

***Blind Injustice: Six lives wrongly incarcerated,  
one story of hope and resilience***

by Mike Telin



When Karen Prasser started her job as executive director of Chagrin Arts in January of 2019, she found herself going through the files of programs that participants in Chautauqua-in-Chagrin had said they wanted to learn more about. Among them was the Cincinnati-based Ohio Innocence Project (OIP) who have a simple goal: to free every innocent person in Ohio who has been convicted of a crime they didn't commit.

At the same time Prasser, who had worked in opera for many years, was made aware of *Blind Injustice*, a work that was to receive its premiere by Cincinnati Opera on July 22, 2019. The 90-minute, one-act opera is based on OIP co-founder Mark Godsey's book of the same name, and on interviews with six people who had their convictions overturned through the efforts of the Ohio Innocence Project.

Prasser was intrigued and knew she needed to get herself to a performance. Even though they were sold out, Prasser was able to obtain a ticket. After the performance she thought, "I want to bring this to Cleveland because it is the epicenter of wrongful convictions. I felt a calling to take what I do and use the arts to make a difference."

For the past six years she and Chagrin Arts have been putting the pieces of the puzzle together that would enable them to produce the opera here. As a result, on Friday, July 11 at 7:30 pm, Chagrin Arts will present the Northeast Ohio premiere of *Blind Injustice* at Outcalt Theatre in Playhouse Square.

Composed by Scott Davenport Richards with a libretto by David Cote, the opera is directed by Eric van Baars. Andrew Grams conducts the orchestra. The production will be repeated on Saturday, July 12 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, July 13 at 3:00 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

*Blind Injustice* tells the real life stories of Rickey Jackson, Nancy Smith, Clarence Elkins, and the East Cleveland 3 —Laurese Glover, Eugene Johnson, and Derrick Wheatt — all of whom were convicted and incarcerated for crimes they did not commit. The opera follows each of their stories from the time the alleged crime was committed, through their incarceration, the work of OIP, and ultimately their release.

At the 2019 premiere, Prasser found herself sitting in the same row as the exonerees whose stories were being told. “I thought, what must they be thinking? 40% of the words are their own words. Do they have to live this over and over again? But I do think that anyone who sees it will have a lifechanging experience.”

*This is the first in a series of previews.*

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