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## **OPERA AMERICA ANNOUNCES SIX RECIPIENTS OF OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS: COMMISSIONING GRANTS**

**Supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**

June 10, 2019 (New York) — **OPERA America** has awarded the fifth cycle of **Commissioning Grants** from its **Opera Grants for Female Composers** program to six professional opera companies across the United States. The grants support the creation of new theatrical works by women who compose for the trained voice and instrumental ensemble. As the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, OPERA America is committed to increasing diversity and gender parity across the field.

Grants were awarded to:

- The Industry (Los Angeles, CA) for *Sweet Land* by Du Yun
- Lyric Opera of Chicago (Chicago, IL) for an untitled opera by Caroline Shaw
- Mill City Summer Opera (Minneapolis, MN) for *Stone Arch: A Walking Opera* by Mary Ellen Childs
- Opera Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA) for *Ten Days in a Madhouse* by Rene Orth
- Opera Steamboat (Steamboat Springs, CO) for *Cookie* by Leanna Kirchoff
- Spoleto Festival USA (Charleston, SC) for an opera on the life of Omar Ibn Said (title TBD) by Rhiannon Giddens

See below for descriptions of the funded works.

The six grantees were selected from an applicant pool of 15 eligible OPERA America Professional Company Members, which applied to receive up to 50 percent of the composer's fee for a full production of a commissioned work, with awards of up to \$50,000. The independent adjudication panel of industry experts included **Carmen Balthrop**, soprano; **Katy Clark**, president, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM); **Stephanie Fleischmann**, librettist; **Jay Scheib**, director; and **Daniel Sonenberg**, composer.

The Opera Grants for Female Composers program promotes the development of new works by women and raises the visibility of women writing for the operatic medium. The program consists of two granting components: Discovery Grants, awarded directly to female composers to advance their work, and Commissioning Grants, awarded to opera companies for commissions by female composers. Since its inception in 2014, the program has presented almost \$1.1 million to opera companies and composers. The grants are made possible through the generous support of the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**.

Over the past four decades, OPERA America has awarded nearly \$20 million to its Professional Company Members to support the work of opera creators, companies and administrators. However, until the launch of Opera Grants for Female Composers in 2013, fewer than five percent of the organization's grants for new works had been awarded to operas by female composers.

"Works by female composers are gaining traction on stages across North America, as our member companies commission an unprecedented number of operas by women," stated Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. "We are grateful to the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation for enabling us to continue this important work, which has brought noteworthy composers to the forefront and enlivened our operatic repertoire with new pieces."

The letter of intent deadline for the next round of Discovery Grants is November 20, 2019. Information about the next cycle of Commissioning Grants will be available in fall 2019, with a letter of intent deadline of March 24, 2020. For more information about the Opera Grants for Female Composers program and other grant programs supported by OPERA America, visit [operaamerica.org/Grants](http://operaamerica.org/Grants).

## **ABOUT THE 2019 COMMISSIONING GRANT RECIPIENTS**

**The Industry** | [theindustryla.org](http://theindustryla.org)

*Sweet Land*

Music by Du Yun and Raven Chacon, libretto by Douglas Kearney and Aja Couchois Duncan



The Industry's grant supports Chinese American composer Du Yun and *Sweet Land*, which brings together a team of two composers, Du Yun and Raven Chacon, and two librettists, Douglas Kearney and Aja Couchois Duncan, to create a multi-perspectival opera exploring the grotesque myths of American identity, directed by Yuval Sharon.

**Lyric Opera of Chicago** | [lyricopera.org](http://lyricopera.org)

Title TBD (theme: isolation and loneliness)

Music by Caroline Shaw, libretto by Sarah Kay



As part of Lyric's 2021–2022 mainstage season, a one-act opera commission by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw will explore the theme of loneliness and isolation in our contemporary world. Presented alongside two additional contemporary one-act commissions, making up one mainstage production, the work will be supported by ancillary audience-engagement activities to enhance the pieces' resonance with diverse audiences across Chicago.

**Mill City Summer Opera** | millcitysummeropera.org

*Stone Arch: A Walking Opera*

Music by Mary Ellen Childs, libretto by Mary Ellen Childs (from found texts)

MILL CITY SUMMER OPERA

Mill City Summer Opera will commission and present *Stone Arch: A Walking Opera*, an interactive, a cappella performance experience with 100 singers, to be created by composer Mary Ellen Childs and performed on the historic Stone Arch Bridge, formerly a railroad bridge and now a National Historic Engineering Landmark that spans the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Opera Philadelphia** | operaphila.org

*Ten Days in a Madhouse*

Music by Rene Orth, libretto by Hannah Moscovitch



Opera Philadelphia, with co-commission and co-production partner Tapestry Opera, will produce *Ten Days in a Madhouse*, a new chamber opera from composer Rene Orth and librettist Hannah Moscovitch. The opera is inspired by the 1887 literary exposé of Nellie Bly, a reporter who feigned insanity to investigate firsthand the abuse in a women's asylum. The world premiere will be at Opera Philadelphia's Festival O21 (September 2021) and the Canadian premiere will be at Tapestry Opera (spring 2022).

**Opera Steamboat** | operasteamboat.org

*Cookie*

Music by Leanna Kirchoff, libretto by Rachel Peters



Steamboat's *Cookie* is a comic one-act fantasia on the colorful trajectory of Cookie Lockhart, a renowned female auctioneer living in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. In 2018, Cookie and her daughter Jo scramble to auction off their family's lifelong home and business. Each object Cookie offers for bidding leads her to recall key moments in her life: including her training in a male-dominated field and induction as the first woman into the National Auctioneers Association Hall of Fame.

**Spoletto Festival USA** | spoletousa.org

An opera on the life of Omar Ibn Said (title TBD)

Music and libretto by Rhiannon Giddens



Spoletto Festival USA has commissioned a new full-length opera by MacArthur Fellow and Grammy Award-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens on the life of Omar Ibn Said. Omar was a Muslim-African man who was captured in Senegambia in 1807 and sold into slavery at Charleston's Gadsden's Wharf. His autobiography, written in Arabic, is an account of his life, unedited by his owner — a singular, authentic manuscript in the U.S. This and other source materials inform the opera's narrative, which follows Omar's spiritual journey from West Africa to the American South. The opera will have its world premiere during the 2020 festival (May 22–June 7).



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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. The organization is committed to:

- Delivering professional development to artists, administrators and trustees.
- Increasing appreciation of opera through educational and audience development resources.
- Offering technical support and informational services that foster the creation and presentation of new works.
- Fostering equity, diversity and inclusion across all aspects of the opera industry.
- Undertaking national research and representing the field to policymakers and the media.
- Managing the National Opera Center, a custom-built facility that provides a centralized space for collaboration, rehearsal and performance.

Founded in 1970, OPERA America fulfills its mission through public programs, an annual conference, regional workshops, consultations, granting programs, publications and online resources. It is the only organization serving all constituents of opera: artists, administrators, trustees, educators and audience members. Membership includes 150 professional opera companies; 350 associate, business and education members; and 1,600 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.

OPERA America's long tradition of supporting and nurturing the creation and development of new works led to the formation of the Opera Fund, a growing endowment that allows OPERA America to make a direct impact on the ongoing creation and presentation of new opera and music-theater works. Currently, OPERA America awards more than \$2 million each year through its range of grant initiatives.