




**OPERA
THEATER
OREGON**

For Immediate Release:
**Opera Theater Oregon Reveals History with
World Premiere of *Nu Nah-Hup: Sacajawea’s Story***

*“How bracing, refreshing and encouraging to see...
such a **high-quality and meaningful** production”*
— *Oregon ArtsWatch*

March 20, 2023; Portland, OR: Opera Theater Oregon, one of the region’s most intrepid arts organizations, dedicated to “shin[ing] a bright and piercing light on social, political and environmental issues,” (*Oregon ArtsWatch*) proudly announces the World Premiere of a 35-minute scene from the revolutionary new opera, *Nu Nah-Hup: Sacajawea’s Story*. This intercultural work in development reimagines the story of Sacajawea, the extraordinary Agai-Dika/Lemhi-Shoshone woman who was a crucial member of the historic 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, from her Agai-Dika (“Salmon Eaters”), Indigenous perspective.



The opera shares a female-forward story based on journal entries and oral histories woven through a **libretto by the great-great-grandniece of Sacajawea and Agai-Dika culture bearer Rose Ann Abrahamson, and music by OTO Artistic Director Justin Ralls and Native American Flutist and composer Hovia Edwards**. Sung in Agai-Dika/Lemhi-Shoshone, Québécois French, English, and including Native American Sign Language (with English supertitles), this project makes substantial contributions towards documenting and preserving the endangered Agai-Dika dialect and language as the recipient of the [2022 Native Voices Endowment Award from the Endangered Language Fund at Yale University](#). This opera is further supported with recognition and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Oregon Community Foundation’s Creative Heights Grant. (Photo above: Willow Abrahamson, familial descendant of Sacajawea. Used with permission.)

“We are telling Sacajawea’s story, her story, from an Agai- Dika perspective from her female familial descendants and people, a woman’s story from women. This story will share tradition, history and culture of Sacajawea from the viewpoint and oral history of the women of her people. The songs will express these aspects, and most importantly her language will be preserved through operatic songs.”

~ Rose Ann Abrahamson, descendent of Sacajawea and Agai-Dika culture bearer

The scene depicts an incident of domestic violence, recorded in the original Lewis and Clark expedition journals on [August 14, 1805](#), through excerpts of music, soundscapes, and presentations of traditional



Agai-Dika/Lemhi-Shoshone music, language, and culture with chamber orchestra. An internationally renowned cast realizes this work including Kwagiulth and Stó:lō First Nations mezzo-soprano, [Marion Newman](#) premiering the role of Sacajawea; [Richard Zeller](#), who will portray Toussaint Charbonneau, and [Dan Gibbs](#) as Captain William Clark.

This production features originally commissioned traditional deer dress, leggings, moccasins and traditional Agai-Dika cradleboard crafted by Rose Ann Abrahamson and her sister, Rozina George as well as a reproduction of [Sacajawea's historic blue bead belt](#), made by Leela Abrahamson, Rose Ann's daughter. Dustina Abrahamson, another of daughter of Rose Ann, will design traditional hair and makeup for Marion Newman's portrayal of their ancestor, Sacajawea.

WHAT: Opera Theater Oregon presents
World Premiere scene from *Nu Nah-Hup: Sacajawea's Story*

WHEN: Saturday, May 13th at 7:30pm
Sunday, May 14th at 2pm

Talk-back with artists and partners, including the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, to follow Sunday's performance

WHERE: The Gregory K. and Mary Chomenko Hinckley Studio Theatre
at Portland Opera's Hampton Opera Center
211 SE Caruthers St, Portland, OR 97214

TICKETS: call Portland Opera Box Office at 503-241-1802; or visit
<https://secure.portlandopera.org/operatheateroregon>

FURTHER DETAILS & PHOTOS: <https://www.operatheateroregon.com/coming-soon-2021/sacajawea/>



Rose Ann Abrahamson and Justin Ralls at the Sacajawea Education, Interpretive and Cultural Center in Salmon, Idaho – the ancestral homeland of the Agai-Dika people. August, 2021. (Photo Credit: Anne Polyakov)



CREATIVE TEAM

Rose Ann Abrahamson: Creative Lead, Librettist, Agai-Dika Culture & Language Consultant



Rose Ann Abrahamson is a recognized authority on the Lemhi Shoshone Cultural History and Language, Governor appointed member of the Idaho Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Committee, and President of Sacajawea Interpretive & Cultural Institute. She served as the Cultural Program Coordinator for tribal gatherings and events for the 2002 Olympics and has served as an educational, historical, and cultural speaker at regional and national events, including: Mistress of Ceremonies for the National Academic Decathlon, April 2004, January 2003 – December 2004 – Lectured at the Smithsonian, St. Louis, Missouri, Sioux City, Iowa, Buffalo Bill Museum, Montana State University, Eastern Washington State University Outstanding Teachers of America, 2002. In 2002 she received the Outstanding Teachers of America Award as well as the Outstanding Young Women in America, 1989. She was instrumental in the creation of the Sacajawea Interpretive, Cultural and Educational Center in her ancestral homeland in the Salmon and Lemhi River Valleys of Idaho. She has served as a consultant on numerous films, documentaries, and projects including the U.S. Mint design of the Sacajawea Golden dollar, issued from

2000-2008. In 2001 she met President Bill Clinton at the White House to accept Sacajawea's posthumous Honorary Sergeant designation in the Corps of Discovery. Recent collaborations include consulting on the Confluence Project mural of Sacajawea at the Vancouver School for the Arts in Vancouver, WA.

Hovia Edwards: Composer, Shoshone Music, Language and Cultural Consultant



Hovia Edwards (pronounced hoo-vee-ya) of Shoshone-Navajo-Okanogan heritage is a flutist, composer, and cultural leader. At only 14 she recorded her first album in January of 1998, *Morning Star*, "Hovia performs original and traditional melodies in a style that is youthful yet with a surprising maturity for an artist so young." (*Canyon Records*) Her father, Herman Edwards is a performer and flute maker, and encouraged her from early childhood to master the flute. Hovia is a second-generation flutist and has grown up performing around the world and soloist at the Scottsdale Center for the Art in Arizona. Hovia has contributed to numerous projects as a performer and composer, including collaborations with recording artist Robert Tree Cody and Academy-Award-winning actor and film producer, Wes Studi. She currently serves as Event Coordinator for the Language and Culture Department of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe.



Justin Ralls: Composer, Producer, OTO Artistic Director



Writing music that is “beautifully textured... full of color and light,” (*Daily Gazette, NY*) **Justin Ralls** is an award-winning composer and conductor that reflects his upbringing in the Pacific Northwest. “A gifted melodist...” (*Artslandia*) who offers “a whirlwind of thick orchestral textures... definitely establishing his own voice,” (*SF Examiner*) Ralls’ music has been presented at the Hydansaal in Eisenstadt, Austria, the Lucca International Youth Orchestra Festival in Albano Terme, Italy, Oregon Bach Festival, Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, Britt Festival at Crater Lake National Park, the Newman Scoring Stage in Los Angeles, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland and more. Composer John Adams spoke of *Tree Ride* as “impressive... showing a mastery of orchestral technique.” Soloists and ensembles that perform Ralls’ work include the Eugene Opera, Albany Symphony (NY), San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra, Third Angle

Ensemble, and Roomful of Teeth. With the world premiere of his chamber opera, *Two Yosemite: An Environmental Opera*, setting the 1903 meeting of John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, “Ralls took this thematic coloring to the next level, in the finest operatic tradition.” (*Oregon ArtsWatch*) Ralls’ education includes degrees from The Boston Conservatory, the San Francisco Conservatory, and a Ph.D. in Music Composition from the University of Oregon including research in “Nature, New Media, and Indigenous Thought.” Ralls has volunteered for the Siuslaw Institute, assisting in a cultural exchange between the Siletz Tribe of Oregon and Itelmen Tribe of Kamchatka, Russia; as well as environmental non-profit, Pacific Environment’s cultural exchange of Russian environmental leaders and U.S. environmental groups including Indigenous leaders of the Shor Tribe of Kemerovo-Oblast, Russia. Ralls enjoys reading in the outdoors, and spending time with his wife, cat, dog, and four chickens.

Katherine Goforth: Stage Director and Dramaturg



American vocalist Katherine Goforth shares her “noble, colorful and iridescent vocal sound” (*Magazin Klassik*) in strong and heartfelt performances. “Goforth... does not hold back,” (*The New York Times*) offering vivid character portraits sung with the utmost commitment and finesse. In 2022-23, Goforth was a featured speaker and performer at the Dallas Symphony Orchestra’s fourth Women in Classical Music Symposium where she was chosen to receive a Career Advancement Award by classical singer Julia Bullock, with whom she shared a joint recital. She sang the tenor solo in Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* with Bozeman Symphony, Walla Walla Symphony, and Yakima Symphony, the tenor solo in Puccini’s *Messa di Gloria* with Vancouver Symphony (USA), and recorded Elisabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre’s *Ester* with Byron Schenkman. Outside of classical

music, Goforth appeared in straight plays as Rebbetzin Tzurris in a reading of Dan Kitrosser’s *Why This Night* for Artists Repertory Theatre and as Emily Webb in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* for Fuse Theatre Ensemble. Goforth received her Bachelor’s degree from St. Olaf College, her Master’s degree from The Juilliard School, was a member of the International Opera Studio of Opera Köln, and attended the Franz Schubert Institut, Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Heidelberger Frühling Liedakademie, Georg Solti Accademia, and Boston Wagner Institute. She is an Instructor of Voice at Clark College. Upcoming, Goforth will appear in Philip Venables and Ted Huffman’s *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (based on Larry Mitchell’s 1977 novel of the same name) which premieres Summer 2023 at Manchester International Festival, Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, and Bregenzer Festspiele.

katherinegoforth.com



CAST



SACAJAWEA: A critically acclaimed mezzo-soprano of Kwagiulth and Stó:lō First Nations with English, Irish and Scottish heritage, **Marion Newman** was born in Bella Coola and grew up in Sooke, BC. She is one of Canada’s most accomplished singers in repertoire from Vivaldi to Vivier. As Carmen, the *Irish Examiner* noted “she sparked an electricity which totally engrossed the audience with her superbly sinuous sexuality... Prudes may raise their eyebrows at the sensuality of this Carmen; theatre goers will clamour for more.” Nominated for a Dora Award for her leading role in the world premiere of *Shanawdithit* (Nolan/Burry) with Toronto’s Tapestry Opera, Ian Ritchie wrote “she invests her character with towering dignity and courage.” Marion portrayed Dr. Wilson in the premiere of *Missing* (Clements/Current) with Vancouver City Opera/Pacific Opera Victoria, which gives voice, in English and Gitksan, to the story of Canada’s missing and murdered Indigenous women. Highlights for the 2022/23 season include her debut with Anchorage Opera in *Missing*, Cantaloube’s *Chants d’Auvergne* with Vancouver Island Symphony, *Messiah* with Vancouver Bach Choir, Bruckner’s *Te Deum* and the world premiere of Stephanie Martin’s *Water* with Grand Philharmonic Choir and Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. Marion has sung many works that speak to her First Nations identity, including a Canada-wide tour of *Ancestral Voices* (Tovey) with the Vancouver Symphony and *Nuyam-il Kulhulmx – Singing the Earth* (Höstman/Robinson) with the Victoria and Vancouver Symphonies and Continuum Concerts in Toronto. Marion is a Co-Founder of Amplified Opera and the host of CBC’s Saturday Afternoon at the Opera.



TOUSSAINT CHARBONNEAU: “A commanding presence housing a brilliant vocal instrument,” (*Oregon Music News*) American baritone **Richard Zeller** consistently receives high acclaim. For his portrayal of Scarpia, the *Calgary Herald* commended his “entirely authentic and wholly dominating” performance, characterized by “flawless vocal mastery.” He has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera in such roles as Marcello in *La Bohème*, Ernesto in *Il Pirata*, Eddie in *A View from the Bridge*, Coroebus in *Les Troyens*, and Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. His other opera appearances include with Scottish Opera, Hamburgische Staatsoper, Deutsche Opera am Rhein, Portland Opera, San Diego Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, English National Opera at the Barbican in London, Opera de Bordeaux, Opera de Vichy, and Portland Opera. Concert appearances include solos with the Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Buffalo Philharmonic, and Huntsville Symphony. Richard Zeller’s recordings include the critically acclaimed *Merry Mount* by Howard Hanson and Deems Taylor’s *Peter Ibbetson*, both with Naxos, and the world premiere of Henri Lazarof’s *Fifth Symphony* on Centaur Records, all recorded with Gerard Schwartz and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.



WILLIAM CLARK: Baritone **Dan Gibbs** is an emerging young artist who makes his Portland Opera debut this spring as The Hunter in Dvořák’s *Rusalka*. Dan’s credits include: studio recording and performance as a member and troupe baritone with Cult of Orpheus, as a featured baritone soloist in Vaughn Williams’ *Five Mystical Songs* and *Dona Nobis Pacem* with the Oregon Chorale and the Beaverton Symphony Orchestra; as Vodnik in LAH-SOW’s PDX concert performance of Dvořák’s *Rusalka*; as Papageno in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*; and as Wotan in Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*. Dan maintains a private teaching studio offering voice, guitar, and piano lessons, is a section leader and cantor at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, and sings as a member of the Portland Opera chorus. He earned his B.A. in Music with an emphasis on Vocal Performance from Southern Oregon University, under the direction of Dr. Paul French.



About Opera Theater Oregon:

“Marvelous... outstanding performances... surprisingly fine opera that resonated with a large audience... emotionally satisfying” - Northwest Reverb

Under visionary leadership, **Opera Theater Oregon** presents intimate, extraordinary new operatic experiences that refresh the genre while highlighting environmental issues and social justice. With an emphasis on creating, developing, and producing contemporary music and English language opera of the highest quality and integrity, OTO respects tradition and embraces innovation, delivering performances that are “thoroughly entertaining,” (*The Oregonian*) at once “marvelous... [and] emotionally satisfying.” (*Northwest Reverb*) OTO productions offer timely messages and reflect Portland’s signature maker mindset with uniquely stylized and abundantly charming attention to detail that together, attract new and younger audiences. Celebrated for their “expression and clarity,” (*Oregon ArtsWatch*) OTO’s singers represent the region’s finest and most versatile talent. More information at operatheateroregon.com

Socially conscious, operatic excellence, at the frontier!

Community Partners:



The Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV)

promotes equity and social change in order to end violence for all communities. We seek to transform society by engaging diverse voices, supporting the self-determination of survivors and providing leadership for advocacy efforts. Collectively, we are committed to removing barriers for persons of color and diverse groups in recognition of the racism, homophobia, able-bodyism and other oppressions existing in our society.

ocadsv.org

Portland Opera gathers and inspires audiences, artists, and collaborators to create shared opera experiences that enliven and connect us all, enhancing the cultural landscape of the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

portlandopera.org

Nu Nah-Hup: Sacajawea’s Story is generously supported by:

Ronni Lacroute

Marilyn Crilley and George Rowbottom



For interview inquiries, additional information, and media materials please contact:

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