

SEATTLE OPERA.

COMPANY HISTORY

Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. The company is recognized internationally for the quality of its productions, supportive and nurturing environment for singers and artists, and is especially known for its productions of the Wagner operas, having created an “international attraction” in its past presentations of Wagner’s epic *Ring*, according to *The New York Times*.

While under the direction of its founding General Director Glynn Ross, Seattle Opera's noteworthy accomplishments included presenting the 1970 world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's opera *Of Mice and Men*, the 1971 first fully staged production of The Who's rock opera *Tommy*, and the 1972 world premiere of Pasatieri's *Black Widow*. Artists such as Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, Franco Corelli, and James McCracken regularly sang at Seattle Opera in its first decade. In 1975, Seattle Opera gave its first complete cycle of Wagner's *Ring* in one week, an event that had not happened in the United States since 1939 (and unique outside of New York). This *Ring* was produced twice each summer, once in German and once in Andrew Porter’s English singing translation, for nine consecutive seasons until 1984.

Under the leadership of General Director Speight Jenkins, who succeeded Ross in 1983, Seattle Opera created a host of landmark productions. Among them were the 1984 *Ballad of Baby Doe*, the 1988 *Orphée et Eurydice*, the 1989 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, the 1990 *Dialogues des Carmélites* and *War and Peace*, the 1993 *Pelléas et Mélisande* with sets by renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly, the 1998 *Tristan und Isolde*, and two new productions of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In 2010, the company presented the world premiere of its first operatic commission, *Amelia*, by Daron Aric Hagen.

Aidan Lang succeeded Speight Jenkins as Seattle Opera's General Director in 2014. Lang ushered in new programs that serve the community both on and off the mainstage, including several critically acclaimed chamber operas, performed in smaller venues. The series, part of the company's Programs and Partnership department, used the art of opera to tell stories that speak to today. *As One*, the first of these presentations, depicted a transgender woman's journey. "For those who think opera is an antique, elitist art form with no connection to our own time, here is a show to change your mind," wrote The Seattle Times, of *The Combat*, another chamber opera which told the story of Muslim/Christian love in a time of war. The company commissioned and produced the 2015 world premiere of *An American Dream*, an opera whose plot, crowd-sourced from the Seattle community, dealt with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

The company has expanded youth programs both in and out of schools, and now regularly visits more than 75 schools across the state, over half of which are Title I (schools with a large concentration of low income students). The 2017 touring production of *Cinderella en España* was designed for dual-language audiences, and traveled to schools with a significant Latino population all over the state of Washington.

In August of 2003, the company inaugurated its new state-of-the-art home, [Marion Oliver McCaw Hall](#), located on the Seattle Center campus, in the heart of the arts and cultural district of the city. At the end of 2018, the company plans to move its education, artistic, and administrative programs to a new civic home next to McCaw Hall. The new building will be an accessible community resource and will allow the company to expand its education programs.

Seattle Opera has a long history of training young singers. Today's programs involve several youth training programs—from youth opera choruses to advanced vocal ensemble and a vocal studio for those aiming to study voice in college. Past training programs included Seattle Opera's Young Artists Program, which ran from 1998 to 2013, and the International Wagner Competition, hosted in 2006, 2008, and 2014.

The company is committed to advancing the cultural life in the Pacific Northwest with performances of the highest caliber, and through innovative education and community programs that take opera far beyond the McCaw Hall stage. Each year, more than 80,000 people attend Seattle Opera performances and the company's programs serve more than 400,000 people of all ages (including school performances, radio broadcasts, and community engagement initiatives).