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OPERA AMERICA KICKS OFF NATIONWIDE CELEBRATION OF 50 YEARS OF OPERA'S PROGRESS IN AMERICA

Unites Field Behind National #meetopera Campaign

Launches Opera Hall of Fame, Oral History Project, Public Events

Announces Funding Milestones and New Initiatives for Racial Diversity

October 23, 2019 (New York) — "I am very optimistic about opera in America," says **OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca**. "When I entered the industry decades ago, new American operas were rarely commissioned or performed. Today, the flow of creativity from American composers, librettists, directors and designers has generated an American opera repertoire that spans the gamut of styles and subject matter."

The wellspring of creative talent in the United States over the past 50 years has been fostered by **OPERA America**, the national champion for opera in America, which has provided financial support, mentorship and connections between thousands of companies and artists. Founded in 1970 as a collaborative agency by mid-sized opera companies, OPERA America now comprises 500 professional companies, conservatories, training programs and other related businesses, as well as nearly 2,000 individual artists, administrators, trustees and operagoers. Its impact extends internationally in scope: OPERA America provided the model for the development of Opera Europa, Ópera Latinoamérica and Opera.ca in Canada, which approaches its 20th anniversary next year.

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 2020, OPERA America will embark on a yearlong celebration of 50 years of opera in America. The organization will commemorate a half-century of opera's progress with a variety of initiatives, including an [Opera Hall of Fame](#), **Oral History Project** and series of national events. It will also rally members of the opera industry to participate in a national promotional campaign, [#meetopera](#), to inspire curiosity in the art form.

"Between 1970 and 2020, opera has moved from being an imported, historic European art form to a dynamic, contemporary American cultural expression that resonates with the world in which we live," says Scorca. "We see this anniversary year as an opportunity to celebrate this astonishing narrative of creativity, determination and growth — and a chance to demonstrate our commitment to continue moving opera forward."

#meetopera

On January 6, 2020, OPERA America will launch a nationally coordinated, locally implemented promotional campaign designed to shift the public perception of opera. Developed with cohorts of field members, the [#meetopera](#) campaign invites arts enthusiasts and other potential operagoers to see opera as the vibrant and progressive art form that it is today. It is about showcasing the breadth of opera, the diversity of the people who make it and enjoy it, and the many ways it can be experienced.

"This is a 'yes, and' campaign," says **Timothy O'Leary, general director of Washington National Opera and board chair of OPERA America**. "Opera is grand *and* intimate. It takes place in historic opera houses *and* local bars. It is in Italian, French, German *and* English, Spanish and Mandarin. It offers a special night on the town *and* a casual evening with friends."

OPERA America introduced the campaign to the public on October 18, when performing luminaries such as **Jamie Barton, Angel Blue, Ailyn Pérez** and **Morris Robinson** joined inspiring creators like **Paola Prestini, Kamala Sankaram** and **Mark Campbell** in announcing their participation in the campaign via social media. These industry icons are part of a cohort of **50th Anniversary Ambassadors** recruited to extend the reach of the [#meetopera](#) campaign and support OPERA America throughout its 50th anniversary initiatives.

Countless opera companies and artists also participated in the October 18 announcement by sharing the [#meetopera campaign video](#), a highlight reel of footage contributed by companies across the nation, showcasing the variety of looks, styles and scales of opera in America.

Anniversary Initiatives

Opera Hall of Fame

OPERA America will honor leaders in the opera field in an **Opera Hall of Fame**. Building on the legacy of the NEA Opera Honors, produced by the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with OPERA America from 2008 to 2012, this new initiative will recognize nine living American artists, administrators or advocates in its first year. These individuals, and those added in subsequent years, will serve to inspire the next generation of industry leaders. The first round of nominations is now open through January 15, 2020, at operaamerica.org/HallofFame.

Oral History Project

The shared stories of opera in America will be captured in an **Oral History Project**. OPERA America will gather interviews with at least 50 industry veterans who have helped advance the art form and the industry over the last five decades. A partnership with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and supported by the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Charitable Foundation, the project will make audio recordings and transcriptions available to the public via a new OPERA America website launching in 2020 and at the library at Lincoln Center.

Opera America Magazine

Six quarterly issues of **Opera America Magazine** will be dedicated to tracing the art form's trajectory since the organization's establishment. These special editions will focus on various aspects of the industry, including the proliferation of opera companies, the development of new work, the establishment of an artist-training infrastructure and the evolution of the opera business model. Each retrospective feature will be paired with statements from the Anniversary Ambassadors and field leaders that envision the next half-century of opera.

Public Events

Beginning in November 2019, OPERA America will hit the road to co-present public events with each of its 16 founding companies. These events, sponsored by Bank of America, will localize the national narrative and provide each company with an opportunity to celebrate its own contributions to the progress of the art form and industry.

The tour begins November 1 with an event honoring **Opera Omaha's** notable accomplishments in civic practice, artistic development and gender parity. On December 3, it highlights **New Orleans Opera**, the 100th anniversary of the burning of the city's French Opera House and the city's rich history of presenting opera since the 18th century. On December 10, an event in San Diego will salute the important role **San Diego Opera** has played in developing and premiering Spanish-language operas.

In 2020, founding city events will continue in Charlotte, Houston, Kansas City, Louisville, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Saratoga Springs, Seattle, Tulsa and Washington, D.C. In addition, special celebrations will commemorate **75 years of Mississippi Opera** in Jackson and **100 years of Cincinnati Opera** in Ohio.

Industry Events

OPERA America will engage artists, administrators and trustees in the industry in an additional series of anniversary events in 2020.

New Works Forum

The **New Works Forum** will take place **January 16–19** in New York City. With sessions at OPERA America's National Opera Center and performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and PROTOTYPE Festival, this convening will be the largest gathering of producers and artists in the country. Past New Works Forums have incubated dozens of important new projects, collaborations and productions, including *JFK* (Little/Vavrek) and *Silent Night* (Puts/Campbell).

National Trustee Forum

The **National Trustee Forum** will bring together opera company board members from **March 18–20** in Washington, D.C., a founding city where OPERA America was headquartered for many years. Discussions will focus on the importance of good governance and strong boards to the health of the field, and the forum will also include performances at Washington National Opera and visits to legislative offices on Capitol Hill to advocate for public policies on the arts.

50th Annual Opera Conference

In May, OPERA America will return to the city of its first conference in 1970: Seattle. The 50th annual [**Opera Conference**](#), hosted by Seattle Opera, will take place **May 13–16** and will include panels, performances and a 50th anniversary party with the announcement of Opera Hall of Fame inductees.

In February 2021, a concluding event in New York City will recognize donors and others who have made significant contributions to the anniversary campaign.

New Programs Announced

OPERA America's commitment to developing new works, advancing gender parity, increasing racial and ethnic diversity, and nurturing the next generation of leaders will be supported by the **2020 Vision Campaign**. This 50th anniversary fundraising effort will build OPERA America's ongoing capacity to serve a growing field, maintain the National Opera Center, and enhance programming for artistic initiatives and leadership development.

On October 18, Scorca announced two new programs made possible by early gifts to the 2020 Vision Campaign that support the creation of American operas:

IDEA Opera Residences

IDEA Opera Residencies (denoting Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) are three-year grants, funded by the Katharine S. and Axel G. Rosin Fund of the Scherman Foundation, to support the creative and professional development of New York City-based composers and librettists of color. By providing direct grants, mentorship and career support to artists entering the field, the program aims to break down systemic barriers faced by artists of color and foster pathways for new voices to the opera stage.

The Next Stage

OPERA America will re-introduce **The Next Stage**, a granting program that supports second and subsequent productions. This initiative, supported in its pilot year by Gene Kaufman and Terry Eder, is intended to encourage companies to program American works that have already premiered and are worthy of more performances in new productions.

"The opportunity to hear new works again is essential to expanding the active repertoire and increasing recognition and programming of the North American canon," says Scorca. "Over the past 30 years, OPERA America has granted over \$15 million to companies in support of new work, and we now have an American repertoire that has earned the admiration of the global opera community."

Milestones

As *The New York Times* noted, OPERA America and its National Opera Center "play a crucial role in the operatic biosphere." OPERA America's focus on identifying and nurturing talent, particularly among women and people of color, has helped usher in a sea change for the industry.

Opera Grants for Female Composers

OPERA America's [Opera Grants for Female Composers](#) program has now contributed over **\$1 million** to support creators like Ellen Reid, Du Yun and Laura Kaminsky. Funded by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation since 2014, grants have been awarded to 45 women to advance their work and to 30 companies in support of their commissions of female composers. These projects have in turn helped increase contemporary themes on stage, with operas exploring issues of today.

Leadership Intensive

The alumni of OPERA America's leadership development programs, including its signature [Leadership Intensive](#) supported by the American Express Foundation, now hold 10 percent of executive leadership positions at member companies across the nation. Launched in 2012 to identify and encourage the field's most promising opera administrators, the program has had a profound impact in promoting women to top positions, with alumni including Peggy Kriha Dye, general and artistic director of Opera Columbus; Lee Anne Myslewski, vice president of Wolf Trap Opera; Barbara Lynne Jamison, general director of Kentucky Opera; Ashley Magnus, general director of Chicago Opera Theater; and Jennifer Rivera, executive director and CEO of Long Beach Opera.

"The Leadership Intensive program was an invaluable resource in my career development," says Annie Burrige, who completed the program in 2012 and now serves as general director and CEO of Austin Opera. "Years later, I am still making use of the knowledge and connections it provided."

Innovation Grants

OPERA America invests **\$1.5 million each year** in **Innovation Grants** to support bold ideas, new projects and important research that promise to improve artistic and administrative practices. The program has now been

extended for a second time thanks to renewed funding from the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation. Past grants have supported The Glimmerglass Festival's *Breaking Glass* podcast on the intersection of music and social justice and Opera Philadelphia's transition to its inaugural fall festival.

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About OPERA America

OPERA America (operaamerica.org) is the national membership organization for artists, administrators, trustees and audiences, dedicated to supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera. Based in New York City at the National Opera Center, a custom-built rehearsal and performance facility for the opera field, OPERA America is committed to advancing new work, audience engagement, civic practice, artist and leadership development, research, national advocacy and an inclusive industry that moves opera forward in America.

Membership includes 150 professional opera companies; 350 associate, business and education members; and nearly 2,000 individuals. OPERA America extends its reach to 80,000 annual visitors to its National Opera Center and over 40,000 subscribers and followers on e-communications and social media. Representing over 90 percent of eligible professional companies, OPERA America is empowered to lead field-wide change.

Upcoming Events

November 1

Opera Omaha

This event will feature Opera Omaha's notable accomplishments in scenic design, civic practice, artist development and gender parity in leadership, emblematic of key threads of the narrative of opera's progress nationally. The panel discussion will feature Opera Omaha's current general director, Roger Weitz, and its former general director, Jane Hill.

December 3–4

New Orleans Opera

A presentation and panel will honor the 100th anniversary of the burning of the French Opera House in New Orleans and New Orleans' rich history of presenting opera, beginning in the 18th century. The panel will include Robert Lyall, general and artistic director of New Orleans Opera; archivist Jack Belsom; and Givanna Joseph, founder and director of OperaCreole. A concert on December 4 will feature local artists and aria selections from works performed over New Orleans Opera's history.

December 10

San Diego Opera

This event will highlight the important role San Diego Opera has played in developing, premiering and promoting Spanish-language operas, including the work of Daniel Catán. The panel discussion will focus on how San Diego Opera builds on this history and continues this work with its new initiative Opera en Español, featuring David Bennet, San Diego Opera's general director, and Andrea Puente-Catán, the company's director of Hispanic affairs and fundraising.

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