THEMES AND SESSIONS
Learn more about the sessions planned for Opera Conference 2018 that tackle crucial themes from the many angles of our art form.

KEYNOTE: JOHN ADAMS

As our keynote speaker, John Adams will launch the conference by sharing the inspirations that have influenced his work and underpinned his commitment to bringing resonant stories to the opera stage.

See page 6 for more about John Adams.

Photo by Vern Evans.

CIVIC ACTION
Increasing the effectiveness of opera companies as active cultural citizens is central to improving our service to communities and building relationships with new audiences and funders. While many companies already have significant community partnerships that deliver reciprocal benefit, our field as a whole has only limited experience extending public service outside the opera house. Several sessions will examine successful strategies that recalibrate the balance between “product focus” and “community focus.”

Sessions include:

**Building Authentic Partnerships**
Opera companies often plan short-term community engagement initiatives around current season programming without investing in long-term partnerships. Moving beyond makeshift collaborations to create authentic and lasting relationships is an essential next step. Opera company leaders will speak about ways they have worked with community partners over longer time spans and how these relationships have broadened their perspective.

**Messaging Our Impact**
Opera companies have a positive impact on the artistic, social, educational and economic health of communities throughout the year, but we are not effectively telling this story in a way that contributes to the positive perception of opera, reinforces company brands and builds constituent loyalty. Hear from colleagues about the benefit of investing in documentation, distillation and communication of everyday work.

**Opera Artists as Activists**
Opera is a powerful art form with the capacity to tell stories that are deeply personal and resonate with the world around us. Yet, the long development cycle of new works makes it difficult for opera to generate dialogue on the issues that matter most in an environment where last month’s pivotal issue has already been superseded. A panel of composers, directors and performers will discuss paths for artist-activists to inspire change through opera.

**Creative Youth Development**
Learn how opera companies are successfully partnering with humanitarian organizations serving victims of human trafficking, incarcerated youth and other marginalized communities. A moderated discussion will focus on a unique program-development approach that listens to individual participants to help them reach personal and professional goals.
### EQUITY

Racism continues to be a polarizing issue in the United States, and opera companies are part of an established social structure that has kept many people from feeling welcome to participate in our art form as artists, staff and audience members. Several sessions will examine strategies for removing barriers and increasing equity on stage, in administrative offices and in board rooms. **Sessions include:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moving Toward an Equitable Organizational Culture</strong></td>
<td>Opera’s homogeneity is increasingly out of place in a country that is becoming ever-more diverse. Motivated by increased self-awareness and external expectations, companies are under pressure to improve equity in hiring, casting, community engagement and programming. New practices must be rooted in changed organizational cultures. Learn from leaders who have succeeded in changing their company cultures to achieve greater equity.</td>
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<td><strong>Don’t Start, Stop!</strong></td>
<td>Discussion about improving diversity seems inevitably to begin with ideas for new efforts, but many established company practices reinforce barriers that inhibit progress and counteract new initiatives. In this session, participants will be invited to reflect on the actions and activities that should be stopped in order to make newcomers feel more welcome.</td>
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<td><strong>Culturally Conscious Casting</strong></td>
<td>General and artistic directors share audience expectations to see diversity on stage across the repertoire and in specific roles. Hear from colleagues about their strategies for identifying, nurturing and casting singers who reflect the diversity of our communities.</td>
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<td><strong>Equity Begins with Access to Training</strong></td>
<td>Community choruses and local church choirs are common gateways to discovering talent as a singer. Recognizing talent is only the first step, but socioeconomic challenges prevent many aspiring singers from opportunities to train, network and forge paths to success. Learn about companies that are creating bridges for talented singers from all walks of life.</td>
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There was a positive energy about the conference, and a great sense of community. Everyone did a great job at making individuals feel like they were a part of something bigger than themselves.

–Opera Conference 2017 Attendee
AUDIENCE AND PATRON ENGAGEMENT

Many recent research reports document changes in public attitudes about culture and participation. Audiences of all ages have evolving expectations about the overall opera experience. Conference sessions will examine this research and explore ways companies are responding to the findings and creating more effective engagement strategies. Sessions include:

**A Holistic Approach to Customer Service**
Staff devote tremendous time and resources to attract new audiences and retain current ones. With increased competition for time, attention and money, and with rising ticket prices, companies must create a signature experience that starts before the ticket purchase and continues well after the final curtain. This session will explore the many elements of customer service that can inspire repeat and frequent attendance and create brand advocates.

**The Art of Asking**
Asking for money is an art form of its own, one that any fundraiser must practice and master. But the actual “ask” is only part of the process. In this nuts-and-bolts session, learn the concrete steps that go into a successful donor meeting, from scheduling the meeting and preparing your approach, to conducting your visit and following up.

**Reinventing the Event**
Tired of your annual gala? Ready to try something new? Turn to your colleagues in this round-robin presentation of innovative ideas that promise to reinvigorate your special events, inspire new approaches and help you realign your events with your fundraising and cultivation goals, as well as the overall company brand.

**Leading Community Conversations Without Staff or Clout**
Smaller companies often lack the capacity to activate and lead community conversations around specific repertoire choices or larger civic issues. Speakers in this session will provide practical examples of good practices and tools that can help you achieve your goals for public practice.

“This conference gave me a list of ‘action items’ that we can and will begin implementing immediately.

–Opera Conference 2017 Attendee
ARTIST CAREERS

Composers, librettists, directors, designers and performers need an entrepreneurial approach to a modern “gig economy.” Discussion in several sessions will focus on personal development opportunities and tools for creating a sustainable career. **Sessions include:**

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<tr>
<th>Training Teaching Artists</th>
<th>Career Transitions for Singers</th>
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<td>A panel of opera education leaders and representatives from other sectors will discuss best practices for training teaching artists and lead a hands-on workshop with exercises, lesson plans and group activities. New resources available for teaching artists in the opera field will be shared.</td>
<td>Informed by research made possible by the Howard Gilman Foundation, this session will feature advice from expert practitioners about charting a path beyond a singing career and how to build new skills for success.</td>
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**Do the Hustle**
Hear from a panel of artists and artist managers about other lines of work that complement an early-career artist’s audition and performance schedule.

INNOVATION IN PRODUCTION

Producing in public or found spaces creates new opportunities for programming and audience development, as well as a variety of technical and safety issues. Sessions will examine both sides of this new artistic strategy. **Sessions include:**

<table>
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<th>All the World’s a Stage</th>
<th>Active Crisis Preparedness</th>
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<td>Site-specific and alternative-venue performances are at the forefront of company strategies to connect to new communities and attract new audiences. Productions in these spaces frequently involve unusual or experimental programming. Learn about recent successes (and failures, too) of non-traditional production experiences.</td>
<td>Codified emergency preparedness plans are in place for performances in traditional opera houses. As more and more events move to outdoor and alternative venues, new plans are needed. Gain tactical knowledge about good practices and resources to help protect your staff, artists and audiences.</td>
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Join the #OperaConf conversation!
GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

Strong organizations depend on effective trustees who understand the complex dynamics of opera companies, regardless of size. A number of sessions that address governance issues and sound management practices will be of equal interest to board members and staff. Sessions include:

Managing Liquidity
New FASB regulations will soon require a restructuring of financial statements that will reveal an organization’s liquidity. Learn how colleagues are managing changes in financial operations, not just the change in reporting. Solutions to be discussed include revolving lines of credit, short-term investment strategies and OPERA America’s new Co-Production Lending Bank.

General Director Evaluations
Reviews are not limited to what occurs on stage. Thoughtful evaluation should be an organizational priority. A panel of consultants and company leaders will share their expertise in defining performance expectations, establishing measurable outcomes and communicating with the general director.

Staff: Your Organization’s Most Valuable Asset
Experts confirm that most thriving companies in corporate America view staff as the most important contributor to their success. Many nonprofit organizations, however, struggle to allocate resources to compensate employees appropriately, provide benefits and invest in professional development. This session will explore ways companies can improve staff recruitment, retention and development as a key strategic objective.

How to Talk Shop
Production staff often do not have the vocabulary or experience to engage trustees in meaningful discussion about the production process and interrelated financial, technical and artistic issues. This session will feature insight from production personnel and board members who have been successful in connecting the work that is central to their mission to trustees and the governance process.

NEW WORKS FORUM

New for Opera Conference 2018, the New Works Forum will feature dedicated breakout sessions for development staff, marketing staff, trustees and other networks to explore all aspects of producing, funding and promoting the expanding American repertoire. There is no additional fee to attend the New Works Forum, which takes place on Wednesday, June 20, and all conference attendees are encouraged to participate.

WOMEN’S OPERA NETWORK

On June 20, women leaders will share how artists and audiences are reimagining women’s stories in opera, both in standard repertoire and through the creation of new works. A second discussion will focus on practical ways to build a personal network, take risks to jump barriers, and instill gender parity through an environment that confronts misogyny and respects women. Attendees will also learn how the Women’s Opera Network is connecting mentors and protégés, creators, colleagues, and allies.
ABOUT JOHN ADAMS

Composer, conductor and creative thinker—John Adams occupies a unique position in the world of American music. His works, both operatic and symphonic, stand out among contemporary classical compositions for their depth of expression, brilliance of sound and the profoundly humanist nature of their themes.

Works spanning more than three decades have entered the repertoire and are among the most performed of all contemporary classical music, among them Harmonielehre, Shaker Loops, Chamber Symphony, Doctor Atomic Symphony, Short Ride in a Fast Machine and his Violin Concerto. His stage works, all in collaboration with director Peter Sellars, include Nixon in China (1987), The Death of Klinghoffer (1991), El Niño (2000), Doctor Atomic (2005), A Flowering Tree (2006) and the Passion oratorio The Gospel According to the Other Mary (2012).

In November 2017, Adams’s new opera Girls of the Golden West, set during the 1850s California Gold Rush, received its world premiere at San Francisco Opera. The opera’s unique libretto, assembled by Sellars, includes original Gold Rush song lyrics, letters, journal entries and personal memoirs from the era.

Adams received the 1993 Grawemeyer Award for his Violin Concerto, as well as the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for composing On the Transmigration of Souls, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to commemorate the first anniversary of 9/11. He has been awarded honorary doctorates from Harvard, Yale, Northwestern University, Cambridge University, the Juilliard School and the Royal Academy of Music, where he has recently been appointed as a visiting professor of composition. A provocative writer, he is the author of the highly acclaimed autobiography Hallelujah Junction and is a contributor to The New York Times Book Review.

As a conductor, Adams appears with the world’s major orchestras in programs combining his own works with a wide variety of repertoire ranging from Beethoven and Mozart to Ives, Carter, Zappa, Glass and Ellington. In recent seasons, he has conducted the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Wiener Symphoniker, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the orchestras of Seattle, Cincinnati, Atlanta and Toronto. Adams is currently creative chair of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

In November 2017, the Berliner Philharmoniker released The John Adams Edition, a new box set of performances conducted by Adams (Harmonielehre and Scheherazade.2 with violinist Leila Josefowicz), Gustavo Dudamel (City Noir), Alan Gilbert (Short Ride in a Fast Machine and Lollapalooza), Kirill Petrenko (The Wound-Dresser with baritone Georg Nigl) and Sir Simon Rattle (The Gospel According to the Other Mary). Other recent recordings of Adams’ work include Scheherazade.2 with Josefowicz and St. Louis Symphony on Nonesuch Records, the Deutsche Grammophon release of The Gospel According to the Other Mary featuring the Los Angeles Philharmonic, City Noir and Saxophone Concerto with the St. Louis Symphony, a Grammy-winning album featuring Harmonielehre and Short Ride in a Fast Machine and the premiere recording of Absolute Jest paired with Grand Pianola Music, both with the San Francisco Symphony, and the Nonesuch DVD of the Metropolitan Opera’s production of Nixon in China conducted by the composer.