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MN OPERA ANNOUNCES THE COHORT OF CREATORS WHO WILL DEFINE THE NEXT PHASE OF ITS NEW WORKS INITIATIVE

An industry leader in new works, MN Opera is investing in long-term commissioning relationships with three composers and three librettists.

MINNEAPOLIS (May 14, 2022) – Today Minnesota Opera announces the engagement of six artists who will pioneer the next phase in the company’s New Works Initiative over the next several seasons. The Initiative’s new commissioning model fosters long-term creative partnerships that will invigorate the operatic art form with a diverse infusion of contemporary vocal works. The result will be nine works total: three operas to premiere at the Ordway, three operas to premiere at the Luminary Arts Center, and three song cycles.

The New Works Initiative creative cohort includes composers B.E Boykin, David Hanlon and Kamala Sankaram, and librettists Minita Gandhi, Harrison David Rivers and John de los Santos.

The six artists involved in this program will collaborate in each composer/librettist combination in turn to collectively create three full-scale operas to premiere at the Ordway, three chamber operas to premiere at the Luminary Arts Center, and three song cycles that will premiere over the next several seasons. The commissioning cycle will include engagement and development opportunities for the cohort to nurture these artistic offerings and encourage deeper relationships with the company throughout the process.

“New works are the lifeblood of any artform, and Minnesota Opera is proud of our organization’s contributions to our community and the field,” said MN Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “This evolution of our New Works Initiative represents a long-term commitment to the vitality and creative output of the six artists we are fortunate enough to engage as a cohort. Commissioning these new pieces from accomplished creators representing an intentionally broad range of lived experiences will diversify the operatic canon, speaking directly to MN Opera’s artistic and diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. We are excited to see what new discoveries will emerge from this talented group of artists as we pursue our vision to ‘sing every story.’”

The New Works Initiative creative cohort defines a new phase in Minnesota Opera’s New Works Initiative, which launched in 2008 and supported the productions of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *Silent Night*, *Doubt*, *The Dream of Valentino*, *The Manchurian*

Candidate, *The Shining*, *Dinner at Eight*, and *The Fix*. Minnesota Opera has premiered 49 new works, with next season's *Edward Tulane* and *The Song Poet* bringing the company's total to 51. Minnesota Opera (originally known as Center Opera) came into being in 1963 with a world premiere of Dominick Argento's opera *The Masque of Angels*, and for the following decades, Minnesota Opera's commitment to new and contemporary opera made it a rarity in the world of American opera.

CREATIVE COHORT

B.E. Boykin

B.E. (Brittney Elizabeth) Boykin is a native of Alexandria, Virginia and comes from a musical family. At the age of 7, she began piano lessons and continued her studies through high school under the tutelage of Mrs. Alma Sanford. Mrs. Sanford guided her through various competitions, such as the NAACP's ACT-SO competition where she garnered 1st place for 3 consecutive years in the local competition, as well as being awarded The Washington Post "Music and Dance Award" in the spring of 2007.

Boykin then pursued her classical piano studies at Spelman College under the leadership of Dr. Rachel Chung. After graduating Spelman College in 2011 with a B.A. in Music, Boykin continued her studies at Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, New Jersey. During her time at Westminster, she was awarded the R and R Young Composition Prize just a few months shy of graduating with her M.M. in Sacred Music with a concentration in choral studies in May, 2013.

Boykin's choral piece, "We Sing as One," was commissioned to celebrate Spelman College's 133rd Anniversary of its founding at the 2014 Founders Day Convocation. She has also been featured as the conductor/composer-in-residence for the 2017 Harry T. Burleigh Commemorative Spiritual Festival at Tennessee State University. Boykin has been commissioned and collaborated with several organizations, including a number of ACDA divisions, the Minnesota Opera and the Kennedy Center. She obtained her PhD from Georgia State University with an emphasis in Music Education and is currently an Assistant Professor of Music at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

<https://beboykin.com/>

Minita Gandhi

Minita (she/they) is a playwright/librettist/healer and multi-hyphenate who was born in Mumbai, India. She currently resides in Los Angeles but has strong roots in Chicago and the Bay Area. Gandhi is most known for their critically acclaimed solo-show, *Muthaland*. *Muthaland* received Jeff nominations for best new work and best solo performance. It has been seen at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (CAATA), *Silk Road Rising*, selected for the Ignition Festival of new plays at Victory Gardens Theater, was an official selection for the NNPN Women in Playwrighting Festival at Florida Studio Theater and the Anne Frank

Social Justice Festival at SUNY. It has played at colleges and universities around the country. Their work has been described as "darkly comedic, brave, poetic, nuanced," and often explores themes of social justice, family, and the multi-cultural and multi-generational experience. Gandhi has a deep love for magical realism and poetry.

Gandhi's play *The Sun and all its Sighs* was part of the 2020 Ripped Festival at American Blues Theater in 2020. They have been a dramaturg for PCPA Theaterfest's production of *Much Ado about Nothing* and Book-It Theater's World Premiere production of *Behold the Dreamers*. They are the director/producer for a 5-episode Documentary Series: *History is Now*. Other directing/writing credits include the digital production of *Hindsight is 2020 or how Raisin Rainbows survived a pandemic* starring Tony Award nominee Cora Vanderbroek, and new work development and readings at CAATA, and Stage Left Theater.

As an activist/healer they have been a keynote speaker for Commit2Change, KCATF, and Imagine Talks. Gandhi has led workshops for business leadership, Activism, Artivism, Manifestation/Meditation, Self-Care, and Advocacy for Self around the world. Their platforms include but are not limited to: equity through an intersectional lens, sexual assault, mentorship, and advocacy and empowerment for those BIPOC and gender diverse people. Minita privately coaches arts leaders and senior executives at Minita Studio and aids them in achieving their goals through a holistic lens. They have worked diligently to build national mentorship programs for the corporate world, and in the arts. They are the Founder of IGNITE, a mentorship program for women and non-binary BIPOC artists and the Co-founder of Pathways a two-year mentorship and professional development program for gender diverse BIPOC artists in the Portland area. They are the former National Program Director for AGE (Advance Gender Equity in the Arts), and StateraArts. They have been invited to speak at many events including the Courier 12 Screenwriting Conference, Brighthouse Networks Women's Leadership Conference, CapGemini in India for International Women's Day, a host for Speak on It! Community Panel for the Goodman Theatre and for the Seattle Arts & Lectures Council.

As an actor they play Dr. Barr opposite Diane Kruger in *Swimming with Sharks*. They can be seen in the recurring role of Dr. Prospero on NBC's *Chicago Fire*, Fox's *Empire*, NBC's *Crisis*, ABC's *Betrayal*, Fox's *The Chicago Code*, in the hit web series *Brown Girls*, and was The Onion News Network's anchor, Nina Shankar. She voices Shuma Mukherjee and others on Disney's *Mixed-Up Adventures*. Minita has also been a proud pledge host with PBS for their WTTW Chicago affiliate station Channel 11. Gandhi has worked at some of the most respected theatrical institutions in America, including: Berkeley Repertory Theater, The Arena Stage, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Lookingglass Theater, and Victory Gardens Theater. They have had the honor of working with Tony award winning adaptor and director Mary Zimmermann, and originated the role of Priya, in Silk Road Rising's World Premiere production of Rajiv Joseph's, *The Lake Effect*. <http://www.minitagandhi.com/>

David Hanlon

David Hanlon is a composer, conductor, and pianist praised by Maestro Patrick Summers as “one of the major compositional voices of the young generation.” David is currently writing *The Pigeon Keeper* with librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, commissioned by Santa Fe Opera. David’s last collaboration with Stephanie was the chamber opera *After the Storm*, whose premiere he conducted at Houston Grand Opera. The Houston Chronicle lauded the score as “haunting” and “stirringly successful.” David has often written work for Houston Grand Opera, including his chamber opera *Past the Checkpoints* about undocumented immigrants (featured in Opera America’s 2014 New Works Forum) the chamber vocal piece *The Ninth November I Was Hiding*, about his grandfather’s arrest during Kristallnacht, and *Power*, based on a text by a high schooler about bullying.

David often works with Wolf Trap Opera, which recently premiered his orchestration of Pauline Viardot’s *Cendrillon*, praised by Opera News for its many “charms” and its “savory, nearly Straussian shimmer.” His other Wolf Trap commissions include the children’s opera *Listen, Wilhelmina!* with *Wilhelmina* librettist Kathleen Kelly, David wrote *Texanische Liebeslieder* about German immigration to Texas, based on oral histories in the Texas German dialect archives at UT-Austin. Since its premiere, it has been revived several times in Austin and Ann Arbor, and broadcast on Austin’s KMFA.

David is also a conductor with a focus in new work, praised by the Washington Post for his interpretive skills and “precise baton.” Most recently, he conducted at Houston Grand Opera the world premiere of *El Milagro del Recuerdo*, which he also co-arranged. Previously, David made his debut at Chicago Opera Theatre, conducting Stefan Weisman and David Cote’s *The Scarlet Ibis*. Among other world premieres, David has long been associated with the mariachi operas *Cruzar la cara de la luna* (World premiere and recording, as well as its revivals in Houston, Lyric Chicago of Chicago, San Diego Opera, Arizona Opera, and New York City Opera.) and *El pasado nunca se termina* (World premiere at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and revivals at San Diego and HGO and Fort Worth.) He has orchestrated numbers from both Mariachi operas for Minnesota Opera’s *Ópera Afuera* concert in 2021.

In addition to his commissioned work at HGO, David has conducted Gregory Spears’ *The Bricklayer*, Jack Perla’s *River of Light*, and Jeeyoung Kim’s *From My Mother’s Mother*. He assisted on numerous productions, including the premieres of Spears’s *O Columbia*, Iain Bell’s *A Christmas Carol*, André Previn’s *Brief Encounter* and Christopher Theofanidis’s *The Refuge* in addition to productions of *Lohengrin*, *Tosca*, *Serse*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He is a graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

David served as Lorin Maazel’s assistant conductor for the Castleton Festival, where he prepared *La Fanciulla del West* for performances in Castleton and Spain, prepared both chorus and orchestra for concert performances, at times substituting for the Maestro in those concerts on short notice. He is also former Adler Fellow with San Francisco Opera.

As an Adler, he conducted the premiere of Jack Perla's *Love/Hate* and debuted his four hand piano piece *iBang Kiss Kiss Bang!* He assisted on SFO operas including *Nixon in China*, *Siegfried*, *Don Giovanni*, and the premiere of *Heart of a Soldier*. He works as head of music staff, assistant conductor, and chorus master at Wolf Trap Opera and Washington Concert Opera and has assisted at Dallas Opera and Philadelphia Opera.

<http://www.davidhanlonmusic.com>

Harrison David Rivers

Harrison David Rivers is an award-winning playwright, librettist and screenwriter based in St. Paul, Minnesota. His plays include *THE BANDAGED PLACE* (Playwrights' Center, Roundabout), *WE ARE CONTINUOUS* (Williamstown, Geva), *THIS BITTER EARTH* (Playwrights' Center, New Conservatory Theatre Center, Penumbra, About Face, Theater Alliance, Richmond Triangle Players, The Road, InterAct, TheatreWorks Hartford), *WHERE STORMS ARE BORN* (Williamstown), *WHEN LAST WE FLEW* (NYFringe, Diversionary, TheatreLAB, Real Live Arts, Out Front) and the musicals *FIVE POINTS* with Douglas Lyons and Ethan Pakchar and *WE SHALL SOMEDAY* with Ted Shen (Theater Latté Da). Harrison has received commissions from Roundabout, Yale Rep, Transport Group, Penumbra, Theater Latté Da, TheatreWorks Hartford, the Public Theater and La Jolla, among others. His television credits include *ONE OF US IS LYING* (Peacock), *THE NEVERS* (HBO), *WYTCHEs* (Amazon) and *THE PLOT* (Hulu). Harrison sits on the Board of Directors of The Movement Theatre Company and the Playwrights' Center. He is a graduate of Kenyon College and the Columbia University School for the Arts.

<http://www.harrisondavidrivers.com/>

Kamala Sankaram

Praised as "one of the most exciting opera composers in the country" (*The Washington Post*), composer Kamala Sankaram moves freely between the worlds of experimental music and contemporary opera. Recent commissions include works for the Glimmerglass Festival (where she will be the 2022 Composer-in-Residence), Washington National Opera, the PROTOTYPE Festival, and Creative Time, among others. Kamala is known for her operas fusing Indian classical music with the operatic form, including *Thumbprint*, *A Rose, Monkey and Francine in the City of Tigers*, and the forthcoming *Jungle Book*. Also known for her work pushing the boundaries of the operatic form, recent works include *The Last Stand*, a 10-hour opera created for the trees of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, *Only You Will Recognize the Signal*, a serial space opera performed live over the internet, *Looking at You*, a techno-noir featuring live datamining of the audience and a chorus of 25 singing tablet computers, *all decisions will be made by consensus*, a short absurdist opera performed live over Zoom, and *The Parksville Murders*, the world's first virtual reality opera. An accomplished performer, Kamala is the leader of Bombay Rickey, an operatic Bollywood surf ensemble whose accolades include two awards for Best Eclectic Album

from the Independent Music Awards, the 2018 Mid-Atlantic touring grant, and appearances on WFMU and NPR. Awards, grants and residencies: Jonathan Larson Award, NEA ArtWorks, MAP Fund, Opera America, HERE Artist Residency Program, the MacDowell Colony, and the Watermill Center. Dr. Sankaram holds a PhD from the New School and is currently a member of the composition faculty at the Mannes College of Music and SUNY Purchase. www.kamalasankaram.com

John de los Santos

Librettist John de los Santos' first collaboration with composer Clint Borzoni, *When Adonis Calls*, was selected for inclusion in both Opera America's New Works Forum and Fort Worth Opera's Frontiers showcase. It had its stage premiere under John's direction at Asheville Lyric Opera. His second collaboration with Borzoni, *The Copper Queen*, was the winner of Arizona Opera's commission initiative, Arizona SPARK. *The Copper Queen* premiered as an award-winning feature film in 2021. His latest libretto with Borzoni, *The Christmas Spider*, will premiere with The American Opera Project. In 2015, he was commissioned by Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative to create an original work with composer Christopher Weiss. The resulting piece, *Service Provider*, premiered at The Kennedy Center, and has since had over a dozen productions. Over the summer of 2020, John and composer Marc Migó were commissioned by UrbanArias to write an operatic film as part of Decameron Opera Project. The film, *The Roost*, was directed by John and was recently included in the archives of the Library of Congress. John is a co-librettist for *Ghosts*, composed by Nicolas Reveles, and will direct the premiere at San Diego Opera in 2023. John has also collaborated with composers Robert Paterson, Tony Solitro, and Lingbo Ma. John has served as a librettist and director for The Juilliard School and Manhattan School of Music.

As director/choreographer, John has staged the world premieres of *Sweet Potato Kicks the Sun* (Santa Fe Opera), *Stardust* (Helios Opera), *Pure Country* (Lyric Stage), and *The Astronaut Love Show* (Kraine Theater, NYC). Other productions include *The Rose & the Knife*, *Le Comte Ory*, and *Otello* for LoftOpera (NYC), *La Cage Aux Folles* for Skylight Music Theatre, *La Fille du Regiment* for Arizona Opera, *Carousel* for Ashlawn Opera, *Trouble in Tahiti* for Lexington Philharmonic, *Frida* for Opera Southwest, and *Maria de Buenos Aires* for San Diego and Arizona Opera. In 2015, he choreographed the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Great Scott* for the Dallas Opera. His choreography has also been seen at the Washington National, Florida Grand, Philadelphia, Des Moines Metro, Utah Festival, and Austin Lyric Opera Companies, and in the world premieres of *Frau Margot* and *Before Night Falls* at Fort Worth Opera. John then made his directing debut with the company with a 2009 production of *Carmen*, followed by *The Mikado*, *The Pearl Fishers*, and *La Traviata*. John has served on the directing faculty of the Seagle Music Colony in Schroon Lake, NY, where his productions have included *Anything Goes*, *Crazy for You*, *The Medium*, *The Fantasticks*, *The Mikado*, *La Boheme*, *Guys & Dolls*, *Brigadoon* and *L'Italiana in Algeri*.



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Other productions include *Italienisches Liederbuch* for Voces Intimae, *The Golden Apple* for Lyric Stage, *Spring Awakening* and *Dogfight* for WaterTower Theatre. For the Dallas-based theatre company Uptown Players, choreographed the American premiere of the Pet Shop Boys musical *Closer to Heaven*, the regional premiere of *Altar Boyz* (for which John was awarded the DFW Critics Forum Award for Best Choreography), and directed and choreographed the regional premiere of *Hello Again* and the American premiere of *Soho Cinders*. <http://johndelossantos.com>

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