



WNO E-NEWS FROM

Tim & Cesca

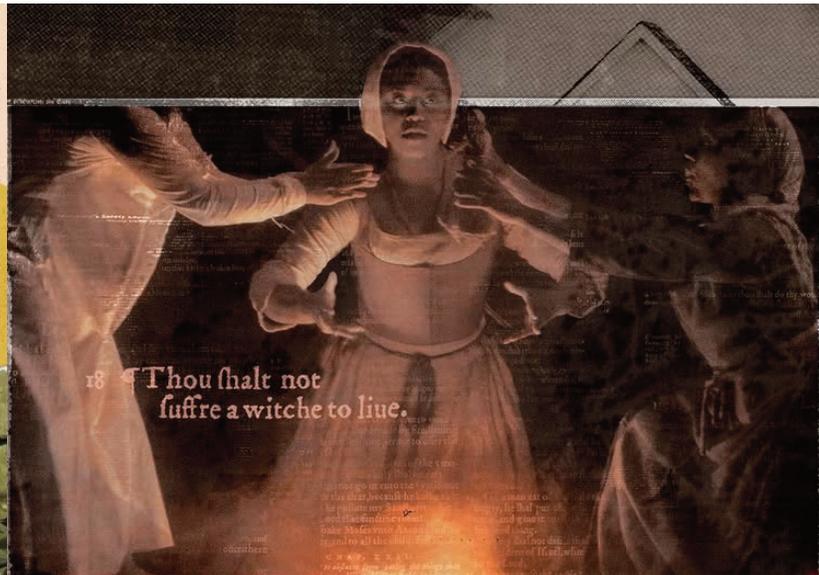
WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA | FEBRUARY 2026

WASHINGTON
NATIONAL
OPERA

Dear Friends,

What a time this has been! Since we began operating again as an independent non-profit organization in January, many have compared WNO to “the little engine that could.” Put another way, we have been building the plane while flying it.

Getting up to cruising altitude has been a whirlwind. Plans that were initially considered “what-ifs” became realities. Our immediate task was to re-start fast enough to keep everyone employed, ensuring our artists and staff would continue to be paid. Thanks to many friends and supporters, our creative teams have not missed a beat getting ***Treemonisha***, ***The Crucible***, and ***West Side Story*** ready for the stage — or various stages — this spring as planned.



**“I am so glad
you are forging
a new path
for the WNO.”**

One of the hundreds of heartfelt notes that we received with donations from supporters

FROM DC TO BALTIMORE TO BETHESDA

Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha* and **Robert Ward’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Crucible*** will be performed at Lisner Auditorium in DC, and **Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*** will be at Lyric Baltimore and The Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda. Performing a range of repertoire in multiple venues underscores our mission to make opera accessible to everyone.

“I saw *The Marriage of Figaro* in November, my first opera, and I am hooked. I applaud the board’s decision. This is not much, but I must give something.”

“THANK YOU for embarking on this new chapter. We love the WNO and will follow you wherever you go.”

“In support of your courageous action. We will be purchasing tickets wherever you are performing. Thank you, thank you.”

To make this happen, leading up to our move and during the past few weeks we raised essential business-start-up funding to begin re-establishing WNO as an independent entity, to cover everything from health insurance to data and payroll systems, IT infrastructure, email, and more; created and launched a website and communications plan; were generously gifted a dedicated reserve fund to be used in part for cash flow as we establish regular ongoing income; and lined up partnerships with theaters to continue our planned season across the DC-Metro area, underscoring our mission to make opera accessible to everyone.

“I’m proud to support the WNO after making such a brave, values-affirming decision.”

*“Bravi for your classy,
clear explanation of
your departure. Wishing
WNO triumphant and
creative inspiration as
you move forward.”*

*“Thank you to the Board,
Tim O’Leary and Co.
for your decision. We know
it comes with challenges
and risks, but it is a bold
statement that affirms
the integrity and values
of your organization. We
stand behind you 100%.”*

To support WNO’s commitment to independence and free expression, more than 1,000 donors have stepped up — making contributions online, by mail, and through stock transfers. These have ranged from \$5 to surprise gifts of \$100,000. Perhaps most meaningful have been the many heartfelt comments in support of our decision that have accompanied these gifts.

It is the enthusiasm and loyalty of our audiences, supporters, artists and friends that has buoyed us as our incredibly energized, talented team have worked around the clock to set the stage for us to continue to operate anew and bring our 70th anniversary season to life.

“We pledge to support WNO in its future endeavors and, on our country’s 250th anniversary and always, to continue standing up for artistic freedom.”

From a letter posted on operawire.com in support of WNO, signed by 62 distinguished opera singers, composers, librettists, directors, agents and producers.

“Now a widow in my eighties, I grew old with you, WNO! ... I feel confident that another door will open and WNO will move on to a new chapter in its 70th anniversary year! Thank you for the many great performances ... looking forward to many more!”

This support has also been heard and felt through the extensive media coverage we’ve received, locally, nationally, and abroad. Among these was an in-depth feature in *Opera* magazine this month about our decision to produce *The Crucible*, and the history and importance of this Pulitzer Prize-winning opera. **“This piece touches on so many themes of mass hysteria, and how public opinion can get out of hand. And clearly we are living through those times,”** writes Eric Myers in the *Opera* magazine article. While *The Crucible* takes place during the Salem Witch Trials, its story of mob mentality and false accusations remains as relevant today as it did when Arthur Miller premiered the play on which the opera is based in 1953 as an allegory for McCarthyism.



We've often said that opera is the most complex art form, and producing it can be even more complex — from the structuring of a balanced season to the conceptualizing, casting, production building, rehearsing, fundraising, and marketing. The planning begins as much as two years in advance for a company of our size, and the work continues until the curtain drops on the final performance each season. Even as one year's repertory is being built or rehearsed, blueprints for future years are being developed and artistic forces contracted.



Denyce Graves directs Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*. WNO brings this powerful work to the stage in a newly commissioned adaptation by composer Damien Sneed (pictured with Denyce) and playwright Kyle Bass. Cafritz Young Artist Viviana Goodwin (center) sings the title role alongside former Marian Anderson Award winner, Justin Austin (top left). *Treemonisha* costumes by Lynly A. Saunders.



***“Bravo, my friends!
Thrilled by your
principled, pragmatic,
courageous decision.”***



Within our rehearsal studio and costume shop in Takoma, drapers, first hands and stitchers are building costumes for *Treemonisha*, while our costume design managers are busy with fittings. Down the hall, rehearsals for the opera are in full swing. Elsewhere in the building, props are being crafted and purchased, lighting plots are being finalized, and trucking and scenic build and load-in plans are being completed for all three spring productions. In music rooms, our Cafritz Young Artists are being coached between rehearsals. While the studios are abuzz with all of this activity, in Takoma’s production management offices, preparations are well underway for the 2026/2027 season, which will be announced shortly, along with preliminary planning for 2027/2028.

Our Cafritz Young Artists, who received standing ovations for *The Marriage of Figaro* and for their heartwarming roles in *The Little Prince*, will be heard throughout the spring season in leading and supporting roles along with alumni from the program.



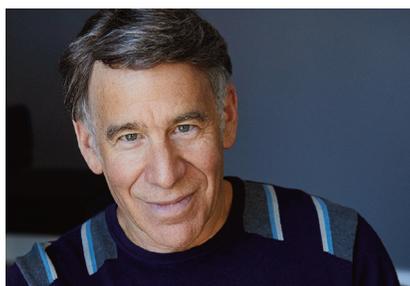
The WNO Orchestra is uniquely versatile—it is the only orchestra in the nation devoted to the musical genres of opera, ballet and musical theater. In this photo, the WNO Orchestra appears in its other incarnation, as the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra. This past week, the orchestra accompanied the American Ballet Theatre, as they have for over half a century. ABT dedicated their performances to DC area arts workers: orchestra, stagehands, costumers, box office workers and others, and invited the Orchestra to join them for an emotional onstage bow after the last performance. The WNO Orchestra is looking forward to appearing on many new stages around DC!

Save the Date

ALLEGRA ANDERSON



JAMIE BERNSTEIN



STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Save the Date for WNO's annual Gala: May 16, co-hosted by the acclaimed composer of *Wicked*, Stephen Schwartz, and the author, director, broadcaster and filmmaker, Jamie Bernstein, daughter of Leonard Bernstein.

In celebration of Washington National Opera's 70th anniversary and new chapter as an independent organization, this year's Gala on May 16 offers an event-filled celebration at the historic National Building Museum. The evening includes cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a thrilling program of operatic selections paired with musical theater counterparts, performed by the **stars of *West Side Story*, WNO's Cafritz Young Artists, and the WNO Chorus and Orchestra.** WNO's annual Gala raises support for the company's acclaimed productions, professional training programs, educational initiatives, and community engagement programs.

**“Bravo to you.
I send you this
donation with the
hope that the WNO
not just survives
... but thrives.”**



A BIT OF TRIVIA:
West Side Story
was written in 1956,
the same year that
the Opera Society
of Washington — which
became Washington
Opera and then
Washington National
Opera — was formed.

Thank you to the hundreds of individuals who reached out with your warm wishes and voices of support for WNO’s new chapter in our 70-year history as a cultural cornerstone of our Nation’s Capital. Many have asked how WNO can independently sustain itself. This will be a significant challenge, but the early response from the public has been inspiring.

We are looking forward to welcoming our audiences this spring and celebrating our anniversary throughout 2026.

With our deepest gratitude,

Timothy O’Leary
GENERAL DIRECTOR

Francesca Zambello
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR