

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

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OPERA AMERICA SELECTS 16 PARTICIPANTS FROM THE U.S., CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA FOR ITS 2019 LEADERSHIP INTENSIVE PROGRAM

Developing Future Leaders and Strengthening Opera Companies

January 15, 2019 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is pleased to announce that 16 participants from the United States, Canada and Latin America have been selected for its 2019 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 2019 Leadership Intensive participants are **Daniel Benavent**, general manager, Theatre Aspen; **Vincent Covatto**, organizational membership manager, OPERA America; **Priti Gandhi**, chief artistic officer, Minnesota Opera; **Matthew Gray**, producing director, American Opera Projects; **Rebecca Hass**, director of community engagement, Pacific Opera Victoria; **Jeila Irdmusa**, marketing and communications manager, Boston Lyric Opera; **Ben Jewell-Plocher**, director of education, Sarasota Opera; **Erik Johnson**, senior financial analyst, Boston Symphony Orchestra; **Carmen Gloria Larenas**, artistic director, Teatro del Lago; **Anh Le**, assistant director of marketing, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; **Jaime Martino**, executive director, Tapestry Opera; **Daniel Moss**, senior director of institutional partnerships, Lyric Opera of Chicago; **Mariel O'Connell**, associate producer, Beth Morrison Projects; **Chidi Ozieh**, managing and media director, Ardea Arts; **Paulina Ricciardi**, administrative coordinator, Ópera Latinoamérica; **Sneja Tomassian**, chief development officer, Cincinnati Opera.

This is the sixth 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 supported the advancement of emerging nonprofit leaders and performing arts institutions," said Timothy J. McClimon, president, American Express Foundation. "Through our continued investment in OPERA America's Leadership Intensive program, we hope to develop the next generation in opera who are committed to the longevity of this art form."

As part of the Leadership Intensive, participants will convene at the National Opera Center in New York City from Friday, February 1 through Friday, February 8 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 February session include **Astrid Baumgardner**, J.D., certified professional coach; **Micaela Blei**, PhD, storyteller and educator; **Ed Harsh**, director of strategic initiatives, The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; **Walker Lewis**, stage director and executive presentation coach; **Jeremiah Marks**, chief financial officer, Opera Philadelphia; **Michelle Ramos, J.D, PhD.**, executive director, Alternate ROOTS; **Kurt Howard**, director of programs and services, OPERA America and **Marc A. Scorca**, president/CEO, OPERA America.

Building upon that weeklong foundation in February, Leadership Intensive participants will take part in additional professional development activities throughout the year, including regular group coaching calls, webinars with field executives and roundtable discussions at OPERA America's annual conference, making this an extended 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 2019 LEADERSHIP INTENSIVE PARTICIPANTS

Daniel Benavent | General Manager, Theatre Aspen



Daniel Benavent recently joined Theatre Aspen as general manager. He previously spent eight seasons as an administrator and producer for Manhattan School of Music, most recently in the role of managing director of Opera Theater and Musical Theatre. Benavent spent three summers as the program administrator with the Aspen Opera Center at the Aspen Music Festival and School. In addition to independent producing, he is an active volunteer and fundraiser for various cultural and philanthropic causes. He recently completed the New York Foundation for the Arts Emerging Leaders program, and holds a Bachelor of Music from Indiana University, a Master of Music from Boston Conservatory and a Professional Certificate from New York University.

Vincent Covatto | Organizational Membership Manager, OPERA America



Vincent Covatto is the organizational membership manager at OPERA America, where, for the past two years, he has served as the main point of contact for 150 professional opera companies and 250 associate companies, businesses and universities. In this role, he helps to bring new companies into the membership community, serves as the advertising manager for the quarterly *Opera America* magazine, secures sponsorship for OPERA America's annual Opera Conference, and provides support to the executive committee of the New York Opera Alliance (NYOA). Covatto joined OPERA America in 2015 as a member of the National Opera Center staff. Prior to this, he worked at Houston Museum of Natural Science as a copywriter and at Houston Grand Opera in HGOCO, the organization's communications and community engagement arm. He earned a Bachelor of Music in music business from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam.

Priti Gandhi | Chief Artistic Officer, Minnesota Opera



Priti Gandhi recently joined Minnesota Opera in the newly created position of chief artistic officer, coming from her previous post as artistic administrator at San Diego Opera (where she served as a member of the administrative team that helped to stabilize the company and avoid its near closure in 2014). As a soprano, Gandhi has had a 20-year international opera career, appearing with companies like the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, San Diego Opera, Théâtre du Châtelet, the Royal Opera House, Prague Estates Theatre, New York City Opera and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Gandhi earned a Bachelor of Arts in communications, with a minor in theater, from the University of California, San Diego, and is an alumna of young artist programs at Cleveland Opera and San Diego Opera. She was a published weekly columnist with *The San Diego Union-Tribune* and was an honored alumna and commencement speaker at Thurgood Marshall College at UCSD in 2016. Gandhi is also an amateur painter and flamenco dancer.

Matthew Gray | Producing Director, American Opera Projects



Matthew Gray has been the producing director and resident dramaturg of Brooklyn's American Opera Projects (AOP) for half of its 30-year history of creating new operas. He uses his background as a stage director, playwright and filmmaker to bring a unique perspective to the development and production of AOP's many concerts, workshops and opera premieres, which have recently included *The Echo Drift* (PROTOTYPE Festival, 2018), *The Summer King* (Pittsburgh Opera, 2017), *Hagoromo* starring Wendy Whelan (BAM, 2015) and *As One* (BAM, 2014), the most widely produced contemporary opera in the U.S. and Canada during the 2017–2018 season. He also serves as the head of drama for AOP's opera-writing training program, Composers & the Voice, and oversees AOP's press, marketing and technical infrastructure. Next year, he will assume the role of general director of AOP. His upcoming directing work includes *As One*, an AOP/New York City Opera co-production to be presented in spring 2019.

Rebecca Hass | Director of Community Engagement, Pacific Opera Victoria



Rebecca Hass is the director of community engagement for Pacific Opera Victoria. She is involved in a wide range of programs, including the Living Opera program for schools, the Young Artists Program, Lunch Box Opera, Opera Pop-Up and *The Hummingbird*, a co-production with Vancouver Opera to premiere in 2020. A mezzo-soprano, she debuted with Pacific Opera Victoria in 2001 and has appeared in many productions, as well as served on the company's board of directors. Hass has a wide and varied background, including over 30 years as a freelance singer and vocal clinician at universities across Canada. She is a certified life coach and works with Canadian Opera Company Ensemble, Opera Nuova and St. Andrews Opera Workshop. She is also a writer, broadcast host and documentary maker for national shows on CBC Radio One and Two. Hass is a graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University, where she earned an Honors Bachelor of Music in performance. She is a member of the Métis Nation of British Columbia.

Jeila Irdmusa | Marketing and Communications Manager, Boston Lyric Opera



Originally from Northern Virginia, Jeila Irdmusa is a Persian-American marketing professional and change agent in the field of opera. After graduating from Boston Conservatory in 2013, she worked with Grammy-nominated composer Deborah Henson-Conant to develop the show *Mythic Women*, consisting of a song cycle paired with a one-woman opera, both starring Irdmusa. Since joining Boston Lyric Opera in 2016, she has led several initiatives geared toward inviting wider and more diverse audiences to engage with opera. She is responsible for revamping BLO's social media and e-mail channels, introducing 360-degree video and live streams, and assembling a team of social media influencers, an initiative that made front-page news in *The Wall Street Journal*. As marketing lead, she helped make BLO's 2016–2017 season the highest in earned revenue since 2008–2009, and exceeded revenue goals by 17 percent in the 2017–2018 season. Outside of BLO, Irdmusa is a soprano and marketing consultant.

Ben Jewell-Plocher | Director of Education, Sarasota Opera



Ben Jewell-Plocher, director of education at Sarasota Opera, has spent his entire career serving arts nonprofits, including the Indianapolis Children's Choir, Interlochen Center for the Arts and St. Louis Muny. Since joining Sarasota Opera's education department in 2011, he has overseen the commissioning of two new works for young voices: Daron Hagen and J.D. McClatchy's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (2012) and Rachel J. Peters' *Rutabaga Country* (2017). He has also increased the company's community engagement initiatives through partnerships with local nonprofits that focus on diversity and inclusion. Jewell-Plocher currently serves on several local arts education advocacy committees, including the Sarasota Arts Education Taskforce, Sarasota Community/School Partnerships for the Arts and Manatee Arts Education Council. He holds a Bachelor of Music from Butler University and a Master of Music in voice from Southern Methodist University.

Erik Johnson | Senior Financial Analyst, Boston Symphony Orchestra



Erik Johnson serves as senior financial analyst for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, providing strategic-planning analysis and financial guidance for the BSO's operations in Boston and Tanglewood and on tour worldwide. Following studies in music business and business administration at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, Johnson earned a master's degree in arts administration from Boston University, where he now serves as adjunct faculty. In 2008, he joined the artistic department of Boston Lyric Opera and went on to serve in a variety of roles during his tenure, ultimately as company manager. He joined the staff of the BSO in 2012. Johnson also serves as board president of Boston Opera Collaborative and as a incorporator with the Community Music Center of Boston.

Carmen Gloria Larenas | Artistic Director, Teatro del Lago



Carmen Gloria Larenas, artistic director of Teatro del Lago in Frutillar, Chile, joined the organization in 2009 as artistic and communications manager and was part of the team that prepared the opening of the theater in 2010. She implemented the Teatro del Lago Ballet School, in association with London's Royal Academy of Dance, to professionalize ballet education in the region, and developed the International Academy Teatro del Lago, a music project that invites young musicians and singers to strengthen their training and artistic experience with first-rate coaches. Larenas has also developed art festivals and social programs, including "Puedes Cantar," which helps children, young people and adults to develop their singing, and has worked on opera projects such as *The Magic Flute* and *Noye's Fludde*. She was named one of the Women Leaders of Chile in 2017.

Anh Le | Assistant Director of Marketing, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis



Anh Le is the assistant director of marketing at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, where she oversees all print publications and provides key strategic support for audience and community engagement efforts. In addition to her duties at OTSL, Le has spoken on advocacy and EDI issues at the 2018 World Opera Forum and the 2017 OPERA America conference, served on OPERA America's Civic Action Group, and participated in The Dallas Opera's 2017 Hart Institute for Women Conductors and Administrators. Inspired by a lifelong love of opera, she first entered arts management during college, when she produced the original-language American premiere of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* at Lowell House Opera. Le graduated from Harvard University in 2012 and was awarded the Robert E. Levi Prize for Excellence in Arts Management. In 2015, she received an M.F.A. in theater management at the Yale School of Drama, where she also served as the associate director of marketing for Yale Repertory Theatre.

Jaime Martino | Executive Director, Tapestry Opera



Jaime Martino is a lifelong contributor to the arts as a dancer and choreographer, and she brings her love for music and theater to her role as executive director of Tapestry Opera. Following the completion of her master's degree in Dunedin, New Zealand, she co-founded the Aha Dance Collective, a contemporary dance company dedicated to exploring gender and movement through a feminist lens. From 2013–2016, Martino served as director of operations for Pride Toronto, steering one of the largest LGBTQ celebrations in the world. In 2014, she was officially commended by the City of Toronto for her contribution to WorldPride, called a "historic and overwhelming success." Martino believes deeply in the power of art to transform people's lives and the world that surrounds them. She is committed to furthering Tapestry's mandate to challenge structures, invest in new art in a way that reaches emerging artists, and carve out space at the edges of the mainstream, where creative disruption lives.

Daniel Moss | Senior Director of Institutional Partnerships, Lyric Opera of Chicago



Daniel Moss is the senior director of institutional partnerships at Lyric Opera of Chicago, overseeing all corporate, foundation and government relationships. He and his team generate approximately 30 to 40 percent of Lyric's \$31 million annual fundraising efforts. Moss began his career at Lyric in 2006 as an administrative assistant in corporate and foundation support, and was elevated to resource development manager within a short time. He works closely with Lyric's board of directors and also leads the Guild board of directors. He received his bachelor's degree in violin performance from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington and his master's degree in violin performance from DePaul University. He lives in Chicago and is an active member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Mariel O'Connell | Associate Producer, Beth Morrison Projects



Mariel O'Connell has been the associate producer at Beth Morrison Projects since March 2016. While touring with BMP, she has worked with such companies and venues as LA Opera, Strathmore Music Center, San Francisco Opera, Austin Opera, ArtsEmerson and the PROTOTYPE Festival. Before joining BMP, O'Connell was business and production associate in the office of Renée Fleming. She is a graduate of Barnard College, where she studied English, art history and European history. While at Barnard, O'Connell was an intern to the dramaturg at the Metropolitan Opera and a production intern at the Mostly Mozart Festival, and she directed for Columbia's New Opera Workshop. She has also served as the administrative director for the Columbia University Orchestra.

Chidi Ozieh | Managing and Media Director, Ardea Arts



Chidi Ozieh has served as managing and media director at Ardea Arts for the past eight years. He is a writer, director, producer, music composer and visual effects supervisor. Ozieh is known for a number of short films, including *Serum* (2010), named Best Sci-Fi Short Film at the 2012 Philadelphia Film Festival; *Inheritors* (2013); and the rotoscope live-action animated film *Young Mallory* (2014), which was selected for the Best Animated Short Film Award at the Raindance Film Festival in London and at the ANIMPACT Animation Film Festival in Seoul. Since childhood, Ozieh has always been an artist at heart, with a solid foundation in visual arts, and he studied music at Thames Valley University. He embarked on his filmmaking journey after immigrating to the U.S. with the belief that filmmaking is the ultimate form of artistic expression and storytelling, as it incorporates his many talents in visual arts, music, writing, producing and directing. Ozieh is currently working on his feature film debut as a writer, director and producer.

Paulina Ricciardi | Administrative Coordinator, Ópera Latinoamérica



Paulina Ricciardi holds a Master of Arts in culture policy and management from City University London, a postgraduate diploma in cultural management in visual arts from University of Chile, and a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from the same institution. She joined Ópera Latinoamérica in 2016, and since then she has been working to advance the lyric genre and develop talents in Latin America. With over eight years of experience working in the cultural sector and creative industries in London, Ricciardi has a deep passion for music and art. She worked at Southbank Centre in its commercial department, at Cultural Cooperation, and at Oxfam, producing music festivals in the U.K. She is now based in Chile, where she is developing Escena Digital, a technological tool for the circulation of opera and ballet productions in Latin America.

Sneja Tomassian | Chief Development Officer, Cincinnati Opera



Sneja Tomassian, arts manager and fundraiser, is the chief advancement officer at Cincinnati Opera. She received her M.B.A. in international business relations from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia, Bulgaria, and later earned her M.A. in arts management from the University of Akron. Her passion for the arts has consistently motivated her professional life. She began by working for several theater companies while studying in Sofia, later volunteering for Playhouse in the Park after her move to Cincinnati in 1996. She subsequently became the first general manager of the New World Performance Laboratory in 1998, holding that position until her Cincinnati Opera career began in 2001. Tomassian has served on fundraising panels for OPERA America and the International Fundraising Congress (IFC) in Amsterdam, and on the board of trustees of concert:nova. She is currently a trustee of the John L. Magro Foundation. Tomassian is an alumna of Leadership Cincinnati.

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 140 Professional Company Members; 300 Associate, Business, Educational Producing Affiliate and Career Service Members; 1,600 Individual Members; and 18,000 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) 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 OPERA America's Leadership Intensive

Launched in 2012, the Leadership Intensive 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. Seminars and networking opportunities provide an active learning environment for addressing strategic issues, building necessary skills and fostering strong professional connections in order to lead the opera field. Following the program, participants are prepared to apply new skills, share their learning and demonstrate leadership that contributes to local companies and communities. Many of the program's seventy alumni have moved into leadership roles across the country.

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 70,000 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 need of leadership development programs 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.