

PRESS RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE

March 15, 2018

THE EVOLUTION OF FRONTIERS: SIX COMPOSER - LIBRETTIST TEAMS SELECTED FOR FORT WORTH OPERA'S DIVERSE 2018 SHOWCASE

A gripping portrait of American Industrialist Henry Ford and his son, an ambitious baker with an obsessive quest to bake the perfect baguette, a riveting Biblical tale taken from the Book of Genesis, an international icon of the avant-garde chasing utopia and romance in the American Southwest, and more to be presented during the final week of the 2018 FWOpera Festival.

FORT WORTH, TX – Fort Worth Opera (FWOpera) announced today the names of the six composer and librettist teams whose unpublished works have been selected for the company's sixth annual, critically-acclaimed new works series, *Frontiers* – funded in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Held during the final week of the 2018 FWOpera Festival, these selected pieces will be presented in two separate showcases of three works each on **Wednesday, May 2 from 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm**, and **Thursday, May 3 from 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm**, on the stage of Bass Performance Hall. Featuring 20-minute excerpts of each selected piece, these brand-new operas will be sung by artists from the 2018 FWOpera Festival with piano accompaniment.

Now entering its sixth season, *Frontiers* has established itself as a pioneering leader in seeking out the best and brightest new voices in the opera industry. **As Fort Worth Opera celebrates Women's History Month and continues to champion diversity and gender equality within the field of opera and in the workplace**, the company is thrilled to announce that operas by **two female composer-librettists** will be highlighted during the 2018 spring showcase. In that spirit of inclusion, FWOpera is also proud to present in 2020 the first opera composed by a woman in company history, **Gabriela Lena Frank's *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego***. *Frontiers* is a part of that journey.

Over the past five 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 the 21st century. 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, 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. The company's seasoned body of jurists will expand in 2018 to include new panelists, as FWOpera continues to provide a visible platform for emerging and established artists and musicians to display their craft.

Tickets for the showcases are \$10, and can be ordered by calling Fort Worth Opera's Customer Service team at **877.396.7372**.

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

FORT WORTH OPERA

THE OPERAS

Composer John Mills Cockell and librettist Ken Gass's opera **Savitri & Sam** was inspired by the true story of Savitri, a 17-year old high school student living in a remote Punjabi community of northern British Columbia. After her secret relationship with Sam, an 18-year old aboriginal boy of Haisla heritage is exposed she is tragically stabbed to death by her father. The story is all the more poignant because of the intense idyllic love of the young couple, who seemed so ideally suited for one another, despite their different cultural heritages.

After Mabel abandons her life in 1910's New York as an international icon of the avant-garde, she reinvents herself in the remote desert village of Taos, New Mexico. Inspired by the life of Mabel Dodge Luhan, **Mabel's Call** by Brooklyn-based composer-librettist Nell Shaw Cohen follows a fiercely unconventional woman chasing utopia and romance in the Southwest.

In William David Cooper's grand Biblical opera **Hagar and Ishmael**, Egyptian handmaid Hagar encounters an angel after she flees Abraham's camp, who tells her an incredible prophecy about her son Ishmael. Sixteen years later, Ishmael learns that newborn Isaac will be Abraham's successor, and tries to kill him. Exiled and desperate in the desert, Hagar and Ishmael find faith, freedom and a marvelous destiny.

Recovering from a nervous breakdown, aspiring baker Leslie Sinclair finally reaches the end of her obsessive quest to bake the perfect baguette when the 207,345th one suddenly comes to life. **Companionship**, by composer-librettist Rachel Peters, mirrors our contemporary world, where what we consume becomes all-consuming. Adapted from the short story by Arthur Phillips.

Domestic by composer-librettist Ben Stevenson is a set of two one-act operas exploring the ways that people interact when no one is watching. *Act One - An Enigma* - is about how people end a relationship, while *Act Two - perc.* - is about the hope that others can offer when things seem hopeless.

Fordlandia by composer William Susman and librettist Stuart Rojstaczer is a family drama about the struggle between Henry Ford and his son, Edsel, over the leadership and future of Ford Motor Company. Henry's inability to relinquish the control of his company to a son he loves dearly destroys Edsel emotionally and physically. The tragedy between father and son is only mitigated by the strength and actions of their wives.

COMPOSER AND LIBRETTIST BIOGRAPHIES

John Mills Cockell, composer of **Savitri & Sam**

Born in Toronto, composer-librettist John Mills Cockell studied music composition, electronic music and piano at the University of Toronto and the Toronto Royal Conservatory. A winner of the BMI Young Composers' Award for his *Fragments for Orchestra*, Cockell has created works for Toronto's Isaacs Gallery new music concert series, formed multi-discipline collective Intersystems, and worked in a series of rock bands including Kensington Market, along with electronic trio Syrinx & Heartbeat band. He has been commissioned by the Toronto Repertory Orchestra, National Ballet, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, scores numerous feature films and documentaries, as well as several stage musicals and dramatic theatre productions.

Ken Gass, librettist of **Savitri & Sam**

Founding artistic director of Factory Theatre (1970-79; 1996-2012), Gass's notable productions include *Rez Sisters* by Tomson Highway; *Leisure Society* by Francois Archambault (Dora Award, Outstanding Direction); and several plays by George F. Walker. In 2014, Gass launched Canadian Rep Theatre, where he directed the highly-acclaimed *How Do I Love Thee?* by Florence MacDonald. Recipient of the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts and the prestigious Dora Silver Ticket Award, Gass's plays include *Claudius and The Boy Bishop*, (Chalmers Award nominees) as well as *Bethune Imagined* and the upcoming *Gulag America*.

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Nell Shaw Cohen, composer-librettist of ***Mabel's Call***

Nell Shaw Cohen (b. 1988) evokes visual art, natural landscapes, and the lives of mavericks and artists in lyrical works ranging from orchestral tone poems to mobile apps. Her operas include *Mabel's Call*, monodrama *The Coming of Spring*, and an upcoming commission from Houston Grand Opera's HGOco with librettist Megan Cohen. An alumna of AOP's Composers & the Voice fellowship and Nautilus Music-Theater's Composer-Librettist Studio, Cohen studied at New York University and New England Conservatory. She lives in Brooklyn. www.nellshawcohen.com.

William David Cooper, composer-librettist of ***Hagar and Ishmael***

Hailed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for their "richly soaring vocal lines," William David Cooper's operas have been featured by West Edge Opera and the National Opera Association, among others. Cooper also composes orchestral, chamber, choral and liturgical music, and is the recipient of awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP, and the Aspen Music Festival. A graduate of the Juilliard School, his teachers have included Samuel Adler, Robert Beaser, Kurt Rohde, Ross Bauer and Pablo Ortiz.

Rachel Peters, composer-librettist of ***Companionship***

Rachel Peters writes all manner of works for the stage. Other operas: *Rootabaga Country* (Sarasota Opera), *Wild Beast of the Bungalow* (Center for Contemporary Opera), *Pie, Pith, and Palette* (The Atlanta Opera), *Ethel Smyth Plays Golf in Limbo* (Semperoper Dresden), *Monkey Do* (Rhymes With Opera). Composer/lyricist for *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*. Residencies/Fellowships: Yaddo, Brush Creek Arts, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center, American Opera Projects, John Duffy Institute, New Dramatists Composer-Librettist Studio. Songs at Lincoln Center, Symphony Space, Joe's Pub, cabarets/theatres nationwide.

Ben Stevenson, composer-librettist of ***Domestic***

Kansas City composer-librettist Ben Stevenson's music has been heard across the United States; at the Charlotte New Music Festival, Electronic Music Midwest Festival, June in Buffalo and SPLICE festivals. He has been commissioned by FuseBox New Music, SPLICE, and the Missouri Music Teachers Association. He has readings and performances by the Kansas City Symphony, the PRISM sax quartet, Beo String Quartet, and Ensemble Dal Niente. He is currently finishing his DMA in at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

William Susman, composer of ***Fordlandia***

William Susman is a composer of orchestral music, chamber music, song cycles and film scores. *Gramophone* calls his compositions "harmonically ravishing," *The New York Times* describes his music as "vivid, turbulent, and rich-textured," and *All Music* hails his album of song cycles as "state of the art." His music has been widely performed in the U.S., Europe, China and Japan including the Aspen Festival Chamber Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, San Jose Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall. Recordings of his compositions have been made by acclaimed soloists Joan Jeanrenaud (Kronos Quartet), Joseph Gramley (Silk Road Ensemble), Greg and Patricia Zuber (Met Opera Orchestra), and soprano Mellissa Hughes. He has received awards from the Tribeca Film Festival, ASCAP, BMI, Fromm, Gaudeamus, Alea III, and the Percussive Arts Society.

Stuart Rojstaczer, librettist of ***Fordlandia***

Stuart Rojstaczer is a bestselling novelist, songwriter, and geophysicist. *The New York Times* calls his writing "smart and brutally honest," and the *Huffington Post* says he "effortlessly combines laughter and tears." His songs and performances have been praised for their "beguiling cross-breeding" of styles (*Detroit Weekly*) and "freshness, humor and verve" (*Global Rhythm*). He has given invited lectures at over fifty universities including Stanford, MIT, Caltech, Berkeley, and Padua. Born in Wisconsin, he has lived in Israel, Italy and throughout the US. He has been a geophysics professor at Duke, has sung with the Milwaukee Symphony Chorus and has won awards from the American Library Association, National Science Foundation, Geological Society of America, Friends of American Writers, and the National Jewish Book Awards.

FORT WORTH OPERA

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 attention from critics and audiences alike for its artistic excellence.

FWOpera has taken a leadership role in engaging audiences beyond the operatic stage, while producing cutting-edge, contemporary operas. Beginning in 2017, FWOpera launched the second phase of its landmark, 10-year *Opera of the Americas* initiative with *Noches de Ópera (Nights of Opera)*, a groundbreaking campaign which introduces powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of American audiences.

Fort Worth Opera is sponsored in part by awards from The Arts Council of Fort Worth & Tarrant County, The City of Fort Worth, and the Texas Commission on the Arts. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Amon G. Carter Foundation; American Airlines; Art & Seek; Crystelle Waggoner Charitable Trust, Bank of America, Trustee; The Pangburn Foundation, J.P. Morgan Chase, Trustee; the Sid W. Richardson Foundation; and WFAA Channel 8.