

NEWS

Pittsburgh Festival Opera

Contact: Yvonne Hudson
yhudson@pittsburghfestivalopera.org
412-621-1499 or (mobile) 412-512-0589
Digital images available upon request
BOX OFFICE & PUBLIC PHONE: 412-326-9687
pittsburghfestivalopera.org

World Premiere Jazz Opera Created By Pittsburgh Artists

A GATHERING OF SONS kicks off Six-Week Summer Season, June 15- July 23, 2017

EDITORS: for all event dates, descriptions and details, see the PFO calendar listing document accompanying this news release OR contact PFO marketing (see above).

A Gathering of Sons is the new social justice opera composed by **Dwayne Fulton** with influences of jazz, gospel and modern-classical music, with a libretto by **Tameka Cage Conley**, her first project for Pittsburgh Festival. With orchestrations by **Robert Frankenberry**, the orchestra features an alto saxophone, a flute, a string quartet, two keyboards, and drums. *A Gathering of Sons* was directed by **Mark Clayton Southers** and is the second commissioned work in the company's Music that Matters series of new operas on contemporary issues. The opera has been developed via a series of workshops at various locations, where scenes of the opera were performed and discussed by esteemed panels of community leaders, activists, educators, and artists.

The festival spirit permeates Pittsburgh Festival Opera with a six-week season in multiple venues in 2017. Opening on June 15 with the world premiere of its commissioned jazz opera *A Gathering of Sons*, the acclaimed American summer opera festival also presents Handel's *Xerxes*, Richard Strauss' *Intermezzo*, and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* on the Mainstage in Falk Auditorium, Winchester Thurston School in Pittsburgh thriving East End. Ticketed opening night parties follow each of our mainstage events with food, drink, good company, and free popular Late Night Cabarets. Pittsburgh Festival Opera's 40th season includes a four-day Discover Strauss series, a new revue of Rodgers and Hammerstein music, concerts of music by Leonard Cohen and Strauss, *Hansel and Gretel* for families, Mozart by Moonlight, an art exhibit featuring two Brazilian artists, and late night cabarets.

In *A Gathering of Sons*, an officer believes he takes a young Black man's life in secret. But the cover of night does not conceal. The police officer, Lockdown, steals something precious from the man, Victor. From above, a collection of Spirits observes this act. The Sons, as they are called, appeal to The Speaking Earth, The Sky That Can't Stop Seeing, The Blood, and The Waters to intercede on their behalf on Earth. Directed by Mark Clayton Southers, this poetic premiere is a conversation on our biases and how we heal after tragedy. It is an

eye towards freedom and the work our communities need to do to reach it. Full of magic, fear, hope, pain, and, still, an even more powerful love.

Southers considers *A Gathering of Sons* as a work that seeks unity through "a powerful story of truth, redemption, atonement, and healing." He adds, "Working on a social justice piece is always a heavy process. Aligning your inner emotions to find that centered space to work from is the most difficult part,"

Southers says. "Much like discussing race, our emotions dictate our actions. More times than not the masses stay silent. That's not the case inside of *A Gathering of Sons*. Here, our characters are both in the flesh and of the spirit world, and they each have the opportunity to express themselves fully. I pray that you take away something from this work. Whether it's family unity, community unity, world unity, justice, or merely gaining a better understanding and appreciation of life."

The cast of *A Gathering of Sons* includes Denise Sheffey-Powell, Adrianna Cleveland, Robert Gerold, Terriq White, Miles Wilson-Toliver, Austin Keys, Jenne Carey, Kevin Maynor, Leslie Howard, Demareus Cooper, Charlene Canty, Michele Williams, Rudy Giron, Lesley Baird, Sam Lothard, William Banks, Kenneth Glover, Jaymes Hall, Royce Hearn, Rob Pruitt, Bryan Keys, André J.C. Southers, and Joseph Thompson.

Following the opening night performance on July 1, members of the creative team, including librettist **Tameka Cagle Conley**, composer **Dwayne Fulton**, and stage director **Mark Clayton Southers**, will speak from the stage about the creative journey that led to *A Gathering of Sons*. A ticketed opening night party follows the conversation.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT :

Performances of *A Gathering of Sons* are made possible through the support of Marjorie and William Cadwallader.

The series of community workshops that formed the development process for *A Gathering of Sons* are made possible, in part, by the generous support from the Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. The commissioning of *A Gathering of Sons* is made possible through the support of Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh, a program of the Pittsburgh Foundation. Additional support for *A Gathering of Sons* is provided by The Pittsburgh Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, Opportunity Fund, and W.I Patterson Charitable Fund.

Audience engagement and outreach activities for *A Gathering of Sons* are supported by a grant from **OPERA America's Opera Fund**.

THE NATIONAL **OPERA** CENTER
AMERICA

The Opera Fund provides technical and financial support to OPERA America Professional Company Members and their partners as part of North American effort to enhance the quality, quantity and creativity of new opera and music theater. The Opera Fund, launched by the National Endowment for the Arts, is funded by the Helen F. Whitaker Fund, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation, Lee Day Gillespie, and Lloyd and Mary Ann Gerlach.

ABOUT PITTSBURGH FESTIVAL OPERA

Founded in 1978 by Metropolitan Opera mezzo soprano **Mildred Miller Posvar**, Pittsburgh Festival Opera (formerly Opera Theater of Pittsburgh), has continued its focus on the staging of opera as theater sung in English. Jonathan Eaton has been the company's Artistic and General Director since 1999.

Reaching across traditional lines of demarcation in the arts, Pittsburgh Festival Opera engages diverse, new and younger audiences, bringing in supporters of music, theater, dance, and the visual arts. In its 40-year history, Pittsburgh Festival Opera has presented more than 50 Pittsburgh premieres, many of them American operas that would not have been produced by other regional companies, including 28 world premieres. Over its first five summer seasons, PFO has drawn more than 50,000 people to operas, musicals, new works and recitals.

Visit pittsburghfestivalopera.org for tickets and details on all events.

Pittsburgh Festival Opera Box Office: [412-326-9687](tel:412-326-9687)

**Mainstage Venue: Winchester Thurston School, 555 Morewood Ave. at Ellsworth Ave. (Shadyside)
Pittsburgh, PA 15213**

Pittsburgh Festival Opera is on Facebook, Twitter, Vimeo, and Instagram.
For more information, contact: Yvonne Hudson, yhudson@pittsburghfestivalopera.org
Phone: 412-621-1499 or 412-512-0589
Interviews, photos, and art upon request.