



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 16, 2021

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Seattle Opera Continues Commitment to New Music and Today’s Stories

**Commission of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2022/23.
Co-production *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* for 2023/24.**

SEATTLE—Seattle Opera continues its commitment to bringing contemporary stories to Seattle audiences with two new operas for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons. In February 2023, Seattle Opera presents the world premiere of its latest commission—*A Thousand Splendid Suns* based on author Khaled Hosseini’s 2007 award-winning novel of the same name. The following season Seattle Opera, in partnership with Michigan Opera Theater, Opera Omaha, and The Metropolitan Opera, produces a brand-new staging of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* by Pulitzer Prize award-winning composer **Anthony Davis**.

Set against Afghanistan’s volatile history, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tells the breathtaking story of two Afghan women. American composer **Sheila Silver** and librettist **Stephen Kitsakos** adapted **Hosseini’s** *New York Times* best-seller for the opera stage. Internationally praised Afghan film producer and director **Roya Sadat** directs this world-premiere production. American conductor **Viswa Subbaraman** (*Flight*) leads the orchestra.

Silver’s compositions have been commissioned and performed by numerous chamber ensembles and orchestras, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic and soloists like Dawn Upshaw. **Kitsakos** is a noted librettist, stage director, scholar, and educator. Following the 2001 fall of the Taliban regime **Sadat** produced her first feature film, *Three Dots*, to critical acclaim, making her the first woman film director

in the post-Taliban era. Her latest film, *Letter to the President*, (2017) was Afghanistan's foreign-language Academy Awards submission.

Sadat explains her passion for the brand-new opera production in this way, "The locations in this novel are near to my heart; I grew up in Herat and live in the Kabul neighborhood where the protagonists, Mariam and Laila, lives intersect. Afghanistan's women have shown strength and resilience in the face of war and an ever-changing political environment. There has never been a more important time for this story to be taking the stage and shared with American audiences. I am thrilled to join Seattle Opera to bring Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to the opera stage."

For the 2023/24 season, Seattle Opera co-produces a new staging of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, composed by Anthony Davis. The piece premiered at New York City Opera in 1986 and is based on the writings of Christopher Davis. Thulani Davis's libretto marks important milestones in Malcolm X's life and his role as an African American leader and prominent figure in the Nation of Islam. In the early 1960s he articulated concepts of race pride and Black Nationalism that still resonate today.

Anthony Davis expounds, "It has been 35 years since the premiere of *X*, and I am eager to work with the extraordinary director Robert O'Hara on this new production that will feature a new generation of artists. Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik el Shabazz) is an even more relevant figure today. His vision is as prescient today as it was in 1986. He is an inspiration for Black Lives Matter and the movement for social justice. As a composer, I am thrilled to help create *X* as an opera for today that speaks to the future as well as the past."

Thulani Davis (Anthony Davis's cousin) is a playwright, librettist, journalist, novelist, poet, and screenwriter. In 1992, she received a Grammy Award for her album notes on *Aretha Franklin's Queen of Soul-The Atlantic Recordings*, becoming the first female recipient of this award.

Seattle Opera's creative team will include **Maestro Kazem Abdullah** (*Tosca*) and **stage director Robert O'Hara, an award-winning American playwright and director**. He is the recipient of the NAACP Best Director Award and the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play. He has written screenplays for Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee, and Jon Avnet.

General Director **Christina Scheppelmann**, referencing Seattle Opera's 2020 **Racial Equity and Social Impact Plan (RESI)**, emphasized that by adding these two titles to upcoming seasons, "We are continuing to demonstrate our commitment to presenting works that reflect and tell the stories of our lives today." Recent seasons have included several contemporary works produced by Seattle Opera

including *Flight* (2021), *Charlie Parker's Yardbird* (2020), *The Falling and the Rising* (2019) and *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (2019). In February 2022, the company will present **Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue***, the 2020 Winner for Best New Opera (Music Critics Association).

RESI is a Seattle Opera initiative that centers the eradication of institutional racism in this art form and community. The production of ***A Thousand Splendid Suns*** and ***X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*** are steps towards that goal. "By staging these offerings we're ensuring that diverse perspectives and stories are increasingly part of our mainstage works," adds Scheppelmann.

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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 the art of opera. Follow Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on 98.1 Classical KING FM.