

Lee, James - Tenor

Biography



The South Korean tenor **James Lee** studied voice at Yeungnam University in Gyeongsan, South Korea, and at the Robert Schumann Hochschule in Düsseldorf, Germany. Between 2011 and 2013 he won numerous international competitions, including First Prize at the *International Singing Competition Masters of Lyrical Art – Valentin Teodorian* in Bucharest, as well as both First Prize and the Special Prize at the *Competizione dell'Opera* in Linz.

In the **2025/26 season**, Lee will appear as **Pinkerton** in *Madama Butterfly* at the Staatstheater Cottbus. In the summer of 2025, he returned to Opera på Skäret in Sweden as **Calaf** in a new production of *Turandot*.

During the **2024/25 season**, he sang **Calaf** in *Turandot* at the Theater Magdeburg and at the Macedonian National Theatre in Skopje, where he also performed as **Radamès** in *Aida*. In late autumn 2024, he appeared as the tenor soloist in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* in Auerbach.

His **recent engagements** also include his debut as **Dick Johnson** in *La fanciulla del West* at Theater Hagen (later reprised at Opera Hedeland in Denmark), his role debut as **Des Grieux** in *Manon Lescaut* at the Saaremaa Opera Festival in Estonia, and numerous appearances as **Calaf** in *Turandot*, including at the Belogradchik and Sofia Opera and Ballet Festivals (Bulgaria), the Daegu International Opera Festival, the Latvian National Opera in Riga, and the State Opera Stara Zagora.

In the **2023/24 season**, Lee sang the title role in the Italian five-act version of **Don Carlo** at the Latvian National Opera in Riga, conducted by Frédéric Chaslin and directed by Claus Guth. At the same house, he also performed as **Radamès** in *Aida* and **Calaf** in *Turandot*. In May 2024 he made his debut in a major German role as **Paul** in Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* at the Korea National Opera in the Seoul Arts Center, under Lothar Koenigs. He also performed Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* in Schweinfurt.

Lee's repertoire spans a wide range of dramatic tenor roles. These include **Calaf** (*Turandot*), **Don José** (*Carmen*), as well as Verdi heroes such as **Arrigo** (*I Vespri Siciliani*), **Manrico** (*Il Trovatore*), and **Riccardo** (*Un Ballo in Maschera*). He has performed at opera houses in Graz, Freiburg, Saarbrücken, and Linz. His portrayals of Calaf have brought him to the Daegu Opera House, the Seoul Arts Center, the International Istanbul Opera Festival, and to Poland's Teatr Wielki in Łódź under Maestro Antoni Wit, where he also debuted as **Samson** in *Samson et Dalila*.

A central role in his career is **Radamès** in *Aida*, which he has performed at the Prague National Theatre, the Cairo Opera House, the Luxor Festival at the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, the Opera Festival St. Margarethen, the Schwerin Castle Festival, and at the Dortmund Opera. He also sang Radamès in Franco Zeffirelli's celebrated production at the State Opera Georgia.

Earlier highlights include appearances at the Dortmund Opera as **Pinkerton** (*Madama Butterfly*, 2019/20), followed by returns in roles such as **Cavaradossi** (*Tosca*) and **Télasco** (*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/>