

# SEATTLE OPERA.

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## **Best New Opera Winner *Blue* Leads Slate of Exciting Events in February–March 2022**

**Eight opera-themed events offer a range of experiences for new audiences and seasoned operagoers alike**

### **Free and ticketed events**

SEATTLE – Seattle Opera continues its 2021/22 season with a dynamic lineup of opera events, including community conversations, artist recitals, laser shows, and a timely and award-winning opera.

Leading the slate is ***Blue*** (February 26–March 12, 2022 in McCaw Hall), named the 2020 winner of Best New Opera by the Music Critics Association of North America. This portrait of contemporary African American life is the creation of librettist **Tazewell Thompson** (winner of five NAACP Awards and two Emmy nominations) and composer **Jeanine Tesori** (Tony Award winner best known for *Fun Home*). A story of love, loss, church, and sisterhood, *Blue* depicts a young couple celebrating the joy of family with the birth of their son. Later they lean on close-knit community in the wake of their son's death at the hands of a police officer.

"I did not want to write about a family that was struggling," says the opera's librettist, **Tazewell Thompson**. "There has been enough of Black struggle and dysfunction on the screen and stage: absent fathers and desperate single mothers barely surviving. I wanted to show a positive household moving forward. In *Blue*, The Mother is educated and talented with equally talented and educated girlfriends. Surrounding The Father, a police officer, are his best friends, fellow police officers, men who are responsible, wonderful, aspiring fathers to their children."

That focus on community has been particularly poignant for the opera's singers. "Black love, community, and relationships are the real heart and soul of this opera," says bass **Kenneth Kellogg**, who reprises his role as The Father from the original 2019 Glimmerglass production. "It opens you up in ways that are, hopefully, life changing. When we first performed it, people came up to me afterwards in tears, thanking me. I believe *Blue* is a life-changing experience."

"*Blue* does not attempt to answer the longstanding complexities of race and violence that our nation has been grappling with for decades," says **Gordon Hawkins**, who plays The Reverend. "Rather, it is an attempt to place us together in the same room of humanity, face to face, so that we may address these issues head-on...together."

Composer **Jeanine Tesori** hopes that audiences will "travel in the shoes of the characters they see on stage—to vest so heavily in the character's victories and tragedies that they experience them as their own. That is what causes the audience to cry and laugh. The character's story is the audience's story."

Original cast members **Kenneth Kellogg** (The Father) and **Gordon Hawkins** (The Reverend) will be joined by three other singers from the 2019 world premiere at the Glimmerglass Festival: **Briana Hunter** (The Mother), **Ariana Wehr** (Girlfriend 1/Nurse/Congregant 1), and **Camron Gray** (Police Buddy 1/Congregant 1). Cast members new to the production include **Joshua Stewart** (The Son), **Ellaina Lewis** (Girlfriend 2/Congregant 2), **Cheryse McLeod Lewis** (Girlfriend 3/Congregant 3), **Korland Simmons** (Police Buddy 2/Congregant 2), and **Joshua Conyers** (Police Buddy 3).

Tickets are on sale now at [seattleopera.org/on-stage/blue-2022/](https://seattleopera.org/on-stage/blue-2022/), with prices ranging from \$35–\$249.

To guide conversations surrounding the opera, Seattle Opera will center the voices of its artists and Black American community partners. "In presenting an opera as timely as *Blue*, we wanted to create space for our broader community to reflect on how the opera's themes relate to their everyday lives," says **Alejandra Valarino Boyer**, Seattle Opera's Director of Programs and Partnerships. "Our community programming will give audiences the chance to hear directly from the artists about their experiences staging this work, as well as to join in the conversation about how the opera addresses the challenges and opportunities facing Seattle's Black communities." All community events are free and open to the public.

- **Opera Talk: Featuring the Cast of Blue**  
*February 10 at 7:00 PM, Tagney Jones Hall and livestreamed on YouTube*  
 This conversation, moderated by Classical KING FM's Artist- and Scholar-in-Residence, **Dr. Quinton Morris**, will feature the lead cast members of *Blue* in discussion about their artistic relationship with the opera.
- **Becoming Blue: A Talk with Tazewell Thompson**  
*February 25 at 7:00 PM, Tagney Jones Hall and livestreamed on YouTube*  
 To delve deeper into the creative journey behind *Blue*, Seattle Opera's Scholar in Residence, **Dr. Naomi André**, will sit down with *Blue* librettist **Tazewell Thompson**.
- **Community Conversations**  
*February 2022, Tagney Jones Hall and livestreamed on YouTube*  
 In partnership with **The Northwest African American Museum**, Seattle Opera presents a set of Community Conversations that will delve into topics illustrated in *Blue* and explore how they relate to Seattle's Black communities. Dates and times will be announced later this winter.

In addition to its programming centered on *Blue*, Seattle Opera will present four diverse and engaging musical programs that explore the full range of operatic expression:

- **Artist Recital: Key'mon W. Murrah**  
*February 4 at 7:30 PM, Tagney Jones Hall*  
 Fresh off his appearance as Orpheus in *Orpheus and Eurydice*, countertenor Key'mon W. Murrah kicks off Seattle Opera's celebration of Black History Month with a program of spirituals and African American art song that shows off his "rich tone and terrific presence" (Aspen Times). Works by Duke Ellington, Moses Hogan, Jacqueline Hairston, and Roland Hayes offer a message of hope that draws on Murrah's experiences growing up in Louisville, KY. Don't miss this opportunity to hear a renowned countertenor in the intimacy of Tagney Jones Hall!
- **Laser Opera**  
*February 11 at 8:00 PM, Pacific Science Center*  
 Seattle Opera partners with the **Pacific Science Center** to bring back an audience favorite: **Laser Opera**. Audiences will join BRAVO! club members for an unforgettable evening of operatic favorites accompanied by the brilliant lights and stunning imagery of the Pacific Science Center's Laser Dome. Tickets available for \$10.
- **Artist Recital: Takesha Meshé Kizart**  
*March 10 at 7:30 PM, Tagney Jones Hall*  
 Soprano **Takesha Meshé Kizart** and pianist **Artina McCain** present an opera recital on the theme of Black motherhood, entitled "**Maternità.**"

Hosted by **The Northwest African American Museum**, the recital will comprise a combination of traditional opera arias and world premieres of new works for accompanied soprano.

- **Artist Recital: Joshua Stewart**

*March 18 at 7:30 PM, Tagney Jones Hall*

Tenor Joshua Stewart—who appears as The Son in **Blue** and last performed at Seattle Opera as Charlie Parker in *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*—returns with an intimate jazz recital. His program includes works by Margaret Bonds, John W. Work, Florence Price, and George Walker, with additional selections from the Great American Songbook and New Orleans jazz traditions.

**All Seattle Opera** staff, artists, and those involved in productions are required to be vaccinated. **Audience members** are required to be vaccinated or present a negative COVID-19 test from the previous 72 hours; masks (N95 or KN95 masks strongly recommended) must be worn except when drinking in designated areas. For more information, see [seattleopera.org/safety](https://seattleopera.org/safety).

### **About Seattle Opera**

Established in 1963, Seattle Opera is committed to serving the people of the Pacific Northwest through music, storytelling, and programs for people of all ages. Each year, more than 80,000 people attend the company's performances, and more than 100,000 people are served through school performances, radio broadcasts, and more. The organization brings opera to life in a number of different ways, offering artistic excellence through national and international collaborations. Seattle Opera strives to create an environment where artists, staff, behind-the-scenes workers, and members of the community feel a strong connection to the company, and to the art of opera. Follow Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on 98.1 Classical KING FM.

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