

WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

PRESS RELEASE

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Washington National Opera Announces “Save Seventy Seats” Community Initiative and Partnership with The Denyce Graves Foundation

*WNO’s March programs go on sale to the public beginning
January 23rd at 10 a.m. at WashNatOpera.org/tickets*

(Washington, D.C.) – Washington National Opera celebrates its 70th anniversary year and new future as an independent organization with an important new community initiative, **Save Seventy Seats**. Seventy seats at every opera this spring will be reserved for free student and community tickets. WNO invites supporters who are enthusiastic about WNO’s independent future to show their support by sponsoring seats for upcoming productions. *To “save a seat,” visit washnatopera.org/support.*

The initiative builds on a groundswell of nearly 1,000 online donations received since WNO announced the end of its affiliation with the Kennedy Center, and is made possible through a partnership with **The Denyce Graves Foundation** (DGF), which will help connect students and community audiences to these sponsored seats. Founded by legendary mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, DGF is dedicated to honoring overlooked musical voices and empowering the next generation of artists. Further, Denyce Graves also directs WNO’s upcoming production of *Treemonisha*, a newly commissioned adaptation by composer **Damien Sneed** and playwright **Kyle Bass**, which brings to life Scott Joplin’s unfinished opera.

WNO also announces that tickets go on sale to the general public today at 10 a.m. for spring programs that include **Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha*** and **Robert Ward’s *The Crucible***, both taking place at George Washington University’s Lisner Auditorium, the same venue where WNO debuted seven decades ago. *For tickets, visit washnatopera.org/tickets.*

“At the heart of Washington National Opera’s mission is a commitment to making opera accessible and meaningful for all audiences,” said WNO General Director Timothy O’Leary. “We have been deeply encouraged by the extraordinary support we’ve received as we enter this new chapter, and we see a powerful opportunity to channel that momentum back into the community. The **Save Seventy Seats** initiative reflects both our 70th anniversary and our renewed dedication to opening the doors of opera—ensuring that everyone has a seat in the house as we build the future of WNO together.”

Denyce Graves elaborates on the partnership and her support for WNO, sharing, “I am thrilled to direct WNO’s first production as an independent organization and continue their legacy as a leader in the industry. I am proud that out of WNO’s 70 years, I have shared 47 of those and now have the privilege of expanding our relationship and engaging as a stage director in Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha*. Joplin, a Black composer who wrote a full-length opera that centered on literacy, community, and self-determination in Reconstruction-era Black life, offered dignity, agency, and complexity at a time when we did not see that kind of portrayal. I am deeply honored to share this work in my hometown with a company that has given me my start in the business.”

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About Washington National Opera

Founded in 1956, Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States, presenting a diverse repertory that spans classic masterworks, contemporary opera, and newly commissioned American works. Under the leadership of General Director Timothy O’Leary, Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, and Music Director Robert Spano, WNO is known for ambitious productions, world premieres, and a deep commitment to artistic innovation, education, and community engagement. In 2026, following 15 years as an artistic affiliate of the Kennedy Center, WNO returned to full independence, building on a storied legacy that includes landmark productions, international acclaim, and nationally recognized programs such as the American Opera Initiative, the Cafritz Young Artist Program, and Opera in the Outfield[®], which brings opera to new and diverse audiences across Washington, D.C.

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