

For Immediate Release

THE
SANTA FE
OPERA



The Santa Fe Opera Presents
its **19th World Premiere** opening **July 13:**
The Righteous from collaborators
Gregory Spears & Tracy K. Smith

The Righteous features an all-star cast including **Michael Mayes, Elena Villalón, Jennifer Johnson Cano, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Greer Grimsley, Brenton Ryan, Wendy Bryn Harmer, Nicholas Newton & more**

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Santa Fe, NM — On **July 13** the Santa Fe Opera will present its 19th world premiere, *The Righteous*, by two of America's most exciting talents, composer **Gregory Spears** (*Fellow Travelers, O Columbia, Paul's Case* and *A New Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei*) and librettist **Tracy K. Smith** (*To Free the Captives, Life on Mars, Ordinary Life: A Memoir* and *Such Color: New and Selected Poems*) who is a former US Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize-winner. The piece explores the intersection between genuine faith and political power in the 1980s American Southwest. Along the way, the characters' sacred love for God becomes entwined with the complicated realities of their romantic lives. It marks the second operatic collaboration between Spears and Smith, whose *Castor and Patience* received its world premiere at **Cincinnati Opera** in July 2022 and was nominated for Best World Premiere at the **International Opera Awards**.

Statement from composer Gregory Spears: "*The Righteous*, with an original libretto by my frequent collaborator Tracy K. Smith, is an evening-length work that spans 12 years of American history (1979-1990) and will be performed by a large cast of principal singers, chorus and orchestra. The opera tells the story of David, a preacher and leader of a growing church who finds himself caught up in the confluence of religion and politics in the 1980s, alongside contemporary events including the rise of feminism, the war on drugs, conflict in the Middle East and the AIDS epidemic. Throughout the narrative, we see how the feeling of being called to serve God can be so easily influenced by human frailty and desire. David's second wife Sheila's own attempt to seek out God and truth becomes central to the story as the evening progresses. While large in scope, the opera also focuses on the most intimate form in opera: the aria. Many of the characters in the story are on a spiritual search, and it's with the aria that we hope to dramatize their attempts to reach into the void and connect with something greater."

For more information on Gregory Spears, visit gregoryspears.com and schott-music.com.

Statement from librettist Tracy K. Smith: “As an artist, I’m interested in the ways that history talks to us. Often, history makes its voice felt when the circumstances of the present fall eerily into step with the upheavals of an earlier time’s conflicts. This fact used to unsettle me, as if we in our time were being hauled back to moments memorable for their struggle and strife; now I understand that the uncertainty of our own time makes it easier and more critical for us to hear anew the wisdom and the warnings of the past. As such, I find myself looking toward history often. It is not a backward gaze, for if history indeed came first, shouldn’t it now be up ahead in the distance, turning behind to see if we are doing what it takes to keep up?”

The terms of civic debate that emerged during the eleven-year span in which *The Righteous* is set have much to say to the conflict between factions in our own patch of the 21st century. Is it possible to muster care for far-flung neighbors when so much divisive rhetoric warns us, instead, to harbor fear, mistrust and righteous condemnation? Whom is it safe to love? Is love any longer a feasible investment, or should we instead be shoring up more concrete resources against future scarcity?”

For more information on Tracy K. Smith, visit tracyksmithpoet.com.

Kevin Newbury directs the world premiere production, which runs for six performances from **July 13** through **August 13**. Newbury shares a close working relationship with Spears, having directed five world premiere productions of his operatic works. At the Santa Fe Opera, Newbury directed the world premiere productions of Lewis Spratlan’s *Life is a Dream* (2010), Theodore Morrison’s *Oscar* (2013) and Mason Bates’s *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (2017). Scenic design is by **Mimi Lien**, named a **MacArthur Fellow** in 2015, the first set designer to receive the award. In 2017, she received a **Tony Award** for the set design of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*. Costumes are by **Devario D. Simmons** who has worked on and off Broadway and on several television shows, including Netflix’s *Rustin* and AMC’s *Turn: Washington’s Spies*. Lighting is by **Japhy Weideman**, a five-time Tony nominee who has also worked on numerous Broadway productions, including *Dear Evan Hansen*, *The Visit*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Macbeth* and *Of Mice and Men*. Video designer **Greg Emetaz** returns to Santa Fe on the heels of *Tristan und Isolde* and the world premiere of *M. Butterfly* in 2022. **Susanne Sheston** is the chorus master, a position she has held at the Santa Fe Opera since 2008 during which she has led the chorus in nine world premieres. **Whitney McAnally** is the stage manager and **Sordelet, Inc.** oversees fight and intimacy direction.

Conductor **Jordan de Souza**, in his company debut, leads the **Santa Fe Opera Orchestra** and a dynamic cast. In 2020, de Souza finished a four-year term at the **Komische Oper Berlin** as first kapellmeister where he collaborated on multiple acclaimed productions with director **Barrie Kosky**. A native of Cut and Shoot, Texas, baritone and former Apprentice singer **Michael Mayes** sings the lead role of David. American bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley** sings the role of Paul, President of Custom Oil who mentors

David and whom David succeeds as governor. American mezzo-soprano **Jennifer Johnson Cano** sings the role of Michele, David's first wife and daughter of Paul. American countertenor **Anthony Roth Costanzo** takes on the role of Jonathan, Michele's brother, son of Paul and David's best friend, who struggles with coming out in the early years of the AIDS crisis. Cuban-American soprano **Elena Villalón** sings the role of Sheila, a member of David's congregation who later becomes his second wife. American Soprano **Wendy Bryn Harmer** makes her company debut in the role of Marilyn, Paul's wife, and American tenor **Brenton Ryan** returns to the SFO stage in the role of CM, Paul's friend.

Several Santa Fe Opera Apprentice singers will make their company debuts: **Jazmine Saunders** as Shannon, **Natasha Isabella Gesto** as Deirdre, **Isobel Anthony** as Woman 1/Jenny, **Ashlyn Brown** as Woman 2/Event Planner, **Cole Bellamy** as Deacon 1 and **Matthew Goodheart** as Deacon 3/Young Aide. **Tessa Fackelmann** returns to the stage playing Woman 3/Woman/Ruth along with **Luke Harnish** playing Deacon 2/Joe/Representative and **Andrew Turner** playing Eli.

Six performances are scheduled: July 13, 17, 26, 30; August 7 and 13, 2024.

The Righteous

Music by Gregory Spears

Libretto by Tracy K. Smith

A World Premiere Commissioned by the Santa Fe Opera

6 performances — July 13, 17, 26, 30; August 7 & 13

Sung in English with opera titles in English and Spanish

Approximate run time: 3 hours including a 25-minute intermission

The 2024 Season is Dedicated to the Memory of
Richard Gaddes, Former General Director of the Santa Fe Opera

Production support generously provided by
Wyncote Foundation, as recommended by Frederick R. Haas & Raphael Gomez
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The Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation
The General Director's Premiere Fund in Honor of Richard Gaddes
The Fund for New or Rarely Performed Operas by Dr. Patricia A. McFate in memory of Ambassador
Sidney N. Graybeal

National Endowment for the Arts

The performances of Anthony Roth Costanzo are supported by
Gene & Jean Stark

The performances of Jennifer Johnson Cano are supported by
The MacKay Fund for Debut Artists

Creative Team

Conductor Jordan de Souza*
Director Kevin Newbury
Scenic Design Mimi Lien*
Costume Design Devario D. Simmons*
Lighting Design Japhy Weideman
Video Design Greg Emetaz
Chorus Master Susanne Sheston
Fight & Intimacy Directors Sordelet, Inc.
Stage Manager Whitney McAnally

Cast

David Michael Mayes*+
Sheila Elena Villalón
Michele Jennifer Johnson Cano*
Jonathan Anthony Roth Costanzo
Paul Greer Grimsley
CM Brenton Ryan
Marilyn Wendy Bryn Harmer*
Jacob Nicholas Newton+
Eli Andrew Turner=
Shannon Jazmine Saunders*=
Deirdre Natasha Isabella Gesto*=
Woman 1/Jenny Isobel Anthony*=
Woman 2/Event Planner Ashlyn Brown*=
Woman 3/Woman/Ruth Tessa Fackelmann=
Deacon 1 Cole Bellamy*=
Deacon 2/Joe/Representative Luke Harnish=
Deacon 3/Young Aide Matthew Goodheart*=-

The Santa Fe Opera Orchestra & Chorus

*Santa Fe Opera debut, +Former Santa Fe Opera Apprentice, =Current Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Singer

Resource Library

Videos

- [Gregory Spears and Tracy K. Smith on *The Righteous*](#): The creators give a brief introduction to the themes and story of *The Righteous*.
- [Works & Process at the Guggenheim: *The Righteous*](#): The creative team behind *The Righteous*, including its composer, librettist and director, have a detailed discussion breaking down the scenes and music. This video includes several performed excerpts from the piece.
[Crafting the World of *The Righteous*](#): An interview with the costume designer for *The Righteous*, Devario D. Simmons, as he discusses his decisions and process.
- [The *Righteous* Advertisement \(English\)](#): The English version of the Santa Fe Opera's advertisement for *The Righteous* for television, web and radio use.
- [The *Righteous* Advertisement \(Spanish\)](#): The Spanish version of the Santa Fe Opera's advertisement for *The Righteous* for television, web and radio use.

About The Santa Fe Opera

Recognized as "Festival of the Year" at the **International Opera Awards**, the Santa Fe Opera annually draws 85,000 people from New Mexico and around the globe. Nestled atop a mountain vista in northern New Mexico, the company's iconic **Crosby Theatre** is open on three sides, allowing visitors to enjoy performances complemented by the elements. Since 1957 the company has presented over 2,000 performances of 179 operas by 91 composers spanning five centuries of opera, creating a legacy of 45 American premieres and 18 world premieres.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility at the Santa Fe Opera

Opera has the power to speak truth, broaden perspectives and invite empathy. The Santa Fe Opera is committed to the continuous work of becoming an antiracist and anti-oppressive organization and incorporating the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. Our goal is to create a joyful and engaging environment in which a diverse community of artists, staff, volunteers and audiences alike belong.

The mission of the Santa Fe Opera is to advance the operatic art form by presenting ensemble performances of the highest quality in a unique setting with a varied repertory of new, rarely performed, and standard works; to ensure the excellence of opera's future through apprentice programs for singers, technicians and arts administrators; and to foster an understanding and appreciation of opera among a diverse public.

Discover More: santafeopera.org

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