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MINNESOTA OPERA ANNOUNCES ITS 2026-2027 SEASON

The company's 52nd world premiere will kick off a lineup of operas never before seen on the Ordway stage.

MINNEAPOLIS (March 10, 2026) – Minnesota Opera is thrilled to announce its 64th season, anchored by a dynamic trio of operas that invite audiences into worlds both unfamiliar and beloved. Immersive drama, quiet introspection, and sparkling comedy drawn from three centuries of music and storytelling coalesce in a testament to the power of this art form to illuminate what it means to be human. Information about the MNOP+ series will be announced at a later date.

The season will feature the world premiere of *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr* by composer Kamala Sankaram and librettist Minita Gandhi, an immersive and vivid adaptation of the graphic novel by Ram V. and Filipe Andrade that has been commissioned and developed through MN Opera's New Works Initiative; George Frideric Handel and Antonio Salvi's emotionally evocative opera seria *Ariodante*; and Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito's exuberant comedy *Falstaff*.

"We view programming a season as an act of stewardship," said MN Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. "We're responsible for both honoring the repertoire that has shaped this art form for centuries while also investing in and lifting up the voices that will define its future. With our 52nd world premiere, *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr*, alongside Handel's *Ariodante* and Verdi's *Falstaff*, this lineup reflects that balance. This season, we're celebrating both how we got here and what possibilities exist now and in the future!"

World-renowned soprano and Anoka native Ellie Dehn (*Albert Herring*) will join the company as Repertory Artist-Faculty for the 2026-2027 season, performing in both *Ariodante* and *Falstaff* and serving as a mentor and instructor to the recently announced cohort of Resident Artists.

The season will present a mix of familiar faces, exciting company debuts, and significant roles for MN Opera's Resident Artists. *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr* will feature soprano Leela Subramaniam as Laila Starr, tenor Omar Najmi as Darius, baritone Efraín Solís (*Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*) as Pranah, and mezzo-soprano Mariam Mouawad as Agni/Ka the Crow/Cigarette. *Ariodante* will feature incoming Resident Artist mezzo-soprano Julia Holoman in the title role, Ellie Dehn as Ginevra, and incoming Resident Artist soprano Emily Finke as Dalinda. *Falstaff* will feature bass-baritone Craig Colclough (*Don Pasquale*) as Sir John Falstaff, Ellie Dehn as Alice Ford, baritone Norman Garrett as Ford, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe as Dame Quickly, Emily Finke as Nannetta, and third-year Resident Artist tenor Ángel Vargas as Fenton.

2026-2027 SEASON

WORLD PREMIERE

The Many Deaths of Laila Starr

October 31-November 8, 2026 at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

Music by Kamala Sankaram

Libretto by Minita Gandhi

Based upon the BOOM! Studios graphic novel by Ram V. and Filipe Andrade

Reincarnated. Resolute. Revolutionary. When the goddess of Death is cast down to Earth to live as a mortal named Laila Starr, the boundaries between the divine and the human begin to blur in this vivid, transporting world premiere from Kamala Sankaram and Minita Gandhi. *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr* was commissioned and developed through Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative and adapted from the acclaimed graphic novel by Ram V. and Filipe Andrade. Infused with elements of Konnakol, Raga, and EDM, this fantasy on purpose and impermanence unfolds with both kinetic energy and striking clarity, as a god made mortal begins to see the world—and life itself—through fresh eyes.

Cast

Laila Starr - Leela Subramaniam

Darius - Omar Najmi

Pranah - Efraín Solís

Agni/Ka the Crow/Cigarette - Mariam Mouawad

Brahma/Bardhan - Ashraf Sewailam

Mun Mun/Gilly - Emily Finke*

Creative Team

Principal Conductor - Christopher Franklin

Stage Director - Mary Birnbaum

Choreographer - Rohit Gijare

Associate Director - Miriam Laube

Scenic Designer - Mimi Lien

Costume Designer - Oana Botez

Lighting Designer - Anshuman Bhatia

Sound Designer - C. Andrew Mayer

The 2026-2027 season will open with the 52nd world premiere in MN Opera history—Kamala Sankaram and Minita Gandhi's *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr*, also marking the second world premiere from the New Works Initiative cohort in as many seasons. Working in coordination with MN Opera's Artistic Planning Team, Sankaram and Gandhi secured the rights to adapt the story from author Ram V. and illustrator Filipe Andrade in January 2024. *The Many Deaths of Laila Starr* was published by BOOM! Studios, an imprint of the Random House Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, and received an Eisner Award nomination for Best Limited Series in 2022. This first-ever American opera by two women of South Asian descent will be overseen by stage director Mary Birnbaum leading a team of designers making, for the most part, their MN Opera debuts. Christopher Franklin will lead the MN Opera Orchestra and Chorus, marking his fourth season as the company's Principal Conductor.

MN Opera will host a First Listen for the new opera in May, which will involve Sankaram, Gandhi, the MN Opera Orchestra, Chorus, and a cast of guest artists and provide the creators with a final opportunity to receive feedback on orchestration and the overall pacing.

The Many Deaths of Laila Starr will feature soprano Leela Subramaniam in her company debut, singing the title role. Tenor Omar Najmi will make his company debut as well, singing Darius. Baritone Efraín Solís (*Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*) will return to the company to sing the role of Pranah, while mezzo-soprano Mariam Mouawad, bass-baritone Ashraf Sewailam, and incoming Resident Artist soprano Emily Finke will make their company debuts as Agni/Ka the Crow/Cigarette, Brahma/Bardhan and Mun Mun/Gilly, respectively.

Ariodante

March 13-21, 2027 at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

Music by George Frideric Handel

Libretto by Antonio Salvi after Ludovico Ariosto

Jealousy. Treachery. True love put to the test. Prince Ariodante is set to marry his beloved Ginevra until scheming rivals threaten their joy. Deceptions abound and honor is called into question—will betrayal and shame consume the happy couple, or will truth and love prevail? From aching, heart-rending laments to dazzling displays of vocal virtuosity, Handel’s score traces a journey from devotion to heartbreak and back again.

Cast

Ariodante – Julia Holoman*

Ginevra – Ellie Dehn^o

Dalinda – Emily Finke*

Il Re – John Mburu*

Polinesso – Calvin Griffin

Lurcanio – Ángel Vargas*

Creative Team

Conductor – Joseph Li

The 2026-2027 will continue in March 2027 with another first for MN Opera—a production of George Frideric Handel’s opera seria *Ariodante*. The opera, which premiered in London in 1735, tells the story of a prince who is falsely accused of infidelity and the emotional and political fallout that ensues. The score highlights Handel’s ability to capture a range of emotions, from the sorrowful “Scherza infida” to the showy “Dopo notte, atra e funesta.” Joseph Li, MN Opera’s Vice President, Artistic, will conduct the MN Opera Orchestra from the harpsichord.

The production will be a showcase of the Resident Artist Program, featuring incoming mezzo-soprano Julia Holoman singing Ariodante and soprano Emily Finke as Dalinda. Bass John Mburu (*My Name is Florence*) and tenor Ángel Vargas (*Così fan tutte*) will return to the company for a third season in the Resident Artist Program, singing the roles of Il Re and Lurcanio, respectively. Soprano and Minnesota native Ellie Dehn (*Albert Herring*) will return to the company as Repertory Artist-Faculty, singing the role of Ginevra, and bass-baritone Calvin Griffin (*The Fix*) will sing Polinesso.

Falstaff

May 8-16, 2027 at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Arrigo Boito

Everything in the world is a jest. Enter Sir John Falstaff, whose predilections toward excess lead him into the pursuit of not one, but two married women. Thus ensues a tangled web of plots and counterplots, full of hilarious misunderstandings, as more and more parties are swept into the pandemonium. A cinematic score from an operatic legend imbues this feel-good comedy with warmth and buoyancy.

Cast

Sir John Falstaff - Craig Colclough

Alice Ford - Ellie Dehn[°]

Ford - Norman Garrett

Dame Quickly - Stephanie Blythe

Nannetta - Emily Finke*

Fenton - Ángel Vargas*

Meg Page - Julia Holoman*

Bardolfo - Daniel Montenegro+

Pistola - John Mburu*

Dr. Caius - Brian Frutiger

Creative Team

Principal Conductor - Christopher Franklin

The 2026-2027 season will conclude in May 2027 with MN Opera's first production of Giuseppe Verdi and Antonio Boito's *Falstaff*. A rollicking comedy that premiered in Milan in 1893, Verdi and Boito based the opera on William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with some scenes from both installments of *Henry IV*. *Falstaff* was a particular favorite of famed conductor Arturo Toscanini and was his most-performed opera. Principal Conductor Christopher Franklin will lead the MN Opera Orchestra and Chorus.

Falstaff will feature the largest cast of the season, star-studded by Metropolitan Opera veterans bass-baritone Craig Colclough (*Don Pasquale*) as Sir John Falstaff, Ellie Dehn as Alice Ford, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe as Dame Quickly, and baritone Norman Garrett as Ford. Resident Artists Emily Finke will sing Nannetta, Ángel Vargas will sing Fenton, Julia Holoman will sing Meg Page, and John Mburu will sing Pistola. The production will also feature former Resident Artist Daniel Montenegro (*Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*) as Bardolfo and tenor Brian Frutiger as Dr. Caius.

* Resident Artist

+ Resident Artist Alum

[°] MN Opera Artist in Residence

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Minnesota Opera connects people in the pursuit of a more empathetic, equitable,
and joyful life, advancing the art and experience of opera.