



CINCINNATI OPERA  
MEDIA RELEASE

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**Cincinnati Opera launches first-of-its-kind, \$5-million initiative**

**The Black Opera Project**

**Featuring three new operas created by Black artists  
celebrating the Black experience**

**The company also announces the first work  
in The Black Opera Project**

***Lalovavi***

**An Afrofuturist grand opera featuring music by Kevin Day,  
libretto by Tifara Brown, and stage direction and dramaturgy by Kimille  
Howard, premiering at Cincinnati Music Hall on Juneteenth 2025**



As part of The Black Opera Project, Cincinnati Opera will present the world premiere of *Lalovavi* in June 2025, with music by Kevin Day (left), libretto by Tifara Brown (center), and stage direction and dramaturgy by Kimille Howard (right).

*Photos: Day/Sara Bill Photography, Brown/PKT Productions, Howard/Provided*

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CINCINNATI (February 22, 2024)—Cincinnati Opera is pleased to announce the launch of **The Black Opera Project**, a groundbreaking, three-opera commissioning initiative that engages Black creators to develop new works celebrating Black stories.

The first program of its kind, The Black Opera Project seeks to illuminate the resilient spirit and vibrant heritage of the Black American experience. The project is the outgrowth of Cincinnati Opera's previously announced grant from the Mellon Foundation to support the development of three fully staged, full-length operas by creators of color focused on uplifting stories about the Black community. Cincinnati Opera's overall financial commitment toward The Black Opera Project is anticipated to be approximately \$5 million.

“The launch of The Black Opera Project marks the fruition of dreams long held by Black artists like me,” said Morris Robinson, world-renowned bass and Cincinnati Opera artistic advisor. “While I was singing the title role in *Porgy and Bess* in 2019, Cincinnati Opera leaders invited my fellow cast members and me into a conversation about opera’s future. My colleagues and I expressed concern that there were no operas that truly represented the African American culture in a positive, modern, realistic, and contemporaneously relatable way. I asked, ‘When is there going to be an opera that has the same impact on the operatic stage that the movie *Black Panther* had on the big screen?’ We knew there was a critical need to create and develop works that represented the vastness and beauty of the African American experience. We also felt that these new works needed to be composed, written, directed, and conducted by Black people. Cincinnati Opera bought into this vision, fully dedicating themselves to bringing The Black Opera Project to life. I’m excited about what this initiative means both for people of color and for opera fans everywhere who’ll get a chance to see what Black joy looks like on the opera stage. We’re making history and changing our art form for the better.”

Said Evans Mirageas, Cincinnati Opera’s Harry T. Wilks Artistic Director, “We’re thankful for the visionary artists and supporters who challenged us to think differently about the types of narratives we present onstage. The Black Opera Project marks an important next step in our longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion, and we can’t wait to share these inspiring and uplifting stories about the Black community with the world.”

The first new work to be featured as part of The Black Opera Project is *Lalovavi* from two first-time opera creators: award-winning composer Kevin Day (music) and writer and performance poet Tifara Brown (libretto), working in collaboration with acclaimed stage director and dramaturg Kimille Howard. *Lalovavi* will premiere on Juneteenth 2025 (Thursday, June 19, 2025) as part of Cincinnati Opera’s 2025 Summer Festival and is made possible in part by lead funding from the David C. Herriman Fund of Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

*Lalovavi* is anticipated to be the first grand opera on an Afrofuturist theme—a large-scale work in three acts for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Set in the year 2119, the opera follows the journey of Persephone, the youngest teenage daughter of the Primus of Atlas, formerly the city of Atlanta. Currency and status in Atlas are determined based on the presence of Syndicus, a rare gene that promotes vitality and longevity. When Persephone is found to possess this gene, she is betrayed by her family and must run for her life. She is thrust into an epic adventure, uncovering a hidden past that leads her to discover love’s true meaning and the power to determine her own destiny.

Written primarily in English, *Lalovavi* will also be the first opera to incorporate songs and poetry written in Tut, a language that is indigenous to Black Americans and passed down from their enslaved ancestors, who developed Tut as a mechanism for learning how to read and write when it was illegal for them to do so. The title of the opera, “lalovavi,” is the Tut word for “love.”

“I’m grateful to Cincinnati Opera for believing so fully in this work and giving Tifara and me the space to be our authentic selves,” said Kevin Day. “Black voices need more positive representation in the arts. My wish for *Lalovavi* is that it offers a fresh perspective on what Black opera represents and that it inspires both the young and old to dream, envisioning their own stories and what’s possible in the future of Black art.”

“*Lalovavi* is the culmination of a lifetime of people, poems, and stories that have influenced the woman and writer I am today,” said Tifara Brown. “My joy in this project is our ability to imagine what is possible, not only for the Black community but for our world as a whole. This project truly has been a labor of love as we’ve created a family show that promotes healing, hope, and joy for all who see it. Often the way Black people are depicted in stories can leave us feeling depressed and pessimistic about the future. We have worked together to show our community the way we see them: triumphant, powerful people who do have hope for what’s to come.”

Said Mirageas, “Kevin and Tifara have created a fantastical new world filled with vividly drawn characters, a thrilling journey, and at its heart, a relatable sense of yearning and optimism for the future. Their perspectives and voices are incredibly exciting additions to our art form, and we’re galvanized by the opportunity to present their first fully staged opera at Music Hall.”

*Lalovavi* will run for two performances on June 19 and 21, 2025, at Cincinnati Music Hall (1241 Elm Street, Cincinnati, OH), featuring scenic design by Lawrence E. Moten III, costume design by Kara Harmon, and lighting design by Thomas C. Hase, with Kevin Miller conducting the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

The second opera in The Black Opera Project will receive its world premiere during Cincinnati Opera’s 2026 Summer Festival and will be based on the life of Congressman John Lewis, featuring music by Maria Thompson Corley, libretto by Diana Solomon Glover, and stage direction by Timothy Douglas; full details, along with the third work in The Black Opera Project, will be announced at a later date.

For more information about The Black Opera Project and *Lalovavi*, visit [cincinnatiopera.org](http://cincinnatiopera.org).

### **About Kevin Day, Composer**

Kevin Day is an internationally acclaimed composer, conductor, and jazz pianist based in San Diego, California. Known for his exuberant, introspective, and groove-oriented composition style, Day’s music fuses genres such as jazz, contemporary classical, R&B, soul, and more. Day has composed more than 250 works which have been performed by some of the world’s top instrumental soloists, wind bands, chamber ensembles, and symphony orchestras throughout the United States, Canada, Austria, Taiwan, South Africa, Australia, and Japan. He is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship for Music Composition, a winner of the BMI Composer Award, a three-time ASCAP Morton Gould Finalist, a finalist for the ABA Sousa-Oswald Award, and a finalist for the NBA Revelli Award. His most recent works include his acclaimed “Concerto for Wind Ensemble,” as well as a double concerto for trombone and piano entitled “Departures,” soon to be premiered by Robert Spano and the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra with soloists Peter Steiner and Constanze Hochwarnter. Originally from Arlington, Texas, Day holds degrees from Texas Christian University (TCU) and the University of Georgia, and he is completing his doctorate in composition from the University of Miami Frost School of Music. He has studied composition with Gabriela Lena Frank, Dorothy Hindman, Charles Norman Mason, Peter Van Zandt Lane, Emily Koh, and Neil Anderson-Himmelspach. *Lalovavi* is Day’s first opera. To learn more, visit [kevindaymusic.com](http://kevindaymusic.com).

### **About Tifara Brown, Librettist**

Tifara Brown is a writer, performance poet, oral historian, and activist with roots in Southern Georgia, who has built a personal brand on the advancement of Black American history, cultural preservation, and community relations. Her poems have been published in *Quartz Literary*, *Wingless Dreamer Publisher*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Minerva Rising Press*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *Main Street Rag Publishing Company*, *Club Plum*, and *Words and Whispers*. In response to the flood of protests and organizing in 2020 through the George Floyd social movement, she published *Honeysuckle: Poems and Stories from a Black Southerner*, a memorial story to one of her ancestors who fell as a victim of racial violence in the late 1950s. She was the inaugural fellow at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping and Training Centre in Ghana, where she executed gender policy projects, studied peacebuilding, and facilitated workshops. She has also partnered with the Irish government and Peaceful Schools International to conduct seminars promoting justice and conflict resolution for students in Northern Ireland. Brown is an upcoming Centrum artist-in-residence, receiving a fellowship through the “In the Making” residency program at Fort Worden (Port Townsend, Washington). She has also been accepted as a 2024 Writing Fellow of the DEEP Center in Savannah, Georgia, where she will be part of the Young Author Project teaching middle school students writing skills. *Lalovavi* is Brown’s first opera. To learn more, visit [tifarabrown.com](http://tifarabrown.com).

### **About Kimille Howard, Stage Director and Dramaturg**

Kimille Howard is a New York-based director, deviser, writer, and filmmaker. Currently, she leads as the appointed artistic director of the Lucille Lortel Theatre's NYC Public High School Playwriting Fellowship, a co-founder of the Black Classical Music Archive, and the new co-captain of programming and production for The Fled Collective. Howard was awarded Best Director at the 2016 Thespis Festival for *It's All About Lorrie* by Joseph Krawczyk (Hudson Theater), which received a commercial run at the American Theater of Actors in 2017. She is a current member of The New Georges Jam, a participant in New York Stage and Film's inaugural NYSAF NEXUS project, and a former resident director at the Flea Theater. She was the series producer for American Opera Project's first season of Music as the Message. Engagements this season include heading the New Works Collective over multiple periods with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, a workshop of the new musical *Influence Her*, *Sanctuary Road* with Virginia Opera, *The Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson* with Pittsburgh Opera and Opera Carolina, and the world premiere of *Two Corners*, a new opera from composer B.E. Boykin, commissioned and presented by Finger Lakes Opera. Recent engagements have included directing *L'italiana in Algeri* with Tulsa Opera, the revival of *The Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson* with the Washington National Opera, *Plantation Black* with Playwrights Horizons, *Honey and Leon* at Theatre Row, *Songs in Flight* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Sparks & Wiry Cries, and *On the Town* for Montclair State University, as well as returning as assistant director at the Metropolitan Opera for both *Champion* and *The Magic Flute*. To learn more, visit [kimillehoward.com](http://kimillehoward.com).

### **About Cincinnati Opera**

Cincinnati Opera's mission is to enrich and connect our community through diverse opera experiences. Founded in 1920 and the second-oldest opera company in the nation, Cincinnati Opera presents a thrilling season of grand opera every summer and engaging programs throughout the year. The company's repertoire includes beloved classics and contemporary masterworks brought to life by some of the world's most dynamic performers and creative artists.

Cincinnati Opera is supported by the generosity of tens of thousands of contributors to the ArtsWave Community Campaign. Lead funder of *Lalovavi* is the David C. Herriman Fund of Greater Cincinnati Foundation. Additional funding for The Black Opera Project has been provided by the Mellon Foundation. This project was supported in part by the Ohio Arts Council, which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. Cincinnati Opera also receives general season support from The Louise Dieterle Nippert Musical Arts Fund, Patricia A. Corbett Estate and Trust, and the Harry T. Wilks Family Foundation, along with general season and project support from many other generous individuals, corporations, and foundations. Cincinnati Opera is a proud member of OPERA America. Learn more at [cincinnatiopera.org](http://cincinnatiopera.org).

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#### **RESOURCES:**

[High-resolution images and bios are available for download here.](#)