

THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA'S 2026–2027 SEASON REIMAGINES OPERA
AS AN IMMERSIVE, MULTI-VENUE EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE REGION,
FEATURING WORLD PREMIERES, ICONIC MASTERWORKS,
AND A GROUNDBREAKING “REVOLUTIONARY STAGE” CONCEPT

2026–2027 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS:

- Acclaimed Artists: Internationally acclaimed artists headline the season, including singers **Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson, Isabel Leonard, Christine Goerke, Ben Bliss, Karah Son, William Burden, Gregory Kunde, Francesca Pia Vitale, Viviana Goodwin, Amber Monroe**; conductors include WNO Music Director **Robert Spano, Erina Yashima, George Manahan, Valentina Peleggi, Donald Lee III**; and directors include WNO Artistic Director **Francesca Zambello, Elkhannah Pulitzer, and E. Loren Meeker**, and choreographers **Jessica Lang and Kanji Segawa**.
- “A Revolutionary Stage”: WNO unveils a bold new theatrical concept at **Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Constitution Hall**, featuring immersive, café-style seating, and a thrust-stage design where WNO will perform new productions of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* and John Adams’ *Nixon in China* and the star-studded concert event *We the People*.
- New Productions: Five major productions and premieres anchor the season, including new stagings of *Madama Butterfly* and *Nixon in China*, the world premiere “ballet-opera” Christopher Tin’s *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky*, a reimagined Mozart’s *Idomeneo: A Trojan Tale*, plus the revival of Verdi’s *La traviata*.
- New stages: Performances expand across iconic venues including **DAR Constitution Hall, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater’s Kreeger Theater, Sidney Harman Hall at Shakespeare Theatre Company, Music Center at Strathmore**, and the company’s **WNO Studio**.
- Renewed commitment to new and young audiences: WNO performs *Odyssey*, a new family-friendly holiday opera adaptation featuring WNO’s Youth Chorus and Cafritz Young Artists.
- Renewed commitment to new voices: WNO continues to champion emerging artists through prominent appearances by members of the **Cafritz Young Artists Program**—which celebrates its 25th anniversary in the current season—plus a world premiere **American Opera Initiative (AOI)** production and **Marian Anderson Award** recipient **Amber Monroe**.
- WNO Orchestra, led by Music Director **Robert Spano**, anchors WNO’s musical offerings with critically acclaimed performances.
- WNO announces that *Fellow Travelers*, previously scheduled for the 2025-2026 season, will be performed in the 2027-2028 season.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Washington National Opera (WNO), led by General Director **Timothy O’Leary**, Artistic Director **Francesca Zambello**, and Music Director **Robert Spano**, announces its groundbreaking 2026-2027 season—its first full season as an independent company, following its departure from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in January 2026. The season offers a creative journey in venues throughout the greater-Washington, D.C. region, and explores themes of freedom, the importance of civic and cultural life in America, and a continuation of WNO’s two-year celebration of the company’s 70th anniversary along with the 250th anniversary of the United States’ founding.

Washington National Opera’s season opens with a series performed on WNO’s novel **Revolutionary Stage**—the DAR Constitution Hall’s historic auditorium is transformed with a thrust stage, surrounded with cafe-style seating to create a fully immersive audience experience. Appearing on the Revolutionary Stage is a new production of Puccini’s **Madama Butterfly** inspired by the theatrical style of David Belasco, the company premiere of John Adams’ **Nixon in China** in celebration of the composer’s 80th birthday, and a special concert, **We the People**, highlighting music from across the operatic canon, featuring Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson, and the season’s Marian Anderson Award recipient Amber Monroe, conducted by Robert Spano.

Beyond this series, the season continues with a wide-ranging lineup that underscores WNO’s commitment to innovation and accessibility, including a family-friendly **Odyssey** at the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, the return of the **American Opera Initiative** in a new two-bill format, and Mozart’s **Idomeneo: A Trojan Tale**, a reimagining of the classic opera through the lens of the Trojan War, performed at Sidney Harman Hall with the orchestra onstage. Of particular note, WNO brings the world premiere of **O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky**, a groundbreaking “ballet-opera” exploring the life and artistry of Georgia O’Keeffe, alongside a revival of Verdi’s **La traviata** presented at the Music Center at Strathmore, bringing a beloved classic to the region in a new season of bold, reimagined opera.

“This season reflects a defining moment for Washington National Opera—one in which we are embracing new creative freedom, new spaces, and new ways of connecting with our community,” shares WNO General Director **Timothy O’Leary**. “We believe that the arts have always mattered deeply to civic life, and in this 250th year of our nation, we are proud to help tell stories that speak to who we are as a people. We remain grateful that our audiences and supporters from around the country have joined us on this new adventure.”

“We have used this new journey to challenge ourselves to explore multiple venues and to treat each work on a different scale. All the interpretations and artists will bring you something different, unique and unexpected,” says WNO Artistic Director **Francesca Zambello**. “Our approach allows us to bring you the best possible visual and musical experiences while heralding the best of American artists joining with international friends.”

A Revolutionary Stage

WNO opens the season with three programs—*Madama Butterfly*, *Nixon in China*, and *We the People* special concert—performed at the **Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Constitution Hall** on WNO’s completely redesigned “**Revolutionary Stage**” which will create an immersive experience through a thrust stage that extends into the audience on three sides—complete with café- and theater-style seating.



“Revolutionary Stage” design by Walt Spangler

Madama Butterfly

A fully staged new production of Puccini’s **Madama Butterfly** (November 7, 13, 15, 18, and 20, 2026) tells one of opera’s most tragic and beautiful love stories in a setting evocative of Japan by **Walt Spangler**, with period costumes by **Florence Klotz**. American naval officer Pinkerton marries the young geisha Cio-Cio-San, known as Butterfly. Innocent and deeply devoted, she ignores warnings about his intentions—until betrayal leaves her facing heartbreak and disgrace, propelling her toward one of opera’s most unforgettable finales. This striking production is directed by **E. Loren Meeker** with choreography by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company member **Kanji Segawa** and renowned choreographer **Jessica Lang**. Korean soprano **Karah Son** makes her company debut in the title role—a role she has performed with nearly every major opera company in the world. She is joined by rising star tenor **Matthew White** as Pinkerton—a role he performed to acclaim with Opéra de Montréal. Cafritz Young Artist alumna and Grand Finals Winner of the 2025 Metropolitan Opera competition **Michelle Mariposa** performs as Suzuki. Japanese-German conductor **Erina Yashima**—who has led orchestras around the world—conducts.

Nixon in China

Nixon in China (November 14, 19 and 21, 2026), WNO’s first opera by prolific American composer **John Adams**, with librettist **Alice Goodman**, is conducted by **Robert Spano**, a longtime collaborator of Adams. The composer celebrates his 80th birthday this year. This thought-provoking work revisits the 1972 meeting of Nixon, Kissinger, and Mao—blending political spectacle with intimate human reflection and culminating in the haunting question: “How much of what we did was good?” Directed by **Elkhanah Pulitzer**, the reimagined production incorporates rare archival film footage by **Bill Morrison** with scenic designs by **Alexander V. Nichols**. The cast is led by two of America’s most celebrated artists, **Renée Fleming** as Pat Nixon and **Thomas Hampson** as Richard Nixon—in their return to WNO. **Kathleen Kim** joins the production as Madame Mao, and the iconic Chairman Mao dances will be choreographed by **Jessica Lang**, who has created more than 100 original works for companies worldwide including American Ballet Theatre, The Royal Ballet, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Special Concert: *We the People*

The third event on the “Revolutionary Stage” is a special concert, ***We the People*** (November 22, 2026), conducted by **Robert Spano**. The event promises a celebration of American ideals, exploring themes of liberty, independence, and creative freedom through a rich program of works by Mozart, Verdi, and contemporary composers. The operatic journey across centuries explores how opera has given voice to moments of transformation, political upheaval, and the enduring human desire for freedom. The concert features an exceptional lineup of artists, including **Renée Fleming**, **Thomas Hampson**, and this year’s Washington National Opera Marian Anderson Award recipient and former Cafritz Young Artist **Amber Monroe**.

Family-Friendly Holiday Opera: *Odyssey*

The season continues during the holiday season with ***Odyssey*** (December 18, 19, and 20, 2026) performed in the **Kreeger Theater of the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater**. Composer **Ben Moore** and librettist **Kelley Rourke** create a vibrant, family-friendly, 70-minute opera based on the world of Percy Jackson—the hero in author Rick Riordan’s beloved children’s book series. Blending mythic adventure with contemporary energy and large-scale puppets, the production invites audiences into the world of Odysseus and his legendary journey to find home. Featuring **WNO’s Youth Chorus** of dynamic young performers alongside the **Cafritz Young Artists** in leading roles, the opera introduces audiences to unforgettable characters such as the Cyclops, Circe, and the God of the Winds. Presented with orchestra in an intimate theater setting, this lively and accessible production is an ideal introduction to opera for families and first-time attendees alike.

World Premiere and WNO Commission: *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky*

A centerpiece of the season is the world premiere of WNO commission ***O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky*** (March 12, 14, 18, 21, and 26, 2027), performed at **Harman Hall at Shakespeare Theater Company**. The production stars an internationally acclaimed cast, including three-time Grammy Award-winner **Isabel Leonard** as Georgia O’Keeffe, international superstar **Christine Goerke** as Mabel Dodge, and veteran opera favorite **William Burden** as Alfred Stieglitz. With music by Grammy Award-winning composer **Christopher Tin**, libretto by **Kelley Rourke**, stage direction by **Francesca Zambello**, and choreography by **Jessica Lang**, led by conductor **George Manahan**, former music director of the New York City Opera, this novel “ballet-opera” traces the legendary American modern painter Georgia O’Keeffe’s journey to become one of America’s most iconic creative forces, and the people who shaped her along the way. **Lawrence E. Moten III**, who designed last season’s colorful sets for *Treemonisha*, will be designing the sets for both this opera as well as Mozart’s *Idomeneo: A Trojan Tale*.

At its heart is the tension between O’Keeffe’s passionate but complicated marriage to art dealer and photographer Alfred Stieglitz—her greatest champion, but also controlling and unfaithful—and the liberating influence of Mabel Dodge Luhan, who helped O’Keeffe discover the vast Southwest desert landscape that would define her work. Through opera and ballet, *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky* explores not just the artist’s life, but the unpredictable ways relationships shaped her voice and legacy. This marks the second WNO commission for Grammy Award-winner Christopher Tin, whose critically acclaimed new ending to Puccini’s *Turandot* was later performed on the world stage at the 2026 Winter Olympics.

“For my work on the *Turandot* commission, I spent years studying Puccini’s sketches and the various endings completed by others before ultimately finding a way to shape a conclusion in my own voice—one that honored his musical world while incorporating material he left unfinished at his death. With *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky*, the process is entirely different and deeply liberating: there is no model to

follow. I am inspired by Georgia O’Keeffe’s fiercely independent artistic voice, and I sought to create music that reflects her sense of freedom, visual clarity, and emotional honesty, as well as the expansive American landscape that shaped her visionary work,” says **Tin**.

“Creating a new work that weaves together music, movement and visual art into a unified form of storytelling is an exhilarating creative journey for this team of collaborators,” shares choreographer **Jessica Lang**. “Bringing Georgia O’Keeffe’s life story to the stage through opera and ballet feels especially organic because it allows each artistic language to illuminate dimensions of her world in different and complementary ways. Ballet, in particular, offers an emotional and visceral perspective that words alone cannot express, while embodying the spirit, texture, and energy of O’Keeffe’s paintings through movement. This work is a bold reimagining of how artistic disciplines can converge within a shared theatrical space, creating an experience that is immersive, transformative, and deeply connected to the story being told.”

Mozart’s *Idomeneo: A Trojan Tale*

Mozart’s *Idomeneo: A Trojan Tale* (March 20, 25 and 27, 2027) takes place at **Harman Hall at Shakespeare Theatre Company**. This new production preserves Mozart’s magnificent score while offering a modern approach to storytelling inspired by the clarity of ancient Greek theater. With a theatrical distillation, the adaptation introduces a new character, the Trojan Woman, who guides the narrative and replaces traditional recitative, helping to clarify and intensify the drama of the Trojan War. Reimagined by **Francesca Zambello** and **Kelley Rourke**, this staging brings renewed clarity and immediacy to Mozart’s opera, placing the orchestra on stage for a fully immersive experience. The story follows a king’s bargain with the gods to save his son following loss during a devastating war. The production features world-renowned American tenor **Gregory Kunde**, conductor **Robert Spano**, alongside a cast of current WNO **Cafritz Young Artists**, in a vivid exploration of myth, conflict, and human emotion.

Of special note, Washington National Opera’s Cafritz Young Artist Program celebrates its 25th anniversary this season. An essential part of the company, these rising artists will take on an expanded presence on the mainstage this year in honor of the milestone.

Revival: Verdi’s *La traviata*

WNO performs its season finale of a revival of Verdi’s *La traviata* at the **Music Center at Strathmore** (April 29, 30, and May 1), featuring the highly anticipated American debut of emerging star Italian soprano **Francesca Pia Vitale**. Violetta is a celebrated courtesan in glittering Parisian society who lives for pleasure while concealing a fatal illness. When the devoted Alfredo—played by 2026 Beverly Sills Artist Award winner **Ben Bliss** in his WNO and role debut—declares his love, she dares to imagine a new life, until his father insists she sacrifice their happiness to preserve the family’s honor. Caught by the hypocritical mores of society and torn between love and duty, Violetta faces a heartbreaking fate. Directed by **Francesca Zambello** and conducted by Italian maestro and music director of the Richmond Symphony, **Valentina Peleggi**, this elegant production features period costumes by Tony Award-winner **Jess Goldstein**, whose designs were inspired by painter John Singer Sargent. In a beloved WNO tradition, the performance on April 30 features Cafritz Young Artists in leading roles. The May 1st production will also be WNO’s annual Opera Gala.

American Opera Initiative: WOLF | LAMBS

WNO continues its commitment to expanding the repertoire through its popular American Opera Initiative (AOI), which mentors emerging young composers and librettists as they create new works, performed by WNO Cafritz Young Artists. AOI welcomes back alumni composer **JL Marlor** and librettist **Clare Fuyuko Bierman** for a double-bill performed on January 15 and 16, 2027 at the **WNO Studio**.

CRY, WOLF opens the program and is a 2025 AOI commission that tells the story about young men on a college campus who use love, fear, and genuine care for one another to push themselves down deep ideological rabbit holes online. It is paired with a 40-minute world premiere from the same team: **LAMBS** follows three cheerleaders on the same college campus as they navigate the violence and sacrifices that they have been driven to through cheer.

2027-2028 Season: Fellow Travelers

WNO will perform *Fellow Travelers* in March 2028. Composed by **Gregory Spears** to a libretto by **Greg Pierce**, it is based on Thomas Mallon's 2007 novel of the same name. Set in Washington D.C., *Fellow Travelers* is a gay love story set against the backdrop a forgotten chapter of LGBTQ+ history known as the "Lavender Scare--the systematic investigation, persecution and purging of LGBTQ+ Americans from government jobs during the McCarthy era in the 1950s.

Widely praised for its emotional depth, lyric beauty, and profound contemporary resonance, *Fellow Travelers* was originally scheduled for WNO's 2025–2026 season at the Kennedy Center. The creators and producers chose to withdraw the work at that time, citing concerns that the opera's themes of liberty, dignity, and freedom for all no longer aligned with the values reflected by the leadership of WNO's former home venue. (Robert Ward's *The Crucible*—itself shaped by the anxieties of the McCarthy Era—was presented in its place during the 2025–2026 season.)

Opera For All

Washington National Opera continues its commitment to shaping the future of opera. The following initiatives are designed to develop and support a new generation of opera performers.

- Named for the barrier-breaking contralto, the **Marian Anderson Vocal Award** is presented annually by WNO to a young American singer. This year's winner is Cafritz Young Artist alumna **Amber Monroe**, who is emerging as one of American opera's compelling young voices. Her recent seasons include major debuts and returns such as the title role in *Aida* with Washington National Opera and in St. Gallen in Switzerland, Mary Johnson in *Fellow Travelers* with Seattle Opera, and Serena in *Porgy and Bess* at WNO, plus debuts with the Boston and Baltimore symphony orchestras.
- Washington National Opera's **Cafritz Young Artists** program celebrates its 25th anniversary in the current season. WNO's beloved resident-artist program offers artists on the verge of international careers a course of intensive training, study, career guidance, and performance opportunities in Washington, D.C. and beyond. Throughout their training, the Cafritz Young Artists are featured prominently in WNO performances, which this season includes *Odyssey*, *Idomeneo*, a *La traviata* performance on April 30 with Cafritz artists in the lead roles, and AOI. Major support for the Cafritz Young Artist Program is provided by The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

- WNO's beloved tradition of Opera in the Outfield®—sponsored by Mars, Incorporated—will return in 2027, with details to be announced at a later date. The popular annual summer event features one of WNO's classic opera productions broadcast on the high-definition scoreboard at Washington, D.C.'s Nationals Park.

About Washington National Opera

(WNO) is one of the world's leading opera companies. Led by General Director Timothy O'Leary, Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, and Music Director Robert Spano, WNO presents a wide-ranging repertory spanning beloved classics, contemporary works, and newly commissioned operas, collaborating with many of opera's greatest luminaries, including Christine Goerke, Denyce Graves, Renée Fleming, J'Nai Bridges, and Ryan McKinny. Founded in 1956, WNO celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2026, a year that also marks its return to operating as a fully independent company. Recent seasons have featured acclaimed productions of *Aida*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and a landmark *Turandot* with a newly commissioned ending by Christopher Tin and Susan Soon He Stanton. WNO's legacy includes Zambello's internationally celebrated Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle, the D.C. premiere of Jeanine Tesori's *Blue* and *Grounded*—a WNO co-commission—and the world premiere of Philip Glass' revised *Appomattox*.

WNO is also internationally recognized for its education and community engagement initiatives, including the American Opera Initiative, the Cafritz Young Artist Program, the WNO Opera Institute, and Opera in the Outfield, which advance its mission to make opera vital, accessible, and artistically ambitious in the nation's capital. Beyond the main stage, WNO artists bring opera into the community through initiatives such as workshops with incarcerated youth at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center, educational programs at the Library of Congress exploring themes from the season's repertory, and performances and musical events in venues throughout the Washington region.

About Washington National Opera Orchestra

Under the directorship of WNO Music Director Robert Spano, the Washington National Opera Orchestra (WNOO) is the musical heartbeat of the company, playing for all WNO productions. Comprised of 61 musicians from around the nation and the world, WNOO members have trained at the leading conservatories in Europe and the United States, including Juilliard, Eastman, and the Curtis Institute, among others, and most hold advanced degrees in their field. The Orchestra's roots date back to the company's founding in 1956 as the Opera Society of Washington. As the small but intrepid group of opera lovers grew into an internationally recognized opera company, the musicians grew with it, and the orchestra was officially established in 1978. Today, the same musicians also constitute the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra, the Center's resident orchestra. WNOO often performs in venues around the region; additional performances will be announced throughout the season.

Sincere thanks the following Season Sponsors:

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Media Contact: press@washnatopera.org

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COMPLETE EVENT DETAILS

Madama Butterfly

Giacomo Puccini, composer / Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, librettists

Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall – 1776 D Street NW, Washington D.C., 20006

Saturday, November 7, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Friday, November 13, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 15, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Friday, November 20, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Cast:

Karah Son	Cio-Cio-San
Mathew White	Pinkerton
Michelle Mariposa	Suzuki
Rodell Rosel	Goro

Creatives:

Erina Yashima	Conductor
E. Loren Meeker	Director
Kanji Segawa	Choreographer
Jessica Lang	Choreographer
Walt Spangler	Set Designer
Florence Klotz	Costume Designer
Duane Schuler	Lighting Designer
Alexander V. Nicols	Projections Designer

Costumes are owned by and on generous loan from the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

In gratitude for an exceptional, substantial, and transformative contribution from the Dallas Morse Coors Foundation, Washington National Opera dedicates this production of *Madama Butterfly* to the foundation's benefactor, Dallas Morse Coors, in recognition of his philanthropic legacy and passion for the classical cannon.

WNO's production of *Madama Butterfly* is generously supported by Betsy and Ed Cohen.

Nixon in China

John Adams, composer / Alice Goodman, librettist

Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall – 1776 D Street NW, Washington D.C., 20006

Saturday, November 14, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, November 19, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 21, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Cast:

Thomas Hampson	Richard Nixon
Renée Fleming	Pat Nixon
Kathleen Kim	Madame Mao

Creatives:

Elkanah Pulitzer	Director
Robert Spano	Conductor
Jessica Lang	Choreographer
Alexander V. Nichols	Scenic Designer
Elisabeth Scott	Costume Designer
Duane Schuler	Lighting Designer

WNO's production of *Nixon and China* is generously supported by Robert L. Turner and Peter N. Speliopoulos

Thomas Hampson and Renée Fleming are generously sponsored by Noémi Neidorff.

We the People

Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall – 1776 D Street NW, Washington D.C., 20006

Sunday, November 22, 2026 at 4 p.m.

Renée Fleming, soprano
Amber Monroe, soprano
Thomas Hampson, baritone
Robert Spano, conductor
Washington National Opera Orchestra

Odyssey

Ben Moore, composer / Kelley Rourke, librettist
Original production by Francesca Zambello
Originally commissioned by The Glimmerglass Festival
Kreeger Theater at the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater – 1101 6th Street SW,
Washington, DC 20024

Friday, December 18, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 20, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 20, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

Donald Lee III, conductor
WNO Youth Chorus
Cafritz Young Artists

American Opera Initiative: WOLF | LAMBS

JL Marlor, composer / Clare Fuyuko Bierman, librettist

Washington National Opera Studio, 6925 Willow St. NW, 3rd Floor, Washington, D.C. 20012

Friday, January 15, 2027 at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 16, 2027 at 7:00 p.m.

Cafritz Young Artists

O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky

Christopher Tin, composer / Kelley Rourke, librettist

Harman Hall at Shakespeare Theatre Company – 610 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20004

Friday, March 12, 2027 at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 14, 2027 at 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, March 18, 2027 at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 21, 2027 at 2:00 p.m.

Friday, March 26, 2027 at 7:00 p.m.

Cast:

Isabel Leonard	Georgia O’Keeffe
Christine Goerke	Mabel Dodge
William Burden	Alfred Stieglitz

Creatives:

Francesca Zambello	Director
George Manahan	Conductor
Jessica Lang	Choreographer
Lawrence E. Moten III	Scenic Designer
Constance Hoffman	Costume Designer
A.J. Guban	Lighting Designer

Major support for *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky* provided by Denise Littlefield Sobel.

WNO’s production of *O’Keeffe: Kiss the Sky* is possible by a generous gift from the Halff Windham Foundation.

Isabel Leonard is generously sponsored by the Howard and Sarah D. Solomon Foundation.

