

WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Dear Friends,

In our February E-news, we described the whirlwind of activity required to rapidly re-form WNO as an independent company. The energy that our amazing staff and Board mined to bring *Treemonisha* and *The Crucible* to the stage and rebuild our organizational infrastructure continues at a pace worthy of a world record as we head into rehearsals for ***West Side Story***, as we bring the Cafritz Young Artists' production of Menotti's satirical ***The Old Maid and the Thief*** to life **this week**, and as we ready this year's **American Opera Initiative** premieres for performances on May 22.

For those of you in a position to do so, one of the best ways you can help right now is by supporting our **70th Anniversary Gala**, either by attending or by making a contribution. All proceeds support our artists, our productions, our mission, and our educational and community programs.

Included next season is the world premiere of a "ballet-opera."

See story on page 6.



**WNO production staff on a site visit to Lyric Baltimore
in preparation for *West Side Story*.**

Along with the here and now, we are also focused on a mountain of preparations for next season. In this issue, we have lots of good news to share, and we will pull back the curtain for a glimpse at one of next year's exciting new offerings ahead of our 2026/2027 season announcement in May.

With gratitude to everyone who is uplifting and sustaining us with your notes, attendance, contributions, and cheers,

Timothy O'Leary
GENERAL DIRECTOR

Francesca Zambello
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



**Before a single note was heard,
the audience at Lisner Auditorium rose to their feet
in a spontaneous standing ovation
as Artistic Director Francesca Zambello and
General Director Timothy O’Leary took to the stage
to welcome returning audience members
to Washington National Opera’s 70th season
and the celebration of what can only be described
as a hero’s victory wrested after
a protracted battle.**

DC THEATER ARTS, ON WNO’S RETURN TO THE STAGE IN MARCH



“This was an evening to remember in an opera that powerfully portrays a reality not too far from our society today. It is also demonstrated Washington National Opera’s resilience in time of change and the importance of the company more than ever.”

OPERA WIRE REVIEW OF *THE CRUCIBLE*

STANDING OVATIONS, NATIONAL HONORS, AND WIDE-RANGING MEDIA COVERAGE

Rave reviews for our productions of *Treemonisha* and *The Crucible* in March appeared with supportive and reflective commentary about WNO’s **“spirit of independence”** (*The New Yorker*) and **“Nimble Reset”** (*The Wall Street Journal*). *The New York Times* described WNO’s “risky, difficult feat of abandoning its home, and all the security that came with it and opening a new production within two months” as **“a miracle.”**

Particularly moving is this beautiful, 7-1/2-minute feature on [**PBS News Hour**](#) (Note: the link begins briefly with ads.)

“... I’d never seen *Treemonisha* live ... I found myself falling for its fairy-tale version of a bright young woman who defeats forces of superstition and assumes leadership of her community. ... DENYCE GRAVES directed the show with an eye toward brilliance of color and vigor of movement.”

Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*,
“An Elegy for the Kennedy Center”



At another evening of ovations, **'Cesca and WNO Trustee, Jeffrey Cunard**, received national accolades for their contributions to the opera field at OPERA America's annual awards dinner in April. 'Cesca was one of this year's seven inductees into the **Opera Hall of Fame** in recognition of her impact on the art form, her global leadership in the arts, and her celebrated tenure at WNO since 2011. Jeff, who has led numerous committees since joining the Board in 2014 and served as president for six years, including navigating the uncharted waters of the pandemic and its after-effects, was one of five recipients to receive the **National Opera Trustee Recognition Award**.

WNO staff and Board who attended this national gathering were particularly moved when, at the start of the dinner, OPERA America Chair Lee Anne Myslewski referenced WNO's courageous move in the second sentence of her welcome remarks, which resulted in **resounding cheers** from the attendees. This support for WNO continued with **prolonged standing ovations** with the announcement of our honorees.



SPRING 2027

WNO WORLD PREMIERE “BALLET-OPERA”

O’KEEFFE: KISS THE SKY

Among our offerings next season is the world premiere of a “hybrid ballet-opera,” *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky*, starring three of opera’s greatest luminaries: **Isabel Leonard** as Georgia O’Keeffe, **Bill Burden** as Alfred Stieglitz, the renowned American photographer and husband of O’Keeffe, and **Christine Goerke** as the influential art patron, Mabel Dodge, who was responsible for enticing O’Keeffe to the southwest with indelible results.

As the story unfolds across four U.S. cities, each with a distinct energy, the opera delves into the unpredictable ways in which relationships contribute to an artist’s development and legacy. O’Keeffe, Dodge, and Stieglitz are **shadowed by dancers** as their *doppelgängers*, drawing audiences into their interior lives, with sung text grounding their emotional journey through real events, conversations, and conflicts.

Pictured are moments from the workshop. On this page, librettist **KELLEY ROURKE** and 'CESCA. We were incredibly fortunate that **CHRISTINE GOERKE** (top of page 6), who last appeared with WNO in *Elektra*, and is in demand internationally for her portrayal of Strauss' *Ariadne*, Puccini's *Turandot*, and Wagner's *Brunnhilde*, among many other leading roles, was able to join us for this week-long workshop to bring nascent life to the role of *Mabel Dodge*.



Because of this blending of music, dance, and voice, the opera is uniquely authored by a triad of creators — composer **Christopher Tin** (who wrote the acclaimed new ending for our *Turandot* two years ago), librettist **Kelley Rourke**, and choreographer **Jessica Lang**.

In March, WNO was invited to workshop this opera as part of the University of Cincinnati-College-Conservatory of Music **Opera Fusion** program, the premiere pipeline for all major new works of the past 15 years since its inception, among them *The Hours*, *Fellow Travelers*, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, and more. However, this is the first Opera Fusion workshop involving ballet, and joining us were three dancers from the **American Ballet Theater**.

**REVIVING THE
DEBATE ABOUT
PUCCINI'S
UNFINISHED FINAL
OPERA, TURANDOT,
THE NEW YORK
TIMES TURNS
TO WNO**



On March 24, in an absorbing full-page article entitled, “**Is it Possible to Solve the Ending of Puccini’s ‘Turandot’?**” *NYT* writer Kevin Ng delved into the opera’s unfinished history, Puccini’s frustration with his librettist’s failure to come up with a satisfactory ending, and his “creative bloc that lasted for six months.” Sadly, Puccini died before he could resolve this dilemma, and the score most frequently performed was subsequently completed by Franco Alfano, along with other attempts, including a more contemporary version in 2001 by Luciano Berio.

“Then the centennial of Puccini’s death inspired Francesca Zambello, the artistic director of Washington National Opera, to think about another new ending.” The article provides a beautiful and in-depth description which we have often shared about ‘Cesca’s desire, as a director, “to take away [Turandot’s] ice princess aspect and help her realize her own humanity,” and how she connected with composer Christopher Tin and librettist Susan Soon He Stanton to write the powerful new ending that WNO premiered in 2024. If you have access to the *New York Times*, please read this impressive and informative [article](#), if you’ve not already done so.



'Cesca and Christopher Tin on break during the O'Keeffe workshop.

CODA: CHRISTOPHER, CHRISTINE, AND YUMA KAGIAMA

One of the ways to hear **Christopher Tin**'s sumptuous *Turandot* score again is by heading to YouTube and watching Yuma Kagiama's Silver Medal-winning men's figure skating routine choreographed to this music at either this year's Winter Olympics or subsequent World Championships in Prague. This [link](#) takes you to the World Championships, which has been described as Yuma's personal best free skate. The recording — by the Royal Philharmonic, English National Opera Chorus, and **Christine Goerke** as Turandot — was made especially for Yuma, and reporters never fail to mention it. At the World Championships, the NBC Sports commentator says, **“This *Turandot* is sublime”** and describes Yuma's performance as a **“masterclass of movement and music on ice.”**



The recording is also available to [stream](#), [download](#), and [purchase](#).

FUN FACTS:
WHAT'S GOING ON

Behind the Scenes

- Properties Manager, Rachel Witt, is unpacking and checking *West Side Story* props and creating a “**stage weapons policy**” for the new WNO. She is also doing a **helium test** on the balloons that will fill the big “Dance at the Gym” scene where Tony and Maria meet, to gauge on how much helium she will need to purchase for the run of the show.
- Technical Director, Christy Blackham, and Assistant Technical Director, Sean Miller, are creating **trucking schedules** for everything that needs to load in at Lyric Baltimore — from props and orchestra materials, to stock equipment, scenery, lighting and sound packages.
- The rehearsal department is preparing **run schedules, hotel reservations, travel arrangements, and parking assignments.**
- The production administration team is working on **2027 contracts** and prepping payroll.
- **Costumes** are being sorted and **fittings** will start on April 16 as the cast arrives and rehearsals begin.
- The *West Side Story* stage management staff has arrived and is “**taping out**” the **rehearsal room** for the layout of the scenery, **organizing paperwork, setting up call boards,** and **prepping scores.**



As WNO continues to bring its productions to multiple venues, the incomparable **WNO Orchestra** reminded us that “**home is where the heart is**” as they gathered in the cozy space under the Lisner Auditorium stage after the final performance of *The Crucible* to celebrate **Music Director Robert Spano** and the WNO’s successful first foray “off campus.”

With just three weeks to opening, we look forward to seeing you in Baltimore and Bethesda.