



FORT WORTH OPERA

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CONTACT:

Ryan Scott Lathan, Manager of Marketing and Communications,
817-288-1218; RLathan@fwopera.org

FORT WORTH OPERA UNVEILS EXPANDED FALL VIRTUAL SEASON AND ANNOUNCES THE 2020-2021 LESLEY RESIDENT ARTISTS

Company's 2020 Free Online Programming to Include: Digital Debut of the **Fort Worth Opera Chorus** with Stirring Performance of **Moses Hogan's *His Light Still Shines***; and the World Premiere of Heartwarming Family Opera ***Stone Soup*** by FWO Artistic Director and Composer **Joe Illick** and Pulitzer Prize-Winning Librettist **Mark Campbell**, Filmed Entirely on Green Screens.

FORT WORTH, TX — Fort Worth Opera (FWO) is excited to announce further details of the reimagined fall virtual season under the company's new online initiative FWO Green Room. On **Tuesday, September 15, 2020**, FWO will present the digital debut of the **Fort Worth Opera Chorus**, with a stunning performance of 20th-century choral icon **Moses Hogan's** epic work ***His Light Still Shines***. Set during the Great Depression in the town of Blessing, FWO Artistic Director **Joe Illick** and Pulitzer Prize-winning librettist **Mark Campbell's *Stone Soup*** takes the popular European fable of yore and gives it a Texas twist. Filmed entirely on green screens with full costumes, set, and props, *Stone Soup* is FWO's first foray into the world of cinema, and will be streamed on the company's website in October. Fort Worth Opera is also pleased to reveal the **2020-2021 Lesley Resident Artists**, soprano **Megan Koch** and tenor **Darius Thomas**, both of whom will be featured in *Stone Soup*, and ***Festival Artists Online***, the company's new platform for thrilling concerts and fascinating discussions.

Commissioned by the Choral Arts Society of Washington in honor of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, Moses Hogan's ***His Light Still Shines*** premiered in 2002 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In the wake of the horrific deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others, coupled with fierce discussions on racial injustice, police brutality, and the ever-expanding wave of Black Lives Matter protests, this moving, fifteen-minute choral medley is now more resonant than ever before. Under the baton of FWO's brilliant **Chorus Master Alfrelynn Roberts**, 39 singers and eight speakers will bring Hogan's vision to life, as three spirituals ("*Done Made My Vow*," "*Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*" and "*Hold Out Your Light*") are interwoven with his original music ("*His Light Still Shines*," "*A Song of Reflection*"), and inspiring spoken word passages.

"Singing with Moses Hogan was truly a highlight of my career," says Roberts. "When I first performed *His Light Still Shines* with the Moses Hogan Singers, I was gripped by a text that challenged the decency of a just America...concepts poignant then and definitely now. Moses reminded us about the tenets of a decent society through his glorious work. In our new digital world, the Fort Worth Opera Chorus ably lends their talent to this amazing project...singing' life into this changing world!"

In times of unrest, musicians and poets have played a catalytic role in illuminating truths and sparking debate throughout history. While cultivating creativity and innovation, they have also highlighted inequity and given the voiceless a voice through the power of artistic expression. Moses Hogan knew that well, and Fort Worth Opera is taking this moment to raise our collective voices to demand accountability, transparency, equality, and inclusion. "*His Light Still Shines*" is just the beginning. FWO will continue to dedicate our creative resources to doing what the arts do best – break down barriers, foster open dialogue, and celebrate our shared humanity.

Following the success of our 2019 world premiere, ***Frida Kahlo and the Bravest Girl in the World***, composer **Joe Illick** and librettist **Mark Campbell** have teamed up once again for ***Stone Soup***, a new family opera with an enduring message of kindness. Led by a resourceful young hero named Sally, this timely tale teaches the value of sharing and collaboration. Initially set to take the stage this fall, the opera's live performances were hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. FWO Manager of Education **Sheran Goodspeed Keyton** (Virtual project producer), FWO Head of Music **Charlene Lotz** (Music Producer), and Producer **Charles W. Bush** of **Appointed Productions** (Film Producer) have teamed up to create something infinitely more imaginative for the inaugural production of FWO's 75th anniversary season.

Under the direction of Theatre Arlington's Executive Producer **Steven D. Morris**, five talented singers were filmed individually, then seamlessly edited together to bring Illick and Campbell's charming opera to life. Starring 2020 District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, soprano **Flora Wall** as Sally, Australian bass-baritone **Christopher Curcuruto** as Max, and mezzo-soprano **Kayla Nanto** as Edna, this Texas-themed work also features FWO Lesley Residents artists **Darius Thomas** and **Megan Koch** as Stan and Delia. *Stone Soup* will be available for booking to view after October 1, 2020. As with all of Fort Worth Opera's *Arts in Place* educational programming, a detailed study guide will accompany the performance piece. Virtual story time and *Stone Soup* book distribution are also available for title I kindergartners within Fort Worth.

2020-2021 LESLEY RESIDENT ARTISTS

Megan Koch, soprano

Soprano Megan Koch returns to Fort Worth Opera as a Lesley Resident Artist in 2020-2021, as part of the company's 75th anniversary season. Ms. Koch was part of the FWO Studio Artist program, and premiered the role of Marianna and Grandmother in composer Joe Illick and Pulitzer Prize-winning librettist Mark Campbell's family opera, *Frida Kahlo and the Bravest Girl in the World*. With UNT Opera, she recently debuted the roles of Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* and Zan in *Regina*. In 2019, she was invited to the Czech Republic to sing in the modern premiere of two lost operas by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer in the Olomouc Baroque Festival. Megan was a Division Winner in the UNT Concerto Competition, a finalist in the Classical Singer Competition and Lewisville Lake Symphony International Voice Competition in 2019. She earned her Master of Music in Voice Performance in 2019 and is currently studying with Carol Wilson while pursuing her Graduate Artist Certificate in Opera at the University of North Texas. She holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Illinois Wesleyan University.

Darius Thomas, tenor

Tenor Darius Thomas continues to make his presence known in the world of opera with his clear and rich voice. In the 2020-2021 season, Thomas will perform throughout DFW as a Fort Worth Opera Lesley Resident Artist, and be featured online through the company's digital platform *FWO Green Room*, where he will perform the role of Stan in the world premiere film of Joe Illick and Mark Campbell's *Stone Soup*. Last season, he made a partial role debut as Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* in Knoxville Opera's touring production, and was previously the tenor in residence for the Mary Ragland Emerging Artists program with Nashville Opera. There he performed the roles Dauber in *The Cradle Will Rock*, and Nathanael/Cochénille in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Mr. Thomas pursued graduate studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville where he studied with American Tenor Andrew Skoog and served as a graduate teaching assistant. Mr. Thomas holds a Bachelors of Music Degree in Voice Performance from Southeastern Oklahoma State University. When he is not on the stage, Thomas can usually be found with his family in his hometown of Sherman, Texas.

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. The organization has received national acclaim from critics and audiences alike for its artistic excellence. Beginning in 2017, Fort Worth Opera launched the second phase of its landmark, 10-year Opera of the Americas initiative with *Noches de Ópera (Nights of Opera)*, a groundbreaking campaign that introduces powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of American audiences.

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