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Seattle Opera appoints Professor Naomi André as Scholar in Residence

SEATTLE—Musicologist, writer, and opera-lover **Naomi André** has been appointed **Seattle Opera's inaugural Scholar in Residence**. She is the author of *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, which *The New York Times* describes as "A necessary exploration of how race has shaped the opera landscape in the United States and South Africa." Additionally, André works as a professor at the University of Michigan, teaching Women's Studies, Afroamerican/African Studies, and more.

"Professor André's research and commentary places this art form in the middle of some of today's most challenging social issues, like racial equity and gender representation," said **Alejandra Valarino Boyer**, Seattle Opera Director of Programs and Partnerships. "We are honored to formalize our relationship with her. Naomi's deep knowledge of the art form and social perspective will help us broaden our storytelling and create an inclusive space for diverse communities at the opera."

In her role, André will advise staff and leadership on matters of race and gender in opera; consult in artistic planning as it relates to representation of race and gender; and participate in company panel discussions, podcast recordings with dramaturg **Jonathan Dean**, and contribute essays to opera programs.

A recent example of André's work includes [an article for CNN](#) on what the opera world has to glean from Beyoncé's *Homecoming* performance at Coachella and subsequent Netflix film (both the pop diva and opera "rely on spectacle, pageantry, and exploding boundaries.") André questioned how opera—an art form developed at the end of the 16th century—can remain relevant today. Helping People of Color feel a "homecoming" in the opera house, is just one idea, she suggested.

Last season, André was a speaker on the forum "Breaking Glass: Hyperlinking Opera and Issues," co-presented by Seattle Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival. That conversation explored racial representation, casting, and what it means to support storytellers of color. She also served as a moderator of Seattle Opera's April 2019 event "Decolonizing Allure: Women Artists of Color in Conversation," which unpacked themes of patriarchy and white-dominated culture in Western art and entertainment. "Decolonizing Allure" was presented in tandem with the company's mainstage performance of *Carmen*.

"Opera has always dealt with human emotion and experience: love, honor, jealousy, revenge, to name just a few," André said. "A key to the genre's success is to help current audiences see that opera is relevant to our lives today. Putting care into productions and educational materials that reflect the broader issues goes a long way to help audiences today."

As a speaker, writer, and thought leader, André has been in high demand, participating in conversations at Long Beach Opera and Cincinnati Opera, most recently. A classically trained singer, she earned a bachelor's in music from Barnard College and a master's and PhD in musicology from Harvard University.

"In my work, I have seen how opera speaks to a wide range of people," André said. "Seattle Opera is a leader in opening up this art form to a new generation. It has done this by having a diverse group of people making important decisions behind the scenes, on the Board, and in the administrative staff. I am impressed with the

support that both seasoned and newer audiences give this company in its conversations with the community. This is a happening place with a dynamic vibe; Yes—I'm very excited to join this team!"

About Seattle Opera

Established in 1963, Seattle Opera is committed to serving the people of the Pacific Northwest with performances of the highest caliber and through innovative educational and engagement programs for all. Each year, more than 95,000 people attend Seattle Opera performances, and more than 400,000 people of all ages are served through school performances, radio broadcasts, and more. By drawing our communities together, and by offering opera's unique fusion of music and drama, we create life-enhancing experiences that speak deeply to people's hearts and minds. Connect with Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on 98.1 Classical KING FM.

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