

SD OPERA Media Release

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San Diego Opera Awarded \$25,000 NEA Grant for World Premiere Co-Commission of New Opera *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*

**Company will present West Coast Premiere as part of
the 2019-2020 Season**

***The Last Dream of Frida and Diego* is composed by
Gabriela Lena Frank with libretto by Nilo Cruz**

San Diego, CA – The National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) announced today that San Diego Opera is the recipient of a \$25,000 grant for the new opera *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*, composed by Gabriela Lena Frank with libretto by Nilo Cruz. *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego* is a co-commission between San Diego Opera, Fort Worth Opera, DePauw University School of Music, and The University of Texas at Austin. The opera will have its world premiere in April 2020 at Fort Worth and will receive its West Coast Premiere shortly afterwards as part of San Diego Opera’s 2019-2020 Season.

Set in 1957, the opera opens in a cemetery, as Mexico celebrates the annual festival of El Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). The great muralist Diego Rivera walks among the worshipers as they prepare for the return of the spirits to the world, singing with joy and anticipation. Surrounded by sugar-coated skulls, candles, and fragrant marigold flowers, he longs to see his deceased lover Frida Kahlo once again before he passes on. In the afterlife, Catrina, the keeper of the souls, approaches Frida, and explains that Diego desperately needs his beloved angel as the seed of death quickly sprouts within him. Moved by the desires of the departed souls she encounters around her, Frida reluctantly agrees to join him in the world above, with the knowledge that the dead can never touch the living. For only twenty-four hours, Frida and Diego will relive their tumultuous love through their paintings, embracing the passion they shared and the pain they inflicted upon one other.

“The commission of *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego* is important to San Diego Opera, both to demonstrate opera’s continued relevance to our community and to show that our company is committed to new visions of what opera can be in the 21st century,” shares David Bennett, San Diego

Opera's General Director. "It also responds to San Diego's growing Spanish-speaking population. One can reach Tijuana within 15 minutes from downtown, and we anticipate that a new opera in Spanish will attract not only attendees from San Diego County and beyond, but also from across the border. We have proven that diversifying our product attracts and serves new audiences and increases ticket revenue which is vital for the health of San Diego Opera."

The Last Dream of Frida and Diego originated in 2014 with Arizona Opera, who was awarded an OPERA America grant for the commission through their Opera Grants for Female Composers program. Fort Worth Opera was included as an official co-commissioner in 2016, with San Diego Opera added in January 2016. After Arizona Opera's withdrawal from the project, San Diego Opera and Fort Worth Opera signed an agreement with OPERA America to transfer the grant funds to the two institutions. DePauw University School of Music and The University of Texas at Austin were also added as co-commissioners. Music publisher G. Schirmer is an organizational partner for this project.

Composer Gabriela Lena Frank was born in Berkeley, California, to a mother of Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank explores her multicultural heritage most ardently through her compositions. Frank is something of a musical anthropologist. Her pieces reflect and refract her studies of Latin-American folklore, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a western classical framework that is uniquely her own. Over the years, she has written challenging idiomatic works for solo instrumentalists, vocalists, chamber ensembles, and orchestras, and received the Latin Grammy Award for best Contemporary Classical Music Composition for *Inca Dances*, written for guitarist Manuel Barrueco and the Cuarteto Latinoamericano.

"Much of my work draws inspiration from Latin American folklore and music. Thus, re-imagining the lives of Mexico's most famous painters, lovers Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, in the context of its most famous festival, El Día de los Muertos, is highly appealing to me," shares composer Gabriela Lena Frank. "As enthusiastic aficionados of the festival, a vibrant and satirical fusion of pre-Colombian sacred beliefs with post-Conquest western worship, Frida and Diego also loved Mexican folk music. Therefore, writer Nilo Cruz and I are creating landscapes rich in Mexican mysticism and re-imagined traditional music, drawing from the marimba, guitar, and flute traditions, and various vocal styles."

Librettist Nilo Cruz is a Cuban-American playwright and pedagogue. He is also the first Latino to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play "Anna in the Tropics". His work includes "Night Train to Bolina", "Dancing on her Knees", and "Lorca in a Green Dress". Cruz has been the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including two NEA/TCG National Theatre Artist Residency grants, a Rockefeller Foundation grant, San Francisco's W. Alton Jones award, and a Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays award. Cruz wrote the book for the Frank Wildhorn musical *Havana* and adapted Ann Patchett's 2001 novel *Bel Canto* for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, with Peruvian composer Jimmy López.

"What has always fascinated me about Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and inspired me to write this libretto was their passion for each other. In life they were soul mates brought together by their love of art, and yet they were individuals who never lost the essence of their personalities and their unique artistic strengths," shares librettist Nilo Cruz. "For me it was important to pay tribute to their moving romance and enduring love. Every great love has aspirations of being achieved in a utopia, and both Frida and Diego fell victims to this pursuit of the impossible. Theirs was a relationship full of storms and separations. But their brief partings and even their infidelities always lead them back to each other's arms. They would quarrel only to reconcile and rekindle their passions. They would divorce only to remarry. They both even saw death as a way to reunite in the after life. For Diego, Frida was his irreplaceable muse. For Frida, Diego was a kind of beacon without which all of life would have drifted and dissolved into the void."

San Diego Opera will announce specific performance dates, casting, and location for *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego* when it announces its 2019-2020 Season in the early part of the 2019 calendar year.

The 2018-2019 International Season

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| <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> | Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart | October 20, 23, 26, and 28 (mat), 2018 |
| <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> | Engelbert Humperdinck | December 1, 4, 6, 8 (mat), and 9 (mat), 2018 |
| <i>Rigoletto</i> | Giuseppe Verdi | February 2, 5, 8, and 10 (mat), 2019 |
| <i>Three Decembers</i> | Jake Heggie | March 8, 9, 10 (mat), 2019 |
| <i>Carmen</i> | Georges Bizet | March 30, April 2, 5, and 7 (mat) 2019 |
| <i>One Amazing Night – Ailyn Pérez and Stephen Powell</i> | | May 15, 2019 |

San Diego Opera Mission Statement

The mission of San Diego Opera is to deliver exceptional vocal performances and exciting, accessible programs to diverse audiences, focusing on community engagement and the transformative power of live performance.

San Diego Opera Vision Statement

The San Diego Opera will be recognized internationally as a leading example of adaptability, innovation and sustainability in the operatic arts, promoting diversified programming and unique performance venues with world-class and emerging talent.

San Diego Opera Core Values Statement

Through excellence in innovative programming and education, SDO provides a lasting cultural service to the community.

- Our tradition of excellence in fully staged opera is augmented with new models of opera and venues. Our unique and deep commitment to the community propels us to explore ways of increasing affordability and accessibility.
- Through fiscal responsibility and nimble adaptation to the changing marketplace, we protect the future of San Diego Opera.
- Our educational and community involvement coupled with relevant programming will build the audience of the future.

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