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OPERA AMERICA ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF REPERTOIRE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Seven Companies Receive a Total of \$220,000 To Develop New American Operas

December 11, 2019 (New York) — **OPERA America** has awarded \$220,000 in Repertoire Development Grants to **The American Opera Project** (New York, NY) in consortium with **Seagle Music Colony** (Schroon Lake, NY), **Beth Morrison Projects** (New York, NY), **Houston Grand Opera**, **Lyric Opera of Chicago**, **San Diego Opera** and **The Dallas Opera**. The grants provide technical and financial support to OPERA America Professional Company Members and their producing partners to enhance the quality, quantity and creativity of new American opera and music theater.

Recipients of the Repertoire Development Grants were selected from among 34 applications by a panel of industry leaders consisting of Jane Cho, director of administration, Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College; Jamil Jude, stage director and producer; Jimmy López Bellido, composer; Jim Lowe, conductor; and Caroline Worra, singer.

Repertoire Development Grants allow creators and producers to assess and refine works-in-progress. The grants may be used to offset creative fees and other costs associated with the development of a new opera or music-theater work, including lab productions, workshops, readings and revisions.

"Fostering the creation of new works is a cornerstone of OPERA America's mission, and we've seen a remarkable flowering of new American opera over recent decades," stated Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. "Since the year 2000, we've seen the premiere of over 700 North American operas. American works account for 18 percent of all productions in the 2019–2020 season."

The grants are made possible through OPERA America's Opera Fund, an endowment dedicated to supporting the creation and production of new work. Since its inception, the Opera Fund has supported the development of 79 new works, including *Akhnaten* by Philip Glass, which recently sold out a run at the Metropolitan Opera, demonstrating the vitality of modern American opera.

The Opera Fund has helped to support new classics like *Nixon in China* (John Adams/Alice Goodman), *Little Women* (Mark Adamo) and *Moby-Dick* (Jake Heggie/Gene Scheer). Three operas that premiered in 2019 and resonate powerfully with contemporary issues received Opera Fund grants: *Blue* (Jeanine Tesori/Tazewell Thompson), *The Central Park Five* (Anthony Davis/Richard Wesley) and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (Terence Blanchard/Kasi Lemmons). *Fellow Travelers* (Gregory Spears/Greg Pierce) and *As One* (Laura Kaminsky/Mark Campbell/Kimberly Reed) are two of the most performed American operas in recent seasons and explore the

issues of sexual orientation and gender identity; both were supported by OPERA America grants.

The Opera Fund was launched with support from 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, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Since the inception of its granting programs, OPERA America has awarded \$20 million to the opera field to support the work of opera creators, companies and administrators. The next round of Repertoire Development Grants will open in summer 2021. More information about OPERA America's grant programs is available at operaamerica.org/Grants.

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Repertoire Development Grants were awarded to works being developed by the following opera companies:

THE AMERICAN OPERA PROJECT and SEAGLE MUSIC COLONY

Legendary by composer Joseph N. Rubinstein and librettist Jason Kim



Famed drag performer Dee Legendary embarks on a passionate love affair with Officer John, whose fascination with Dee threatens to dismantle the House of Legendary and its drag family. *Legendary* is an opera about double lives and destructive desires, set in the glory days of New York City's underground drag culture in the 1980s. It is currently in development with The American Opera Project (AOP) and will have its fabulous premiere in 2022.

BETH MORRISON PROJECTS

Adoration by composer Mary Kouyoumdjian and librettist Royce Vavrek



Based on the Atom Egoyan film of the same name, *Adoration* follows the fictional and actual circumstances of how a child became an orphan, and how religious intolerance and hatred can lead to viral hysteria and justification for death. This gripping drama fosters a challenging discussion about the root causes of hate and how we can strive for a more just society.

In 2018, Beth Morrison Projects received a Commissioning Grant for this work, as part of OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program.

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

Intelligence by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer



Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Intelligence*, set during the Civil War in Richmond, Virginia, follows the historically documented story of two remarkable women, an enslaved woman and an abolitionist, whose courageous espionage efforts impacted the outcome of the war.

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

Three one-act operas (titles TBD) curated by Renée Fleming, by composers Caroline Shaw, John Luther Adams and Daniel Bernard Roumain, with librettos by Anna Deavere Smith, poet John Haines, and a librettist to be confirmed



Lyric's 2022–2023 mainstage season will feature three new one-act opera commissions, curated by Lyric Creative Consultant Renée Fleming, offered as a single opera production. Pieces by preeminent composers Caroline Shaw, John Luther Adams and Daniel Bernard Roumain, who will participate in the works' rehearsal and development process, offer audiences world premieres that explore relevant, contemporary themes related to our personal connectivity with each other, society and our world.

In 2019, Lyric Opera of Chicago received a Commissioning Grant for this work, as part of OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program.

SAN DIEGO OPERA

El último sueño de Frida y Diego (The Last Dream of Frida and Diego) by composer Gabriela Lena Frank and librettist Nilo Cruz



San Diego Opera will host an orchestral workshop of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego (The Last Dream of Frida and Diego)*. A co-commission between San Diego Opera, Fort Worth Opera and DePauw University School of Music, *El último sueño* imagines a reunion between the influential artists and Mexican cultural icons Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, against the backdrop of a Día de los Muertos celebration in Mexico City in 1957.

In 2017, San Diego Opera received a Commissioning Grant for this work, as part of OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program.

THE DALLAS OPERA

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly by composer Joby Talbot and librettist Gene Scheer



The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is an adaptation of Jean-Dominique Bauby's memoir of the same name. The story follows Bauby, the editor-in-chief of French *ELLE* magazine, after a stroke leaves him with "locked-in syndrome," in which he is physically paralyzed yet mentally aware. This is a story about the triumph of the human spirit and the ability to find hope and joy in the face of unimaginable tragedy.

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. The organization is committed to:

- Delivering professional development to artists, administrators and trustees.
- Increasing appreciation of opera through educational and audience development resources.
- Offering support and 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 160 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 50,000 subscribers and followers on digital 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.