

Lee, James - Tenor

Biography



The South Korean tenor James Lee studied singing at Yeungnam University in Gyeongsan, South Korea and at the Robert Schumann Hochschule in Düsseldorf, Germany. He was a **winner** of numerous competitions, including the 1st Prize at the International Singing Competition *Masters of Lyrical Art – Valentin Teodorian* in Bucharest, and both the 1st Prize and a Special Prize at the *Competizione dell'Opera* in Linz.

Among his recent engagements are role debut as **Dick Johnson** in *La fanciulla del West* at Theater Hagen and performance of it at the Opera Hedeland, Denmark, **Des Grieux** in *Manon Lescaut* at the Saaremaa Opera Festival and **Calaf** in *Turandot* at the Belogradchik, Sofia Opera and Ballet in Bulgaria, the Daegu International Opera Festival, the Daegu Opera House, the Latvian National Opera in Riga, and State Opera Stara Zagora.

In the 2023/24 season, he sang the title role in the Italian five-act version of **Don Carlo** (under the direction of Frédéric Chaslin and Claus Guth) at the Latvian National Opera, where he also performed as **Radamès** in *Aida* and **Calaf** in *Turandot*. He also debuted as **Paul** in the new production of *Die tote Stadt* at the Korea National Opera.

Upcoming performances include the role of **Calaf** in *Turandot* at Macedonian National Theatre in Skopje, North Macedonia, and **Beethoven's 9th** in Auerbach, Germany.

Lee's repertoire spans a wide range of dramatic roles, including **Calaf** in *Turandot* and **Don José** in *Carmen*, as well as roles in Verdi's operas such as **Arrigo** in *I Vespri Siciliani*, **Manrico** in *Il Trovatore*, and **Riccardo** in *Un Ballo in Maschera*. These roles were sung at opera houses in Graz, Freiburg, Saarbrücken, and the Landestheater Linz. Furthermore, he has portrayed **Calaf** in *Turandot* at notable venues including the Daegu Opera House, Seoul Arts Center, the International Istanbul Opera Festival, and under the baton of Maestro Antoni Wit at the Teatr Wielki w Łodzi in Poland, where he also debuted as **Samson** in *Samson et Dalila*.

One of his significant roles is **Radamès** in *Aida*, which he performed at the Prague National Theatre, the Cairo Opera House, the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut at the Luxor Festival, the Opera Festival St. Margarethen, the Schwerin Castle Festival and the Dortmund Opera. Additionally, he played the same role in Franco Zeffirelli's production at the State Opera in Georgia.

During the 2019/20 season at the Dortmund Opera, Lee took on the role of **Benjamin F. Pinkerton** in *Madama Butterfly*, and in the following season, he became an ensemble member, captivating audiences as **Mario Cavaradossi** in *Tosca* and **Télasco** in *Fernand Cortez or The Conquest of Mexico*.

Repertoire

Opera

Adams, J.	Nixon in China	<i>Mao Tse-tung*</i>
Bizet, G.	Carmen	<i>Don José</i>
Krongold, E.W.	Die tote Stadt	<i>Paul</i>
Leoncavallo, R.	Pagliacci	<i>Canio**</i>
Mascagni, P.	Cavalleria rusticana	<i>Turiddu**</i>
Puccini, G.	La fanciulla del West	<i>Dick Johnson</i>
	Madama Butterfly	<i>Pinkerton</i>
	Manon Lescaut	<i>Des Grieux</i>
	Tosca	<i>Cavaradossi</i>
	Turandot	<i>Calaf</i>
Saint-Saëns, C.	Samson et Dalila	<i>Samson</i>
Spontini, G.	Fernand Cortez	<i>Télasco</i>
Strauss, S.	Ariadne auf Naxos	<i>Bacchus**</i>
Verdi, G.	Aida	<i>Radamès</i>
	Un ballo in maschera	<i>Riccardo</i>
	Don Carlo	<i>Don Carlo</i>
	Il Trovatore	<i>Manrico</i>
	I vespri sicilliani	<i>Arrigo</i>
Wagner, R.	Tannhäuser	<i>Tannhäuser*</i>

**prepared*

***studied*

Symphonic/Oratorio

Beethoven, L.van	Symphony No. 9
Puccini, G.	Messa di Gloria
Verdi, G.	Requiem

Reviews

La faciulla del West, Opera Hedeland, 2024

The second is Dick Johnson/Ramerez, a role that the South Korean tenor James Lee imbues with – one senses – a great deal of authority. He seems to master the dramatic, the heartfelt, the intense, and pure bel canto. He completes the trio that is the focal point in *The Girl of the West*. A constellation without which nothing would work.

- *berlingske.dk*

<https://www.berlingske.dk/scene/berlingskes-anmelder-har-kun-en-ting-at-sige-denne-opera-maa-du-ud-at-se>

Die tote Stadt, Korea National Opera, 2024

...But the all-Korean cast was overall the better one, as the tenor James Lee, who is well-known and frequently heard in Germany and Austria, sang a major German role for the very first time in the performance attended by the reviewer, and he left nothing to be desired in his portrayal of Paul. He sang this demanding role with almost no issues in terms of stamina and, as far as possible with this type of music, with great clarity of text. His voice, more trained in the Italian style, allowed him to effortlessly project in the not-so-small auditorium of the Opera House at the Seoul Arts Center. Further engagements with this role will likely make him a potential representative of this role in the coming years.

- *onlinemerker.com*

<https://onlinemerker.com/seoul-opernhaus-im-arts-center-die-tote-stadt/>

Gala Puccini 100 Daegu Opera House, Bucharest Opera Festival

I heard again the tenor James Lee, who debuted in the role of Calaf from the last Puccini opera, in a concert on the Bucharest stage 12 years ago. In June 2024, he performed the arias *Nessun dorma* (Turandot), *Donna non vidi mai* (Manon Lescaut), and *E lucevan le stelle* from *Tosca*, from which he also chose the first duet with the titular heroine, here soprano Lee Myung-joo. James Lee is the authentic type of spinto tenor with dramatic touches, sound homogeneity and robustness, phrase shaping (the aria from *Tosca*), and fabulous high notes (first a B-flat in the duet, then the glorious final *Vincerò* from Turandot, which shook the hall).

- *adevarul.ro*

<https://adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/festivalul-bucurestean-de-opera-in-format-all-2367583.html>

Tosca, Theater Dortmund, 2022

James Lee portrays Cavaradossi as a bohemian who isn't particularly committed to fidelity but needs a strong woman like Tosca. The South Korean tenor Lee is a revelation in this role. Many opera houses dream of a Cavaradossi with such a substantial tenor — rich with sensual warmth, radiant high notes, and a voice that combines power with suppleness. His first aria already received enthusiastic applause. The dark timbre of Lee's voice blends wonderfully with Inga Kalna's soprano, which is powerful yet never harsh, with great depth and a beautifully dark hue.

- *Julia Gaß, Ruhr Nachrichten*

James Lee already demonstrates his tenor abilities in his brief entrance aria *Recondita armonia*, effortlessly and without forcing, his voice carries over the orchestra. ... Lee also captivates with the bravura aria *E lucevan le stelle*, delivering it with tenor brilliance and driving the audience wild. Together with Kalna, he shapes the duet dreaming of a happy future in an absolutely moving way before he becomes a victim of the intrigue.

- *omm.de*

<http://www.omm.de/veranstaltungen/musiktheater20212022/DO-tosca.html>

The theater deserves congratulations for the casting of the three main characters. James Lee, a member of the theater's ensemble, impresses from the very first aria. The tenor effortlessly adds just the right amount of emotion to his powerful voice. Vocally, Lee harmonizes wonderfully with Gabriele Scherer, who is making her Tosca debut in Dortmund that evening. Their duets are an absolute listening delight. Lee clearly rises as the star of the first act.

- *ruhrbuehnen.de*

<https://www.ruhrbuehnen.de/de/menu/projekte/blogbeiträge/tosca-dortmund/>