I wanted to honor Ed's memory. Having worked in theatre for much of his career, he loved new works. He was also a huge reader and researcher of gay history and had completed a booklet on 100 gay, Jewish heroes for our annual Passover Seder. I look forward to performing this special work with my chorus brothers and know that Ed will be in the audience watching us!"

The world premiere of UNBREAKABLE is presented by **San Francisco Toyota**.

For additional information on the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus and UNBREAKABLE, visit: www.sfgmc.org.

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ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO GAY MEN'S CHORUS

For 40 years, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has courageously served as the international standard bearer for a powerful and accomplished mix of high-caliber performance, human rights, community activism, empowerment and inclusiveness, establishing it as an icon among LGBT organizations. Founded in 1978, it was the first organization of its kind and is credited with starting the LGBT choral movement, galvanizing and changing the course of LGBT history. It continues to rally and inspire other arts-based community organizations around the world. Under the leadership of Artistic Director and Conductor Dr. Timothy Seelig, SFGMC has in recent seasons established a heightened level of performance standards receiving audience and choral acclaim, increased its touring and recording profile and broadened its impact and reputation in the community while maintaining its signature blend of humor, personality and high-voltage performances.

For more information on SFGMC, visit www.sfgmc.org.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sfgmc

Twitter: www.twitter.com/sfgmc

Instagram: www.instagram.com/sfgmc

YouTube: www.youtube.com/sfgmcvideo

ABOUT ANDREW LIPPA

Andrew Lippa wrote the music and lyrics for *Big Fish*, book by John August, directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, which recently played the Neil Simon Theater on Broadway. His oratorio, *I Am Harvey Milk* (words and music), was premiered by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus and the recording, released in October, 2013, reached number 2 on the iTunes Classical Chart. He wrote the Tony-nominated music and lyrics for the Broadway musical *The Addams Family*, book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice (*Jersey Boys*), which opened in April of 2010 and starred Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth. Mr. Lippa wrote the music for the Broadway production of Aaron Sorkin's ("The Social Network," "A Few Good Men") new play *The Farnsworth Invention* directed by Des McAnuff. *Asphalt Beach* (music and lyrics) was premiered at Northwestern University by the American Music Theatre Project in October, 2006. *The Wild Party* (book/music/lyrics) was given its world premiere in 2000 at the Manhattan Theater Club in New York City. *The Wild Party* won the Outer Critics Circle Award for best Off-Broadway musical of the season and Mr. Lippa won the 2000 Drama Desk Award for best music. 2004 saw the premiere of *A Little Princess* (book and lyrics by Brian Crawley) at Theatreworks in Palo Alto, CA. In 1999 he contributed three new songs to the Broadway version of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* (including "My New Philosophy" for Tony-Award Winner Kristin Chenoweth) and created all new arrangements. He wrote the music and co-wrote the book (with Tom Greenwald) for *john & jen*, which premiered in New York City in 1995 at The Lamb's Theater.

Mr. Lippa is proud to have been music director for Kristin Chenoweth since 1999 for many of her concerts. He conducted/played her sold-out shows at the Metropolitan Opera House in NYC in 2007, at Carnegie Hall in 2004, and at the Donmar Warehouse in London in 2002. He has conducted the San Francisco, Chicago, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestras for Ms. Chenoweth, among others. Additionally, he is an accomplished singer having been heard in many venues in New York and, in 2005, as a guest artist at the Adelaide Cabaret Convention in Adelaide, Australia. Recordings include Julia Murney's CD "I'm Not Waiting" (producer, 3 songs), "The Wild Party" (RCA Victor) which he also produced, "You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown" (RCA Victor) which earned him a Grammy Award nomination, "The Addams Family" (Decca Broadway), "A Little Princess" (Sh-k-boom), and "john & jen" (Fynsworth Alley) which he associate produced. Jazz phenom Peter Cincotti recorded the song "Raise The Roof" on his CD titled "On The Moon" (Phil Ramone, producer). In addition, Mr. Lippa produced the original cast recording of **Bat Boy** for RCA Victor and his singing voice can be heard on "The Sondheim Album" on Fynsworth Alley and "If I Sing" on PS Classics. Vocal selections from "The Addams Family," "A Little Princess," "The Wild Party" and "john & jen" are published by Hal Leonard. Hal Leonard also released "The Andrew Lippa Song Book" in Winter 2013.

Awards include a Tony and Grammy nomination, sharing in an Emmy for the Nickelodeon TV series “The Wonder Pets,” the Gilman/Gonzalez-Falla Theater Foundation Award, ASCAP’s Richard Rodgers/New Horizons Award, The Drama Desk, The Outer Critics Circle and second place for the Alice B. Deucey Award for all-around outstanding fifth-grader (lost to Cynthia Fink). Memberships include ASCAP, Actor’s Equity and the American Federation of Musicians. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Mr. Lippa serves on the council of The Dramatists Guild. He was born in Leeds, England but grew up in suburban Detroit. For more information on Andrew, visit: www.andrewlippa.com.

ABOUT LISA VROMAN

From Broadway to classics, on stage and in concert, Lisa Vroman has established herself as one of America's most versatile voices. She starred on Broadway, Los Angeles and San Francisco as Christine Daaé in *The Phantom of the Opera*. As “One of American Musical Theater’s most beautiful voices” (Cameron MacIntosh), she has garnered theatre critics’ awards for her portrayal. Lisa starred as Marian Paroo in *The Music Man* (Bushnell Theater with Shirley Jones, Patrick Cassidy and the Hartford Symphony), Lili Vanessi in *Kiss Me Kate* (Glimmerglass Opera/MUNY Theatre of St. Louis), Birdie in *Regina*, Josephine in *HMS Pinafore*, Anna 1 in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Utah Symphony/Opera), Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus* (New Jersey Opera), and Rosabella in *The Most Happy Fella* (New York City Opera). For PBS: Johanna in “Sweeney Todd” (2001 Emmy Award), and “Hey! Mr. Producer” (London Royal Gala). She played Laurey in *Oklahoma* (BBC PROMS festival), Anna Leonowens in *The King and I* (Lyric Opera of Virginia), Mary Turner in *Of Thee I Sing* (San Francisco Symphony w/Michael Tilson Thomas), and sang and danced opposite Dick Van Dyke as Mary Poppins at the Hollywood Bowl (Disney 75th). Lisa is a frequent guest with symphonies including San Francisco, Nashville, Philadelphia, Dallas, Utah, St. Louis, Houston, Pacific, Atlanta, Hong Kong, Cleveland, National, Florida, Cleveland, BBC Concert Orchestra, Boston Pops (Keith Lockhart), Philly Pops (Peter Nero), New York Pops (Carnegie Hall) as well as with the New York Festival of Song and Organist David Higgs (Disney Hall, Los Angeles). Her Broadway debut was in *Aspects of Love* and she was the first to play both Fantine and Cosette in *Les Misérables*. Ms. Vroman is a graduate of the Crane School of Music, State University at Potsdam (BM, Hon. Dr. of Music, Minerva Award), Carnegie-Mellon University (MFA), and is a George London Competition winner.

Recent performances have included a multi-city tour of China, “An Evening of Rodgers & Hammerstein” with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, a concert series with L’Opera de Rennes in France, and playing the role of Maria Callas in Terence McNally’s award-winning play, *Master Class*. For more information on Lisa, visit: www.lisavroman.com.

ABOUT BRITNEY COLEMAN

Britney was born and raised a proud Wolverine in Ann Arbor, MI. One of the youngest members of a large, musically accomplished family, she started her stage career in third grade playing Mary in *The Secret Garden*. After being bit by the bug, she continued to pursue theatre, choir and orchestra through the end of high school.

Her accomplishments in school lead to her acceptance into the nationally-recognized BFA Musical Theatre program at The University of Michigan. It was there in her backyard where she had the freedom to develop her craft and play dream roles like Sarah in *Ragtime*, and other characters in the premiers of the new shows *Ella Minnow Pea* and *See Rock City (And Other Destinations)*.

It was also at UofM where she happened to audition for a student-run musical based on the Harry Potter book series. Little did she know it would become one of the most widely recognized Youtube videos in Harry Potter fandom! She couldn't be more lucky to be a part of the totally awesome, hilarious and wonderfully creative group of people that is Team Starkid.

Since graduating, she has moved to New York City and appeared on Broadway in the revival of *Sunset Boulevard* starring Glenn Close and *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, as well as readings, YouTube videos and workshops at the historic St. Anne's Warehouse in Brooklyn, NY, various regional theaters across the country including the Old Globe Theater, Marriott Lincolnshire Theater, Westport Country Playhouse, Baltimore Center Stage, The Fulton Opera House and more. NYC concerts and cabarets happen from time to time, so stay tuned for details! For more information on Britney, visit: www.britneycoleman.com.

ABOUT MARCUS J. PAIGE

Making his debut with the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, Marcus J. Paige is a rising tenor who hails from Southern California where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance from Chapman University's Hall-Musco Conservatory of Music. During his tenure, Mr. Paige has had the privilege of appearing in numerous Opera Chapman productions such as Basilio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*. Additionally, he has appeared as Nate in William Grant Still's *Highway 1, USA*, and as the Tenor in Pacific Symphony's Leonard Bernstein tribute concert where he sang the prelude to *Trouble in Tahiti* under the baton of Carl St. Clair.

Mr. Paige has also had the immense opportunity of performing internationally. In 2015 he traveled to Salzburg, Austria where he was named a winner in the Mirabel Schloß concert series competition. Last year he traveled to Berlin, Germany, performing the dual roles of Tanzmeister and Brighella in Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Berlin Opera Academy.

Currently finishing his Master's Degree at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Mr. Paige studies under Mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer and was recently seen as Male Chorus in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. For more information on Marcus, visit: MarcusJPaige.com.