



# FRIDA

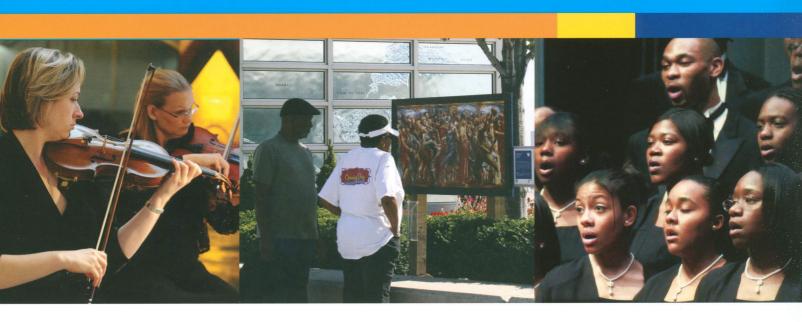
ROBERT XAVIER RODRIGUEZ MARCH 7 - 28, 2015



MacombCenter for the Performing Arts

# "HOW DO THE ARTS CREATE ENERGY?"

The arts awaken curiosity, creativity and the desire for knowledge – things that DTE Energy believes empower both people and the communities they live in. Through support of cultural programs and organizations, DTE promotes the human expression that enriches life and encourages broader horizons. And that's something that we all benefit from.





#### CREDITS

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THE BERMAN center for the Performing Arts





# FRIDA

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Michigan Opera Theatre FRIDA • March 2015

## WELCOME

## WAYNE S. BROWN

PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

Welcome to today's presentation of Michigan Opera Theatre's (MOT's) Midwest premiere of *Frida* — an opera about the Mexican-American iconic figure Frida Kahlo. This also marks the inaugural component of MOT's Michigan Regional Initiative — the central component of the recently adopted strategic plan for the future. We are thrilled to have you join us for this special occasion.

From the earliest days of MOT, this Detroit-based cultural entity, under its founder Dr. David DiChiera, has been committed to inclusion and diversity on stage and in all aspects of the organization's operation. MOT has served as the launching pad of numerous careers among the stars in the opera world, and is acknowledged as one of the nation's proponents of high artistic standards and community engagement. I am delighted and honored to carry forward that same commitment to the art form for the benefit of our audiences.

Through the generosity of numerous funding partners, *Frida* and *Overture to Frida* will be hosted by six venues in five counties during the month of March and will serve as a template for MOT as it seeks to further engage audiences throughout the State of Michigan. Opera is for everyone, and I am delighted that, in addition to the opera performances, through a series of open rehearsals, *informances*, opera club gatherings, and media events throughout the month, more than 7,000 individuals will learn about Frida Kahlo.

The DTE Energy Foundation is the Title Sponsor for *Frida* and is joined by the generosity of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, the General Motors Foundation, the William Davidson Foundation, the Berman Foundation, Karen and Rick Williams, the Opera America Fund, Comerica Bank, the DIA Detroit Film Theatre, WRCJ, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

MOT is appreciative to Dr. James Jacobs, president of Macomb Community College, and Christine Guarino, departing Director of the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, for the partnership that has been created between the Macomb Center and MOT as co-producers of the opera *Frida*.

I wish to thank our Honorary Chairman – Juan Carlos Solana Morales, Consul of Mexico, Friends of Frida, and the cast, volunteers, supporters, and audience members for joining in MOT's regional initiative to celebrate this multidimensional art form. Thank you for your support!

## DR. DAVID DICHIERA

FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

For some years now, Robert Xavier Rodriguez's opera Frida has been on my "to-do" list of works that Michigan Opera Theatre should produce. Of course, the list is long, and there are so many factors involved in putting a season together.

Those of you who have followed the history of Michigan Opera Theatre know that from its very founding, we have been committed to presenting artists and operas which reflect and pay homage to the rich ethnic diversity that makes up our community. It has been my privilege to



present both world and American premieres of African American, Armenian, and Polish operas. While over the years we have had many Latino artists grace the Detroit Opera House stage, we have not yet presented a Latino work. So when the Detroit Institute of Arts announced its intention to mount a major exhibit devoted to Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, it seemed like the ideal time to produce Frida.

What could be more exciting than to present a beautifully composed work about an amazingly iconic figure, whose life was completely operatic? The music of Rodriguez is inspired by Mexican culture, and I was determined to bring as much authenticity to this production as possible. The search for the perfect Frida and Diego was long, laborious and often discouraging. How thrilled I was to finally discover the talented and beautiful Colombian soprano, Catalina Cuervo. The search for Diego took even longer, but paid off when I found Mexican-born baritone, Ricardo Herrera, He is tall and handsome, with a wonderful voice, and while he is not rotund like the real life Diego, our costume department has created the necessary girth. The renowned Argentinian stage director, Jose Maria Condemi, is here to stage this new production. Monika Essen, production designer, traveled to Mexico to the home and museum devoted to Frida. While in Oaxaca, Monika acquired some of the very same fabrics and designs worn by our heroine.

In so many ways, Frida is the perfect vehicle to inaugurate MOT's new initiative, spearheaded by Wayne S. Brown, to bring opera into metro Detroit communities. By performing this opera in three community venues, it gives MOT the opportunity to expand its impact throughout the region. For this, I want to thank our sponsors, and I am especially grateful to those who have so generously contributed to the Opera of Our Time fund. Frida is the second contemporary works supported by this fund, which allows audiences to experience, and hopefully embrace, new operas that reflect our time.

FRIDA • March 2015 Michigan Opera Theatre

## GRAHAM W. J. BEAL

DIRECTOR, DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

We are delighted to partner with MOT as a venue for its production of Frida at the same time as we present our own exhibition, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit. In planning this once-in-a-lifetime exhibition, a primary goal was to extend its reach by involving local communities on their own terms and, last year, we invited metro-Detroit arts and cultural organizations, libraries and other community groups to the DIA for an outline presentation of Diego and Frida, encouraging them to develop programs based on the exhibition that would



fit their individual organizations. The community responded magnificently, with more than twenty organizations offering dozens of programs, including such topics as Detroit's labor movement, women in art, music, and Frida fashions. We have produced a brochure containing all the community programs and thank our friends at IXITI, who are hosting an electronic version of the brochure on their website. It can be accessed at ixiti.com/diegofrida.

I hope that after seeing the opera you will visit the exhibition and learn more about Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera; one of the great power couples of the 20th-century art world. Our exhibition focuses on their time in Detroit, a period during which each artist made significant career breakthroughs: Rivera painting what he — and others — regarded as his most successful mural cycle; Kahlo, forging her deeply personal and highly autobiographical style. Quite what Frida would have made of herself, rather than her more famous husband, being the central figure of an opera, is hard to say but some clue might be found in her calculatedly provocative statement to a newspaper reporter that Diego "does pretty well for a little boy, but it is I who am the big artist."

I'd like to give special thanks to David DiChiera and Wayne Brown, longtime friends of the DIA, for including us in this exciting event. Special thanks are also due to Bank of America, who has provided support for the exhibition as well as for the conservation of the rare and spectacular actual-size drawings — known as cartoons — Rivera used in making the murals and that will be on view in the exhibition for the first time in more than 30 years.

I invite you all to see Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit and take the opportunity to enjoy many of the related programs both at the DIA and throughout our community. Please visit dia.org for more information.



## JAMES JACOBS, PHD

PRESIDENT, MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Welcome to the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts at Macomb Community College. And, welcome to our first-ever collaboration with Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) for the Michigan premiere of the opera, *Frida*.

We're proud that this co-production represents MOT's first main stage opera production outside the Detroit Opera House. And, we're excited to be able to offer this special cultural experience, bringing the world-class production directly to our community.



Macomb Community College provides a breadth of cultural enrichment opportunities that span generations, supplement educational objectives and enrich community life. We're pleased to play a role in amplifying the impact of MOT, one of our region's cultural treasures. It's gratifying that this partnership brings us full circle with southeast Michigan's finest arts organizations, with MOT joining the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in working with Macomb Community College to provide unique cultural experiences to the members of our community.

Collaboration is a driving philosophy for Macomb Community College and an essential ingredient in realizing our mission of education, enrichment and economic development. We embrace partnership not only to reduce duplication and increase effectiveness, but to create meaningful new experiences and resources for the residents of Macomb County. Perhaps as importantly, collaboration is a key tool in fostering a regional perspective that builds on our strengths and leverages the assets of our neighbors, while benefiting metro Detroit as a whole. Macomb County is important to the region's vitality, and southeast Michigan is important to Macomb County.

As a case in point, the opera *Frida* complements the DIA's upcoming special exhibition, "Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit." We're honored to be a serious contributor to the related events planned in the region, shining a spotlight on the artists that influenced us, as well as how our local sensibilities influenced the artists who spent time in the area.

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to First State Bank, which is headquartered in Macomb County and deeply committed to community engagement and partnership, for their sponsorship of our pre-opening Gala and performance Afterglows at the Macomb Center.

We appreciate your support and your attendance at what we hope to be an annual collaboration with MOT, and we sincerely hope you enjoy the production.

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## WELCOME

## FAYE ALEXANDER NELSON

VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC AFFAIRS
DTE ENERGY
PRESIDENT, DTE ENERGY FOUNDATION

#### Greetings!

Welcome to the Midwest debut of *Frida*. The DTE Energy Foundation is pleased to serve as the title sponsor of *Frida* and related cultural events that enhance the arts, while showcasing a compelling Latina artist with a unique Michigan connection.

What makes this event so impressive is the collaboration among the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) and some of our state's finest cultural institutions to make opera more accessible to people who may not otherwise experience this evocative art form.



The MOT, the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, The Berman Center for the Performing Arts and the DIA's Detroit Film Theatre are cornerstones of our communities and touch our lives in so many powerful ways. At the DTE Energy Foundation, we want to do our part to ensure that these institutions - and the communities that they serve — continue to thrive.

The "Shining Light on Frida" project will benefit these organizations that help drive the health and vitality of our state. Not only do Michigan's arts and cultural non-profits add significantly to the quality of life here, they also contribute more than half a billion dollars to the state's economy, according to the "Creative State Michigan" 2014 report.

The *Frida* productions alone have created dozens of jobs, from musicians to stage hands. *Frida* is drawing new audiences to entertainment venues in Macomb, Oakland, and Detroit, and new patrons to neighborhood restaurants and shops.

The DTE Energy Foundation is proud to be a part of this amazing partnership to enrich the lives of people in our region.

Please enjoy the show.



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: THE VENUES OF ERIDA



### Macomb Center for the Performing Arts

Saturday, March 7, 2015 at 7:30 PM Sunday, March 8, 2015 at 2:30 PM

The Macomb Center for the Performing Arts (www.MacombCenter.com) is a community enrichment program of Macomb Community College dedicated to providing a diverse range of cultural enrichment experiences, and to inspire and encourage artistic expression through education, performance and volunteer opportunities. Hosting more than 100,000 visitors annually, the Macomb Center presents high-quality professional performances, offers educational outreach in the arts, provides a performance venue for community-based arts organizations, and, in partnership with the adjacent Lorenzo Cultural Center, creates unique opportunities for multifaceted cultural programming.

## THE BERMAN center for the Performing Its

## The Berman Center for the Performing Arts

Saturday, March 21, 2015 at 7:30 PM Sunday, March 22, 2015 at 2:30 PM

Inspired by an extraordinary gift from Mandell and Madeleine Berman, The Berman Center for the Performing Arts is a beautiful, world-class theatre. The Berman showcases the Jewish Community Center's exceptional events and offers opportunities for exciting new programs for all audiences of Metropolitan Detroit.

Since its first public performance in the Spring of 2011, The Berman has been the host to over 125,000 people for such performers as Barbara Cook, Marvin Hamlish, Patti LuPone, Bebe Neuwirth, Mandy Patinkin, Chita Rivera, Seth Rudetsky and J.B. Smoove & Lily Tomlin.



## Detroit Film Theatre - Detroit Institute of Arts

Friday, March 27, 2015 at 7:30 PM Saturday, March 28, 2015 at 7:30 PM

In continuous operation since 1974, the Detroit Film Theatre (DFT) screens new and classic motion pictures in the DIA's magnificently restored 1927 auditorium. Films of various genres from around the world are presented, and audiences are given both artistic and historical context for each in printed program notes, website information and links, and introductions by the series programmer prior to most screenings.

The DIA auditorium has a tradition of hosting live performances of music and theater, including productions by the Jewish Ensemble Theatre. The DFT is currently the home venue for the renowned Mosaic Youth Theatre.

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## **CAST**In order of vocal appearance

Frida KahloCatalina Cuervo*	Communists Angela Cavazos
Diego RiveraRicardo Herrera*	Leah Dexter, Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup>
Diego raveta	Aynsley Martindale, David Moan
Cristina KahloAlexa Lokensgard	Corey Roberts, Adrian Rosas <sup>†</sup>
	Lila Weinstein
Schoolgirls, Frida's teenage enemies Claire DiVizio <sup>†</sup> Diane Schoff	Mr. Rockefeller Zachary Coates†
Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup> Aynsley Martindale	Mrs. Rockefeller Diane Schoff
	Mr. FordBrian Leduc
Cachuchas, Frida's	
teenage male school companionsBrian Leduc	Mrs. FordClaire DiVizio <sup>†</sup>
Zachary Coates <sup>†</sup>	Guests of the Fords
David Moan	and RockefellersLeah Dexter, Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup>
	Alexa Lokensgard,
AlejandroCorey Roberts	Aynsley Martindale
Dimas' MotherLeah Dexter	Corey Roberts, Adrian Rosas <sup>†</sup>
Dimas Wother Ecan Dexter	Corey Roberts, Adrian Rosas
Petate VendorAdrian Rosas†	CalaverasClodagh Earls†
	Aynsley Martindale
RevolutionariesZachary Coates†	David Moan
Claire DiVizio <sup>†</sup> , Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup>	
Brian Leduc, Aynsley Martindale	Leon TrotskyBrian Leduc
David Moan, Adrian Rosas†	Natalia Trotsky
Corey Roberts, Diane Schoff	Tvatana 110tsky
Bus PassengersZachary Coates <sup>†</sup>	Frida's female loversLeah Dexter
Clarie DiVizio <sup>†</sup> , Leah Dexter	Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup>
Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup> , Brian Leduc	
Aynsley Martindale, David Moan	Edward G. Robinson
Adrian Rosas <sup>†</sup> , Diane Schoff	Nicholas MurrayCorey Roberts
ranan Rosas , Diane sensii	
Lupe Marin (Diego's ex-wife)Leah Dexter	Dancers Angela Cavazos
	Marco Pelle
Guillermo Kahlo (Frida's father) Adrian Rosas†	Lila Weinstein
Wedding GuestsZachary Coates†	
Clarie DiVizio <sup>†</sup> , Clodagh Earls <sup>†</sup>	* Michigan Otona Theatre debut
Brian Leduc, Aynsley Martindale	* Michigan Opera Theatre debut
	† Barbara Gibson Young Artist Apprentice

<sup>†</sup> Barbara Gibson Young Artist Apprentice

David Moan, Diane Schoff



### SYNOPSIS:

#### Act I

#### Scene 1: Mexico City, 1923

An unruly male gang called Cachuchas, led by the young Frida Kahlo and her boyfriend Alejandro, accosts a group of schoolgirls. Frida and her sister Cristina watch a Mother whose child has died beg a Vendor for a mat to bury her son. Moved by the poverty they see, Frida and Cristina witness a celebration of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and take heart in the promise of the revolution.

Scene 2: Frida's room in Coyoacan, 1925 Experiencing her first menstruation, Frida tells Cristina of her expectations of life upon coming of age.

Scene 3: A Street & Frida's room, 1925 Frida and Alejandro board a bus headed for school, which is then struck by a tram. In the accident, Frida is severely injured but she resolves to live and begin her life as a painter.

#### Scene 4: Mexico City, 1928-29

As Diego Rivera paints a mural at the Preparatory School, his wife Lupe attempts to grab his attention. Frida pays Diego a visit and introduces herself to him. Lupe becomes jealous of the young visitor. Frida shows Diego her portfolio and he encourages her to pursue a career as an artist and begins to court her. Diego asks Frida's father for her hand in marriage. At the wedding ceremony, Lupe makes a dramatic and futile attempt to win Diego back.

Scene 5: Diego's Studio, 1930-31

Frida critiques Diego's work as he paints a portrait of Emiliano Zapata. They are interrupted by revolutionary communists who denounce Diego. Frida and Diego resolve to try their luck in the USA.

Scene 6: New York City, 1931-33
Frida and Diego attend a dinner party
hosted by the Fords and the Rockefellers.

hosted by the Fords and the Rockefellers. Diego enjoys the adulation while Frida ridicules the rich. Rockefeller commissions a mural from Diego, and Frida gives a spirited interview to the press.

Scene 7: New York City, 1933-34

Diego works on his commission, "Man at the Crossroads." Rockefeller berates Diego for displaying his communist sympathies by portraying Lenin in the painting. The mural is destroyed and Frida miscarries. She persuades Diego to return to Mexico.

#### Act II

Scene 1: San Angel, Mexico, 1934-35
Back in Mexico, Frida and Diego move
to adjacent blue and pink homes. She is
overjoyed at being back in their homeland
while he is miserable. Frida chooses to

ignore the parade of lovers that go through Diego's house but she is horrified to discover her sister Cristina among them.

Scene 2: San Angel, Mexico 1937

Leon Trotsky and his wife Natalia visit the Riveras in Mexico. Diego and Natalia confront Frida and Trotsky over their undeniable mutual affection. Cristina expresses regret for betraying Frida. Diego and Frida come to the realizations that their differences cannot be reconciled.

#### Scene 3

Frida retreats to the seclusion of her home and takes comfort in male and female lovers.

#### Synopsis continued...

Scene 4: New York Art Gallery, 1938

Diego resolves to promote Frida's work in the USA and meets American actor Edward G. Robinson who purchases several of Frida's paintings. Diego urges Frida to pursue her own career without him. Frida takes photographer Nicholas Murray as her lover. Frida and Diego decide to divorce.

Scene 5: Frida's imagination

Haunted by physical and emotional pain, Frida continues to paint while imagery from her seminal works "The Broken Column," "The Wounded Deer" and "Self Portrait with Monkeys" come alive in her mind.

Scene 6: Hospital Room, last day of Frida's life, 1954

In a delirium, Frida relives episodes of her life, including the assassination of Trotsky, of which she and Diego were accused. Diego returns and sings to entertain Frida, finishing with a proposal to marry her again. Frida agrees and a joyful celebration ensues as she departs life with a cry of "Viva la vida, alegria and Diego" ("Long live life, joy, and Diego")

## MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE ORCHESTRA — Frida

Violin Andrew Wu

Viola Scott Stefanko

Cello Nadine Deleury

> Bass Clark Suttle

Guitar Steven Dearing

Clarinet/Alto Sax Shannon Ford

Trumpet
Gordon Simmons

Bass Trombone Gary Hellick Percussion John Dorsey

Accordion
Pam McGowan

Piano Jean Schneider

Detroit Federation of Musicians, Local #5, of the American Federation of Musicians

### **BALLET FOLKLORICO DANCERS**

Maria Luisa Carrillo

Jaime Carrillo

Alexandra Huerta

Adrian Bazzel

## ARTIST PROFILES



Suzanne Mallare Acton CONDUCTOR

As long-term Chorus Master of MOT, Suzanne Acton has received wide critical acclaim for her choral direction involving more than 125 productions in seven languages. Conducting credits include West Side Story, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Music Man, Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado, Daughter of the Regiment, Carmen, La Traviata, Les Pêcheurs de Perles and Carmina Burana with The Medium for MOT; My Fair Lady and La Traviata for Dayton Opera; Merry Widow and Madame Butterfly for Artpark; and Tosca for Augusta Opera. As founding Director of the MOT Children's Chorus, Ms. Acton was instrumental in developing the inaugural 2007-08 season. She is also the Artistic and Music Director of Rackham Symphony Choir.



## Angela Cavazos

Angela Cavazos is extremely excited and blessed to be making her debut with the Michigan Opera Theatre as a dancer in this production of *Frida*. Hailing from Southfield, MI, Ms. Cavazos is a proud graduate of Point Park University holding a BA in Musical Theatre with a dance minor. Favorite past credits include dance captain and aerialist for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, *Contact, Sweet Charity*, and performances with *Pillow Project*. She would love to thank her husband Chris, parents, in laws as well as family and friends for all of their love and support throughout the years.



#### Jose Maria Condemi DIRECTOR

Jose Maria Condemi's directorial work, which has been presented by companies in North America and abroad, encompasses an eclectic range of styles and repertoire, and has been consistently praised for its creative, theatrical, and innovative approach. Notable engagements include Carmen, Madama Butterfly, Faust, Tosca, Così fan tutte, The Elixir of Love for Families and the world premiere of The Secret Garden (San Francisco Opera), Ernani, Tristan und Isolde, and Il Barbiere di Siviglia for Families (Lyric Opera Chicago), Aida (Houston Grand Opera), and Luisa Miller (Canadian Opera Company).

Collaborations with contemporary composers include directing the world premieres of Hector Armienta's *River of Women* and *The Weeping Woman* and the workshop performance of the San Francisco Opera commissioned piece *Earthrise* by 2000 Pulitzer Prize Lewis Spratlan. Mr. Condemi has been a guest lecturer, master teacher and stage director for the San Francisco Opera Center, Seattle Opera Young Artists Program, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Houston Grand Opera Studio, University of Cincinnati/CCM, University of Houston Moores School, Opera Theater of Lucca and the New National Theater Young Artists Programme in Tokyo.

Mr. Condemi was a first-time Adler Fellow in Stage Direction at the San Francisco Opera and a Fulbright Fellow. He is also the Artistic Director of Opera Santa Barbara where he oversees artistic planning and the Studio Artists Program.

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Catalina Cuervo

Known as a fiery soprano, Colombian-born Catalina Cuervo sings the role of Frida Kahlo in Michigan Opera Theatre's 2015 opera Frida. Ms. Cuervo has performed the role of Maria in Piazzolla's Maria de Buenos Aires more than any opera singer in the world. She has performed the role at numerous opera companies and festivals, including Florida Grand Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Syracuse Opera, and Chicago Dance Festival. Her performance in the acclaimed tango show "This is Tango," with Kaia Quartet at the Latino Music Festival in Chicago, has garnered her a large following of tango lovers in Chicago and other cities. Recently, Cuervo debuted in her native city Medellin, Colombia as Amapola in the Zarzuela La Leyenda del Beso. She performed the role of Magda in Puccini's La Rondine at the Chicago Opera Theater in 2010, and will return there to sing the role of Musetta in La Boheme. Ms. Cuervo was in the final round of the Neue Stimmen International Singing Competition in Germany, and recently won the Graduate Division of the Chicago Area for the Classical Singer Competition.



Leah Dexter

American mezzo-soprano Leah Dexter, praised for "...a beautiful voice, great acting gifts, [and] outstanding musicianship" (Italian Tribune), has performed leading and supporting roles with Sarasota Opera, Arbor Opera Theater, Opera

Theatre of St. Louis, New York Harlem Theater, Motor City Lyric Opera, Opera Festival of Rome, and Brevard Music Center, among many others. Previous roles with Michigan Opera Theatre have been in productions of La Traviata, La Rondine, Le nozze di Figaro, Turandot, and Porgy & Bess. Recent engagements include a debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Annie in Porgy & Bess, Annina in La Traviata with South Shore Opera, concerts with the American Spiritual Ensemble, and a debut as soloist with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra. A native of Detroit, Leah studied violin, cello, and ballet for many years and received her Bachelor's and Master's of Music degrees from the University of Michigan.



Monika Essen
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Monika Essen is an award-winning, nationally recognized artist and designer. The recipient of the prestigious Detroit Free Press Lawrence DeVine Award for Outstanding Contribution to Theatre, she studied interior architecture and environmental design at Parsons School of Design and received her MFA in scenography from the renowned Hilberry Repertory Co. Ms. Essen has designed countless productions in theatre, opera, and film; just recently designing MOT's acclaimed productions of Carmina Burana and The Medium. Additionally, she creates furniture, museum exhibits, interiors and full sensory, multi-media environments for residential and commercial clients, including the Detroit Zoo. Ms. Essen's passion for this production of Frida and quest to infuse it with authenticity led her on a journey to visit Frida's world in Mexico City for inspiration. This process will be the subject of an upcoming documentary.



Ricardo Herrera DIEGO

Mexican-born bass-baritone Ricardo Herrera studied voice at the prestigious Juilliard School of Music, and in 1999 was invited to join the Merola Opera Program. That same year, Ricardo was honored with the First Prize at the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation Competition in New York and was invited to participate in Placido Domingo's Operalia World Opera Contest.

During the summer of 2000, after performing in the premiere season of Opera Aegean in Greece under the Artistic Direction of Sherrill Milnes, Mr. Herrera received the Demodocus Award which entitled him to his Carnegie Hall debut as the bass soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor. In 2002 he received the Adler Fellowship with San Francisco Opera and appeared in many San Francisco Opera productions. He has sung many concerts and recitals throughout Europe, and made his European operatic debut as Escamillo in Carmen at the Oldenburgisches Staatstheater in Germany. Mr. Herrera is currently an associate professor of voice on the faculty of the University of Illinois, and he continues to make guest appearances with opera companies throughout the United States.



Brian Leduc

Brian Leduc is a Detroit native who completed his undergraduate studies at Wayne State University, where he received acclaim

in operatic and musical theatre productions. He has also received recognition for his work with early music and oratorio. He appears as a tenor soloist regularly in the Detroit area and internationally for works such as Handel's Messiah, Verdi's Requiem, and others, including a long list of relatively new works. Opera News describes Mr. Leduc as having a "ringing tenor" and being "especially impressive...with firm tonal impact." His recent MOT credits include Tony in A View from the Bridge, Spoletta in Tosca, Monostatos in Magic Flute, and Don Basilio in Marriage of Figaro.



Alexa Lokensgard

Alexa Lokensgard returns to MOT after previous roles with the company, including Anna in Verdi's Nabucco, Mrs. Segstrom in A Little Night Music, Papagena in The Magic Flute and a Page in Rigoletto. Ms. Lokensgard has also sung Lauretta in Puccini's Gianni Schicchi, Alma in Lee Hoiby's Summer and Smoke, Venus in Cavalli's Egisto and the title character, Treemonisha in Scott Joplin's ragtime opera. Alexa holds degrees in vocal performance from St. Olaf College (B.M.) and New England Conservatory (M.M.).



Christopher Maravich LIGHTING DESIGNER

Christopher Maravich is currently the Lighting Director of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and served as San Francisco Opera's Lighting Director from 2006 to 2012 where

he has created lighting for many productions including The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Cosi Fan Tutti, Turandot, Cyrano de Bergerac, Le Nozze di Figaro, Salome, Il Trittico, Tosca, Simon Boccanegra, Don Giovanni, Nixon in China, and Attila. He has collaborated on the lighting designs for Doktor Faust at Staatsoper Stuttgart, Tannhäuser for the Greek National Opera, and La Fanciulla del West, The Makropulos Case, The Daughter of the Regiment, Il Trovatore, Die Tote Stadt, Ariodante, Samson and Delilah, and Macbeth all for San Francisco Opera. Mr. Maravich has also designed lighting for Florida Grand Opera, Opera Colorado, San Diego Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Cal Performances and Opera San José to name a few.



## Aynsley Martindale

Aynsley Martindale holds a Bachelor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Michigan School of Music where she studied classical voice with George Shirley, as well as musical theatre and jazz/improvisation. She can be seen and heard onstage, in the concert hall, recording studio, and live on the radio singing everything from jazz and rhythm & blues to opera, musical theatre, and Irish folk.

Ms. Martindale made her solo debut with the Nashville Symphony in 2007, joining Irish tenor John McDermott in A Celtic Celebration. She worked for eight seasons as a contract singer and soloist with the Nashville Symphony Chorus and Chamber Chorus. Favorite performances include the mezzosoprano solos in John Corigliano's Fern Hill and in the premier of Charles Heimermann's piece Behold the Lamb of God for four soloists, choir, organ, and orchestra. Favorite stage roles include Diana in Next To Normal, Lily in The

Secret Garden; singing in the world premiere of Marcus Hummon's rock opera Surrender Road, Carmen, and The Magic Flute.

Ms. Martindale has recorded and produced several albums, most recently: *Cradle*, her award-winning album of lullabies from around the world and *Rhythm and Songs*, featuring her jazz vocals with JJ Saint James Band.



#### David Moan

Baritone David Moan recently made his comprimario debut with Michigan Opera Theatre as Mike in the company's 2014 premiere of *A View from the Bridge*. Originally from Pittsburgh, Mr. Moan studied at Manchester University, where he currently serves as adjunct professor of music and frequent guest artist, recently as the baritone soloist in *Carmina Burana*. He has spent the past three seasons singing with the MOT chorus and looks forward to his role in MOT's upcoming productions of *The Merry Widow* and *Faust*.



## Marco Pelle

CHOREOGRAPHER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Born in Vicenza, Italy, Marco Pelle began his dance training in his hometown, continued in Monaco at the "Academie de Danse Classique Princesse Grace" before moving to New York City to study under merit scholarship with famous American choreographer Merce Cunningham. As a choreographer, he was

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introduced to the opera world by MOT Founder and Artistic Director David DiChiera and presented his early works at numerous dance festivals. He began collaborating with New York Theater Ballet in 2002. He created several works for the company, among which "Solitude," "Spaces" and "Endless Possibilities of Being," all composed by his brother, Federico Pelle. He has choreographed for several ballet stars, including Roberto Bolle, Polina Semionova, Letizia Giuliani, and Isabelle Ciaravola. Mr. Pelle has collaborated with Alessandra Ferri on her comeback show "The Piano Upstairs" presented at Spoleto Festival, starring Mrs. Ferri and Mrs. Boyd Gaines. In 2013, Mr. Pelle received the SIAE National Award in Italy, for his contribution to the Arts. In the same year, he choreographed "Passage", a short movie directed by Fabrizio Ferri which opened Venice Film Festival, starring Mr. Bolle and Mrs. Semionova.

He's grateful and happy to be back at MOT for his fourth production.



Corey Roberts

Corey Roberts, a Detroit native, is thrilled to be making his Michigan Opera Theatre debut in this production of *Frida*. An actor as well as a singer, Mr. Roberts recently worked on the upcoming seasons of *Broad City* (Comedy Central) and on TV Land's newest show, *Younger*." Mr. Roberts holds a BFA in Vocal Performance from Carnegie Mellon University and trained in the young artist program Lyrique-en-mêr, Festival de Belle-Île in France. Following his graduation, Mr. Roberts moved to NYC to pursue his performance career. He is a former competitive figure skater and spends his summers volunteering with the Opera on Wheels outreach for Detroit Public Schools.



#### Diane Schoff

Diane Schoff continues her work with Michigan Opera Theatre in all three productions this spring after performing as 2nd Maid in *Elektra* this past fall. Ms. Schoff holds the honor of being a National Semi Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Competition and was an apprentice with San Francisco Opera's Merola Program where she performed the roles of Pr. Orlofsky in Die Fledermaus and Zulma in L'Italiana in Algeri. As a member of Boston Opera Collaborative, Diane performed the roles of Clytemnestre in Gluck's Iphigenie in Aulide, The Mother/Witch in Hansel and Gretel, and the Old Prioress in Poulenc's Dialogues of the Carmelites. Regional credits also include roles with Opera for the Young, and Milwaukee Opera Theater. A recent transplant to the Detroit Metro area, Ms. Schoff sings at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, as soloist and section leader.



### Joanne Weaver WIG AND MAKEUP DESIGNER

Born in England, Joanne Weaver came over to the United States in the late 1980s. She began apprenticing with what was then Washington Opera, now Washington National Opera. Ms. Weaver has since designed at many Opera companies throughout the United States, including Glimmerglass Opera, Central City Opera, Sarasota Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Des Moines Metro Opera. Her notable MOT credits include *Margaret Garner*, *Cyrano*, and *Pearl Fishers*. Ms. Weaver was one of the designers invited to be a part of the opening of The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, which was designed by Moshe Safedi, Kansas City 2011.



#### Lila Weinstein

Lila Weinstein started taking dance lessons at the age of 7. She studied strictly ballet for 10 years at Geiger Ballet and was a company member of the pre-professional company affiliated with Geiger Ballet called Michigan Classic Ballet Company. At the end of her sophomore year of high school she discovered her passion for modern and contemporary dance. She chose to change paths and began dancing at Eisenhower Dance Ensemble in their student company for her last two years of high school. In addition, Ms. Weinstein also attended the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre's professional division summer intensive in NYC, as well as a summer intensive with Nashville Ballet. She has participated in many dance festivals including Regional Dance America's Mid-states festival as well as at Michigan Youth Arts Festival. Ms. Weinstein graduated in December of 2014 from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Dance and a Consumer Retail Studies minor. Lila will be getting married in July and will be moving to Dayton, Ohio. She hopes to further her professional dance career there.

#### BARBARA GIBSON YOUNG ARTIST APPRENTICE PROGRAM

In 2002, a generous endowment gift established the Barbara Gibson Young Artist Apprentice Program, which will support Michigan Opera Theatre's ongoing commitment to training and preparing the opera singers of tomorrow.



## **Zachary Coates**

Baritone Zachary Coates made his debut with Michigan Opera Theatre in the fall's *Elektra* and Madame Butterfly. Mr. Coates recently completed his graduate studies at Indiana University, where he performed in the roles of Count Almaviva in Le nozze di Figaro, Aye in Akhnaten, Don Giovanni in Don Giovanni, Sid in Albert Herring, Guglielmo in Cosi fan tutte, Wagner in Faust, and the Gallery Director in Vincent. Roles elsewhere include John Brooke in Little Women with Opera North, Golaud in Pelléas et Mélisande with Westminster Opera Theater, and the Father in Hansel and Gretel with Opera MODO. Off the opera stage, Zachary is a passionate advocate of art song and is seen frequently in recital.



## Claire DiVizio

Praised by the *Ann Arbor News* for her "marvelous voice," Detroit native Claire DiVizio is thrilled to be making her professional debut with Michigan Opera Theatre. In the last three years, she has been seen in Louisville, KY as Blanche de la Force in Poulenc's *Dialogues of* 

the Carmelites, in San Francisco as Giorgetta in Puccini's Il Tabarro, and in Bytom, Poland as Donna Anna in Mozart's Don Giovanni. She has twice been named the winner of the Michigan District of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and in the fall of 2014 was awarded an Encouragement Award from the National Council on the stage of the Detroit Opera House.

One of Ms. DiVizio's greatest passions is working with living composers. Claire has created seven opera roles and premiered nearly twenty concert works for voice, including song literature, chamber music, and choral solos. She is also the founder and Executive Director of Thompson Street Opera Company, a Louisvillebased organization which performs exclusively contemporary works. Now preparing for its third season, the company is recognized as a leading presenter of contemporary works in the region.



Clodagh Earls

Recognized for her vocal warmth, charming stage presence, and vibrant personality, Canadian soprano Clodagh Earls is a young artist to watch as she bursts onto the North American operatic and concert scene. Commanding the stage in both theatrical and recital engagements, Ms. Earls has performed in various musical theatre, opera, and scene productions throughout Canada and in Europe. In 2014, she debuted in the coveted role of Königin der Nacht, in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, under the baton of Maestro Grzegorz Nowak, at the prestigious Miami Summer Music Festival, in Florida. Ms. Earls joined the 2014 Michigan Opera Theatre Chorus for the incredible production

of Puccini's Madame Butterfly, under the baton of Maestro Stephen Lord. Ms. Earls is thrilled to be an apprentice artist at Michigan Opera Theatre for spring 2015, performing in the company premiere of Robert Xavier Rodriguez's Frida, Lehar's The Merry Widow, and Gounod's Faust. Ms. Earls holds a Master of Music: Voice Performance from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, and a Bachelor of Music: Honours Voice Performance from the University of Western Ontario. She is currently mentored by Canadian soprano Frédérique Vézina and Dr. Cynthia Hoffmann of The Juilliard School. Ms. Earls resides in Birmingham, Michigan.



#### Adrian Rosas

Hailed by Opera News as a "mellifluous bass-baritone [with] theatrical flair", Adrian Rosas is an emerging young artist with "impressive experience and talent" (The Boston Globe). Mr. Rosas made his Opera Theatre of St. Louis debut in the role of The Captain in Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin as well as understudying the roles of Willy Wonka in a world premiere of Peter Ash's opera The Golden Ticket and the title role in Don Giovanni. He made his Seattle Opera debut as the Sergeant in Rossini's Il Barbiere di Siviglia and as part of Seattle Opera's Young Artist Program performed the roles of Procolo in Donizetti's Viva la Mamma, as well as Masetto and Il Commendatore in Mozart's Don Giovanni. In concert, Mr. Rosas has made his Carnegie Hall debut as the Angel Gabriel in Oh My Son, an opera by Spanish composer Marcos Galvany and has performed on numerous occasions with the acclaimed New York Festival Of Song. Mr. Rosas holds a Bachelor of Music Degree from Western Michigan University and a Master of Music degree from The Juilliard School.



## SHINING LIGHT ON FRIDA



Director Jose Maria Condemi discussing *Frida* with stage management.



Catalina Cuervo and Corey Roberts share a scene.



Dancers Lila Weinstein and Marco Pelle in rehearsal.



Alexa Lokensgard and Catalina Cuervo taking notes from the director.





The Frida cast in rehearsal.

Ricardo Herrera and Catalina Cuervo work with Suzanne Mallare Acton, conductor.



Paintings from the set.



Monika Essen, production designer, painting the set.







## A LIFE OF AGONY & POETRY, ON THE STAGE

stone's throw from where the opera Frida is playing throughout metropolitan Detroit, its eponymous heroine painted a work that marked a new path for her, one of unusual symbols and unrelenting selfreflection—one that would lead to her being considered among the world's great artists. The piece's title is familiar to Detroit audiences, whether or not they are familiar with the work of Frida Kahlo. It is called Henry Ford Hospital, and depicts her 1932 miscarriage suffered there while her husband Diego Rivera labored to complete the Detroit Industry murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Henry Ford Hospital shows her weeping on a hospital bed, the smokestacks of the faraway River Rouge Plant rise starkly behind her, and her naked form connected by red thread to a collage of floating images, the emblems of her suffering and her survival: the baby that might have been, a snail curling from its shell, a bright purple orchid. Diego said of the work, "Never before had a woman put such agonized poetry on canvas as Frida did at this time in Detroit."

Agony and poetry. Frida united both in her extraordinary life, one characterized by the extremes of physical pain, bodily injury, and heartbreak, and on the other hand, the splendors of artistic creation, of indulgence in sensual pleasures, of romantic love. Michigan Opera Theatre resident designer Monika Essen unites them in her creation of sets, costumes, and props for this opera. We see on the set, in images inspired by Frida's artwork, detached parts of the famous artist's body: her breast bound by an orthopedic corset, an eye, her lips. "With these images, I'm breaking apart her

persona as she was broken," said Essen. But along with agony, the designer gives us poetry: "Then we also have organic elements that she surrounded herself with — beautiful, lush greenery, a butterfly. That butterfly was very important to me, because for Frida it was a symbol of rebirth, rejuvenation, regeneration."

These distinct parts are anchored by a heart in the center of the set, its arteries and veins spreading outward as if to unite the other elements, rather like the red thread in Henry Ford Hospital. Essen explained, "Frida painted a lot hearts in her imagery, sometimes on top of her, sometimes apart from her, sometimes things connected to her by ribbons. In this case, I'm not using ribbons, but the veins of the heart." She added, "Everything is going from the world, to her, and out into the universe. If you look at the set, it has a forced perspective. It brings you into the center and then up. She did that through her paintings — she took herself, her soul, and put it out into the universe for all to see."

Essen gained many of her insights into the woman and her work while on a "pilgrimage," as she calls it, to Mexico City, undertaken to gather inspiration and materials for the design. She met Oaxacan embroiderers who would provide some of the distinctive shawls and dresses worn in the opera, in the traditional style that Frida favored. She was greeted with excitement in the marketplace, where men and women professed to her an impassioned love of "their" Frida. And she explored the Casa Azul

[blue house], the Mexico City home where Frida came into the world and left it, now a museum dedicated to her memory.

Seeing the home proved invaluable to Essen, who "photographed everything" she saw there, commenting, "Frida spread beauty around her. That's one of the things I like most about her. The Casa Azul is so beautiful. Everything is vibrant, painted in yellows and blues and pinks and reds. I think it's because she was cooped up so

often there, she had to surround herself with beautiful things or she would go stir crazy. In her bedroom, where she spent so much time, she had a mirror up above to help her paint, but she also decorated it, and had painted sayings and butterflies all over it. I appreciate that about her — because I do it in my life, too. I surround myself with beauty just like that. I think that's necessary in life."

Even herself, Frida covered in beauty. She endured many surgeries as a result of a devastating bus accident she survived. She was fitted with countless body casts over her lifetime. But, said Essen, "She didn't give up. When she was stuck in bed, not only would she paint canvases, but also her casts! And they were quite beautiful. She would paint butterflies on them, too. I thought it was such sweet imagery."

After being interviewed for this article, Essen had to leave for a two-and-a-half-hour "casting session" with the star soprano, Catalina Cuervo. In a typical opera, this might have meant she was going to hear her croon a couple arias to judge the singer's appropriateness for the role. But Frida is no typical opera! This appointment was to cast Cuervo's body, to cover her with plaster and fit her with an orthopedic cast, which Essen would later paint in Frida's style.

And the people applying the bandages? Medical professionals from Henry Ford Hospital. The veins of one undying heart connect past and present, life and art.



Monika Essen, Frida production designer.



## COMPOSER'S NOTE ROBERT XAVIER RODRIGUEZ

Frida is based on the life of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo and her tempestuous relationship with Diego Rivera. It was commissioned by the American Music Theater Festival (now Prince Theater) and premiered in Philadelphia in 1991, with Helen Schneider in the title role, stage direction by Hilary Blecher and musical direction by Richard Cordova. John Rockwell, in the *New York Times*, named it "The Best Opera/Musical Theater of 1991."

Frida's original libretto, by Hilary Blecher and Migdalia Cruz, was written in English, with some Spanish. For the European premiere, in Vienna, a



German narrator was added, giving a synopsis of each scene and reading excerpts from Frida's letters, translated into German. A Spanish translation by Josefina García was commissioned for the Mexican premiere, in Guadalajara. There have been two productions in Germany and productions throughout the United States, including the Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival, American Repertory Theater (Boston), the City Summer Opera (San Francisco) and the Houston Grand Opera.

The music of *Frida* is in the Gershwin-Sondheim-Weill tradition of exploring the common ground between opera and musical theater. The score calls for mariachi-style orchestration — with prominent parts for accordion, guitar, violin, and trumpet — in which authentic Mexican folk songs and dances are interwoven with bits of tangos, colorations of *zarzuela*, ragtime, and jazz. Among the "stolen" musical fragments developed in *Frida* are such strange musical bedfellows as two traditional Mexican piñata songs ("Hora y fuego" and "Al quebrar la piñata"), two narrative ballads ("La Maquinita" and "Jesusita"), the Communist anthem ("L'Internationale"), Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony* and Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Spanish speakers might also listen for the rhythm of a familiar Mexican curse growling in the trombone as Lupe (Diego's former wife) insults Frida and Diego at their wedding.

The orchestra continues its ironic commentary throughout the work. Two examples: as Frida and Diego quarrel about their mutual infidelities, the brass offer a snarling version of the tender Act I love music, "Niña de mi corazon" (Child of my heart); and as Frida's death figures (*calaveras*) recreate her self-portrait, as the wounded "Little Deer," in a ballet sequence, Frida is stabbed, both physically (by the arrow) and musically (by piercing orchestral repetitions of Diego's demand for a divorce, "You don't need me anymore").

Deeper musical characterization is achieved through the extensive use of vocal ensembles. Frida and Diego have two important love scenes, one at the beginning and one at the end, with frequent arguments in between. The demanding role of Frida requires not only extensive monologues, both spoken and sung, but also duets, trios, quartets, a quintet, sextet, and several larger ensembles, working up to an intricate nine-part samba finale. In a musical metaphor for Frida's unique persona, her vocal line is scored with its own characteristic rhythms: often in three-quarter time while the orchestra or the rest of the cast is in duple meter. Frida, thus, sings as she lived: against the tide from the very first note.

### **COMPOSER PROFILE**

## Robert Xavier Rodríguez

Music by Robert Xavier Rodríguez (b. 1946) has been performed by conductors such as Sir Neville Marriner, Antal Dorati, Eduardo Mata, James DePriest, Sir Raymond Leppard, Keith Lockhart, Andrew Litton, and Leonard Slatkin and by such organizations as the New York City Opera, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Dallas Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Houston Grand Opera, Vienna Schauspielhaus, Israel Philharmonic, Mexico City Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, and the Seattle, Houston, Dallas, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Baltimore, St. Louis, National, Boston, and Chicago Symphony Orchestras. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Prix Lili Boulanger, and the Prix de Composition Prince Pierre de Monaco. Rodríguez has served as Composer-in-Residence with the San Antonio Symphony and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Twenty CDs featuring his music have been recorded (1999 Grammy nomination), and his music is published exclusively by G. Schirmer, Inc. He is Professor of Music at the University of Texas at Dallas, where he holds an Endowed Chair of Art and Aesthetic Studies and is Director of the Musica Nova Ensemble.

## CHARLES H. OPPENHEIM INTERVIEWS ROBERT XAVIER RODRIGUEZ

PRO OPERA (MEXICO) JUNE 6, 2007

CHO: What place does this opera have in your lengthy musical production?

RXR: I have written eight operas, six of them comedies. Besides *Frida*, two others have Mexican subject matter: *La Curandera* and *Monkey See*, *Monkey Do*.

CHO: What was it you saw in the character of the painter Frida Kahlo that inspired you to create a "musical biography" on this subject?

RXR: I cannot take the credit for choosing Frida Kahlo as a subject. The American Music Theater Festival (now Prince Theater) was already working with the two librettists, Hilary Blecher and Migdalia Cruz, when they commissioned me to write the music. I'm glad they did, because Frida is an ideal subject for the stage, full of color, tragedy, humor, sex, infidelity, violence and passion. Mark Twain said that fiction was limited by the laws of probability, but that real life was not. If one were to try to make up a story with such bigger-than-life characters doing all those outrageous things, no one would believe it. Frida was destined for the intense genre of

opera. As one American reviewer put it, her life was "...an opera waiting to happen."

CHO: *Frida* has been described as extending the common ground between opera and musical theater, in the tradition of Gershwin, Sondheim and Weill. Is this an accurate description of your style?

RXR: Yes. Diego Rivera began his career working in Paris in an elitist Cubist style. He then experienced a kind of artistic conversion and decided to devote his talent to popular art for all the people. He created powerful and complex formal structures which had amazing immediacy and clarity. I decided to follow Diego's model and to write music in the populist genre of musical theater while still mainting the intricate ensembles and large-scale structural dimensions of opera. Frida interweaves several musical styles ranging from authentic Mexican folk music to the jazzy musical style of the 1930's in the New York scenes— with a very contemporary "lyrical atonality," as Musical America has described it. I enjoy creating stylistic "collisions" in my work, bringing widely

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disparate musical elements together and creating a synthesis of opposites. I've used that process in many other pieces, starting with Medieval or Renaissance music, Hebrew chant, Bach, Mozart, Rameau, ragtime or tangos and letting my own musical language have a conversation (or argument) with it.

CHO: Did you actually research the musical styles and genres current in the times of the historical Frida?

RXR: Atmosphere is important to me, so I did look for authentic Mexican folk songs to use in the opera; but the main point of my study was to learn the style so that I could create my own Mexican-sounding music. I was inspired by Manuel de Falla, who said he wrote "imaginary folk music." It may seem strange to find Mariachi, side-by-side with American jazz, "The Internationale," Viennese-inspired atonality plus twisted bits of Wagner and Tchaikovsky; but, since Frida was such a complicated personality, no music about her could be one-dimensional.

CHO: I was wondering, do you know what kind of music Frida actually liked and listened to? Were Frida and Diego very "musical" at all? We know of their relations with other famous plastic artists and politicians, but do you know if they were they acquainted with Mexican composers or musicians?

RXR: I have no idea what music Frida and Diego liked. Years ago, someone made a Mexican movie about them in which they sang bits of Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*to each other, which seems, to me, highly unlikely. Just as Diego took the liberty of portraying Emiliano Zapata's horse as white rather than black, I am taking the liberty of recreating Frida and Diego in musical terms, even though music was not an element in their creative lives.

CHO: What do you think your opera brings to the table in terms of knowledge and comprehension of the character of Frida and of such a significant period in Mexico's modern history?

RXR: I have tried to show in music what Frida must have been like as a person; for instance, the first music that Frida sings in the opera shows us that she has an independent streak. The orchestra is playing in 4/4 time, but she sings in 3/4, swimming against the rhythmic tide from the very first note. Also, Frida is unpredictable in that she resists being tied down for very long to either speaking or singing; she keeps switching back and forth between the two. And, in the second act, in her seductive bath scene with her lesbian lover, she suddenly begins singing low, below the staff, in the same register as a man. As for the historical context, the period during and after the Mexican Revolution was an important time in which many artists, including the composers Chávez and Revueltas, began to explore their native traditions, rather than affecting the European veneer of the earlier Díaz regime. Frida's famous Tehuana costumes were a symbol of this national pride. Musically, I've tried to make the score as Mexican as possible; but, in order to do so, I needed to place the Mexican elements in a larger international context.

CHO: What is your personal relationship with Mexico and Mexican music?

RXR: My parents were both of Mexican descent, and my mother was born in Mexico; but, since I am an American, I know Mexico only as an admiring outsider. Perhaps viewing the culture from a distance has given me the fresh spark of enthusiasm to try to create an opera that could be a national rallying point for two of Mexico's most important cultural icons. After all, it was not an African-American who wrote the music for Porgy and Bess, but a New York Jew of Russian descent. In addition to my three operas on Mexican subjects, I have also written several instrumental works which incorporate Mexican themes. The three largest are Con Flor y Canto, Màscarasand Sinfonia à la Mariachi. Unfortunately, I do not know very much of what is being written in Mexico today; still, I was deeply touched when, after a performance of one of my works in Mexico, a member of the audience said to me, "Thank you for giving us OUR music."

CHO: The fact that you've already published seven operas not only speaks of you as a prolific composer, but also speaks in favor of the genre: that contemporary opera is alive and well. How does one go about composing opera these days? Through commission only?

RXR: It is no accident that the word "opera" means "work." Frida was, by necessity, composed in the terrifyingly short time of nine months: like having a baby, but with the labor pains at the beginning and continuing all the way through. Normally, operas involve a commitment of several years, from developing the libretto to the short score to the orchestration to (if you're lucky) a workshop process to try out the material and, finally, to the actual production. With Frida, after the opening in Philadelphia, we were able to keep testing and rewriting on the road in Boston and Vermont before opening in New York. Even then, there were many more revisions before the final version was ready for the Houston Grand Opera. With so many people involved, both a commission to compose an opera and a performing organization to produce it must be in place before a composer can begin to write. After a commission, the promise of hearing a new work performed is the best inspiration for a composer.

CHO: Now that we celebrating not only *Frida's* centennial but opera's 400th anniversary since Monterverdi's *L'Orfeo*, what are your thoughts on the genre as a musical form and as a means of storytelling?

RXR: Opera is the supreme art form. Because music actually enters our bodies and makes us vibrate from within, we have a deeper, physical response to the words and images we see and hear on the stage. Even though symphony orchestras are struggling these days, I'm happy to see that audiences still crave the wonderful emotional catharsis that opera can provide. One of my favorite quotations is from Jean Cocteau's play *Les Parents Terribles*, "We read books to see whether we're in them." Similarly, we go to operas to see blown-up versions of our own hopes and fears. It's no wonder that

most operas deal primarily with love affairs. The forms and styles of musical theater may change, but music will always be the most magical way to tell a story.

CHO: The Calavera dance figures are a constant presence throughout the opera; they are always around Frida and accompany her in her journey through life. Are they a symbol of the constant presence of Death in her tortuous life?

RXR: The constant presence of Death was real for Frida. She actually slept with a skeleton mounted over her bed; so she, literally, looked Death in the face every day of her life. In the opera, the Calaveras serve as a visualization of Frida's personal demons. They both torture her and comfort her. They also provide comic relief, or *lazzi*, as equivalent characters to the *Zanni* in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*.

CHO: In a recent interview in Mexico, you mentioned that in most activities celebrating *Frida's* centennial, the emphasis has been placed on her role as a victim of circumstances, but that you wanted to stress her significance as a survivor, as a fighter who never surrenders to fate. Could you elaborate?

RXR: Oscar Wilde said that he put his genius into his life, rather than into his work. Frida, on the other hand, was able to combine her life and her work into one inseparable whole. Frida's physical and emotional torments would be hard for the audience to endure unless her pain were clearly seen as a catalyst to inspire the extraordinary images she was able to create. We have an American saying that "Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional." In spite of her pain, Frida had a marvelous sense of humor, which makes her rare among operatic heroines. In the opera, the librettists and I decided to emphasize how Frida used the events of her life as raw material for her art and for the remarkable public persona which she created for herself. We portrayed Frida, not as a victim, but as a fighter who looks Death in the eye and shouts "¡Viva la vida!"

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## **OPERA OF OUR TIME**

Today, many composers are creating new works which reflect our times in exciting and theatrical ways. These operas are being produced by important opera companies worldwide. MOT will not be left behind. To this end, MOT has launched a three-year program — OPERA OF OUR TIME. First in the series was our production of A View From the Bridge in the 2014 spring season. A powerful operatic treatment of Arthur Miller's dramatic play set to music by one of today's preeminent composers, William Bolcom. This spring, we are producing an exciting opera, Frida, about the artist Frida Kahlo whose life and work intertwined with that of her husband Diego Rivera. It is both shocking and fascinating. The third piece is still in the planning stages but promises to be controversial and exciting.

New and contemporary works are vital to the future of opera and to MOT's growth.



Jean Schneider and Catalina Cuervo

Funds from the three-year OPERA OF OUR TIME campaign will continue to specifically support opera productions that reflect present-day themes. MOT would like to acknowledge all of the donors who helped raise more than \$500,000 in the first year of the campaign, with special thanks to Maxine and Stuart Frankel who made the extremely generous lead gift.



David DiChiera and Catalina Cuervo



Ricardo Lugo and Kim Josephson in MOT's A View from the Bridge



Catalina Cuervo

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The performance on March 7 will be broadcast live on Detroit radio station WRCJ 90.9 FM.

Special thanks to Tori Davis and Marvin Jones from Henry Ford Hospital for creating Frida's body cast.

Arrangements for costumes created in Mexico organized by Ofelia Contreras, Martina Guzmán,

Adrián Ortega Hijar and Cecilia Hijar.

This production of *Frida* has been made possible with the remarkable support of the management and staffs of Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, The Berman Center for Performing Arts, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Consulate of Mexico in Detroit, and Michigan Opera Theatre.

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