

# NEWS

## Pittsburgh Festival Opera

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## World Premiere Jazz Opera opens 40th Season of Pittsburgh Festival Opera, June 15-July 23, 2017

**A GATHERING OF SONS** created by Pittsburgh artists kicks off Six-Week Summer Season  
Jazz Opera debuts in Pittsburgh venues as 'Music That Matters' series tackles today's issues

- 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 fourth rarely performed Richard Strauss opera, presented as part of a four-day Discover Strauss Series
- *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 (May 16, 2017) — Kicking off its 40th season of innovative and intimate opera and music events, **Pittsburgh Festival Opera** expands to 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.

Opera sung in English and a Broadway musical are joined by 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, and late night cabarets.

Now established as the go-to midsummer performing arts option for intimate audience experiences, PFO is the realization of Artistic and General Director Jonathan 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."

This season Eaton stages both *Intermezzo* and *Hansel and Gretel* and will be among the Festival artists participating in the Discover Strauss events, along with company founder Mildred Miller Posvar.

## THE 2017 PITTSBURGH FESTIVAL OPERA SEASON

Celebrating its **sixth summer season and 40th season overall**, the company opens with a world premiere social justice opera on a three-week tour, then settles at its home venue, the beautifully renovated Falk Auditorium at Winchester Thurston School in Pittsburgh's Shadyside, where all mainstage operas are sung in English with projected titles in English.

- ***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 28th world premiere of Pittsburgh Festival Opera, *A Gathering of Sons* 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, with excerpts from the opera and panel discussions in community spaces before the world premiere.

*A Gathering of Sons* takes audiences on a mystical journey through the lives of a young Black man, a white police officer, parents of a newborn child, and a collection of spirits who watch over the world. Mark Clayton Southers, founder of Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater, stages the new American opera which tours to three Pittsburgh partner venues: Mt. Ararat Baptist Church on Thurs., June 15 and Fri., June 16; Rodef Shalom Temple, Sat., June 24; and Elsie H. Hillman Aud., Kaufmann Center of Hill House, June 28 and 29. *Sons* takes the Falk Auditorium stage on Fri., July 1 and Fri., July 8. A short talkback with guest panelists will follow each Festival Mainstage performance. Following the opening night performance on July 1, members of the creative team, including librettist **Tameka Cage 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.

- In addition, a free workshop on Fri., June 2 at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church features excerpts from *A Gathering of Sons* and a talkback with artists and community guests.
- ***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 Cousin, the show is conducted by Douglas Levine. Pittsburgh favorites Anna Singer (Mrs. Lovett) and Robert Frankenberry (Beadle) are joined by acclaimed baritone Andrew Cumming (Sweeney Todd), John Teresi (Toby), April Amante (Johanna), and Adam Cioffari (Judge Turpin).
- ***Xerxes***, a comic romantic masterpiece by George Frideric Handel stars Metropolitan Opera artist Andrey Nemzer as Xerxes, the King Persia. Staged by returning Metropolitan Opera director Dan Rigazzi, the Handel opera enjoys three performances on Fri., July 14, Sun., July 16, and Sat., July 22. Walter Morales conducts an orchestra which includes Pittsburgh's celebrated **Chatham Baroque** ensemble. The cast also features Lara Lynn McGill (Romilda), Cody Bowers (Arsamene), and Emily Harmon (Amastre).
- ***Intermezzo***, a Pennsylvania premiere, is a semi-autobiographical romantic comedy about a tempestuous marriage, with text and music by Richard Strauss. The fourth in the company's series of rarely-performed Strauss operas is directed by Jonathan Eaton and conducted by Brent McMunn. Ryan Milstead and Meghan DeWald, both regional artists, will portray Robert, distracted conductor husband, and Christine, his determined wife. Their marriage is tested by mistaken assumptions and jealousy when Christine meets a charming Baron played by Jason Slayden.
- ***Hansel and Gretel*** by Engelbert Humperdinck is performed in a 40-minute family-friendly version on three Saturday mornings in the 125-seat Hilda Willis Room at Winchester Thurston. Conducted by Joel Goodloe and staged by Jonathan Eaton, the production continues the Festival's tradition of low-priced family matinees on Saturday morning, followed by photos with the cast and fun activities for everyone.

**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, and a screening of the silent movie version created by the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*. Two package options include exclusive events, such as a Strauss recital at the historic Benedum House in Shadyside and a gathering with Festival founder Milder Miller Posvar, with optional parties. Discover Strauss dinners in popular restaurants are *a la carte*. The silent film and lecture are open to the public at no charge.

"**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. Eight singers are featured in this debut compilation of favorites including "Shall We Dance", "You'll Never Walk Alone", and "There is Nothing Like a Dame", during four Sunday early evening performances. A gourmet barbeque option is available at two Snuggery Farm performances, June 25 and July 2. The revue runs on the Festival Mainstage on July 9 and 16.

**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, opening the residency at on Fri., June 30 at First Unitarian Church, followed by opening night party.
- **Daphne Alderson Sings Leonard Cohen: *A Hallelujah at Love Café*** on Thurs., July 13 at First Unitarian Church.
- ***Mozart by Moonlight: a Garden of Operatic Delights*** with two full acts from *The Marriage of Figaro* performed in a moonlit garden, beginning in Falk Auditorium on Wed., July 19.
- ***Songs of Richard Strauss*** features singers from the Young Professional Artists company on Sat., July 22 at First Unitarian Church.

### **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, good company, and free popular Late Night Cabarets.

### **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.

"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.

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."

Eaton adds: “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 better reflect our activities.”

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 300 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.

As well as rebranding and renaming the company, Pittsburgh Festival Opera is celebrating its fourth decade 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 (2018-21), with the Jonathan Dove version in English, first premiered in Pittsburgh by PFO (2005-06);
- launching a new initiative to reach out to potential national and international audiences to let them discover not only a great festival opera, but also the many attractions of Pittsburgh and its environs in the summer;
- founding a new friends organization, Festival Opera Fans; and
- announcing an Endowment Campaign with existing pledges of \$3 million.

### **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 360 seats. 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.

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*Interviews, photos, and art upon request.*