

Rising Waters
Collective



In Anticipation and Support of the 2026 Currents Festival

SHE CARRIES THE FIRE

Songs of Survival, Freedom, and Resilience

June 27, 2026
ArtLove Salon, Seattle



SHUNPIKE

ARTLOVE
SALON @ CONCRETE ART
FOUNDATION

PROGRAM

Love Let the Wind Cry

Undine Smith Moore/Sappho

Golden Years
from *For a Look or a Touch*

Jake Heggie/Gene Scheer

Els segadors

trad.

Polo
from *Siete canciones populares españolas*

Manuel de Falla

It's the Way of War (Jim's Aria)
from *An American Dream*

Jack Perla/Jessica Murphy Moo

To This We've Come (Magda's Aria)
from *The Consul*

Gian Carlo Menotti

Crudel, perchè finora
from *Le nozze di Figaro*

W.A. Mozart/Lorenzo Da Ponte

(Mariam's Aria)
from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Sheila Silver/Stephen Kitsakos

Judy Blume's Bookstore
from *Songs of Resilience*

Sheila Silver/Stephen Kitsakos

Take What You Need

Reena Esmail

Performers

Julia Benzinger, *mezzo soprano*

Holly Boaz, *soprano*

Anjani Briggs, *soprano*

Elisabeth Ellis, *piano*

Ibidunni Ojikutu, *soprano*

Morgan Smith, *baritone*

NOTES

Welcome and thank you for being here with us to celebrate art, beauty, community, and solidarity through the power of music and the human voice.

Tonight's program opens with Undine Smith Moore's *Love Let the Wind Cry*, a setting of Sappho that places one of history's most ancient surviving voices in the hands of one of America's most important composers. Moore, a Black American composer and educator who spent decades at Virginia State University training generations of musicians, understood that love and beauty are forms of resilience.

Jake Heggie's *Golden Years* is one song from *For a Look or a Touch*, a dramatic song cycle based on the true story of Gad Beck and Manfred Lewin, two gay teenagers whose lives were torn apart by the Holocaust in Berlin. The title refers to the law that allowed police to arrest gay men for nothing more than a look or a touch. We are honored to have it performed here on Pride weekend in the city where this work had its world premiere in 2007, and performed by the baritone who originated the role.

Els Segadors, the Catalan national anthem, began as a seventeenth-century harvest song and became an anthem of resistance during the 1640 Catalan Revolt. It has been banned, suppressed, and sung in defiance ever since. Manuel de Falla's *Polo*, from his *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas*, draws from the deep well of Andalusian Romani flamenco. These are two songs from the Iberian Peninsula that speak directly to survival, and cultural survival through music.

Jack Perla and Jessica Murphy Moo's *It's the Way of War* comes from *An American Dream*, an opera commissioned by Seattle Opera and inspired by true stories from Puget Sound's own history. The opera depicts two intersecting narratives during World War II: a Japanese American family facing incarceration and a German Jewish immigrant preoccupied by those she left behind. It was written here, about here, about what the US government has done and what it is capable of doing again.

Gian Carlo Menotti's *To This We've Come* is Magda's aria from *The Consul*. It was written in 1950 about a woman trapped in the machinery of a totalitarian state, handed from one form to another while her family dies around her. She has run out of patience for a system that runs on paper and produces nothing but grief. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1950 and sadly, it has not aged a day.

Mozart and Da Ponte's *Crudel, perchè finora* is the duet between the Count and Susanna from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The Count believes he is entitled to whatever he wants, including his wife's chambermaid. Susanna has absolutely no intention of giving in to him, and the story of the intelligence and wit she and the other servants deploy to outmaneuver him is credited with helping fan the flames of the French Revolution.

Sheila Silver's *Mariam's Aria* from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Judy Blume's *Bookstore* from the forthcoming *Songs of Resilience* represent two faces of the same composer: one looking at women's lives under oppression abroad, one looking at what is being dismantled here at home. Silver was born in Seattle and we are proud to bring her work home this August.

Reena Esmail's *Take What You Need* closes the evening. It has been performed in jails, shelters, schools, and memorial services. It is offered here in the spirit in which it was written: as a space where a room full of people can turn to one another and remember what we are capable of, together.

Julia Benzinger, Holly Boaz, Lucy Weber, & Ibidunni Ojikutu
Co-Directors, Rising Waters Collective

Love Let the Wind Cry

Undine Smith Moore/Sappho

*Love let the wind cry
On the dark mountain,
Bending the ash trees
And the tall hemlocks
With the great voice of
Thunderous legions,
How I adore thee.*

*Let the hoarse torrent
In the blue canyon,
Murmuring mightily
Out of the gray mist
Of primal chaos
Cease not proclaiming
How I adore thee.*

*Let the long rhythm
Of crunching rollers,
Breaking and bursting
On the white seaboard
Titan and tireless,
Tell, while the world stands,
How I adore thee.*

*Love, let the clear call
Of the tree cricket,
Frailest of creatures,
Green as the young grass,
Mark with his trilling
Resonant bell-note,
How I adore thee.*

*But, more than all sounds,
Surer, serener,
Fuller of passion
And exultation,
Let the hushed whisper
In thine own heart say,
How I adore thee.*

Program Notes

Golden Years

Jake Heegie/Gene Scheer

Wild. Free.
We are wild! We are free!
Topsy turvy, joyful Berlin.

You are free! You are wild!
Topsy turvy child of Berlin.
Golden years. Golden years.

Give me a look or a touch and I'll know.
A wink or a nod or a glance – mm mm –
We don't need words. Just stand very close.
Let's not miss out on a chance for love tonight.

A look or a touch and I'll know you're the one.
A grin or a smile – mm mm
Just for a while, tonight or a lifetime,
Let's not miss out on a chance for love right now.

Dance with me.
This is the Schwanenberg, hottest spot in Berlin. Meet and
greet and eat and cheat and swing.

What a band!
What a crowd at Schwanenberg!
Take my hand, dance all night at Schwanenberg! Let's
have a laugh now. Let's have some fun.
Shout: "Police!"
Then watch 'em pull their skirts up and run!

Everybody's running around. Screaming! Laughing!
Giddy from the joy of this town
And these golden years. Golden years

While we are young, wild and free let's keep dancing.
Let's not miss out on a thing.
And if we should find we're of the same mind,
A look or a touch could lead to a precious night of love.

"Police!"

Els Segdors

Catalunya triomfant,
tornarà a ser rica i plena.
Endarrera aquesta gent
tan ufana i tan superba.

Bon cop de falç,
Bon cop de falç,
Defensors de la terra!
Bon cop de falç!

Ara és hora, segadors.
Ara és hora d'estar alerta.
Per quan vingui un altre juny
esmolem ben bé les eines.

Bon cop de falç,
Bon cop de falç,
Defensors de la terra!
Bon cop de falç!

Polo

¡Ay!
Guardo una,
¡Ay! Guardo una,
¡Ay!
¡Guardo una pena en mi pecho,
¡Guardo una pena en mi pecho,
¡Ay!
Que a nadie se la diré!

Malhaya el amor, malhaya,
Malhaya el amor, malhaya,
¡Ay!
¡Y quien me lo dió a entender!

¡Ay!

trad.

Catalonia triumphant
Will once again be rich and bountiful,
Drive them back, these people
So conceited and so arrogant.

A good blow with the sickle,
A good blow with the sickle,
Defenders of the land!
A good blow with the sickle!

Now is the time, reapers,
Now is the time to be alert.
For when another June comes,
Let us sharpen our tools well.

A good blow with the sickle,
A good blow with the sickle,
Defenders of the land!
A good blow with the sickle!

Manuel de Falla

Ah!
I keep a...
Ah! I hold a,
Ah!
I hold a pain in my chest!
I hold a pain in my breast!
Ah!
that will I tell to no one!

Curse love, curse it,
Curse love, curse it,
Ah!
And [a curse on] whoever made me
feel it!

Ah!

TEXTS

It's the Way of War (Jim's Aria)

Jack Perla/Jessica Murphy Moo

It seems so long ago now, Eva.
It's the way of war.
Time speeds up.
You learn a small part of the truth,
a maze of trenches and tell your men: "Advance!"
open fire!
Or not.

Plant the harvest with a storm in store.
Propose marriage without knowing the way home.
Still, we found our way.
Your father said: "keep her safe!"

I made a promise.
We found our way across the ocean.
The stars, our constant visitors, led us here.

It's the way of war.

I gave her father what we had.
He... He accepted!
You were happy here, Eva!

TEXTS

To This We've Come (Magda's Aria)

Gian Carlo Menotti

To this we've come:

That men withhold the world from men.

No ship nor shore for him who drowns at sea.

No home nor grave for him who dies on land.

To this we've come:

that man be born a stranger upon God's green earth,

that he be chosen without a chance for choice,

that he be hunted without the hope of refuge.

To this we've come, to this we've come:

and you, you, too, shall weep.

If to men, not to God, we now must pray,

tell me, secretary, tell me, who are these men?

Who are these dark archangels?

Will they be conquered? Will they be doomed?

Is there one - anyone behind those doors

to whom the heart can still be explained?

Is there one - anyone who still may care?

Tell me, secretary, tell me, have you ever seen the Consul?

Does he speak, does he breathe?

Have you ever spoken to him?

Papers! Papers! Papers!

But don't you understand?

What shall I tell you to make you understand?

My child is dead.

John's mother is dying...My own life is in danger.

I ask you for help and all you can do is give me... papers.

What is your name?

Magda Sorrel.

Age?

Thirty-three.

Program Notes

TEXTS

Color of eyes? Color of hair?
Single or married? Religion and race?
Place of birth, Father's name, Mother's name?
Papers! Papers! Papers!
Papers, papers, papers, papers, papers, papers!

Look at my eyes, they are afraid to sleep.
Look at my hands, at these old woman's hands.
Why don't you say something?
Aren't you secretaries human beings like us?

What is your name? Magda Sorrel.
Age? Thirty-three.
What will your papers do?
They cannot stop the clock.
They are too thin an armor against a bullet.

What is your name? Magda Sorrel.
Age? Thirty-three.
What does that matter? All that matters is that the time is late,
that I'm afraid and I need your help.

What is your name? What is your name? What is your name?
This is my answer:
My name is woman.
Age: still young.
Color of hair: Gray.
Color of eyes: The color of tears.
Occupation: Waiting. Waiting. Waiting,
waiting, waiting, waiting.

Oh! The day will come, I know
when our hearts aflame will burn your paper chains.
Warn the Consul, secretary, warn him.
That day neither ink nor seal shall cage our souls.
That day will come.
That day will come!

Program Notes

TEXTS

Crudel, perchè finora

IL CONTE

Crudel! Perché finora
farmi languir così?

SUSANNA

Signor, la donna ognora
tempo ha dir di sì.

IL CONTE

Dunque, in giardin verrai?

SUSANNA

Se piace a voi, verrò.

IL CONTE

E non mi mancherai?

SUSANNA

No, non vi mancherò.

IL CONTE

Mi sento dal contento
pieno di gioia il cor.

SUSANNA

Scusatemi se mento,
voi che intendete amor.

How Quietly We Endure (Mariam's Aria)

How quietly we endure all that falls upon us
like snow that drops silently on the people below.

He was not unkind at first,
when the promise of child was so close.

But I could not give him what he wanted,
I could not give him a child.
I could not give him a son.

Program Notes

W.A. Mozart/Lorenzo Da Ponte

THE COUNT

Heartless! Why until now
do you leave me to languish?

SUSANNA

Sir, every lady
has her time to say yes.

THE COUNT

Then you'll come to the garden?

SUSANNA

If it pleases you, I'll come.

THE COUNT

And you won't fail me?

SUSANNA

No, I won't fail you.

THE COUNT

My contented heart
now feels full of joy!

SUSANNA

Forgive me if I am lying,
all you who understand love's ways.

Sheila Silver/Stephen Kitsakos

TEXTS

Allah. Allah. Allah.

Give me a child, someone to love,
someone to love me.

How quietly we endure all that falls upon us
like snow that drops silently on the people below.

Each snowflake is a sigh heaved by a sad woman.
Oh Nana, you told me this a long time ago.
Oh Nane, forgive me. Forgive me, mother.
I miss you.

Judy Blume's Bookstore

Sheila Silver/Stephen Kitsakos

I read about it first on Truth Social,
then Googled it to find out more.
The table in the bookshop with the sign that read:
"We read banned books," in Judy Blume's Bookstore.
That table draped in yellow caution tape,
a hazard I could not ignore.
So I had to see it for myself,
That blasphemous table,
That shameful table with the banderole proclaiming:
"We read banned books."
They sell banned books? in Judy Blume's Bookstore.
So I got in my car in central Florida and
Pumped the pedal 'til "Key West Ahead"
Appeared on a sign, ten miles to go,
To that baby blue dot in the middle of red.
And there it was! Judy Blume's Bookstore!
And there she was! Judy Blume!
Surrounded by tourists and families and schnooks.
Enveloped by fans who were buying her books.
Seducing like a spider setting sights on a fly.
Taking selfies and chatting when she caught my eye.
"I'm a mother," I said, and a "Mom for Liberty" too.
"Likewise," she said. "I'm a mother, too,
and I'm all for liberty, through and through."
"Take a look. See what's on offer.
You won't turn into a pillar of salt!"

Program Notes

TEXTS

And there they were on that table of resistance
Margaret Atwood, Jean Jacques Rousseau,
James Baldwin, the Barenstein Bears,
And lots of covers with a rainbow.
Biographies, fiction, roman a clef.
But when I saw Danielle Steel, Danielle Steel, I
said
What the F!?? (WTF)
The hours went by, I lost track of time.
They were ready to lock the door.
When I realized I had spent the day
Thumbing through books, reading the books,
loving the books on that table of resistance.
And maybe in this instance, tomorrow,
I'd come back for more in
Judy Bloom's Bookstore.

Take What You Need

Take a moment
Take a breath
Take time
Take care

Take heart
Take hope
Take a step
Take a chance

Take courage
Take charge
Take a stand
Take pride

Take joy
Take pause
Take a moment
Take a breath

Take what you need

Program Notes

Reena Esmail (*1983)

**Texts: Isa Upanishad (verses 6-7) and
selections from Kabir (English and Hindi)**

ARTISTS

Julia Benzinger makes opera. She also builds organizations, directs productions, advocates for who gets to stand on the stage and whose stories get told, and is raising three sons in the Pacific Northwest and Barcelona.



In the 2025-2026 season she conceived and directed the *Vox Project* with Rising Waters Collective, a first-of-its-kind opera crawl featuring six unique site-specific interpretations of Poulenc's *La voix humaine* across Seattle in a single day, including a film version released on streaming platforms. This summer, she will be performing **Her** in the North American premiere of *disPLACE*, a contemporary chamber opera addressing displacement and cultural identity, in co-production with Theatre Off Jackson in Seattle's International District.

Over more than twenty years she has performed principal roles on stages across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, including seven seasons as a principal mezzo-soprano at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Her repertoire defies easy categorization, spanning lyric, dramatic, and character mezzo territory into Falcon soprano, from Strauss and Wagner to Britten, Janáček, Bizet, and Fauré. Favorite roles include: **Komponist** (Ariadne auf Naxos), **Mère Marie** (Dialogues des Carmélites), **Mistress Quickly** (Falstaff), **Venus** (Tannhäuser), Kundry (Parsifal), **The Fox** (The Cunning Little Vixen), **Le Prince Charmant** (Cendrillon), **Fricka** (Das Rheingold and Die Walküre), **Erda** (Götterdämmerung), **Zia Principessa** (Suor Angelica), **Zita** (Gianni Schicchi), **Erste Norn** (Die Götterdämmerung), and the title roles in **Carmen**, **Lucretia** (The Rape of Lucretia), **Cassandra** (Gnecchi), **Pénélope** (Fauré), and **Hänsel** (Hänsel und Gretel). Julia divides her time between Bainbridge Island and Barcelona.

Holly Boaz is a performer, educator, and arts leader whose work spans the stage, the classroom, and the heart of her local arts community. Praised by the Seattle Times for her "expertly sung" performances, she has performed over 30 operatic roles across the U.S. and internationally, including engagements with Seattle Opera and England's Aldeburgh Festival.



A dedicated educator, Holly has served on the voice faculty at Pacific Lutheran University for 18 years. She is a frequent adjudicator and clinician for arts organizations throughout the Northwest and holds degrees from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and The Hartt School. Her training includes fellowships and apprenticeships at the Aspen Music Festival, Music Academy of the West, the Britten-Pears Programme, and Seattle Opera Young Artist Program. Recent and upcoming engagements include appearances with the Northwest Sinfonietta, Symphony Tacoma, Drama Dock Theatre Company, the South Sound New Works Festival, Puget Sound Concert Opera, SkyOpera, and Rising Waters Collective.

ARTISTS

Anjani Briggs is an operatic singer based in Bellevue, WA. Anjani received her formal education from Western Washington University (B.M.) and the University of Michigan - School of Music, Theatre, and Dance (M.M). In her youth, she studied Carnatic and Hindustani styles of singing, as well as developed a deep love for both musical theater and jazz.



Some of Anjani's notable roles include **Fiordiligi** in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, **Rosario** in Granados' *Goyescas*, and **Helena** in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Aside from her operatic performances, Anjani has made a number of appearances as a featured soloist in large choral works and is passionate about musical advocacy and helping expand the standard classical music canon through the research, study, and performance of underrepresented artists.

Lorenzo Da Ponte (born March 10, 1749, Ceneda, near Treviso, Veneto [Italy]—died Aug. 17, 1838, New York, N.Y., U.S.) was an Italian poet and librettist best known for his collaboration with Mozart.



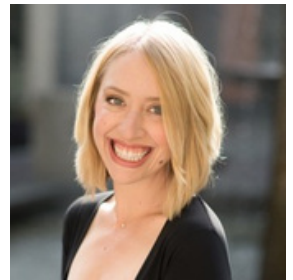
Jewish by birth, Da Ponte was baptized in 1763 and later became a priest; freethinking (expressing doubts about religious doctrine) and his pursuit of an adulterous relationship, however, eventually led, in 1779, to his expulsion from the Venetian state. Taking up residence in Vienna (probably in 1780), he became official poet to the court of Emperor Joseph II and in that capacity wrote successful librettos for numerous musicians. It was there in 1783 that Da Ponte made the acquaintance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and entered upon the finest period of his literary career. Three masterpieces appeared in rapid succession—*Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (1790). During the same period he achieved his greatest popular success with the libretto to Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara* (1787). Da Ponte's enduring merit derived from his ability to infuse borrowed themes with new life and to interweave tragic and comic elements. His version of the Don Juan legend, in particular, exercised a lasting literary influence.

Left without support after Joseph II's death in 1790, Da Ponte resumed his wanderings. After a period in London (1792–1805), he emigrated to the United States to escape his creditors, settling finally in New York, where he devoted himself to teaching Italian language and literature at Columbia College and promoting Italian cultural activities. His four-volume *Memorie* (1823–27; *Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte*), although mainly concerned with portraying the author as a victim of fate and enemies, is valuable for its portrait of early 19th-century America.

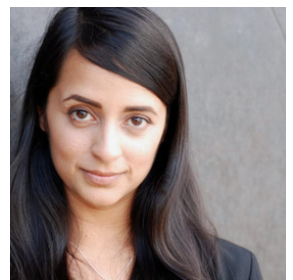
-Britannica

ARTISTS

Elisabeth Ellis After earning her Master's degree in Collaborative Piano from Michigan State University, Elisabeth moved to Seattle in 2011 and quickly became immersed in the local music scene. She has worked with Seattle Opera, the Pacific Northwest Ballet, the 5th Avenue Theatre, many local opera and orchestral groups, and several of the area's top choral groups, including one dear to First Church, the Kirkland Choral Society. Elisabeth serves as a pianist, organist, music leader, audio engineer and video editor, most recently collaborating with local music groups to produce digital concert seasons during the Covid pandemic. She loves filling multiple roles and using her musical talents, creativity and people skills to enrich the musical community in Seattle and beyond.



Reena Esmail's music weaves together the traditions of Hindustani and Western classical music, drawing musicians from many perspectives into shared creative spaces. She divides her attention evenly between orchestral, chamber and choral work. She has written commissions for ensembles including the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Seattle Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony and her music has featured on multiple Grammy-nominated albums, including *The Singing Guitar* by Conspirare, *BRUITS* by Imani Winds, and *Healing Modes* by Brooklyn Rider. Many of her choral works are published by Oxford University Press, and her piece *TaReKiTa* has sold over 100,000 copies worldwide. Her life and music was profiled on Season 3 of PBS Great Performances series *Now Hear This*, as well as *Frame of Mind*, a podcast from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Esmail was the Los Angeles Master Chorale's 2020-2025 Swan Family Artist in Residence, and was Seattle Symphony's 2020-21 Composer-in-Residence. She has been in residence with Tanglewood Music Center (co-Curator – 2023), Spoleto Festival (Chamber Music Composer-in-Residence – 2024) and Marlboro Music Festival (2025 Composer in Residence)

Esmail holds degrees in composition from The Juilliard School (BM'05) and the Yale School of Music (MM'11, MMA'14, DMA'18). Her primary teachers have included Susan Botti, Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Theofanidis, Christopher Rouse and Samuel Adler. She received a Fulbright-Nehru grant to study Hindustani music in India. Her Hindustani music teachers include Srimati Lakshmi Shankar and Gaurav Mazumdar, and she currently studies and collaborates with Saili Oak. Her doctoral thesis, entitled *Finding Common Ground: Uniting Practices in Hindustani and Western Art Musicians* explores the methods and challenges of the collaborative process between Hindustani musicians and Western composers.

ARTISTS

Manuel de Falla was born in Cadiz in 1876 to a Valencian father and Catalan mother. While his family moved to Madrid when he was a teenager, de Falla remained fascinated by the music and culture of his native Andalusia, and in particular that of flamenco. He composed numerous operas and *zarzuelas* and is often cited as one of Spain's most important composers. He dies in exile in Argentina after fleeing Spain in 1939, following Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War.



Stephen Kitsakos is an opera librettist, writer, and theater practitioner. His work in opera includes writing the libretto for *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, adapted from the bestselling novel by Khaled Hosseini (Seattle Opera, Nominee Best New Opera World Premiere International Opera Awards), *The Wooden Sword*, and the opera cantata, *The White Rooster: A Tale of Compassion* for the Smithsonian, all with composer, Sheila Silver. With composer, Martin Hennessy, he wrote the libretto for the opera adaptation of Tomasz Jedrowski's modern LGBT classic, *Swimming in the Dark*, in collaboration with the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, *The Pleasing Recollection*, and the opera-theater monologues, *An Incident in Sutton Square* (Finalist 2023 National Opera Association Chamber Opera Prize), and *The Woman in Penthouse A*.



His work as a writer includes the novel, *The Accidental Pilgrim* (ASD Publishing), and co-editor, with Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, *Key West Noir* for Akashic Books. He has been a contributing writer for *The Sondheim Review* and ABC-CLIO's *Music in American Life*.

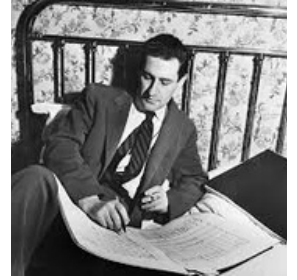
Kitsakos has worked as a Theater director and dramaturg concentrating on developing new works with established and emerging playwrights as well as the experimental one-act plays of Tennessee Williams for the Tennessee Williams Key West Museum.

Kitsakos is the recipient of grants or commissions from the Seattle Opera, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Commission on the Arts, the Florida Council on the Arts, the Catskill Watershed Commission, the Episcopal Diocese of New York, the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, NYFA, the American Opera Project, the Rowe Foundation & the Majors Downs Fund. His Professional affiliations include Opera America, the Dramatists Guild, and ASCAP.

A graduate of New York University & the BMI Musical Theater Workshop, he was a member of the Theatre Arts Faculty at SUNY New Paltz in New York's Hudson Valley from 1999-2013 teaching courses in performance & theater studies. Additional teaching includes work at Shantigar, the spiritual retreat of Jean-Claude van Itallie, Kripalu, The Studios of Key West and UCLA Osher.

ARTISTS

Gian Carlo Menotti became the most-performed contemporary opera composer of his era. He stood alone on the American scene as the first to create American opera with so much appeal to audiences that it became established in permanent repertory. He adapted his natural Italian gift for operatic drama and performance to the requirements of the American stage and changing times. According to fellow composer Ned Rorem: "It is not opinion but fact that Menotti singlehandedly revitalized the concept of living opera for Americans...and violently altered the nature of lyric theater here and, by extension, throughout the world."



Menotti was born in the country town of Cadegliano on Lake Lugano in Italy. At age 10, Menotti wrote his first opera titled *The Death of Pierrot*, though it was never performed professionally. At age 13, when Menotti entered the Milan Conservatory, he had already written a second opera. In 1927, he came to the United States and studied at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Menotti's first full length opera, *The Consul*, considered by many to be his greatest work, opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater March 15, 1950. This searing contemporary work describing the plight of political fugitives vainly trying to escape an unnamed police state but failing to obtain the necessary visa had an eight month run and received the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Award. It has since been translated into 12 languages and performed in more than 20 countries. - The Kennedy Center

In 1904 in the state of Virginia, **Undine Smith Moore** was born to African American parents James William Smith and Hardie Turnbull Smith, whose own parents had been enslaved. The Smiths' lives were filled with music – whether at home or singing in church. According to Helen Walker-Hill's *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music*, Undine once said of her childhood, "above all else, music reigned". Undine trained as a classical pianist, but her heart lay in vocal music. As a composer and arranger, she would go on to write numerous choral works, many of them inspired by African spirituals and folk music.



Moore got her music education at Fisk University and Columbia University. In 1924, at the age of 20, she became the first graduate of Fisk to receive a scholarship to New York's prestigious Juilliard school. Despite her early successes, Moore tragically never thought herself capable of becoming a composer. She once said: "One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of blacks, so that though I have been 'making up' and creating music all my life, in my childhood or even in college I would not have thought of calling myself a composer or aspiring to be one." - Classic FM

ARTISTS

A musical prodigy from the age of six, **W.A. Mozart** is considered by many to be the greatest musician of all time. His legions of works include famous pieces for symphonies and operas, choral and piano; nearly every one is considered a masterpiece of the classical music form.



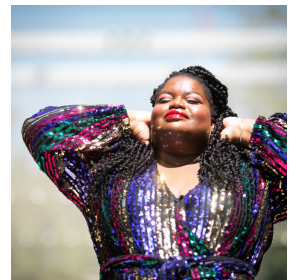
Beginning at age 10, Mozart composed fifty symphonies during his life. In his youth, he was knighted by the Pope and performed for the King and Queen of England. Gifted with “perfect pitch,” Mozart’s inborn abilities as a natural musician became increasingly evident the older he grew. Other seemingly supernatural gifts were equally stunning. It was not uncommon for young Mozart to pick up an instrument and play it without a single lesson.

At twenty-five, Mozart married and settled in his homeland of Austria. Although Emperor Joseph of Austria briefly employed him, Mozart struggled to clothe and feed his family. Ironically enough, the emperor clothed Mozart in fine apparel and bestowed upon him the gift of a large ring to be worn during performances.

Mozart wrote every genre of music known to him, including symphonies, concertos, chamber music, church music, operas, and operettas—most of which are regarded as masterpieces today. Among his most acclaimed works are the operas *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Although Mozart died at the age of thirty-five, his legacy on western music is profound: not just in terms of sheer numbers, but in their emotional impact, his works include the frivolous and lively to the solemn and morose.

-The Kennedy Center

A frequent performer in the Pacific Northwest (and Bellingham High School alum), Soprano **Ibidunni Ojikutu** is known for having a strong foundation in traditional and contemporary repertoire and has studied extensively in both areas. Ms. Ojikutu made her Seattle Opera debut as **Strawberry Woman** in their 2011 production of *Porgy and Bess*. Opera News said of her performance, “Ibidunni Ojikutu's turn as Strawberry Woman was as charming as the lilt in her voice.”



A recipient of the top award in the Seattle Opera Guild Training Grant Competition, Ms. Ojikutu is a teaching and freelance artist with Seattle Opera Outreach and Seattle Opera. Ms. Ojikutu was also pleased to reprise the role of Strawberry Woman in Seattle Opera's 2018 production of *Porgy and Bess* along with making her role debut as **Serena** in the same production. Other Seattle Opera performances include singing the debut of “*Burn*” a new opera created for the Seattle Opera Creation Lab.

Ms. Ojikutu was thrilled to make her debut with Seattle Art Song Society (SASS) as a performer in their Black Voices and Womxn's Voices Concerts. It was also a privilege to be included as a featured artist on Lakewold Garden's "Music From Home" concert series, as well as being a featured performer on Bellingham Symphony Orchestra's “Home For The Holidays” concert.

Ms. Ojikutu's project, *Roar* with collaborative pianist Rebecca Manalac, was a concert of songs of and about women. Featuring the works of Florence Price, Nina Simone, Libby Larsen, and others, *Roar* also featured the west coast premier of “Nobody Knows” with words by Mahze Kane & music by Nailah Nombeko.

Upcoming projects include “*In The Garden of Sonder*”, a film project with Lakewold Garden's Music From Home, a debut with Portland Opera in their upcoming production of Pulitzer-winning *The Central Park Five* and a currently unnamed recording project featuring Libby Larsen's “*Try Me Good King*”. Ms. Ojikutu is also an active adjudicator and masterclass clinician.

ARTISTS

Sappho (born c. 610, Lesbos [Greece]—died c. 570 bce) was a Greek lyric poet greatly admired in all ages for the beauty of her writing style. She ranks with Archilochus and Alcaeus, among Greek poets, for her ability to impress readers with a lively sense of her personality. Her language contains elements from Aeolic vernacular speech and Aeolic poetic tradition, with traces of epic vocabulary familiar to readers of Homer. Her phrasing is concise, direct, and picturesque. She has the ability to stand aloof and judge critically her own ecstasies and grief, and her emotions lose nothing of their force by being recollected in tranquillity.



Her work contains only a few apparent allusions to the political disturbances of the time, which are so frequently reflected in the verse of her contemporary Alcaeus. Her themes are invariably personal—primarily concerned with her thiasos, the usual term (not found in Sappho's extant writings) for the female community, with a religious and educational background, that met under her leadership. Sappho herself attacks in her poems other thiasoi directed by other women.

Frequent images in Sappho's poetry include flowers, bright garlands, naturalistic outdoor scenes, altars smoking with incense, perfumed unguents to sprinkle on the body and bathe the hair—that is, all the elements of Aphrodite's rituals. In the thiasos the girls were educated and initiated into grace and elegance for seduction and love. Singing, dancing, and poetry played a central role in this educational process and other cultural occasions. As was true for other female communities, including the Spartan, and for the corresponding masculine institutions, the practice of homoeroticism within the thiasos played a role in the context of initiation and education. In Sappho's poetry love is passion, an inescapable power that moves at the will of the goddess; it is desire and sensual emotion; it is nostalgia and memory of affections that are now distant, but shared by the community of the thiasos.

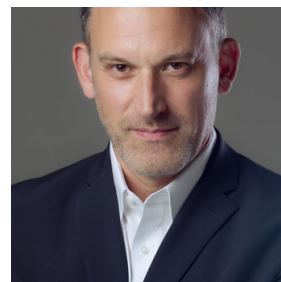
Sheila Silver is an important and vital voice in American music today. Her compositions have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, ensembles, and soloists throughout the world. She has written in a wide range of mediums: from solo instrumental works to large orchestral works; from opera to feature film scores. Her musical language is a unique synthesis of the tonal and atonal worlds, coupled with a rhythmic complexity which is both masterful and compelling. Again and again, audiences and critics praise her music as powerful and emotionally charged, accessible, and masterfully conceived. "Only a few composers in any generation enliven the art form with the musical language and herald new directions in music. Sheila Silver is such a visionary." (Wetterauer Zeitung)



Her opera, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, based on Khaled Hosseini's international best-selling novel, was premiered in 2023 by Seattle Opera to rave reviews and was short-listed for "Best World Premiere" by the International Opera Awards 2023.

ARTISTS

American baritone Morgan Smith is widely admired for the power and beauty of his voice and for dramatic portrayals that bring extraordinary emotional depth to the operatic stage. One of the most prolific interpreters of modern repertoire working today, Morgan has been entrusted with the creation of 17 roles in world premieres, including **Starbuck** in Jake Heggie's widely celebrated *Moby-Dick*, a performance praised for its moral gravity and searing intensity. His commitment to contemporary opera has also included major roles in such works as *The (R)Evolution of Steve Jobs*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Silent Night*, *The Passenger*, *Morning Star*, *Blind Injustice*, and *All Is Calm*, as well as workshops and recording projects for new operas including Kevin Puts' *The Hours*.



Alongside his leadership and advocacy for new works, Morgan has earned consistent acclaim for his interpretation of roles in the core repertoire, including **Scarpia** (Tosca), **Escamillo** (Carmen), the title role in **Don Giovanni**, **Sharpless** (Madama Butterfly), **Count Almaviva** (Le nozze di Figaro), the **Four Villains** (Les contes d'Hoffmann), **Marcello** (La bohème), and the title role in **Eugene Onegin**. Morgan's performances have taken him to leading companies in the United States and abroad, including Seattle Opera, Dallas Opera, Florida Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, LA Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Welsh National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival, Israeli Opera, Houston Grand Opera, the Taiwan National Symphony, and the Berliner Staatsoper. Fully fluent in German, he spent four seasons as a resident artist with Oper Leipzig, singing a wide range of repertoire including: **Figaro** in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, **Billy** in *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, **Papageno** in *Die Zauberflöte*, **Dr. Falke** in *Die Fledermaus*, **Leandre** in *The Love for Three Oranges*, **Whitelaw Savory** in *One Touch of Venus*, **Marcello** in *La bohème*, and **Guglielmo** in *Così fan tutte*.

A frequent concert soloist, Morgan has appeared with orchestras such as the Dallas Symphony, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, performing repertoire ranging from Bach, Handel, and Mozart to Brahms, Vaughan Williams, Sir James MacMillan, and Detlef Glanert. Upcoming engagements include a collaboration with Cristian Macelaru (the new Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony), as soloist in J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

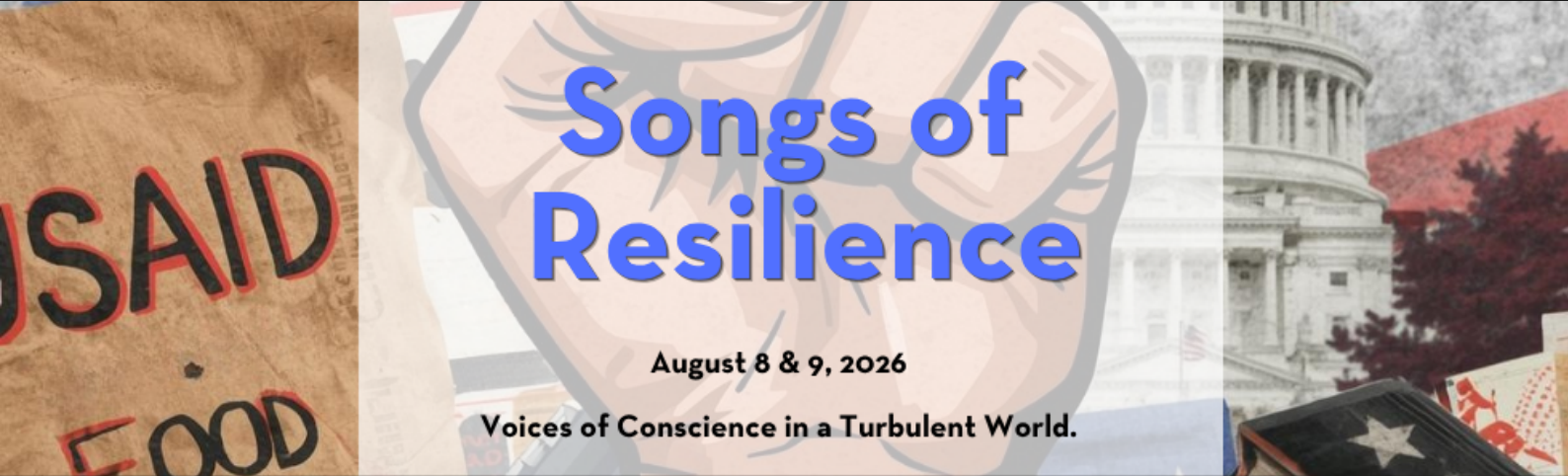
In this current chapter of his career, Morgan has also become an avid songwriter and Executive Producer. He is currently Executive Producing a recording of Jack Perla's opera, *An American Dream* (set for release in Spring of 2027), which tells the story of a Japanese American family torn apart by incarceration during World War II.

FESTIVAL PARTNERS & SPONSORS



2026 Currents Festival

The 2026 Currents Festival marks the close of Rising Waters Collective's boundary-pushing debut season with two landmark premieres: Sheila Silver's *Songs of Resilience* and the North American premiere of *disPLACE*. New music. New voices.



Songs of Resilience

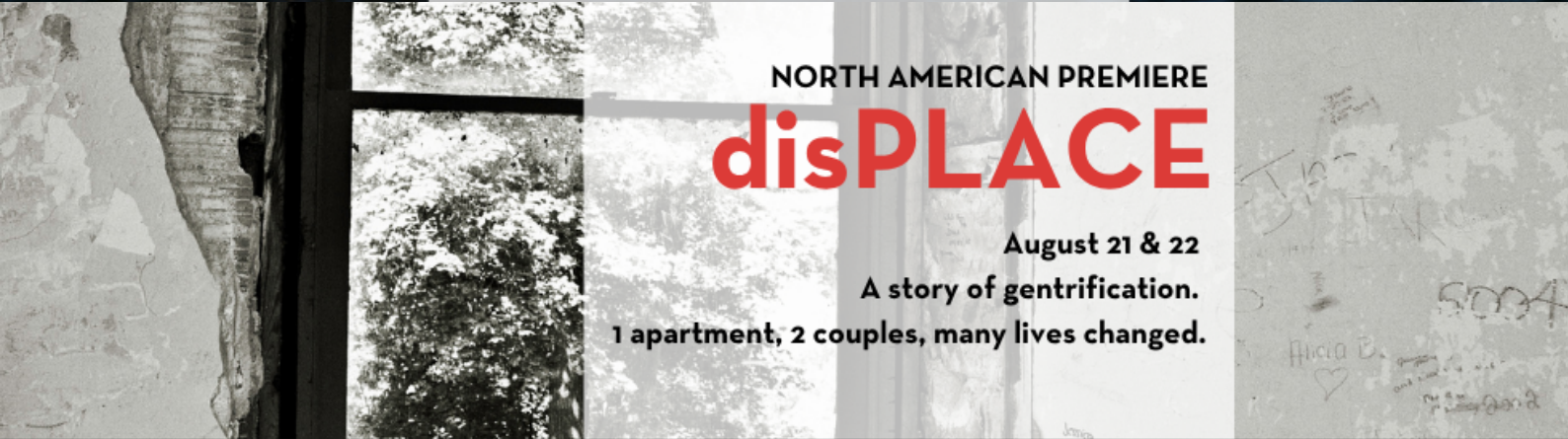
August 8 & 9, 2026

Voices of Conscience in a Turbulent World.



Rising Artists

Showcasing new and emerging
performing artists in the Pacific Northwest.



NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

disPLACE

August 21 & 22

A story of gentrification.

1 apartment, 2 couples, many lives changed.



Rising Waters
Collective



Visit: www.risingwaterscollective.org