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## **NINE COMPANIES AWARDED TOTAL OF \$100,000 IN COMMISSIONING GRANTS FROM OPERA AMERICA'S OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS**

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

July 16, 2020 (New York) — **OPERA America** has awarded the sixth cycle of **Commissioning Grants** from its **Opera Grants for Female Composers** program to nine Professional Company Members. The grants, totaling \$100,000, support the creation of new works by women who compose for the trained voice and instrumental ensemble, and bring the creative perspectives, experiences, and stories of women to stages nationwide. The grants are generously supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

Grants were awarded to:

- **Beth Morrison Projects** (Brooklyn, NY) for *In Our Daughter's Eyes* by Du Yun
- **Boston Lyric Opera** (Boston, MA) for *The Desert Inn* (working title) by Ellen Reid
- **Guerilla Opera** (Haverhill, MA) for *HER:alive/un/dead: a media opera* by Emily Koh
- **HERE** (New York, NY) for *A Practical Breviary: Terce* by Heather Christian
- **Houston Grand Opera** (Houston, TX) for *Turn and Burn, a Rodeo Opera* by Nell Shaw Cohen
- **Opera on Tap** (Brooklyn, NY) for *Joan of the City* by Kamala Sankaram
- **Opera Orlando** (Orlando, FL) for *The Secret River* by Stella C. Y. Sung
- **Opera Philadelphia** (Philadelphia, PA) for *The Listeners* by Missy Mazzoli
- **The American Opera Project** (Brooklyn, NY) for *Precipice* by Rima Fand

Descriptions of these projects follow.

The nine grantees were selected from an applicant pool of 24 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 **Andrea Clearfield**, composer; **Oswaldo Golijov**, composer; **Lillian Groag**, playwright, stage

director, and actress; **Timothy Long**, pianist and conductor; **Nick Stuccio**, president and producing director, FringeArts; **Jorell Williams**, baritone.

Over the past four decades, OPERA America has awarded over \$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.

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 **\$1.3 million** to opera companies and composers. The grants are made possible through the generous support of the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**.

"Commissioning Grants advance our goal of increasing gender parity in the field by incentivizing opera companies to program new works by female composers. Thanks to this program, we have seen a dramatic increase of works by female composers on stages across North America," 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."

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 2020 COMMISSIONING GRANT RECIPIENTS**

**Beth Morrison Projects** | [bethmorrisonprojects.org](http://bethmorrisonprojects.org)

*In Our Daughter's Eyes*

Music by Du Yun, libretto by Michael Joseph McQuilken



Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Du Yun is creating *In Our Daughter's Eyes*, with librettist/director Michael Joseph McQuilken, written for world-renowned baritone Nathan Gunn. This one-man opera depicts the arc of fatherhood — from the promise of life to acceptance of a devastating diagnosis — and the reconciliation of a challenging, reckless past. Yun's newest opera will premiere at New York's 2021 PROTOTYPE Festival and have its West Coast premiere at LA Opera.

**Boston Lyric Opera** | blo.org

*The Desert Inn* (working title)

Music by Ellen Reid, libretto by Christopher Oscar Peña



Ellen Reid, Christopher Oscar Peña, and James Darrah will create a digital miniseries that challenges notions of how opera is developed and experienced, connects BLO to its patrons in new ways, and expands its reach to new audiences. The artists will use a television production model guided by BLO's artistic team.

**Guerilla Opera** | guerillaopera.org

*HER:alive/un/dead: a media opera*

Music and libretto by Emily Koh



*HER:alive/un/dead* is a concert-length media opera about three generations of Asian women in a single family. Through birth and death cycles in the family, and encounters in a space called the in-between, these women expound on gender biases against women and discriminatory practices faced by people of Asian descent.

**HERE** | here.org

*A Practical Breviary: Terce*

Music and libretto by Heather Christian



*A Practical Breviary: Terce* weaves together classic monastic texts, the artist's own adaptations, and passages from *Revelations of Divine Love* — a medieval text written by one of the first female theologians, who describes a revelation of spirituality through a feminine view of Christ. This mass pays homage to God as the mothers that live within us. Its lyrical score is built for two all-women choirs, with a percussive underscore of traditionally female medieval home crafts being made.

**Houston Grand Opera** | houstongrandopera.org

*Turn and Burn, a Rodeo Opera*

Music by Nell Shaw Cohen, libretto by Megan Cohen



In *Turn and Burn*, small-town barrel racing champion Shayla Taylor and ambitious executive Jamie Hernandez aim for a big win at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. When an accident threatens Shayla's career-defining race, the women discover each other's strength in adversity. Set in a colorful world of bucking broncs and carnival rides, composer Nell Shaw Cohen and librettist Megan Cohen's original story is part of Houston Grand Opera's renowned Song of Houston program.

**Opera on Tap** | [operaontap.org](http://operaontap.org)

*Joan of the City*

Music by Kamala Sankaram, libretto by Kamala Sankaram and Kristin Marting, based on original texts from interviews with homeless individuals and found texts



Continuing to explore immersive tech in opera, Opera on Tap has commissioned collaborator Kamala Sankaram on *Joan of the City*, a site-specific mixed reality opera for five voices, string quintet, soundscape, and AR app. Audiences are led through city streets by one of five modern-day Joans of Arc, experiencing her visions and battling occupying forces of greed and corruption. Developed with Kristin Marting using texts by formerly homeless women, *Joan* explores homelessness, mental health, addiction, and abuse.

**Opera Orlando** | [operaorlando.org](http://operaorlando.org)

*The Secret River* (a new opera for all audiences based on the book by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings)

Music by Stella C.Y. Sung, libretto by Mark Campbell



*The Secret River* is a one-act opera for all audiences based on the Peabody Award-winning book by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, with music by fellow Floridian Stella Sung and libretto by Mark Campbell. The work depicts the story of a young African American girl who helps her family survive during the Great Depression by trusting her imagination. Scheduled to premiere in December 2021, *The Secret River* will feature musicians from the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra and performers from the Opera Orlando Youth Company.

**Opera Philadelphia** | [operaphila.org](http://operaphila.org)

*The Listeners*

Music by Missy Mazzoli, libretto by Royce Vavrek



Opera Philadelphia, with co-commissioner Norwegian National Opera, will hold two development workshops for *The Listeners*, a new opera from composer Missy Mazzoli and librettist Royce Vavrek. A mother notices a “hum” that only a select few “Listeners” can hear. A community group forms to solve the mystery of the hum and takes on cult-like proportions under a de-facto leader. The world premiere will be at NNO in March 2021, and the American premiere will take place during Opera Philadelphia’s Festival O21.

**The American Opera Project** | [aopopera.org](http://aopopera.org)

*Precipice*

Music by Rima Fand, libretto by Karen Fisher



*Precipice*, an object-theater chamber opera, sets an intimate story of one young woman's struggle to find her authentic voice in the epic landscape of America's Mountain West. By drawing parallels between environmental and emotional damage, *Precipice* looks at how we are silenced and exiled, and at how we find our way to connection, both with each other and in the natural world.



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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 1,700 individuals. OPERA America extends its reach to 80,000 annual visitors to its National Opera Center and over 50,000 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.