

# THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

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

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

**A TOTAL OF \$100,000 AWARDED FOR SIX OPERAS**

July 31, 2017 (New York) — **OPERA America**, the national service organization for opera and the nation's leading champion for American opera, is pleased to announce the latest recipients of **Commissioning Grants** from the **Opera Grants for Female Composers** program, made possible through the generosity of the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**.

A total of \$100,000 was awarded to the following companies in support of six projects:

- **Houston Grand Opera** for *Home of My Ancestors* by **Nkeiru Okoye**;
- **Minnesota Opera** (Minneapolis, MN) for *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by **Paola Prestini**;
- **Opera Parallèle** (San Francisco, CA) for *Today It Rains* by **Laura Kaminsky**;
- **Sarasota Opera** for *Rootabaga Country* by **Rachel J. Peters**;
- **Seattle Opera** for *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by **Sheila Silver**; and
- **Washington National Opera** (Washington, D.C.) for *Proving Up* by **Missy Mazzoli** in a consortium with **Opera Omaha** and **Miller Theater at Columbia University** (New York, NY).

These grants, which were awarded by an independent adjudication panel, provide funds that cover up to 50 percent of each composer's commissioning fee. (See below for descriptions of the funded works.)

Over the past 30 years, OPERA America has awarded \$13 million to its Professional Company Members in support of new American operas. Until the launch of Opera Grants for Female Composers in 2013, fewer than five percent of the organization's grants for repertoire development had been awarded to works by female composers.

Opera Grants for Female Composers seek to promote the development of works by women, as well as raise the visibility of women writing for the operatic medium and increase diversity across the field. The program consists of two granting components: Commissioning Grants of up to \$50,000 that are awarded to opera companies for commissions by female composers, and Discovery Grants of up to \$15,000 that are awarded directly to female composers to advance new works. Since its inception, the program has awarded a total of \$700,000 to opera companies and composers.

“Thanks to the continued support of the Toulmin Foundation, works by women are gaining traction on stages across North America,” stated Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. “This year, we received more applications for Commissioning Grants than ever before — a testament to our members’ investment in works by women — and among the funded works, three are by composers who previously received Discovery Grants. We are grateful to the Toulmin Foundation for enabling us to continue this important work, which has brought noteworthy composers to the forefront and has enlivened our operatic repertoire with new works.”

The adjudication panel for this round of Commissioning Grants consisted of **William Burden**, tenor; **Tyson Deaton**, conductor; **Michael Korie**, librettist; **Rita Shapiro**, former executive director of the National Symphony Orchestra; and **Du Yun**, composer.

The program’s next round of awards will be Discovery Grants, for which applications will open on October 5, 2017. Applications for the next round of Commissioning Grants will open on March 1, 2018. Visit [operaamerica.org/Grants](http://operaamerica.org/Grants) for more information.

## ABOUT THE RECIPIENTS

**HOUSTON GRAND OPERA (HGOco)** | [houstongrandopera.org](http://houstongrandopera.org)

*Home of My Ancestors* | Nkeiru Okoye, composer; Anita Gonzalez, librettist



It’s Juneteenth (the holiday commemorating the June 19, 1865 announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas). Olivia, a Chicago-based African American doctor, returns to her childhood home in Houston’s Third Ward for her Grandma Rose’s memorial service. Her ex-boyfriend Barron hopes to rekindle their relationship as they reminisce and pack her grandmother’s living room. When Olivia falls asleep and dreams of her ancestors, she awakens with a new understanding of home and heritage. *Home of My Ancestors* was proposed as part of HGO’s Song of Houston initiative that has been telling the stories of those who call Houston home since 2007.

Nkeiru Okoye was the recipient of a 2016 Discovery Grant for *We’ve Got Our Eye on You* (libretto by David Cote).

**MINNESOTA OPERA** (Minneapolis, MN) | [mnopera.org](http://mnopera.org)

*The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* | Paola Prestini, composer; Mark Campbell, librettist



*The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* is a family-friendly opera based on the young adult novel of the same name by Kate DiCamillo. It follows the adventures of an aloof toy rabbit named Edward whose comfortable life in a loving household abruptly ends when he is thrown into the sea from the Queen Mary. Edward ventures to many places: He is adopted by a kindly fisherman and his wife, rides the rails with a drifter and his dog, provides solace to an ailing young girl and performs on the streets of Memphis. He finally opens his heart and finds his way back home. This opera will feature an ensemble cast, advanced puppetry and state-of-the-art projection design.

**OPERA PARALLÈLE** (San Francisco, CA) | [operaparallele.org](http://operaparallele.org)

**Today It Rains** | Laura Kaminsky, composer; Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, librettists; Kimberly Reed, film; original concept by Mark Campbell



*Today It Rains* is a chamber opera inspired by a real event in the life of American artist Georgia O'Keeffe. On the rainy morning of April 29, 1929, O'Keeffe boarded a train in New York with fellow artist Rebecca Strand. Yearning for escape and creative fulfillment, O'Keeffe left behind a tumultuous marriage with photographer and influential curator Alfred Stieglitz. Three days later, she arrived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, soon to be inspired by the power of the area's landscape and ready for a new artistic experience.

Laura Kaminsky was the recipient of a 2014 Discovery Grant for *As One*, and her opera *Some Light Emerges* garnered a 2016 Commissioning Grant for Houston Grand Opera. (Both works feature librettos by Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed).

**SARASOTA OPERA** | [sarasotaopera.org](http://sarasotaopera.org)

**Rootabaga Country** | Rachel J. Peters, composer and librettist



*Rootabaga Country* is an adaptation of selections from Carl Sandburg's 1922 *Rootabaga Stories*, a collection of whimsical American fairy tales. The opera's main characters — Gimme the Ax and his two children, Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions — travel to Rootabaga Country, a land in the sky that the children's long-lost mother, Alelia, frequently visited when she was a child. The children's adventures in Rootabaga Country provide them with a connection to the mother they never knew and an understanding that each family is unique. *Rootabaga Country* is the sixth opera commissioned by the Sarasota Youth Opera program, which offers young people ages 8–18 the opportunity to experience opera through participation in after-school choruses, a professionally produced Youth Opera production on the mainstage and more.

**SEATTLE OPERA** | [seattleopera.org](http://seattleopera.org)

**A Thousand Splendid Suns** | Sheila Silver, composer; Stephen Kitsakos, librettist



Adapted from the novel by Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on two Afghan women from different backgrounds, Mariam and Laila, who are forced to share a physically and psychologically abusive husband, Rasheed. Mariam and Laila are initially suspicious of one another, but they eventually form a loving relationship and make incredible sacrifices for one another in order to survive the abuse. During an escape attempt, Mariam kills Rasheed and bears all responsibility. Standing before the firing squad, Mariam finally finds spiritual peace. With *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Seattle Opera seeks to illuminate new stories and perspectives on its main stage.

Sheila Silver previously received Discovery Grant in 2014 for *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

**WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA** (Washington, D.C.) | [kennedy-center.org/WNO](http://kennedy-center.org/WNO)

***Proving Up*** | Missy Mazzoli, composer; Royce Vavrek, librettist

Co-commissioned by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and Miller Theater at Columbia University

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Based on a coming-of-age short story by Karen Russell, *Proving Up* depicts a group of Nebraska families who struggle to claim their land under the Homestead Act of 1862. In order to meet one of the requirements of the Act, or “prove up,” their homes must each have at least one glass window. Unable to afford such a luxury, the families recruit young Miles Zegner to ferry a single window from one home to the next, each time the inspector visits. This co-commission with Opera Omaha and the Miller Theatre at Columbia University will be presented as part of Washington National Opera’s American Opera Initiative.

Missy Mazzoli’s opera *Breaking the Waves* garnered a Commissioning Grant in 2015 for Opera Philadelphia (libretto by Royce Vavrek).

For more information about OPERA America, its many programs and the National Opera Center, visit [operaamerica.org](http://operaamerica.org).



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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.

- 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](http://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.

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. Since its inception, OPERA America has made grants of \$13 million to assist companies with the expenses associated with the creation and development of new works.