

Cleveland Opera Theater launches {New Opera Works} Festival

by Mike Telin



The presentation of new and recently composed operas has been part of Cleveland Opera Theater's mission since it was founded in 2006. Beginning on Friday, January 20, the company will launch its first festival dedicated to new opera works.

Scott Skiba, executive artistic director of COT, said that this year's {New Opera Works} Festival features works

that are in the beginning, middle, and ending stages of development. "Federico García Lorca's final play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, is in the initial stages of being adapted into an opera, and there will be a reading of the English translation by Lorca scholar Caridad Svich," Skiba said during a recent interview.

Representing the middle period of development will be a preview of Scene Three from composer Nkeiru Okoye's and librettist David Cote's new opera *We've Got Our Eye on You*. "This will be a teaser of the complete opera, which will be presented during next year's {NOW} Festival," Skiba said. A recently completed work at the Festival will be *Amelia Lost*, a new opera by Larry Delinger and Brad Carroll which had its world premiere in Knoxville back in 2014 (pictured above).

Skiba said the Company is excited to include opera scenes by seven members of the Cleveland Composers Guild on the Festival. {NOW} will conclude with the company's annual collaboration with Oberlin Opera Theater, featuring a production of Philip Glass's *Songs from Liquid Days*.

Following each {NOW} Festival performance, audience members will get to engage with the creative teams and performing artists by attending talk-back discussions. "These are great opportunities for the community to actively



participate in the creative process,” Skiba said. “We’re still about opera for all,” he added, referring to the company’s previous name, Opera Per Tutti.

Skiba said that he and his Cleveland Opera Theater colleagues are happy to be able to launch the first {NOW} Festival. “We started laying the groundwork for it in 2014 with our production of *Clarimonde*,” Skiba said. Since then the company has presented André Previn’s *Streetcar Named Desire* (2015) and Nkeiru Okoye’s *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed that Line to Freedom* (2016). “We hope the Festival will become a destination for the creation, development, and performance of new opera.”

Descriptions of performances and workshops are below.

Click [here](#) for ticket information.

[New Scenes Workshop.](#)

A collaboration with the Cleveland Composers’ Guild. Friday, January 20 at 8:00 pm and Sunday, January 22 at 3:00 pm in the Kulas Music Hall at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music.

The workshop features selections and scenes from new operas by Guild members and will be semi-staged by regional and national directors. Conductor Domenico Boyagian will lead the casts and chamber orchestra.

Both performances include excerpts from Nicholas Underhill’s *Remember the Pines*, William Rayer’s *The Inferno of the Divine Comedy*, Jennifer Conner’s *Dog Meets Cat*, Margi Griebeling-Haigh’s *The Higgler*, Jeffrey Quick’s *The Little White Hen*, Dawn Sonntag’s *Verlorene Heimat*, Margaret Brouwer’s *Voice of the Lake*, Ryan Ramer’s *Amphigorey Also*, and Robert Rollin’s *Meister Raro*.

[New Opera Forum.](#)

Saturday, January 21, 3:00 pm in Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music’s Gamble Auditorium.

The afternoon begins with a performance of Scene Three from Nkeiru Okoye’s and David Cote’s new opera *We’ve Got Our Eye on You*. Domenico Boyagian leads the chamber orchestra and cast featuring Amber Monroe (Enyo), Angela Mitchell

(Pemphredo), Susan Fletcher (Deino), Adrianna Cleveland (Pythia), and Brian Johnson (Perseus).

Following the performance, the opera's libretto will be read and followed by a discussion focusing on how potential alterations could strengthen the impact of the opera's drama and social themes.

A discussion about the state of new opera and producing opera in the 21st century will follow. Panelists include composers Nkeiru Okoye, Larry Delinger, Griffin Candey, and H. Leslie Adams, librettist David Cote, and stage director Jonathon Field.

Performances of Larry Delinger's and Brad Carroll's [*Amelia Lost*](#).

Saturday, January 21 and Monday, January 23 at 8:00 pm in the Kulas Music Hall at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music.

This new 30-minute opera was inspired by aviator Amelia Earhart and a homeless woman Delinger encountered in California. In the story, created using Earhart's actual words, the homeless woman believes that she is experiencing Earhart's final flight.

The performances will feature soprano Kathryn Frady, who originated the role of Amelia during the 2014 world premiere in Knoxville, TN. Frady's portrayal of Amelia was also featured in the 2016 New York City premiere of the work at the National Opera Center. This production will feature stage direction by James Marvel, and guest conductor Brian Holman will lead the chamber orchestra. A pre-performance introduction and post-performance talk-back session will be led by Larry Delinger.

A reading of Federico García Lorca's final play, [*The House of Bernarda Alba*](#).

Sunday, January 22 at 7:00 pm in Kulas Music Hall at Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music.

This new work is currently in the beginning stage of development. The performance will feature a full-cast reading of the play in English translation by Lorca scholar Caridad Svich, and is presented through a collaboration between Cleveland Opera Theater, composer Griffin Candey, and the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music. A talk-back session will follow the reading.

The cast includes Nancy Maultsby (Bernarda Alba), Joanne Uniatowski (LaPoncia), Dawna Warren (Adela), Emily Pucell (Anghiustas), Sarah Antell (Martirio), Olivia Beal (Amelia), Ciara Newman (Magdalena), Nanette Canfield (María Josefa), and Cynthia O'Connell (Prudencia).

Philip Glass's *Songs from Liquid Days*.

Friday and Saturday, January 27 and 28 at 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm in Oberlin Conservatory's Warner Concert Hall. Admission is free, but seating is limited. Please call 440.775.8260 to reserve a ticket.

A co-production with Oberlin Opera Theater, *Songs from Liquid Days* is a collection of songs with lyrics by Paul Simon, Suzanne Vega, David Byrne, and Laurie Anderson. Oberlin Opera Theater's Jonathon Field directs this multimedia production.

On Sunday, January 29 the production travels to The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. The 5:00 pm performance will be preceded by a 3:00 pm educational exhibit and information session presented by Rock Hall representatives.

The session looks at the fusion of rock and classical music, and the divisions between what are perceived as high and low art. Attendees will learn how the many Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees were involved in the creation and performance of *Songs from Liquid Days*. The discussion and performance are free and open to the public.

Later this week we will talk to Jonathon Field to get his insights into the production of Philip Glass's groundbreaking work.

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