

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

Yuval Sharon, Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director

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Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's American opera *Blue* to receive a bold new production by Michigan Opera Theatre on September 11 and 12

Award-winning opera about the Black experience will be first opera ever staged at Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre

DETROIT July 16, 2021 – Michigan Opera Theatre is set to stage its next production, an opera shedding light on the everyday experience of Black Americans. Winner of the 2020 Music Critics Association of America Award for Best Opera, *BLUE* is a new American opera which centers on a family and community as they experience both tragedy and healing. This production will be the first opera staged at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre, and boasts a fully female leadership team under director Kaneza Schaal and conductor Daniela Candillari.

In addition to featuring many original cast members reprising their roles, many have a direct connection with Metro Detroit and affiliations with institutions such as Oakland University (Krysty Swann) and University of Michigan (Kenneth Kellogg, Olivia Johnson and Camron Gray).

BLUE features a richly evocative libretto by playwright Tazewell Thompson (MOT's *A View from the Bridge*) and masterful score by lauded theatrical composer Jeanine Tesori (Broadway's *Fun Home* and *Caroline, or Change*).

"You could say that *BLUE* is about a Black teenage boy who dies at the hands of a police officer – but that would be misleading, and would probably make you think the opera was exploitative of tragedy," says MOT Artistic Director Yuval Sharon. "What *BLUE* is actually about is the story of a Black family, and the strong community that family has in the wake of a terrible tragedy. Tazewell's heartfelt and deeply personal story, expressed through Jeanine's engaging music, highlights just how much opera can serve as a mechanism for creating community and for offering healing."

MOT's production of *BLUE* will feature the beautiful ambiance of the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre with a stunning backdrop of the Detroit River. *BLUE* will premiere in Detroit with performances on Saturday, Sept. 11 and Sunday, Sept. 12, both at 7 p.m. Tickets will be available for public purchase on Saturday, July 17 at Noon via [Ticketmaster](#) and on the MOT website.

BLUE is presented by Cadillac with support from the Rocket Community Fund, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Masco, and the Burton A. and Sandra D. Zipser Foundation.

Directed by Kaneza Schaal

Kaneza Schaal works in theater, opera and film and is based in New York City. Schaal's work has shown in divergent contexts from NYC basements, courtyards in Vietnam, East African amphitheaters, European opera houses, US public housing, to rural auditoriums in the UAE. By creating performances that speak many formal, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and experiential languages she speaks to expansive audiences. Domestically her work has shown at Brooklyn Academy of Music, LA Philharmonic, The Shed, The Kennedy Center, Walker Arts Center, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, REDCAT, The New Victory Theater, New York Live Arts, Performance Space 122, New Orleans Center for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, PICA, and On The Boards. Schaal received a Guggenheim Fellowship, Herb Alpert Award, United States Artists Fellowship, SOROS Art Migration and Public Space Fellowship, Ford Foundation Art For Justice Bearing Witness Award, and Creative Capital Award.

The MOT debut of Kaneza Schaal is partially supported by OPERA America's Opera Grants for Women Stage Directors and Conductors, generously funded by the Marineau Family Foundation.

Krysty Swann as The Mother

Acclaimed mezzo-soprano Krysty Swann has been hailed for her beautiful and rich voice, as well as her captivating presence on stage. *The Washington Post* declares, "Krysty Swann has a voice, and she knows how to use it...[She] displayed an instrument of immense power, natural beauty of tone and luscious legato line." The Philadelphia-born, New York-based mezzo-soprano was featured on the cover of *Opera News* with the great Dolora Zajick.

Next, Swann will be making returns to the esteemed roster of The Metropolitan Opera for their productions of *Akhmaten* and *Elektra*, will debut the role of the Mother in Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's *Blue* for Michigan Opera Theatre and Toledo Opera, and will create the role of Mayme in *Intimate Apparel*, a new opera directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Lynn Nottage with music by Ricky Ian Gordon at the Lincoln Center Theatre. Additionally, she will perform in a Gala Concert for Princeton Festival and in Tulsa Opera's *Greenwood Overcomes*, Beethoven's *9th Symphony* for Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, and *The Ordering of Moses* for the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park. Most recently she appeared in a virtual performance of Handel's *Messiah* with Glens Falls Symphony and created the role of Joyce "Tilly" Mitchell in the world premiere of Nico Muhly's digital one act opera *The Glitch* which was released by Catapult Opera in February 2021.

Aaron Crouch as The Son

Aaron Crouch, born and raised in Bowie, Maryland, is a recent graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA. The 2019-2020 season would have included debuts at Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the mostly Mozart Festival. All of these engagements were

cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. Crouch has been a soloist with the New World Symphony in Miami, FL for their Ravel Journey concert. He also performed an all-Bernstein concert with the Philharmonic of Southern New Jersey for Bernstein's centennial.

Crouch was a gold medalist at the YoungArts Foundation Awards in 2017. He also won first place in the Schmidt Youth Vocal competition, Sue Goetz Ross voice competition, Shirley Rabb Winston voice competition (Maryland chapter), and Classical Singer vocal competition (University Intermediate Division). He received 3rd place in the Rochester International vocal competition and received an Encouragement Award at the Premiere Opera International vocal competition. He was also given an Emerging Artist Award from the Opera Index vocal competition in 2019.

In the past Crouch has spent summers at the Chautauqua Institution and Houston Grand Opera's Young Artist Vocal Academy. In 2019, he was a Young Artist at the Glimmerglass Festival where he sang the role of The Son in the world premiere of Jeanine Tesori's new opera, *Blue*.

Training his voice year-round, Aaron continues to cultivate his God-given gift by marrying his natural talent with rigorous practice and the continuous development of an impeccable technique, rendering his uniquely powerful and emotive sound.

Kenneth Kellogg as The Father

American bass, Kenneth Kellogg, enjoyed a busy and successful 2019-20 Season, returning to Europe for performances of Rossini's *Sigismondo* singing the two roles of Ulderico and Zenovito with Capella Cracoviensis in Poland. In 2021, he appeared as Commendatore *Don Giovanni* at Seattle Opera, more recently he sang the role of Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at San Francisco Opera in a highly lauded production. Next season includes three role debuts for Kenneth in the US: Rocco in *Fidelio*, Grand Inquisitore in *Don Carlo*, and Raimondo in *Lucia de Lammermoor*.

A recent highlight of the artist's career was establishing the role of Father *Blue*, written by Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson for Glimmerglass Festival's world premiere which brought Kenneth great acclaim; production runs are scheduled at several major opera companies in the next few seasons. Previously at Michigan Opera Theatre, he revived the role of Sam Bakewell in *The Summer King*, a role he inaugurated at Pittsburgh Opera during its world premiere. He returned to Washington National Opera for Father Palmer in *Silent Night* and appeared as Mephistopheles in *Faust* at Opera de Lausanne, and at Opera de Oveido, Spain. He was Young Emile in *Champion* for Opera Parallele in its West Coast premiere. As Sarastro in *Die Zauberflote*, Kenneth made his debut at Opera de Lausanne, and sang the role at Virginia Opera and Opera Memphis. At Annapolis Opera, Kenneth made his debut as Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*.

Gordon Hawkins as The Reverend

Gordon Hawkins is critically acclaimed throughout the world for his in-depth interpretations and lush baritone voice. A dramatic baritone with an international reputation as a "Rigoletto specialist," Hawkins has delighted audiences as the tragic Verdi underdog in more than 200 performances, most recently with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Vancouver Opera, Washington National Opera, Arizona Opera, and Opera Colorado. He is now earning critical acclaim as a Wagner specialist: "Alberich was superbly

realized by baritone Gordon Hawkins, in his [Los Angeles Opera] début. Despite wearing a grotesque puppet head and clunky boots that hobbled his movements, Hawkins delivered a sterling vocal characterization of the power-mad Nibelung.” (*Opera News*). He has been engaged as Alberich in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at esteemed international companies including San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, Washington National Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro de la Maestranza de Sevilla, and the BBC Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall in London.

Most recently, Mr. Hawkins performed the role of the Reverend in the World Première of Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s *Blue* at the Glimmerglass Festival, The Warden in *Dead Man Walking* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the title role of *Porgy and Bess* with Harrisburg Symphony. Hawkins’ upcoming engagements include *Champion* at Boston Lyric Opera, the role of Reverend in *Blue* at Toledo Opera, Washington National Opera, and Michigan Opera Theatre, Scarpia in *Tosca* at Portland Opera, and a World Premiere for the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2023.

Conducted by Daniela Candillari

Conductor Daniela Candillari, praised for her “confidence and apparently inexhaustible verve” (*The New York Times*), continues to be recognized for her dynamic and compelling performances at opera houses and concert stages throughout North America and Europe. Equally at home leading contemporary and long-beloved repertoire, Candillari “finds equal inspiration in tradition and novelty.” (*Opera News*)

Candillari makes her Metropolitan Opera debut in the 2021-2022 season conducting Matthew Aucoin’s *Eurydice*. She also conducts *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and leads performances with Music Academy of the West.

Recent highlights include Candillari’s New York Philharmonic debut at The Met Museum; debuts with LA Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Opera Philadelphia, and Saint Louis Symphony; and her Asian debut in Hong Kong. As a composer, she has been commissioned by instrumentalists from the Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh Symphonies, as well as the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and New York City Ballet.

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About Michigan Opera Theatre

Michigan Opera Theatre is one of the nation’s preeminent professional opera companies and serves as a major cultural resource for the city of Detroit. Founded in 1971 by Dr. David DiChiera, MOT is committed to presenting opera and dance of the highest artistic caliber and ensuring accessibility for everyone. The organization is led by Wayne Brown, President and CEO; Yuval Sharon, the Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director; Christine Goerke, Associate Artistic Director; and Ethan Davidson, Chairman of the Board. Visit our website at www.michiganopera.org.

Michigan Opera Theatre's 2021-22 Opera Season

BLISS

September 25, 2021

The Historic Michigan Building Theatre (220 Bagley Street, Detroit, MI 48226)

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 Condemi

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