

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

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OPERA AMERICA SELECTS 13 PARTICIPANTS FROM THE U.S., CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA FOR ITS 2017 LEADERSHIP INTENSIVE PROGRAM

Developing Future Leaders and Strengthening Opera Companies

July 19, 2017 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is pleased to announce that 13 participants from the United States, Canada and Latin America have been selected for its 2017 Leadership Intensive program. These future industry leaders were chosen through a competitive selection process focusing on candidates' potential to make significant contributions to the opera field. This program is made possible by the generous support of **American Express**.

The Leadership Intensive exemplifies OPERA America's long-standing commitment to identify and nurture leaders who will advance the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera for years to come. This program identifies the most promising professionals in the field of opera administration and provides them with a unique experience designed to bolster their leadership capacity and advance their careers.

The 2017 Leadership Intensive participants are **Alejandra Valarino Boyer**, director of community programs, Lyric Opera of Chicago; **Jennifer Dubin**, chief development officer, Austin Opera; **Julia Gallagher**, assistant production director, Minnesota Opera; **Jason Hardy**, director of development, Opera Memphis; **Steven Humes**, education manager, Opera Philadelphia; **Caroline Koelker**, managing director, Opera Maine; **Rhanda Luna**, director of administration and education, OPERA San Antonio; **Alisa Magallón**, teaching artist, Minnesota Opera; **Nicole Malcolm**, development manager, Pacific Opera Victoria; **Alejandra Martí**, executive director, Ópera Latinoamérica; **Courtney Rizzo**, budget manager, LA Opera; **Michael Sakir**, music director, Opera Memphis; and **Robin Whiffen**, manager of artistic operations, Opera on the Avalon. This is the fifth class of Leadership Intensive participants to have been selected since the program's inception in 2012.

OPERA America's partner organizations, Opera.ca and Ópera Latinoamérica, were responsible for selecting the Canadian and Latin American participants.

"American Express has long advocated for the advancement of emerging nonprofit leaders and performing arts institutions," said Timothy J. McClimon, president of the American Express Foundation. "By continuing our investment in OPERA America's Leadership Intensive program, we hope to develop arts professionals committed to securing the longevity of this industry."

As part of the Leadership Intensive, participants will convene at the National Opera Center in New York City from Friday, August 11 through Friday, August 18 for a weeklong learning program that will address strategic issues, build essential skills and foster strong professional connections. These developing leaders will be prepared to apply new skills, share their learning with colleagues and demonstrate leadership that contributes to their local companies and communities. Expert faculty for the August session include **Astrid Baumgardner**, J.D., certified professional coach; **Micaela Blei**, storyteller and educator, The Moth; **Walker Lewis**, stage director and communications coach; **Jeremiah Marks**, chief financial officer, Opera Philadelphia; **Michelle Ramos**, project director, Vera Institute of Justice; and **Marc A. Scorca**, president/CEO, OPERA America.

Building upon that weeklong foundation in August, Leadership Intensive participants — including those from the previous four classes — will take part in additional professional development programs throughout the year, including regular group coaching calls, webinars with field executives and roundtable discussions at OPERA America's annual conference, making this a comprehensive professional development experience.

"The Leadership Intensive has proven to be a crucial training ground for a new generation of opera leaders who would not otherwise have access to such specialized learning opportunities or to an international network of peers," stated Marc. A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. "We are deeply grateful for American Express' continued support of this program."

For more information about the Leadership Intensive, including a list of program alumni, visit operaamerica.org/Leadership.

PROFILES OF 2017 LEADERSHIP INTENSIVE PARTICIPANTS

Alejandra Valarino Boyer | Director of Community Programs, Lyric Opera of Chicago



Alejandra Valarino Boyer joined Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2010. As the director of community programs for Lyric Unlimited, Boyer has played an integral role in producing artistic productions for adult and youth audiences, including *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina*, *The Property* and *Second Nature*. In support of Lyric Unlimited's community engagement initiatives, such as Caminos a la ópera, she works closely with community partners and collaborators to develop and present events and performances throughout Chicago. In January 2016, as part of Chicago Voices, she led the development of the Community Created Performances program, which supports community organizations in creating and performing original music-theater works. Boyer also established Lyric's Youth Opera Council, a program for teens passionate about opera and interested in the operations of an opera company. Before her position with Lyric Unlimited, she was a member of Lyric's development team, where she helped to facilitate many of the company's key fundraising events. Prior to joining Lyric Opera of Chicago, she was a private voice instructor and performer. Boyer holds degrees in music from Florida State University and Northwestern University, and she was a participant of Opera Europa's 2015 Opera Management Course.

Jennifer Dubin | Chief Development Officer, Austin Opera



Jennifer Dubin has dedicated the last nine years to working in opera administration. She began her career in company management and artistic administration before discovering her passion for fundraising. She was recently appointed as chief development officer at Austin Opera, where she is responsible for all contributed revenue streams, with a focus on major gift philanthropy and business intelligence. Dubin was previously a member of the development team at Opera Philadelphia for seven years, most recently as the director of individual giving, a role in which she was responsible for managing the company's individual giving programs, development department operations and VIP donor services. She holds a B.M. in voice performance, with a minor in business administration, from the University of Florida. She also earned an Executive Program certificate in arts and culture strategy from the University of Pennsylvania in partnership with National Arts Strategies.

Julia Gallagher | Assistant Production Director, Minnesota Opera



Julia Gallagher serves as assistant production director at Minnesota Opera, where she supports all facets of production, with a focus on special projects, education and new works. She also serves on Minnesota Opera's Diversity Task Force. Prior to joining the opera field, Gallagher spent eight years working in theater. She served as the production manager at Mixed Blood Theater, a company that has gained national attention as a leader in diversity and inclusivity for its Radical Hospitality initiative. She was also engaged with contract work and stage management roles at a variety of companies, including the Jungle Theater, Pillsbury House Theatre, Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, Guthrie Theater and The Playwrights' Center. Gallagher earned her B.A. in theater, with a production emphasis, from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. In her spare time, she serves on the board of directors for Fair State Brewing Cooperative, a Twin Cities-based craft brewery.

Jason Hardy | Director of Development, Opera Memphis



Jason Hardy is director of development at Opera Memphis. He joined the company in 2016 after serving as the managing director at Opera Delaware. Prior to this work, Hardy enjoyed 18 years as a leading operatic bass, with a complementary career in outreach, education and administration. His performances on the opera, concert and recital stages were acclaimed by many of the world's major publications. He received a master's degree and artist diploma from the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, which followed studies in business and music at Emory University. Through his artistic, technical and administrative leadership, Hardy has helped build several organizations in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors.

Steven Humes | Education Manager, Opera Philadelphia



Steven Humes serves as education manager for Opera Philadelphia. There, he continues to develop the company's education program Sounds of Learning, which reaches nearly 8,500 students throughout greater Philadelphia each year. Humes is also an active founding member of Lynx Project, a nonprofit organization geared toward connecting performers and audiences through art song. He has served as the administrative assistant for "Si parla, si canta," an Italian immersion program for aspiring young singers and pianists in Urbania, Italy. With degrees in music education and vocal performance from Ithaca College and Eastman School of Music, Humes continues to find opportunities to perform on the operatic stage. Most recently, he was a member of the men's chorus in the world premiere of Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's *Breaking the Waves*.

Caroline Koelker | Managing Director, Opera Maine



Caroline Koelker is managing director for Opera Maine, located in Portland, Maine. In this role, she is responsible for implementing all aspects leading up to the opera company's productions, engagement programs and fundraising. To this position Koelker brings diverse experience, ranging from performing opera to fundraising for a school of music to acting as communications manager for a community activities organization. Koelker most recently served as event coordinator and development manager for Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she earned her Master of Music in opera performance. A native of Maine, she received her Bachelor of Music in vocal performance from the University of Maine. Koelker continues to sing and perform in New England and as a member of Vox Nova Chamber Choir.

Rhanda Luna | Director of Administration and Education, OPERA San Antonio



Rhanda Luna is director of administration and education at OPERA San Antonio. She joined the company in June 2013, just over a year before its inaugural season, and is currently the longest-serving member of its staff. Luna is a well-rounded manager and administrator who came to OPERA San Antonio with ample experience and outstanding skills, which have proved instrumental in establishing the young company as a major performing organization within the U.S.' seventh largest city. She has overseen the growth of the company in the areas of finance, development, operations and education, garnering praise for her engaging programming and close connection with the community. Luna earned a Bachelor of Music Business from West Texas A&M University, and she is currently pursuing a Master of Nonprofit Management at Our Lady of the Lake University, with an expected graduation in 2019. She is an active member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals in San Antonio, chairing the hospitality committee and co-chairing the city's annual fundraising conference, Sharpen Your Skills. She actively promotes arts organizations as a civic asset and is a founding member of the Nonprofit Council's Arts Cohort. Luna is also a volunteer with the Opera Guild of San Antonio.

Alisa Magallón | Teaching Artist, Minnesota Opera



Alisa Magallón is a versatile musician, teaching artist and arts advocate based in Minneapolis. Since 2009, she has been a leader in opera education and community outreach programs with companies like Minnesota Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Young Audiences of Houston. Currently, Magallón is the teaching artist for Minnesota Opera, where she oversees the implementation of school and community-based programs, classes, performances, and arts integration projects throughout the region. Magallón is passionate about mentoring performers in the teaching artist field and connecting opera to diverse communities. She has a B.A. in music from Luther College and an M.M. in vocal performance from Northwestern University. Magallón was a young artist with Chicago Opera Theater, appeared at the Teatro Piccinni in Bari, Italy, toured with Houston Grand Opera's Opera to Go!, and has performed recitals in La Paz, México. In 2013 she was awarded first place in the Lois Alba Aria Competition.

Nicole Malcolm | Development Manager, Pacific Opera Victoria



Nicole Malcolm is an artist of European settler and Métis ancestry whose work now takes place primarily on the unceded Coast Salish Territories in and around the traditional lands of the Lekwungen people, in Victoria, B.C. She has been with Pacific Opera Victoria since 2009 as assistant stage manager, project coordinator and box office manager, and she has managed the development department since 2014. Malcom holds a B.F.A. in stage management and lighting design from the University of Regina. She co-founded Hectik Theatre, a Saskatchewan nonprofit with a mandate to present edgy, thought-provoking and entertaining theatrical experiences that challenge both the audience and the artists involved. Before moving to British Columbia, Malcom spent two summers in dance stage management at Banff Centre, and also worked backstage with Youth Ballet Company of Saskatchewan, New Dance Horizons, Nightwind Theatre's Aboriginal Youth Playwrights Festival, Theatre Calgary and Citadel Theatre, to name a few. Recently, she has been active in the Victoria cultural scene as part of the leadership for the Victoria Spoken Word Festival, TEDxVictoria and Paper Street Theatre Co. An improviser and storyteller for 18 years, she performs regularly with Paper Street Theatre Co., the Dungeons and Dragons Improv Show and Victoria's Improv Cabaret; she is also a regional judge and adjudicator for the Canadian Improv Games.

Alejandra Martí | Executive Director, Ópera Latinoamérica



Alejandra Martí is the CEO of Ópera Latinoamérica, a nonprofit organization with over 20 member theaters in Latin America and Spain. Martí has more than 12 years of experience in the field of opera and classical performing arts, where she has managed artistic programs, international relations, new media projects and audience development, as well as led interdisciplinary teams and projects related to creative industries. Prior to joining Ópera Latinoamérica, she spent 11 years at Municipal de Santiago (Chile), leading an interdisciplinary team and overseeing innovation and modernization within the organization. Before that she worked in the HHRR department at Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.

Courtney Rizzo | Budget Manager, LA Opera



Courtney Rizzo is budget manager at LA Opera, having previously worked at a dozen opera and theater companies across the country. She began her career as a freelance stage manager, and the love of backstage has informed her work ever since. Favorite productions in stage management include the *Ring* cycle at Seattle Opera in 2009 and 2013, *Moby-Dick* at San Francisco Opera and its broadcast on PBS' *Great Performances*, the American premiere of Philip Glass' *Kepler* at Spoleto Festival USA, and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* starring *RuPaul's Drag Race* winner Jinkx Monsoon. Rizzo transitioned to financial planning and analysis projects, crunching numbers for *The Lion King* at Disney Theatrical Group and then for Lincoln Center's international consulting arm while earning her M.B.A. at New York University. She got her start at Michigan State University with an arts internship in an office labeled "supply closet" and a bachelor's degree in vocal music.

Michael Sakir | Music Director, Opera Memphis



Praised for his “artistic authority,” “fluidity of expression” and “great delicacy of feeling,” Michael Sakir takes on the role of music director at Opera Memphis in the 2017–2018 season. Recent guest conducting engagements include Des Moines Metro Opera, Eugene Opera, Opera Memphis, Opera Orlando, Intermountain Opera Bozeman, Opera Company of Middlebury, Opera North, Opera in the Ozarks, Boston Opera Collaborative and Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music. He has held cover conductor and chorus master positions for over three dozen productions with Washington National Opera, The Santa Fe Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Sarasota Opera, Pensacola Opera and Opera Boston. Sakir holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Boston Conservatory. He is a native of Northern California.

Robin Whiffen | Manager of Artistic Operations, Opera on the Avalon



Robin Whiffen is quickly establishing herself as a promising young arts administrator. She holds the position of manager of artistic operations at Opera on the Avalon, where she works in consultation with the general and artistic director in developing and implementing artistic plans that support the organization’s overall artistic vision. Her greatest accomplishment has been her role in the creation and premiere of Atlantic Canada’s first grand opera, *Ours*, by John Estacio and Robert Chafe. Whiffen is focused on expanding the cultural tapestry of her home province while advocating for women in the arts. An avid performer, she appears with a variety of musical groups in her hometown of St. John’s, where she also operates her own voice studio. Whiffen studied with soprano Elizabeth McDonald at University of Toronto and holds a Bachelor of Music in voice performance.

For more information about OPERA America, its many programs and the National Opera Center, visit operaamerica.org.



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About OPERA America

OPERA America (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 17,500 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) 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.

About American Express: Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow

One of American Express' three philanthropic platforms is [Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow](#). Under this giving initiative, which recognizes the significance of strong leadership in the nonprofit and social purpose sectors, American Express makes grants focused on training high-potential emerging leaders to tackle important issues in the 21st century. More than 30,000 emerging nonprofit and social sector leaders worldwide have benefitted from American Express leadership programs, including the American Express Leadership Academy, among others. Launched in 2008, the American Express Leadership Academy addresses the growing deficit of leadership talent in the nonprofit sector by bringing together emerging leaders from a diverse set of nonprofit, social sector and non-governmental organizations. For leadership journey stories and additional resources, visit leaderstories.org.