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OPERA AMERICA ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF ITS NEW CIVIC PRACTICE GRANTS

Supported by the Opera Fund

A TOTAL OF \$180,000 AWARDED TO SEVEN COMPANIES

February 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 the recipients of its first-ever **Civic Practice Grants**, supported by OPERA America's Opera Fund endowment.

Civic Practice Grants help U.S. Professional Company Members of OPERA America and their partners develop new or deeper relationships within their communities — leading to mutual understanding, sustained collaboration, and shared projects and programming.

Grants of up to \$30,000 each, awarded on a biennial basis, support opera companies' efforts to learn more about civic priorities within their communities, to develop relationships with leading arts and non-arts organizations and their leaders, and to discover and deliver services that strengthen their communities, as well as the visibility and trust of the opera company within it.

A total of \$180,000 was awarded to seven companies: **Chicago Opera Theater, Houston Grand Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Minnesota Opera, Opera Omaha, San Francisco Opera** and **The Santa Fe Opera**. (See below for descriptions of the funded projects.)

"With Civic Practice Grants, we see a great opportunity to use the art form's unique qualities to address local civic priorities through authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships," stated OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca. "These new grants help opera companies find ways to enhance their real and perceived value as cultural citizens in communities throughout the country."

An independent panel of experts reviewed a total of 36 applications for Civic Practice Grants. The panelists were **Leah D. Barto**, nonprofit consultant and former director of learning and leadership, OPERA America; **Kayhan Irani**, Emmy Award-winning writer, performer and Theatre of the Oppressed trainer; **Melanie Powell-Robinson**, diversity consultant; **Logan Phillips**, poet, performer and arts consultant; and **Gus Schulenburg**, director of communications, Theatre Communications Group.

Information about the next round of Civic Practice Grants will be available in summer 2020 at operaamerica.org/Grants.

BACKGROUND

Civic Practice Grants build upon OPERA America's efforts in recent years to advance opera companies' connections with and service to their communities. In 2013 and 2014, OPERA America's Strategy Committee examined pressing issues challenging the field and identified an acute need to increase opera's public value through reciprocal relationships — with both arts and non-arts organizations — and to use opera's creative assets to address local priorities in an authentic manner. Although several pioneering companies had designed and implemented successful civic engagement initiatives, there were still significant gaps in knowledge, experience and research across the field.

In 2015, OPERA America made civic impact the theme of its annual conference in Washington, D.C., and with support from the **National Endowment for the Arts** in 2016, it created a **Civic Action Group**. This two-year initiative brought together staff from several operas companies, as well as experts in creative placemaking and community-based arts, to share approaches for serving communities through opera. To make the Civic Action Group's learnings available to the entire field, OPERA America launched a resource hub at operaamerica.org/CivicPractice, featuring interviews with members of the Civic Action Group and an "Introduction to Civic Practice" primer.

With continued support from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2018, OPERA America initiated a series of regional **Civic Practice Workshops**, bringing together opera company representatives to examine how they have integrated civic practice into their organizational operations and created and sustained community partnerships. The first workshop was hosted by Austin Opera, and additional workshops will be held throughout 2019 in Orlando, Memphis and Omaha.

For its annual conference this June in San Francisco, OPERA America has made civic practice one of three key themes to be explored, with sessions focusing on topics such as community advisory panels, ROI on civic practice, new generations of board members, and creating safe spaces for underrepresented communities. A plenary session on civic practice will be moderated by **Jane Chu**, former chair of the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT THE OPERA FUND

OPERA America's long tradition of supporting the creation and development of new works led to the formation of its Opera Fund endowment, which allows OPERA America to sustain a number of grant programs. Since the Opera Fund's inception, OPERA America has granted nearly \$13 million to assist companies with the expenses associated with creating and developing new works, as well as related audience-engagement initiatives. The Opera Fund has supported such works as *Akhmaten* (Philip Glass), *Bel Canto* (Jimmy López), *Cold Sassy Tree* (Carlisle Floyd), *Elmer Gantry* (Robert Aldridge), *JFK* (David T. Little), *Little Women* (Mark Adamo), *Moby-Dick* (Jake Heggie), *Nixon in China* (John Adams), *Silent Night* (Kevin Puts) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (André Previn).

The Opera Fund was launched by the National Endowment for the Arts, and it is funded by The Helen F. Whitaker Fund, Lee Day Gillespie, Lloyd and Mary Ann Gerlach, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation.

ABOUT THE RECIPIENTS

Civic Practice Grants were awarded to the following seven companies for the projects described below:

CHICAGO OPERA THEATER chicagooperatheater.org	
	Chicago Opera Theater is expanding existing partnerships with several refugee service organizations in order to provide admission and facilitate additional support for refugees to attend and enjoy the opera. Engaging refugees in this way and offering an access point to opera (and the arts) can help build a base for their future cultural lives in the city.

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA houstongrandopera.org	
	In partnership with Houston’s refugee service organizations, Houston Grand Opera’s “We Belong” is designed to serve the city’s growing refugee population. Teaching artists will help generations of refugee families communicate with each other and their new neighbors through storytelling workshops, family-friendly performances and the creation of original works of art. “We Belong” will share the stories of these new Americans and send the message that Houston welcomes them home.

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO lyricopera.org	
	Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Urban League have partnered to present EmpowerYouth!, a multidisciplinary afterschool program that will culminate in the performance of a fully staged, youth-centric opera. African-American high school students will meet weekly after school to work with professional artists to develop skills in areas such as scriptwriting, singing, acting and dance. Students will share personal stories, which will become the basis for the libretto of the new work.

MINNESOTA OPERA mnopea.org	
	Minnesota Opera will build its capacity to develop a civic practice with the local Hmong-American community. Through a conversation series co-created with project partners, the company will listen and learn what are the pressing needs of this community and what of its own expertise and resources might be a support.

OPERA OMAHA | operaomaha.org



Opera Omaha is undergoing a transformation from an opera company that primarily produces mainstage operas, to a significant cultural resource for the community. With a focus on civic practice and community-engaged work through its Holland Community Opera Fellowship, Opera Omaha will utilize its grant to build upon its civic-practice base to expand partnerships and serve more people in the community who have limited access to the arts.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA | sfopera.com



San Francisco Opera will expand its partnership with two leading social service organizations addressing homelessness in San Francisco — Compass Family Services and Community Housing Partnership — with assistance and facilitation by 5th House Ensemble, a Chicago-based music and civic practices organization. Support from the grant will help develop programming that integrates with both partners' existing programs and services and with SFO's mainstage programs.

THE SANTA FE OPERA | santafeopera.org



The Santa Fe Opera seeks to institute an annual event featuring the culture of the Native American tribes of New Mexico during future festival seasons. To do so, the Santa Fe Opera will build upon relationships developed through its 45-year-old Pueblo Opera Program and the work of three Northern New Mexico Pueblos (San Ildefonso, Santa Clara and Tesuque), who came together to create a sacred offering of a Corn Dance on the mainstage prior to and during performances of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic* in 2018.

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



@OPERAAmerica

About OPERA America

OPERA America (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. Since the inception of its granting programs, OPERA America has awarded more than \$18 million to the opera field to support the work of opera creators, companies and administrators. Currently, OPERA America awards more than \$2 million each year through its range of grant initiatives.