SEATTLE OPERA.

spring 2021 season program guide

TOSCA

premieres June 4 at 7 pm
available through June 27

Photo © Philip Newton
FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our streaming performance of Giacomo Puccini’s Tosca—our final production of this season. Without a doubt, this year has been the most unpredictable in our history in so many ways. Oddly, it seems fitting that we are ending the season with this title. As an upstart opera company, Tosca was Seattle Opera’s very first production, opening on May 7, 1964. That show was our first experience hiring artists, designing stage scenery, and selling tickets. Similarly, this season was full of firsts, from filming and editing video productions to hosting Zoom events to mastering online streaming.

As our colleagues did 57 years ago, we met each obstacle head-on. Moreover, despite the complexities and uncertainties of the season, our commitment to our community never wavered. As you read the program, also please take time to discover how we have connected with artists, students, and neighbors across the region despite the pandemic. The latest impact report starts on page 16.

It has been an honor to lead Seattle Opera this season. Our resilience and creativity has been outstanding and impressive. Regardless of the challenges, we have moved forward. However, our success came with many sacrifices and hardships; we laid off 30 administrative staff members, losing more than 230 years of collective Seattle Opera experience. I am saddened by the loss of our colleagues and friends, and miss them. Those of us who remain at the opera will support the future endeavors of our former coworkers, whether in Seattle or wherever their careers take them.

For this production, we were granted access to St. James Cathedral to film parts of Tosca. Many thanks to The Very Reverend Michael Ryan and the cathedral’s staff for their assistance.

When this opera premiered in Rome in 1900, the team of Puccini, Illica, and Giacosa followed their previous opera, La bohème, with a second hit show. It is indeed a magical theatrical masterpiece. And it is perfect from beginning to end. It is true musical theater. Under the baton of Kazem Abdullah, Tosca is the pitch-perfect ending to a season like no other in Seattle Opera’s history.

We will launch our 2021/22 season the same way—with that other timeless masterpiece from Puccini, Illica, and Giacosa. La bohème, in October. The season continues with Gluck’s Orpheus and Eurydice and Tesori and Thompson’s Blue, the 2020 winner for Best New Opera from the Music Critics Association of North America. The season wraps up with Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro. In addition to these outstanding operas, we are excited to present one of today’s most distinguished international operatic voices. Tenor Lawrence Brownlee—a Seattle Opera favorite—returns for a special one-night concert performance in April 2022. Brownlee is recognized globally for his interpretations of classic arias, familiar art songs, and uplifting spirituals.

Now is your opportunity to renew your subscription for this special 21/22 season. I invite you to subscribe today. Your staunch commitment to supporting our work ensures that we can overcome even the most unprecedented challenges. Everyone at Seattle Opera deeply appreciates your devotion and affection with the highest regards. Thank you!
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Seattle Board of Directors, Advisory Board and Honorary Lifetime Members have demonstrated superior leadership and assistance to Seattle Opera throughout the past season. Thank you for your sustained stewardship and guidance.

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The parishioners of St. James Cathedral, who enthusiastically embraced this production of *Tosca*, inspire Seattle Opera. The cathedral is an ideal setting for Giacomo Puccini’s masterpiece. Thank you for graciously opening your doors to us.
TOSCA
Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Premiere: Rome, Teatro Costanzi, 1900
Seattle Opera Premiere: 1964

Conductor ......................................................................................... Kazem Abdullah †
Stage Director .................................................................................. Dan Wallace Miller
Production Designer ........................................................................... Christopher Mumaw
Video Director/Editor ......................................................................... Ken Christensen
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Costume Designer ................................................................................ Liesl Alice Gatcheco
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Chorusmaster ........................................................................................ John Keene
English Subtitles .................................................................................. Jonathan Dean

CAST (In order of vocal appearance)
Angelotti ............................................................................................. Adam Lau
Sacristan............................................................................................... Matthew Burns †
Cavaradossi ......................................................................................... Dominick Chenes
Floria Tosca......................................................................................... Alexandra LoBianco
Baron Scarpia ....................................................................................... Michael Chioldi †
Spoletta ................................................................................................. Andrew Stenson
Sciarone ............................................................................................... José Rubio †
Shepherd Boy ..................................................................................... Ellaina Lewis
Jailer ...................................................................................................... Ryan Bede

Assistant Conductor ............................................................................. Philip A. Kelsey
Music Preparation ............................................................................... David McDade, Jay Rozendaal
Production Stage Managers ............................................................... Yasmine Kiss
Assistant Stage Manager ...................................................................... Cristine Reynolds, Catherine Costanzo

† Seattle Opera mainstage debut


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THE STORY

Act I
Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, finds refuge in his family’s chapel located in a nearby cathedral. A painter, Mario Cavaradossi, comes to work on his portrait of the Mary Magdalene, inspired by a woman he observed praying in church the day before—the Marchesa Attavanti, Angelotti’s sister. While the old Sacristan performs his duties, Cavaradossi compares the woman who inspired him to the beauty of his lover, the singer Flora Tosca.

When the Sacristan leaves, Angelotti emerges from hiding and asks for Cavaradossi’s help. They are interrupted by the entrance of Tosca, who has come to see her lover and is suspicious of the whispering she heard from outside the locked cathedral door. Cavaradossi hides Angelotti and quiets Tosca’s jealous fears. The two men hear a cannon shot—a signal that Angelotti’s escape has been discovered. They flee to hide Angelotti at Cavaradossi’s villa.

The Sacristan enters, excited to tease the liberal painter about the late-breaking news of Napoleon’s defeat, but finds the cathedral empty. Scarpia, chief of police, enters, having tracked Angelotti to the church. Tosca returns to find her lover gone. Scarpia sows seeds of jealousy in Tosca, suggesting that her lover is having an affair with the Marchesa. Tosca rushes out to find the painter. Scarpia sends his minions to follow her, hoping that Tosca will lead them to Cavaradossi and Angelotti. He anticipates punishing the rebels and enjoying Tosca for himself.

Act II
Scarpia, at dinner in his office, sends for Tosca. When his men bring in Cavaradossi, Scarpia interrogates the painter about Angelotti’s whereabouts. He gets nowhere, and sends him off to the torture chamber adjacent to his office. Tosca appears, and Scarpia makes her listen to Cavaradossi’s torture. She can’t bear it and tells Scarpia where Angelotti is hiding. Scarpia’s men rush off to capture Angelotti. A message arrives, correcting the earlier news: Napoleon has won, not lost, at Marengo.

Cavaradossi, weakened by torture, explodes with a defiant cry of victory. Scarpia has him dragged off to prison.

Tosca is left to bargain with Scarpia for her lover’s life. Scarpia suggests that he will exchange Cavaradossi’s life for a moment of Tosca’s love. Tosca fights him off and prays to God for help. Eventually, she yields to Scarpia’s demands in exchange for a mock execution and a safe conduct pass for her and Cavaradossi. As he is writing the pass, Tosca’s eyes light upon a dinner knife, and she plans an alternative solution to her dilemma.

Act III
Before dawn, in his cell, Cavaradossi remembers a night of bliss in his garden with Tosca. Tosca arrives at the prison with the safe conduct letter and tells Cavaradossi how she dealt with Scarpia. She explains to him that they must proceed with the farce of a fake execution, and she instructs him on how to fall and how to pretend to die. But when the soldiers come for the firing squad, Scarpia has the last laugh. Tosca takes her quarrel with Scarpia before a higher judge.

Photo © Philip Newton
FIGHT FOR IT
By Jonathan Dean

Giacomo Puccini was a deeply competitive man, always pitting himself against other composers.

 Asked why he wanted to write Manon Lescaut (1893) when Massenet’s Manon (1884), on the same story, was making the rounds, Puccini famously explained, “Massenet feels the story as a Frenchman, with the powder and minuets. I shall feel it as an Italian, with desperate passion.”

And what does Puccini do when he learns that Ruggero Leoncavallo, librettist/composer of Pagliacci, was interested in making an opera of La bohème? Leoncavallo even asked if Puccini wanted to collaborate with him, composing music to the La bohème libretto Leoncavallo had written. Puccini rejects the offer. And then, when Leoncavallo decides to compose La bohème himself, Puccini announces that he’s writing a La bohème opera of his own. Understandably, Leoncavallo was furious.

As for Tosca, there are at least three different stories explaining how composer Baron Alberto Franchetti yielded the subject to Puccini; some stress Franchetti’s magnanimity, others Puccini’s conniving and duplicity. Whether Puccini considered Franchetti a serious rival or not, Puccini knew he and Tosca were a match made in theatrical heaven. Here was a heroine as competitive and mercurial as the man who gave her musical life.

If Tosca is a tragedy—and by the way, not everybody agrees on that, despite the opera’s high death count—the heroine’s fatal flaw is jealousy. In fact, her drive to keep rival lovers at bay is made clear well before she enters the stage. Her initial offstage cries of “Mario! Mario!” are typically sung with fear and anger in the voice. Mario explains those cries to Angelotti: “È una donna gelosa” (“It’s a jealous woman”). She is so pathologically jealous, Tosca feels threatened because her artist boyfriend painted another woman? In my experience, this scene usually makes contemporary American audiences laugh. But in Puccini’s world, jealousy was no joke. Shortly after Tosca premiered, Puccini married his mistress of many years (whose husband had finally died). The new Mrs. Puccini promptly accused one of the servants of seducing Puccini, and hounded the poor girl until she died by suicide.

“That vixen! Let me at her,” Tosca sings, raging about the Marchesa Attavanti, Angelotti’s sister, who only appears onstage as Mario’s portrait of Mary Magdelene. Is Tosca jealous, or just competitive? If Mario is worth anything, he’s worth fighting for; and Tosco is nothing if not a fighter. She’ll even invent a rival, if necessary, because life makes more sense to her when she’s fighting with somebody.

This opera is structured as a series of duets, much to the chagrin of one of its librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa, who warned Puccini that that would become monotonous. It doesn’t, because each of these duets is actually an entertaining competition. The affectionate friction between the two lovers is at least as compelling as the fierce and deadly battle between Scarpia and Tosca—a competition which, her final line implies, is going to continue in the next world.

THE DUETS OF TOSCA

Act 1: Mario vs. Tosca
Much of Tosca’s first act is an amusing love duet for Mario Cavaradossi, who’s got a lot on his mind, and Floria Tosca, his unpredictable ladylove. She fumes, flirts, sins, begs forgiveness, and tries to plan a romantic evening; he’s mostly interested in preventing her from discovering Angelotti (who’s hiding about ten feet away).

Act 1: Tosca & Scarpia
That act concludes with an extended dialogue in which Baron Vittelio Scarpia, hot on Angelotti’s trail, fans the flames of Tosca’s jealousy, pulling on the loose thread that’s the key to unravelling the entire fabric. It’s not exactly a duet, in that they don’t sing at the same time. But the music characterizes every twist and turn of the scene: Scarpia’s menacing gallantry and oily hypocrisy, Tosca’s jealous fury and heartbreak. She finds Scarpia so contemptible, so unworthy of her attention, she dangerously underestimates him.

Act 2: Scarpia vs. Tosca
Most of this scene is a tense game of cat-and-mouse between heroine and villain. Its final few minutes are some of the most compelling in all theater.

The Trio
All three principals blend their voices only for about twenty seconds, at the heart of Act Two, following Mario’s great cry of “Vittoria! Vittoria!” This scene is the purest opera—it’s not in the play. (It’d be ludicrous in a play.) But those few seconds of wild emotional explosion form the keystone of Act Two.

Act 3: Tosca & Mario
After Cavaradossi’s beautiful aria of nostalgic despair, he and Tosca sing yet another duet, this one all about dawn and hope and the triumph of love. What makes it so poignant is, he knows this is a joke; there isn’t going to be any fake execution. But rather than weeping in fear, or crying for vengeance, wouldn’t you rather spend your last moments on earth singing an uplifting love duet?
ARTISTS

KAZEM ABDULLAH
Conductor (Indiana)
Seattle Opera Debut
Engagements: Conductor, Hansel and Gretel (Cape Town Opera); Castor and Patience (Cincinnati Opera); Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera); Malcolm X (Michigan Opera Theater); Musical Director and Guest Conductor (Richmond Symphony Orchestra)

RYAN BEDE
Jailer
Baritone (Tacoma, WA)
Seattle Opera Debut: Second Priest, The Magic Flute ('17)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Moraîles, Carmen ('19); Fiorello, The Barber of Seville ('17); Jim Crowley, An American Dream ('17)
Engagements: Belcore, The Elixir of Love (Tacoma Opera); Schaunard, La bohème (Lyric Opera Northwest); Masetto, Don Giovanni (Opera Idaho); Bass soloist, Mozart Requiem (Symphony Tacoma); Jim Crowley, An American Dream (Opera Idaho)

MATTHEW BURNS
Sacristan
Bass-Baritone (Richmond, VA)
Seattle Opera Debut
Engagements: Leporello, Don Giovanni (Michigan Opera Theater); Dansker, Billy Budd (Central City Opera); Bottom, A Midsummer Night's Dream (Virginia Opera); Bartolo, The Barber of Seville (Utah Opera)

DOMINICK CHENES
Cavaradossi
Tenor (Las Vegas, NV)
Seattle Opera Debut: Pinkerton, Madame Butterfly ('17)
Engagements: Alfredo, La traviata (New National Theatre Tokyo); Turiddu, Cavalleria rusticana (New Orleans Opera); Pinkerton, Madame Butterfly (Opéra Royal de Wallonie-Liège); Carlo, I masnadieri (Valencia Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia); Pollione, Norma (Musica Viva Hong Kong)

MICHAEL CHIOLDI
Baron Scarpia
Baritone (Pittsburg, PA)
Seattle Opera Debut
Engagements: Miller, Luisa Miller (Gran Teatre del Liceu); Giorgio Germont, La traviata (Utah Opera); Rigoletto, Rigoletto (Austin Opera); Tonio, Pagliacci (Palm Beach Opera)

KEN CHRISTENSEN
Video Director/Editor (Seattle, WA)
Seattle Opera Debut: Don Giovanni ('21)
Engagements: Productions for King County Parks, Woodland Park Zoo, Bloomberg Businessweek, City of Tacoma

JONATHAN DEAN
Dramaturg (Okemos, MI)
As Dramaturg, Jonathan Dean helps audience, staff, and artists access, understand, and interpret opera. Since 1997, he has created English captions for more than 75 operas. He helped build Seattle Opera’s online presence and directed in-house publications including the book 50 Years of Seattle Opera and a recording of Der Ring des Nibelungen. His hour-long English adaptations for children of Wagner’s Ring operas introduced young learners all over Washington to the passion and fascination of opera.

LIESL ALICE GATCHECO
Costume Designer (Seattle, WA)
Liesl Alice Gatcheco has worked as a fashion designer, wardrobe stylist, costume designer, makeup artist, and has been the Hair and Makeup Manager at Seattle Opera for more than 10 years. She also serves as the company's photography stylist. Gatcheco is a graduate of Fashion Institute of Technology and Loyola Marymount University with degrees in Fashion Design and Art History and currently owns Eyebrowbaby, a permanent makeup studio in Ballard.

JOHN KEENE
Chorusmaster (Lancaster, PA)
John Keene joined Seattle Opera for Fidelio in 2012 and serves as the company’s Head of Music Staff and Chorus Master. In addition to preparing the chorus and overseeing all musical activities, Keene regularly accompanies singers in concert and conducted Seattle Opera's As One. He previously served as Head of Music and Chorus Master at Florida Grand Opera and as concert accompanist has appeared in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, and many other great halls.

ADAM LAU
Shepherd Boy
Soprano (Washington, DC)
Seattle Opera Debut: Strawberry Woman, Porgy and Bess ('18)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Chorus member, Eugene Onegin ('20); Porgy and Bess ('18, '11)
Engagements: Recitalist, Intermezzo Recital Series (Tacoma Opera); Soprano soloist, Music from Home (Lakewold Gardens)

ELLAINA LEWIS
Shepherd Boy
Soprano (St. Petersburg, FL)
Seattle Opera Debut: Donna Anna, Don Giovanni ('14)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Santuzza, Cavalleria rusticana ('20); Aida, Aida ('18)
Engagements: Chrysothemis, Elektra (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Prima Donna/Ariadne, Ariadne auf Naxos (Austin Opera); Helmwige, Die Walküre (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Tosca, Tosca (Portland Opera); Aida, Aida (Opera Carolina); Leonore, Fidelio (North Carolina Opera)

ALEXANDRA LOBIANCO
Floria Tosca
Soprano (Dayton, OH)
Seattle Opera Debut: The Combat ('17)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Santuzza, Cavalleria rusticana ('20); Aida, Aida ('18)
Engagements: Chrysothemis, Elektra (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Prima Donna/Ariadne, Ariadne auf Naxos (Austin Opera); Helmwige, Die Walküre (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Tosca, Tosca (Portland Opera); Aida, Aida (Opera Carolina); Leonore, Fidelio (North Carolina Opera)

DAN WALLACE MILLER
Director (Seattle, WA)
Seattle Opera Debut: The Combat ('17)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Director, Three Singing Sisters ('19); Il trovatore ('19)
Engagements: Director, Carmen (Kentucky Opera); Associate Director, Silent Night (Washington National Opera); Director, Dido and Aeneas (Central City Opera); Director, Street Scene (Young Artists of America)

CHRISTOPHER MUMAW
Production Designer (Dayton, OH)
Seattle Opera Debut: Scenic Designer, The Combat ('17)
Previously at Seattle Opera: Associate Scenic Designer, Il trovatore ('19)
Engagements: Scenic Designer, Admissions (Seattle Public Theatre); Scenic Designer, Howl’s Moving Castle (Book-It Repertory Theatre); Scenic Designer, Sunset Baby (ArtsWest Playhouse and Gallery)
ORCHESTRA

Violin I
Noah Geller, Concertmaster
Jennifer Bai
Leonid Keylin
Mikhail Shmidt, Asst. Concertmaster
John Weller
Arthur Zadinsky

Violin II
Kathleen Boyer, Principal
Gennady Filimonov, Asst. Principal
Stephen Bryant
Linda Cole
Andrew Yeung

Viola
Susan Gulks Assadi, Principal
Olivia Chew, Asst. Principal
Wesley Dyring
Sayaka Kokubo

Cello
Meeka Quan DiLorenzo, Principal
Nathan Chan, Asst. Principal
Roberta Downey
Vivian Gu

Bass
Joseph Kaufman, Principal
Jonathan Burnstein
Will Langlie-Miletich, Asst. Principal

Flute/Piccolo
Jeffrey Barker, Principal

Oboe
Ben Hausmann, Principal

Clarinet
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Philip A. Kelsey

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Duane Schuler

Sound Designer
Robertson Witmer

Hair and MakeUp Designer
Ashlee Naegle

AShlee Naegle
Hair and MakeUp Designer (Las Vegas, NV)
Ashlee Naegle started at the Seattle Opera in 2007 as the Hair and Makeup Intern for Giulio Cesare. She returned several times from 2008 to 2017 as a Hair and Makeup Artist and Wig Assistant. During that time she worked as a Wig Assistant for Village Theatre, Seattle Repertory, and Act Theatre. In 2017 she made her Wig Master debut for Madame Butterfly. Since then she has been Seattle Opera’s resident Wig Master and Lead Hair and Makeup Artist. She returns next season as Wig Master and Assistant Costume Hair and Makeup Manager.

José Rubio
Soprano
Baritone (Vancouver, WA)

Seattle Opera Debut: Hannah (Before), as One (Alamo City Opera); Alfio, Cavalleria rusticana (Juneau Lyric Opera, Vashon Opera); Mills, The Diary of John Rabe (Jiangsu Grand Opera Theater); Walter Harper, Princess Sophia (Orpheus Project)

DUANE SCHULER
Lighting Designer (Elkhart Lake, WI)

Seattle Opera Debut: Norma (’94)

Previously at Seattle Opera: Flight (’21); The Magic Flute (’17); Count Ory (’16)

Engagements: Lighting Designer, Cinderella (Dutch National Opera); Of Love and Rage (American Ballet Theatre); Manon Lescaut (San Francisco Opera); The Marriage of Figaro (Santa Fe Opera); Cinderella (Los Angeles Opera); Tosca (Lyric Opera of Chicago)

Andrew Stenson
Soprano
Tenor (Rochester, MN)

Seattle Opera Debut: Arturo, Lucia di Lammermoor (’10)

Previously at Seattle Opera: Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni (’21); Nemorino, The Elixir of Love (’20); Tamin, The Magic Flute (’17); Tonio, The Daughter of the Regiment (’13)

Engagements: Demetrius, The Enchanted Island (Metropolitan Opera); Almaviva, The Barber of Seville (Opera Colorado); The Steersman, The Flying Dutchman (Dallas Opera); Opera in the Park (Madison Opera); Pluto, Orpheus in the Underworld (Madison Opera); Bill, Flight (Dallas Opera)

Robertson Witmer
Sound Designer (Seattle, WA)

Seattle Opera Debut: The Falling and The Rising (’19)

Previously at Seattle Opera: Sound Designer, Flight (’21); Don Giovanni (’21); Charlie Parker’s Yardbird (’20)

Engagements: Dracula (ACT Theatre); Greenwood (Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater); Lyric Suite (Spectrum Dance Theater); The Great Leap (Portland Chinatown Museum)

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Marc Sasse, Assistant Production Manager
Stephanie Sintef, Production Coordinator

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Ashlee Naegle, Wig Master
Cheryl del Rosario Lavarias, Costume, Hair and Makeup Assistant
Carrie Steficek, Wardrobe Head
Cristy Kazimour, Assistant Wardrobe Head
Scott Arend, Wardrobe Attendant
Denise Barry, Lead Cutter
Miriom Goodman-Miller, Crafts Supervisor
Kim Dancy, First Hand
Rose Hope, Stitcher
Ashlee Naegle, Lead Principal Hair and Makeup Artist
Calli Dey, Trisha Partida, Principal Makeup Artists

Stage Crew
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Jason Balter, Bruce Warshaw, Assistant Master Stage Carpenters
Justin Loyd, Head Flyman
Adam Lantz, Matthew Lint, Robert Millard, Tommy Price, Jason Wagoner,
Assistant Stage Carpenters
Jim Nash, Master Electrician
Martin Cunningham, Assistant Master Electrician
Molly Brindley, Chris Dimoff, Jim Gable, Assistant Electricians
Chris Reay, A/V Supervisor
Hannah Fenske, Properties Master
Sandy Burke, Assistant Properties Master

Stage crew work is performed by employees represented by I.A.T.S.E., Local 15, 488, 887
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Featuring music, laughter, special guests, and a little magic the Big Opera Show sparked generous donations and almost 1,000 views! The virtual fundraiser was hosted by Rebecca M. Davis and showcased performances by Karen Vuong, Jewel Tones, and Lawrence Brownlee, and the Seattle Symphony and Opera Players. Thank you for giving $606,542 to support the artists and opera you love.
SEATTLE OPERA.
Together we have continued our commitment to creating, entertaining, and educating.

STREAMING OPERAS
The Elixir of Love, Don Giovanni, Flight, Tosca

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With your support, Seattle Opera kept singers and artists working this season. This season, you were one of more than 2,500 households who collectively donated $7.1M funds that have fueled the employment of opera staff, musicians, vocalists, and stage crew professionals!

ARTIST EMPLOYMENT BY THE NUMBERS

BEING A PART OF SEATTLE OPERA’S STREAMING OF DON GIOVANNI, FOR ME, IS LESS ABOUT THE OPERA ITSELF AND MORE ABOUT THE FORTITUDE OF THIS COMPANY. SEATTLE OPERA HAS USED ITS RESOURCES TO FACE THE DIFFICULTY OF THIS TIME. THEY ARE CONTINUING WITH THEIR MISSION TO CREATE ART AND SERVE THE COMMUNITY OF BOTH OPERA LOVERS AND ARTISTS DURING THIS CRISIS.

–Kenneth Kellogg, Bass
Is there a doctor in the house?

By Glenn Hare

Fortunately, for Seattle Opera the answer is YES!

Dr. George Counts, a Seattle Opera volunteer, a new member of the Board of Directors, and a retired infectious disease physician, is an important member of our COVID-19 prevention team, serving as a medical advisor and resource. In recent months, he has offered guidance on safety protocols and policies as well as how to respond to a presumptive positive test and more.

“His expertise has provided the assurance we need to do the right thing,” says Seattle Opera Director of Human Resources Nancy Del Villar Vivé.

That is because Counts’ professional experience spans more than 40 years of teaching and mentoring, researching and publishing, and developing and implementing clinical field trials. In addition to his academic career at the University of Washington and the University of Miami, he has led the infection control team at Harborview Medical Center and directed the bacteriology lab at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. He also held key positions at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), where he worked with Dr. Anthony Fauci.

During his time at the NIAID, he established HIV/AIDS drug testing trials nationwide and headed the Office of Research on Minority and Women’s Health, a new division charged with increasing the participation of women and minorities in clinical trials.

After 15 years of retirement, Counts currently finds his skills in demand at Seattle Opera and at Horizon House, the retirement community where he lives. At Horizon House, he is part of a COVID prevention task force that meets daily. He also established a health advisory group comprised of three other physicians who offer advice to the task force and residents.

What’s more, Counts helps apply CDC and county guidelines to Seattle Opera, explains Jane Repensek, the opera’s Chief Operations Officer and Chief Financial Officer. “We consult with him on details surrounding our specific workplace circumstances. In one case, we had an urgent question that needed answers after business hours. Dr. Counts was contacted. He remained available throughout the evening, when public health officials and other resources were long offline for the day.”

Reared in segregated Oklahoma, Counts was one of the first African Americans to attend the University of Oklahoma, where he studied chemical engineering, then Russian history, before finding his passion for bacteriology. “I had a very hard time with the pre-engineering courses that first year,” he recalls. “Then I became fascinated with bacteria and medical science. Microbes can do all sorts of things—from fermenting beer to causing fatal diseases.”

It was also at this time when his interest in classical music deepened. A high school baritone horn player and member of the marching band, Counts was already involved in music. A college friend introduced him to opera and he saw his first live performance several years later. “It was after completing medical school,” he says. “I was a resident-in-training at Ohio State University at the time. I drove to Cleveland with two other interns to see a touring production of Madama Butterfly at Severance Hall.”

Counts’ enthusiasm for the art form goes beyond attending performances. He has been an eager Seattle Opera volunteer for nearly 30 years. He has served as an artist aide, driving visiting artists to and from the airport. He has helped in the costume shop and worked at the front desk. He has also assisted with lighting design, serving as a light walker for several productions. And he has appeared on stage as a supernumerary.

“I was in Otello and Orpheus,” he says. “That was thrilling!”

Now he brings a wealth of institutional knowledge and optimism to the Board of Directors. “During the pandemic, I’ve been impressed by the adroitness of Christina and the company. There are tremendous challenges ahead, but the way Seattle Opera has kept things going this season is impressive,” Counts says.

Seattle Opera is lucky to be able to turn to him.

“We all appreciate his willingness to share his expertise. His help has come at a time when we needed a steady guide in addition to resources we had available,” says Vivé.
YOUTH LEARNING ONLINE

Amid a global pandemic and social unrest, Brundibár—a youth opera closely associated with the Holocaust—could easily hit an unsettling note. But Sara Litchfield was surprised to discover that this 1938 Czech work is a beacon of hope—a work of art for right now.

Litchfield, Youth & Family Programs Manager for Seattle Opera, led participants ages 7–18 in an 11-week online program from January to April. The final product, a streaming Brundibár performance, was recently viewed by participants and families. In addition to working with Seattle Opera staff, the young artists had the chance to learn from individuals with the Holocaust Center for Humanity, which provided guest speakers, a virtual tour of its museum, and more to deepen participants’ understanding of the context and significance of the opera.

Because Brundibár is meant to be performed by youth, it offers an entry point for young children today to learn about the Holocaust. Written prior to World War II, the opera was performed more than 55 times in Terezín, where many Jewish artists were sent. This camp-ghetto supported a cultural community, as well as secret art-making, amidst Hitler’s atrocities.

“At the height of human hatred, people held on to their humanity. It’s a really incredible example of strength,” said Julia Thompson, Holocaust Center for Humanity’s Education Program Manager.

Youth participants with Seattle Opera had the chance to meet with two adult children of Terezín survivors over Zoom. One of the speakers shared how her father attended a Brundibár performance. Youth Opera Online participants met with Hana Kern to hear about her father’s experience as a child in Terezín.

Because the program included both elementary and high school students, Seattle Opera’s youth participants were divided up at times—with younger children receiving less specific information about the wartime genocide. But everyone was given space to process their emotions, including grief, anger, and sadness. They also had the chance to think deeply about their own interpretations of fairness and justice.

“I really liked how the Holocaust Center included kids in the discussion,” Litchfield said. “They would ask, ‘If you see people being treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity today, what can you do?’ The kids offered ideas like, ‘You can go to a protest. You can treat that person with love. You can tell an adult.’”

At one point during the program, a teaching artist had participants draw a picture based on their feelings surrounding the Holocaust. Then, the group had a conversation about hope, resilience, and connection. The youth surrounded their original images of despair and heartbreak with uplifting images of butterflies, for example.

“The beauty of youth opera is that there is less of a set idea on what it has to be,” Litchfield said. “Partnering with other cultural or historical groups such as the Holocaust Center provides such a meaningful experience for our young people. Both in moments of profound joy and in moments of deepest anguish, the arts allow us to process our feelings and experiences. Music and storytelling can bring us back to our humanity.”

Students from this spring’s Youth Opera Online attend a session with the Holocaust Center for Humanity to deepen their understanding of the context and significance of the youth opera Brundibár.

Youth Singers Learn From Holocaust Center for Humanity

By Gabrielle Nomura Gainor

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ARTISTS & ADMINISTRATORS OF TOMORROW

THIS SEASON WE LAUNCHED TWO PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE.

JANE LANG DAVIS CREATION LAB: NEW STORYTELLERS, NEW STORIES

Supported by the generosity of the Friday Foundation, the first cohort of Washington State composers and librettists is busy crafting new opera music and stories. Seventeen young artists from unique backgrounds are being coached by librettists Jerre Dye and Tazewell Thompson, actress Aishé Keita, and composers Zach Redler and Kamala Sankaram. Concert presentations of their works-in-progress will take place later this summer.

SEATTLE ARTS FELLOWSHIP: A LEADERSHIP INVESTMENT

Seattle Opera, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Symphony, Seattle University, and KING FM are investing in the training of professionals who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color. The Seattle Arts Fellowship is a new initiative that will prepare individuals for careers in arts administration. The paid fellowships will offer hands-on experience in Marketing, Community Engagement, and Artistic Planning beginning next season. They will receive mentoring, leadership, training, and networking opportunities.

THANK YOU!

BRAVO TO SEATTLE OPERA! TODAY, I WATCHED DON GIOVANNI AND IT WAS SO WELL DONE! GREAT PRODUCTION VALUES, CAMERA WORK, COSTUMES. MOST OF ALL THE SINGING—TRIOS, QUARTETS, AND ARIAS WERE SUBLIME. GREAT VOICES AND GREAT CASTING AS USUAL! THANK YOU FOR GIVING US OPERA AGAIN. TRULY WONDERFUL.

–Seattle Opera Subscriber

Creation Lab artists from left to right: Miraabai Kukathas, Steve Tran, Aaron Jin, Brian Dang, Christopher Reed, Drew Swatosh, Elise Winkler, Erika Meyer, Chess Albanese, James Washburn, Julia Koyfman, Kyleigh Archer, El Yu, Larisa June, Rico Lastrapes, Paul Stovall, Rheanna Atendido.
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

We have been adding Seattle Opera fans this year from across the globe. Since April 2020, viewers from across the US and **58 countries have watched thousands of hours** of Seattle Opera video content, including recitals, mainstage productions, and educational programming. Our KING FM broadcasts have reached **240,000 listeners**!