



Washington National Opera
The Kennedy Center

Timothy O'Leary
General Director

Francesca Zambello
Artistic Director

Press Release
November 13, 2018

Washington National Opera presents

The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me

The holiday-themed opera by Jeanine Tesori and J.D. McClatchy returns to the Kennedy Center for the whole family to enjoy

WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello brings Jeanette Winterson's classic children's book to vibrant life in a revival production

**December 14–16, 2018
in the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.)—Washington National Opera (WNO) continues its annual holiday family opera tradition with *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*, December 14–16, 2018, in the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater. Based on Jeanette Winterson's award-winning children's book which tells the Nativity story from the donkey's point of view, [*The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*](#) features music by Tony®-award winning composer Jeanine Tesori (*Fun Home*) and a libretto by the late poet J.D. "Sandy" McClatchy. These performances star current and former members of WNO's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program.

This production of *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me* offers extra opportunities to enhance the whole family's magical experience, including a special sensory-friendly performance on Saturday, December 15 at 2 p.m. Prior to each performance, there will be a "touch cart" in the lobby where audience members will have the opportunity to see and feel costumes and props featured in the opera. A meet-and-greet with photo opportunities featuring some of the characters in costume follows the weekend matinees on Saturday, December 15 and Sunday, December 16, in the Terrace Gallery.

As the holiday season approaches, an Angel is interviewing all the animals in the community to handle an important job—leading Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. From cats and dogs, hippos and horses to oxen and sheep, the final three candidates are chosen: the Lion, the fearful ruler of the jungle; the Unicorn, a graceful steed; and the Donkey, small and unremarkable. *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me* celebrates the underdog and champions the humble as the Donkey is chosen for his sturdy back and sensible ways. While following a starlit sky, the Donkey soon discovers that miracles can happen anywhere—and that no one should be underestimated.

One of the title roles is being performed by the former Young Artist who originated the role: [Soloman Howard](#) (Lion / Butcher 2) is a native of Washington D.C. whose star has been on the rise since graduating WNO's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program in 2014. Most recently, he starred in *Turandot* at San Francisco Opera and *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera. New to this production is the use of a girl soprano, as well as a boy soprano, who will alternate in the role of the Angel. That role is sung by Kylee Geraci of Alexandria, Virginia, who is making her WNO debut, and by “veteran” of the WNO Children's Chorus Holden Browne of Springfield, Virginia, who made his debut last year in WNO's *The Little Prince*.

The cast also includes current Young Artists, including [Alexandra Nowakowski](#), [Alexander McKissick](#), [Hannah Hagerty](#), [Joshua Conyers](#), [Marlen Nahhas](#), [Eliza Bonet](#), [Joshua Blue](#), [Samson McCrady](#), and [Samuel Weiser](#), and features WNO's Children's Chorus, made up of 16 D.C.-area youth, under the direction of chorus master Steven Gathman.

This production is directed by WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, who premiered the work at the Kennedy Center in 2013. Zambello has a long history of bringing works for children and families to the stage, including the world premieres of Rachel Portman and Nicholas Wright's *The Little Prince* at Houston Grand Opera (later televised as part of PBS's *Great Performances*), Ben Moore and Kelley Rourke's *Robin Hood* and *The Odyssey* at The Glimmerglass Festival, and Rachel Portman and Donna di Novelli's *Little House on the Prairie* at Guthrie Theater, as well as the 2008 Broadway musical *The Little Mermaid*.

Conducted by James Lowe (Broadway's *Les Misérables* and *Anything Goes*), the production team also includes set designer Michael Yeorgan (WNO's *Ring Cycle*, Tony® winner for Broadway's *The*

Light in the Piazza), costume designer Erik Teague (The Glimmerglass Festival's *The Flying Dutchman*), lighting designer Mark McCullough (WNO's *Show Boat* and *Ring Cycle*), and associate director/choreographer Eric Sean Fogel (WNO's *Candide*).

American composer Jeanine Tesori is known for her award-winning musical theater scores, including five Tony® nominations for *Fun Home*; *Shrek The Musical*; *Caroline, or Change*; *Thoroughly Modern Millie*; and *Twelfth Night*. This past summer her musical with David Henry Hwang *Soft Power* earned rave reviews during its world premiere in Los Angeles. Her first opera, *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck*, with a libretto by Tony Kushner, had its world premiere at The Glimmerglass Festival in 2011. Recently, Tesori was announced as one of the first female composers to receive a Metropolitan Opera commission for her forthcoming work entitled *Grounded*.

Over a 20-year career, librettist J.D. "Sandy" McClatchy was a prize-winning American poet and literary critic. His opera libretti included William Schuman's *A Question of Taste*; Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*; Lorin Maazel's 1984, co-written with Thomas Meehan; and Elliot Goldenthal's *Grendel*, co-written with Julie Taymor. He was also the editor and translator of the highly praised *Seven Mozart Librettos: A Verse Translation*, published by W.W. Norton in 2010. McClatchy passed away in April 2018.

Washington National Opera's 2018–2019 season continues with Tchaikovsky's epic *Eugene Onegin* (March 9–29, 2019); Gounod's devilishly entertaining *Faust* (March 16–30, 2019); and Puccini's towering masterpiece *Tosca* (May 11–25, 2019). The season also features new works to premiere during the American Opera Initiative Festival (January 11–13, 2019); a special Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist performance *A Concert of Comic Masterpieces* (May 24, 2019); and other exciting vocal events. [Tickets](#) are available now.

The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me Performance and Ticket Information

Friday, December 14 at 7:30 p.m. ▪ Saturday, December 15 at 2 p.m.
Saturday, December 15 at 7:30 p.m. ▪ Sunday, December 16 at 2 p.m.
Sunday, December 16 at 7:30 p.m.

Ticket Information

Tickets start at \$49 and are available [online](#), in person at the Kennedy Center Box Office, and by calling (202) 467-4600 or (800) 444-1324. Groups of 10 or more receive discounts up to 15% for *The Lion, the*

Unicorn, and Me purchases. For all other ticket-related customer service inquiries, call the Advance Sales Box Office at (202) 416-8540.

Patrons 30 and under and active-duty members of the military are invited to join the Kennedy Center's *MyTix* program for special discount offers and chances to win free tickets. *MyTix* discounts will be available for select performance of *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me*. For more information, visit kennedy-center.org/mytix

The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me Production Information

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Libretto by J.D. McClatchy

Based on the book by Jeanette Winterson

In English with projected English titles.

This production of *The Lion, the Unicorn, and Me* is a revival of WNO's 2013 world premiere.

Cast and Creative Team

Angel	Holden Browne / Kylee Geraci *	Conductor	James Lowe
		Director	Francesca Zambello
Mary / Carmen	Hannah Hagerty ‡	Associate Director & Choreographer	Eric Sean Fogel
Joseph / Stagehand	Alexander McKissick ‡	Set Designer	Michael Yeargan
Cat / Brother 1 / Silk Merchant 2	Eliza Bonet ‡	Costume Designer	Erik Teague
Hippo / Holy Man / Dog / Water Seller	Joshua Blue ‡	Lighting Designer	Mark McCullough
Flamingo / Brother 2 / Horse / Silk Merchant 1	Marlen Nahhas ‡	Children's Chorus Master	Steven Gathman
Elk / Camel soloist / Butcher 1	Samson McCrady * ‡		
Unicorn / Weaver	Alexandra Nowakowski * ‡		
Innkeeper / Ox / Sheperd Soloist	Samuel Weiser ‡		
Donkey	Joshua Conyers ‡		
Lion / Butcher 2	Soloman Howard ‡		

* Washington National Opera Debut

± Alumnus of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program

‡ Current member of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program

ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. Under the leadership of General Director Timothy O'Leary and world-renowned Artistic Director Francesca

Zambello, the company presents a diverse repertory of grand opera across three main venues of the Kennedy Center. From classic operas to more contemporary pieces each season, WNO's artistic output also includes several commissioned American works and a variety of special concerts, youth operas, and events.

Recent celebrated productions have included the world premiere of Philip Glass's reconceived *Appomattox*, presented in conjunction with cultural events throughout Washington, D.C.; the powerful performances of Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*; and the massive feat of WNO's first-complete *Ring Cycle*, which was helmed by Zambello and played to sold-out houses following international acclaim.

Founded in 1956 and an artistic affiliate of the Kennedy Center since 2011, WNO has a storied legacy of more than 100 new productions, plus world premieres, international tours, live recordings and radio broadcasts, as well as 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 for 15 years, as well as luminaries such as Music Director Heinz Fricke and Director of Artistic Operations Christina Scheppelmann.

Among the company's most successful programs is the *American Opera Initiative (AOI)*, a commissioning program that develops new one-act works for WNO's annual festival. By mentoring emerging composers and librettists, the Initiative works to expand the American operatic repertory and enhance its relevance to our time. Since its inception, AOI has commissioned 28 chamber opera world premieres, with some going on to future productions around the country.

With a commitment toward youth, WNO contributes to the future of opera through two signature artist-development programs. The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, now in its 17th season, is one of the nation's most competitive professional training programs, providing two years of intensive study to a highly selective cadre of young singers and collaborative pianists. Alumni of the program have won major competitions and gone on to successful careers at major opera houses worldwide. 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.

The most popular of WNO's community-engagement programs is *Opera in the Outfield*®, a free Kennedy Center Opera House production broadcast on 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 3–8, 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.

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#LionUnicornDC

FUNDING CREDITS

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TICKETS & INFORMATION

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