



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**NOVEMBER 9, 2021**

**CONTACT:**

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

**FORT WORTH OPERA PROUDLY ANNOUNCES LINE-UP OF EXTRAORDINARY ARTISTS  
HEADLINING THE COMPANY'S SECOND ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH,  
A NIGHT OF BLACK EXCELLENCE: SAY IT LOUD - SONGS OF A REVOLUTION**

*Part of FWO's milestone 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, this live February 20 concert will feature acclaimed opera singers Michelle Johnson, Limmie Pulliam, Audra Scott, Karen Slack, Brandie Sutton, Veronica Williams, composer/vocalist Jasmine Barnes, Lesley Resident Artist Brandon Bell, bassist Laesio Littlejohn, flutist Malcolm Payne, virtuoso pianists Dr. Gregory Thompson and Joseph Williams, David W. Carter High School Choir, Bandan Koro African Drum & Dance Ensemble, and Sheran Goodspeed Keyton Gospel Ensemble featuring pianist Myles Tate.*

*Fort Worth Opera announces continued alliance with the Tarrant County Pearls Chapter of The Society, Incorporated and new partnership with Ego Tequila, owned by Fort Worth entrepreneur Rikki Kelly, as the official sponsors of the company's Black History Month performances and A Night of Black Excellence: Say It Loud - Songs of a Revolution.*

**Fort Worth, TX – Fort Worth Opera (FWO) announced today the starry line-up of internationally renowned artists headlining the company's second annual celebration of Black History Month, A Night of Black Excellence: Say It Loud - Songs of a Revolution.** This inspiring virtual concert proved to be the most successful event of the organization's 2020-2021 season, and on **February 20, 2022, at 2:00 pm**, it will return with live performances at the 900-seat auditorium of Fort Worth's historic **I.M. Terrell Academy for STEM and VPA**. Co-curated and co-hosted by Metropolitan Opera superstar soprano **Karen Slack** and FWO General Director **Afton Battle**, this eagerly anticipated concert will feature rousing performances by renowned opera singers **Michelle Johnson, Limmie Pulliam, Audra Scott, Karen Slack, Brandie Sutton, Veronica Williams**, bassist **Laesio Littlejohn**, FWO Lesley Resident Artist **Brandon Bell**, composer/vocalist **Jasmine Barnes**, flutist **Malcolm Payne**, virtuoso pianists **Dr. Gregory Thompson** and **Joseph Williams**, and **Sheran Goodspeed Keyton Gospel Ensemble**, featuring pianist **Myles Tate**.

For the first time in company history, Fort Worth Opera will collaborate with Dallas's award-winning **David W. Carter High School Choir** under the direction of **Demetrius Ethley**. This talented group will provide soul-stirring choral/backing vocals for several performances, most notably as part of the grand finale with the exhilarating **Bandan Koro African Drum & Dance Ensemble** and the entire cast of the show. The concert will feature works by Cyrus Chestnut, Duke Ellington, Shawn Okpebholo, Nina Simone, original pieces composed and performed by Veronica Williams and Jasmine Barnes, and beloved classics by Puccini, Verdi, Massenet, and other great operatic composers.

"I am incredibly proud to join this amazing cast of American artists in celebration of Black excellence, says soprano **Karen Slack**. "After last year's overwhelmingly successful virtual concert, we are all anticipating a spectacular IN PERSON event bringing the people of Ft. Worth together for a thrilling evening of culture and the arts!"

This second installment of Fort Worth Opera's tribute to Black artistry and ingenuity will highlight arias, songs, and instrumental works written exclusively by Black and Afro-Latino(a) composers. As FWO steps to the forefront of the industry as true leaders in equity, diversity, and inclusion, both on and off the stage, the company is excited to once again honor the vast cultural heritage and indelible contributions of Black musicians, composers, and librettists. Not only will FWO pay homage to many pioneering Black artists and innovators of the past, but *A Night of Black Excellence* will feature some of the most extraordinary Black artists currently dominating the global opera and classical music scenes.

"General Director Afton Battle's curation reflects an unequivocal investment in Fort Worth's Black community. She is a strategist and visionary who tirelessly cultivates Black ecosystems on and off stage," says pianist **Joseph Williams**. "I'm thrilled for her to join forces with internationally celebrated soprano Karen Slack, whose multifaceted advocacy is unparalleled in our field. I see these sisters as griots devoted to illuminating multiplicities of the Black experience through art and story."

"I am deeply honored to serve as one of the pianists and arrangers for *A Night of Black Excellence*. In the context of Kujichagulia, ANOBE beckons Black artists to define themselves and shape their own narratives. This is of utmost importance not only to the operatic community but to society at large. The versatility and talent of this cast are off the chain!"

I.M. Terrell opened its doors in 1882 in the Butler Place Historic District as the city's first Black school during the era of formal racial segregation in the United States and has produced many prominent 20th and 21st century luminaries. These individuals include musicians Ornette Coleman, John Carter, Kurtis King, and Charles Moffett, author and educator Lillian B. Horace, Civil Rights leader Vada Phillips Felder, Opal Lee, "Grandmother of Juneteenth," and Tuskegee Airman Robert T. McDaniel. Closed in 1973 during racial integration of Fort Worth's schools, it reopened in 1998 as I.M. Terrell Elementary School. Following a restoration and construction project, it opened again in 2018 as I.M. Terrell Academy for STEM and VPA.

"It was a pleasure getting to work with Ms. Battle and her team at the Fort Worth Opera for *A Night of Black Excellence*," says I.M. Terrell Principal **Baldwin R. Brown**. This was a very inspiring event that shed light on a lot of the great work that is coming out of the African American community and our African American Leaders. I was humbled and honored to be able to participate in this momentous event, and I look forward to the second, live edition in the near future."

This season, Fort Worth Opera is thrilled to announce a new partnership with **Rikki Kelly**, trailblazing young entrepreneur, CEO and Founder of **EGO Tequila**, the first Black female-owned tequila brand in the state of Texas, and only the third in the United States. Based locally here in Fort Worth and sourced from an award-winning distillery in the heart of Jalisco, Mexico, EGO tequila will serve as one of the official sponsors of *A Night of Black Excellence: Say It Loud - Songs of a Revolution* and FWO's Black History Month performances.

"It's very important to showcase black talent and recognize that it is often overlooked," says Rikki Kelly. "That is why we are thrilled to be working with Fort Worth Opera and very excited to be sponsoring their *Night of Black Excellence*. We look forward to seeing all of the beautiful black talent that is here in Fort Worth."

Additionally, the company is proud to announce that last season's partners, the **Tarrant County Pearls Chapter of The Society, Incorporated**, will return as official sponsors to support our community endeavors throughout the month of February 2022. Formed in the fall of 2020, the Tarrant County Pearls Chapter is part of The Society, Incorporated, a highly revered national non-profit organization of women, dedicated to enhancing, exposing, and promoting youth in the arts for the betterment of our communities. Focusing on under-served children, they provide support for young literary, visual, and performing artists. Founded 37 years ago in Washington, D.C. The Society, Incorporated now has 30 chapters in 15 states across the United States.

### ***A Night of Black Excellence: Say It Loud - Songs of a Revolution***

Sponsored by North Texas Community Foundation Fund to Advance Racial Equity, the Tarrant County Pearls Chapter of The Society, Incorporated, and Ego Tequila

February 20, 2022, at 2:00 pm CT

I.M. Terrell Academy of STEM & VPA

Co-curated and co-hosted by American soprano Karen Slack and FWO General Director Afton Battle

Starring Michelle Johnson, Limmie Pulliam, Audra Scott, Karen Slack, Brandie Sutton, Veronica Williams, composer/vocalist Jasmine Barnes, Brandon Bell, bassist Laesio Littlejohn, flutist Malcolm Payne, virtuoso pianists Dr. Gregory Thompson and Joseph Williams, David W. Carter High School Choir under the direction of Demetrius Ethley, Bandan Koro African Drum & Dance Ensemble, and Sheran Goodspeed Keyton Gospel Ensemble featuring pianist Myles Tate.

Featuring works by Cyrus Chestnut, Duke Ellington, Shawn Okpebholo, Nina Simone, original pieces composed and performed by Veronica Williams and Jasmine Barnes, and classics by Puccini, Verdi, Massenet, and others.

### **A NIGHT OF BLACK EXCELLENCE PRODUCTION TEAM:**

Sheran Goodspeed Keyton (FWO Director of COT Production & Civic Impact) - Producer and Director

Tyrinika Marie (Sr. Manager of Artistic and Production Administration) - Production Manager

Charles W. Bush (Founder of Appointed Productions) - Video Production

**Tickets are \$75** (Front Orchestra), **\$55** (Back Orchestra), and **\$35** (Balcony).

**\$125 VIP tickets** include seating in the Front Orchestra and exclusive access to the Post-Show Reception, featuring food, specialty drinks, and an artist meet and greet.

Tickets can be purchased online at

<https://www.fwoopera.org/anightofblackexcellence>

or by contacting Fort Worth Opera's box office at **817.731.0726**, Tuesday - Thursday, 9 am – 5 pm CST

**About Fort Worth Opera:** Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is poised to celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. After fourteen years of producing a nationally recognized Festival in the springtime, the organization returns to a year-round format in the fall of 2021. FWO has become one of the leading American companies dedicated to nurturing and performing new opera, while producing traditional repertoire with rising stars. The company's acclaimed Children's Opera Theatre program serves around 60,000 students across North Texas each season with live, interactive performances. Fort Worth Opera is committed to celebrating all North Texans, and through our ongoing *Noches de Ópera* program and concerts like *A Night of Black Excellence*, the company offers 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 Visit Fort Worth, The Arts Council of Fort Worth & Tarrant County, The City of Fort Worth, the Texas Commission on the Arts, The Burnett Foundation, The Amon G. Carter Foundation, The Sid W. Richardson Foundation, Alcon Foundation, Hattie Mae Lesley Foundation; Bank of America, Simmons Bank, Trustee, Virginia Hobbs Charitable Trust, Garvey Texas Foundation, Claytor Family Charitable Foundation Inc., Mary Potishman Lard Trust, Fifth Avenue Foundation, The Thomas M. Helen McKee and John P. Ryan Foundation, Red Oak Foundation, The Rea Charitable Trust, Wells Fargo Trustee, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: Fresnel Technologies, Mr. & Mrs. Nicole Duvall and Brian J. Smith, Mr. & Mrs. Jeff and Mari Sullivan, Doctors John & Arlene Barnett, Ms. Debbie Vaughan, Ms. Barbara Jordan, Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce, Texas Christian University, Time to Heal America, Allan Virgo, Royal Flesh, Townplace Suites Marriott, Haltom's Fine Jewelers, and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: PKGD Group, Rahr & Sons, TX Whiskey, Brennan Vineyards, Del Campo Empanadas, G4 Tequila, Diaz Brothers Agave, and Miron Crosby.

*A Night of Black Excellence* and Black History Month are sponsored by the North Texas Community Foundation Fund to Advance Racial Equity, the Tarrant County Pearls Chapter of The Society, Incorporated, and Ego Tequila

Fort Worth Opera is a proud member of OPERA America.

American Airlines is the Official Airline of Fort Worth Opera.