

THE NEXT

50

MICHIGAN
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ACT I
OUT AND ABOUT

THE ARETHA FRANKLIN
AMPHITHEATRE

SAT / SEP 11, 2021 / 7 PM
SUN / SEP 12, 2021 / 7 PM

BLUE



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THE IMPORTANT STORY OF MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE'S BLUE

FOR YOUR SAFETY AND COMFORT

PLEASE BE ADVISED:

For the safety of all, facial coverings are required at performances, regardless of vaccination status.

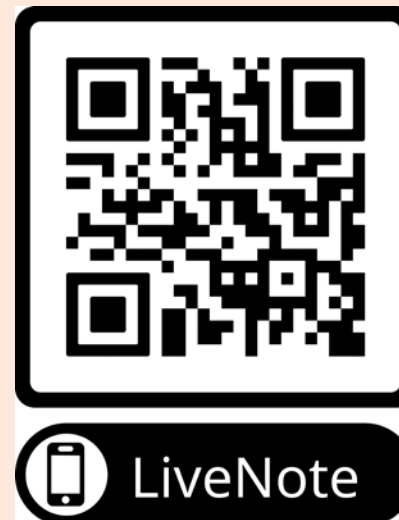
The safety of guests, artists, and staff is Michigan Opera Theatre's greatest priority for performances and workplace conditions. *Blue* is proudly presented at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater, an open-air facility that is conducive to airflow and ventilation, and tickets are sold in blocks to allow for distancing between groups.

FOLLOW THE OPERA ON YOUR PHONE

Follow along with the action right on your phone!

During the performance of *Blue* at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre this Saturday and Sunday, patrons will have the opportunity to follow along with the opera via a new technology called LiveNote, which provides an in depth look at the award-winning opera. Every audience member, no matter where they are seated, can follow along in real-time as the opera unfolds.

LiveNote is an innovative new technology that allows performing arts venues to stream all kinds of content including translations, fun facts, picture and audio content, and more, of any performance straight to your mobile device! LiveNote is very intuitive and easy to use from any device but please note, there is no WiFi at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre so make sure to bring any electronic device that uses cellular data (phones, iPads, etc.).



A MESSAGE FROM WAYNE S. BROWN

MOT PRESIDENT AND CEO

Welcome to the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) fall opening of our 21/22 season, featuring the opera *Blue* by composer Jeanine Tesori and librettist Tazewell Thompson in a new production by Kaneza Schaal. Following our highly successful concert opera offering of *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Meadow Brook Amphitheatre in June, these two performances of *Blue* mark the first in-person opera presentation in 22 months.

Michigan Opera Theatre's opening night of *Blue* coincides with the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. We pause to honor the individuals, many of whom were first responders, who lost their lives on that tragic morning.

Through a partnership that has been created between MOT and The Aretha under the leadership of Shahida Mausi and her team, these performances are possible in a beautiful open-air amphitheatre on the shores of the Detroit River. Residents of Greater Detroit are fortunate to benefit from this unique waterfront setting where the heart of the city resonates!

Under the Artistic Leadership of Yuval Sharon, MOT has launched a new chapter for our organization. Site-specific work marks a point of distinction for our company, and you can expect MOT to produce opera performances and present dance and education events both within the Detroit Opera House and in settings throughout the region.

I wish to thank MOT Board Members Dr. Shauna Ryder Diggs, Denise Lewis, and Ellen Hill Zeringue for their leadership with this project - along with City of Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan and Wayne County Executive Warren Evans for their leadership and advocacy.

As MOT continues to navigate its way through unprecedented challenges, I offer special thanks to Cadillac as our Presenting sponsor and the generous corporate, foundation and individual sponsors who have made these performances possible as noted in your program book.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne S. Brown'.

WAYNE

MOT President and CEO

ON BUILDING BRIDGES AND BLUE

“Sometimes I think pain is a bridge between people, a secret connection; other times, it seems like an abyss.” Half a world away from us here in Detroit, the Nobel Prize-winning author Svetlana Alexievich wrote those words as she contemplated the suffering of everyday Russians. Her ambivalence cuts right to the bone of the universal need for our individual pain to be shared – whether through literature, through song, or through dance. Without a community to absorb and hold up our emotions, and without an outlet to express those feelings, pain can indeed be a bottomless pit; but once it is transformed into expression or art, pain builds a bridge of empathy and the mutual consideration of our shared humanity.

This is why *Blue* is such an important piece for MOT to perform right here and right now. The opera’s first act feels warm, light-hearted, familiar – the same kind of familiarity Sicilian audiences would have experienced recognizing their fellow citizens in Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*. But whereas verismo at the turn of the 20th century relished acts of violence, the brilliant stroke of Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s brand of realism is that the violence happens during the intermission. This puts the focus of Act II on the aftermath of a senseless killing that pushes the family to the edge of despair. For me, the true tragedy of *Blue* is that this violence is too familiar in this country.

Act II, however, is where pain becomes a bridge, in the incredibly moving scenes of the community encircling the Father and the Mother with love. In director Kaneza Schaal’s interpretation of the opera, the layers of communication and expression include all of the registers of contemporary life – from high-tech video and state-of-the-art sound to the movement of the human body as realized by the dancers. Kaneza has built ramps extending into the auditorium, not only to reach out and bring this intimate story even

closer to us, but to form a physical bridge between our lives and the world of the opera.

In addition to Kaneza, we have important artists making their debuts at MOT, notably the brilliant conductor Daniela Candillari. Members of the original cast Kenneth Kellogg, Aaron Crouch, and Gordon Hawkins are revisiting their roles surrounded by Detroit voices: mezzo-soprano Krysty Swann; the jit dancers Queen Gabby and Michael Smith; and of course, the incredible environs of the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater. For the past few weeks, they have shared the joys and pains reflecting on what it means to return to live performance with a story that so urgently needs our attending. I wish for all of us in the audience to experience this evening’s performance as a revelation of the many bridges that are all around us – in the stories of our own community that still need our compassion and that call for us to stand for a safer and more just world. May we have the courage to cross those bridges together.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yuval Sharon'.

YUVAL SHARON
The Gary L. Wasserman
Artistic Director

A MESSAGE FROM SHAHIDA MAUSI

Dear *Blue* Guest,

Welcome to the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre. The collaboration with the Michigan Opera Theatre to present the opera *Blue* is one that has been in the making for a long time. As two iconic arts, culture and entertainment venues in Detroit, we open our doors to audiences to present a variety of high-quality programs and events. Presenting *Blue* is such an opportunity. It is my pleasure to host *Blue* on the stage of the Aretha. *Blue* is the captivating depiction of community, police interactions, social justice, impacting a loving black family, facing tragedy and loss. There is a compelling story to be told and the time to tell it is right now. *Blue* provides a collective moment for music, storytelling and reflections to facilitate conversations and engagement, surrounding important and powerful issues of our time. Through *Blue*, a story that resonates is told and all are welcome to share the experience. Our goal is to redefine what opera can mean with relevance to our everyday lives. Great art, such as the opera *Blue*, are filled with challenging ideas, inspiring opportunities for continued dialogue, and understanding that make for a more civil society. The Aretha and MOT look forward to future collaborations that bring us together through the arts and entertainment. Enjoy *Blue* and we look forward to welcoming you again.



SHAHIDA MAUSI,

President & CEO

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BLUE IS GENEROUSLY...

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With support from



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The company debut of Kaneza Schaal was partially supported by OPERA America's Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors, generously funded by the Marineau Family Foundation.



MOT's production of Blue is presented in L-ISA Immersive Hyperreal Sound by L-Acoustics. This innovative audio technology will envelop the audience, bringing them intimately inside the experience, fostering a deeper connection with the performance.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

KANEZA SCHAAL

Over the last year, we have been in the bones of the country. The bones of our own psyches. And we have been in the bones of our industry, of opera, of what it means to gather and share breath.

Tonight. Together. Let us begin to reset these bones.

Blue is at once a most intimate story of a family loving and protecting each other with all their might, and an epic tale of struggle, loss, and confrontation with the state, God, and ourselves. I can imagine no better setting than the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater. We are reminded of ancient amphitheaters and Greek tragedies playing out extended remixes critiquing state violence and power through stories of family.

The state is very good at storytelling and using story to reinforce itself. The tension between artists telling stories and the state telling stories has been a driving force in building culture through the ages. Today, even stories of verdicts and seeking justice, let's say, ultimately – they are narratives invested in the state's practice. My question as an artist is what are the stories that keep us alive? *Blue*, in its complexity and tenderness, is such a story.

Every great piece of theater, every opera, every ballet, every experimental plunge is made from a collectivity and given to a collectivity. Opera as a form was built from the hybridity inherent to gathering groups of people to create unified works. For hundreds of years, it has been shaped by vast cultural exchange. Great storytelling requires speaking many languages, formal and aesthetic language, as well as cultural and historical languages. For this production of *Blue*, I've included dancers who work in various forms from krumping, to waacking, to Jit. The Detroit Jit is a dance which, like Opera, evolved through cultural exchange and is rooted in histories of resistance, celebration, and protest. We have

also engaged paintings, photography, and tapestries by artist Hank Willis Thomas, whose practice deeply investigates American history, identity, and media. These vocabularies help us animate the music, the story, and invite you to hear these sounds within the vastness of opera.

On this weekend of September 11th, we mark the mourning of lives lost. Today we are again carrying so much death. For those of us historically unprotected by the state, sickness, disaster, violence, hits our communities with disproportionate velocity. We cannot know the losses each of us bear. For tonight, amidst our socially distanced viewing, let us give each other the benefit of knowing we cannot know.

As these exquisite artists take you on the journey of *Blue*, may their storytelling put to rest bones that have piled up in your own life. And may we begin to build ourselves back towards expansiveness, possibility, and bombast only the opera can inspire.



KANEZA SCHAAL
Director

BLUE

MUSIC

Jeanine Tesori

LIBRETTO

Tazewell Thompson

WORLD PREMIERE

Glimmerglass Festival
July 14, 2019

DIRECTOR

Kaneza Schaal

CONDUCTOR

Daniela Candillari

ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

Ian Andrew Askew and Clarissa Marie Ligon

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Jessica Jahn

ASSOCIATE COSTUME DESIGNER

April M. Hickman

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Mark Grey

SOUND MIXING

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Michael Sherman

STAGE MANAGER

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CAST

The Father	Kenneth Kellogg
The Mother	Krysty Swann
The Son	Aaron Crouch
The Reverend	Gordon Hawkins
Girlfriend #1/Nurse	Kimwana Doner
Girlfriend #2	Nicole Joseph
Girlfriend #3	Olivia Johnson
Policeman #1	Camron Gray
Policeman #2	Edward Graves
Policeman #3	Christopher Humbert, Jr.
Dancers	Mehdi T. Arshed
	Calex J
	Devon Campbell
	Larry "Ruin" Combs
	Segun "Delusion" Delu
	Gabrielle McLeod/Queen Gabby
	Michael Smith
	Reggie "Banga!" Williams Jr.!

Blue was commissioned by The Glimmerglass Festival and premiered in July, 2019.

Costumes were originally created for a co-production with The Glimmerglass Festival, Washington National Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Scenery and property elements fabricated and/or furnished by Westend Studios, and Studio Epoque, both of Detroit, MI.

LED video and projection systems provided by LMG Touring and Entertainment, Orlando, FL.

L-ISA Immersive Sound is a technology created and provided by L-Acoustics, Westlake Village, CA.

Sound system provided by Thunder Audio, Livonia, MI.

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Laura Roelofs
Velda Kelly
Andrew Wu

FLUTE I

Dennis Carter

OBOE I

Sally Heffelfinger-Pituch

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Dan Stachyra
Anna Bittar-Weller
Henrik Karapetyan

BASSOON I

Francisco Delgado

HORN I

Francisco Delgado

VIOLA II

Scott Stefanko
James Greer

CELLO I

Andrea Yun

BASS

Derek Weller



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BLUE SYNOPSIS

The Mother calls her Girlfriends together to her apartment in Harlem to tell them she is expecting a child. Their joy turns to concern when she tells them she is carrying a boy; they warn her that her son will not be welcomed in this country. When her hope and love — for the child she carries and for The Father, a policeman — will not be shaken, her Girlfriends relent, blessing her and the child. The Father's police officer buddies, on the other hand, are immediately joyful — and a bit jealous — when they learn their fellow officer has fathered a son.

Sixteen years later, The Son, a student artist and activist, frequently finds himself at odds with the law for his involvement with non-violent political protests. The Father confronts The Son, who pushes back, accusing his police officer Father of upholding an oppressive system. Despite The Son's bitter words, The Father tells him he will always love him and hold him close.

After The Son is shot by a police officer at a protest, the heartbroken Father meets with The Reverend, who attempts to comfort him and encourages him to forgive. The Father, adopting the attitude of The Son, lashes out angrily. As the funeral for The Son approaches, The Girlfriends return to Harlem to support the grief-stricken Mother as she prepares to lay her son to rest.

At the funeral, Father and Mother pray with the congregation, asking God to welcome their son to Heaven. The Father briefly becomes lost in a fog of emotion, guilt, regret and memory, then finds his way back to the community gathered around him in church.

In an epilogue, we see The Father, The Mother and The Son, together, in a bittersweet moment around a kitchen table, sharing a meal, as The Son reconciles with his father and announces his plans for further artistic studies and one more peaceful protest.

Classical music has enjoyed a unique place in American society, by turns vaunted and disparaged, analyzed and disregarded, embraced and disavowed. Despite how mixed our feelings have been about the medium, one thing has been crystalline about the artform in the United States: it seldom has been used as an instrument for social change. We do not typically think of *Il trovatore* as a commentary on the unforeseen consequences of capital punishment, *Tosca* as a mediation on police corruption, or *La bohème* as a musing on public health crises. This is why Tazewell Thompson and Jeanine Tesori's masterful opera, *Blue*, which directly grapples with the racialized police violence that has plagued this nation since Reconstruction, is such a revelation: it takes seriously that the medium can speak clearly to the most pressing social issues of the day.

Television, film, dance, and theatre have thrived in a way that opera has not in the United States. These media have taken as their mandate to present stories that are immediately relevant to the contemporary audiences, whereas opera has been content to leave modern-day issues unexplored. Many of the operatic plotlines that we love so much unfurl in mythological places, idealized exotic locales, or European courts of yore. Startlingly timely and uncomfortably timeless, *Blue* unfolds with immediacy, urgency, and familiarity as it probes one Harlem's family's efforts to overcome a devastating loss after an unprovoked act of police violence. Thompson's incisive, insightful narrative chronicles a Black police officer and his wife struggling to make sense of the senseless, having lost their own teenage son at the hands of a white patrolman.

In *The Washington Post*, Michael Andor Brodeur referred to *Blue* as “the opera on police violence we need to see, but can’t.” After eight stunning performances at the Glimmerglass Festival in the summer of 2019, the pandemic necessitated the cancellation or postponement of productions at Minnesota Opera, Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival. *Blue*'s ascent cannot be eclipsed fully by COVID-19, though. In fact, many of the central questions posited by *Blue*—What will it take to solve America's racialized violence problem? Is the church still capable of fortifying the Black community against systemic racism? Will another generation of Black boys be besieged by the very structures that should shepherd them to manhood? Do we have a government set up to keep *any* of us safe?—only have become more salient in light of the events of the last two years.

As captured by an August 2020 documentary that aired on WQXR, the classical music arm of New York Public Radio, *Blue* places “race and police brutality at the forefront of modern opera” in a way that speaks compellingly to the current moment. To be sure, these issues have been brought to the concert hall in substantive fashion by gifted composers like Joel Bentley Thompson (*The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, 2016), Courtney Bryan (*Yet Unheard*, 2016), and Nkeiru Okoye (*Invitation to a Die-in*, 2017). Yet the scale of fully-staged opera accords *Blue* opportunities to mine the emotional nuances of the fraught topic in myriad ways.

The expressive, evocative libretto by Mr. Thompson is, in turns, exhilarating and excruciating. *Blue* presents The Mother and The Father experiencing the apexes and nadirs of parenting in an era when society exaggerates both for Black families. Upon hearing that The Mother is carrying a boy, the fretful reactions of her three girlfriends foreshadow the grievous path the child's life would take: “We talked, argued, debated; ev’ry Black girl knows this. It’s stitched into

the stars and stripes of the American flag, baked in the cake: Thou shalt bring forth no Black boys into this world.” Indeed The Son grows into a principled young man, intelligently apprehending the zeitgeist, parsing the societal messaging meant to define the Black male experience, and enunciating clearly his restiveness with the status quo. He embodies fully James Baldwin’s 1961 observation about the Black experience in America: “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time.” And the way those potent passions career towards an ineluctable conclusion evokes the tragic trajectories of the families of the *Argonautica*, the *Orestia*, and the Theban plays. Thompson’s gift for rendering America’s shameful circadian cycle of state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies both universal and local makes *Blue* necessary viewing for us all.

Ms. Tesori’s musical theatre oeuvre—which includes sonic palettes that capture everything from the Roaring Twenties to the Civil Rights Movement to a post-Obama New World Order—highlights her gifts for drawing out the subtle gradations in multifaceted narratives about the American experiment. *Caroline; or Change* disabuses us of the notion of monolithic Black thought in the midst of the struggle for equal rights; *Soft Power* turns a century of orientalist American theatre on its ear; *Violet* probes the limitations of religion in personal development; and *Fun Home* unpacks generational trauma wrought by homophobia. *Blue* is just as powerful in reframing how Black families survive amidst ubiquitous, deleterious, savage racism.

I have come to understand the future of classical music as tied completely to mastering a new set of demographic realities, and *Blue* provides a powerful point of entry for anyone curious (or skeptical) opera’s capacity to speak to contemporary issues. Like the *verismo* operas of Puccini, Giordano, and Leoncavallo, *Blue* features an accessible plot with ordinary people thrown into extraordinary circumstances, scaffolded on muscular melodies and lush orchestration. For instance,

while mourning, rather than offering a plaintive supplication, The Father explodes against the racism that has fractured his family: “The God you describe is a white God, not for me. I cannot allow this white God, let this white man to go free. Don’t you know they despise you? Don’t you know, no matter what you do for them, it’s never enough. It’s never enough. The white cop will go free.” In these moments, Thompson offers the audience no reprieve through moments of consolation or conciliation; instead he insists that we fulminate, grieve, and agonize with The Father and The Mother and so many other Black families that have been torn asunder by America’s national curse. He doesn’t have to say their names—Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, Tamir Rice, Knox Fail, Eugene Burt, Aubrey Pollard—for us to grasp the families’ anguish, helplessness, and fury. In more ways than not, Thompson and Tesori’s celebrated work is much less a radical redefinition of the genre than a critical embracing of a contemporary condition than creates an avenue of understanding for those of us desperate to see an opera industry engaged with our experiences, remonstrances, triumphs, and yearnings.

THE ARTWORK OF HANK WILLIS THOMAS



Josh Higgason's video work for *Blue* incorporates the work of Hank Willis Thomas, whose artwork provided a key source of inspiration for director Kaneza Schaal.

Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976, Plainfield, NJ) is an American conceptual artist

working primarily with themes of perspective, identity, commodity, media, and popular culture. His body of work encompasses video, public art and collaborative installations, sculpture, and photography that inspires reflection on how art informs racial equity and civil rights. The first major retrospective of Thomas' work, titled *Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...*, debuted in 2019 at Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, and followed in 2020 at Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Bentonville, AK and Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH.

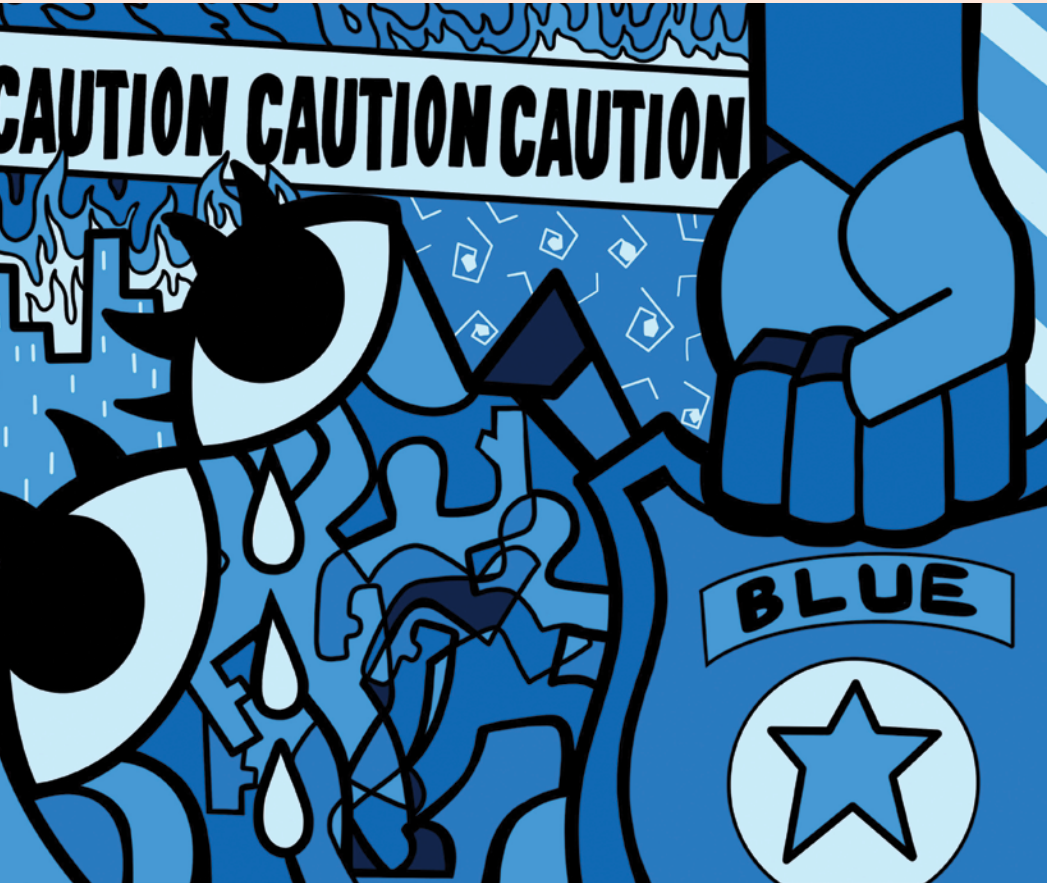
Thomas incorporates widely identifiable iconography in his images to create commentaries on racial inequality, violence, bias and portrayal of Black bodies perpetuated through advertising. In *Absolut Power* (2003), Thomas depicted the silhouette of the namesake beverage and filled its volume with the cramped arrangement of enslaved bodies aboard ships during the Atlantic slave trade. In the photographic series *Branded* (2003-2006), he superimposed the Nike swoosh logo onto Black male bodies to reference jarring images of slave branding and the modern exploitation of the Black male body—particularly in athletics.

The relatability viewers encounter with Thomas' works suggests that potent racial and social inequalities are entrenched in everyday

experiences. The series *Punctum* (2013-2015) presents sculptures inspired by gripping scenes of civic demonstration sourced from archival photographs. Thomas developed *Raise Up* (2014) from an apartheid-era photograph of miners positioned with arms raised upward—the stance recalling a universal understanding of surrender yet also a striking monument of protest when paired with the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” chant birthed in Ferguson, MO. In his monumental traveling public art exhibition, *All Power to All People* (2019), Thomas produced another sculpture inspired by gesture—the raised fist attributed to the Black Power salute combined with the Afro pick. While corporate advertising seeks consumer fidelity Thomas engages with and repurposes media and commodity-based images to evoke contemplation and activism. He co-founded *For Freedoms*—the first artist-led super PAC—with Eric Gottesman in 2016. The following year, in 2017, *For Freedoms* was awarded the ICP Infinity Award for New Media and Online Platform. Thomas also collaborated with artists to revive the *Wide Awakes*—the Lincoln-era activist coalition that rallied abolition and re-emerged in 2019 as a decentralized civic engagement and creative network.

His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and abroad including at the International Center of Photography, NY; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong, and the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Netherlands. Thomas' work is included in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

ART INSPIRED BY *BLUE*



Art often imitates life and there is no better example of that than *Blue*. In an effort to create a platform for conversations surrounding *Blue*'s themes and messaging, the Michigan Opera Theatre commissioned local artist and muralist Tashif "Sheefy McFly" Turner to create an original work of art based on the award-winning opera.

"Sheefy McFly came to the launch of *Blue* at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater, and it was so moving to hear how much this opera resonated with him. It's an honor to have his authentic response to the work among the array of conversations and imagery around the themes of the opera," MOT Artistic Director Yuval Sharon said. "Opening up this opera to different (and differing) Detroit-specific perspectives is so important for MOT, because we feel *Blue* – and all opera – should create a space where real dialogue may be possible."

Sheefy McFly is Motown's Renaissance Man. The multifaceted artist is a College for Creative Studies alum and well-rounded independent entrepreneur. Sheefy has over 20 murals in the city of Detroit spreading his "Sheefy Faces" on walls all over the state of Michigan, making his signature style become prolific. From his cubist, surrealist, and pop art influences, Sheefy creates his own subconscious gesture figures that grow stronger with every painting completed.

"Once I heard the description of *Blue*, I had so many emotions evoked that I wanted to illustrate. Even though the color palette is calming, I wanted to portray rage and chaos," Tashif "Sheefy McFly" Turner said. "With the blue flame engulfing the city in the background I wanted to express the intensity of pain and truth that Black people know so much. The fist and badge colliding represents the friction of not only the community and police, but the inner battle of a police officer & his wife losing their son that they love to the very same entity that they abide by."

ARTIST AND PRODUCTION PROFILES



JEANINE TESORI (COMPOSER)

Jeanine Tesori is an award-winning composer of musical theatre and opera. Along with Missy Mazzoli, Tesori is one of the first female composers commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera.

Tesori's operas include *Blue*, libretto by Tazewell Thompson, premiered in July 2019 at Glimmerglass Festival with future performances at Washington National Opera and Chicago Lyric Opera; *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck*, libretto by Tony Kushner, premiered at Glimmerglass Festival in 2011; *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me*, libretto by J.D. McClatchy and based on the book by Jeanette Winterson, premiered at Washington National Opera in 2013; and the forthcoming *Grounded*, libretto by George Brant based on his play.

Best known for her musical theater works her award-winning catalog includes *Fun Home* (Tony Award, Pulitzer finalist); *Caroline, or Change* (Olivier Award); *Violet*; *Shrek*; *Thoroughly Modern Millie*; *Twelfth Night*; *A Free Man of Color*; and by The Public at Central Park: *Mother Courage*. She is currently the Supervising Vocal Producer for Steven Spielberg's forthcoming film of *West Side Story*. She is also the founding Artistic Director of Encores! Off-Center, and a lecturer at Yale University.



TAZEWELL THOMPSON (LIBRETTIST)

Tazewell Thompson is an internationally acclaimed director for opera and theatre, an award-winning playwright, librettist, teacher and actor.

His opera *Blue* with composer Jeanine Tesori, won the 2020 MCANA Award for Best New Opera in North America. The New York Times listed *Blue* as Best in Classical Music for 2019. He has more than 150 directing credits, including 30 world and American premieres, in major opera houses and theaters across the USA, France, Spain, Italy, Africa, Japan and Canada, including Glimmerglass, New York City Opera, Teatro Real, La Scala, L'Opera Bastille, Cape Town, Tokyo, Vancouver and San Francisco Opera. His award-winning play, *Constant Star* has had 16 national productions, garnering 9 Barrymore Awards, 5 NAACP Awards and 3 Carbonell Awards. *Mary T & Lizzy K*, commissioned and produced at Arena Stage, is the recipient of The Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award; author of *Jam & Spice: The Music of Kurt Weill*; an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*; and a contributing writer to *Our War*, short plays for Washington DC. His a cappella musical *Jubilee: Fisk Jubilee Singers* had its world premiere spring of 2019 and played to SRO audiences at Arena Stage. He has play commissions from Lincoln Center Theatre, South Coast Rep and People's Light & Theatre

Company. His production of *Porgy and Bess*, broadcast Live from Lincoln Center, received EMMY Award nominations for Best Director, and Best Production: Classical Music. He holds the record for directing three productions: *Appomattox*/ Philip Glass, *Lost in the Stars*/ Kurt Weill, and his American premiere production from Glimmerglass Festival of *Cato in Utica*/ Vivaldi all in the same season in three different theaters at The Kennedy Center. He was chosen to rewrite the libretto and direct the premiere staging of Aaron Copland's *The Second Hurricane* as part of a New York State-wide celebration of Copland's 85th birthday.

A select list of operas directed: *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Death in Venice*, *Xerxes*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Tender Land*, *Street Scene*, *Pearl Fishers*, *Norma*, *Margaret Garner*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Patience*, *Freedom Ride*. He is commissioned by Seattle Opera to write a song cycle and his opera *Blue* is rescheduled for future productions at Washington National Opera, Chicago Lyric, Minnesota Opera and Mostly Mozart Festival. At schools and conservatories, he has directed productions and held master classes at NYU, Juilliard, Yale, Dartmouth, Columbia, Tulane, Indiana/ Bloomington, and Kansas/ Lawrence. Chair of Theater Department: St. Ann's School and Columbia Prep.

His national theatre directing credits include nearly every major theatre across the country including: the Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival, Roundabout Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Arena Stage, the Goodman, Seattle Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Cleveland Play House, Hartford Stage,

Second Stage, Guthrie, Indiana Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Huntington Theatre, Delaware Theatre Company, Syracuse Stage, Playmakers Rep, City Theatre, Virginia Stage, and the Old Globe.

He is a member of SDC, SAG, AFTRA, AEA, AGMA and CAE.



KANEZA SCHAAL (DIRECTOR)

Kaneza Schaal works in theater, opera and film and is based in New York City. Schaal's work has shown in divergent contexts from NYC basements, to courtyards in Vietnam, to East African amphitheaters, to European opera houses, to US public housing, to rural auditoriums in the UAE. By creating performances that speak many formal, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and experiential languages she speaks to expansive audiences. Domestically her work has shown at Brooklyn Academy of Music, LA Philharmonic, The Shed, The Kennedy Center, Walker Arts Center, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, REDCAT, The New Victory Theater, New York Live Arts, Performance Space 122, New Orleans Center for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, PICA, and On The Boards. Schaal received a Guggenheim Fellowship, Herb Alpert Award, United States Artists Fellowship, SOROS Art Migration and Public Space Fellowship, Ford Foundation Art For Justice Bearing Witness Award, and Creative Capital Award.

The MOT debut of Kaneza Schaal was partially supported by OPERA America's Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors, generously funded by the Marineau Family Foundation.



DANIELA CANDILLARI (CONDUCTOR)

Conductor Daniela Candillari, praised for her “confidence and apparently inexhaustible verve” (The New York Times), continues to be recognized for her dynamic and compelling performances at opera houses and concert stages throughout North America and Europe. Equally at home leading contemporary and long-beloved repertoire, Candillari “finds equal inspiration in tradition and novelty.” (Opera News)

Candillari makes her Metropolitan Opera debut in the 2021-2022 season conducting Aucoin's *Eurydice*. She also workshops the composer's *Grounded* with Washington National Opera and The Met, conducts *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and leads performances with Music Academy of the West.

Recent highlights include Candillari's New York Philharmonic debut at The Met Museum; debuts with LA Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Opera Philadelphia, and Saint Louis Symphony; and her Asian debut in Hong Kong. As a composer, she has been commissioned by instrumentalists from the Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh Symphonies, as well as the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and New York City Ballet.

A native of Slovenia, Candillari holds a Doctorate in Musicology from the Universität für Musik in Vienna a Master of Music in Jazz from Indiana University, and a Master of Music and Bachelor in Piano Performance from the Universität für Musik in Graz. She was a Fulbright Scholarship recipient and was subsequently awarded a TED Fellowship.



AARON CROUCH (THE SON)

Aaron Crouch, born and raised in Bowie, Maryland, is a recent graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA.

The 2019-2020 season would have included debuts at Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the mostly Mozart Festival. All of these engagements were cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. Crouch has been a soloist with the New World Symphony in Miami, FL for their Ravel Journey concert. He also performed an all-Bernstein concert with the Philharmonic of Southern New Jersey for Bernstein's centennial.

Crouch was a gold medalist at the YoungArts Foundation Awards in 2017. He also won first place in the Schmidt Youth Vocal competition, Sue Goetz Ross voice competition, Shirley Rabb Winston voice competition (Maryland chapter), and Classical Singer vocal competition (University Intermediate Division). He received 3rd place in the Rochester International vocal competition and received an Encouragement Award at the Premiere Opera International vocal competition. He was also given an Emerging Artist Award from the Opera Index vocal competition in 2019.

In the past Crouch has spent summers at the Chautauqua Institution and Houston Grand Opera's Young Artist Vocal Academy. In 2019, he was a Young Artist at the Glimmerglass Festival where he sang the role of The Son in the world premiere of Jeanine Tesori's new opera, *Blue*.

Training his voice year-round, Aaron continues to cultivate his God-given gift by marrying his natural talent with rigorous practice and the continuous development of an impeccable technique, rendering his uniquely powerful and emotive sound.



KIMWANA DONER
(GIRLFRIEND #1/NURSE)

American soprano, Kimwana Doner has been described as “absolutely luminous” as well as “mesmerizing to watch and thrilling to hear.” A product of the distinguished young artist training programs of San Francisco Opera (Merola and Adler Fellowship), Seattle Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and Opera North, Ms. Doner is establishing a career that includes the full breadth of the lyric to dramatic soprano repertoire.

With acclaimed performances on the mainstages of the San Francisco Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Boston Lyric Opera, and Opera North, the statuesque Ms. Doner is becoming increasingly seen as an important young talent in her fach. Her repertoire already encompasses many of the Mozart heroines including Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Pamina and Erste Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* as well as Puccini's Liu in *Turandot* and Musetta in *La Bohème* and Bizet's Michaëla in *Carmen*. In recent years, she is excited to have expanded her repertoire into

Verdi and Strauss with Leonora in *Il Trovatore*, Alice in *Falstaff* and the title role in *Ariadne* with Naxos.

Also an avid concert performer, she has appeared with the Saint Louis Symphony, Modesto Symphony, Yakima Symphony, Napa Valley Opera House, and Rackham Symphony as well as several prominent concert series including the Music at Meyer Concert Series in the acoustically superb Meyer Sanctuary in San Francisco, CA and the Eureka Chamber Music Concert Series which brings together prominent artists from the US and abroad.

Ms. Doner is the proud recipient of the Best Performance Leading Female Award 2006 from Opera Online and the Emily Gaddes Memorial Award 2002 from Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.



EDWARD GRAVES
(POLICEMAN #2)

A 2019-20 Studio Artist at Michigan Opera Theatre, Edward Graves' roles included *Don Ottavio* in *Don Giovanni*, Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* and Ching's Buoso's Ghost, and Luis Rodrigo Griffith in *Champion*. In 2020, Graves debuted with Baltimore Concert Opera. 2021-22 engagements include a role and house debut in the title role of a filmed version of *Bastien and Bastienne* with Raylynmor Opera, a world premiere of the JFK Chorale with the Minot University Symphony, a concert debut with the LaPorte Symphony, Gary Wedow conducting, and his debut as Tamino in a new English translation of *The Magic Flute* with *InSeries* Opera. Edward also joins the prestigious Merola program at San Francisco Opera, and returns to Michigan Opera Theatre for *Blue*. He assays Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Maestro John

DeMain and the Madison Symphony Orchestra. In the 2022 season Edward returns to Seattle for *Blue*, and further reprises his roles in the show with Pittsburgh Opera.

His Seattle Opera debut as Robbins in *Porgy and Bess* and a return to the Glimmerglass Festival for the world premiere of *Blue* were highlights of the 2018-19 season. As a Baumgartner Studio Artist at Florentine Opera, he sang St. Brioche in *The Merry Widow*, Shepherd, Sailor in *Venus and Adonis*, Dido and Aeneas, and 2nd Priest, 1st Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*.

Edward received an Encouragement Award from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Wisconsin District in 2017. A young artist at the Glimmerglass Festival he sang the role of Peter and covered the role of Robbins in *Porgy and Bess*, also performing the role of Fred in *Oklahoma!* He received his Performer Diploma and Master of Music in Voice Performance from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music and his Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance from Towson University.



**CAMRON GRAY
(POLICEMAN #1)**

Tenor Camron Gray is a native of Winchester, Tennessee who has performed solo recitals, concert repertoire, and opera across the United States since 2010. As a soloist in recent years audiences have heard Gray at Opera Naples as Scalia in *Scalia/Ginsburg* (2020), The Glimmerglass Festival as Police Buddy #1 in the world premiere of *Blue*, The University of Michigan Ann Arbor as Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Bohème*, and with Michigan Opera Theatre as

Vigilante George in *The Grapes of Wrath* (2019).

While attending U-M, Mr. Gray studied with distinguished Professor Emeritus George Shirley, Stanford Olsen, Richard Leech, and now currently studies with Daniel Washington. During his time at U-M, he debuted roles such as Tom Snout in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017), Larry Renault in William Bolcomb's *Dinner at Eight* (2017), Robbins and Crab Man in the authoritative, fully-revised score of The Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (2018), and El Gobernador in Bernstein's *Candide* (2018). Throughout his studies at U-M, and prior at Tennessee Tech University (B.M. in Mus.Ed./B.A. in Spanish, 2014), Gray has participated in workshops and concerts for new works, Goldovsky-based stagecraft, and choral ensembles. In 2018, Mr. Gray was fortunate to be a part of the ensemble assembled by the Toledo Symphony with world renowned soprano Kathleen Battle in concert.

Mr. Gray is excited to return to the stage Fall 2021 in *Blue* with Michigan Opera Theatre, and subsequently with Toledo Opera (2022) and as Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, the timeless classic opera by Donizetti, with Opera Huntsville (2022).



**GORDON HAWKINS
(THE REVEREND)**

Gordon Hawkins is critically acclaimed throughout the world for his in-depth interpretations and lush baritone voice. A dramatic baritone with an international reputation as a "Rigoletto specialist," Mr. Hawkins has delighted audiences as the tragic Verdi underdog in more than 200 performances, most recently with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Vancouver Opera, Washington National

Opera, Arizona Opera, and Opera Colorado. He is now earning critical acclaim as a Wagner specialist: “Alberich was superbly realized by baritone Gordon Hawkins, in his [Los Angeles Opera] début. Despite wearing a grotesque puppet head and clunky boots that hobbled his movements, Hawkins delivered a sterling vocal characterization of the power-mad Nibelung.” (*Opera News*). He has been engaged as Alberich in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at esteemed international companies including San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, Washington National Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro de la Maestranza de Sevilla, and the BBC Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall in London.

Most recently, Mr. Hawkins performed the role of The Reverend in the World Première of Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s *Blue* at the Glimmerglass Festival, The Warden in *Dead Man Walking* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the title role of *Porgy and Bess* with Harrisburg Symphony. Mr. Hawkins’ upcoming engagements include *Champion* at Boston Lyric Opera, the role of Reverend in *Blue* at Toledo Opera, Washington National Opera, and Michigan Opera Theatre, Scarpia in *Tosca* at Portland Opera, and a World Première for the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2023.



**CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT, JR.
(POLICEMAN #3)**

With a “rich baritone voice,” and a “towering and alluring” stage presence, bass-baritone, Christopher Humbert Jr., has proven a favorite with several US audiences. Originally from Akron, Ohio, Mr. Humbert has appeared in multiple operatic and theatrical productions throughout his home state with Opera Columbus, Mid-Ohio

Opera, Nightingale Opera Theatre and others where he performed in multiple leading roles such as, Secret Police Agent in *The Consul*, Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*, Count Carl-Magnus in *A Little Night Music*, Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas*, Fred Graham in *Kiss Me, Kate*, and more.

Christopher has since performed with Seagle Music Colony, Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theatre, Des Moines Metro Opera, and Palm Beach Opera. Humbert was selected to join Opera Theatre Saint Louis during the 2020 season as a Gerdine Young Artist. During this time, Humbert was featured on St. Louis Missouri’s Channel Nine station for the inaugural “Songs for St. Louis” televised concert series.

In addition to opera, Mr. Humbert is a frequent oratorio and concert soloist: Mozart’s *Requiem*, Bach’s *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Schütz’s *St Matthew Passion*, and Bach’s *St John Passion*, *Händel’s Messiah*. Humbert was a first place finalist in Opera Guild of Dayton’s Tri-State Vocal Competition (2019) and has frequently won classical music and musical theatre awards from the National Association of Teachers of Singing. Humbert has since returned to Carnegie Hall stage as a soloist with Manhattan Concert Productions’ in the work, *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Humbert is notably excited to make his role debut with Michigan Opera Theatre in Jeanine Tesori’s, *Blue* for the 2021-2022 season.



OLIVIA JOHNSON (GIRLFRIEND #3)

Olivia Johnson, born in Jacksonville, NC, is a graduate of the University of Michigan, where she earned her Master's degree while studying under Professor George Shirley.

Recently, this summer she took part as a Fellow in the Vocal Institute of Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, CA. Ms. Johnson also made her debut with the AEPEX Contemporary Ensemble as the mezzo-soprano soloist in Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater* in Spring of 2021. She completed a young artist residency with Toledo Opera in Toledo, Ohio for the 20/21 season. In October 2020, Ms. Johnson appeared with Michigan Opera Theatre as the second Rheinmaiden, Wellgunde, under the direction of Yuval Sharon in his re-imagining of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in the modern adaptation, *Twilight: Gods*.

After performing the comprimario role of the Girlfriend in Daniel Sonenberg's *The Summer King* at MOT in 2018, Ms. Johnson made her second appearance with MOT in the role of La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi* followed by Buoso's Ghost by Michael Ching. Wherein she was reviewed in Opera News as "...the intriguing mezzo-soprano Olivia Johnson and her cool, stylish demeanor as La Ciesca." She has appeared as a soloist for Rackham Choir and Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Johnson also participated in young artist summer programs including the Martina Arroyo Foundation, Prelude to Performance and the American Institute of Musical Studies (AIMS) in Graz, Austria.



NICOLE JOSEPH (GIRLFRIEND #2)

Described as an artist with a "sweeping range of emotions" and a "honeyed, effortless voice," Detroit-area soprano Nicole Joseph has delighted audiences in a wide range of performances across the country. She received critical acclaim for many recent opera performances, including Blanche in *Dialogue of the Carmelites* and Magda Sorel in *The Consul*, with Detroit's Opera MODO, the latter of which earned her recognition with a nomination for the 2019 Wilde Award for Best Opera Performance. In 2020, Ms. Joseph was seen in Michigan Opera Theatre's last pre-pandemic production as Nella in *Gianni Schicchi*, following her debut in 2018 as Hattie in Daniel Sonenberg's *The Summer King*.

As a choral singer and soloist in many highly acclaimed ensembles, Nicole performs frequently with the Sphinx Organization's Exigence Vocal Ensemble, and Conspirare, with whom she received Grammy recognition as a featured soloist on their 2015 award-winning recording, *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*. Nicole also had the honor of performing for the nationally televised Aretha Franklin Tribute Concert held at Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre in Detroit. She is currently the Interim Director of Music at Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield Hills.



KENNETH KELLOGG (THE FATHER)

American bass, Kenneth Kellogg, enjoyed a busy and successful 2019-20 Season, returning to Europe for performances of Rossini's *Sigismondo* singing the two roles of Ulderico and Zenovito with Capella Cracoviensis in Poland. In 2021, he appeared as Commendatore *Don Giovanni* at Seattle Opera, more recently he sang the role of Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at San Francisco Opera in a highly lauded production. Next season includes three role debuts for Kenneth in the US: Rocco in *Fidelio*, Grand Inquisitore in *Don Carlo*, and Raimondo in *Lucia de Lammermoor*.

A recent highlight of the artist's career was establishing the role of Father *Blue*, written by Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson for Glimmerglass Festival's world premiere which brought Kenneth great acclaim; production runs are scheduled at several major opera companies in the next few seasons. Previously at Michigan Opera Theatre, he revived the role of Sam Bakewell in *The Summer King*, a role he inaugurated at Pittsburgh Opera during its world premiere. He returned to Washington National Opera for Father Palmer in *Silent Night* and appeared as Mephistopheles in *Faust* at Opera de Lausanne, and at Opera de Oviedo, Spain. He was Young Emile in *Champion* for Opera Parallele in its West Coast premiere. As Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, Kenneth made his debut at Opera de Lausanne, and sang the role at Virginia Opera and Opera Memphis. At Annapolis Opera, Kenneth made his debut as Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*.



KRYSTY SWANN (THE MOTHER)

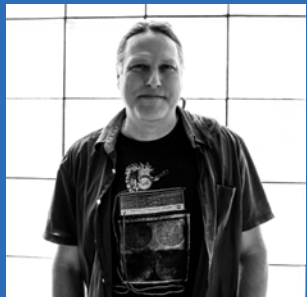
Acclaimed mezzo-soprano Krysty Swann has been hailed for her beautiful and rich voice, as well as her captivating presence on stage. The Washington Post declares, "Krysty Swann has a voice, and she knows how to use it...[She] displayed an instrument of immense power, natural beauty of tone and luscious legato line." The Philadelphia-born, New York-based mezzo-soprano was featured on the cover of *Opera News* with the great Dolores Zajak.

Next, Ms. Swann will be making returns to the esteemed roster of The Metropolitan Opera for their productions of *Akhnaten* and *Elektra*, will debut the role of the Mother in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue* for Michigan Opera Theatre and Toledo Opera, and will create the role of Mayme in *Intimate Apparel*, a new opera directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Lynn Nottage with music by Ricky Ian Gordon at the Lincoln Center Theatre. Additionally, she will perform in a Gala Concert for Princeton Festival and in Tulsa Opera's *Greenwood Overcomes*, Beethoven's *9th Symphony* for Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, and *The Ordering of Moses* for the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park. Most recently she appeared in a virtual performance of Handel's *Messiah* with Glens Falls Symphony and created the role of Joyce "Tilly" Mitchell in the world premiere of Nico Muhly's digital one act opera *The Glitch* which was released by Catapult Opera in February 2021.



**IAN ANDREW ASKEW
(ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR)**

Ian Andrew Askew is an artist working in performance, theater, and music. Recent work includes *SLAMDANCE*, *SLAMDANCE TV: A Story Project*, and *love conjure/blues*. As an associate director and sound designer, Ian has presented work in New York and Massachusetts alongside artists including American Modern Opera Company, Diana Oh, Kaneza Schaal, Christopher Myers, Jackie Sibblies Drury, and Joie Lee.



**MARK GREY
(SOUND DESIGN)**

Mark Grey is an Emmy Award winning sound designer and composer who made history as the first sound designer for The New York Philharmonic (*On the Transmigration of Souls*, 2002, which also won the Pulitzer Prize in Music) and The Metropolitan Opera (*Doctor Atomic*, 2008, *Nixon in China*, 2011, *Death of Klinghoffer*, 2014, *The Merry Widow*, 2015, *Bluebeard's Castle/Iolanta*, 2015, *L'Amour de Loin*, 2016). As a composer, his opera *Frankenstein* recently premiered at La Monnaie in Brussels, along with several commissions from The Atlanta Symphony and The Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has collaborated intimately with composer John Adams, and several others, for nearly three decades. He designed and toured extensively with Kronos Quartet for nearly 15 years. His sound designs have been heard throughout most major concert halls, HD simulcast theatres and opera houses worldwide.



**APRIL M. HICKMAN
(ASSOCIATE COSTUME DESIGNER)**

April M. Hickman is a costume designer, stylist, and costume illustrator originally from Denver, CO. Her most recent and first film credit, *The Promotion*, was a short film she received a nomination for Best Costume Design by the LA International Film Festival. She recently received her M.F.A. in costume design at Yale School of Drama (20') where some of her credits include *Hamlet*, *Pivot*, and *Seven Spots on the Sun*. Other credits include *The Plot*, a world premiere by Will Eno, directed by Oliver Butler (Yale Repertory Theatre), *thee feels... (kms)*, *Is God Is* and *Agreste (Drylands)* (Yale Cabaret). April previously lived in Chicago, IL and Washington D.C., where she worked as the resident costume design assistant at the Goodman Theatre and was a costume fellow turned costume design assistant at Arena Stage. She has assisted several prominent costume designers, including Emily Rebholz, Jess Goldstein, Ilona Somogyi, Paul Tazewell, and Catherine Zuber. She was awarded the William R. Kenan Jr. Costume Design Fellowship at the Kennedy Center in 2014 and the Leo Lerman Fellowship in 2020. April received her B.F.A. in costume design from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts where she designed *Topdog/Underdog*, *Detective Story*, and *Innocent Thoughts*, *Harmless Intentions*.



JOSHUA HIGGASON (PROJECTION DESIGN)

Joshua Higgason (video designer) is a video, scenic, lighting, and interactive designer, creating experiences for theater, concerts, opera, and events. Recent video designs include *Così fan Tutte* for Opera di Firenze, *Die Ägyptische Helena* and *Hansel und Gretel* for La Scala; Purcell's *King Arthur* for Staatsoper Berlin and Theater An Der Wien; *Mackie Messer- Eine Salzburger Dreigroschenoper* for Salzburger Festspiele; *Acquanetta* for Bard Summerscape; *Powder her Face* for NYC Opera; *Persona* for LA Opera; Lucinda Childs' *The Day*; Ira Glass' *Seven Things...* Tour; and Sufjan Stevens' *Carrie and Lowell* Tour. His work has been seen at Carnegie Hall, Salzburg Festspiele, Bayreuth Festival, BAM, TED, The Public, MoMA, Panorama Festival NYC, Beacon Theatre, and many others. He is an instructor of performance design at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



JESSICA JAHN (COSTUME DESIGN)

New York: *Coal Country*, (The Public Theatre); *Gloria: A Life* (Daryl Roth Theatre); *The Confession of Lily Dare* (Primary Stages, winner of the Lucille Lortel, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Award); *Love, Loss and What I Wore* (Westside Theatre); *Once On This Island* (Papermill Playhouse); *One Night...* (World Premiere, The Cherry Lane Theatre); *Die Mommie Die!* (New World Stages, winner of the Lucille Lortel Award); *Monodramas* and *Mose in Egitto* (New York City Opera).

Regional: *Rigoletto* (Houston Grand Opera); *Blue* (Glimmerglass Festival); *Dead Man Walking* (Washington National Opera), *Norma* (Canadian Opera Company and Lyric Opera of Chicago, winner of the Dora Mavor Moore Awards), *Life*

Is A Dream (World Premiere, Santa Fe Opera); *The Crucible* (Glimmerglass Festival); *Anna Bolena* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *The Manchurian Candidate* (World Premiere); *Maria Stuarda* (Seattle Opera). *Moby Dick* (Utah Opera), *West Side Story* (Houston Grand Opera), *Siege of Calais* (Glimmerglass Festival).

International: *Norma* (The Gran Teatre de Liceu); *Don Bucefalo* (Wexford Opera Festival).

Upcoming: *Barber of Seville* (San Francisco Opera); *The Road We Came* (On Site Opera); *Snowy Day* (Houston Grand Opera); *Fidelio* (San Francisco Opera).

Ms. Jahn is an Adjunct Costume Design Professor with Brandeis University's Theatre Arts Department.



CLARISSA MARIE LIGON (ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR)

Clarissa Marie Ligon is a stage manager, director, performer, and self-proclaimed renaissance woman. She makes art because she believes it can change the world. Recent production work includes: *Off Broadway*, streamed through BroadStream, *Dana H.* at The Vineyard Theatre, *Jack &* at BAM Fisher, *Black Light* at the Greenwich House Theatre, *Cruel Intentions: The Musical* at le Poisson Rouge, *5/Fifths* at 5LD, and *Penny Arcade's Longing Lasts Longer* at St. Anne's Warehouse.

AMY RUBIN
(SET DESIGN)

Amy Rubin is a designer of environments for theater, opera, dance, and live events. Upcoming: *Snow Day* at Houston Grand Opera. Recent credits include *Cyrano* at Daryl Roth Theatre; *Octet and Thom Pain (based on nothing)* at Signature Theater Company; *Gloria: A Life* at Daryl Roth Theatre; *Miles for Mary* at Playwrights Horizons; *Acquanetta* at Prototype Festival; *Aging Magician* at New Victory Theatre; *Mahagonny/Medium and The Rape of Lucretia* at Curtis Institute of Music; and *All the Fine Boys* at The Pershing Square Signature Center. Her designs have been featured at American Repertory Theater, McCarter Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Walker Arts Center, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Z Space, The Kimmel Center, and numerous TED Talks.



JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW
(LIGHTING DESIGN)

Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew is an award-winning lighting designer for theatre, dance, opera, musicals, music performances, installation, immersive experiences and digital productions. She aims to create a visual environment that is organically integrated into the landscape and language of the production. NY Times described them as “clever” and “inventive”. Her designs have been seen across US cities and internationally at Havana (Cuba), Prague (Czech Republic), Lima (Peru), Edinburgh (Scotland), Tokyo (Japan), Graz (Austria), Shanghai (China), Paris (France), and Bloemfontein (South Africa). Recent operas: The Industry’s *Sweet Land* (2020 Lighting Design Achievement Award) with Yuval Sharon, White Snake Projects’ *Alice in the Pandemic* (digital premiere), Kamala Sankaram’s *Thumbprint*

(world premiere), HK Gruber’s *Gloria - A Pig Tale* with Alan Gilbert and Doug Fitch, Schubert’s *Fierrabras* with Leon Botstein, Gotham Opera’s *Oriente*, Jonathan Dawe’s *Così fan Tutti*, Peter Winkler’s *Fox Fables* with Rhoda Levine, Tarik O'Regan’s *The Wanton Sublime* and David Cote’s *The Companion* (both semi-stage premiere), Aaron Siegel’s *Brother Brother* (world premiere), Handel’s *Alcina* with Pocket Opera NY, and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* with Isabel Milenski.

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The Michigan Opera Theatre Board of Directors began the first phase of fundraising for Detroit Opera House capital improvements in January 2020. This multi-phase capital campaign grew from recommendations identified in the facilities master plan completed by Albert Kahn Associates, Inc. Scheduled facility improvements and upgrades will shape the patron experience at the Opera House for years to come.

We look forward to sharing full details about the capital campaign in the coming months. Until then, we extend heartfelt thanks to the following donors who made contributions that enabled capital improvements to begin.

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*The following listing is provided as of August 31, 2021 and is listed in alphabetical order.

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The Italian word avanti means "ahead," or "forward." The Avanti Society at Michigan Opera Theatre represents a designated group of patrons Michigan Opera Theatre who have made plans to include the organization in their estates — whether by will, trust, insurance, or life income arrangement. Membership in The Avanti Society is open to all.

Michigan Opera Theatre is grateful for the generosity and foresight of those listed below, who have chosen to declare their intentions and join the Avanti Society.

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OUT, ABOUT AND AT THE OPERA: CIVIC-MINDED STAGINGS WITH MOT

MEGAN STEIGERWALD ILLE

What exactly is opera? This simple question typically elicits very different responses. All of the answers I've heard, however, are correct, if different in focus: sound, voice, narrative, spectacle, instruments, acoustic performance, and amplification all are a part of operatic performance. Even the question of what to call a group of people watching an opera—audience, viewers, patrons, spectators—gestures towards the genre's many elements. To call these people an "audience" for instance, emphasizes the process of audition, the listening, and thus the sounds that are a part of the genre. "Spectator" and "viewer" point to the role of watching. Spectacle is an inherent part of any opera regardless of the size of the work. And "patron?" This word references the complex system of funding historical and contemporary performances alike. The genre of opera is a teeming mass of signifiers, sounds, sights, stories, and crucially, spectators, audience members, viewers, and patrons. The many elements that make up an operatic production are meant to exist in tension with one another, and this is also one of the reasons operatic performances can be so exciting and overwhelming.

What about the space in which the spectacle is taking place? This specific operatic convention—the opera house—represents far more than the building that contains operatic components. Rather, the opera house concretizes particular relationships between sight and sound. In facilitating these relationships, the opera house also represents more than simply a space for looking and listening. When operatic performance is taken out of the opera house, far more occurs than a reorganization of the way individuals might watch and listen—although that happens too!

Operas and events staged in public spaces beyond the opera house offer the opportunity to rethink what it means to access and engage with the genre, and indeed, to reckon with its complex history.

This process of reckoning and engagement is at the heart of the performances featured in the first part of MOT's 2021-2022 season. Operatic performances outside of the opera house can take many forms and in turn, engage with civic spaces in different ways. For instance, a work like Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, presented at the Meadow Brook Amphitheatre, will be performed in what might be *appear* to be a set up more similar to that of the Detroit Opera House, with audience members facing a proscenium-style stage. The similarities may end there, however. For instance, audience members may listen differently as they feel the cool night air and watch the sun dropping below the stage. Bringing this narrative outside of the opera house and into the open space of the amphitheatre might even recall the village square upon which much of the opera's action takes place. A work like Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue* is situated in an even more definitive way in Detroit. In traveling to the Aretha Franklin

Amphitheatre, ticketholders using Woodward (Avenue) might pass Hubert Massey's "Power to the People" mural, painted by twenty Detroit teens and unveiled on June 19, 2020 in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The narrative of *Blue*—a Black family negotiating the consequences of structural racism in their community—is thus staged "in conversation" with the civic space of Woodward Avenue and the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre.

Leaving the opera house, as demonstrated by the first part of Michigan Opera Theatre's season, allows for a work to be civically minded in a way that can differ from mainstage-oriented ways of thinking about community engagement. In other words, opera companies frequently center much of their focus on the mainstage season (which makes sense) and use the auxiliary events as a way to draw audiences *into* the mainstage space. Regional opera companies around the country have engaged in these types of "beyond-the-mainstage" activities and programming for many years. These events, what I call "auxiliary programming" in my own writing, have the potential to enact a relationship between opera company and the community for whom it is a part in multiple ways.



Junfu Han and Kelly Jordan, *Detroit Free Press*



Dorian L. Dillard II singing at a Summer Serenade concert at Spirit Plaza

Historically, “auxiliary programming” might be understood as any kind of programming that takes place beyond the scope of the mainstage, encompassing both outreach and education. These events might take the form of pop-up performances at nightclubs (San Francisco Opera), site-specific performances in community gardens (Atlanta Opera), food trucks offering aria performances (Portland Opera), storybook hours for kids (Cincinnati Opera), and flash mobs (Opera Philadelphia). At Michigan Opera Theatre, past auxiliary initiatives have taken the form of programs like “Opera Goes to Church,” in which performances were offered at Detroit churches and the 2018-19 “Page to Stage” series offered at Detroit-metro public libraries. In general, these auxiliary events are seen as a way to facilitate the opera company’s relationship to the community and the programming is often shaped around mainstage season offerings. What makes both the appointment of Davóné Tines as Artist-in-Residence *and* the first part of MOT’s 2021-2022 season significant is that the model of mainstage/auxiliary; center/periphery has been inverted. In other words, the Detroit community is being foregrounded as key to enacting the mainstage. This new model might also be understood as exerting a kind of centrifugal force. The Detroit-based Act I of the 21-22 season (*Cavalleria rusticana*, *Blue*, and *Bliss*) creates a kind of community-driven momentum. As Act II (*Frida*, *La bohème*, and *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*) begins, we then return to our seats inside Music Hall and the Detroit Opera House and confront the problems and situations that occur outside in everyday life and now also onstage.

While this type of community-oriented turn is significant, opera is not an innocent ambassador. It is an art form with a complex history. Works staged outside of the opera house can reproduce some of the hierarchies and inequalities of the genre that take place in conventional spaces, and crucially, all companies must be aware of the types of spaces into which these performances are brought. What is so fascinating about Act I of the Michigan Opera Theatre’s 2021-2022 season, however, is that these

company choices are not just a form of opera for the COVID-19 era. Instead, they signify the ways operatic performance both in and out of the house could constitute the genre for the future. These works are ambitious: they perform a definition of opera that is civic minded, and that reflects the experience of everyday people. They have the potential to mobilize the realism of *verismo* from narrative into production. “My goal with any project I ever do is that I want every single person to recognize themselves in the work we create,” Yuval Sharon said to me in October 2020. Sharon was speaking of collaborative processes with other artists, but these words describe the civic orientation of Michigan Opera Theatre as well. In the process, we have arrived at a further word to describe those audiences, spectators, viewers, and patrons whom I mentioned at the beginning of this essay: collaborators. The definition of opera keeps expanding.

Note: This essay is indebted to the ideas of Joy Calico regarding operatic spectatorship and spectacle, Ryan Ebright’s work on Anthony Davis’s X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X and also amplification in the opera house, and finally, the writings of David Levin and Roger Parker on operatic ontologies.

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UPCOMING PERFORMANCE

X:

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MALCOLM X

Father murdered by white supremacist. Mother institutionalized by white society. A grade school boy taken from his siblings and forced into the foster care system. So starts the Michigan story of Malcolm Little, whose early years in East Lansing shaped the brutal worldview and ultimate redemption of the man who would become Black activist, human rights icon, and Detroit hero Malcolm X.

A masterpiece penned in the mid-80s by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Anthony Davis (Central Park Five), X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X charges onstage with a distinctly American story told in a distinctly American opera. With recognizable Wagnerian influences sharpened by Miles and Mingus improvisations, X barrels through Malcolm's outlaw years as Detroit Red, his spiritual awakening in prison, and his rise to glory and infamy as an unflinching critic of white power and beacon of black hope.

MOT is proud to create the first professional staging of the opera since its 1986 premiere with New York City Opera in a new, revised version of the score and in a dazzling production directed by Tony nominee Robert O'Hara (Slave Play). An opera whose time has come, X offers an unforgettable affirmation that the act of defining oneself can be the most daring act of all.

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