

# SD OPERA Media Release

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**FORT WORTH OPERA AND SAN DIEGO OPERA TO  
ANNOUNCE THE 2020 WORLD PREMIERE OF  
*THE LAST DREAM OF FRIDA & DIEGO*,  
ON AUGUST 24, 2017 IN MEXICO CITY AT THE  
HISTORIC PALACIO DE BELLAS ARTES**

*This stunning new opera in Spanish, a co-commission with Fort Worth Opera, San Diego Opera, the College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, and DePauw University, will celebrate the life and immortal artistry of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.*

San Diego, CA – Fort Worth Opera and San Diego Opera will formally announce the 2020 world premiere of *The Last Dream of Frida & Diego* in Mexico City on August 24, 2017, written by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Nilo Cruz and Latin Grammy winner, pianist, and classical composer Gabriela Lena Frank. A co-commission with Fort Worth Opera, San Diego Opera, the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin, and DePauw University, *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego* will be formally introduced to the world on the 24th of August at Mexico City’s opulent concert hall and cultural arts center, Palacio de Bellas Artes.

This bilingual press conference will be held within Palacio’s intimate Manuel M. Ponce Hall, and feature an exclusive reading from the opera’s libretto by Nilo Cruz, along with a piano performance by Gabriela Lena Frank. The award-winning, composer-librettist team will play audio samples from their nine works together and discuss the evolution of their decade-long creative partnership, culminating in this celebratory new opera. Following the conclusion of the presentation, there will be a brief Q&A session for local press and attendees.

“San Diego Opera is proud to join our colleagues at Fort Worth Opera, the University of Texas, and DePauw University in the commission of *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*. Creating and producing new, innovative works of opera helps us deepen connections with the diverse community of San Diego. In looking for the right subject matter, the lives of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera made perfect sense to us - their extensive bodies of work influence creative artists here in our community, on both sides of the border,” said David Bennett, General Director of San Diego Opera. “With the inspired vision of Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz, I know the result will be a new opera that will engage and entertain audiences.”

FWOpera's General Director Tuomas Hiltunen said, "I am thrilled and honored to be joining the Fort Worth Opera in this exciting new era, as we collaborate with San Diego Opera, the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin, and DePauw University to co-commission *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*. Kahlo and Rivera greatly influenced American art and visual artists, muralists, graphic designers, and sculptors. Their idiosyncratic style and commitment to social equality continue to inspire artists and art enthusiasts around the globe. This compelling new work, featuring Nilo Cruz's haunting libretto set to music by one of the most innovative composers working today, Gabriela Lena Frank, perfectly embodies FWOpera's commitment to community-driven storytelling and programming. We look forward to presenting the world premiere in 2020."

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.

"We're delighted to be part of this collaboration to bring the lives of artistic icons Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera to life onstage through music," said Doug Dempster, Dean of the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. "Working on this production will provide a unique and immersive learning experience for our students, and we're excited about the opportunities to engage and reach new audiences."

Composer Gabriela Lena Frank said, "Frida and Diego were Mexicans, but they were also global citizens. For me as an artist, I find great inspiration in how they used the specific colors and sounds of their culture to express what is universal. You don't have to be Mexican to be moved by their paintings nor their life stories. In other words, you can relate to them, and you can identify with them. I feel that Frida and Diego remind us of our humanity -- so important as we currently navigate these early decades of the 21st century feeling so very politically and socially divided. Their art remains as relevant as ever."

Librettist Nilo Cruz said, "Through her work, Frida gives us permission to find our own personal relationship to life as well as to make sense of life after trauma. Painting helped her to make sense of the universe. For Diego, painting has to do with humanist philosophical reflection, a way of documenting history and social injustice. They both rescue their roots, their Mexican identity from oblivion. As the Aztecs took out human hearts and offered them to the gods, they offer us their hearts through their art, through the lives they lead as witnesses of life in the universe."

## **ABOUT THE PRESS CONFERENCE AND CULTURAL TOUR IN MEXICO CITY**

The official announcement of this world premiere opera will take place at Palacio de Bellas Artes on August 24, 2017, after three days of cultural tourism that will take donors and guests through the historic neighborhoods of Mexico City, with visits to Coyoacán Market, Templo Mayor, Alameda Park, the Museo Diego Rivera, the Museum of Modern Art, and an after-hours visit to the National Museum of Anthropology. Following the announcement, participants will enjoy a private reception in the garden courtyard of La Casa Azul, Frida Kahlo's cobalt-blue home and museum in the Colonia del Carmen neighborhood of Coyoacán.

#### **ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM**

##### **Nilo Cruz**

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.

##### **Gabriela Lena Frank**

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 she received the Latin Grammy Award for best Contemporary Classical Music Composition for *Inca Dances* (Tonar Label), written for guitarist Manuel Barrueco and the Cuarteto Latinoamericano.

**ABOUT SAN DIEGO OPERA:** 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. The Company's vision is that it 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. Through 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 will protect the future of San Diego Opera. Our educational and community involvement coupled with relevant programming will build the audience of the future.

**ABOUT FORT WORTH OPERA:** Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is the oldest continually performing opera company in Texas, and one of the 14 oldest opera companies in the United States. The organization has received national attention from critics and audiences alike

for its artistic excellence, pioneering spirit, and steadfast willingness to take risks. From its first world premiere, *Frau Margot* in 2007, to 2016's critically-acclaimed new work *JFK* -- a co-commission with American Lyric Theater and Opéra de Montréal by creative duo of David T. Little and Royce Vavrek -- FWOpera continues to augment its worldwide reputation as a trailblazing, civically minded arts institution.

Known throughout the operatic world as a champion of new and rarely-performed works, FWOpera has taken a leadership role in engaging audiences beyond the operatic stage, while producing cutting-edge, contemporary operas. Beginning in 2017, FWOpera launched the second phase of its landmark, 10-year Opera of the Americas initiative with *Noches de Ópera* (Nights of Opera), a groundbreaking campaign which introduces powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of new American audiences.

**ABOUT THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN:** The College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin educates artists, scholars and future arts educators in a context that emphasizes artistic excellence, advanced technology, cultural diversity and best professional practices. The college places a high priority on research and the creation of new work through its many divisions and departments, including among others, the Butler School of Music, the Department of Art and Art History, the Department of Theatre and Dance, the Center for Arts and Entertainment Technologies, Texas Performing Arts, the university's arts presenting organization, and Landmarks, the university's public art program. A comprehensive visual and performing arts college, degree concentrations from the B.A. to Ph.D. are offered in classical music and composition to acting, dance and scenic design to studio art and design studies, as well as the scholarly study of the arts in a broad range of disciplines.

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