

# Detroit Opera

Detroit Opera Youth Chorus to present  
Ben Moore and Kelley Rourke's *Odyssey* at the  
Detroit Opera House, April 20, 2:30pm



The Detroit Opera Youth Chorus will perform the one-hour opera *Odyssey* on April 20 at the Detroit Opera House. Glimmerglass Festival photo (2018) by Karli Cadel

**DETROIT, April 2024**—The choristers of the Detroit Opera Youth Chorus (DOYC) will perform *Odyssey*, a fully staged opera for young audiences, at the Detroit Opera House, April 20 at 2:30pm. The one-hour opera by composer Ben Moore and librettist Kelley Rourke is based on Homer's epic tale of a hero's journey home. In their rendition, the stories of Odysseus and his faithful wife, Penelope, are woven together in a colorful production that includes sailor songs, storms, a Siren song that "conveys a sense of ageless, timeless beauty" (*Opera News*), a tango, a love duet, and more. The stage director for *Odyssey* will be Sarah Hawkins Rusk, who directed DOYC's digital opera performance of Cary John Franklin and Michael Albano's *The Very Last Green Thing* in 2020. The conductor will be Preparatory Chorus Conductor Jane Panikkar. All roles in the opera are performed by DOYC singers;

principal roles include Bard 1 (sung by Viraj Tathavadekar), Bard 2 (Lana Lanzanas), Odysseus (Harrison Hunger), and Penelope (Olivia Emanuele).

### **Odyssey**

Composer: Ben Moore

Librettist: Kelley Rourke

Originally commissioned by the Glimmerglass Festival

Director: Sarah Hawkins Rusk

Conductor: Jane Panikkar

Detroit Opera Youth Chorus

Detroit Opera House

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 2:30pm

Tickets: \$15–50 for adults, free for children 5 and under

More information: <https://detroitopera.org/season-schedule/doyc-performances/>

### **About the Creative Team**



Left to right: *Odyssey* composer Ben Moore, librettist Kelley Rourke, director Sarah Hawkins Rusk, conductor Jane Panikkar

The songs of American composer **Ben Moore** have been heard at venues across the world including Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, the Kennedy Center, Wigmore Hall in London and the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. His work has been called “brilliant” and “gorgeously lyrical” by the *New York Times* while *Opera News* has praised the “easy tunefulness” and “romantic sweep” of his songs. Singers who have performed his work include Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Frederica von Stade, Isabel Leonard, Lawrence Brownlee, Nathan Gunn and Audra McDonald. Moore’s work includes opera, musical theater, cabaret, choral music, chamber music and comedy material. Moore composed the scores for three operas including *Enemies, a Love Story* (libretto by Nahma Sandrow), which premiered at Palm Beach Opera in 2015 and has been called “an important new work that will find its place among those works that audiences will be moved by...” (Fred Plotkin/WQXR). *Odyssey* and *Robin Hood* (librettos by Kelley Rourke) are youth operas commissioned by the Glimmerglass Festival. They have been seen at venues across the country including Seattle Opera, Minnesota Opera, Houston Grand Opera and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 2006 the Metropolitan Opera featured two of Ben’s comedy songs in a gala broadcast nationally. Recent events include the premiere of the song cycle *And Another Song Comes On* (words by Mark Campbell) for the London Song Festival and the premiere of a newly revised version of the choral work, *The Wave Rises*, for Cantori New York. Website: [www.mooreart.com](http://www.mooreart.com).

**Kelley Rourke** is a librettist, translator and dramaturg. She has collaborated with composers including John Glover, Laura Karpman, Ben Moore, Kenji Oh, Kamala Sankaram and Wang Lu on new operas. Her modern English adaptations of numerous standard and not-so-standard operas

have been hailed as “crackingly witty” (*The Independent*, London) and “remarkably well wedded to the music and versification in arias” (*New York Times*). She has written libretti for four youth operas, with performances across the country. Her work has been commissioned and performed by the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, San Francisco Conservatory, and Milwaukee Opera Theatre, among others. Kelley is resident dramaturg for the Glimmerglass Festival and Artistic Advisor for Washington National Opera’s American Opera Initiative. Kelley holds degrees in piano performance and arts management, and she is a Certified Critical Response Practitioner. She has studied, practiced and taught yoga and mindfulness for more than two decades, and is a co-developer and trainer for a wellness curriculum that has been implemented in public schools in New York City, Houston, Indianapolis, El Paso and Columbia, SC. Recent and upcoming premieres include *The Emissary* (Kenji Oh, composer) at Opera Parallèle; *right now*, an orchestral song cycle with composer John Glover for Chrystal E. Williams, Felipe Hostins, and American Composers Orchestra; *Macbeth and the Weird Sisters*, a rock adaptation of Verdi’s *Macbeth* featuring Andrew Wilkowske at Theater Latte Da; *Songbird* at Washington National Opera; and a new adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel* for Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Instagram: @ kelley\_rebecca

**Sarah Hawkins Rusk**, a native of Indiana, has been working as an actor, director, and educator across the country for the last eighteen years. Hawkins Rusk received her MFA from Wayne State University and BA from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. As a director, she has worked with such theatres as Open Book Theatre Company, Tipping Point Theatre, Wagon Wheel Theatre, Motor City Youth Theatre and Detroit Mercy Theatre Company, where she garnered national recognition from the Kennedy Center American Theatre Festival in 2021 for her impactful production of *Antigone*. Her work has also extended to the digital realm, as she directed the DOYC’s first-ever digital opera performance of *The Very Last Green Thing* in 2020, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression. As a performer, Hawkins Rusk has graced the stages of renowned theaters across the country, from Detroit-area theatre such as Tipping Point Theatre, Planet Ant, and Matrix Theatre to the Commonweal Theatre Company in Lanesboro, MN, CLIMB Theatre in St. Paul, MN, and the prestigious Creede Repertory Theatre in Creede, CO. Hawkins Rusk’s dedication to her craft extends to sharing her knowledge and expertise with aspiring artists. As a certified teacher in the transformative Michael Chekhov technique, she teaches at the University of Detroit Mercy, shaping the next generation of theatrical visionaries. Instagram: @ sakathharu

**Jane Arvidson Panikkar** is conductor of the Detroit Opera Youth Preparatory Chorus. Panikkar is also a professional pianist, trumpeter, vocalist, and teacher. Prior to her position with the Detroit Opera, she was on the music faculty at Concordia University, conducting the Chamber Choir. Currently, Panikkar is a music director at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Ann Arbor and serves as a board member and Vice President of Artistic Affairs for the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra. She is also the high school and middle school choir director for HSC, one of the largest homeschool co-ops in Michigan, and conducts and directs theater productions at Saline High School. Panikkar is in high demand as a collaborative pianist, while maintaining a private voice studio. She holds a master’s degree in choral conducting from Eastern Michigan University, and a bachelor of music degree in trumpet performance from the University of Michigan. Panikkar resides in Saline, Michigan, with her husband, international opera singer Sean Panikkar, and their four children.

## About the Detroit Opera Youth Chorus



Detroit Opera Youth Chorus photo by Cindi Jones Photography

The Detroit Opera Youth Chorus (DOYC) is a world-class training program for young vocalists ages 8 to 17 from metropolitan Detroit. The chorus, founded in 2007 by Suzanne Mallare Acton, Detroit Opera's Assistant Music Director and Chorus Master, performs as a separate ensemble as well as with international opera stars in Detroit Opera mainstage productions. Rehearsals take place at the Detroit Opera House on Monday evenings from September through May, led by Conductor Jane Panikkar. DOYC's 2023–24 performances include a December "A Winter Fantasy" holiday concert in Royal Oak, Michigan, and Ben Moore and Kelley Rourke's *Odyssey*, a fully staged opera presentation in April. The Detroit Opera's professional presentation of Janáček's opera *The Cunning Little Vixen* in May 2024 will also feature singers from the DOYC Principal Chorus, with several small solo roles also to be selected from the DOYC. Past performances have included the Seymour Barab's *The Maker of Illusions*, Cary John Franklin and Michael Albano's *The Very Last Green Thing*, Malcolm Williamson's *The Happy Prince*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and Hans Krása's *Brundibár*. The chorus is open to all voice types: sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses, ranging from elementary-school students to high-school seniors. Contact Chorus Administrator Twannette Nash at [TNash@Detroitopera.org](mailto:TNash@Detroitopera.org) or visit <https://detroitopera.org/about-us/youth-chorus/> for more information.

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