

Cleveland Opera Theater to present {NOW} Festival

by Mike Telin



More often than not, the creation of a new opera is a lengthy process. While composers such as Mozart and Rossini were able to dash off operas in record time, new titles can go through a long gestation period.

Beginning later this week, Cleveland Opera Theater will present its second annual [{NOW} Festival](#) featuring performances of new opera works at various stages of development, including readings, workshops, and staged productions. {NOW} is presented in collaboration with The Cleveland Composers' Guild, Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, Oberlin Conservatory, and the Maltz Center for the Performing Arts. All events are free and open to the

public (some require registration). Following each performance audiences will have the opportunity to engage with the creative teams and performers during talk-back sessions.

{NOW} begins on Friday the 26th at 7:30 pm at the Maltz Center with a reading of Obie award winner and Garcia Lorca scholar Caridad Svich's new libretto based on Lorca's last play, *Bernarda Alba*. "During last year's Festival we read Caridad's English translation of the play," Scott Skiba, COT's executive artistic director said during a recent telephone conversation. "This year we'll have the first public reading of the English/Spanish-language libretto. We will plan to produce the opera with a score by Griffin Candey during future {NOW} Festivals." Admission is free.

On Saturday the 27th at 10:00 am at the Maltz, the "New Opera Forum" will feature Festival Artists discussing the process of creating, developing, and producing new works. Participants include librettist Caridad Svich; composers Griffin Candey, Dawn Sonntag, Margi Griebing-Haigh, Lorenzo Salvagni, and Ryan Charles Ramer; and

stage director Christopher Mirto. “I’m excited about this because it includes artists who are local and regional, as well as global,” Skiba said. “The session will begin with a little teaser of Du Yun’s *Angel’s Bone*, which will be presented at the end of the Festival.”

Later that day at 3:00 pm, also at the Maltz, a “Scenes Workshop,” presented in collaboration with the Cleveland Composers’ Guild, will include selections from new operas by Guild members. Scenes from Margi Griebing-Haigh’s *The Higgler*, Ryan Charles Ramer’s *Taste of Addiction*, and Lorenzo Salvagni’s *Piedigrotta* will be performed with piano accompaniment. The event will be repeated on Sunday at 7:30 pm. Performances are free but [ticketed](#).



At 7:30 pm on Saturday at the Maltz, {NOW} will present the Cleveland premiere of Dawn Sonntag’s *Verlorene Heimat*. Set in a Nazi-occupied village, the opera is based on the true story of the East Prussian refugee family of Christa Neuber Kuske (1937 – 2012) and the Jewish-Ukrainian girl they sheltered. The fully-staged production is directed by Justin John Moniz, and conductor Domenico Boyagian will lead the orchestra. The cast includes Rebecca Freshwater, Brian Johnson, Donna Warren, Timothy Culver, and Jason Budd. (Watch a short video of Sonntag describing the piece [here](#).) “It is wonderful that we are able to present this on [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#),” Skiba said. “It’s going to be very special.” A second performance will be

presented on Sunday at 3:00 pm. Free tickets are available [online](#).

Beginning on Wednesday, January 31 at 7:30 pm, a new production of *Angel’s Bone* will be presented at Oberlin College’s Cat in the Cream Coffee House. The one-act opera by composer Du Yun, with libretto by Royce Vavrek, melds chamber music, theater, punk rock, opera, cabaret, and electronics, exploring the dark effects and motivations behind modern-day slavery and the trafficking industry. Christopher Mirto is the stage director and Matthew Chamberlin leads the orchestra. Performances run through February 7. Admission is free, but [tickets](#) are required.

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