



# SEATTLE OPERA. THANKFUL

**MARCH 2019**

Donor Impact Report

# THANK YOU

After only a few months in our new home, we've made strides towards expanding our reach in the community—we're broadening and deepening our relationships with people throughout the city and state. It's through your generosity to Seattle Opera that we're able to start this chapter. Learn how your investment in Seattle Opera is paying off in this Impact Report.

[SEATTLEOPERA.ORG/GIVE](https://seattleopera.org/give)



## YOUNG ARTIST CONNECTIONS

As a young singer, it's very difficult to find performance opportunities. As a member of Seattle Opera's Teen Vocal Studio I not only get to sing in recitals and other local performances, I also get access to master classes with incredible singers and coaches, experiences that are incredibly valuable to me and hard for high school students to find."

—Johanna M.

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT: AKSHAY KULKARNI



Photo supplied by Akshay Kulkarni

Akshay Kulkarni has always had his head above the clouds. As a child in India, he gazed at the stars and dreamed of becoming an astronomer. So he earned a Ph.D. in astrophysics and studied the outer limits of deep space. When his passions turned closer to Earth he changed tools, switching from radio telescopes to computers, focusing his math and programming know-how to cyber space.

“I realized that I enjoyed the computer side of my work more than the science research,” he says about his career shift. Now he’s a software engineer at Microsoft developing tools that safeguard data stored on the cloud.

Since moving to the Pacific Northwest seven years ago, Akshay has embraced his new profession, and expanded his enjoyment of the outdoors by taking on skiing and snowboarding. “I’m not very good,” he says. “But I love learning.”

He says the same about his love of classical music. He started by listening to singers like Andrea Bocelli. “Maybe it was moving to a new place and trying something new that sparked my interest in classical music. I kept listening more and more. I even sang along with the recordings,” Akshay remembers.

From cloud computing to snowboarding to opera, Akshay’s passions are varied and deep.

In 2012, he discovered Seattle Opera. “I just kind of got hit by lightning one day and bought a ticket to *Turandot*,” he says. “I was really excited, because I knew the story and my favorite aria at the time was ‘Nessun dorma.’”

He wasn’t blown away at first. “I found it hard to stay focused throughout the performance. But I was committed to discovering more.” Akshay joined BRAVO! and became an annual donor. He attended pre-performance lectures and other Seattle Opera events, learning more about the art form and making friends.

Now, Akshay has gone beyond just attending performances and singing at home. He’s taking voice lessons. And his instructor is Christine Menschner, a former BRAVO! member and friend. “Lieblingsplätzchen” by Felix Mendelssohn and “Before the Blazing Fire” by Robert J. Powell are some of the pieces he’s learned so far. But he’s not ready to sing in public, at least not yet. “Maybe, someday, I’ll join a local choir or something,” he says.

In the meantime, he’ll continue practicing—both singing and snowboarding.

***It’s people like Akshay, who enjoy discovering new things—like opera—who will keep opera alive for future generations. We appreciate your passion!***

# STATE OF THE COMPANY:

A letter from the President of the Board of Directors

Dear Seattle Opera Family,

I am absolutely thrilled about our new season, and I hope you are too. Passion, fantasy, and intrigue will abound in performances of *Rigoletto*, *Cinderella*, and *La bohème*. *Eugene Onegin*, which was last presented by the company nearly two decades ago, and *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*, a compelling new drama about the jazz icon, makes the 2019/20 season our biggest in recent years. In addition, **we're also introducing the first weekday matinee since the opening of McCaw Hall.** We look forward to welcoming middle- and high-school students to this performance of *La bohème*.

## OPERA FOR ALL

And if that's not enough, **we're adding a chamber opera to next season in November 2019.** *The Falling and the Rising* is a new American opera we co-commissioned with the U.S. Army Field Band based on the true stories of active duty soldiers and veterans. It will be the first chamber production in the Opera Center's Tagney Jones Hall. **But more importantly, this opera demonstrates our commitment to telling stories that speak to the hearts and minds of Seattleites and Washingtonians.** This story is especially relevant because of our community connections to the armed services. *The Falling and the Rising* follows other works that illustrate our pledge to telling diverse stories. Among them are *O+E*, a retelling of the classic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice that featured women in the leading roles; and *An American Dream*, a story inspired by two real-life Puget Sound women: a German Jewish immigrant worried about family she left behind and a Japanese American forced to leave her home.

## THE RING

As you may be aware Seattle Opera has a long history of presenting Richard Wagner's *Ring*. In 1975, we were the first to stage a complete cycle in the United States in more than 35 years. That production and subsequent presentations helped build U.S. audiences for this important repertoire, and in recent years, several U.S. companies have presented partial or complete *Ring* cycles. This trend has vastly reduced Seattle Opera's distinct exclusivity with this work. Fittingly, many of you are curious to know when we'll present the *Ring* again. Building a new production is a significant financial commitment for any opera company and will require a substantial fundraising campaign to create and present an entire cycle set. **Given the costs and the planning timeline required, the decision to mount a new *Ring* will be between the new General Director (soon to be announced) and the Board of Directors and should not be expected before the company's 60th anniversary in 2023.**

## OPERA CENTER OPENING

Thank you to all who attended one of our Opera Center opening events in December. It was a festive and celebratory month! Our staff and artists are now settling into producing opera in this beautiful new facility designed for 21st century opera. **As Aidan has reported in past State of the Company emails, the opening of the Opera Center is an opportunity for the company to evaluate all of its facilities.** In keeping with the growing practice of co-creating new productions as we have recently done with *Porgy and Bess*, *Aida*, and *The Barber of Seville*,



**Seattle Opera continues to collaborate with other companies both nationally and globally.**

Co-productions include *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, *Carmen*, and *Eugene Onegin* (the latter of which is a joint effort by five U.S opera companies). These collaborations allow us to stage reimagined favorites in the grand style you enjoy, while simultaneously reducing our construction costs. Consequently, in recent years the fabrication and construction work for opera sets at our Renton Scene Shop facility has declined. Since the start of the 2016/17 season through our recently announced 2019/20 season, only two new mainstage opera sets (out of 20) were completed start to finish out of the Renton facility. In addition, much of the work we have been doing at the site recently, such as receiving incoming sets, constructing components of set pieces, and making repairs, is shifting to the Opera Center. As a result, the work in Renton will decline further.

In the past year, the Board of Directors has analyzed future uses of the Renton Scene Shop facility and has recommended the sale of the site.

We will begin this process by talking with parties who may be interested in purchasing the site and continuing its use as an independent scene shop. The sale of the property is a critical part of the company's overall financial well-being and will help secure some of the funding needed to stage future mainstage performances in the coming years. **I want to assure you that this will not impact what you see on stage or your overall opera experience.** In fact, most large U.S. opera companies do not operate sizable scene shops such as the facility we own in Renton. Companies in our industry are working more closely together to design and construct sets that we can share and enjoy with all of our audiences.

Your Seattle Opera Board of Directors is dedicated to supporting this company and stewarding your investment so that Seattle Opera continues to create opera we all love.

With gratitude,

Brian Marks  
President, Seattle Opera Board

# SEATTLE OPERA. AT WORK

Designed specifically to produce opera for all people, the Opera Center has amenities that we've dreamed about for decades. Your generosity is making a difference today and will make a difference tomorrow. Thank you!



Since opening, Tagney Jones Hall has hosted rehearsals, masterclasses, auditions, staff meetings and a town hall gathering. The 200-seat glass-box space also offers a street-level glimpse inside Seattle Opera.

For the first time, Seattle Opera has dedicated spaces to dye fabrics and build wigs. Wig Master Ashlee Naegle prepares a wig fitting for an upcoming production.



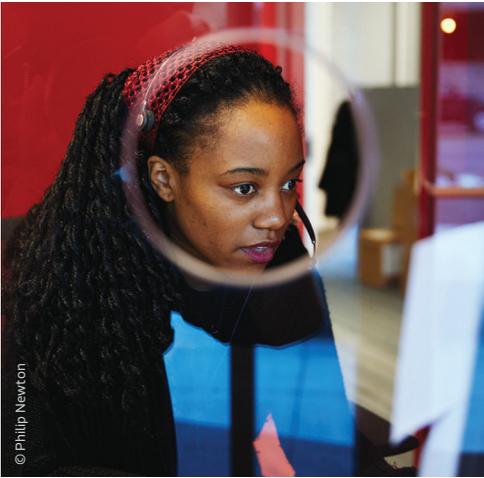


© Sean Althart



© Philip Newton

Sets, costumes, equipment, and props now move easily from our fabrication studios and storage areas to the McCaw Hall stage. Ron Erickson, Wardrobe Head, returns battle helmets following a recent production.



The new Mercer Street location offers easy access to the Robert and Loretta Comfort Ticket Office. Audience Services Representative Zeapoe Matalda is busy helping customers who stop by to get their tickets.

Assistant Carpenter Robert Millard assembles a stage element in the fabrication studio.



Company Librarian Emily Cabaniss manages Seattle Opera's Neukom Family Library. The library comprises more than 12,000 opera scores, instrument parts, books and CDs. In addition, the Jack and Connie Bloxom Archives contains historic photos, letters, and documents.



The Opera Center has three multi-purpose studios. The largest—the West Studio—is the same size as McCaw Hall’s mainstage, allowing casts and crews to practice on the actual sets that will be on stage.



Music instruments, swords, flags, dishes, chairs, and even a plastic horse are some of the more than 50,000 props that were moved from the South Lake Union facility to our new Seattle Center location.



# COMMUNITY IMPACT

## ANGELA MEADE INSPIRES FUTURE FANS!

While performing in Seattle Opera's *Il trovatore*, Soprano Angela Meade took time from her rehearsal and performing schedule to coach and speak with groups of talented teens.



© Philip Newton

## TEEN VOCAL STUDIO MASTERCLASS

Five singers from Seattle Opera's Teen Vocal Studio had the unique opportunity to receive one-on-one coaching from Ms. Meade. Held at the Opera Center's Tagney Jones Hall, the performers presented a variety of works, among them Leonard Bernstein's "I Hate Music," Handel's "Piangerò la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare*, and Faure's "Chanson d'Amour."

Breath support, sound control, and vocal phrasing were just a few of the singing fundamentals Ms. Meade demonstrated after each selection. Raina Swanson-Edison, who recorded the entire masterclass, was amazed by the experience. "It was an incredible opportunity to sing for someone who you admire so much, and the feedback was wonderful."

“ THIS IS SOMETHING THAT  
I’LL ALWAYS REMEMBER ”  
—LILY B.  
TEEN VOCAL STUDIO PARTICIPANT



© Gabrielle Nomura Gahner

### CHIEF SEALTH INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Music students at Chief Sealth International High School received a surprise visit from Ms. Meade shortly after the new year. Angela Meade, who sang the role of Leonora in *Il trovatore*, shared her journey from Centralia, WA, where she was a young

person uncertain of her career path, to a student at Centralia Community College, where she discovered that she had a knack for classical voice. During the visit, students performed a choral song for Ms. Meade, and had a chance to ask the soprano questions about her life and career.

*From camps and touring productions to intensive training opportunities, we are committed to creating unique opera experiences that connect artists to community members of all ages. Your investment in Seattle Opera’s Programs and Partnerships initiative make opportunities like these possible. Thank you.*

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# SEATTLE OPERA'S BIG OPERA PARTY

SUPPORT SEATTLE OPERA  
PROGRAMS BY ATTENDING  
THIS ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

FRIDAY MAY 10, 2019  
THE OPERA CENTER

