Michigan Opera Theatre announces 2021-22 Season - the first of Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director Yuval Sharon

Christine Goerke announced as Associate Artistic Director

Davóne Tines announced as Artist-in-Residence for the 21-22 season

Watch the live announcement at 1 PM ET today

Photo © Mitty Carter

Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) is pleased to announce its 2021-22 season, under the artistic leadership of Yuval Sharon. This marks Sharon's first full season since being named the inaugural Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director in September, a five-year appointment made
possible by a generous gift from MOT Board member Gary L. Wasserman.

MOT’s 2021-22 season is a statement of principles of what opera can be: built on collaboration, a reflection of our real experiences, and a look at the familiar with fresh eyes. Using the strong groundwork cultivated since the company’s 1971 founding by David DiChiera, MOT plots a distinct course for its next 50 years. Notably, soprano Christine Goerke has been named Associate Artistic Director for three years, and Davóne Tines will be Artist-in-Residence for the 2021-22 season. These affiliations are profound for the company, the community, and the art form. Opera in Detroit in 2021-22 will not be limited to the Opera House, nor constrained to a traditional footprint. Six major events this season will take MOT throughout the community. All of the venues this season are intentional: Detroit landmarks that have served as cultural hubs throughout the city’s history. Additionally, audiences will be invited back to the Detroit Opera House—currently in the midst of a multi-year effort to improve accessibility—for its first in-person opera performances in more than two years.

“The breadth of artistic appointments, collaborations, and partnerships marks a new emerging vision for MOT under the artistic leadership of Yuval Sharon, with a nod to the next 50 years,” says MOT President and CEO Wayne S. Brown. “The 2021-22 season celebrates a defining moment for opera and dance in Detroit and beyond.”

“One of the guiding principles of this season is bringing opera into contact with everyday life, which is especially emotional after a year of so little live performance,” says Yuval Sharon. “The verismo masterpieces of Mascagni and Puccini sought to magnify and open up the interior lives of our neighbors and fellow citizens—an urgent necessity in today’s society and so beautifully elaborated in the more contemporary visions of Anthony Davis, Jeanine Tesori, and Robert Xavier Rodriguez. I’m thrilled to work with Wayne Brown, Christine Goerke, Davóne Tines, and the entire MOT team to bring to life a vision for opera in Detroit that is just as aspirational as it is accessible; a vision that speaks to who we are now, while helping us imagine who we might become.”

In keeping with Sharon’s history of interdisciplinary collaboration, the powerful programming on display this season could not have been achieved without the help of the many artists who have stepped forward over the last six months of planning. The 2021-22 season also includes collaborations with many institutional partners from communities within Metro Detroit and across the country. Pietro Mascagni’s Cavalleria rusticana is presented in cooperation with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra; Robert Xavier Rodriguez and Migdalia Cruz’s Frida is staged in MOT’s first home, Music Hall in downtown Detroit; La bohème is co-produced with Boston Lyric Opera, and Anthony Davis and Thulani Davis’s X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X is co-produced with Opera Omaha.
MOT has announced new additions to their artistic team: **Associate Artistic Director Christine Goerke** and **Artist-in-Residence Davóne Tines**. As Associate Artistic Director, Goerke will assume principal responsibility for production casting and will play a leading and collaborative role with Yuval Sharon on all musical matters, ensuring that MOT maintains the highest possible musical standards in all aspects of the company’s performances and presentations. Goerke will also serve as a member of the MOT leadership team, and act as a major resource on artistic matters. The appointment, made possible with the support of Paul & Mary Sue Ewing, Carl & Mary Ann Fontana, Elaine Fontana, and Richard Sonenklar & Gregory Haynes, is effective April 1 and extends through the 2023-24 season. Goerke will continue to pursue her extraordinary career as one of the world’s most esteemed dramatic sopranos.

“I am overjoyed at having Christine Goerke as a partner in shaping the next phase of MOT's artistic identity,” says Yuval Sharon. “Her ability to articulate and embody a vision of opera makes her an ideal spokesperson for a socially engaged and vibrant future for the art form. Christine and I share a love for artists who—like her—transcend the merely musical to offer a fully realized character on stage; having her eyes and ears on every artist who comes through our doors will be invaluable in giving our audience the very highest theatrical and musical
“This appointment aligns with Christine Goerke's incredible international career that continues to result in opera and concert appearances on stages throughout the world,” says Wayne S. Brown. "I am extremely pleased with the appointment of Christine and welcome this extraordinary artist to MOT and the City of Detroit. As a new member of the MOT leadership team, she will partner with Yuval Sharon to reposition MOT with a new focus for what opera in Detroit will mean!"

Also joining MOT’s creative team will be Artist-in-Residence Davóne Tines. Tines will serve as Artist-in-Residence for the 2021-22 season, culminating in his performance as Malcolm X in MOT’s new production of Anthony Davis’s *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*. Through regular engagement and collaboration with artists, churches, black-owned businesses, and cultural institutions, the residency will focus on relationship-building between MOT and the larger Metro Detroit community. The residency will actively combine the efforts of MOT’s Education, Community Engagement, and Marketing departments to help lay the groundwork for the longer-term goal of making MOT more fully reflect its surrounding community.

The 2021-22 season’s programming will unfold in two themed “Acts.” In “**Act I: Out and About,**” MOT celebrates the Detroit community with performances staged in landmark venues throughout the Metro Detroit area. “**Act II: Coming Home**” looks at MOT’s roots with
fresh eyes, first by inviting audiences to its birthplace, Music Hall, and then with a return to the Detroit Opera House for its first live on-stage opera performances in more than two years.

**Act I: Out and About**

“Act I: Out and About,” MOT’s celebration of the act of experiencing new sites and speaking to a broader audience, kicks off on May 15 with a special concert performance of Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, presented in cooperation with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO). MOT’s Associate Artistic Director, soprano Christine Goerke, makes her role debut as Santuzza; DSO Music Director Jader Bignamini conducts MOT’s orchestra and chorus. The pastoral subject matter of the opera will be reflected in the choice of venue: **Meadow Brook Amphitheatre** on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester Hills, MI, operated by 313 Presents which promotes and produces concerts at the venue. Tickets for *Cavalleria rusticana* will be available for purchase to the public on March 24, 2021 at noon and can be purchased online via MOT’s website or via the Ticketmaster website, or by phone at (313) 471-7000. Ticket prices range from $39 to $169; fees will apply.

“I am very excited to conduct the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra for the first time, and also to bring live opera to audiences in Detroit and surrounding communities,” said Jader Bignamini, Music Director of the DSO. “After a long, uncertain year in which the DSO, MOT, and our audiences have had to adapt to new circumstances brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, I know this will be a powerful moment and so refreshing for all of us to experience the beauty of the arts together in-person once again.”

“Out and About” continues on September 11-12 with Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s *Blue*, in a new production by Kaneza Schaal conducted by Daniela Candillari. Thompson’s libretto, inspired by the writings of Ta-Nehisi Coates and interviews with everyday people, follows a modern-day Black family in Harlem whose NYPD officer father and socially-conscious and politically-active son navigate the complex and nuanced struggle of being Black in America. Described by *The Wall Street Journal* as “a wrenching and remarkably original opera,” *Blue* is presented by Cadillac with support from the Rocket Community Fund.

“Out and About” programming will conclude with *BLISS*, a recreation of Ragnar Kjartansson’s performance based on Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*, re-staged by MOT Artistic Director Yuval Sharon. *BLISS* replays the three greatest minutes of *The Marriage of Figaro*, with the same cast and orchestra, for twelve hours without pause. Sold out in New York and Los Angeles, *BLISS*
comes to Detroit as a community experience; listeners are encouraged to come as they are and go as they please. More details on the timing and venue of BLISS will be announced in the coming months.

Photo courtesy of Bruce Kantor and Music Hall

**Act II: Coming Home**

In “Act II: Coming Home,” MOT looks back with fresh eyes upon its roots, embodied first by a return to its original performance space, Music Hall. “Coming Home” commences on February 26-27, 2022 with the return of an MOT favorite, Robert Xavier Rodríguez and Migaila Cruz’s *Frida*, in the production originally staged by Jose Maria Conde. Cruz’s libretto follows the life, philosophy, and art of Frida Kahlo from her schoolgirl days through her marriage to painter Diego Rivera, creation of her own unprecedented body of work, and many tempestuous encounters with the art-world status quo. Rodríguez’s score, written for chamber orchestra, mixes mariachi-style orchestrations with classical opera and hints of Mexican folk songs. Originally planned for MOT’s 50th anniversary celebration, *Frida* returns with the original cast from its 2014-15 run, featuring Catalina Cuervo as Frida and Ricardo Herrera as Diego Rivera. MOT Assistant Music Director Suzanne Mallare Acton conducts.

MOT truly comes home on April 2, 2022, with the triumphant return to a newly-improved and more accessible Detroit Opera House for the first in-person opera performances in more than two years. This momentous occasion is marked by a new production of Giacomo
Puccini’s *La bohème*, led by Yuval Sharon and co-produced with Boston Lyric Opera. In a historic first, Sharon and MOT extract hope from tragedy, life from death, and love from loneliness by staging Puccini’s tragic opera in reverse order—starting with Act IV and ending with Act I. This adventurous production will be conducted by Vimbayi Kaziboni and features Matthew White as Rodolfo, Brandie Sutton as Musetta, and Edward Parks as Marcello. Complete casting for the season will be announced later this spring.

“We are thrilled to forge a new partnership with Michigan Opera Theatre for this reconstructed telling of ‘Bohème,’” says Boston Lyric Opera Chief Operating Officer Bradley Vernatter. “We believe arts organizations will emerge from this pandemic stronger together, so I am especially pleased that John Conklin and Vimbayi Kaziboni, in pivotal roles as BLO’s Artistic Advisors, will join Yuval Sharon and a deep bench of artists. BLO’s strong recent history of rethinking and remounting the classics in fresh ways has brought forth some of our best work; joining with MOT lets us dream bigger than before and captivate audiences for both companies.”

“Coming Home” concludes with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Anthony Davis’s *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, in a new production led by Tony nominee Robert O’Hara and conducted by Kazem Abdullah. Described by *The New York Times* as “a riveting and uncompromising work,” X pairs Davis’s distinctly American score with a libretto by Thulani and Kip Davis, together casting an unflinching look at one of the most unfairly maligned men in American history in all of his complexity. X stars MOT’s 2021-22 Artist-in-Residence Davóne Tines as Malcolm X. *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* is co-produced with Opera Omaha. Three performances begin May 14, 2022.

“As the creators of an opera that was ground-breaking nearly 40 years ago, we are having the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the work realized in a newly dynamic way with its strengths weighed before a new generation,” says Thulani Davis. “We are thrilled also to build this production in Michigan, a place central to Malcolm X, his family, and the communities in which he came into manhood and later honed his skills as an organizer.”

“Malcolm X is an iconic American figure and his story is an important one to tell,” says Roger Weitz, General Director of Opera Omaha. “Opera Omaha is proud to partner with Michigan Opera Theatre in the premiere of a new edition of this opera by Anthony Davis, and we see no two better companies to launch this journey than those from the cities and states representing Malcolm X’s place of birth and childhood.”
Dance Season

The 2021-22 MOT Dance Season features two productions, staged in the Detroit Opera House. First, from January 22-23, 2022, Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) presents a mixed-repertory program of ground-breaking contemporary works from choreographers Claudia Schreier and Robert Garland. Created specifically for Dance Theatre of Harlem, Schreier’s work, Passage, recognizes the 400th anniversary of enslaved Africans arriving in Virginia in 1619. Exploring the strength of the human spirit in this moving, complex contemplation, Passage features music by acclaimed composer Jessie Montgomery. DTH presents a modern, breathtaking performance that “offer[s] a different future, one where ballet is more daring and more perceptive than ever before” (Broadway World). Passage is supported in part by a grant from The New England Foundation for the Arts.

The DTH program also includes the Detroit premiere of Higher Ground, resident choreographer Robert Garland’s latest work set to Stevie Wonder songs penned during turbulent times. The piece pioneers the use of ballet as resistance art, and is “a marvel of a work that shows off Mr. Garland’s many choreographic gifts, from his sparkling musicality to his ability to seamlessly weave classical ballet with influences from modern and social dance” (The New York Times).

On March 19-20, audience favorite Ballet Hispánico returns to celebrate its 50th anniversary with the Detroit premiere of Doña Perón: The Rise and Fall of a Diva, a full-length
ballet based on one of the most spellbinding women of South American history. Eva “Evita” Perón rose from dancehall performer to First Lady of Argentina—all before her untimely death at 33 years old. Ballet Hispánico explores the Argentinean icon with this seminal new work. Sumptuous, surprising, and instantly popular—like Evita herself—Doña Perón is choreographed by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, the internationally-renowned maker of the Scottish Ballet’s A Streetcar Named Desire, and set to music by the inimitable ballet composer Peter Salem.

MOT’s 2021-2022 Dance Season is supported by Richard & Joanne Brodie, Maxine & Stuart Frankel Family Foundation, Marvin, Betty, and Joanne Danto Family Foundation, and Kevin Dennis & Jeremy Zeltzer.
Yuval Sharon

Yuval Sharon is the newly appointed Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director of Detroit’s Michigan Opera Theatre and founder and Artistic Director of The Industry in Los Angeles. He made his MOT debut in 2020, with *Twilight: Gods*, an innovative adaptation of Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* staged in the Detroit Opera House Parking Center. With The Industry, Sharon has directed and produced new operas in moving vehicles, operating train stations, Hollywood sound stages, and various "non-spaces" such as warehouses, parking lots, and escalator corridors. From 2016-2019, Sharon was the first Artist-in-Residence at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, creating nine projects that included newly commissioned works, site-specific installations, and performances outside the hall. His residency culminated in a major revival of Meredith Monk’s opera *ATLAS*, making him the first director Monk entrusted with a new production of her work. The first American ever invited to direct at Bayreuth, Sharon distinguished himself with a boldly progressive *Lohengrin* in 2018. He is the recipient of the 2014 Götz Friedrich Prize in Germany for his production of John Adams’s *Doctor Atomic*. He also directed a landmark production of John Cage's *Song Books* at the San Francisco Symphony and Carnegie Hall with Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, and Jessye Norman. His 2016 production of Peter Eötvös’s *Three Sisters* at the Wiener Staatsoper led Opernwelt to call him "one of the most interesting arrivals on the musical landscape." His production of *Cunning Little Vixen*, originally produced at the Cleveland Orchestra, was the first fully-staged opera ever presented in Vienna’s Musikverein in October 2017. In 2017, Sharon was honored with a MacArthur Fellowship and a Foundation for Contemporary Art grant for theater.

Christine Goerke

Christine Goerke has appeared in the major opera houses of the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Paris Opéra, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Real, and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. She has sung much of the great soprano repertoire, earning critical acclaim for her Strauss and Wagner roles. Goerke’s recording of Vaughan Williams’s *A Sea Symphony* with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra won the 2003 Grammy Award for Best Classical Recording and Best Choral Performance. Other recordings include Britten’s *War Requiem*, which won the 1999 Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance. Goerke’s ties to Detroit include a starring role in Sharon’s MOT debut *Twilight: Gods* and MOT’s 2014 production of *Elektra*, and a recent appointment to the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival’s Board of Directors.

Davóne Tines
Davóne Tines is a pathbreaking artist whose work not only encompasses a diverse repertoire, from early music to new commissions by leading composers, but also explores today’s pressing social issues through work that blends opera, art song, contemporary classical, spirituals, gospel, and songs of protest, as a means to tell a deeply personal story of perseverance that connects to all of humanity. Before he won the 2020 Sphinx Medal of Excellence in recognition of extraordinary classical musicians of color—Tines was named one of Lincoln Center’s 2018 Emerging Artists.

Since the grand reopening of the Detroit Opera House in 1996, it has welcomed upwards of four million visitors. As MOT seeks to engage future generations, it is imperative that programs offered within the Opera House are accessible to all. With the declaration of a $750,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, construction will begin this spring to address and improve accessibility. Requiring a 4:1 match from private contributions to disburse the challenge funds over a two-year period, these initial modifications and improvements to the Opera House – inclusive of a new elevator tower and ADA-compliant restrooms – are part of a $15,000,000 comprehensive multi-year capital effort with construction slated through 2023.
From 1971-1984, MOT made its home in the historic Music Hall. Music Hall is Detroit’s “people’s theater,” and stands as one of the city’s premiere venues for theater, dance, and particularly jazz.

**Meadow Brook Amphitheatre**, on the campus of Oakland University, is host to the hottest lineup of musical acts in Metro Detroit. Set on a beautiful hillside in northern Oakland County, Meadow Brook plays host to a variety of musical genres and offers an unforgettable experience for guests and performers alike.

“313 Presents is honored to have the opportunity to work with luminary artistic director, Yuval Sharon, and the Michigan Opera Theatre to bring one of the most beloved operas of all time, *Cavalleria rusticana*, to Meadow Brook Amphitheatre,” says 313 Presents President Howard Handler. “Meadow Brook’s unique ambiance and intimate setting provides an exceptional backdrop to showcase this renowned Italian opera.”

313 Presents is Detroit’s premier live entertainment company. Inspired by the soul of Detroit, 313 Presents promotes and produces concerts, theatrical productions, sporting events and family shows at six world-class venues across southeast Michigan including Little Caesars Arena, Fox Theatre, Comerica Park, DTE Energy Music Theatre, Meadow Brook Amphitheatre and Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre. Headquartered in The District Detroit, 313 Presents is a joint venture between Olympia Entertainment and Pistons Sports & Entertainment. More information is available [here](#).
Michigan Opera Theatre
2021-22 Season
Full casting will be announced later this spring

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA IN CONCERT
May 15, 2021
Meadow Brook Amphitheatre
Music by Pietro Mascagni
Libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci
Conducted by DSO Music Director Jader Bignamini
Featuring Christine Goerke, MOT’s Associate Artistic Director, as Santuzza

BLUE
September 11-12, 2021
Location TBD
New Production
Music by Jeanine Tesori
Libretto by Tazewell Thompson
Directed by Kaneza Schaal
Conducted by Daniela Candillari
Featuring Kenneth Kellogg as the Father, Krysty Swann as the Mother, Aaron Crouch as the Son, and Gordon Hawkins as the Reverend

BLISS
Date and location TBD
A recreation of Ragnar Kjartansson’s performance based on Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro
Re-staged by Yuval Sharon

FRIDA
February 26-27, 2022
Music Hall
Music by Robert Xavier Rodríguez
Lyrics and monologues by Migdalia Cruz
Book by Hilary Blecher
Directed by Jose Maria Condehi
Conducted by Suzanne Mallare Acton
Featuring Catalina Cuervo as Frida Kahlo and Ricardo Herrera as Diego Rivera

LA BOHÈME
April 2, 6 & 10, 2022
Detroit Opera House
New Production
Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica
Directed by Yuval Sharon
Conducted by Vimbayi Kaziboni
Co-produced with Boston Lyric Opera
Featuring Matthew White as Rodolfo, Brandie Sutton as Musetta, and Edward Parks as Marcello

X: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MALCOLM X
May 14, 19 & 22, 2022
Detroit Opera House
New Production
Music by Anthony Davis
Libretto by Thulani Davis and Kip Davis
Directed by Robert O'Hara
Conducted by Kazem Abdullah
Featuring Davóne Tines as Malcolm, Whitney Morrison as Betty, and Victor Robinson as Elijah Mohammed
Co-produced with Opera Omaha

Opera in Detroit is made possible with support from: