

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 10, 2017

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**Washington National Opera
presents
Verdi's epic masterpiece**

Aida

**Francesca Zambello's visionary new production features
conceptual artwork by acclaimed street artist RETNA
and choreography by contemporary dance icon Jessica Lang**

**September 9–23, 2017
in the Kennedy Center Opera House**

**Performance on Saturday, September 23 will be simulcast free
to Nationals Park as part of Mars Incorporated *Opera in the Outfield***

**Exhibition of RETNA's large-scale, hieroglyphic-inspired art created
for the Kennedy Center on view August 14–September 24, 2017**

(WASHINGTON)—Washington National Opera (WNO) opens its 2017–2018 season with a new production of Verdi's grand Egyptian epic [Aida](#), September 9–23, 2017, in the Kennedy Center Opera House. In this majestically scaled but intimate love story, a captive princess must choose between her patriotic duty and her love for an enemy military hero. This bold new WNO production, directed by WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, is inspired by the street artist RETNA, whose work uses calligraphy, hieroglyphics, and striking colors and shapes to evoke a mythic past with a modern edge. Jessica Lang, one of the most celebrated choreographers in contemporary dance, creates the stunning choreography for members of her Jessica

~ more ~

Lang Dance company. Evan Rogister, who most recently conducted a fiery run of *Carmen* to open WNO's 2015–2016 season, returns to lead the WNO Orchestra in interpreting Verdi's enduring score. The Saturday, September 23 performance will be simulcast free to thousands of fans at Nationals Park as part of Mars Incorporated *Opera in the Outfield*.

The timeless conflict of duty versus desire rises like a pyramid in Verdi's towering drama of passionate love, thundering vengeance, and heartbreaking sacrifice. *Aida*, a young woman enslaved by the Egyptians, harbors secret feelings for military hero Radamès. Unbeknownst to her captors, she's also an Ethiopian princess and daughter of their sworn enemy. Torn between love and loyalty to her people, *Aida* must make an impossible choice—all as the King of Egypt's own daughter Amneris desperately seeks the affections of Radamès for herself. One of the most beloved operas in the repertory, *Aida* features such famous arias as "Celeste Aida," "Ritorna vincitor," and "O patria mia," along with intimate duets, extended dance sequences, and a grand Triumphal Scene, during which more than 115 people are on stage.

RETNA, born Marquis Duriel Lewis, created the original sketches and concept design from which the production draws its vision. RETNA is best known for his expansive murals and paintings on canvas that employ an intricate system of hieroglyphic calligraphy. These works draw their influence from Arabic, Egyptian, Hebrew, Old English, and Native American typographies. His totemic symbologies reflect both his upbringing in urban Los Angeles and a consideration of his rich cultural heritage. Some of RETNA's diverse commercial projects include the cover of Justin Bieber's *Purpose* album (2015) and collaborations with Nike, Louis Vuitton, and VistaJet. *Aida* is RETNA's first opera. "Having my artwork, much of which is based on the structure of Egyptian hieroglyphics, used for *Aida* turned my entire concept of my career full circle, marking a milestone in my artistic and spiritual development," says RETNA.

To celebrate his designs for *Aida*, WNO presents an exhibition of RETNA's large-scale work. [The exhibition](#), on view August 14–September 24, 2017, includes a display on the windows flanking the bust of President Kennedy in the Kennedy Center Grand Foyer

and a new monumental mural painted on site in the Hall of Nations. For more information, see page 6 of this press release.

Jessica Lang, founder and artistic director of Jessica Lang Dance, brings her unique contemporary dance sensibility to *Aida*, creating stunning choreography for some of the opera's most spectacular scenes. Lang has created more than 95 new works since 1999, including for the National Symphony Orchestra's NEW MOVES: symphony + dance festival in 2014. Lang's prior work in opera includes an acclaimed production of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* at The Glimmerglass Festival in 2013.

The international cast of *Aida* includes many returning favorites as well as several important artists making their WNO debuts. Sharing the title role are two blazing sopranos returning to the WNO stage: Tamara Wilson, the 2016 Richard Tucker Award winner last seen at WNO in 2010's *Un ballo in maschera*, who has performed the role of Aida around the world, including at the Metropolitan Opera; and Leah Crocetto, a major star on the rise who sang the role at this production's premiere in San Francisco in 2016 and made her WNO debut as Madame Lidoine in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* in 2015. Performing as Aida's rival Amneris are two celebrated Russian mezzo-sopranos, each making their WNO debuts: Ekaterina Semenchuk, who sang the role to great acclaim at this production's premiere in San Francisco in 2016, and Marina Prudenskaya, who has won praise for her roles in Verdi and Wagner at many of the world's leading opera houses. Sharing the role of the noble captain Radamès are South Korean tenor Yonghoon Lee, a star at the Met in leading Verdi roles who makes both his WNO and role debuts in this production; and Carl Tanner, last seen at WNO as Captain Ahab in 2014's *Moby-Dick*, and well-known for his portrayal of Radamès at the Met, Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Colorado, and Wolf Trap Opera.

Also in the cast are baritone Gordon Hawkins, who was memorable as Alberich in WNO's *Ring* cycle in 2016, as Aida's father Amonasro; bass Morris Robinson, an unforgettable Joe in 2013's *Show Boat*, as the high priest Ramfis; former Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist and rising star bass Soloman Howard as the King of Egypt, the role of his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2014; soprano Madison Leonard, a new member of

WNO's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, as the High Priestess; and current Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Frederick Ballentine as the Messenger.

The creative team includes associate director E. Loren Meeker, set designer Michael Yeargan, costume designer Anita Yavich, lighting designer Mark McCullough, and hair and makeup designer David C. Zimmerman in his WNO debut.

WNO continues its partnership with the Washington Nationals with the Mars Incorporated *Opera in the Outfield* presentation of *Aida* on Saturday, September 23, 2017, at Nationals Park. Gates open at 5 p.m. for "pregame" activities for the entire family, including a meet-and-greet with M&M'S® spokesperson Ms. Brown, a musical instrument "petting zoo," a costume trunk and face painting play area, chances to win prizes from M&M'S® Chocolate Candies and the Kennedy Center, and more. The opera is broadcast live from the Kennedy Center Opera House to the high-definition NatsHD scoreboard at the ballpark at 7 p.m. Free seating is available on the outfield grass and in the stands. The event takes place rain or shine—in case of inclement weather, some covered seating is available. More information about Mars Incorporated *Opera in the Outfield* is at OperaintheOutfield.org.

Aida—a new co-production with San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, and Minnesota Opera—opens on Saturday, September 9, 2017 at 7 p.m. in the Kennedy Center Opera House and runs for nine performances, including September 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, and 23. The opera's running time is approximately three hours, including one intermission. *Aida* is performed in Italian with projected English titles. Visit WNO's [website](#) for complete production details and casting information.

Washington National Opera's 2017–2018 season continues with the company premiere of Handel's magical baroque opera *Alcina*, Verdi's soaring drama *Don Carlo*, Rossini's delightful comedy *The Barber of Seville*, and Bernstein's biting satire *Candide*. The season also features a festival weekend of four world premieres as part of the American Opera Initiative, the return of the holiday family opera *The Little Prince*, two special Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist performances, and more. [Subscription packages](#) and [single tickets](#) are available now.

Aida Production Information

Music by Giuseppe Verdi ▪ Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni

New Co-Production with San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, and Minnesota Opera

Performed in Italian with Projected English Titles

September 9, 10m, 13, 15, 16, 17m, 18, 21, and 23, 2017

Cast and Creative Team

Aida	Tamara Wilson (9/9, 13, 16, 18, 21, and 23)	Conductor	Evan Rogister
		Director	Francesca Zambello
	Leah Crocetto (9/10, 15, and 17)	Original Sketches and Concept Design	RETNA *
Amneris	Ekaterina Semenchuk * (9/9, 13, 16, 18, and 23)	Associate Director	E. Loren Meeker
		Set Designer	Michael Yeargan
	Marina Prudenskaya * (9/10, 15, 17, and 21)	Costume Designer	Anita Yavich
Radamès		Lighting Designer	Mark McCullough
	Yonghoon Lee * (9/9, 13, 16, 18, 21, and 23)	Hair and Makeup Designer	David C. Zimmerman *
	Carl Tanner (9/10, 15, and 17)	Choreographer	Jessica Lang *
Amonasro	Gordon Hawkins	Assistant Choreographer	Claudia McDonald *
Ramfis	Morris Robinson	Assistant Director	Sara Widzer
King of Egypt	Soloman Howard ±	Stage Manager	Lynn Krynicki
High Priestess	Madison Leonard * ‡		
Messenger	Frederick Ballentine ‡		
Principal Dancers	Patrick Coker *, Julie King *, John Harnage *, Eve Jacobs *, Milan Misko *, Kana Kimura *, Thomas Ragland *, Rachel Secrest *, and Jammie Walker *		

* Washington National Opera Debut

± Alumnus of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program

‡ Current member of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program

Aida Performance and Ticket Information

Saturday, September 9 at 7 p.m. ▪ Sunday, September 10 at 2 p.m.
Wednesday, September 13 at 7:30 p.m. ▪ Friday, September 15 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, September 16 at 7 p.m. ▪ Sunday, September 17 at 2 p.m.
Monday, September 18 at 7 p.m. ▪ Thursday, September 21 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, September 23 at 7 p.m.

Tickets start at \$25 and are available [online](#), in person at the Kennedy Center Box Office, and by calling (202) 467-4600 or (800) 444-1324. For all other ticket-related customer service inquiries, call the Advance Sales Box Office at (202) 416-8540.

Aida Related Programs and Events

RETNA Exhibition, August 14–September 24, 2017

Kennedy Center Grand Foyer and Hall of Nations

The visionary artist behind the concept design for *Aida* presents a free site-specific exhibition featuring newly created works using his signature calligraphy-inspired technique, which evokes ancient hieroglyphics within the context of modern street art. A large-scale installation of RETNA's work adorns four of the Kennedy Center's floor-to-ceiling windows flanking the iconic bust of President Kennedy in the Grand Foyer, executed using removable vinyl decals. A new monumental mural, painted across five separate 10 x 16 foot temporary walls, is on view in the Hall of Nations.

Musical Preview: WNO's new productions of *Aida* and *Alcina*

Tuesday, September 5 at 6 p.m., Kennedy Center Millennium Stage

Enjoy a free preview of musical highlights from WNO's two blockbuster fall productions of *Aida* (September 9–23 in the Opera House) and *Alcina* (November 4–19 in the Eisenhower Theater), featuring members of WNO's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and other artists from the productions.

***The Making of Aida*, Thursday, September 7 at 5:30 p.m.**

Kennedy Center Atrium

Join WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello along with other members of the creative team of *Aida* for a discussion about bringing this new WNO production to the stage. Ticket holders to this event are also invited to observe the evening's orchestra technical rehearsal of *Aida* for an inside look at the process. The rehearsal begins at 7 p.m. and patrons must present the ticket stub from *The Making of Aida* in order to attend.

Washington National Opera's *Aida* in Context

Friday, September 8 at 6:30 p.m., Embassy of Italy, 3000 Whitehaven St., N.W.

Presented by WNO and the Italian Cultural Institute. Join associate director E. Loren Meeker, conductor Evan Rogister, and other special guests for a program of discussion and music that explores Verdi's epic drama. Admission is free but reservations are required. Visit the website of the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) for more information and reservations.

Opera Insights before every performance, Kennedy Center Opera House

WNO presents a free pre-performance education event prior to every performance of *Aida*. These events begin one hour prior to curtain in the Opera House and last approximately 20–25 minutes. (The *O-Zone* lecture with musicologist Saul Lilienstein on Wednesday, September 13 begins at 6:15 p.m. and lasts approximately 45 minutes.)

Saturday, September 9 at 6 p.m.: Colin Michael Brush, Artistic Associate

Sunday, September 10 at 1 p.m.: Robert Ainsley, Director of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and the American Opera Initiative

Wednesday, September 13 at 6:15 p.m.: *O-Zone* lecture with Saul Lilienstein

Friday, September 15 at 6:30 p.m.: Colin Michael Brush, WNO Artistic Associate

Saturday, September 16 at 6 p.m.: Robert Ainsley, Director of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and the American Opera Initiative

Sunday, September 17 at 1 p.m.: Robert Ainsley, Director of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and the American Opera Initiative

Monday, September 18 at 6 p.m.: Robert Ainsley, Director of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and the American Opera Initiative

Thursday, September 21 at 6:30 p.m.: Colin Michael Brush, WNO Artistic Associate

Saturday, September 23 at 6 p.m.: Colin Michael Brush, WNO Artistic Associate

Artist Q&As: *Aida*

Immediately following the performances on Sunday, September 10;

Sunday, September 17; and Monday, September 18

Kennedy Center Opera House

Join WNO artistic staff for a wide-ranging discussion with the artists of the production. These events are free to patrons presenting a ticket from any performance of *Aida*.

ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, the company presents a diverse season of grand opera—including both classics from the repertory and more contemporary pieces—plus several newly commissioned American works and a variety of special concerts and events. The WNO Orchestra is led by Music Director Philippe Auguin. Founded in 1956 and an affiliate of the Kennedy Center since 2011, WNO has a storied legacy of world premieres, new productions, international tours, live recordings and radio broadcasts, and innovative education and community-engagement programs. Throughout its history, WNO has been led by titans in the opera field, including the legendary Plácido Domingo, who headed the company from 1996 to 2011.

WNO contributes to the future of opera through two signature artist-development programs. The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, soon to begin its 16th season, has become one of the nation's most competitive and comprehensive professional training programs for young singers

and collaborative pianists. Alumni of the program have won major competitions and gone on to successful careers at major opera houses in the U.S. and abroad. The WNO Opera Institute nurtures the ambitions of high-school-age singers from across the nation during an intensive three-week summer program held at American University in Washington.

Among the company's most successful recent programs is the 2012 launch of the American Opera Initiative, a comprehensive commissioning program that works to expand the American operatic repertory, to give WNO's young artists the chance to collaborate with living composers and librettists on new works, and to make American opera more relevant to 21st-century audiences. The most popular of WNO's community-engagement programs is M&M'S® *Opera in the Outfield*, during which an opera is broadcast live from the Kennedy Center Opera House stage to the high-definition scoreboard at Nationals Park. The company's other education programs include the *Kids Create Opera* program at local elementary schools, Look-In performances for students in grades 4–8, and the Student Dress Rehearsal Program for middle and high school students. The company also offers free Opera Insights programs before every performance in the Opera House.

Discover [Washington National Opera](#) on social media:



#AidaDC

ABOUT MARS, INCORPORATED

Mars is a family-owned business with more than a century of history making diverse products and offering services for people and the pets people love. With almost \$35 billion in sales, the company is a global business that produces some of the world's best-loved brands: M&M's®, SNICKERS®, TWIX®, MILKY WAY®, DOVE®, PEDIGREE®, ROYAL CANIN®, WHISKAS®, EXTRA®, ORBIT®, 5™, SKITTLES®, UNCLE BEN'S®, MARS DRINKS, and COCOAVIA®. Mars also provides veterinary health services that include BANFIELD® Pet Hospitals. Headquartered in McLean, Virginia, Mars operates in more than 80 countries. The Mars Five Principles—Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, Efficiency, and Freedom—inspire its more than 85,000 Associates to create value for all its partners and deliver growth they are proud of every day.

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FUNDING CREDITS

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Mars Incorporated *Opera in the Outfield* is brought to you by the M&M'S® Chocolate Candies and AMERICAN HERITAGE® Chocolate Brands; Louise Austin Remmey Trust, by JD Katz, P.C.; and the Washington Nationals.

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TICKETS & INFORMATION

(202) 467-4600; (800) 444-1324
www.kennedy-center.org/wno