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PRESS PHOTOS:

<https://seattleopera.smugmug.com/1819/Porgy/>

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Seattle Opera explores the Black American experience during *Porgy and Bess*

**Aug. 11-25, 2018
McCaw Hall**

SEATTLE—When you think of the song, “Summertime,” perhaps you hear the elegant Ella Fitzgerald—or the earthy Janis Joplin—singing in your mind. But, while many great covers exist, there’s nothing like experiencing the song where “fish are jumpin’ and the cotton is high,” as Gershwin first wrote it: for the powerful voice of an opera singer. This August, come experience the origin of songs such as “Summertime,” and “I Loves You, Porgy” when Seattle Opera presents [*The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*](#).

“Not only is the music in *Porgy and Bess* iconic, but this opera offers a rare and beautiful moment to see so many People of Color onstage,” said [Christiana ObeySumner](#), Social Impact Consultant for Seattle Opera. “As audience members, *Porgy* is an opportunity for us to celebrate the Black American experience, and to wrestle with aspects of America’s complicated racial history.”

Through lobby displays, program articles, and blog pieces, Seattle Opera will center Black narratives as it provides historical and cultural context for *Porgy*. Prior to the August performances, all are encouraged to attend [Breaking Glass: Hyperlinking](#)

[Opera & Issues](#), a free public forum on July 28 that will tackle issues of diversity, equity, and representation in a conversation led by arts leaders of color.

Set in 1920s South Carolina, *Porgy* depicts life, death, love, and hope in an African American community. The all-Black cast includes both international opera stars such as Plácido Domingo protégée and former beauty queen **Angel Blue** (Bess), and a chorus made up of artists from throughout the Puget Sound such as **Ty Willis**, who most recently performed in 5th Avenue Theatre's *Kiss Me Kate*, and his daughter, **Bethanie Willis**, who recently starred in "Crowns" at Taproot Theatre. Also joining the *Porgy* chorus is **Michael A. Wansley** ("Wanz") who sang the soulful hook on the Grammy-Award winning song "Thrift Shop," by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis.

The first production of the company's 2018/19 Season, *Porgy* offers an opportunity to create programming based on feedback garnered at "[Cultured Conversations: Black Inclusion at the Opera](#)," which the company hosted in March 2018. For example, the company plans to offer a free event for the Black community to attend a rehearsal and meet with the artists.

"Our ultimate goal is to continue reducing historic barriers and biases in this art form that have impacted Black people and other People of Color," said **General Director Aidan Lang**.

In the title roles of *Porgy and Bess*, **Alfred Walker** and **Angel Blue** return to McCaw Hall, alternating with **Kevin Short** and **Elizabeth Llewellyn**, who makes her company debut. Returning artists from the company's 2011 *Porgy* include **Mary Elizabeth Williams** as Serena and **Jermaine Smith** as Sportin' Life. The opera also includes performances by **Lester Lynch** (Crown), **Brandie Sutton** (Clara), **Derrick Parker** (Jake), **Judith Skinner** (Maria), **Bernard Holcomb** (Mingo), **Edward Graves** (Robbins), **Martin Bakari** (Peter the Honeyman), **Nicholas Davis** (Jim), **Damien Geter** (Undertaker), **Ernest C. Jackson Jr.** (Nelson), and **Cheryse McLeod Lewis** (Annie) in their company debuts; as well as **Ashley Faatoalia**

(Crab Man), **Ibidunni Ojikutu** (Strawberry Woman), and **Marlette Buchanan** (Lily).

The creative team includes **Paul Tazewell**, who took home a Tony Award for his costume design in *Hamilton*, as well as stage director **Francesca Zambello**, whose production has been hailed as “proof that Gershwin’s opus remains America’s most important 20th-century opera” (*Bachtrack.com*). Maestro **John DeMain**, whose *Porgy and Bess* recording won a Grammy, conducts the opera for the fourth time at Seattle Opera.

Porgy and Bess opens Saturday, Aug. 11 and runs through Saturday, Aug. 25. Tickets are available online at seattleopera.org, by calling 206-389-7676, or in-person at the box office located at 1020 John Street (two blocks west of Fairview). Box office hours are Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Groups save at least 20 percent: 206.676.5588 or groups@seattleopera.org.

Family Day

Sunday, August 19 at 2 p.m.

McCaw Hall

Sunday, August 19, 2018 at 2:00 PM is Family Day at [Porgy And Bess!](#) For this specially designated performance, students age 18 and under pay only \$20 for almost any seat.* Family Days also feature special student-oriented activities during intermission. Wondering if this opera is appropriate for your children? [READ OUR CONTENT ADVISORIES](#)

The Gershwins®’ Porgy And BessSM

By George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin
In English with English captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall

Performances: August 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, and 25, 2018

Approximate Running Time: 3 hours including one intermission

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Premiere: Alvin Theater, New York, NY; October 10, 1935

Cast:

Porgy

Alfred Walker (Aug. 11, 15, 17, 19, & 25)

Kevin Short (Aug. 12, 18, 22, & 24)

Bess	Angel Blue (Aug. 11, 15, 17, 19, & 25) Elizabeth Llewellyn* (Aug. 12, 18, 22, & 24)
Crown	Lester Lynch
Serena	Mary Elizabeth Williams
Sportin' Life	Jermaine Smith
Clara	Brandie Sutton*
Jake	Derrick Parker*
Maria	Judith Skinner*
Mingo	Bernard Holcomb*
Robbins	Edward Graves*
Peter the Honeyman	Martin Bakari*
Jim	Nicholas Davis*
Undertaker	Damien Geter*
Annie	Cheryse McLeod Lewis
Nelson	Ernest C. Jackson Jr.*
Crab Man	Ashley Faatoalia
Strawberry Woman	Ibidunni Ojikutu
Lily	Marlette Buchanan

Conductor	John DeMain
Original Production by	Francesca Zambello
Stage Director	Garnett Bruce*
Set Designer	Peter J. Davison*
Costume Designer	Paul Tazewell*
Lighting Design	Mark McCullough
Choreographer	Eric Sean Fogel*

* Company Debut

Scenery and props for this production of *Porgy and Bess* are co-produced by Glimmerglass Festival and Seattle Opera.

Costumes by Washington National Opera

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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 through Seattle Opera's partnership with Classical KING FM 98.1.

