

Detroit Opera

Yuval Sharon, Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director
Christine Goerke, Associate Artistic Director
Roberto Kalb, Music Director

Detroit Opera announces Patty Isacson Sabee as next President and CEO, succeeding long-time leader Wayne S. Brown



Patty Isacson Sabee photo by Elman Studio

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DETROIT, August 24, 2023—The board and trustees of Detroit Opera have announced that Patty Isacson Sabee will be the organization’s next President and CEO. When she begins her new position on January 2, 2024, Isacson Sabee will be only the third person to lead Detroit Opera since its founding (as Michigan Opera Theatre) in 1971 by the late David DiChiera. Earlier this year, Wayne S. Brown, who has led the company since 2014, announced his intention to retire by the end of the 2023–24 season.

“Patty Isacson Sabee is a transformative, collaborative leader with more than 35 years of experience driving excellence at U.S. arts institutions,” says Board Chairman Ethan Davidson. “With proven leadership and entrepreneurial skills, and knowledge and experience in all aspects of arts management, she is the right match for the Detroit Opera, which has become

the destination for progressive opera in the United States. We are impressed by her innovative, forward-thinking approach to the arts, which includes leading a pop-culture museum in Seattle and an immersive language museum in Washington, D.C. She has the people skills necessary for successful and collaborative partnership development, individual performance management, and board, staff, musician, volunteer, and community relations. We are excited to have Patty lead Detroit Opera and confident that she will build on our success as a leading producer of opera in America and a premier theater in Detroit.”

“Detroit Opera is one of America’s great cultural treasures,” says Patty Isacson Sabee. “David DiChiera and Wayne Brown have been inspirational leaders in stewarding this company, and I look forward to preserving their important partnerships while building new connections that will advance Detroit Opera’s mission and deepen its impact. I also look forward to collaborating with Yuval Sharon, Christine Goerke, Roberto Kalb, and Detroit Opera’s Board, musicians, production and administrative staff in defining an innovative vision for opera and dance for the future. But most important, I look forward to engaging with the city of Detroit and the people who call it home. This city’s history and creative energy inspires and informs my path, and I am honored to lead the company at this exciting time.”

“I couldn’t be happier that the board has chosen Patty as Detroit Opera’s new president and CEO,” says Yuval Sharon. “Beyond her proven managerial expertise and her demonstrated love of opera, Patty has a clear-eyed vision for sustainability and community engagement, and she knows how to support artists in their pursuits of extraordinary work. She is the perfect person to take on the mantle from David DiChiera and Wayne Brown – both of whom have shown a tireless commitment to cultivating opera throughout the region. Detroit Opera is in good hands!”

“I am thrilled to welcome Patty Isacson Sabee as my successor,” says Wayne Brown. “She is a highly respected leader with a remarkable track record, and I cannot imagine a better outcome of the search process for our organization and community. Having followed our founder, David DiChiera, as President and CEO for nearly ten years, I will pivot from my role in the coming months. It is affirming for me to know that the reins will pass to Patty as the next President and CEO.”

Isacson Sabee is currently Executive Director of Planet Word, an immersive language experience in Washington, D.C. that opened in October 2020 and celebrates the fun, beauty, and power of words, language, and reading. At Seattle’s Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP), founded in 2000 as the Experience Music Project, she served as Director of External Relations and Development before being named CEO and Director. She oversaw MoPOP’s national programming and \$213 million in assets and was responsible for bringing in more than 600,000 annual visitors. She began her career in arts administration at the Seattle Symphony, where over the course of two decades she held positions in operations, artistic administration, and development before serving as Interim Executive Director. Her accomplishments at Seattle Symphony include directing the start-up operations of Benaroya Hall, a \$118 million dedicated symphonic concert hall that opened in September 1998.

Isacson Sabee joins Detroit Opera as it builds on David DiChiera's vision for the company as a center for high-quality, accessible opera in the heart of Detroit. Under the artistic direction of Yuval Sharon, recent highlights include 2020's *Twilight: Gods*, a drive-through experience of Richard Wagner's opera *Götterdämmerung (Twilight of the Gods)*, staged in the Detroit Opera's Parking Center. This was followed in 2021 by the world premiere of a new co-production of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, the first revival of Anthony Davis and Thulani Davis's opera since its 1986 premiere, and a new staging of Ragnar Kjartansson's performance piece *BLISS*. Sharon's 2022 acclaimed *La bohème* staging presented the four acts of Puccini's classic opera in reverse order, and his *The Valkyries* last fall used virtual reality, filmmaking technology, and graphics engines to bring Act III of Wagner's *Die Walküre* to life. Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar (Fountain of Tears)* in April 2023 represented another major milestone: Detroit Opera's first international co-production, in collaboration with Opera Ventures, Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera, where it will be staged in the 2024–25 season.

About Detroit Opera

Detroit Opera (formerly Michigan Opera Theatre), one of the nation's most vibrant nonprofit arts organizations, aspires to influence the future of opera and dance with a goal of invigorating audiences through new and re-imagined productions, relevant to current times. It is creating an ambitious standard for American opera and dance that emphasizes community, accessibility, artistic risk-taking, and collaboration. Detroit Opera's artistic leadership team comprises Yuval Sharon, Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director; Associate Artistic Director Christine Goerke; Music Director Roberto Kalb; and Artistic Advisor for Dance Jon Teeuwissen.

Single tickets are on sale now for the 2023–24 Detroit Opera season, which opens with three October presentations, beginning with Puccini's tragedy *Madame Butterfly*, as re-envisioned by an all-Japanese and Japanese-American creative team that transports the opera to a virtual-reality setting. Dance Theatre of Harlem will perform works choreographed by George Balanchine and William Forsythe, plus the Detroit premiere of Artistic Director Robert Garland's *Return*, featuring music by James Brown and Aretha Franklin. *Arias and Overtures: Detroit Opera in Concert* will spotlight new Music Director Roberto Kalb leading a cast of superstar singers, headlined by soprano Christine Goerke. The opera season continues in 2024 with John Cage's *Europerras 3 & 4*, Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's *Breaking the Waves*, and Leoš Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*. For more information, call the box office at 313.237.7464 or visit www.detroitopera.org.