

# THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

**Media Contact:**

Patricia Kiernan Johnson  
212.796.8628 (office) | 856.419.7083 (mobile) | [PKJohnson@operaamerica.org](mailto:PKJohnson@operaamerica.org)

## OPERA AMERICA LAUNCHES CIVIC ACTION GROUP

### A TWO-YEAR INITIATIVE TO INCREASE OPERA COMPANIES' CAPACITY FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

*The Civic Action Group is supported in part by an award from the  
National Endowment for the Arts*



November 29, 2016 (New York) — OPERA America, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is launching the **Civic Action Group**, a two-year initiative designed to build the field's capacity for strengthening communities through opera. Beginning next month, OPERA America will partner with five member companies in the U.S., as well as two in Canada, to help increase their capacity to work collaboratively with other organizations to address civic priorities. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts through its Our Town program, which supports creative placemaking projects that help to transform communities into lively, beautiful and resilient places with the arts at their core.

The five American companies selected by OPERA America to take part in the Civic Action Group are **Anchorage Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Memphis, Opera Philadelphia** and **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis**. OPERA America's sister organization **Opera.ca** selected the two Canadian companies to join the group — **Manitoba Opera** (Winnipeg, MB) and **Pacific Opera Victoria** (Victoria, BC) — and will fund their participation. The companies were chosen for their track records of building long-term, trusting and mutually beneficial community partnerships.

Representatives from each company will come together in New York on December 12 and 13, 2016, to discuss their approaches to deepening their service to communities through opera. Faculty from outside the field will lend insights and methods for understanding, measuring and refining the companies' efforts. Initial learning from the meeting will be shared with the field at OPERA America's next annual conference, taking place May 5 to 8, 2017, in Dallas. The scope of the Civic Action Group will be expanded in its second year, when additional organizations will participate as part of a larger peer-learning group guided by outside faculty, as well as by opera company staff from the first-year cohort. By the end of the project, OPERA America will compile case studies and effective methodologies into a resource for the entire field.

"Opera is a multimedia art form in today's multimedia world, and it possesses the capacity to enrich the lives of diverse audiences and communicate universal human stories, intensified and elevated by music," stated OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca. "With the Civic Action Group, we see a great opportunity to use the art form's unique qualities to address local civic priorities through authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships. The Civic Action Group will help opera companies find ways to enhance their real and perceived value as cultural citizens in communities throughout North America. We are profoundly grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts for making this endeavor possible."

OPERA America's lead consultant on the project is **Roberto Bedoya**, an expert in arts-based civic engagement projects, creative placemaking and inclusion. Also joining the project are staff from the Arts Foundation for Tucson and Southern Arizona, a funding agency that provides arts and cultural development services to its namesake region. Bedoya served as executive director of the foundation from 2006 to 2015, when it was known as the Tucson Pima Arts Council, and he spearheaded the organization's P.L.A.C.E. (People, Land, Arts, Culture and Engagement) initiative, a civic engagement platform supporting artists' projects that address critical community issues.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Civic Action Group builds on OPERA America's efforts in recent years to examine the role of opera companies in their communities. In 2013 and 2014, OPERA America's Strategy Committee examined pressing issues challenging the field and identified an acute need to increase opera's public value through reciprocal relationships — with both arts and non-arts organizations — and to use opera's creative assets to address local priorities in an authentic manner. Although several pioneering companies have designed and implemented successful civic engagement initiatives, there are still significant gaps in knowledge, experience and research across the field.

In 2015, OPERA America made civic impact the theme of its annual conference held in Washington, D.C., at which Roberto Bedoya and other experts on the topic delivered presentations. That June, OPERA America continued to explore this topic by convening a civic action working group to engage in focused discussions about placemaking strategies and their validity in opera.

OPERA America's Civic Action Group is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts through its Our Town program. For a complete list of the 64 projects nationwide receiving NEA Our Town support, visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov). Case studies of other Our Town projects and lessons learned are available on the NEA's [Exploring Our Town website](#).

**For more information about OPERA America, its many programs and the National Opera Center, visit [operaamerica.org](http://operaamerica.org).**



**@OPERAAmerica**

## **About OPERA America**

OPERA America ([operaamerica.org](http://operaamerica.org)) leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera.

- Artistic services help opera companies and creative and performing artists to improve the quality of productions and increase the creation and presentation of North American works.
- Information, technical and administrative services to opera companies reflect the need for strengthened leadership among staff, trustees and volunteers.
- Education, audience development and community services are designed to enhance all forms of opera appreciation.

Founded in 1970, OPERA America's worldwide membership network includes 150 Professional Company Members, 250 Associate, Business and Educational Members, 1,200 Individual Members and 16,000 subscribers to the association's electronic news service. In response to the critical need for suitable audition, rehearsal and recording facilities, OPERA America opened the first-ever **NATIONAL OPERA CENTER** ([operaamerica.org/OperaCenter](http://operaamerica.org/OperaCenter)) in September 2012 in New York City. With a wide range of artistic and administrative services in a purpose-built facility, OPERA America is dedicated to increasing the level of excellence, creativity and effectiveness across the field.