



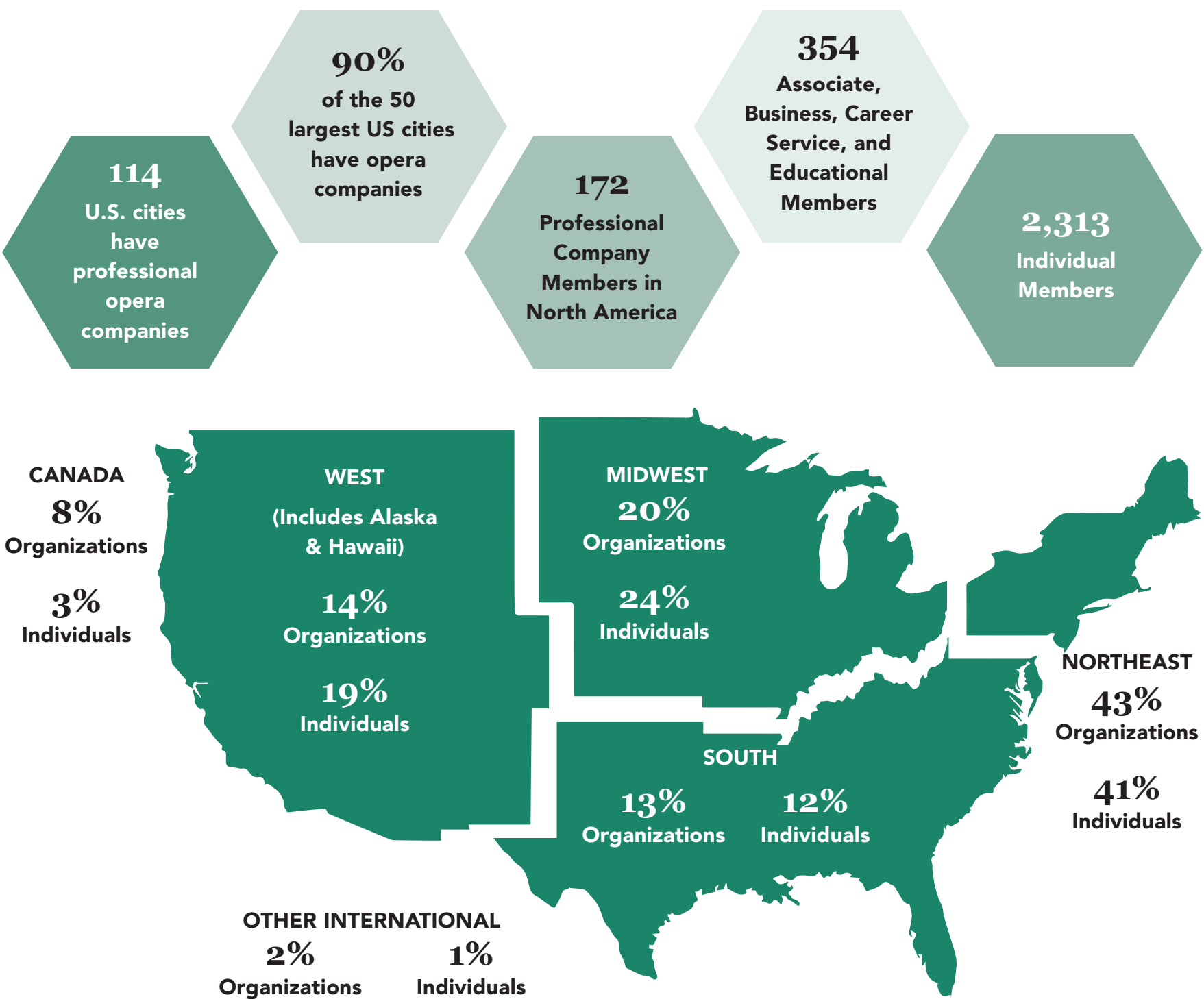
A Tale of Two Companies

Space, Site, Meaning, and Language

WEEK 14, OPERA AND RACE

Opera in the United States

OPERA America Membership

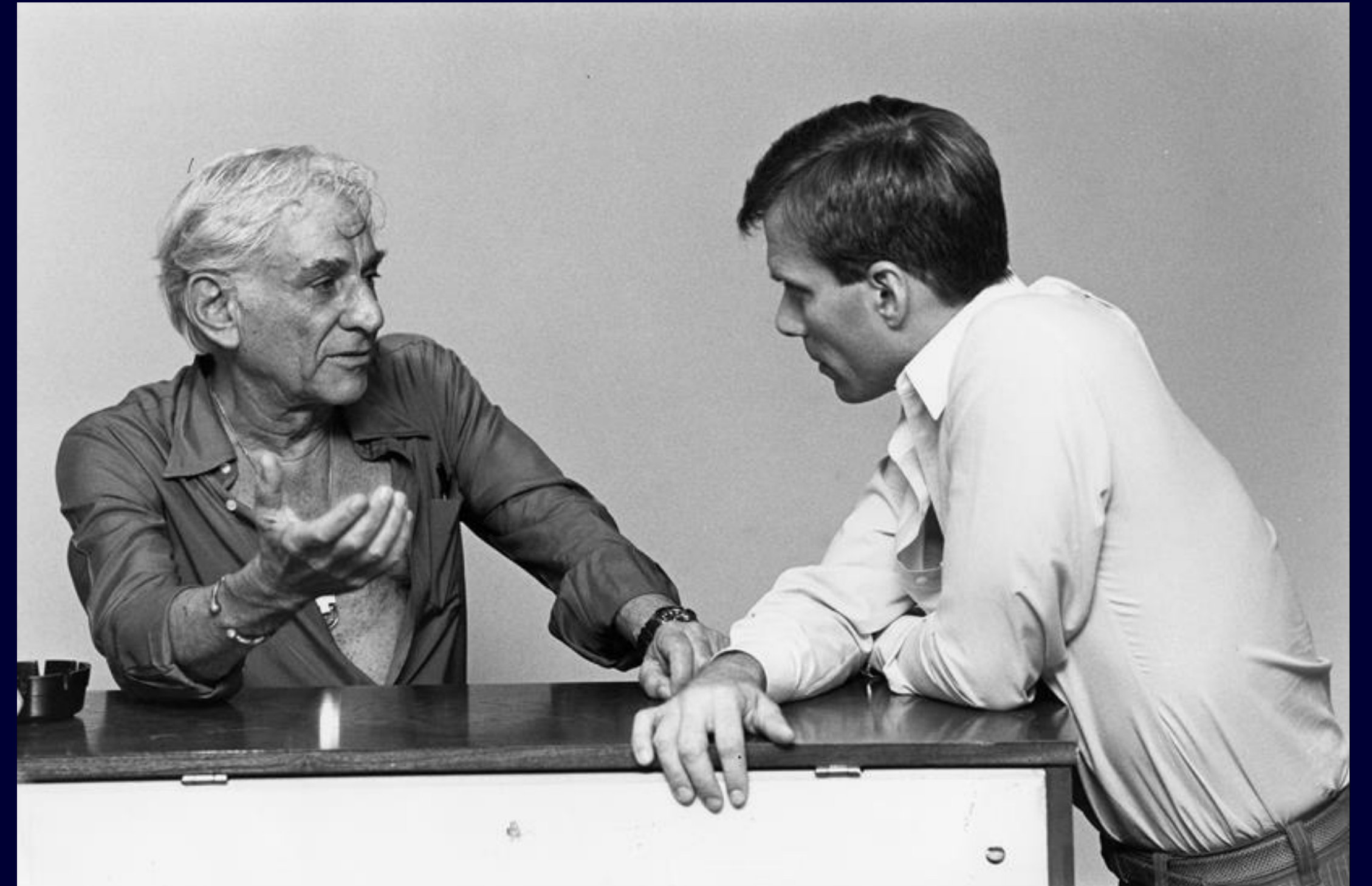


View an interactive map of the OPERA America membership at operaamerica.org/MemberDirectory.

Topics #1: A Tale of Two Companies

Houston Grand Opera:

- founded 1955
- 6-8 productions a season, operating budget circa \$27 million
- performance spaces: Wortham Theater Center, capacity about 3,300
- 1973-1974: HGO begins major project of commissioning and producing new works, mostly from American composers (a lot of Carlisle Floyd)
- Also a lot of American premieres: *Rinaldo* (1975), the operatic *Porgy and Bess* (1976), *Treemonisha* (1976), *La donna del lago* (1981),
- 1977: Houston Grand Opera Studio—early and influential young artist training programs
- Opera Orchestra: house orchestra, per service group, 49 players
- Emmys, Grammys, Tonys



Leonard Bernstein takes David Gockley's notes on
A Quiet Place at Houston Grand Opera, 1983

(photo: Houston Grand Opera Archives)

Topics #1: A Tale of Two Companies

Long Beach Opera:

- founded 1979
- started out with repertory staples, but then turned to less mainstream works—today, has given a very large repertoire of about ninety operas in 42 seasons
- About 5 productions a season, operating budget about \$1.5 million a year
- performance spaces: no single home—often performs at Wallis Annenberg Center in Santa Monica; known for site-specific works
- 1983-1984: two important productions—Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice* and Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea*
- 2004 onward: lots of Philip Glass, Piazzolla, and other contemporary composers
- American premieres: Szymanowski's *King Roger*, Schoenberg's *Die Jakobsleiter*, Zimmerman's *Turning*, I Saw Great Injustice, Cage's *Europas 3&4*



2019 Central Park Five

Topics #2: Commissioning Opera

- commission agreement will usually spell out ways the presenter may use the opera, which typically includes the right to present the world premiere performance of the opera as well as a number of additional performances
- The agreement may also include the right to add one or more co-commissioners (such as another opera company). In exchange for bearing some of the financial burden of the commission fees and production costs, co-commissioners are typically entitled to present a certain number of performances at a reduced royalty
- costs are generally reduced when several organizations co-commission a work, which also ensures multiple performances
- *Marnie* (2017): commissioned by Met and co-production Met and English National Opera
- *Proving Up* (2018): Missy Mazzoli, opera commissioned by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, and Miller Theatre
- *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2019): Terence Blanchard, opera commissioned by Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Jazz St. Louis



Topics #3: Site Specific Opera

- Site-specific performance is a theatre form which was developed in the 1980's. Distinct locations were identified around a city and used as a stage for a specific performance.
 - meaningful
 - Site-specific opera merges the potential of theatrical entertainment and the value of an existing site.
 - often non-traditional venues, not in the opera house
 - a lot of work by independent or small companies; consulting companies and directors who specialize in this
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- Long Beach Opera Company: Past productions include *The Diary of Anne Frank*, staged on various nights in a small synagogue in Hollywood, the parking lot of Sinai Temple, and the parking lot of Long Beach City Hall. The company's 2012 production of *The Paper Nautilus* was staged inside the Aquarium of the Pacific
 - New York's OnSite Opera with many productions including Gershwin's *Blue Monday* in the historic Cotton Club of Harlem, John Musto's *Rhoda and the Fossil Hunt* (world premiere) at the American Museum of Natural History



Topics #4: Locally Relevant Commissions and Productions

- Material—whether newly commissioned or reshaped in a new production—that is somehow particularly relevant to a particular city or space
- *Amistad* (1997): Anthony Davis; about a slave rebellion in 1839-1841; additional meaning when it was revived in Charleston, S.C. in 2008
- 2007: HGO established HGOco, an initiative designed to create partnerships between the company and the community. HGOco's first project, the ongoing *Song of Houston* initiative, creates new works focused on people and groups in Houston
- first commissioned work *The Refuge*, by Christopher Theofanidis and Leah Lax, HGOco identified seven statistically significant immigrant communities in Houston and the creators began interviewing residents of those communities. The libretto was created from the actual words of some of the residents, and the premiere included performances by members from these communities.
- May 2018: HGOco has premiered 22 new works, including eight short chamber operas focusing on various Asian communities in Houston, which were commissioned and premiered during a four-year series titled East + West. Works about Houston philanthropists, NASA, about the impact that Hurricane Ike and the Great Storm of 1900 had upon Galveston and the Gulf Coast, and song cycles in cooperation with workers in the Houston Ship Channel, the veterans community, and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.



NYTimes, 2008:

But Anthony Davis's "*Amistad*," a historically inspired exploration of slavery and freedom, has come back to the stage 11 years after its debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and in a deeply resonant setting.

It is the central work at this summer's Spoleto Festival U.S.A., whose host is Charleston, a city fully freighted with slavery's legacy. The relevance has not been lost on African-Americans involved: the composer, the librettist, performers and audience members.

"This is one of the main ports of slavery," said Gregg Baker, who sings the part of Cinque, leader of the band of captive Africans who are the subject of the story. "To do it down here was a bit, I guess, ironic. Slavery basically built this town."

4 Titles

Frida (1991)

Florencia en el Amazonas (1996)

Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (2010)

Únicamente la verdad (2008/2010)

Frida (1991) music by Robert Xavier Rodríguez

- Opera in two acts
- Mezzo, Baritone, SATB, 3 calaveras (death figures), SATB chorus, orchestra
- Program Note: Rodríguez describes Frida as being “in the Gershwin, Sondheim, Kurt Weill tradition of dissolving the barriers and extending the common ground between opera and musical theater. In keeping with the Mexican setting of Frida, he has created a unique musical idiom. **The score calls for mariachi-style orchestration (with prominent parts for accordion, guitar, violin and trumpet), in which authentic Mexican folk songs and dances are interwoven with the composer’s own “imaginary folk music,” tangos and colorations of zarzuela, ragtime, vaudeville and 1930’s jazz – all fused with Rodríguez’ characteristic “richly lyrical atonality” (Musical America) in a style “Romantically dramatic” (The Washington Post) and full of “the composer’s all-encompassing sense of humor” (The Los Angeles Times).**
- Among the “stolen” musical fragments developed in Frida (like Stravinsky, Rodríguez says “I never borrow; I steal.”) are such strange musical bedfellows as **two traditional Mexican piñata songs** (“Horo y fuego” and “Al quebrar la piñata”), **two narrative ballads** (“La Maguinita” and “Jesusita”), the **Communist anthem** (“L’Internationale”), **Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony, and Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde**. And “Spanish speakers might also listen for the rhythm of a familiar Mexican curse growling in the trombone as Lupe (Diego’s former wife) insults Frida and Diego at their wedding.

Book by Hilary Blecher; Lyrics and Monologue
by Migdalia Cruz

- Sung in both Spanish and English, Frida is the story of renowned Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, wife of the country’s great muralist Diego Riviera. Her tortured life unfolds in a flowing succession of scenes, acted and sung by two woman and two men in a variety of guises – masked or plain-faced and as two- or three-dimensional puppets; shadow puppets and projections are also involved. Diego’s preoccupation with art and other women shrivel Frida’s soul and her demands for love drain him; they need one another desperately. Divorce is imminent. Frida’s health deteriorates; only painting permits emotional release, translating her agonies into a series of canvases. Her fate is to live alone, engulfed by pain, but her paintings live forever, reflecting hidden dreams and inspiring courage to transcend conventional boundaries.



Frida (1991)

- original production included prominent roles for puppets and ballet-pantomime style
- one common thread throughout all productions has been a focus on the images from the work of both Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera
- 1991: commissioned American Music Theater Festival ; premiered Philadelphia
- 1992: Brooklyn Academy of Music
- 1993: revised; **Houston Grand Opera**
- 2007: Guadalajara Mexico, 100th Anniversary of Frida Kahlo's birth
- 2015: Michigan Opera Theatre
- 2017: Cincinnati Opera and **Long Beach Opera**
- ? Vienna Schauspielhaus
- 2019: Atlanta Opera, Florida Grand Opera
- 2020: Anchorage Opera, Opera Cultura,
- 2021?: Portland Opera
- 2022: Michigan Opera Theatre

Florencia en el Amazonas (1996)



- two act opera by Mexican composer Daniel Catán with a libretto by one of his students Marcela Fuentes-Berain
- characters broadly inspired by magic realism of renowned Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez
- very interesting plot about a diva opera singer (Florencia Grimaldi) who is on a trip through the Amazon in Brazil—she is searching for her long-lost love. Inquisitive journalists, love triangles, storm scene, card games, the river spirit and river gods of the Amazon, a cholera epidemic... fantastic plot

Full recording of the opera from Mexico City:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP9d5u4rnzU&feature=emb_imp_woyt

Florencia en el Amazonas (1996)



- co-commissioned **Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera**
 - 1999: Mexico City production
 - 2001 and 2019: revivals in Houston at HGO
 - 2005: Seattle Opera
 - 2006: European premiere in Heidelberg, Germany
 - 2014: Los Angeles Opera
 - looooots of other performances: Florida Grand Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Opera Colorado, Utah Opera, Washington National Opera, Nashville Opera, Arizona Opera, New York City Opera, the University of Illinois School of Music, and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.
 - In the 2021-2022 season, it will be the first Spanish-language opera to be performed in a mainstage season at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.
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Cruzar la Cara de la luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon) (2010)



- mariachi opera in Spanish and English, about 75 minutes
- music by José "Pepe" Martínez' (b. 1941 in Tecalitlán , Jalisco Mexico), director of storied Mariachi Vargas De Tecalitlán (founded in 1897 by Gaspar Vargas, oldest continuously performing mariachi group in the world).
- libretto by Leonard Foglia, Broadway playwright and director
- the orchestra is on stage—Mariachi Vargas De Tecalitlán at first, sometimes other mariachi groups at other productions
- commissioned **Houston Grand Opera** to commemorate the Mexican War of Independence in 1810 and Mexican Revolution in 1910. Note this is HGO's 41st world premiere.
- Synopsis: Where is home? Is it where we are born? Or where we live most of our lives? Is it with the family we leave behind or with the new ones we create?
- To Cross the Face of the Moon follows three generations of a single family, divided by countries and cultures. As a Mexican—American man deals with the approaching death of his father, he is forced to face these questions about his own place in the world — straddling two cultures — as well as that of his immigrant father and his American daughter. As long—buried secrets are revealed, he finds himself dramatically re—evaluating his own understanding of what makes a family.
- Like the Monarch butterflies that migrate every year to the birthplace of his father, the members of the Velásquez family must travel both physically and spiritually between Michoacán and Texas and look deep into their hearts before they learn where they truly belong.

Cruzar la Cara de la luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon) (2010)



13. CANCIÓN –
EL PADRE DE MI PADRE
— (THE FATHER OF MY
FATHER)

RENATA
AL PADRE DE MI PADRE
QUISIERA TOCAR SU MANO
AL PADRE DE MI PADRE
QUISIERA TOCAR SU MANO

TO MY FATHER’S FATHER
I WOULD LIKE TO HOLD
YOUR HAND.
TO MY FATHER’S FATHER
I WOULD LIKE TO HOLD
YOUR HAND.

Y AUNQUE NUNCA LO HE
TENIDO A MI LADO
LO MIRO COMO A MI PADRE

Y AUNQUE NUNCA LO HE
TENIDO A MI LADO
LO MIRO COMO A MI PADRE

MARIACHI
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY

RENATA
LO LLEVO LO LLEVO DENTRO
MUY ADENTRO DE MI ALMA
PADRE

MARIACHI
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY

RENATA
CUANDO YO MIRO SUS OJOS
SON SUS OJOS LOS DE MI
PADRE

AND ALTHOUGH I’VE
NEVER HAD HIM BESIDE
ME
I SEE HIM AS MY FATHER
AND ALTHOUGH I’VE
NEVER HAD HIM BESIDE
ME
I SEE HIM AS MY FATHER
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY
I CARRY HIM DEEP INSIDE
MY SOUL, FATHER
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY
WHEN I LOOK INTO HIS
EYES
HIS EYES ARE MY
FATHER’S

RENATA
AL PADRE DE MI PADRE LO
QUIERO CON TODA MI ALMA
AL PADRE DE MI PADRE LO
QUIERO CON TODA MI ALMA
DESDE QUE LO CONOCÍ YO LO
QUIERO LO SIENTO QUE ES
TODO MÍO
Y AUNQUE NUNCA YO LO TUVE
A MI LADO
YA SIENTO QUE ES TODO MÍO

MARIACHI
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY

RENATA
LO LLEVO LO LLEVO DENTRO
MUY ADENTRO DE MI ALMA
PADRE

MARIACHI
AY AY AY AY AY AY AY AY

Cruzar la Cara de la luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon) (2010)



- 2013: Houston revival
 - 2011: Paris
 - 2013: Chicago
 - 2013: San Diego
 - 2014: Arizona Opera
 - 2018: Los Angeles
 - 2018: Houston revival
 - 2018: New York City Opera
 - 2019: Houston Grand Opera offered a prequel to the story, *El Milagro del Recuerdo* (The Miracle of Remembering). It takes place during Christmas in Michoacán, Mexico and offers a look at family and traditions against a backdrop of wanting and dreaming of something more.
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Únicamente la verdad (2010)

Music by Gabriela Ortiz; libretto compiled by Rubén Ortiz Torres [the composer's brother] "from various sources"



- The story of Camelia was first told in the *corrido* "Contrabando y Traición" ("Contraband and Betrayal"). It was made famous by the nortño band Los Tigres del Norte, and it was a big hit in the early 1970s — a totally fictional one, as confirmed by the song's writer, Ángel González.
- Camelia la Tejana and her lover Emilio Varela transport a cache of marijuana to a dark alley in Hollywood, where he tells her she can have her share of the money for a new life while he joins his mistress in San Francisco. She shoots him seven times. The song produced two sequels, and the inevitable movie two sequels more.
- this opera is about mythology and the creation of myths
- When Ortiz and her brother, Rubén Ortiz Torres, researched the story, they were fascinated by the role of newspapers like *Alarma!* in sustaining the myth of a real-life Camelia. "The interesting thing is how the media contributes to form this myth," she says. "So basically, the inspiration of my opera, in terms of the music, comes from that."...The opera, he says, is more about how the media creates a character and makes it look real, and how that character becomes a myth in the popular imagination. And Ortiz knows just how firmly that myth has stuck.

Únicamente la verdad (2010)

Music by Gabriela Ortiz; libretto compiled by Rubén Ortiz Torres [the composer's brother] "from various sources"



- 2008: done at Indiana University
 - first professional performance in Mexico City in 2010
 - 2013: **Long Beach Opera**—the Long Beach production, directed by Mario Espinosa, “spins the fractured facets of Camelia's mirror ball on a high platform surrounding the orchestra, traversed by a structure recalling the international bridges connecting the U.S. and Mexico across the Rio Grande. A stream of evocative video imagery—train tracks, border wire, the zeroes and ones of the digital world—plays out on the surrounding walls.”
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