

Michigan Opera Theatre Receives Largest Single Gift in its History

\$5 Million Grant from the William Davidson Foundation to Support Opera House Renovations and Artistic Programming



L-R: MOT President and CEO Wayne S. Brown, Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director Yuval Sharon, and Chairman of the MOT Board Ethan Davidson

At its Annual Meeting on November 18, 2021, Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT), in partnership with the William Davidson Foundation, announced that the Foundation has awarded a \$5,000,000 grant to support critical infrastructure renovations at the historic Detroit Opera House (DOH) and artistic programming over two seasons.

“It is with deep appreciation that I announce that the partnership between the William Davidson Foundation and Michigan Opera Theatre has resulted in MOT receiving its single largest charitable gift in the organization’s 50-year history. The Foundation’s \$5,000,000 grant is an investment in the next 50 years of MOT, and importantly, an investment in the performing arts sector for the Metro Detroit Region,” said MOT President and CEO Wayne S. Brown.

“We consider this grant an important way to continue our ongoing role in advancing the amazing story of this visionary and celebrated company and the Detroit Opera House that it calls home,” said Darin McKeever, President & CEO of the William Davidson Foundation. “Recent years have lifted up how leaders, artists, and innovators at Detroit’s arts and cultural institutions have helped define our region for decades, and we want them to continue to comfort, challenge, and inspire for decades to come. With this new grant and the help of so many other champions, the Michigan Opera Theatre will be better positioned to do just that.”

The Michigan Opera Theatre is now in the middle of a \$15,000,000 capital campaign to modernize the 2,700 seat Detroit Opera House, which is home to MOT’s main stage productions as well as its educational programs. Brown shared, “With this gift, the William Davidson Foundation becomes the

lead donor of our campaign for the Detroit Opera House, with \$3,000,000 of the award designated for building renovations that will help make the nearly century-old building more welcoming and accessible to all. The upgrades and repairs will enhance the Opera House's reputation as the 'venue of choice' in downtown Detroit for a myriad of events, from opera and dance performances to civic meetings and weddings."

Planned renovations to the Detroit Opera House include a new elevator tower that provides direct access to all six levels of the building, an upgraded HVAC system, additional ADA-compliant restroom facilities, and auditorium upgrades that will improve access, wayfinding, and seating.

"The William Davidson Foundation has been backing MOT for many years, supporting their work to develop the next generation of artists and in recognition of the important role MOT plays in Downtown Detroit," commented Ethan Davidson, Board Chair of MOT and chair of the grants committee at the William Davidson Foundation. "At this most critical time for our cultural community, my family and I are proud to re-invest in the facility and support the current and next seasons of programming. We appreciate MOT's commitment to telling stories that resonate with the Detroit community, its embrace of artistic risk, and the strength of its partnerships across the region."

In addition to funding for Opera House renovations, the new William Davidson Foundation grant includes \$2,000,000 to support artistic programming for MOT's 2021-2022 and 2022-23 seasons.

Brown added, "Like so many arts organizations who are emerging from performance closures and seeking to rebuild staff levels as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, MOT looks forward to in-person programming at the beginning of the calendar year in producing opera and presenting dance performances for our community. With the remarkable support from donors in tandem with the cooperation and sacrifices by members of our staff and artists, we managed to achieve a balanced budget for fiscal year 2021. With the William Davidson Foundation's support, we now look forward to reengaging the artists, contract personnel and staff necessary to create enhanced programming for the benefit of our community."

Yuval Sharon, the Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director at MOT, assumed the artistic helm of the organization in 2020 and together with Brown, is revolutionizing opera in Detroit for audiences and for the opera industry itself. "I am deeply moved by the generosity of the William Davidson Foundation and the support it shows for MOT's new artistic direction. This is a transformational moment for the company, and the transformational support from the William Davidson Foundation allows us to move even more boldly towards the future of opera in the Metro Detroit area," Sharon said. "This grant will help ensure the success of many productions to come such as a milestone new production of Anthony and Thulani Davis' *X: The Life and Times of Malcom X*, a contemporary masterpiece whose time has come. This major work is poised to make a deep impact in communities across Detroit and throughout the country, as our production will go on to subsequent performances at the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Omaha, and Seattle Opera."

Michigan Opera Theatre was founded in 1971 by Dr. David DiChiera, growing from the work of its precursor the Detroit Grand Opera Association that began opera presentations in 1963. Celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year, MOT is an essential component of the cultural landscape of Detroit and beyond.

The historic Detroit Opera House was renovated and reopened by Dr. DiChiera in 1996 as the home of Michigan Opera Theatre. Dr. DiChiera's vision also included the Opera House serving the entire community as a venue for a range of performing arts productions and events. Many in Detroit credit MOT and the DOH as the spark that helped generate the downtown revival. The William Davidson Foundation's unprecedented \$5,000,000 grant unofficially honors the 50th Anniversary of MOT and the 25th Anniversary of the DOH reopening.

The William Davidson Foundation is a private family foundation, established in 2005, that honors its founder and continues his lifelong commitment to philanthropy, advancing for future generations the economic, cultural and civic vitality of Southeast Michigan, the State of Israel, and the Jewish community. More information is available [here](#).

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