MINNESOTA OPERA PRESENTS MNIATURES: TINY OPERAS, BIG IDEAS

The new program will feature entirely original mini operas from four creative teams with a variety of artistic backgrounds.

MINNEAPOLIS (January 8, 2021) – Minnesota Opera presents MNiatures, a new program intended to make space for a variety of voices in and around the opera world, offering them a platform to create and share their stories. MNiatures will be available on YouTube, Facebook and mnopera.org starting Friday, February 5, 2021.

As part of its mission, Minnesota Opera strives to advance the art of opera for future generations. With the creation of MNiatures, Minnesota Opera looks to accomplish that by providing the opportunity for new voices, genres and stories to be given center stage. This program will support teams of creators that reside in Minnesota to develop and record a brief, fully original piece of work—with the hope that the result might challenge traditional connotations associated with opera.

"A big focus for Minnesota Opera as an organization has been to better understand the barriers that surround opera as an artform,” said Minnesota Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “One of the ways we want to tackle those barriers is by actively making space for new stories to be told, from artists with varying backgrounds and expertise. We’re also using this as an opportunity to be intentional about promoting diversity among opera creators. Opera is a discipline that has historically neither promoted nor celebrated the work of composers who are women and people of color, and that reality has informed the creation and structure of this program.”
MNiatures will feature composers, lyricists, librettists, songwriters and others interested in the operatic creative process, from those with traditional opera training to those with experience outside the classical artform.

“Our goal with this program is to reach creative thinkers who we might not have otherwise reached, and to give them the space and resources they need to freely create something entirely of their own,” said Taylor.

Creators who participate in the program will work in teams of two or more, developing an 8-10-minute composition that features a narrative element written primarily for the voice. During this time, Minnesota Opera will facilitate a series of virtual meetings and provide professional video and audio recordings of the final compositions. Teams will also have the opportunity to collaborate with Minnesota Opera artistic and production staff to support the creation of their performances, both musically and visually. Each team will receive a $3,500 stipend, along with additional funding and support for singers and instrumentalists for the final presentation.

Submissions were due by November 5 and program recipients were notified on November 13. Filming and recording will take place in late January, after which the digital release of MNiatures will become available on Friday, February 5, 2021.

To learn more about MNiatures, please visit mnopera.org/mniatures.

Creative Teams Biographical Information

KASHIMANA AHUA & KHARY JACKSON

Kashimana is a mother, musician, composer, producer, and teaching artist with a rich soulful blues voice that soars through their original compositions. The name Kashimana means ‘that’s their heart’ and you can hear Kashimana’s heart beating in the compelling sound of her music which is a mix of pop, soul, R&B, folk and rock. Kashimana often draws inspiration from her experiences growing up in Nigeria, Kenya, traveling through Africa, Europe and finally settling in the United States. Kashimana was the 2018-19 In Common Composer in Residence in Willmar, Minnesota, a community residency geared towards teaching songwriting as a tool to encourage community sharing of stories. Kashimana was also a 2019 Cedar Commissions Artist, where her project, ‘Phantom Cries’ - a musical exploration of new motherhood while shedding some light on the higher maternal mortality rate of African American women. Kashimana was a Northern Spark Festival Artist in 2018 (Applause Posse) and in 2019 (Soundscape of stories). Kashimana is also one of the teaching artists at COMPAS.

Khary Jackson is a writer, dancer and musician. He has written several plays, one of which (Water) was produced in 2009 at Ink and Pulp Theatre in Chicago. As a hip hop/street dancer he was fortunate to create and perform a piece at the 2018 Choreographers’ Evening at the Walker Art Center. He has been a recipient of several generous grants, including the 2019 Jerome Artist Fellowship, the 2016 McKnight Artist Fellowship in Writing, the Minnesota State Arts Board’s 2012 Cultural Community Partnership Grant and 2010 Artist Initiative Grant for Poetry, the Many Voices Fellowship from The Playwrights’ Center in 2005 and 2007 as well as the 2009 VERVE Spoken Word Grant from Intermedia Arts. He is an alumnus of Cave Canem, the esteemed writing...

**ASAKO HIRABAYASHI & REBECCA NICHLOSON**

A harpsichordist and composer, Asako Hirabayashi's first recording on Albany Label, whose program is entirely composed and played by herself, was selected as one of the top 10 albums of the year 2018 and won the Gold Medal Award by the Global Music Awards. It was also selected as one of the five best classical CDs of the year 2010 by the *Star Tribune*. It received seven favorable reviews internationally. She won numerous grants and awards including the 2009 McKnight Fellowship for Performing Musicians and two Minnesota State Arts Board's Artist Initiative grants as a soloist. She has appeared as a featured guest soloist in international festivals and concert series worldwide since her New York debut recital at Carnegie Hall. Her live performance of her own composition was featured in the United States' most popular classical music program Performance Today in 2018. As a composer, she won 2016 McKnight Fellowship for Composers, several first prizes in Alienor International Harpsichord Composition Competition (won the sixth, seventh and eighth consecutively) and NHK International Song Writing Competition in Japan. She was awarded 2012 Jerome Fund for New Music by American Composers Forum to write her first opera *Yuki-onna* (Snow Witch) and a 2019 Schubert Club Composer Award to complete her second opera *Hebi-onna* (Snake Woman). Her compositions have been performed in 14 countries. She holds a doctorate's degree in Harpsichord Performance from the Juilliard School and a master's degree in composition from Aichi Art University in Japan.

Rebecca Nicholson (She/Her): Rebecca is a singer/songwriter, composer, poet, fiction writer, playwright and theatre maker. She is the author of numerous creative works, including *Mara, Queen of the World* (an acapella musical), *The Wild, Bold Enlightenment of Velvet the Mistress, Cooking With Keisha* (or Anatomy of Pie), and *Jill, Jack & the Martian Lady*, a play she created for a children's educational workshop at Minnesota Opera. Her fiction and performance pieces include *Children of the First Hummingbird, Intelligence, and Zar-Baby*, among others. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting (Multiplatform Writing) from Columbia University and an M.A. in English Literature. She was also the recipient of a 2020 Commission from the Cedar Cultural Center for which she created *Multicolored Musings: Jewels of Love, Loss, & Triumph* (a three-part collection of songs exploring her African and African American heritage and passion for genre eclectic music) and received a 2020 honorable mention from the McKnight Foundation (Spoken Word). In addition, she is the recipient of the Liberace Award, the Howard Stein Fellowship, The Matthew’s Fellowship, an America-in-Play Fellowship and a Many Voices Fellowship from the Minneapolis Playwrights Center (2008-2009). She is currently working on a collection of poetry and new music. Learn more at www.RebeccaNicholson.com.

**RITIKA GANGULY & ROSHAN GANU**

Ritika Ganguly, PhD., is a Minneapolis-based singer, composer, performance artist, and anthropologist, born and raised in New Delhi, India. She applies anthropological insights to practical problem-solving in the areas of equity in the arts and cross-cultural medicine. Her consulting practice and artistic practice both strive for an equality based on difference, rather than on the similarity of things, people, and knowledges. Ritika was commissioned as a composer by The Cedar Cultural Center in 2016, received the Jerome-supported Naked Stages award in 2017, and an MRAC Next Step award in 2018 for her research and new musical work in Baul...
(Bengali Sufi music/poetry). She has trained in multiple genres within Bengali music and in contemporary Indian musical theater. Her vocal and compositional work bring disparate musical styles, literatures, and disciplines together.

Roshan Ganu is a storyteller and a visual-experimental artist who uses different mediums to tell stories about our everyday lives. She has successfully collaborated with the Minneapolis Institute of Art on a two-part storytelling series titled Chappal Visits MIA where a slipper from the Indian subcontinent expresses her views on the exhibits in the museum. Her storytelling work has found a mention in the Star Tribune and has been exhibited at ArtReach St.Croix-Stillwater, Soo Visual Arts Center, the Twin Cities Zine Fest, Women Who Influence Conference and Solid State Records among others. Ganu is also the creator and founder of The Banyan Tree Project which is a participatory, public art, storytelling project that uplifts the notion of community in adversity.

CHARLIE MCCARRON & OANH VU

Charlie McCarron is a film composer, songwriter, video producer, visual artist, and board game designer in Minnesota. He is the executive director of Film Score Fest and produced the podcast Composer Quest. Notable films Charlie has composed for are Emmy-nominated Beneath the Ink, STARZ documentary Silicone Soul and Kare 11’s Love Them First: Lessons From Lucy Laney Elementary, the best-selling film in the history of the Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Film Festival. For his podcast Composer Quest, Charlie crowdfunded a tour throughout the US, Australia, Taiwan, and Japan, interviewing and writing music with composers there. In 2018, Charlie was selected as a finalist in the Banaue International Music Composition Competition for his orchestral piece “Balitúk: The Divided Child,” traveling to the Philippines for a three-week immersion program in the mountain village of Banaue. In 2019, Charlie was a guest speaker at Catalyst Content Festival, presenting about film scoring with members of the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra performing his scores live onstage. With over 25 self-produced albums to his name, Charlie often approaches composition as a record producer does: building the journey layer by layer. His songs often involve intricately woven melodies and rhythms, with the aim of giving each instrument or electronic layer a unique role to play.

Oanh Vu is a puppeteer, filmmaker, educator and community organizer. She is a second-generation Vietnamese American who grew up in rural Minnesota. She uses humor and the playfulness of puppetry to tell stories of healing for herself and her Southeast Asian community. Her stories feature characters grappling with the past and their pain. Ultimately, they are transformed by the struggle, and able to walk through the world from a place of hope and power. She was a 2020 Puppet Lab Artist and her work has been shared through Monkeybear’s New Puppetworks, Twin Cities Public Television (TPT), the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

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Minnesota Opera changes lives by bringing together artists, audiences and community, advancing the art of opera for today and for future generations.