

## PRESS RELEASE

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **FORT WORTH OPERA PROUDLY ANNOUNCES WORLD PREMIERE OPERA, COMPANIONSHIP, BY COMPOSER-LIBRETTIST RACHEL J. PETERS, & FULL CASTING FOR THE 2019 FESTIVAL SEASON**

FORT WORTH, TX – Fort Worth Opera (FWOpera) announced today the casts and creative teams for the 2019 Festival season, including the world premiere of composer-librettist Rachel J. Peters's delightfully wicked opera, *Companionship*. Adapted from the short story by internationally bestselling author Arthur Phillips, this deliciously dark comedy about an obsession with dough, mirrors our modern world, where what we consume becomes all-consuming. Selected as a winner of the 2018 FWOpera Frontiers showcase, the work will receive a fully staged production next spring at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, as part of FWOpera's alternative venue series, *Opera Unbound*, and is the first opera written by a woman to be produced by the company in its 73-year history.

Led by acclaimed opera director Beth Greenberg, who started her career at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, *Companionship* stars soprano Maren Weinberger (*The Barber of Seville*, *Buried Alive* | *Embedded*) as an aspiring baker named Leslie Sinclair, living in present-day Waukesha, Wisconsin. Recovering from a nervous breakdown, she sets out to bake the perfect baguette when the 207,345<sup>th</sup> one suddenly comes to life. The ambitious and tyrannical Dough, played by mezzo-soprano Kate Tombaugh (*Brief Encounters*), promises to reveal a mysterious "great wisdom," if only she will comply with its wishes. Baritone Samuel Schultz (*Brief Encounters*) returns to Fort Worth as Leslie's retired police detective father Gene, with mezzo-soprano Hilary Ginther and bass Benjamin Sieverding as her overbearing mother Judy and the Dough's Mate. Soprano Jeni Houser (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) and tenor David Walton will portray Leslie's fraternal twin sister Viv and her exterminator boyfriend Tom. Called a "titanic force" by the *New York Times*, versatile performer Adam Marks music directs and accompanies at the piano.

"This project began on a whim in 2011 with scenes for a concert featuring Brooklyn Book Festival authors, and I just couldn't let it go. I felt as if Arthur had written this story specially for me; it was already so full of music and crying out for adaptation," said Brooklyn-based Peters. "The opera has been developed in fits and starts over the years by American Opera Projects, Manhattan School of Music, and the John Duffy Institute for New Opera. I'm thrilled to finally bring the entire piece to life at Fort Worth Opera."

The 2019 Festival opens on April 26 with renowned opera director Francesca Zambello's celebrated revival of George Gershwin, DuBose Heyward, Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. This iconic love story, considered one of the most important American operas of the past century, returns to Bass Performance Hall after seventeen years with a groundbreaking production that has been praised by audiences and critics alike at Washington National Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

## FORT WORTH OPERA

This beloved classic, directed by **Garnett Bruce**, stars one of the finest interpreters of the role of Bess in the world, Marian Anderson Award-winning soprano **Indira Mahajan**, and rising young baritone **Thomas Cannon**, as the disabled beggar named Porgy. The powerhouse cast also includes **Jermaine Smith** (Sportin' Life), **Karen Slack** (Serena), **Norman Garrett** (Crown), **John Fulton** (Jake), **Meroë Khalia Adeeb** (Clara), **Chaz'men Williams-Ali** (Robbins | Crabman), and **Martin Bakari** as the elderly "honey man," Peter.

On May 10, the company will present the world's second mariachi opera, *El Pasado Nunca se Termina* (*The Past is Never Finished*), with music by the late **José 'Pepe' Martínez** and opera director **Leonard Foglia**. Part of FWOpera's unwavering commitment to works that reflect the culturally diverse North Texas community, this stunning bilingual family drama is set on the eve of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, as race, class, and economic conflicts between peasants and the descendants of the Spanish conquistadors boil to the surface.

The opera follows the forbidden romance between a wealthy European landowner's son, played by exciting American tenor **Daniel Montenegro** (Luis), and Amorita, an indigenous Mexican girl –thrilling Puerto Rican soprano **Abigail Santos Villalobos** – whose family works and lives on the estate. Surrounded by violence, their clandestine love affair will alter the destiny of their families for generations to come. The talented cast includes **Paul La Rosa** (Enrique), **Ricardo Rivera** (Acalán), **Vanessa Cerda-Alonzo** (Juana), **Luis Ledesma** (Augustino), **Cassandra Zoé Velasco** (Isabel | Dolores), **Miguel Nuñez** (Miguel/Hotel Manager), and Mexican baritone **Octavio Moreno** as the mysterious shaman Xihuitl.

### **Companionship**

Music and Libretto by Rachel J. Peters

May 1, 3, 5

Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Lecture Hall Auditorium

In English with no supertitles

### **CAST:**

Maren Weinberger (Leslie Sinclair)

Kate Tombaugh (The Dough)

Samuel Schultz (Gene Sinclair)

Jeni Houser (Viv Sinclair)

Hilary Ginther (Judy Sinclair)

David Walton (Tom)

Benjamin Sieverding (Dough's Mate)

### **ARTISTIC TEAM:**

Beth Greenberg, Director

Adam Marks, Music Director | Pianist

### **Porgy and Bess**

By George Gershwin, Dubose Heyward, Dorothy Heyward, Ira Gershwin

April 26, 28m, 30

Bass Performance Hall, downtown Fort Worth

In English with Spanish and English supertitles

# FORT WORTH OPERA

## CAST:

Indira Mahajan (Bess)  
Thomas Cannon (Porgy)  
Jermaine Smith (Sportin' Life)  
Karen Slack (Serena)  
Norman Garrett (Crown)  
John Fulton (Jake)  
Meroë Khalia Adeeb (Clara)  
Chaz'men Williams-Ali (Robbins | Crabman)  
Martin Bakari (Peter)

## ARTISTIC TEAM:

Garnett Bruce, Director  
Joe Illick, Conductor  
Eric Sean Fogel & Eboni Adams, Choreographers  
Mark McCullough, Lighting

## ***El Pasado Nunca se Termina*** (*The Past is Never Finished*)

Music by José 'Pepe' Martínez  
Libretto by Leonard Foglia  
May 10, 11, 12m  
Bass Performance Hall, downtown Fort Worth  
In Spanish and English with Spanish and English supertitles

## CAST:

Abigail Santos Villalobos (Amorita)  
Daniel Montenegro (Luis)  
Paul La Rosa (Enrique)  
Ricardo Rivera (Acalán)  
Vanessa Cerda-Alonzo (Juana)  
Luis Ledesma (Augustino)  
Cassandra Zoé Velasco (Isabel/Dolores)  
Octavio Moreno (Xihuitl)  
Miguel Nuñez (Miguel | Hotel Manager)

## ARTISTIC TEAM:

Leonard Foglia, Director  
David Hanlon, Music Director

**ABOUT FORT WORTH OPERA:** Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is the oldest continually performing opera company in Texas, and one of the 14 oldest opera companies in the United States. The organization has received national attention from critics and audiences alike for its artistic excellence. FWOpera has taken a leadership role in engaging audiences beyond the operatic stage, while producing cutting-edge, contemporary operas. Beginning in 2017, FWOpera launched the second phase of its landmark, 10-year *Opera of the Americas* initiative with *Noches de Ópera* (*Nights of Opera*), a groundbreaking campaign which introduces powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of American audiences.

Fort Worth Opera is sponsored in part by awards from The Arts Council of Fort Worth & Tarrant County, The City of Fort Worth, and the Texas Commission on the Arts. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Amon G. Carter Foundation; American Airlines; Art & Seek; Crystelle Waggoner Charitable Trust, Bank of America, Trustee; The Pangburn Foundation, J.P. Morgan Chase, Trustee; the Sid W. Richardson Foundation; and WFAA Channel 8.