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**Chicago Opera Theater sheds light on oft-forgotten Black American chapter
in Revolutionary War history with World Premiere of**
Quamino's Map
in three performances only at the Studebaker Theater, April 23, 29 & May 1

CHICAGO (January 2022) — **Chicago Opera Theater (COT)**, Chicago's foremost producer of contemporary and re-imagined opera, proudly presents the World Premiere of ***Quamino's Map***, shedding light on the post-Revolutionary War years when London was the unlikely refuge for thousands of Black Americans who fought for their liberty on the side of the British. *Quamino's Map*, the final production of the COT 2021-22 season, will be staged at the Studebaker Theater in the Fine Arts Building, 410 S. Michigan Avenue, in three performances only, April 23, 29 and May 1, 2022.

Commissioned by COT, *Quamino's Map* is composed by the Belize-born, British-based [Errollyn Wallen](#), with a libretto by American playwright [Deborah Brevoort](#). The story, loosely inspired by the novel *Incomparable World* (1997) by S.I. Martin, is, in Brevoort's words "about the enduring pull of freedom and the ends to which people will go to achieve it."

Quamino's Map tells the story of Juba Freeman who arrives in London after winning his freedom from slavery by fighting for the British in the Revolutionary War. Thrown headfirst into British society, he meets Amelia Alumond, a member of the British Black gentry, and reconnects with other ex-enslaved who are struggling to build new lives for themselves as free men. Inspired by historical events, the opera sheds a light on a forgotten corner of history – and challenges current assumptions of what life was like in 18th-century London for a person of color.

“Commissioning new works is a central tenet of Chicago Opera Theater’s mission,” said COT Edlis Neeson General Director **Ashley Magnus**. “We are thrilled to be collaborating with such esteemed storytellers to bring this under-told historical moment to audiences in Chicago.”

“Errollyn Wallen is a world-class opera composer whose work must be heard more often on American stages,” said COT Music Director **Lidiya Yankovskaya**. “I’ve been looking for an opportunity to commission Errollyn since I first arrived at COT and I am thrilled to finally present this rigorously developed new work, written with the superb playwright and librettist Deborah Breevoort.”

The *Quamino’s Map* creative team includes conductor [Jeri Lynne Johnson](#), founder of the Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra in Philadelphia, and director [Kimille Howard](#), in-demand opera director and Metropolitan Opera assistant stage director. Premiere operatic dramaturg [Cori Ellison](#) serves as dramaturg for this historically steeped production. All three women are making their COT debuts with *Quamino’s Map*.

Leading its talented national cast are tenor [Curtis Bannister](#) as Juba Freeman, Soprano [Flora Hawk](#) (COT debut) as Amelia Alumond and Bass-Baritone [Damien Geter](#) (COT debut) as the eponymous Quamino Dolly. The ensemble cast is rounded out with COT regulars **Cameo Humes**, **Kimberly E. Jones**, **Joelle LaMarre**, **Tyrone Chambers II**, and **Leah Dexter**, and COT apprentice artists **Keanon Kyles** and **Veena Akama-Makia**.

Performed in the newly remodeled Studebaker Theater at the Fine Arts Building, 410 S. Michigan Avenue, *Quamino’s Map* is a 90-minute work without intermission. It will be sung in English accompanied by English surtitles. Performances are Saturday, April 23, at 7:30 p.m.; Friday, April 29, at 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, May 1, at 3:00 p.m. Tickets start at \$45 and are on sale now at chicagooperatheater.org/season/map.

***Quamino’s Map* Creative Team Bios**

Born in Belize, **Errollyn Wallen** gave up her training at the Dance Theater of Harlem, New York, to study composition at the universities of London and Cambridge. She founded her own Ensemble X, and its motto, ‘*We don’t break down barriers in music... we don’t see any,*’ reflects her genuine, free-spirited approach and eclectic musicianship. She has been commissioned by outstanding music institutions from the BBC to the Royal Opera House and performed her songs internationally. Wallen was awarded an MBE for her services to music in the Queen’s birthday honours list in June 2007.

Deborah Breevoort is a playwright and librettist from Alaska who now lives in the New York area. She is an alumna of New Dramatists, one of the original company members of Alaska’s Perseverance Theatre, a member of the playwright’s collective at Florida Studio Theatre, and a co-founder of Theatre Without Borders, dedicated to international theatre exchange. She is best known for her play *The Women of Lockerbie*, which won the Kennedy Center’s Fund for New American Plays Award and the silver medal in the Onassis International Playwriting Competition.

Jeri Lynne Johnson made history in 2005 as the first African American woman to win an international conducting prize when she was awarded the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship. Johnson is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra in Philadelphia. She founded Black Pearl in 2008 as a model for the 21st-century American orchestras combining artistic excellence with

cultural diversity and meaningful community engagement. A graduate of Wellesley College, Johnson began conducting while completing a master's degree in music theory and history at the University of Chicago (2004).

Kimille Howard is a New York-based director, deviser, writer, and filmmaker. She is an Assistant Stage Director at the Metropolitan Opera and recently worked on the new James Robinson production of *Porgy and Bess*. Howard is also the newly appointed Artistic Director of the Lucille Lortel Theatre's NYC Public High School Playwriting Fellowship and a cofounder of the Black Classical Music Archive. Select directing credits include *Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson* (Glimmerglass Festival), Joseph Bologne's *The Anonamous Lover* (Wolf Trap Opera), and *Death By Life* (White Snake Projects).

As staff Dramaturg at Glyndebourne Festival Opera (2012 through 2017) and New York City Opera (1997 through 2010), **Cori Ellison** helped to shape repertoire choices and new productions, and oversaw company publications, curating and presenting outreach programs, striving for all of these endeavors to spring seamlessly from the company's artistic vision.

About Chicago Opera Theater

Chicago Opera Theater (COT) is a company laser-focused on living its values: expanding the tradition of opera as a living art form, producing high-quality works new to Chicago audiences, identifying top-tier casts and creative talent at the beginning of grand operatic careers, and following through on commitments to equity and access – behind the scenes, on the stage, and in the audience. Since its founding in 1973, COT has grown from a grassroots community-based company to a national leader in an increasingly vibrant, diverse, and forward-looking art form. COT has staged over 150 operas, including 77 Chicago premieres and 44 operas by American composers. COT is led by Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson General Director Ashley Magnus and Music Director Lidiya Yankovskaya, who is one of only two women to hold that title at a multimillion-dollar opera company in the United States.

In addition to its mainstage season, COT is devoted to the development and production of new opera in the United States through its three-pronged Vanguard Initiative, launched in 2018. The Vanguard Initiative trains emerging opera composers, invests time and talent in new opera at various stages of the creative process, and opens up opportunities for Chicago audiences to become part of the development of new work, in dialogue with the creators themselves. Current Vanguard Emerging Opera Composer [Wang Lu](#), one of the *Washington Post's* "21 composers for '21," with librettist [Kelley Rourke](#), have composed COT's third Vanguard opera [The Beekeeper](#). *The Beekeeper* will be performed one night only, [Friday, March 4, 2022, at 7:30pm](#), at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport Avenue, Chicago. Tickets start at \$36 and can be purchased at chicagooperatheater.org/season/bees.

For more information on Chicago Opera Theater productions, visit chicagooperatheater.org/.

COVID Precautions

COT is dedicated to the health and well-being of its audiences, artists, crews, and staff. All audience members at the Athenaeum Theatre and at the Studebaker Theater must show proof of complete COVID-19 vaccination, or a recent negative COVID-19 test. Masks must be worn during the performance, and audience capacity will be limited. For full and up to date COVID-19 precaution information, visit chicagooperatheater.org/covid.

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Cast photos (from l-r): Curtis Bannister, Flora Hawk, Damien Geter

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