



F O R T W O R T H
O P E R A

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FRONTIERS 2020: SIX INNOVATIVE LIBRETTISTS SELECTED FOR FORT WORTH OPERA'S VIRTUAL LIBRETTO WORKSHOP, A TWO-NIGHT EXPLORATION OF OPERATIC STORYTELLING

*AN EPIC FAIRYTALE SET 5,000 MOONS AGO IN A PRIMEVAL AFRICAN DESERT,
A RESOURCEFUL JEWEL THIEF CAUGHT IN AN UNUSUAL LOVE TRIANGLE IN LATE 1950S NEW ENGLAND,
A HARROWING FAMILY TALE OF TRAGEDY AND REDEMPTION SET AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE SIERRA DE
PICACHOS IN MONTERREY, MEXICO, AND MORE TO BE PRESENTED IN FRONT OF A LIVE ZOOM AUDIENCE,
OCTOBER 7 & 8, 2020, AS PART OF FWO'S REIMAGINED 2020 FALL PROGRAMMING.*

FORT WORTH, TX —Fort Worth Opera (FWO) announced today the names of the six librettists whose unpublished works have been selected for *Frontiers: FWO Libretto Workshop*, an exciting exploration of operatic storytelling, and the eighth installment of its innovative new works showcase. Part of the company's new digital initiative FWO Green Room and reimagined 2020 fall programming, these selected pieces will be presented in two separate online showcases on **Wednesday, October 7, from 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm CT, and Thursday, October 8, from 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm**, in front of a live audience on Zoom. Led by Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award-winning librettist and lyricist **Mark Campbell**, FWO's workshop will feature a distinguished panel of librettists, composers, directors, and artists, including **Héctor Armienta, Nicole Brooks, Octavio Cardenas, Blythe Gaissert, Alison Moritz, Rachel J. Peters, Kelley Rourke, and Talise Trevigne**.

From celebrated Broadway and opera designer, director, and librettist **Julian Crouch**, to rising jazz vocalist, folklorist, and performance artist, **Joshua Banbury**, *Frontiers: FWO Libretto Workshop* will highlight some of the most imaginative literary voices in contemporary opera, both seasoned and fresh on the scene. While the first seven installments of *Frontiers* provided a visible platform for emerging composer and librettist teams to hone their craft, this latest incarnation removes the musical elements and focusses entirely upon the text of these new operas in development. Six immensely talented local and national actors and operatic artists — **Itzel Ayala, Jovane Caamaño, Claudia Chapa, Stormi Demerson, Luther Lewis, and Adam Richardson** — will breathe life into the fascinating characters within these six libretti.

"This year has been extraordinary in both beautiful and terrible ways, and Fort Worth Opera wants to add to the beauty with six imaginative and inspiring librettos," says **FWO Artistic Director Joe Illick**. "Part of our fall 2020 Season, we have reimagined the *Frontiers* program to include an online librettist workshop, to allow the public a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how new works come into being. This is your chance to hear how stories are conceived, developed, crafted and sharpened until they reach you, the audience member, in their most engaging possible form. Whether you are a writer yourself, a theater or opera lover, or someone who has been fascinated by storytelling, these two evenings are for you!"

Over the past seven successful seasons, *Frontiers* has established itself as one of the premiere showcases in North America for vibrant new work from some of the most unique and thrilling new voices in 21st-century opera. Each year, the program features a distinguished panel of collaborative partners who could potentially play a critical role in the long-term development of the *Frontiers* works beyond the Festival showcase. In past showcases, selected composer and librettist teams took part in closed feedback sessions with the panelists following the workshop to strengthen and develop their pieces. Next month, the esteemed panelists for the *Frontiers: FWO Libretto Workshop* will offer a real-time assessment of their works in front of a live audience. Librettists will also obtain a recording of the Zoom workshop to assist them further in their compositional process.

Tickets for the showcases are FREE. Please sign up on Eventbrite to receive the Zoom link for Night One and Night Two of the *Frontiers: FWO Libretto Workshop*:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/frontiers-fwo-libretto-workshop-tickets-123110343351>

Night One, October 7, at 7:30 pm CT:

- Anita Gonzalez – *Home of my Ancestors*
- Alejandra Villarreal Martinez – *Higueras*
- Julian Crouch – *The Sailmaker's Wife*

Night Two, October 8, at 7:30 pm CT:

- Kaitlin Sullivan – *Magpie*
- Joshua Banbury – *The Illustrator*
- Caitlin Vincent – *Song of the Last Cowboy*

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

THE OPERAS

5,000 moons ago in a primeval African desert, three triplet princes prepare to become men on their twentieth birthday. **Joshua Banbury's** fairytale *The Illustrator* begins on a golden African night with a kingdom wide celebration for the Prince's passage. They pray, dance and sing around a roaring fire, dressed in their finest silk and gold. Suddenly, a foreign wind hastens over the revelry, lifting the fire into the sky and down upon the kingdom people. In this macabre phenomenon the entire kingdom perishes in the mouth of the fire. Everyone perishes except for the three Princes. Enraged and heartbroken, they vow to avenge their kingdom and swear to find Death and murder him. Death is indeed revealed to be the creator; the Illustrator of all.

One day, during a winter storm, a poor lonely sailmaker saves a crane that is tangled up in fishing line. Arriving back home, he discovers a mysterious woman has taken refuge there. He welcomes the woman, and over time, they become man and wife. Times are hard for the sailmaker, who can't compete with the cheaper sails from a nearby factory, and so the woman, after making her husband promise that he will never watch her work, weaves a magic sail. A chamber opera exploring fate, temptation, greed, pride, betrayal and loss, **Julian Crouch's** *The Sailmaker's Wife* serves as a metaphor for multiple issues: human relation to the natural world, self-sacrifice and self-harm, the consequences of concealing or revealing authentic truths and identities, and our current existential environmental crisis.

In **Anita Gonzalez's** *Home of my Ancestors*, an African American medical doctor named Olivia Walker returns to her home town of Houston after Grandma Rose's death. As she approaches the door of her Grandma's house, ex-Boyfriend Baron waits inside to express his unresolved love for her. Olivia offers Baron a cold shoulder because she wants to sell the house and its memories. They fight, and she packs and falls asleep with exhaustion. As she sleeps, a chorus of ghostly ancestors from the first Emancipation Day appear. They express their love for Olivia and teach her what Juneteenth and freedom meant to her people and to her community. Olivia awakens with a resolve to rebuild her life in her hometown neighborhood. She exits eager to attend the Houston Emancipation celebration Grandma Rose loved.

Higueras is a small town located outside of Monterrey in Mexico, which is known for its yearly celebration called "La Quema de la Candelilla," in which the candelilla, a plant native to the region, is gathered and burned in offering to the Virgin Mary. Against this backdrop, **Alejandra Villarreal Martinez's** *Higueras* depicts a family in crisis. After its patriarch, Anastasio, is killed in a tragic accident, his son is stricken with agoraphobia and PTSD, his youngest daughter leaves to start her life in the United States, his wife descends into the fog of dementia, and his eldest daughter, Laureana, is left to pick up the pieces. Over time, the ranch Laureana once saw as her home and safe haven is transformed into a prison. In spite of moments of happiness and a brief hope for redemption, a simple mistake leads to yet another bitter tragedy, when Laureana's mother accidentally overdoses on her sleeping medication. Maddened by grief and fear, Laureana makes a holy offering of her inheritance, burning her homestead--now completely overgrown with candelilla--in the hope that the consecrating, cleansing fire will reunite her family.

Set in the summer of 1959, **Kaitlin Sullivan's** *Magpie*, follows a New England jewel thief named Margaret "Magpie" Hughes who finds herself caught in an unusual love triangle. When her long-time adversary, detective Roger Hart, threatens her with arrest, they discover the new accountant at Margaret's day job, Scotty Barnes, is Roger's old lover from the war. Margaret claims Scotty as her alibi and they agree to be each other's cover story, but as times goes on, they wonder if the lavender arrangement for their secret lives is worth the lie.

In a series of vignettes, **Caitlin Vincent's** *Song of the Last Cowboy* traces one man's life journey in the moments before his death at the hands of the man in black. From the memory of his mother's lullaby and his childhood dreams of a distant horizon to the murder of his lover and the heart-pounding thrill of his final gunfight, the Cowboy retraces his path to the present while Death looks on.

LIBRETTIST BIOGRAPHIES

JOSHUA BANBURY is an emerging, multidimensional vocal artist and writer. Originally from Austin, Texas, he uses his facility as a classically trained singer for the stasis of his art. Joshua graduated with honors from The New School, having studied opera performance, vocal jazz, playwriting and social science. Today, he creates original operas, plays and audio/visual presentations. In addition to his writing, Joshua is a rising jazz vocalist and folklorist, set to release his first album of American folk music this fall, sponsored by the National YoungArts Foundation. He has recently sung at venues such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Glimmerglass Opera, The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Mintons Playhouse. Joshua is slated to make his Kennedy Center debut with his trio spring of 2021. www.joshuabanbury.com.

JULIAN CROUCH is best known as a designer and director. His best known projects in the US include *Shockheaded Peter* and *Satyagraha* (for the Met Opera). Other operas for the Met include *Doctor Atomic*, *The Enchanted Island* and *The Merry Widow*. Broadway includes *Hedwig And The Angry Inch*, *Head Over Heels*, *The Addams Family* and *Big Fish*. Most recently he designed *A Little Shop Of Horrors* Off Broadway. With the experience of many devised shows for his UK company Improbable Theatre, two years ago he turned his hand to Libretto writing, and was accepted as a fellow on The American Lyric Theater's Composer/Librettist program. He currently has three full length operas in development, of which *The Sailmaker's Wife* is the latest. His post Covid experience has drawn him to film and he has just finished animating Du Yun's *A Cockroach's Tarantella*.

ANITA GONZALEZ directs, devises and writes theatrical works. Her innovative stagings of historical and cross-cultural experiences have appeared on PBS national television and at Lincoln Center Out-of Doors, The Working Theatre, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York Live Arts, Tribeca Performing Arts Center, and other national and international venues. Her musical writings include *Zora on My Mind* (under development), *Ybor City* (Cuban unionists, readings, rhumba, and smoke converge in 1918 Tampa, Florida), *Ayanna Kelly* (a Black Caribbean woman time travels through British pubs until she finds self-discovery) and *Home of My Ancestors* (2017) with composer Nkeiru Okoye for HGOCO. Gonzalez is a Professor of Theatre and Associate Dean in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance at the University of Michigan where she promotes internationalism in the arts, engaged learning, and interdisciplinary research. She is the Artistic Director of Art BoundariesUnlimited.com, a member of the Dramatists Guild, the National Theatre Conference, the League of Professional Women in Theatre, and a founding member of the Urban Bush Women. www.anitagonzalez.com

ALEJANDRA VILLAREAL MARTINEZ is a soprano and aspiring librettist originally from Los Angeles. She made her professional singing debut with Long Beach Opera's 2017 production of *Frida*, which sparked in her a passion for contemporary opera. Since then, she has gone on to perform in several modern and contemporary works, including *Ainadamar* (Golijov/Hwang), *Three Tales* (Reich/Korot), and *The Love Potion* (Martin/Bédier/trans. MacDonald), and will soon help create roles in *The Jungle* (Griffith/Ricciardi) and *What the Horse Eats!* (Phan/Hoang). Her work as a singer has helped develop her skills as a librettist and her texts have since been set by composers such as Lauren Bernofsky and Nicholas Landrum. Recently, she helped develop *The Lunchbox Project*, a children's opera commissioned by Reimagining Opera for Kids. Ms. Martinez holds a special desire to honor Latin American identities and experiences in classical music and she works closely with the Latin American Music Center at Indiana University. She is pursuing her Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Jacobs School of Music and holds degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music, the University of Miami, and Stanford University. www.soprano-alejandra-martinez.com

KAITLIN SULLIVAN is a writer from Yonkers, NY who specializes in slapstick comedy, feminist body horror, and children's verismo. She recently completed a master's in libretto writing from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and has a background in animation. When she's not deep in multilingual research for a WWII biography, she is a passionate disciple of Rose Schneiderman.

CAITLIN VINCENT is an American librettist and lyricist whose writing has been praised as 'nuanced and honest' (*DC Theatre Scene*), 'intriguing' (*The Baltimore Sun*), and 'a luminous standout' (*The Huffington Post*). Her opera *Better Gods*, with composer Luna Pearl Woolf, premiered in January 2016 at the Kennedy Center as part of Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative. In August 2017, Vincent and composer Douglas Buchanan won the Sackler Music Composition Prize to fund a new one-hour opera about Bessie Coleman, the first African-American female aviator, and Miriam "Ma" Ferguson, the first female governor of Texas. *Bessie and Ma* premiered at the University of Connecticut in March 2019. Other recent works include the opera *Tienda* (2019) with composer Reinaldo Moya for the Schubert Club of Minnesota, the chamber piece *Ella Que Lloro* (2019) with composer D. J. Sparr, and the monodrama *Godiva* (2019) with composer Juliana Hall for mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately and the Oxford Lieder Festival. In December 2020, bass-baritone Zachary James will premiere Vincent's latest collaboration with Juliana Hall, a monodrama based on Captain Ahab from *Moby-Dick*, as part of the visual album *Call Out*. A classically trained soprano, Vincent graduated cum laude from Harvard University and holds an MM degree from the Peabody Conservatory and a PhD from Deakin University in Australia. She is currently on faculty at the University of Melbourne where she researches the future of work in the arts. Her first book, *Digital Scenography in Opera in the 21st Century*, is forthcoming from Routledge in 2021/22. www.caitlinvincent.com

ABOUT FORT WORTH OPERA: Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is poised to celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2021. For the last fifteen years, FWO has become one of the leading American companies dedicated to nurturing and performing new opera, in addition to producing performances of traditional repertoire with rising American stars. Our acclaimed *Frontiers* program is going online this fall with our first digital Libretto Workshop. Our Children's Opera Theatre typically reaches about 60,000 students across North Texas each season with live, interactive performances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, FWO has created online educational curriculum for local music students to supplement their in-school studies, and COT can also now serve entire families and communities beyond the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Fort Worth Opera is committed to celebrating all North Texans, and through our ongoing *Nóches de Opera* program, the company offers exciting community-driven events and powerful operas that represent the diverse cultures of all of the Americas.

Fort Worth Opera is sponsored in part by awards from The Arts Council of Fort Worth & Tarrant County, The City of Fort Worth, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and OPERA America. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; The Burnett Foundation; the Amon G. Carter Foundation; the Sid W. Richardson Foundation; Visit Fort Worth; Adeline & George McQueen Foundation, J.P. Morgan, Trustee; Smallwood Foundation, J.P. Morgan, Trustee; Hattie Mae Lesley Foundation, Bank of America, Trustee; Virginia Hobbs Charitable Trust, Simmons Bank, Trustee; Garvey Texas Foundation; Mary Potishman Lard Trust; Fifth Avenue Foundation; The Thomas M. Helen McKee and John P. Ryan Foundation; R4 Foundation; Red Oak Foundation; The Rea Charitable Trust, Wells Fargo Trustee; Wells Fargo Foundation; and Autobahn.

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