

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

Media Contact:

Patricia Kiernan Johnson

212.796.8628 (office) | 856.419.7083 (mobile)

PKJohnson@operaamerica.org

INAUGURAL PARTICIPANTS SELECTED FOR OPERA AMERICA'S MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN

**Backstage Brunch (Jan. 13) will benefit Mentorship Program and
feature New York Premiere Performance of *Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin***

January 4, 2018 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is pleased to announce that protégés and mentors have been selected for the organization's new **Mentorship Program for Women**.

OPERA America's Mentorship Program for Women is intended to provide a unique opportunity for promising female administrators (protégés) in the field to be paired with established leaders (mentors), to help the protégés identify advancement barriers and create a plan for professional growth.

The following three protégé/mentor pairings have been selected for this first year of OPERA America's Mentorship Program for Women:

Protégé: **Piper Gunnarson** | Executive Director, On Site Opera (New York, NY)

Mentor: **Annie Burrigde** | General Director and CEO, Austin Opera

Protégé: **Katie Preissner** | Director of Production, Opera Colorado

Mentor: **Clare Burovac** | Director of Artistic Operations, Portland Opera

Protégé: **Mitra Sadeghpour** | Director of Opera, University of Northern Iowa

Mentor: **Stacy Brightman** | Vice President, Education and Community Engagement, LA Opera

The Mentorship Program for Women was created to help further the goals of OPERA America's [Women's Opera Network \(WON\)](#), a task force designed to address and advance gender parity in the opera field. WON seeks to provide ongoing support for emerging female professionals in opera and to design programs that nurture and advance talented women.

"With its emphasis on building deep relationships between promising administrators and established leaders, OPERA America's Mentorship Program for Women has the capacity to create real change for the participants and by extension the field," stated Kathryn Smith, chair of the Women's Opera Network Steering Committee and general director of Madison Opera. "This process will not only provide protégés with practical guidance, but also the confidence to use their new tools long after this year is complete. I am so grateful to everyone who supported last season's Backstage Brunch and thus made the Mentorship Program possible. Investing in the future of female administrators is a true investment in the opera field itself."

The mentors and protégés will work together during 2018 through remote as well as in-person sessions, such as at Opera Conference 2018 in June in St. Louis and in site visits to the mentors' opera companies.

Mentors and protégés will also be in attendance at the second annual Backstage Brunch, a special morning to support the Mentorship Program and the Women's Opera Network, on Saturday, January 13, 2018, at OPERA America's National Opera Center in New York City. Co-chaired by Jeri Sedlar and Nancy Barton, the Backstage Brunch features the New York premiere of *Fierce Grace: Jeannette Rankin*, a song cycle by five women about the first female congresswoman, commissioned by OPERA America and performed by Heather Johnson, mezzo-soprano, and Mila Henry, pianist. The performance will be followed by an interview with two women who are expanding the field of American opera: Paola Prestini, composer and co-founder/artistic director of National Sawdust, and Beth Morrison, president and creative producer of Beth Morrison Projects. Tickets for the Backstage Brunch are sold out, but donations to support the Women's Opera Network and Mentorship Program are welcome. For more information about the Backstage Brunch, or to donate, visit operaamerica.org/BackstageBrunch.

Mezzo-soprano Heather Johnson appears courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

OPERA America's Mentorship Program for Women: 2018 Participants

Piper Gunnarson (protégé) | Executive Director, On Site Opera (New York, NY)



Piper Gunnarson is a seasoned nonprofit arts administrator with a background in theater administration for organizations spanning all manifestations of the art form, including classical plays, new work, musicals and children's theater. Before joining the team at On Site Opera, Gunnarson was the managing director for the Random Farms Kids' Theater, a prominent youth-focused theater institution in Westchester, New York, where she steered strategic plans to establish and strengthen the administrative functions of the company. Prior to that, Gunnarson served as general manager/producer for the Gallatin Arts Festival and director of development for the Abingdon Theatre Company, and she has consulted for numerous nonprofit theaters on fundraising and strategic planning. She also worked in the education/outreach department for the Geffen Playhouse, managed grants for Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum and apprenticed with the Lark Play Development Center on program management. Gunnarson holds a B.A. in theater from the University of California, San Diego, and an M.A. in leadership for the arts from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

Annie Burrige (mentor) | General Director and CEO, Austin Opera



Annie Burrige was named general director and CEO of Austin Opera in October 2016. Prior to joining Austin Opera, Burrige spent nine years at Opera Philadelphia, where she most recently served as managing director. Responsible for the implementation of the company's business plan and leadership of the development, marketing and communications departments, she led the company's rebranding campaign and a comprehensive consumer study resulting in the company's new programming model and the creation of the O17 festival. Burrige holds a graduate certificate in nonprofit administration from the University of Pennsylvania, as well as an M.M. in voice performance and an M.M. in opera studies from the New England Conservatory. She graduated as valedictorian from the College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State University, where she earned a B.M. in voice performance with a minor in business administration. Burrige is an alumna of Wharton's Women's Executive Leadership program, the Aspen Institute's Emerging Nonprofit Leaders program and OPERA America's Leadership Intensive program. She was named a 2017 Woman of Power by *Austin Way Magazine* and 2017 Mover and Shaper by *Musical America*.

Katie Preissner (protégé) | Director of Production, Opera Colorado



Katie Preissner is the director of production for Opera Colorado in Denver. Originally from the Washington, D.C. area, Preissner spent much of her youth involved in musical pursuits, including choir, violin, piano and musical theater. She studied vocal performance and communication studies at the Catholic University of America before turning her attention to stage management. After a stage management internship with Wolf Trap Opera, Preissner embarked on a career as a stage manager, working on productions with 15 opera companies across 12 states, from smaller organizations like Opera Santa Barbara and Greensboro Opera, to larger companies such as San Francisco Opera,

Minnesota Opera and Florida Grand Opera. In 2013, she joined the staff of Opera Colorado, where she oversees all aspects of the production department. Preissner lives in Arvada, Colorado, with her husband, two young sons and two basset hounds.

Clare Burovac (mentor) | Director of Artistic Operations, Portland Opera



In 2008, Clare Burovac was appointed director of artistic operations at Portland Opera, where she oversees casting, the Portland Opera Resident Artist Program and all community engagement programs. She also serves as the primary management liaison to both of Portland Opera's artist unions: AGMA and the AFM. Under her leadership, Portland Opera has produced two world-premiere recordings on the Orange Mountain Music label: *Orphée* and *Galileo Galilei*, both by Philip Glass. Prior to joining Portland Opera, Burovac spent 14 years at Seattle Opera, beginning in 1994 in the stage management department, and taking on a variety of increasingly demanding positions, including production stage manager and production coordinator of the company's world-renowned *Ring* cycle. Burovac, who has 30 years' experience producing and managing opera, received her bachelor's degree in violin performance from Bowling Green State University. As a violinist,

she performed with the Toledo Symphony, Ohio Light Opera Orchestra and other groups in the Cleveland area. A recipient of an OPERA America Fellowship in Opera Production in 1993, she has been a guest stage manager for San Francisco Opera, LA Opera and The Glimmerglass Festival, among many others. She is a frequent judge for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Mitra Sadeghpour (protégé) | Director of Opera, University of Northern Iowa



Opera educator Mitra Sadeghpour joined the University of Northern Iowa School of Music in 2014 after 12 years at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where she was honored as a Max Schoenfeld Distinguished Professor. At UNI, Sadeghpour is the director of UNI Opera and is responsible for productions, acting courses, opera pedagogy and community engagement. She also teaches applied voice and collaborates with the theater department on musical theater productions. Since joining the UNI faculty, she has directed full productions of *Hansel and Gretel*, *Riders to the Sea*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, *Signor Deluso*, *Susannah* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as well as two opera showcases and an opera gala. Sadeghpour is committed to opera education and engagement of students and the community, and she is currently collaborating with the School of Education to develop new ways of integrating opera into the K–12 curriculum. A soprano, Sadeghpour regularly performs in recital and concert. She served from 2012 to

2016 as the NATS National Vice President of Outreach, and she joined the board of directors of the National

Opera Association in 2017. A native of Iowa, she earned her B.A. from Luther College and M.M. and D.M. from Indiana University Bloomington.

Stacy Brightman (mentor) | Vice President, Education and Community Engagement, LA Opera



Stacy Brightman is responsible for the oversight and production of LA Opera's education and community programs, which serve 140,000 students and family members annually. She develops and supervises all public scholarship initiatives that engage students and community members in cultural practice and inquiry. She directs all community partnerships, which encompass in-school and community opera commissions, productions and tours, and creating and leading teacher seminars. From 2009 to 2010, she was the senior staff member responsible for producing Ring Festival LA, a 10-week festival across multiple sectors that included performances, exhibits and symposia presented by more than 120 festival partners. Brightman holds a bachelor's degree in theater and religious studies from Pomona College and a doctorate in theater research from the University of California, Davis. She has spent more than 20 years working in the performing arts in Los Angeles, holding senior management positions at Theatre/LA and Shakespeare Festival/LA, as well as faculty positions at USC's Thornton School of Music, Loyola Marymount University and the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising. She frequently serves as a grants and conference panelist for the City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles, City of Pasadena's Arts Commission and California Arts Council.

Learn more about the Women's Opera Network at operaamerica.org/WON.

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



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.