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## OPERA AMERICA ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF INNOVATION GRANTS

GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY THE ANN AND GORDON GETTY FOUNDATION

A TOTAL OF \$1.4 MILLION AWARDED TO 27 COMPANIES  
TO FOSTER INNOVATION AND FIELD-WIDE LEARNING

June 1, 2017 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion of American opera, is pleased to announce the first-ever recipients of **Innovation Grants**, generously funded by the **Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation**.

Launched last fall, Innovation Grants support exceptional projects that have the capacity to strengthen the field's most important areas of practice, including artistic vitality, audience experience, organizational effectiveness and community connections. These grants invest up to \$1.5 million annually in OPERA America's Professional Company Members, enabling organizations of all sizes to increase their commitment to experimentation and innovation, as well as contribute to field-wide learning.

Twenty-seven companies — representing nearly 20 percent of all Professional Company Members — received awards totaling \$1.411 million in the program's first granting cycle. The recipients are:

**American Lyric Theater** (New York, NY)  
**American Opera Projects** (New York, NY)  
**Anchorage Opera**  
**Arizona Opera** (Phoenix, AZ)  
**The Atlanta Opera**  
**Austin Opera**  
**Beth Morrison Projects** (New York, NY)  
**Central City Opera** (Central City, CO)  
**The Dallas Opera**  
**Fargo-Moorhead Opera** (Fargo, ND)  
**Florentine Opera Company** (Milwaukee, WI)  
**The Glimmerglass Festival** (Cooperstown, NY)  
**HERE** (New York, NY)  
**Houston Grand Opera**

**Michigan Opera Theatre** (Detroit, MI)  
**Minnesota Opera** (Minneapolis, MN)  
**Opera Maine** (Portland, ME)  
**Opera Memphis**  
**Opera Omaha**  
**Opera Philadelphia**  
**Opera Saratoga**  
**Pacific Opera Victoria** (Victoria, BC)  
**San Diego Opera**  
**San Francisco Opera**  
**The Santa Fe Opera**  
**Seattle Opera**  
**Tulsa Opera**

Grants will fund a wide range of initiatives, including programs to support opera creators and incubate new works; productions of new or novel repertoire and related audience-engagement activities; the presentation of works in unusual venues or in innovative season formats; partnerships among performing arts organizations, and with social service providers; and added institutional capacity to address areas such as the overall audience experience and program evaluation. (See below for details about all the funded initiatives.)

The Innovation Grants program also includes an infrastructure to capture and assess outcomes of funded projects. OPERA America will provide administrative and technical support to document successes, challenges and even failures. Outcomes will be shared with the entire field at future OPERA America meetings and conferences, as well as through publications.

“Thanks to the tremendous generosity of the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, our member companies receive support to pursue new thinking and experimentation — to expand the boundaries of their current practices and adapt to an ever-changing field,” stated Marc A. Scorca, president and CEO of OPERA America. “These grants benefit not only the recipients but the entire art form: Through the lessons gleaned from the funded initiatives, companies throughout North American will be able to borrow and adapt good ideas, spreading the learning field-wide.”

Submitted by 55 companies in the U.S. and Canada, grant applications were adjudicated by an independent panel consisting of **Barbara Schaffer Bacon**, co-director, Animating Democracy; **Michelle Hensley**, artistic director, Ten Thousand Things; **Anne Manson**, conductor; **Ann Owens**, field consultant, and former executive director, Houston Grand Opera; **Kate E. Prescott**, president, Prescott & Associates; **Kyle Sircus**, director of marketing, Playwright Horizons; and **James Wright**, field consultant, and former general director, Vancouver Opera.

Applications for the next cycle of Innovation Grants will open this fall. Visit [operaamerica.org/Grants](http://operaamerica.org/Grants) to learn more about Innovation Grants, as well as OPERA America's complete grant offerings.

## **ABOUT THE RECIPIENTS**

Innovation Grants were awarded to the following 27 companies for the projects described below:



**American Lyric Theater** will offer its Composer Librettist Development Program (CLDP) with significant enhancements, including the creation of an apprenticeship for an emerging opera dramaturg and stipends for all first-year resident artists. The CLDP was the first full-time mentorship initiative for both opera composers and librettists in the country. A tuition-free, multiyear training program with a highly credentialed faculty, the CLDP has a proven track record for developing the skills of gifted writers, incubating successful operas and fostering lasting collaborations.



Music-theater students will have the opportunity to compose for operatic voices through a new initiative from **American Opera Projects** at several institutions. Students will create six new site-specific works on the theme of “New York Stories.” This curriculum will provide training that is underrepresented in academic music-theater programs, serving as a potential model for other schools and conservatories.



**Anchorage Opera** will present the Alaskan premiere of *As One*, the powerful chamber opera by Laura Kaminsky, Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed that chronicles the experiences of a transgender protagonist. This project is courageous in Alaska, which has no state laws to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination and does not address hate crimes based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Through the presentation of this socially relevant work and a partnership with Identity, a statewide LGBTQ advocacy organization, Anchorage Opera seeks to attract new audiences and actively engage in an important community issue.



**Arizona Opera** will use learning from its Arizona Bold initiative, launched in 2014 and focused on creating connectivity between audiences and the art form of opera, to continue its evolution. The company is seeking opportunities both on and off the main stage to maximize its civic impact through expanded programmatic offerings and performance experiences. A more sustainable season model will be achieved by internalizing the civic spirit of Arizona Bold into the central strategy of the company, engaging new areas of the community with each production and program.



Undertaking its first-ever commission, **The Atlanta Opera** will premiere *2020*, an opera inspired by the real-life experiences of Chad Foster, who lost his sight as a young man. Incorporating accessibility technology and feedback from focus groups of target audiences, *2020* will create an environment that simulates the experience of living without sight.



Placing audience experience at the forefront of its operations, **Austin Opera** will create a new senior staff position: director of audience experience. Ensuring an excellent audience experience from the ticket-buying process through the performance promises to create long-term improvements in audience retention and frequency in participation, and ultimately stronger annual fundraising.



**Beth Morrison Projects** will launch a DISCOVERY competition aimed at broadening the organization's commissioning program by identifying and cultivating early-career artists who are interested in writing opera. Through open submissions and juried semi-finalist presentations, the process will result in the award of a full commission. Beth Morrison Projects will work with the chosen composer from initial idea through world-premiere production. Eight to ten semi-finalists and two finalists will each receive a public presentation at Brooklyn's National Sawdust, providing early-career artists with the connections needed to build the future opera-theater and music-theater canon.



**Central City Opera** will offer productions outside its traditional summer festival during the early fall and late spring. This new initiative, called Central City Opera Presents, is part of a long-term strategic plan focused on diversifying the company's revenue and improving the visitor experience. The project ultimately seeks to revitalize Central City as an arts-based community and cultural destination, and to strengthen its economy.



Michel van der Aa's *Sunken Garden* is a stunning celebration of art and technology, featuring 3-D film, projections, spoken word and opera. **The Dallas Opera** will mount the American premiere of this ambitious work in 2018. Through behind-the-scenes tours and lectures on projection and film technology, the company will offer learning opportunities for local science and technology communities.



In its 2017–2018 season, **Fargo-Moorhead Opera** will launch a new chamber opera series featuring works that range from the contemporary to the Baroque in order to attract more diverse audiences. Straddling the state border between North Dakota and Minnesota, the company has the opportunity to perform in Minnesota by creating small, intimate and diverse performances for smaller venues.



**Florentine Opera Company's** Carlisle Floyd Recording Initiative will seize the opportunity to produce recordings by America's most revered opera composer during his lifetime. Archiving Floyd's works will expand and enhance the depth and quality of the recorded canon of American opera, which contributes to the artistic vitality of the opera community as a whole.



Harnessing the power of art to respond to current challenges, **The Glimmerglass Festival** will present *Breaking Glass: Hyper-Linking Opera & Issues*. Comprising five podcasts and eight national forums inspired by contemporaneous Glimmerglass repertory, the project will connect opera to issues in people's lives while raising important questions for the industry on race, community development and other pertinent topics.



**HERE**, in collaboration with Beth Morrison Projects, will present **PROTOTYPE: Out of Bounds**. Moving opera beyond traditional performing arts venues to bring commissioned, original, site-specific works to public streets and spaces in New York City, this initiative will connect new audiences to the next generation of opera creators.



**Houston Grand Opera's** new six-year artistic initiative, *Seeking the Human Spirit*, celebrates the deep connection between music and humanity. It will feature a set of new and rarely produced mainstage opera productions that fosters discussion of deep spiritual questions. The company hopes to create a blueprint for other performing arts companies to use art as a platform to forge partnerships and ask big questions of their communities.



By investing in the creation of an evaluation toolbox, **Michigan Opera Theatre** seeks to better measure the impact of its community education and engagement programs. A comprehensive menu of standard templates with interchangeable metrics will be shared with the field, enabling companies to be more responsive to their communities.



**Minnesota Opera** will launch a new community engagement model that supports consensus-based programming to expand, diversify and empower its constituents. Work on this project will be guided by a community engagement matrix to determine metrics for accurately assessing audience empowerment and to shape community programming.



Motivated by the belief that the power of creative expression can change communities and prepare youth for future success, **Opera Maine** (formerly PORTopera) will collaborate with local partners to launch *An Opera is Born of Our Community*. Youth participants will write their own libretto, which will be performed as a one-act chamber opera composed by Dan Sonenberg, composer in residence at the University of Southern Maine, where students will premiere the work.



Seeking deeper engagement with people of color, **Opera Memphis** will undertake a number of initiatives organized around the legacy of African-American soprano Madame McCleave. Through facilitated community conversations, performances, and the creation of a McCleave Fellowship for singers, directors and coaches of color, Opera Memphis seeks to move beyond the "opera bubble."



**Opera Omaha** will launch the Holland Community Opera Fellowship, the centerpiece of the company's strategic vision for the future. The fellowship provides a new model for community engagement, directly linking arts programming to neighborhood needs. Representing a cross-section of the city, a Community Artist Panel will empower residents to select community-minded opera singers to live and work in Omaha each season.



Seeking to increase attendance, amplify human connectedness and propel the genre, **Opera Philadelphia** will debut a dual-format season, launching with Festival O (September 14–25, 2017), a 12-day, six-venue urban opera festival featuring three world premieres. This will be followed by two new productions in winter/spring 2018. The company's reconfiguration from a traditional season will be informed by consultancies in hospitality, telemarketing and human-centered design.



Leading with the presentation of Grétry's opera-ballet *Zémire et Azor* in July 2017, **Opera Saratoga's** Opera in Motion initiative will foster participation between dance and opera audiences. Based on the outcome of this summer's production, Opera Saratoga and the Saratoga Performing Arts Center will develop a joint artistic, marketing and evaluation plan for future Opera in Motion programming. Companies exploring other collaborative synergies across disciplines will benefit from their findings.



**Pacific Opera Victoria** will launch The Co|Opera|tive, a platform for community engagement to address the cultural and social needs of diverse constituencies, including First Nations and immigrant communities. The company will develop a suite of community programming and partnerships, including dialogues, exhibits, performances and youth workshops, to articulate opera's value as a tool for social relevance, justice and advocacy.



Reimagining its existing scenic studio as a non-traditional performance venue and arts incubator space, **San Diego Opera** will host two new events. The first, Opera Hack, aims to stimulate the creation of new works by providing neighborhood artists with the opportunity to conceive of new projects that explore their own cultures and experiences. The following year, new works will premiere at a street arts festival celebrating cross-cultural storytelling and attracting new audiences.



To support the continued development of **San Francisco Opera's** adaptability, risk-taking and experimentation, the company will launch SFO+. This initiative will implement design-thinking methodology across the company, extending the experimental approaches used to form the company's alternative programming arm, SF Opera Lab.



To reach, entertain and inspire audiences of all ages, **The Santa Fe Opera** and San Francisco Opera co-lead Opera for All Voices, a consortium of seven North American opera companies. The group will be committed to commissioning and producing new American operatic works for all ages.



Breaking from tradition, **Seattle Opera's** Opera Up Close series will present chamber operas in intimate venues throughout the region at a significantly lower price point than mainstage operas. An expanded 2017–2018 season seeks to reach new audiences and inspire civic dialogue.



To address the impact of arts education budget cuts in Oklahoma, **Tulsa Opera** will pilot an unprecedented partnership with the Tulsa Public School District through Raise Your Voice, a vocal music after-school program. Implementation in six economically disadvantaged middle schools will provide students with access to quality music education.

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



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### **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.