

21ST CWU OPERA
ENSEMBLE
PRESENTS
CENTURY
AMERICAN
ONE-ACT
OPERAS

Having Guests | The Beautiful | Speed Dating
for Dinner | Bridegroom | Tonight!

CWU | Central
Washington
University

Jerilyn S. McIntyre Music Building Wayne S. Hertz Concert Hall
Saturday, April 12, 2025 7:00 PM
Sunday, April 13, 2025 4:00 PM

Directors' Note

from Gayla Blaisdell and Jan Nelson

Why 21st Century American Operas?

It is a common misconception that opera is an outdated and dying classical genre that is no longer relevant to modern society. This couldn't be further from the truth and our Spring 25 Opera Workshop performances are here to disprove that myth! The three operas being performed in this production were all written by American composers, in English, in the 21st century and have found exciting life in the voices and bodies of the CWU opera ensemble. Let's examine some of the most common myths about opera.

Opera is too expensive and only for the rich. WRONG

The average price to see an opera in America ranges from \$25 - \$400 a ticket. Even the Metropolitan Opera in NYC, the nation's most famous and expensive opera house, has tickets that are under \$50 per ticket. Most regional opera companies are much more accessible in price and almost all opera houses in America have special ticket prices for students, season ticket holders, and other groups. When compared to tickets to a Broadway show, a major league football game, or a concert ticket to Taylor Swift, opera tickets are quite reasonably priced. And opera exists in Ellensburg, WA at CWU for about the price of a movie theater ticket!

Opera is always in another language, and you won't understand it. WRONG
American composers write opera in English for English-speaking performers and audiences. And yes, you should be able to understand most of the words. It is normal that some words will be lost in the musical texture or the range, but for the most part, the audience should be able to follow the plot by understanding the dialogue and watching the action.

Opera isn't relevant to modern society. WRONG

Most operatic works, even the old ones, are relevant to the underlying aspects of human experience that are unchangeable throughout time: love, anger, revenge, grief, joy, and many more. Live performance lets the audience share in a communal expression of these fundamental human emotions and we become closer to each other through the experience. However, these three operas also contain current cultural references to everyday 21st century living: technology and social media, isolation, aging, modern expressions of gender and romance, substance use, mental health struggles, and contemporary humor.

Opera is boring. WRONG

These three operas will keep you engaged, laughing, and maybe even crying a little for the whole evening.

Opera is not dead. Opera is for everyone. Spread the word.

21st Century American One-Act Operas Synopsis

The evening will begin with a short new work by Nicholas Benz and Robert Feng, *Having Guests for Dinner*. The scene is about a young professional couple attending dinner at a mutual friend's home only to question whether their host, Christoph Aberfield, has sinister intentions. The second opera is a popular new work written in 2009 by Dan Shore entitled, *The Beautiful Bridegroom*. *The Beautiful Bridegroom* is based on an 18th century play by Ludvig Holberg that tells the story of a widow who is looking for a young husband – not for her daughters, but for herself. The composer describes the work as a Mozart pastiche made up of lyrical vocal writing for six sopranos. Dr. Jan Nelson has worked with these two casts, creating staging and character development to bring these one-act operas to life. The second act of the evening will feature *Speed Dating Tonight!* by Michael Ching. This innovative opera has seen nearly one hundred forty productions since its 2013 premiere, making it one of the most popular operas of the 21st century. Ching describes the opera as a “new numbers opera”: a traditional form of opera based on arias, duets, ensembles, and finales. The episodic and inclusive structure of this material is not gendered or limited to vocal type. Dr. Gayla Blaisdell, the Director, chose from almost one hundred options to craft a story that spotlights the unique talents and voices of the CWU Opera cast. The opera starts and ends by setting up an evening of speed dating at a local pub with the bartender, server, bus boy, and dating coordinator. Once the speed dating starts, the audience learns more about each dater and the various sub-plots as each character is revealed in their number. We are looking forward to an evening of fun, creative, and relatable operas performed in English by the talented CWU opera students and collaborative pianists.

Please turn off your cell phone and refrain from the use of any electronic devices throughout the duration of your visit to our facility.

Thank you, and enjoy the show.

Having Guests for Dinner

By Nicholas Bentz and Robert Feng

Laura.....Sofie Strandjord⁺

Marcus.....James Kirkham⁺

Christoph Aberfield.....Jared Loveless

The Beautiful Bridegroom

By Dan Shore

Terentia.....Moira McGregor⁺

Pernille.....Miranda Wojciechowicz⁺

Laurentia.....Violet Madson

Leonora.....Nicole Loveless⁺

Madam Kirsten.....Anna Grushevskiy

von Frauenliebe.....Morgan Lenz

intermission

+ Final CWU Opera Production

Speed Dating Tonight!

By Michael Ching

Quinn, the Bartender.....Christopher Lerch*

Stephanie, the Waitress.....Camille Brennan

Kaylee, the Coordinator.....Sophie Otness+

Emery, the Bus Boy.....Camden Sanor

Daters, in order of appearance:

Kristina Svistunov

Trevor Stowell

Caitlyn Leners

Ryan Taylor-Schmid

Ashley Both

Arturo Meza

Jakob Kennicutt

Sofie Strandjord+

Jared Loveless

Kyra Ross

Jaykub Willis

James Kirkham+

Mark May

Dallin Millard

* Indicates Graduate Student

+ Final CWU Opera Production

Production Crew

Artistic Directors

Having Guests for Dinner..... Jan Nelson
The Beautiful Bridegroom
Speed Dating Tonight..... Gayla Blaisdell

Musical Directors

Having Guests for Dinner..... Issac Vargas
The Beautiful Bridegroom..... Mia Spencer
Speed Dating Tonight..... Issac Vargas

Lighting Design..... Luis Anguiano[#]

Set Design & Construction..... Kathleen Beach

The Beautiful Bridegroom Costumes..... Moriah Josephson[#]

Sound..... Luis Anguiano[#]

Graduate Assistant..... Christopher Lerch^{*}

Student Production Crew Leads..... Sophie Otness

Kyra Ross

Caitlyn Leners

Christopher Lerch^{*}

Camille Brennan

Sofie Strandjord

* Indicates Graduate Student

Indicates CWU Theater Student

Special Thanks

CWU Music Department

Mark Goodenberger, Chair

Teresa Larsen

Shannon Martin

Anne Smethurst

Allen Larsen

Nicole Lamartine

Melissa Schiel

CWU Custodial Staff

CWU Theater Department

Christina Barrigan, Chair

Lirit Olyan Pendell

Emily Rollie

CWU University Relations

Bret Bleggi

Ella Tosingilo

Valley Theater Company

Jessica Solberg, Executive Director



Scan the QR code to the
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biographies and headshots!