

# SEATTLE OPERA. THANKFUL



**SPRING 2023**

Donor Impact Report

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Photo © Philip Newton



When you give to Seattle Opera your gift is a catalyst that creates trailblazing new works, re-imagined opera classics, and uplifting community projects. Your enthusiasm for artistic excellence, arts education, and civic engagement inspires us! Your investment brings our VALUES to life. Even more, I am always humbled by your passion for the art form, the community, and Seattle Opera.

Thank you so very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christina Scheppelmann". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "C" and a long horizontal line at the bottom.

Christina Scheppelmann,  
General Director



# ARTIST IMPACT

## splendid experiences

Performing in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has deeply impacted our artists. After weeks of rehearsal and multiple performances some have described their experiences as “life-changing,” and “once in a lifetime.” Here are several more impressions they’ve shared with us:



Photo © Sunny Martini

Left to right: Maureen McKay (Laila) and Karin Mushegain (Mariam) discover their mutual love for one another as they care for Laila's child, Azziza.

To be able to make this incredibly important story come to life is something that I will treasure for the rest of my career. “

—Andrew Potter, Bass

I was floored the moment I heard the orchestra play this score for the first time. It was more glorious and colorful than I ever could have imagined. I had shivers all over my body in nearly every scene. I will never forget that feeling. I will always cherish the experience I have had here.”

—Maureen McKay, Soprano



Ashraf Sewailam (Hakim) and Maureen McKay (Laila) embrace during a poignant moment in the opera.

*The Seattle Opera has made everything feel so secure and put together. In a show where I play a secondary character, but have six costumes, four quick changes, three wigs, a rotating set to navigate, and complicated music to sing, this show has felt like an exercise in artistic teamwork at an extremely high level. I am always calmed by and in awe of the professionalism and skill of every team member. That, to me, is what makes opera great."*

**—Sarah Coit, Mezzo-soprano**

*It's been an honor to be involved with this project since 2016 and what a thrill it has been to be part of the team to bring it to stage. I've enjoyed working as an Afghanistan Cultural Consultant with the talented creative team, world-class singers and the devoted Seattle Opera staff who cared deeply about authentic portrayal of Afghans and Afghanistan."*

**—Humaira Ghilzai, Cultural Consultant**

*I love this city. I love the people I meet here. I've had a beautiful experiences over the years, learning more about the people that make the opera happen here. I trust this company. I trust the vision. And I believe Seattle Opera is in the right position to honor the tradition of opera, while giving artists the ability to find new ways to engage audiences."*

**—John Moore, Baritone**

*The most memorable moment was opening night when everyone shone and the audience responded positively and I realized that I had written an opera that appealed to both long-time serious opera goers as well as those who had never seen an opera. That was unexpected and I was humbled by the general audience response. I was also deeply relieved by the fact that Khaled Hosseini loved it"*

**—Sheila Silver, Composer**



# CIVIC IMPACT

## Jashin: a community celebration

Photo © Sunny Martini



*Tabla player Deep Singh gave a rousing performance at our Afghan art and culture celebration. He was joined by rubab player Ustad Homayoun Sakhi.*

Before the world premiere of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* more than 500 guests attended Jashin: A Celebration of Afghan Arts. The day-long festivities featured an exhibition of rescued art works by artist-activist group ArtLords, an unveiling of an embroidery project created by local Afghan women in partnership with Refugee Artisan Initiative, and a screening of

“Symphony of Courage,” a documentary about the Afghanistan National Institute of Music and the Zohra Orchestra. A presentation by film director and stage director Roya Sadat, poetry readings, Afghan food, and a crowd-pleasing concert by rubab player Ustad Homayoun Sakhi and tabla master Deep Singh were among the other activities presented.



Under the direction of ArtLords co-founder Kabir Mokamel, Jashin participants painted a community mural that was exhibited in McCaw Hall and is now on permanent display in the Opera Center.



Kofta, ashak, and qabili palau—favorite Afghan/Persian dishes—were served. The dishes were prepared by Jazze's, an Afghan caterer in Tukwila, Washington.



People have forgotten about Afghanistan's humanity," said Humaira Ghilzai. "...it is really important that non-Afghans see the talents of Afghan people and our culture, and that the Afghan artists themselves feel celebrated, appreciated, and respected."  
—International Examiner

Eight women artists from the Refugee Artisan Initiative created this amazing garment, which showcases intricate designs and beadwork practiced throughout Afghanistan.



# MEDIA IMPACT

## splendid news

Photo © Antone Patterson



The world premiere of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* piqued the interests of local, national, and global media outlets, including industry publications *Opera News* and *Opera* magazine. Stories appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Associated Press*, *Agence France-Presse*, and *Financial Times*. What's more, "Music Matters," a BBC Radio 3 program, interviewed composer Sheila Silver, director Roya Sadat, Afghan cultural consultant Humaira Ghilzai, and novelist Khaled Hosseini. *The Seattle Times*, KUOW, KNKX, KIRO-7, and Crosscut were among the local media that covered the production. Like the novel, our opera sparked world-wide attention. A sampling of coverage is below.

Haunting and beautiful, the story and music merge as one in this formidable show. The central truths of hope and love will echo long past the last note and curtain fall.

—**Broadway World**

By the end of this deeply engrossing saga of a life-changing friendship, you'll have a new impression of Afghanistan imprinted in your mind — thanks to fleeting scenes of a prosperous Kabul shopping district filled with women in colorful modern dress, of children playing happily — along with a lingering sense of the power of love and female courage."

—**Crosscut**

"[Roya Sadat's] adroit staging, with sets by Misha Kachman, costumes by Deborah Trout, and lighting by Jen Schriever, reflects some of the complexity of Afghan society and its changes over the years, including Western, cosmopolitan attire coexisting with headscarves and burqas in an outdoor marketplace."

—**The Wall Street Journal**

I happened to be at the Seattle Opera on the pay-what-you-can night, and I felt the audience reflected how opera was always supposed to be. In my 20 years of classical music-going, this was one of the most diverse audiences I've seen for a venue where tickets start at a higher price point than most are comfortable with."

—**Real Change**



# CIVIC PRIDE

## J'Nai Bridges Day in Tacoma



Mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges' Seattle Opera debut was more than just a performance at McCaw Hall. It was a homecoming celebration. Bridges, a native of Lakewood, Washington, was welcomed with open arms and civic pride! Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodward recognized Bridges with a special award during the city's 35th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration. Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell also issued a special proclamation after her performance in *Samson and Delilah*. What's more, the Lakewood City Council honored the Grammy Award-winning opera singer at its first meeting in 2023.

*J'Nai Bridges treasures the memories of her youth in Lakewood just outside Tacoma. Growing up in a close-knit, supportive family, she was encouraged to pursue her exceptional musical talents early on. "My skills were honed during my conservatory studies in New York and Philadelphia, but it was in Lakewood and Tacoma where my gifts were first identified,"*

**— The Seattle Times**

Photo © Sunny Martini





# IMPACTFUL LEARNING

## school tour returns



Photo © Sunny Martini

*Frida Kahlo and the Bravest Girl in the World*, this season's school opera tour, is currently visiting schools throughout Washington State. It's the first school tour in three years, due to the pandemic. "We are thrilled to bring our school opera tour program back into schools this spring," said Associate Director of Youth Programs Sara Litchfield.

The 35-minute-long bilingual opera written for youth audiences tells the story of Mariana, a young girl living in Mexico City who has her portrait painted by Frida Kahlo. At first, Mariana is nervous about meeting Frida because of strange

rumors about the eccentric artist. But Mariana quickly befriends Frida and learns two important lessons in the process: that art can happen anywhere and how important it is to be brave even when you feel scared.

The opera is visiting fifty schools in seven counties and the tour will culminate in two public performances of the opera at the Opera Center on Sunday, June 25.

**[SEATTLEOPERA.ORG/FRIDA.](https://seattleopera.org/frida)**

# YOUTHFUL CONFIDENCE



This winter, the Youth Opera Project presented a production of *The Jungle Book*. The adaptation by composer Kamala Sankaram and librettist Kelley Rourke presents a tale of compassion, justice, and forgiveness, and featured more than forty students ages 7 through 18.

"I have always loved singing, and the people in Seattle Opera are amazing. They're just really fun!" says 13-year-old Caitlin Naumowicz. "Being in the Youth Opera Project has built my confidence. And the people are super welcoming and this community is wonderful."



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Photo © Sunny Martini

