

**BOSTON
LYRIC
OPERA**

OMAR

Music by Rhiannon Giddens & Michael Abels

Libretto by Rhiannon Giddens

Conductor Michael Ellis Ingram

Director Kaneza Schaal

MAY 4-7 | Emerson Cutler
Majestic Theatre

BRADLEY VERNATTER

*Stanford Calderwood
General Director & CEO*

DAVID ANGUS

Music Director

JOHN CONKLIN

VIMBAYI KAZIBONI

NINA YOSHIDA NELSEN

Artistic Advisors

Jamez McCorkle in Omar, courtesy of Leigh Webber | Spoleto Festival USA

STAY FOR THE TALKBACK

Please keep your seat to dive deeper into the musical experience with a half-hour discussion immediately following each performance.



MAY 4

Ashleigh Gordon,
Castle of Our
Skins Artistic &
Executive Director;
professional violist.



MAY 6

Ala Alryyes, PhD
Associate Professor
Queens College, CUNY
2011 translation of Omar
ibn Said's *Life*, entitled:
A Muslim American Slave:
The Life of Omar ibn Said.



MAY 7

Morgan Beckford,
Director of
Community Connects,
Silk Road Project;
professional singer.

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WELCOME



The operatic stage is full of captivating stories about the human experience, such as those that opened our Season in *Romeo & Juliet* and *La bohème* to BLO's production of *Champion: An Opera in Jazz* by Terence Blanchard last year. In each of these instances, the operatic medium breathes life into stories that can be experienced in new and meaningful ways. This opera offers a poignant tale to join this roster — the story of Omar ibn Said.

Omar was an extraordinary individual, and what makes Omar's story singular is that he tells his story in his own words. Through his writing, the only known surviving autobiographical account of American slavery written in Arabic, Omar has given us an intimate and unedited account of his life and faith. His story is a potent reminder that art gives voice to those whose stories might otherwise go unheard and reminds us that opera makes us kinder, wiser, and more empathic human beings.

When BLO undertook the co-commissioning of this opera, we recognized the role our art form could play in reflecting on this period of our shared American history and in honoring Omar's strength and spirituality. Closing out the 2022/23 Mainstage Season with *Omar* is a fitting choice for BLO after a remarkable year, where we brought four unique operas to the stage that span the very best of the art form, from beloved classics to premieres like this presentation.

I hope you'll join us for BLO happenings this summer, including: our youth presentation of *Hansel & Gretel* at the Boston Public Library; to *The Wanderer's Tethering*, our collaboration between Boston poet laureate Porsha Olayiwola, Boston-based composer Mason Byne and Castle of Our Skins; the return of BLO Street Stage; and more, including our upcoming 2023/24 Season and return to the Emerson Colonial Theatre for a new production of *Madama Butterfly*.

On behalf of the Company, thank you for joining us for this performance and for supporting Boston Lyric Opera.

Bradley Vernatter | *Stanford Calderwood* General Director & CEO



ELIZABETH FRIAR

From left: Emmett G. Price III, Bradley Vernatter, Cierra Byrd, Rhiannon Giddens, Brianna J. Robinson, and Brendon Shapiro at BLO's *Deconstructing Opera: Omar*, presented at GBH.



UPCOMING BLO EVENTS

May 25

OPERA NIGHT at the
Boston Public Library

June 18

THE WANDERER'S
TETHERING

See page 7.

June 2023

PRIMA EVENT

Become an email insider!

See page 23.

August 25

CONCERT IN THE
COURTYARD at the
Boston Public Library

September 14-24

MADAMA BUTTERFLY
at the Emerson Colonial
Theatre

**For additional details
and event times, visit
blo.org/events**

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Boston Lyric Opera's new mission, vision, and values were created with the extensive participation of the leadership team and staff of the Company and represent the first time the organization has adopted a clear set of shared values to guide the work of our team.

Mission

Boston Lyric Opera inspires, entertains, and connects communities through compelling opera performances, programs, and gatherings.

Vision

To create operatic moments that enrich everyday life.

Values

BOLDNESS | We tell evocative stories through music and drama on a large scale and in unexpected settings. We celebrate the rich history of opera and promote adventurousness, which advances the art form, accesses our imaginations, and inspires new thinking.

CONNECTION | We nurture a vital ecosystem of relationships and exchanges that elevate the human experience and impact people. These connections are the force that strengthens us and our communities.

COLLABORATION | Opera is deeply interconnected storytelling, music, and design on an ambitious level that requires many people's artistry, technical skill, passion, participation, and support. We nurture creative people and partnerships that are diverse in thinking and experiences, and we provide structure and support for everyone to thrive.

LEARNING | We seek opportunities to learn new ideas and expand our minds, which drives progress. We create time and space to listen, engage, and grow together.

BELONGING | We are committed to storytelling that reflects a wide variety of perspectives and identities and invites everyone to participate. We create welcoming and accessible spaces that celebrate the uniqueness of our communities.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & ACCESSIBILITY

To fulfill our mission, we must engage people of all backgrounds — meaningfully and respectfully — throughout our organization. For Boston Lyric Opera, advancing the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is a moral priority and a necessity for our success. As adopted by the Board in the 2021/22 Season, we commit to becoming a more diverse and inclusive organization and fostering healthy, vital communities. To that end, this work underscores all that we do and is embedded in our strategic priorities.

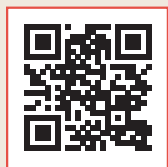
We recognize that this work will take time, intentional actions, and accountability from our Board, employees, artists, patrons, and community. We commit to embracing individuals of all backgrounds and identities.

Opera has the power to speak the truth, broaden perspectives, and invite empathy. We acknowledge that the history of operas and those engaged in opera has not always been diverse or inclusive. We believe that we can address the necessary changes for opera to evolve and thrive.

DIVERSITY
EQUITY
INCLUSION
ACCESSIBILITY

OUR DEIA VALUES

- We acknowledge and appreciate the inherent human rights of all individuals without discrimination.
- We believe that our work must be based on mutual respect.
- We aim to examine our actions so that we may act without bias based on the differences we encounter during our work.
- We aspire to listen to, learn from, and seek diversity among the voices that join us in our work.



For more information, scan
the QR code or visit us at:
BLO.org/deia

BLO'S DECONSTRUCTING OPERA: OMAR

"How do we tell our story in a way that acknowledges the bad stuff, but also acknowledges all of the beauty?"

– Rhiannon Giddens in conversation with Emmett G. Price III about the New England premiere of *Omar*.



**BOSTON
LYRIC
OPERA**



◀ SCAN TO WATCH THE CONVERSATION

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



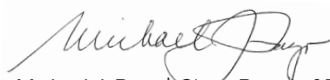
On behalf of BLO's Board of Directors and Board of Advisors, I welcome you to the Company's production of *Omar*. This extraordinary work, with music by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, and a libretto by Ms. Giddens, tells a riveting story — one that compels us to reflect on the dignity and unique value embodied in each member of the human family, and the horror of slavery that denies dignity and value to the enslaved person.

In bringing *Omar* to this stage, BLO again reinforces its commitment to introduce new works, to listen to and amplify voices that need to be heard, to broaden perspectives, and to invite empathy. As you engage with this work, we invite you to walk with the characters, to enter into the story, and to feel the power of the music and the words of *Omar's* journey.

This art form is ideally suited to storytelling. Using words and music, movement and drama, all driven forward by the unique medium that is the unamplified human voice, opera weaves these elements together as a seamless whole and in a manner that transcends other art forms. As BLO tells new stories, as it draws on the deep reservoir of traditional works and invites us to see ourselves in these stories, we fulfill our mission to our community.

As we close this season, we do so mindful that our work as a Company expands beyond the theater. The Artist Classroom Visits program brings our singers, musicians, and teaching artists into schools and other venues in Greater Boston. In those classrooms, we share the beauty of opera and the creativity that undergirds it with young people, many of whom also take part in the school-based Create Your Own Opera Program. Recently, the College of the Holy Cross, through the gracious invitation of its President and fellow BLO Director Vincent Rougeau, welcomed BLO to the wonderful new Prior Performing Arts Center for a program featuring selections from *Omar*, offering an opportunity to bring the story and music to a wider audience.

On behalf of the Company, thank you for your presence at this performance and thank you for supporting Boston Lyric Opera.



Michael J. Puzo | Chair, Board of Directors

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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° Deceased

As of April 1, 2023

In Memoriam

Boston Lyric Opera celebrates the lives and musical passion of patrons whom we lost this year. They contributed to the Company, the City, and the art form in extraordinary ways.



E. LEE PERRY

It is with deep sadness and heavy hearts that we bid goodbye to our friend, opera lover, and dedicated BLO Director, **E. Lee Perry**. Lee served on BLO's Board since 1992. Over the years, he has been a friend to everyone at BLO and to many in the national opera community.

We remember his warmth, joyful spirit, and how he cherished our art form.

BLO Remembers with Fondness

Paul Gilbert
Sandra Hoffman
John Moriarty
Robert Osteen

Millie Perkins
E. Lee Perry
Sandra Pollack
Roger Saunders

Marie Louise Scudder
Lise Striar
Paul Ward White

John Moriarty was celebrated throughout Boston and beyond for his many musical gifts which he shared unstintingly, including as official accompanist for the Metropolitan Opera New England Regional Auditions for 50+ years. Locally, John had near lifelong associations with New England Conservatory and Boston Conservatory.

Sandy Pollack joined the BLO Board of Directors in 1995, serving until 2008. Alongside her late husband Herb, Sandy was a stalwart supporter of Boston Lyric Opera and the arts in Boston. She brought a very special light to BLO.

Marie Louise Scudder was a lifelong music lover who supported the Company enthusiastically and generously, alongside her husband David. ML's constant presence is greatly missed.

A musical and spoken
word performance
collaboration.

BOSTONLYRICOPERA

THE WANDERER'S TETHERING

SUMMER CONCERT

MASON BYNES



COMPOSER

PORSHA OLAYIWOLA



BOSTON POET LAUREATE
LIBRETTIST & PERFORMER

BRIANNA J. ROBINSON



BLO JANE & STEVEN AKIN EMERGING ARTIST
SOPRANO

VIMBAYI KAZIBONI



PROGRAM CURATOR
BLO ARTISTIC ADVISOR

FEATURING

ARTISTS FROM BLO & CASTLE OF OUR SKINS

HIBERNIAN HALL

184 DUDLEY ST #200,
BOSTON, MA 02119

SUNDAY, JUNE 18

4:00PM | [BLO.ORG/EVENTS](https://blo.org/events)

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**PAY
WHAT
YOU
LIKE**

OMAR

Music by
RHIANNON GIDDENS
& MICHAEL ABELS

Libretto by
RHIANNON GIDDENS

Published by and presented with
permission of Subito Music Corporation

Sung in English with English surtitles

David Angus, BLO Music Director
2022/23 Season Sponsor
Linda Cabot Black

PERFORMANCES

THU, MAY 4, 2023 | 7:30PM

SAT, MAY 6, 2023 | 7:30PM

SUN, MAY 7, 2023 | 3PM

Performance time is approximately
2 hours, 15 minutes with one intermission.

EMERSON CUTLER
MAJESTIC THEATRE
219 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02116

*Boston Lyric Opera Debut

† Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin
Emerging Artist

‡ Boston Lyric Opera Jane and Steven Akin
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CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor
MICHAEL ELLIS INGRAM

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Set Designer
AMY RUBIN

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APRIL HICKMAN
MICHELINE RUSSELL-BROWN

Lighting Designer
LUCRECIA BRICENO

Lighting Co-Designer
ALEJANDRO FAJARDO

Video Designer
JOSHUA HIGGASON

Wig & Makeup Designer
FRANDRESHA HALL

Choreographer
KIARA BENN

Intimacy Director
JACKIE DAVIS

Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra
ANNIE RABBAT *Orchestra Leader*

Chorus Director
BRETT HODGDON†

Rehearsal Coach/Accompanist
BRENDON SHAPIRO‡

Stage Manager
MIKE JANNEY

CAST

Omar

JAMEZ MCCORKLE

Fatima, Omar's Mother

CIERRA BYRD

James Owen/Johnson

DANIEL OKULITCH

Julie

BRIANNA J. ROBINSON

Auctioneer/Taylor

NEAL FERREIRA†

Eliza, Owen's Daughter

EMMA SORENSON†

Katie Ellen/The Caller

CATHERINE ANNE DANIEL

Abdul, Omar's Brother/Abe

NICHOLAS LAGESSE†

Amadou/Renty

FRED C. VANNESS JR.†

Suleiman/Townsperson 1

CHRISTON CARNEY

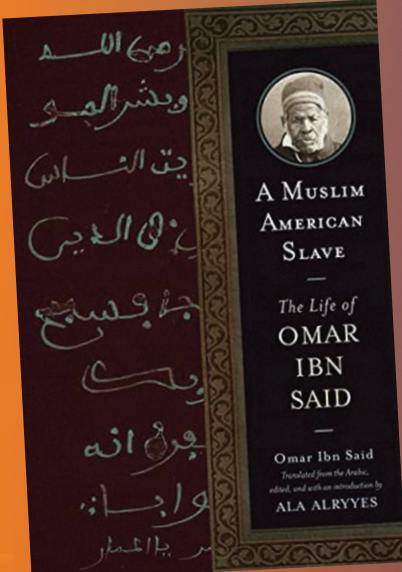
Olufemi

CHRISTOPHER HUMBERT JR.

The Figure

KIARA BENN

Omar is co-produced by Spoleto Festival USA and Carolina Performing Arts at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and co-commissioned by LA Opera, Spoleto Festival USA, Carolina Performing Arts, Boston Lyric Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.




FROM HIS OWN WORDS

Omar is inspired by Dr. Ala Alryyes' translation of Omar ibn Said's autobiography in his book *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar ibn Said*.

LEARN MORE & ORDER

Published by University of Wisconsin Press, 2011;
uwpress.wisc.edu



ACT I

Futa Toro (present-day Senegal), 1807. Omar ibn Said recites the Qur'an. Omar's Mother leads the village in prayer to Allah, asking for guidance and assistance. Slavers have been pillaging the region, and Omar's brother, convinced that an agreement will secure peace, plans to negotiate with them. While Omar prefers to leave his fate in Allah's hands, his brother is determined to control his destiny, and he leaves to continue the negotiations. Omar's brother soon discovers that he has been deceived, and the village is raided. Slavers overrun the village and begin taking people prisoner. In the chaos, Omar is separated from his family, and his mother is murdered.

The Middle Passage. Omar is shackled with other men in the hold of a ship. They do not speak the same language and struggle to introduce themselves. Inhumane conditions have caused disease and death. Two white slavers watch over the prisoners, concerned about their future profits.

The Slave Market, Charleston, South Carolina. Julie, an enslaved woman, is dragged into the market for sale by a white kidnapper. She plans to escape and return to the Owen plantation in Fayetteville. At the market, she encounters Omar, but he cannot understand her English. Undeterred, she tells Omar that if he were to escape, he should find Master James Owen in Fayetteville. The auction begins, and a family is separated. Omar's cap is taken from him and discarded. Julie retrieves it. Omar prays and is visited by his Mother. He notices that Julie has gotten free of her bonds. To create a diversion, Omar falls to his knees and prays loudly, giving Julie a chance to escape. Omar is sold to Johnson.

Johnson plantation. Enslaved workers talk about the newcomer, Omar. Johnson demonstrates his vicious temperament. He yells at Omar in an attempt to break him, but from Omar's perspective, the words are garbled; Omar cannot understand him. Finally, Johnson sends Omar to pick cotton in the fields.

Five months later. The spirit of Omar's mother encourages Omar to pray to Allah and reminds him of Julie's guidance. As Johnson approaches, Omar flees.

ACT II

Fayetteville County Jail. Omar has been captured and brought to the county jail, where he prays and writes on the jail walls. The people of Fayetteville swirl with questions about Omar: Where did he come from? Who let him get away? Omar's writing, captures the attention of the daughter of plantation owner James Owen. Calling his writing "magic," she encourages Owen to purchase Omar. Owen is fascinated by Omar's religious piety and believes Omar can be converted to Christianity.

Owen plantation. Katie Ellen, one of the enslaved workers on the plantation, is surprised that Julie came back. Owen introduces Omar to the other enslaved people, and they welcome him and warn him of the dangers that persist there. Omar prays, asking for another sign from Allah, and he is reunited with Julie. She reveals that her father had worn a cap like his and had prayed in the same way. But her father was sold away when she was young. She encourages Omar to hold on "to memories, to histories, to feelings."

Owen's study. Omar is summoned and accompanied by Katie Ellen and Julie to Owen's study. Owen and Taylor, a visitor from the North, discuss the prospect of converting Omar to Christianity. Owen gives Omar a Bible written in Arabic, and he and Taylor ask Omar to write the beginning of the Lord's Prayer. Instead, Omar secretly expresses his desire to go home.

Later that day. Omar stands alone under a tree reading the Arabic Bible. He reflects on his life, thinks of his mother, and asks for forgiveness from Allah. In the final scene, Julie is amazed that Omar can read and write. She encourages him to write a book to tell his story, and Omar's mother joins her call. Omar's faith flows through his pen.

Allison Chu is a PhD candidate in music history at Yale University. Her research focuses on the intersection of identity and opera in the twenty-first century.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2022/23 JANE AND STEVEN AKIN EMERGING ARTISTS ON A FANTASTIC SEASON



**Brianna J.
Robinson**
Soprano



**Fred C.
VanNess, Jr.**
Tenor



**Junhan
Choi**
Baritone



**Nicholas
LaGessee**
Baritone

I Cannot Write My Life

Islam, Arabic, and Slavery in Omar ibn Said's America

By Mbaye Lo, Carl W. Ernst

Mbaye Lo and Carl W. Ernst weave fresh and accurate translations of Omar ibn Said's eighteen surviving writings, for the first time identifying his quotations from Islamic theological texts, correcting many distortions, and providing the fullest possible account of his life and significance.

MBAYE LO is associate professor of the practice of Asian and Middle Eastern studies and international comparative studies at Duke University.

CARL W. ERNST is William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

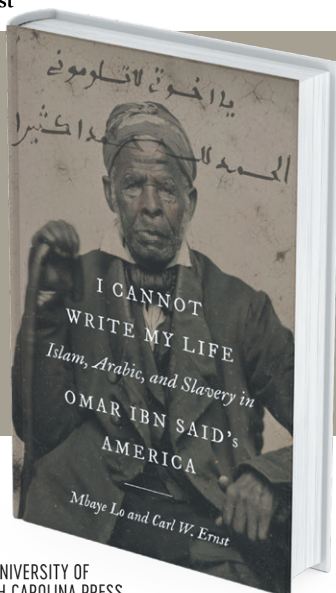
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COMPOSER NOTES

OMAR is at once a story of one man and of many. He is himself, trying to understand the shape his life has taken; he is the enslaved Muslim (of which there were so many more than we will ever know) seeking his community in any way he can; he is the eternal outsider. The fractured yet steadfast nature of the culture that formed around the members of the African diaspora struggling for survival in the Americas wraps around his journey, as I have envisioned it; the anonymous voices of the countless Black musical creators from my musical lineage are shot through a score that is nevertheless firmly situated at a crossroads of the folk and western classical traditions. Who was Omar? We will never really know.

This Omar is merely one of a thousand different possible interpretations of his writings and what we know of his life. Nevertheless, I heard an echo of his

voice reaching out to me over the centuries — I felt the spirits rise in me with every word written and every note composed. I felt a connection to a time that I cannot easily imagine; a time that tested the ancestors, gave no quarter, and took an unfathomable strength of spirit to survive. I hope this is merely the beginning of the artistic renderings of this remarkable man — let this be not the last operatic word on Omar, but merely the first. And I am honored it is so.

*– Rhiannon Giddens
Co-Composer & Librettist*

OMAR is the story of one man's physical and spiritual journey, as told from veiled references in his own autobiography and interpreted through Rhiannon Giddens' moving libretto. Musically, the piece shows as many influences as the many cultures it flows through, from the music of Senegal and the broader Muslim diaspora to the earliest melody transcribed from enslaved people in North America, to spirituals, bluegrass, Protestant hymns, Gershwin, and even a touch of Wagner. The chorus plays a prominent, active role in the work, as a way to center it in a Black community that is multifaceted and real. These diverse elements are unified via the use of a traditional orchestral palette and immensely singable vocal lines.

*– Michael Abels
Co-Composer*



ERIC SCHWABEL

EBRU YILDIZ





ROLEY/BARTMICHELIS

Over the last few years, we have been in the bones of the country. The bones of our own psyches. And we have been in the bones of our industry, of opera, of what it means to gather and share breath.

The opera we share with you touches all these bones: the story of Omar ibn Said, a Fulani man, forced to the United States and enslaved, literate before stolen from his home in West Africa, and author of an autobiography.

The West has a fantasy of its singularity, it imagines itself as consistent and fixed. Opera lost itself to that lie. Tonight, we return the opera to itself. A form built on hundreds of years of cultural exchange, sonic exchange, formal and aesthetic encounters with “others.” A form dependent on many different kinds of artists teaming up. A form built of hybridity. Perhaps one of the only places big enough for Said’s journey, the contradiction, the violence, the holiness, the omissions, the terror, and the triumph.

Slavery, of course, existed before people were torn from their homes in West Africa at gunpoint and enslaved in the United States. The institution of American Slavery created and named a permanent condition attached to your body.

The ferocious clarity in American Slavery on the power of language was such that one of the most sacrosanct laws was that you could not teach enslaved people to read. Or write.

And here, we have a text! From Omar ibn Said. Written by Omar. An Islamic scholar who was literate before mercenaries enslaved him. His autobiography is the prayer from which the music and words you hear tonight were created. The glory and triumph that his words exist, even if generated under duress, is holy.

We gather to tell you Said’s story through the contest of languages in his life, spiritual languages, cultural languages, spoken and written languages, the language of materials like wood and fabric. And ultimately, his holding of all these languages simultaneously brims with resistance, omission, refusal, and reincarnation.

Listening to the story of Omar ibn Said tonight, together, let us begin resetting the bones.

– Kaneza Schaal
Director

CREATIVE TEAM



Rhiannon Giddens |
Composer & Librettist

The acclaimed musician Rhiannon Giddens uses her art to excavate the past and reveal bold truths about our present. A MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient, Giddens co-founded the Grammy Award-winning Carolina Chocolate Drops, and she has been nominated for six additional Grammys for her work as a soloist and collaborator. She was most recently nominated for her collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi, *there is no Other* (2019). Giddens’ forthcoming album, *They’re Calling Me Home*, is a 12-track album, recorded with Turrisi in Ireland during the recent lockdown; it speaks of the longing for the comfort of home as well as the metaphorical “call home” of death, which has been a tragic reality for so many during the COVID-19 crisis. Giddens’ life-long mission is to lift up people whose contributions to American musical history have previously been erased, and to work toward a more accurate understanding of the country’s musical origins. *Pitchfork* has said of her work, “few artists are so fearless and so ravenous in their exploration,” and *Smithsonian Magazine* calls her “an electrifying artist who brings alive the memories of forgotten predecessors, white and black.” Among her many diverse career highlights, Giddens has performed for the Obamas at the White House, served as a Carnegie Hall *Perspectives* curator, and received an inaugural Legacy of Americana Award from Nashville’s National Museum of African American History in partnership with the Americana Music Association. Her critical acclaim includes in-depth profiles by CBS *Sunday Morning*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and NPR’s *Fresh Air*, among many others. Giddens is featured in Ken Burns’ *Country Music* series, which aired on PBS in 2019, where she speaks about the African American origins of country music. She is also a member of the band Our Native Daughters with three other black female banjo players, Leyla McCalla, Allison Russell, and Amythyst Kiah, and co-produced their debut album *Songs of Our Native Daughters* (2019), which tells stories of historic black womanhood and survival. Named Artistic Director of Silkroad in 2020, Giddens is developing a number of new programs for the organization, including one inspired by the history

of the American transcontinental railroad and the cultures and music of its builders. She recently wrote the music for an original ballet, *Lucy Negro Redux*, for Nashville Ballet (premiered in 2019), and the libretto and music for an original opera, *Omar*, based on the autobiography of the enslaved man Omar ibn Said for the Spoleto USA Festival (premiering in 2022). As an actor, Giddens had a featured role on the television series *Nashville*.



Michael Abels | Composer

Michael Abels is a two-time Emmy-nominated composer of music for film, media and the concert hall, often incorporating elements of folk, classical and bluegrass music. He is known for his genre-defying scores for the Jordan Peele films *Get Out* and *Us*, for which Abels won a World Soundtrack Award, the Jerry Goldsmith Award, a Critics Choice nomination, and multiple critics awards. The hip-hop influenced score for *Us* was short-listed for the Oscar, and was even named “Score of the Decade” by *The Wrap*. Other recent media projects include the films *Bad Education*, *Nightbooks*, *Fake Famous*, and the docu-series *Allen v. Farrow*. Current releases include *Beauty* which premiered at the Tribeca Festival and is now streaming on Netflix, and *Breaking* (formerly *892*) which premiered at Sundance and opened in theaters in August of 2022. Abels’ third collaboration with Jordan Peele, *Nope*, opened in theaters in July of 2022. Abels’ creative output also includes many concert works, including *At War With Ourselves* for the Kronos Quartet, *Isolation Variation* for Hilary Hahn, and the opera *Omar* co-composed with Grammy-winning singer/songwriter Rhiannon Giddens, which opened at Los Angeles Opera in October 2022. His scores have been performed by the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the Los Angeles Master Chorale and many others. Some of these pieces are available on the Cedille label, including *Delights & Dances* and *Winged Creatures*. Current commissions include a work for the National Symphony, and a guitar concerto for Grammy-nominated artist Mak Grgic. Abels is co-founder of the Composers Diversity Collective, an advocacy group to increase visibility of composers of color in film, gaming and streaming media. His compositions include the one-act opera *Homies and Popz*, with a libretto by Bernardo Solano, commissioned by LA

MEET THE ARTISTS

Opera and premiered in 2000. Born in Phoenix, Arizona, Michael Abels attended the University of Southern California where he studied with James Hopkins and Robert Linn. Later on in his collegiate career, he studied West African music with Alfred Ladzekpo at the California Institute for the Arts. He currently serves as Director of Music for New Roads School in Santa Monica.



Michael Ellis Ingram | Conductor

Michael Ellis Ingram is a conductor and educator based in Hamburg, Germany. He led the Collegium Musicum Leipzig and served as Kapellmeister of two of the nation's oldest orchestras: the Loh-Orchester Sondershausen (est. 1600) and the Mecklenburgische Staatskapelle Schwerin (est. 1563). Mr. Ingram has collaborated with composers Peter Ruzicka, Steven Kazuo Takasugi, and Dominick Argento, bringing contemporary classical music to new audiences in a variety of non-traditional venues, including a cathedral, a vaudeville theater, a foundry, a yacht club, a salt mine, and a zoo. As a music educator, Mr. Ingram has taught at the conservatories of Leipzig and Dresden and at The Salzburg Institute of Religion, Culture & the Arts. He currently teaches conducting at the Hochschule für Musik & Theater Hamburg. Mr. Ingram's interests extend far beyond the realm of music. He has published poetry and prose, lectured on literature, race, film, and theology, and moderated for NPR member station KBLA. In his free time, he can be found folding origami in a windowsill or standing in quiet contemplation of a bronze sculpture. Highlights of Mr. Ingram's 2022/23 season include *Porgy and Bess* (Des Moines Metro Opera), *Carmen* (Portland Opera), *The Sleeping Beauty* (Compagnie Illicite Bayonne), and *Aida* (Barclays Arena Hamburg).



Kaneza Schaal | Director

Kaneza Schaal works in theater, opera, and film, and is based in New York City. Schaal's work has shown in diverse contexts, from NYC galleries, to courtyards in Vietnam, to East African amphitheatres, to European opera houses, to Egyptian theater festivals, to US public housing, to rural auditoriums in the UAE. By creating performances that speak many formal, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and experiential languages, she seeks expansive audiences. Domestically, her work has

shown at Brooklyn Academy of Music, LA Philharmonic, The Shed, The Kennedy Center, Walker Arts Center, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, The New Victory Theater, and New Orleans Center for Contemporary Art. Schaal has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, Herb Alpert Award, United States Artists Fellowship, SOROS Art Migration and Public Space Fellowship, Ford Foundation Art For Justice Bearing Witness Award, and a Creative Capital Award.



Christopher Myers | Production Designer

Award-winning illustrator Christopher Myers has collaborated with Kaneza Schaal on works including *GO FORTH*, premiering to great acclaim as part of PS122's COIL 2015; and *Cartography*, which premiered at The Kennedy Center in 2019. He is the son of acclaimed author Walter Dean Myers. In 1998, the two collaborated on *Harlem*, which was named a Caldecott Honor Book as well as a Coretta Scott King Honor Book. Myers' solo effort, *Black Cat*, was also a Coretta Scott King Honor Book. His most recent books include *Firebird*, written by Misty Copeland; *Jake Makes a World*, written by Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts; and *My Pen*, written by himself. The Kennedy Center has adapted three of Myers' books to the stage for young audiences. His sculptural work has been shown at PS1-MoMA, Contrasts Gallery in Shanghai, and the Sundance Film Festival. Most recently, Myers was included in the Prospect Biennial in New Orleans, where he and his collaborators, the Propeller Group, organized a funeral march that went from Saigon to the Lower Ninth Ward.



Amy Rubin | Set Designer

Amy Rubin is a designer of environments for opera, theater, and dance. Recent designs include *Omar*, LA Opera/Spoletto Festival USA; *The Snowy Day*, Houston Grand Opera; *Blue*, Michigan Opera Theatre; *Aging Magician*, San Diego Opera; *Lucy*, Audible Theater; *Most Happy*, Williamstown Theatre Festival; *Octet*, Signature Theatre; *Gloria: A Life*, A.R.T./Daryl Roth Theatre; *Miles for Mary*, Playwrights Horizons; and *Acquanetta*, Bard College/Prototype Festival. Rubin's work has been featured at American Repertory Theater, McCarter Theatre

Center, La Jolla Playhouse, Walker Arts Center, MassMoCA, Z Space, The Kimmel Center, and numerous TED Talks.



April Hickman | Costume Designer

April M. Hickman recently earned a Master of Fine Arts in costume design from the Yale School of Drama, where she designed costumes for

productions including *Hamlet*, *Pivot*, *Seven Spots on the Sun*, *In the Palm of the Giant*, *Slave Play*, and four plays for the school's Dwight/Edgewood Project. Elsewhere, she has designed costumes for Theatre Squared, Yale Cabaret, and C1Media's short film *The Promotion*, for which she was nominated for Best Costume Design at the LA International Film Festival Indie Short Fest. She has also worked with major regional companies, including Yale Repertory Theatre, Goodman Theatre, and Arena Stage.



Micheline Russell-Brown |

Costume Designer

Trained as a modern dancer and choreographer, Micheline Russell-Brown has always had a deep love for her

work as a costume and design professional. She began her wardrobe career at the Roundabout Theatre Company and then the Metropolitan Opera after a recommendation from her mentor at Bard College. From the Met, she moved on to Broadway, working backstage for several years at *Rent*. After making a career in theatre, Russell-Brown shifted to film and television and has worked on productions such as *The Sopranos*, *Flight of the Conchords*, *Damages*, *The Good Wife*, and *The Good Fight*. Always missing the pulse of live theatre, Russell-Brown is thrilled to be returning to the wings of the stage. She lives in Brooklyn with her wife and two children, forever dreaming up ways to better dress her family.



Lucrecia Briceno | Lighting Designer

Lucrecia Briceno is a Peruvian artist currently based in Brooklyn. Much of her work has been in association with artists developing innovative and

original pieces. Her work includes theatre, opera, puppetry, and dance, as well as collaborations in several non-performance projects. Her designs have been presented at such venues as Spoleto Festival USA, The Public Theater, Oxford Playhouse (UK), Arena

Stage, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dallas Theater Center, BAM (Fisher), The Kennedy Center, The Atlas Performing Arts Center, Berliand Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, La Mama ETC, Birmingham Repertory Theatre (UK), Culture Project, Pregones Theatre/PRTT, Intar Theatre, HERE Arts Center, Soho Rep, Ohio Theatre, and Irondale Center, among many others. Internationally, her work has been seen in Caracas, Peru; Turkey; Scotland; Seoul, South Korea; Bogotá, Colombia; Norway; and England. Her design work for *Crime and Punishment* was part of the Venezuelan delegation for the 2015 Prague Quadrennial. She is an associate artist with The Civilians; co-artistic director of Anonymous Ensemble, a device ensemble that creates new theater, performance media, and live film; and resident designer with Pregones Theater/PRTT and LaMicro Theater. She has also been a guest artist/lecturer at NYU, JMU, Princeton University, Hunter College, and the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. She received her Master of Fine Arts from the NYU Tisch School of the Arts and is a member of 829.



Alejandro Fajardo |

Lighting Co-Designer

Alejandro Fajardo is a Colombian lighting designer based in Lenapehoking/Brooklyn. Fajardo strongly believes

that art and imagination can help guide our communities through the current crises we face and build a new future that centers community care and growth. His recent credits include regional theater (Two River Theatre, Trinity Repertory Company, St. Ann's Warehouse), opera (*Omar* at Spoleto Festival USA, Bard Music Festival), dance performances (MICHİYAYA Dance; Kafka Collective; Danspace Project, Inc.), and performance festivals, including NYC Free — a month-long performance festival at Little Island Park — and Fall for Dance Festival at New York City Center. Fajardo also designs escape, theatrical immersive, site lighting for music, fashion shows, and other commercial events.



Joshua Higgason | Video Designer

Joshua Higgason is a video, lighting, scenic, and interactive designer for theater, opera, concerts, and live performances. Recent projects include

Hansel and Gretel (projections), Teatro alla Scala;

MEET THE ARTISTS

King Arthur (projections), Staatsoper Berlin; *The Threepenny Opera* (projections), Salzburg Festival; *Control* (*Five Landscapes for Orchestra*) (video, scenic), Utah Symphony; *Ira Glass' Seven Things I've Learned* tour (projections); *Persona* (video and lighting), Beth Morrison Projects; Sufjan Stevens' *Carrie and Lowell* tour 2015 (video); Radiolab's *Apocalyptic* tour (video, scenic, lighting); *Powder Her Face* (video), New York City Opera; and *The Ambassador* (video), Brooklyn Academy of Music. He has designed and consulted for The Builders Association, Big Dance Theater, MoMA, Mass MoCA, Theatre for One/Christine Jones, The Windmill Factory, and TED. He teaches design at MIT.



Frandresha Hall |
Wig & Makeup Designer

Frandresha "Brie" Hall is an Atlanta native who has been specializing in hair and makeup for film, television, theatre, and celebrities for over 17 years. She began working with Atlanta Opera in 2015 for their production of *La bohème*. She quickly grew to become a Hair and Makeup Department Head and now Designer. Her theatre works include *Pagliacci*, *Kaiser of Atlantis*, *Carmen*, and *The Threepenny Opera*. She is proud to have this production of *Omar* be her design debut with Boston Lyric Opera. Her film and television credits include *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, National Geographic's *Genius*, the Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Young Rock*, and *Black Lightning*.



Kiara Benn | *Choreography/
The Figure*

Kiara Benn is a movement artist and producer pursuing a career in the realm of creative direction. Benn attended Wesleyan University, where she received the Dancelink Fellowship (2019-2020) and was awarded a grant to intern with Whitney Biennial Artist Brendan Fernandes. Benn assisted with his movement-based installations at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at Wesleyan's Zilkha Gallery. Benn danced with Brooklyn youth company Dancewave, where she danced in works by Kyle Abraham, Camille A. Brown, Andrea Miller of Gallim Dance, and more, including performances at renowned venues like The Pocantico Center and

Jacob's Pillow. Benn has produced three choreographic pieces: "Will You Reminisce For Me?", "tempo take me...", and "excuse me while I take up space". Benn's artistry often explores the question of how music serves as a portal to privately experienced memories and triggers our bodies to move in ways that reference the past.



Jackie Davis | *Intimacy Director*

Jackie Davis is an actor, director, choreographer, and intimacy director/advocate working in theater, film, and television. Recent intimacy direction credits include: *The Inheritance, Parts 1 and 2*, Trinity Repertory Company; *A Silhouette of a Silhouette*, The Wilbury Theatre Group; *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot*, Brown/Trinity MFA; and *Incels and Other Myths*, Boston Playwrights' Theatre. Recent acting credits include: Shirley Chisolm, *The Inferior Sex*; Margaret, *The Inheritance, Part 2*; and Jasmine, *Fairview*, Trinity Repertory Company. Recent directing credits include: *AntigonX*, The Wilbury Theatre Group; and *Race*, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. Davis can be seen as abolitionist Susan Robbins in the Columbia Pictures film *Little Women*.

CAST



Cierra Byrd |
Fatima, Omar's Mother

Cierra Byrd is a mezzo-soprano from Ohio now in her third year in the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. She made her Met debut as Bertha in Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* during the 2021/22 season. Later that season, she participated in the annual Lindemann Program recital series held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and performed in the City Parks Foundation's SummerStage recitals. During the Met's 2022/23 season, she will sing a Woman of Crete in *Idomeneo* and cover the role of Sister Mathilde in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Recent operatic appearances include the Governess in *The Queen of Spades* at Des Moines Metro Opera, Lady Catherine De Bourgh in the stage premiere of Kirke Mechem's *Pride and Prejudice* at Peabody Opera Theatre, and the Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel* at Opera Saratoga. On the concert stage, she

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has been a featured soloist in Mahler's *Symphony No. 3* with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Marin Alsop. Notable accolades include the Legacy Award from the National Opera Association's Carolyn Bailey Argento Vocal Competition, being named a finalist in Opera Ebony's Benjamin Matthews Vocal Competition, second prize in the Peabody Conservatory's Vocal Studies Song Competition, and the Peabody Artist Excellence Award. She is an alumna of Des Moines Metro Opera's apprentice artist program and Opera Saratoga's young artist program. She holds degrees from Ohio State University and the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University, where she studied with legendary mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves. *Cierra Byrd's participation in the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program is sponsored by The Elroy and Terry Krumholz Foundation. Cierra Byrd appears by kind permission of The Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.*



Christon Carney |
Suleiman/Townsperson 1

Christon Carney, a native of Nashville, TN, received his Master of Music degree in vocal performance from the New England Conservatory and his Bachelor of Music in music education from Lipscomb University. He debuted in Nashville Opera's production of *La Traviata* as Giuseppe and has gone on to perform with the Boston Lyric Opera, singing various roles in the chorus. He has performed as a concert soloist with the Rhode Island Civic Chorale and Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Nashville's Heimermann Chorale, and has over a decade of choral experience participating in vocal ensembles, premiering new works, and as a soloist. He has received honors from several organizations, including the prestigious ABRSM Diploma in Voice and recognition as a finalist in the Alltech Vocal Scholarship Competition. Carney is also a compelling recitalist, performing programs for the Music at Trinity music series, College of the Holy Cross, Mechanics Hall's Concerts Plus series, and many others. He has worked as a paid singer and section leader at many religious organizations, including the Parish of All Saints (Worcester, MA). He is currently the education and outreach coordinator at the prestigious Mechanics Hall and managing director of the Many Voices Mechanics Hall Youth Singers.



Catherine Anne Daniel |
Katie Ellen/The Caller

Career highlights for Ms. Daniel include: singing Emelda Griffiths in Grammy Award-winner Terence

Blanchard's opera *Champion* with Opéra de Montréal, debuting Klytaemnestra in Edmonton Opera's production of *Elektra*, singing Elisabetta in Knoxville Opera's production of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, and debuting at Carnegie Hall as a soloist in Haydn's *Mass in Time of War*. Ms. Daniel made her Opera Tampa debut in *Carmen* singing the title role in 2020. Ms. Daniel studied voice with coloratura soprano Tracy Dahl at the University of Manitoba. She was a member of the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, and later became a member of the Opera Studio Nederlands in Amsterdam.



Neal Ferreira | Auctioneer/Taylor

Neal Ferreira is a nationally recognized lyric tenor known for his cultivated vocalism and eloquent expression. He recently appeared with the Boston

Youth Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall as Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, and with Emmanuel Music as Macheath in Benjamin Britten's *The Beggar's Opera*. The tenor made his Carnegie Hall debut in the spring of 2022 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as Ein Soldat in *Wozzeck* under the baton of Maestro Andris Nelsons. A much sought-after interpreter of new music, Mr. Ferreira made his European debut in the spring of 2021 as Laertes in the world premiere of Joseph Summer's *Hamlet* with State Opera Rousse (Bulgaria). Ferreira enjoyed a successful performance as the Visitor in Boston Lyric Opera's production of Philip Glass' *In the Penal Colony*. The tenor has also been featured on the premiere recordings of Charles Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (BMOP/sound), Joseph Summer's *The Tempest* (Albany Records), Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Odyssey Opera), and James MacMillan's *Clemency* (BIS Records). Ferreira has also appeared with Florida Grand Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Opera Colorado, Virginia Opera, Anchorage Opera, Syracuse Opera, American Repertory Theater, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Guerilla Opera. He is a proud student of internationally renowned tenor Frank Lopardo.


Christopher Humbert Jr. | *Olufemi*

Bass-baritone Christopher Humbert Jr. hails from Akron, Ohio and has performed throughout the United States. He was a featured soloist in

Minnesota Orchestra's Listening Project, in which he performed Eleanor Alberga's *The Soul's Expression* and Margaret Bonds' *Spirituals*. Humbert was selected to join Opera Theatre of Saint Louis during in 2020 as a Gerdine Young Artist and featured on St. Louis, Missouri's Channel 9 for the inaugural "Songs for St. Louis" televised concert series. He is a frequent oratorio and concert soloist. Recent repertoire includes *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott* (Bach), *Matthäus-Passion* (Schütz), *Johannes-Passion* (Bach), and *Messiah* (Händel). In spring 2023, Humbert was the bass soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* with the Erie Philharmonic. He made his Carnegie Hall debut as a soloist in Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Manhattan Concert Productions). Humbert was recently named a winner of the St. Louis District of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. Other competition credits include first place in Opera Guild of Dayton's Tri-State Vocal Competition (2019) and multiple classical music and musical theater awards from the National Association of Teachers of Singing. He has since joined the Benenson Young Artist Program (Palm Beach Opera) and made his professional debut as Zuniga in *Carmen* under the baton of Anetolli Allemandi, alongside operatic inspirations like J'Nai Bridges and Rihab Chaieb. He is currently pursuing an M.M. in opera performance at Boston Conservatory and is a graduate of the Capital University Conservatory of Music. Humbert will join the Ryan Opera Center (Lyric Opera of Chicago) for the 2023/24 season.


Nicholas LaGesse |

Abdul, Omar's Brother/Abe

Baritone Nicholas LaGesse most recently starred as Sheriff Danny Loewe (Count Danilo), *The Merry Widow*, Pacific Opera Project. During his 2015 season, he debuted as Jameson in the critically acclaimed, revolving-location production of *Hopscotch* with The Industry in Los Angeles. LaGesse has also starred as Harlequin, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Pacific Opera Project. Previous roles include Demetrius, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Zuniga, *Carmen*; Ottone, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; Claudio, *Agrippina*; Jupiter, *Orpheus and the*

Underworld; and Marquis de la Force, *Dialogues des Carmélites*. He has been honored as a finalist in the Palm Springs Opera Guild Competition, as the winner of the Chicago Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Competition, and was a Bella Voce award recipient in the Bel Canto Foundation Competition. In addition to his musical endeavors, LaGesse is equally skilled in the world of Latin dance. He has trained with The Omambo Dance Project (winners of the 2014 and 2015 World Latin Dance Competition) and also danced with the companies Clave y Tumbao and Bachata Caliente in Los Angeles. He previously was on the dance faculty of Soho Dance Los Angeles, where he taught bachata and studied under former world champion Raul Santiago. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Northwestern University, a Master of Music from UCLA, and has also trained at Marlena Malas' summer voice institute at the Chautauqua Institution.


Jamez McCorkle | *Omar*

An innate musician and trained pianist, tenor Jamez McCorkle made headlines after his critically acclaimed appearance in the world premiere of

Rhiannon Giddens' *Omar* at Spoleto Festival USA in 2022, which has led to debuts in the title role with LA Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, and Carolina Performing Arts. This season, McCorkle returns to the Bayerische Staatsoper as Duke of Cornwall in *Lear*, to Spoleto Festival for an innovative new project, and joins Trondheim Symphony Orchestra for Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, conducted by Han-Na Chang. McCorkle looks forward to upcoming debuts with San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Hamburg State Opera, the Royal Danish Theatre, and Glyndbourne Opera. Recent role highlights include Telemaco, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, Theatre Basel; Omar ibn Said, *Omar* (world premiere), Spoleto Festival; Duke of Cornwall, *Lear*, Bayerische Staatsoper; Peter the Honeyman, *Porgy and Bess*, Metropolitan Opera; Tamino, *Die Zauberflöte*, Kentucky Opera; Lensky, *Eugene Onegin*, Michigan Opera Theatre and Spoleto Festival; and Leonard Woolfe, *The Hours* (concert premiere), Philadelphia Orchestra, under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. McCorkle also recently sang Britten's *War Requiem* with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with Spoleto

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Festival. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, McCorkle is an alumnus of the Mannes School of Music and Loyola University New Orleans. He was a member of the International Opera Studio in Zurich and a Young Artist with the Salzburg Festival in 2017. McCorkle was a finalist in the Neue Stimmen competition in 2019 and has won awards and competitions including the George London Competition, Sullivan Foundation, Brava! Opera Competition, National Opera Association Vocal Competition, and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (Gulf Coast Region).



Daniel Okulitch |

James Owen/Johnson

Bass-baritone Daniel Okulitch has earned international acclaim for his portrayal of the Mozart roles of Don

Giovanni, Count Almaviva, Figaro, and Leporello, which he has performed with LA Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and Dallas Opera. He recently made house debuts as Don Giovanni, *Don Giovanni*, Bolshoi Theatre; and Count Almaviva, *Le nozze di Figaro*, Opernhaus Zürich. This season, he returns to *Don Giovanni* with Teatro Udine. Okulitch has created several principal characters, notably Ennis del Mar, *Brokeback Mountain*, Teatro Real; Seth Brundle, *The Fly*, Théâtre de Châtelet and LA Opera; Mark Rutland, *Marnie*, English National Opera; and LBJ, *JFK*, Fort Worth Opera and Opéra de Montréal. He recently debuted as The Protector, *Written on Skin*, Opéra de Montréal, and further explored George Benjamin's work in *Lessons in Love and Violence* at Gran Teatre del Liceu. This season sees Okulitch in *Omar* with LA Opera, Carolina Performing Arts, and Boston Lyric Opera. He also reprises the role of Beck, *Everest*, The Barbican Centre. Okulitch recently appeared as the bass soloist in Handel's *Messiah*, Houston Symphony Orchestra; Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra; and Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. This season, he sings Mendelssohn's *Elijah* for the first time with Symphony Nova Scotia. Okulitch's first solo recording, *The New American Art Song*, was released on GPR Records in 2011. He can further be heard in recordings of Chausson's *Le Roi Arthus* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*, and DiChiera's *Cyrano*.



Brianna J. Robinson | Julie

Soprano Brianna J. Robinson returns to Boston Lyric Opera as a Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artist for her third season, where she covered the roles of Mimì in *La bohème*. During her time with BLO, she has performed the role of Lucy in Spears' *Fellow Travelers* and covered three principal roles in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This season, Ms. Robinson will make her concert debut with several orchestras, including the Akron Symphony Orchestra, Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra/New World Chorale, and the Handel and Haydn Society. Ms. Robinson was named a finalist in the 2021 Benjamin Matthews Vocal Competition with Opera Ebony. In January 2020, Ms. Robinson was awarded first prize at the 6th Getting to Carnegie Competition at Carnegie Hall, New York City. In Boston, her most recent work includes singing the role of Florence Price in *Florence Comes Home* by Francine Trester with Shelter Music Boston, and being a featured soloist with the Boston Landmarks Orchestra and Castle of Our Skins. Previously, she was a Rising Artist with Pegasus Early Music, performing in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Ms. Robinson performed the title role in Caccini's *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'Isola d'Alcina* with the Baroque performance ensemble Collegium Musicum. She has participated in international programs, including the Berlin Opera Academy and Opernfest Prague. She made her international debut in Ruse, Bulgaria in 2021, creating the role of Ophelia in the world premiere of Joseph Summer's *Hamlet*. Ms. Robinson is a proud graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University and the Eastman School of Music. *Brianna J. Robinson's performances this Season are underwritten by Allison K. Ryder & David B. Jones*



Emma Sorenson |

Eliza, Owen's Daughter

Mezzo-soprano Emma Sorenson is a Chicago-based singer who in 2020 was named winner of the Kansas City District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and semi-finalist in the Lotte Lenya Competition presented by the Kurt Weill Foundation. Ms. Sorenson is known for a capturing stage presence and striking vocal quality. For the 2022/23 season, Ms. Sorenson returns to the chorus of The Lyric Opera of Chicago as a full-time ensemble member. Recent roles include

Alto Soloist in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with South Bend Symphony, Nicklausse in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with Union Avenue Opera, and Sandman in *Hänsel und Gretel* with The Lyric Opera of Chicago.



Fred C. VanNess Jr. |

Amadou/Renty

Boston-based tenor Fred C. VanNess, Jr. is a native of Kinder, Louisiana. Recently, he appeared as Russell Davenport in Dan Shore's acclaimed new opera *Freedom Ride*, presented in a co-production by MassOpera and Chicago Opera Theater. Other engagements include Voltaire/Pangloss, *Candide*, Opera del West; Don Ottavio, *Don Giovanni*, Toronto Summer Opera and MassOpera; Don José, *Carmen*, NEMPAC Opera Project; and Rodolfo, *La bohème*, Longwood Opera. VanNess is a member of Castle of our Skins, an organization dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. He was the tenor soloist in the world premiere of Samuel Beebe's *Remember the Sea*,

Castle of our Skins; and the tenor quartet soloist in the world premiere of Geoffrey Gibbs' *Tide Flowers*, University of Rhode Island Artist Series. He sang in several solo recitals with Lake Charles Symphony, Salem Philharmonic, and Coushatta Casino Resort. Other notable performances include *Schöpfungsmesse*, Concord Chorale; *Judas Maccabeus*, Handel by Candlelight; and *Messiah*, Tremont Baptist Church. VanNess has developed and performed two one-man shows. His most recent show, *When I Think of Home...*, premiered at McNeese State University, following the success of his first show, *Beethoven to Broadway*, at the Larcom Theatre in Beverly, Massachusetts. VanNess received his Graduate Performance Diploma from the Longy School of Music and his Master of Music from Louisiana State University. He was awarded first place for the North Shore Star, presented by the North Shore Music Theatre and The Beverly Rotary Club. He is also a recipient of The Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana Career Grant.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OMAR



The Divine Pen: Omar ibn Said and the Power of the Written Word

by Jennifer J. Yanco, PhD



Omar and the Memory of Slavery by Lucy Caplan



Reading Between the Lines: A Case for an Operatic Omar by Allison Chu



From left: Detail from the painting *The Divine Pen*, by Senegalese calligrapher Yelimane Fall, c. 2007. Scene from *Omar* and Jamez McCorkle in *Omar*, production photos courtesy of William Struhs | Spoleto Festival USA.

ARTISTIC & PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

PRODUCTION STAFF

Mike Janney *Stage Manager*
Ian Andrew Askew *Assistant Stage Director*
Carmen Catherine Alfaro *Assistant Stage Manager*
Una Rafferty *Assistant Stage Manager*
Natalie Main *Stage Management Production Assistant*
Michael Gottke *Lighting Director*
Matt Cost *Assistant Lighting Designer*
Melinda Abreu *Wig-Makeup Artist*
Sharon Ferreira *Wig-Makeup Artist*
Frاندresha Hall *Wig & Makeup Artist*
Natalia St Jean *Surtitles Creator & Operator*

PRODUCTION CREW

Brian Willis *Head Production Carpenter*
Weston Lant *First Assistant Production Carpenter*
Michael Geoghagan *Second Assistant Production Carpenter*
Brendan Ritchie *Head Rigger*
Kirt Kaminski *Head Production Electrician*
Jake Seibert *Lighting Programmer*
Donald King *First Assistant Production Electrician*
Maxx Finn *Second Assistant Production Electrician*
Shawn Higgins *Second Assistant Production Electrician*
Emily Picot *Head of Production Properties*
David Picot *First Assistant of Production Properties*
Bryan Ritchie *Head of Production Audio*
Joshua DeChristopher *First Assistant Production Audio*
Chris Norman *Head Production Video*
Anthony Norman *First Assistant Production Video*
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Keith Skretch *Video Design Associate*
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Now in its 46th Season, Boston Lyric Opera's programming remains faithful to tradition while exploring new ground, building audiences, and creating new ways to enhance the opera-going experience.

Since its founding in 1976, Boston Lyric Opera continues to celebrate opera through innovative productions and public programming. BLO has produced world and US premieres, commissions, and co-productions of note, ranging from live stage productions to films streamed worldwide on its online platform, operaobx.tv.

BLO has partnered with organizations such as Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Detroit Opera, and more, and continues to be a destination for leading artists, conductors, directors, and designers from around the world.

Alongside its mainstage programming, BLO artists in our Jane & Steven Akin Emerging Artists initiative work to hone their craft and prepare for the next step in their careers while taking part in BLO's wide-reaching community programming and education initiatives that introduce opera to new audiences across generations.

BLO launched a new five-year strategic plan in 2022, prioritizing four strategic pillars: Programming, Community, Space, and Leadership alongside a renewed commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility.

BLO employs nearly 500 artists and creative professionals annually — vocalists, instrumentalists, artisans, stagehands, costumers, scenic designers, administrators, and beyond. The Company is proud to play a significant and meaningful role in Boston's vibrant arts community.

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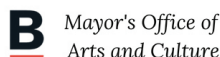
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We extend our utmost gratitude to our frontline workers for their effort in providing a safe work environment for BLO's administrative staff and artists.

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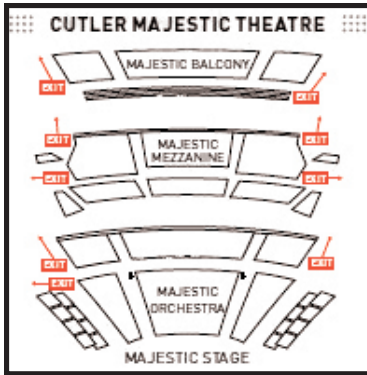
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All performances begin on time. To respect the enjoyment of others, BLO observes a no late seating policy. While we understand that traffic conditions, public transportation, weather, and other factors can have unexpected effects on your arrival, we wish to minimize disruptions for our seated patrons and for our artists on stage. Additionally, if you must leave during the performance, reentry may be prohibited.

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- There is no elevator access to the Mezzanine and Balcony.
- Restrooms are in the lower lobby accessible by elevator.
- There are 30+ stairs to reach the Mezzanine and 60+ stairs to reach the Balcony.

- Listening devices are available at the box office windows in the lobby.

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