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DOWNLOADABLE PRESS IMAGES: <https://seattleopera.smugmug.com/Events/BlackInclusion>
[Password: "press"]

‘Inclusion at the Opera’ forum seeks insights, experiences from Black community

Queer, Afro-Latinx activist ChrisTiana ObeySumner leads company’s racial equity work

**Friday, March 30
Seattle Opera Studios
200 Terry Avenue**

SEATTLE — Seattle’s Black community is invited to “[Cultured Conversations: Black Inclusion at the Opera](#),” an open forum led by facilitator [ChrisTiana ObeySumner](#). ObeySumner, social impact consultant for Seattle Opera, is leading conversations on Black representation and inclusion this spring and summer during the company’s presentations of [Aida](#) and [Porgy and Bess](#). The March forum is free and open to individuals who identify as Black* with an interest in theater, classical music, the performing arts, and especially—opera. Participants will be able to speak freely and share ideas in this intentional space for people of color. Topics will include Black representation onstage and behind the scenes, various ways to get involved with the art form, and potential steps toward a future for opera that centers people of color.

“Jim Crow laws meant that Black performers and audience members would either be excluded altogether, or would often not be presented with the same opportunities,” ObeySumner said. “There’s a history of Black people feeling and being unwanted in these sorts of spaces. What I’ve been brought in to do—and what I’m honored to do—is to help identify and break down some of those barriers.”

Seattle Opera began its racial-equity work several years ago, but reached a new level of transparency and dialogue with the Asian Pacific Islander community last summer during *Madame Butterfly*.

“Opera deserves a beautiful future where everyone is represented,” said **Seattle Opera General Director Aidan Lang**. “Through continued work with communities of color and activist-leaders such as Christiana ObeySumner, we will continue to make strides toward this vision.”

ObeySumner (who uses they/theirs pronouns) has a BS of Psychology, a Masters of Nonprofit Leadership, and is currently pursuing a Masters of Public Administration at Seattle University. They serve as the General Co-Chair, and Housing Committee Chair, of the Seattle Commission for People with disAbilities. They also founded the Eleanor Elizabeth Institute for Black Empowerment.

“I would love for McCaw Hall to become a place where an 8-year-old girl of color can think, ‘I can be up there. That’s something I can do.’”

To read an interview with Christiana ObeySumner and learn more about their work at Seattle Opera, go to seattleoperablog.com.

Cultured Conversations: Black Inclusion at the Opera

Seattle Opera Studios
200 Terry Avenue, Seattle
7:00 p.m., Friday, March 30

Register at seattleopera.org/blackinclusion

*This forum will seek to intentionally center the narratives of folks who identify as Black-American, Afro-Latinx, or otherwise a member of the African Diaspora. Seattle Opera will have future opportunities for non-Black allies.

Please note: the forum will be recorded, and responses will be used as part of a report written by Christiana ObeySumner to be shared with Seattle Opera. Each participant will be asked to sign a form of consent and release. The contents of these forms will be explained in explicit detail at the start of the forum. Contact for additional responses and to provide input if unable to attend:

christiana.obeysumner@seattleopera.org.

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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 the [Seattle Opera channel on Classical King FM. 98.1.](#)