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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Fort Worth Opera Announces New Line-Up of Unpublished Operas to be Presented During the Company's 2017 *Frontiers* Workshop**

*The life of a ruthless Colombian drug lord, a bedeviled candy shoppe, an anniversary dinner undone by an adulterous text message, a private insane asylum with a revolutionary method of treatment, and more to be presented during the final week of the 2017 FWOpera Festival.*

**Fort Worth, Texas – Fort Worth Opera (FWOpera) announced today the names of the eight composer and librettist teams whose unpublished works have been selected for the company's fifth annual, critically-acclaimed new works series, *Frontiers* – funded in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Held during the final week of the 2017 FWOpera Festival, these selected pieces will be presented in two separate showcases of four works each on **Wednesday, May 3 from 8:00pm – 10:00pm, and Thursday, May 4 from 8:00pm – 10:00pm**, in the state-of-the-art **McDavid Studio at Bass Performance Hall**. Featuring 20-minute excerpts of each selected piece, these brand-new operas will be sung by artists from the 2017 FWOpera Festival with piano accompaniment, under the baton of Maestro Stephen Dubberly and Maestro Stephen Carey. Tickets for the showcases are \$10, and can be ordered by calling FWOpera's Customer Service team at 877.396.7372.**

Now entering its fifth season, *Frontiers* has established itself as a pioneering leader in seeking out the best and brightest new voices in the opera industry, with a specific eye toward identifying exceptional works for future production in FWOpera's alternative venue series *Opera Unbound*. The program includes a distinguished panel of collaborative partners who will play a critical role in the long-term development of the *Frontiers* works beyond the Festival showcase, (panel members listed below), and all selected composer and librettist teams will take part in closed feedback sessions with the panelists during the workshop to help them strengthen and develop their pieces.

In announcing this year's participants, Fort Worth Opera General Director **Darren K. Woods**, chair of the *Frontiers* panel, stated, "As we head into the fifth season of *Frontiers*, we are incredibly proud of how far the program has come. Over the last few years, works that have had their fledgling beginnings on our stage have gone on to full premieres with great companies around the U.S. Moreover; the program continues to succeed in its mission as we at FWOpera have had the unique opportunity to populate our season with past *Frontiers* participants. Such is the case of last season's Edgar Allan Poe-inspired *Opera Unbound* selection, *Buried Alive | Embedded*, and our 2017 Festival world premiere of *Voir Dire*, a gut-wrenching, true-crime legal opera. As FWOpera enters Phase Two of our ten-year artistic vision *Opera of the Americas*, we are proud of this pioneering program and look forward to fostering the next generation of storytellers, as we present these stellar works to our North Texas audiences and the opera community at-large this spring."

Over the past four successful seasons, *Frontiers* has established a national presence as one of the premiere showcases for vibrant new work, from some of the most talented composers and librettists in 21<sup>st</sup> century opera. Our diverse and seasoned body of jurists will expand in 2017 to include new panelists, as we continue to provide a visible platform for burgeoning and established artists to display their craft.

*Synopses of each opera (in alphabetical order by composers' last names) and brief biographies of the composers and librettists follow below.*

## THE OPERAS

Composed by **Griffin Candey** on an original story and libretto by **Thom Miller**, the darkly-comic **Sweets by Kate** follows Elizabeth Brigmann as she returns to her hometown with her partner, Kate, to run the family business after the untimely death of her father. Once there, she faces down both the buried remnants of the prejudice that she faced in her youth and her parents' (quite literal) deals with the Devil.

Based on the short story "A Souvenir of Hell" by Etgar Keret, **A Taste of Damnation**, by composer **Avner Finberg** and librettist **Edward Einhorn**, follows a woman who works in a convenience store at damnation's doorstep, who falls in love with a man on a one-day furlough from Hell. He leaves, but her obsession for him remains. Her father, also condemned, sacrifices himself to reunite them, but when she sees her lover again she faces a terrible choice.

Adapted from the Giovanni Verga novella and originally to have been composed by Puccini, **La Lupa**, by composer and librettist **Norman Mathews**, follows a sensual and beautiful 35-year old Sicilian widow who loves and seduces a handsome young wheat-harvester near Mt. Etna. Much to her horror, he wishes to marry her young daughter. Their affair recklessly continues even after he marries her daughter, leading to tragedy.

**Escobar**, by composer and librettist **Matteo Neri**, chronicles the search for Colombia's most notorious cocaine trafficker, Pablo Escobar. When hitmen in his empire assassinate a popular presidential candidate, the Colombian government goes after the drug cartels with full force, but due to Pablo's wit and his ability to garner protection from the people of his hometown, the government's task of tracking him down would become far more dramatic and violent than anticipated.

A young doctor's investigation into a new method of treating the mentally insane reveals a thin line between reality and a terrifying masquerade. Based on a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, **The System of Soothing**, by composer and librettist **Frank Pesci**, balances precariously on the observation that one person's madness is another's normalcy. A devastating conclusion drives home the warning echoed throughout the opera: "believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see!"

Inspired by the tradition of Sherlock Holmes, the detective tale **A Capacity for Evil** is based on an original story conceived by composer **Evan Snyder**, and by tenor **John Riesen**. The story follows Daniel, a famed 1930s private eye, who, with help from his partner Doyle and his fiancée Angelica, works to unravel a series of grisly religious murders occurring on New Year's Eve before the unknown murderer is able to realize the full scope of his perverse aims. As tensions rise and time runs short, the bonds between the three friends are tested - the limits of human compassion and trust tried against the dark ordeals of this imperceptible murderer.

**Service Provider**, the hilarious comic opera by composer **Christopher Weiss** and librettist **John de los Santos**, details the erosion of modern romance by our obsession with mobile technology. When a loving young couple goes out for their anniversary dinner at an elegant restaurant, the evening descends into farcical disaster as the pair's phone calls and texting unmask the facade of their fragile marriage.

In **Nothing in the Nothingness**, by **Daniel Zajicek** and **John Grimmert**, a man is pulled underwater in a strong undertow during his visit to the beach. After twelve minutes without oxygen, he never regains consciousness. This operatic monologue for bass-baritone and electronics explores what it means to be alive and functioning in a vegetative state when consciousness is not possible.

*Frontiers* composers will be in residence at the Festival from April 29 – May 5, 2016.

Post-performance receptions will be part of the showcase.

## COMPOSER AND LIBRETTIST BIOGRAPHIES

### **Griffin Candey, composer of SWEETS BY KATE**

Griffin Candey (b. 1988) is an American opera composer dutifully committed to creating vocal and theatrical works that, by approaching forward-looking subject matter, aim to both expand and preserve these genres. Candey's theatrical music features a level of practical vocal finesse that interpreters praise for its "prosody that showcases both the words and the singers," its "intuitive rhythm," and its "lyricism and emotional depth." His recent *Sweets by Kate* -- described in press as "hilarious and moving," "a piece with charming and elaborate complexity" and "a meaningful and beautiful work of art" -- recently saw premiere productions at Knoxville's Marble City Opera, Detroit's Opera MODO, and central Illinois' Midwest Institute of Opera. During Pride Week 2017, the work will see its NYC premiere as part of an LGBTQ Double Bill with Brooklyn's OperaRox Productions.

### **Thom Miller, librettist of SWEETS BY KATE**

Thom Miller is an actor, writer, librettist, and teacher living in Syracuse, NY where he is a professor of Voice and Verse in the Department of Drama at Syracuse University. *Sweets By Kate* is his first creative venture into the world of opera. He is thrilled to have collaborated on this project with his talented and daring writing partner, Griffin Candey. Thom received a BFA from the North Carolina School of the Arts and an MFA from the University of Illinois. As an actor Thom has performed off-broadway and regionally all over the country as well as in commercials and short films. Most recently he played Bobby in *Company* to critical acclaim at Writers Theatre in Chicago. Thom is a proud member of AEA and SAG/AFTRA. More info at [www.thommler.net](http://www.thommler.net)

### **Avner Finberg, composer of A TASTE OF DAMNATION**

Avner Finberg is an Israeli-American composer. His compositions include works for solo instruments, ensembles, orchestra, film, dance, musical theater and opera. Mr. Finberg participated in the highly selective Composers and the Voice workshop in Brooklyn, NY. His first opera, *A Taste of Damnation*, was first produced as a special student project at Manhattan School of Music on April 2015. The opera is based on a short story by the celebrated Israeli writer Etgar Keret, with a libretto written by Edward Einhorn. He is the winner of the 2011 Bard Prize and the 2014 Kol Emet Young Composers competition, and he officially represented Israel at the 2013 ISCM New Music Days in Vienna, Austria. His music was performed by Meitar Ensemble, ensemble mise-en, Ensemble Platypus Wien, the Mannes Orchestra, and the Manhattan School of Music Philharmonic, among others. His teachers include Robert Cuckson, Susan Botti, Samuel Adler and Steven Stucky.

### **Edward Einhorn, librettist of A TASTE OF DAMNATION**

Edward Einhorn is a playwright, director, translator, librettist, and novelist. He writes plays about neurology; adaptations of sci-fi novels; translations of plays written in French, Czech, and ancient Greek; puppet theater; modern Oz novels; explorations of economic theory; midrashim on Jewish cultural icons; picture books about math; opera/oratorio librettos; and other texts of a less definable nature. Recent work has been produced at La MaMa, The New Ohio, The Walter Bruno at Lincoln Center, St. Ann's Warehouse, 3LD Art + Technology Center, The Czech Embassy, and Judson Church. His work has also received Critic's Picks in Time Out New York, The Village Voice, and The New York Times. His newest script, *The Marriage of Alice B. Toklas* by Gertrude Stein, won a playwriting award from the Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation, and will perform at HERE Arts Center in May. He is a current librettist fellow for American Opera Projects. He is the Artistic Director of Untitled Theater Company No. 61, a Theater of Ideas.

### **Norman Mathews, composer/librettist of LA LUPA**

Composer/playwright Norman Mathews' work has been performed at the Kennedy Center and around the world. *Songs of the Poet*, set to Walt Whitman, premiered in Europe with Munich Opera tenor Gregory Wiest, who recorded the work for Capstone Records. The American Composers Orchestra performed the work at its Whitman and Music Celebration. Rossetti Songs, set to Christina Rossetti poetry for mezzo-soprano, piano, flute, and cello, was recorded by Navona Records and distributed by Naxos. *Sonnet No. 61*, a choral work set to Shakespeare, won the American Composers' Forum Vocal Essence Award. *Ye Are Many—They Are Few, Cantata for a Just World* received a Puffin Foundation Grant and premiered in Chicago. Mathews' one-woman Dorothy Parker musical play, *You Might as Well Live*, which received a Vogelstein Foundation playwriting grant, has been performed around the country by Tony-Award-Winner Michele Pawk and Outer-Critics-Award-Winner Karen Mason. His music is published by Graphite Publishing.

## **Matteo Neri, composer/librettist of ESCOBAR**

Composer Matteo Neri has a versatile musical background, with experience in film scoring, orchestral music, chamber music, as well as opera. He received his Masters in Scoring for Film/TV/Video Games from Berklee College of Music in 2014, his Bachelor of Music in Theory/Composition from Westminster Choir College of Rider University in 2013, and was a participant in the ASCAP/NYU Film Scoring workshop in 2013. He has worked in Los Angeles with Emmy Award winning composer Alex Wurman, and has composed various film scores of his own. He is also the orchestrator for "FORTE," a classical crossover tenor group that was a finalist on "America's Got Talent." Currently, Matteo is composing a new opera that will be completed in 2017. In order to promote the idea of expanding the audiences of new classical music, Matteo started "Yard Road Productions" to curate concerts of new music for composers and performers that create more accessible new music. YRP is now expanding to include larger projects, such as the eventual production of operas and larger works by contemporary composers.

## **Frank Pesci, composer/librettist of THE SYSTEM OF SOOTHING**

Frank Pesci (b. 1974) is an American composer of "... sophisticated music with surprising harmonies." His compositions have been performed across North America and Europe. He has written nearly 100 works for the concert stage, including five operas, forty choral works, eleven song cycles, and nearly twenty chamber and concert scores, in addition to his work as an arranger and orchestrator. Recent commissions and collaborative partners include the Boston Conservatory, Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, London Review of Books, National Book Award-winning poet Terrance Hayes, the Mars Hill College Saxophone Quartet, the What is Noise ensemble, Trinity Church in the City of Boston, and Saturday Night Live writer Simon Rich. Born in Washington, D.C., he graduated from the University of Cincinnati and the University of Southern Mississippi, where he received the Theodore Presser Award. He studied with Luigi Zaninelli, John Heiss, and Daron Hagen.

## **Evan Snyder, composer/librettist of A CAPACITY FOR EVIL**

Composer Evan Snyder strives to capture a beauty that echoes human experiences in his music. His writing inhabits an operatic language both engaging and comprehensible, insisting decisively on relevancy to his audience. In both his compositions and in his librettos, Evan seeks to explore genres previously untrodden in opera writing, combining time-honored operatic traditions with novel ideas and stories. An experienced singer himself, Evan's lines and melodies are carefully crafted with both singer and audience in mind. His orchestration is lush, and often romantic, but also finds stark contrasts and deftly mirrors the moods, intentions, and ideas of the characters that it supports. A keen advocate for the future of opera and the important role that the art plays in our society, Evan is extremely honored to have his first opera, *A Capacity for Evil*, chosen for the 2017 *Frontiers* Showcase.

## **Christopher Weiss, composer of SERVICE PROVIDER**

Christopher Weiss' music has been praised as "wonderfully fluid [with a] cinematic grasp of mood and lighting" (New York Times). His opera *Service Provider*, written with John de los Santos, was commissioned by Washington National Opera and hailed as a "crowd pleaser" (*Washington Post*). *In a Mirror, Darkly*, written with S. O'Duinn Magee, has been presented by Fort Worth Opera, New York City Opera, the Virginia Arts Festival, the Crane Opera Ensemble and Orchestra, and the National Opera Association. Christopher has received commissions and performances from the Huntsville Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Alarm Will Sound, Boston Chamber Orchestra, Lancaster Symphony, Gainesville Symphony, Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic, Columbia Orchestra, Twickenham Fest, and Music from Angel Fire. Christopher has been in residence at Yaddo, the Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts, and the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center, and holds degrees from Rollins College, the Curtis Institute of Music, and the University of Michigan.

## **John de los Santos, librettist of SERVICE PROVIDER**

Director/choreographer and librettist John de los Santos' opera *When Adonis Calls*, with composer Clint Borzoni, was seen at *Frontiers* in 2015, and was performed in Opera America's 2017 *New Works Showcase*. Their next operatic collaboration, *The Copper Queen*, won Arizona Opera's SPARK competition. *Service Provider*, with composer Christopher Weiss, was commissioned by Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative and premiered at The Kennedy Center in 2015. John also wrote the book for the musical, *A Taste of Beauty*, which had its Dallas premiere in 2016. In NYC, John has directed *Le Comte Ory* and *The Rose & the Knife* (his own adaptation of Berlioz and Mahler) for LoftOpera, and the world premiere of *The Astronaut Love Show* for the Kraine Theatre. His other productions across the United States include choreography for the world premieres of *Great Scott* (Dallas Opera) and *Before Night Falls* (Fort Worth Opera). John lives in New York City. [www.johndelossantos.com](http://www.johndelossantos.com)

# FORT WORTH OPERA

# FRONTIERS

## **Daniel Zajicek, composer of *NOTHING IN THE NOTHINGNESS***

Daniel Zajicek is an American composer and artist, whose works have been described as both “significant” and “unsettling.” His creative output consists of installation and video art, as well as electronic, orchestral, operatic, and instrumental works. He studied composition and piano at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, electroacoustic music and composition at the University of North Texas, and received a doctoral degree in composition from Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. In addition to his musical studies at Rice, he also had the distinct opportunity to work with noted American video artist Kara Hearn. Presentations of his works have taken place throughout the United States, as well as Portugal, the Czech Republic, England, Cuba, Canada, China, and Taiwan. Daniel is also active as a performer of both the electric and acoustic bass, performing regularly with bluegrass, gospel, and rock ensembles.

## **John Grimmert, librettist of *NOTHING IN THE NOTHINGNESS***

John Grimmert (b. 1988) is a composer, writer and director. His work has been performed internationally by the Washington National Opera, Fort Worth Opera, and the Baltic Chamber Opera Theatre, among others. Mr. Grimmert is the recipient of the 2014 Festival Award in Opera from the Boston-International Contempo Festival and the 2015 runner-up for The American Prize in Composition. Mr. Grimmert’s mentors include Edward Albee, Jake Heggie, and David Ashley White. During the academic year, Mr. Grimmert directs a junior high theatre program in the Pearland Independent School District (Pearland, TX). He is also a teaching artist for the Red Door Theatre Company (Pasadena, TX) and the Director of Educational Programming for CMASH, a new music repertory group dedicated to establishing long-term collaborative relationships between composers and performers and welcoming new audiences to the genre of contemporary chamber music. [www.johngrimmett.com](http://www.johngrimmett.com)

**ABOUT FORT WORTH OPERA:** Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is the oldest continually performing opera company in Texas, and one of the 14 oldest opera companies in the United States. Under the leadership of General Director Darren K. Woods since 2001, the organization has received national attention from critics and audiences alike for its artistic excellence, pioneering spirit, and steadfast willingness to take risks. From its first world premiere, *Frau Margot* in 2007, to 2016’s globally-anticipated new work *JFK* -- a co-commission with American Lyric Theater and Opéra de Montréal by the acclaimed creative duo of David T. Little and Royce Vavrek -- FWOpera continues to augment its worldwide reputation as a trailblazing, civically minded arts institution.

Known throughout the operatic world as a champion of new and rarely-performed works, FWOpera has taken a leadership role in engaging audiences beyond the operatic stage, while producing cutting-edge, contemporary operas. Beginning in 2017, FWOpera will launch the second phase of its landmark, 10-year *Opera of the Americas* initiative with *Noches de Ópera* (Nights of Opera), a groundbreaking campaign which will introduce powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of new American audiences.

The 2017 FWOpera Festival will include a time-honored classic, Bizet’s incendiary tale of tragic seduction, *Carmen*; a vibrant, contemporary mainstage production unlike anything in FWOpera’s repertoire, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*; and the riveting world premiere of *Voir Dire*, an insider’s look into the disturbing, explicit, savagely brutal world of legal drama. The Festival will also usher in the fifth year of Fort Worth Opera’s critically-acclaimed new works showcase, *Frontiers*.

### **Grand Opening Night Concert:**

Featuring Ava Pine, Michael Mayes, The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra & Special Guests  
April 15

### **Carmen**

April 22, 30, & May 5

### **Voir Dire**

April 23, 25, 29, 30, & May 2, 6

### **Cruzar la Cara de la Luna**

April 29 & May 7

### **Frontiers**

May 3 & 4

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