

MN Opera Diversity Charter July 2020

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Statement of Intent

MN Opera's vision and mission is to sing every story and to change lives by bringing together artists, audiences and community, advancing the art of opera for today and future generations. We aim to inspire hope, empower all voices, and strengthen bonds between people of all backgrounds and identities. To this end, MN Opera commits itself to continuously working to become an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization. We acknowledge that along our journey, our culture and the world around us is constantly evolving. We will inevitably make mistakes. We choose to accept that reality and will humbly begin again in order to lean into this practice.

Artistic Statement of Belief

Opera as a form was created in order to capitalize on the collaboration of a multiplicity of creative disciplines. MN Opera recognizes that opera – the performers, the productions, and the music – has been subject to systems of oppression that restrict access and ownership over the art form. MN Opera believes that pursuing anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices enhances the beauty and power of the form itself, and amplifies the tremendous artistry cultivated in our musical storytelling.

Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Statement

There are many reasons we have chosen to move in this direction, which include changing demographics, funding sources and stakeholder expectations. Above all, however, we believe there is a moral imperative to do so.

As it works to become an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization, MN Opera will create authentic belonging by:

- Actively acknowledging and examining racism, anti-Blackness, and other discriminatory practices;
- Promoting anti-racist and anti-oppressive ideas, values and policies that counter the oppression of any people during the education, production, promotion and experience of opera;
- Working towards eliminating all forms of oppression;
- Developing effective tools for social justice;

For clarity, MN Opera offers the following definitions of anti-racism and anti-oppression:

Anti-racism: "Anti-racism is the practice of identifying, challenging and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism" (Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat; Anti-Racism Defined – Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre).

Anti-oppression: "Anti-oppression is the strategies, theories, actions and practices that actively challenge systems of oppression on an ongoing basis in one's daily life and in social justice / change work. Anti-oppression work seeks to recognize the oppression that exists in our society and attempts to mitigate its effects and eventually equalize the power imbalance in our communities. Oppression operates at different levels (from individual to institutional to cultural) and so anti-oppression must as well" (LibGuides at Simmons University).

These are positive terms, and we embrace them as such. While anti-racism and anti-oppression, by definition, reject oppressive practices, systems and behaviors, this work also demands actions of collaboration, community building, hope, strength and compassion.

MN Opera recognizes that in the United States of America, race is the biggest difference that makes a difference. We, therefore, make an explicit rejection of racism. In addition, the company also rejects all forms of oppression including, but not limited to, cissexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, and misogyny. We acknowledge that race, gender and other aspects of identity are socially constructed, tied to complex histories, and play significant roles in how resources and power are distributed. Race and attributes such as, but not limited to, age, ability, socio-economic status, gender, and sexual orientation intersect and often

compound to cause more harm. These systems of oppression have been realized in the opera industry, including our own organization, by restricting access and ownership over the art form.

Through this work we aim to no longer be a venue of exclusion, but a space of refuge, healing, and justice in all that we do.

Approach

When MN Opera first formalized its commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the organization's Board of Directors passed a Charter establishing a standing Diversity Council to define, implement, review, measure, and improve diversity initiatives at the company. The Council, comprised of both leadership and staff, met annually and work was guided by a Steering Committee. In order to improve efficiency and amplify impact, the structure was updated in the 2019-20 season and the group unified under one Diversity Council. The group meets monthly and continues to include both leadership and staff.

MN Opera began its EDI work with a specific focus on increasing racial, socio-economic, gender and age diversity of its staff, artists and patrons. Through substantial efforts, EDI and cultural competency have been integrated throughout the organization. As we've progressed on our journey, we've come to a clearer understanding that oppression is amplified by race and that racial oppression is a structural occurrence that requires internal action to dismantle. In the 2019-20 season, the decision was made to more explicitly identify the company's commitment as anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

The Council's aim is to support MN Opera in its work as an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization. As staff representatives, the group is committed to a collaborative approach, as opposed to one that is competitive or punitive. It aims to provide resources and a structure of accountability in order to help move MN Opera forward. This includes encouraging each department to create an outline of goals, developed in partnership with colleagues, that serves as a roadmap of activity. Goals are set with the full understanding that this work is process oriented and will need to be reviewed and amended as progress is made.

MN Opera's Board of Directors is pursuing its own concurrent plan of activity, led by the Governance and Nominating Committee. The board will adopt recruitment policies, processes and annual benchmarks that enhance the diversity of the board. It will incorporate diversity measures in its annual self-survey and generally monitor the effectiveness of the Diversity Council and its work.

Diversity Council Goals

To be realized by end of FY21

- Support individual departments in setting and realizing their own goals around anti-racism and anti-oppression work.
- Partner with Team Dynamics on all-staff and cross-department trainings.
- Create and support affinity groups.
- Expand EDI Web Page on MN Opera site.
- Update EDI Glossary.
- Write and communicate a patron code of conduct.
- Create a Resource Library of both online and print resources for staff, patrons and community members.
- Create a mechanism for anonymous feedback on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Incorporate Land Acknowledgement into MN Opera communications.
- Develop recommendations to bring MN Opera hosted 2021 OPERA America conference in closer alignment with anti-racism and anti-oppression values.