

# NEWS

## Pittsburgh Festival Opera

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



## 40th Season brings new name and summer line-up to Pittsburgh Festival Opera

Formerly Opera Theater SummerFest, Pittsburgh Festival Opera announces  
Six-Week Summer Season, June 15-July 23, 2017

- *A Gathering of Sons* debuts on tour to regional venues, continuing our 'Music That Matters' series of world premieres on timely subjects
- Handel's *Xerxes* features Metropolitan Opera artist Andrey Nemzer, returning with Chatham Baroque, following their 2016 sell-out appearances in *Julius Caesar*
- *Intermezzo* (Pennsylvania Premiere) is our fourth rarely performed Richard Strauss opera and is presented as part of a 'Discover Strauss Series' with four days of Strauss events
- *Sweeney Todd*, Stephen Sondheim's Tony-winning musical reimaged
- *Hansel and Gretel* serves up family opera and fun on three Saturday mornings

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

PITTSBURGH, PA (Feb. 8, 2017) — **Pittsburgh Festival Opera** is the new name of Western Pennsylvania's innovative and nimble opera company, formerly known as Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Now an acclaimed American summer opera festival, Pittsburgh Festival Opera's rebranding celebrates the four-decade history of the organization and positions the company as it expands to a six-week season in multiple venues in 2017.

Artistic and General Director **Jonathan Eaton** says: "Six years ago we transformed ourselves into an extended summer festival, producing our celebrated mix of new operas, rarely performed works, and classic works done in new ways, all sung in English in an intimate theater. 'SummerFest', as we called it, has been a great success, and we realize that it has come to define our company more and more—so we feel it is now time to change our name to Pittsburgh Festival Opera to reflect our current activities more closely."

Board President **Dr. Eugene N. Myers** observes: "We are proud of our heritage, and we thank all those who helped build and support Opera Theater through the years. We are pleased to be able to signal our progress and professionalism with our new name: Pittsburgh Festival Opera."

The company also presents its 40th season this summer. So as well as rebranding and renaming the company, Pittsburgh Festival Opera is celebrating with some important new initiatives. These include:

- continuing a signature series of rarely performed Richard Strauss operas;

- reviving an acclaimed Pittsburgh “Ring” Cycle of Wagner’s epic operas over four years, starting in 2018, with the Jonathan Dove version in English which was first premiered in Pittsburgh by PFO in 2005-2006;
- launching a new initiative to reach out to potential national and international audiences to let them discover not only great festival opera, but also the many attractions of Pittsburgh and its environs in the summer;
- founding a new friends organization; and
- announcing an Endowment Campaign with existing pledges of \$3 million.

Founded in 1978 by Metropolitan Opera mezzo soprano **Mildred Miller Posvar**, the company has continued its focus on the staging of opera as theater sung in English. “While our main productions take place in an extended summer season, our commitment to the next generation of both artists and audiences is maintained year-round with our education programs,” says Jonathan Eaton, who has been the company’s artistic and general director since 1999.

Now established as the go-to midsummer performing arts option for intimate audience experiences, PFO is the realization of Eaton’s vision to fill a classical music and opera void in the summer arts landscape. He says, “We are thrilled that audiences and critics support us as a cherished addition to the summer cultural calendar. We continue to produce our mix of new operas, rarely-performed works, and reinvented classics with passion and commitment. And all mainstage operas are sung in English with projected titles in English.”

## THE 2017 PITTSBURGH FESTIVAL OPERA SEASON

Celebrating its **sixth summer season in its 40<sup>th</sup> year**, the company opens with a world premiere ‘social justice’ opera on a two-week tour, then settles at its home venue, the beautifully renovated Falk Auditorium at Winchester Thurston School in Pittsburgh’s Shadyside.

- ***A Gathering of Sons*** is the new ‘social justice’ opera composed by Dwayne Fulton with influences of jazz, gospel and modern-classical music, set to a libretto by Tameka Cage Conley. The opera is being developed via a series of workshops, with excerpts from the opera and panel discussions in community spaces before the world premiere production. This tours to four Pittsburgh partner venues, June 15-24 before taking the Falk Auditorium stage on Fri., July 1 and Fri., July 8. Directed by Mark Clayton Southers, founder of Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater, a short talkback will follow each mainstage performance.
- ***Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street***, winner of the Tony for Best Musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by Hugh Wheeler, begins a five performance run on Fri., July 7 continuing through Sat., July 22. Staged by international director Tomé Cousins, the show is conducted by Douglas Levine.
- ***Xerxes***, a comic masterpiece by George Frideric Handel stars Metropolitan Opera artist Andrey Nemzer and enjoys three performances beginning Fri., July 14. Walter Morales conducts an orchestra which includes Pittsburgh’s celebrated Chatham Baroque ensemble.
- ***Intermezzo*** is a semi-autobiographical romantic comedy about a tempestuous marriage, with text and music by Richard Strauss. It is the fourth in the company’s series of rarely performed Strauss operas, and receives its Pennsylvania premiere under the direction of Jonathan Eaton with Brent McMunn conducting.
- ***Hansel and Gretel*** by Engelbert Humperdinck, the beloved children’s opera, is performed in a forty minute version on three Saturday mornings in the 125-seat Hilda Willis Room also at Winchester Thurston.

**DISCOVER STRAUSS SERIES** This new four-day series during the season's closing week features a lecture on Richard Strauss's *Intermezzo* by world-renowned musicologist Bryan Gilliam, two recitals, a 'silent' movie version created by the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*, dinners and parties.

**RECITAL SERIES** Pittsburgh Festival Opera's tradition of recitals, concerts and special events features world-class singers and pianists, including:

- ***The Three (Counter)Tenors*** with Metropolitan Opera star Andrey Nemzer
- ***A Hallelujah at Love Café*** Daphne Alderson Sings Leonard Cohen
- ***Songs of Richard Strauss***
- ***Mozart by Moonlight: a Garden of Operatic Delights*** with scenes from *The Marriage of Figaro* performed in a moonlit garden...

In addition, "**IF I LOVED YOU...**", a new dramatic revue of star-spangled songs by Rodgers and Hammerstein performs around the July 4 holiday weekend in the historic horse barn at Snuggery Farm in Sewickley Heights (along with a holiday barbeque) and then again in the Falk Auditorium.

#### **OPENING NIGHT PARTIES AND LATE NIGHT CABARETS**

The festival spirit permeates Pittsburgh Festival Opera with ticketed opening night parties for each main stage production, with food, drink, and good company, plus free popular Late Night Cabarets.

#### **ABOUT PITTSBURGH FESTIVAL OPERA**

Pittsburgh Festival Opera features a company of 150 performers including top national and regional singers as well as rising stars from its Young Professional Artists Program. Members of this six-week Program are recruited from more than 200 candidates in auditions in Pittsburgh and five other cities across the US. Forty-five young professional artists, including singers, pianists, and stage directors from the United States and several other countries, take part. 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.

#### **WINCHESTER THURSTON SCHOOL**

Winchester Thurston School is the home base for Pittsburgh Festival Opera's summer season. It is a nationally recognized coeducational independent school in Pittsburgh, PA with a pre-K – 5 campus in Allison Park and a pre-K – 12 campus in Shadyside. WT's Falk Auditorium in Shadyside, beautifully renovated by Pittsburgh's premier theater architect, **Al Filoni**, is one of the city's best appointed medium-sized theaters, with 315 seats, none more than a few feet from the stage. Attributes include hearing assist devices, accessible spaces, free parking, and proximity to the East End's popular dining and accommodation options.

**Visit [pittsburghfestivalopera.org](http://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.

Pittsburgh Festival Opera  
June 15-July 23, 2017

For more information, contact: Yvonne Hudson, [yhudson@otsummerfest.org](mailto:yhudson@otsummerfest.org) Phone: 412-621-1499 or 412-512-0589  
*Interviews, photos, and art upon request.*