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Austin Opera's 2026-2027 Season begins with the company's first World Premiere commission and the opening of the new Sarah & Ernest Butler Performance Center

Additional seasonal highlights include the company premiere of Massenet's *Thaïs*, the Texas premiere of *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce, and Verdi's classic *La traviata* in partnership with Opera San Antonio

(Austin, TX—Thursday, February 26, 2026) Austin Opera's 2026-2027 Season begins in October with the company's first world premiere commission, *Ofrenda*, with music by **Jorge Sosa** and a libretto by **John de los Santos**. The 90-minute chamber opera performed in English and Spanish will open the company's new **Sarah & Ernest Butler Performance Center**, bringing year-round community-centric programming to the city.

Four performances of the new opera, a celebration of family, cultural memory, and Día de los Muertos traditions, will launch Austin Opera's biggest season in decades, with three additional productions planned for the Long Center for the Performing Arts: an epic staging of Jules Massenet's *Thaïs* (November 13 & 15) starring soprano **Nicole Heaston** in the title role; the Texas premiere of the renowned love story *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce (February 6-7); and Verdi's timeless *La traviata* (April 18, 22 & 24, 2027) starring soprano **Sara Gartland** and tenor **Kameron Lopreore** as doomed lovers Violetta and Alfredo.

"I cannot think of a more ideal work to launch the 2026-2027 season and help us open the Butler Performance Center than *Ofrenda*, which has grown right here in Austin over the past three years through Jorge and John's work in the Residency for Latinx Creatives," said **Annie Burrige**, Austin Opera's General Director & CEO. "Presenting this world premiere is both a celebration of artistic innovation and an act of community representation, highlighting the power of opera to honor heritage, inspire empathy, and bring people together across cultures. Combined with three incredible love stories at the Long Center, this season puts opera at the center of Austin's reputation and practice as the Live Music Capital of the World."

Sarah & Ernest Butler Music Director **Timothy Myers** conducts November's grand staging of *Thaïs*, Jules Massenet's tale of sensuality and spirituality, which centers around a seductive priestess and a holy man. Soprano **Nicole Heaston** stars in the title role of the Egyptian courtesan and priestess, with baritone **Troy Cook** as the Christian monk Athanaël.

In February, Austin Opera presents the trailblazing opera *Fellow Travelers*, a gay love story set during the Lavender Scare, a McCarthy-era witch hunt that ousted thousands of gay and lesbian employees from the federal government. Created by composer **Gregory Spears**, librettist **Greg Pierce**, and director **Kevin Newbury**, and based on **Thomas Mallon's** best-selling 2007 novel,

Fellow Travelers is one of the most critically acclaimed and widely produced operas of the past fifty years, selling more than 25,000 tickets over 14 productions across the United States.

April brings Verdi's most timeless and lyrical score, *La traviata*, in a new co-production with Opera San Antonio, presented in three performances conducted by **Timothy Myers** and directed by **E. Loren Meeker**.

Subscriptions for the 2026-2027 Season will go on sale to current subscribers on Thursday, February 26 at 10 a.m., and new subscribers can purchase a season ticket package starting on Tuesday, March 17. Individual tickets for the season will be available on Tuesday, July 28. Subscriptions and individual tickets can be purchased at www.austinopera.org.

Austin Opera's 2026-2027 Season

Ofrenda

World Premiere

Thursday, October 1, 2026

Friday, October 2, 2026

Saturday, October 3, 2026

Sunday, October 4, 2026

Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Center

Developed over years of partnership with composer **Jorge Sosa** and librettist **John de los Santos**, this new work is a celebration of family, cultural memory, and Día de los Muertos traditions. *Ofrenda* will open the 2026–2027 season, representing a major milestone for the company—it is Austin Opera's first commissioned work and the culmination of years of investment in developing new voices and stories that reflect Latinx communities, family, and tradition.

"The idea for *Ofrenda* came to me during COVID," said composer **Jorge Sosa**. "I wanted to write a work that centered around healing and celebrated essential workers. I was thinking about the curanderas (traditional healers) in México and the mysticism that surrounds them. John de los Santos has been an incredible creative partner in developing the idiosyncrasies of the characters and the bilingual libretto. The opera reads like a hospital procedural show, mixed with a healthy dose of magical realism and high drama. The main character is Macaria (soprano **Stephanie Sanchez**), a custodian at a hospital who has an encounter with death, La Señora (mezzo-soprano **Victoria Vargas**). Moved by Macaria's kindness, Señora sheds a tear of life into Macaria's water bottle, giving her the power to heal anyone. But the price for such power will eventually catch up with her."

"In *Ofrenda*, themes of remembrance, love, and healing are woven through a narrative that honors life's enduring connections," said **Claudia Chapa**, Austin Opera's Associate Director of Artistic Operations and Curator of Hispanic & Latinx Programming. "The work resonates deeply in Austin, where more than one-third of residents identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and where Austin Opera has cultivated long-term relationships with the community through programs such as *Concerts at the Consulate* and the Residency for Latinx Creatives. As communities seek

shared experiences that foster understanding and connection, *Ofrenda* offers a poignant reflection on the ties that bind families and cultures across generations.”

In 2023, *Ofrenda* was selected by Austin Opera to receive financial and workshop support through its Residency for Latinx Creatives, a program funded by the Butler Fund for Spanish Programming, which focuses on nurturing new works by Latinx artists. During the residency, Austin Opera’s artistic and administrative staff worked closely with Sosa and de los Santos. The team met regularly to provide feedback on libretto development and musical composition. A duet from the work premiered in November 2025 during Austin Opera’s *Celebrate Opera!* concert, introducing audiences to the new piece. In June 2026, a weeklong workshop will be held in Austin. Austin Opera will premiere the chamber version of the opera; however, a full orchestration is also being composed. *Ofrenda* is made possible by the Butler Fund for Spanish Programming and support from OPERA America.

As Austin Opera’s new home for performance, rehearsal, and creative development, the **Butler Performance Center** is designed to serve as a dynamic cultural hub for Austin’s southeast community. The venue’s flexible 185-seat configuration offers an intimate and immersive setting—ideal for premiering a contemporary work like *Ofrenda* that emphasizes storytelling, emotional connection, and audience engagement. The venue’s size and location also make it ideal for reaching new and returning audiences from Austin’s culturally diverse southeast neighborhoods.

Opera Unleashed: *Thaïs*
Friday, November 13, 2026, at 7:30 pm
Sunday, November 15, 2026, at 2:00 pm
Long Center for the Performing Arts

In celebration of **Timothy Myers’** 2023 appointment as the Sarah and Ernest Butler Music Director, Austin Opera launched Opera Unleashed: Epic Masterpieces with Timothy Myers, a series of company premieres featuring some of the most historically significant works composed for the operatic voice. November brings Jules Massenet’s tale of sensuality and spirituality, which centers around a seductive priestess and a holy man. Premiered in 1894 at the Paris Opera, it is one of the most seductive and introspective operas ever to grace the stage.

The titular *Thaïs* is sung by soprano **Nicole Heaston** in the role of an Egyptian courtesan and priestess of Venus whom the Christian monk Athanaël (baritone **Troy Cook**) tries to convert to the new faith. But as she finds her salvation in Christ, he becomes obsessed with her sexually and falls to lust.

Myers, Heaston, and Cook teamed up to great acclaim in the production’s 2025 premiere at Spoleto Festival. “What powers this production is the mesmerizing Heaston, whose stunning soprano and magnetic stage presence makes it palpably clear why men of all stripes are fixated,” said the *Charleston City Paper*. “In the third act, Cook’s rich baritone rose also to poignancy as he channeled the soul-searching of Athanaël.”

Crystal Manich, who earned raves for her 2026 Austin Opera staging of *Fiddler on the Roof*, returns to direct *Thaïs*, alongside lighting designer **Tlálloc López-Watterman**, costume designer **Brandon McDonald**, projection designer **Greg Emetaz**, and movement designer **Michael Pappalardo**.

Fellow Travelers

Saturday, February 6, 2027, at 7:30 pm

Sunday, February 7, 2027, at 2:00 pm

Called “a deeply human love story” by the *Chicago Tribune*, ***Fellow Travelers*** portrays the experiences of government employees who were subject to humiliating investigations because of their sexuality. In 1953, the young, idealistic Timothy Laughlin arrives in Washington, DC, eager to join the fight against Communism. A chance encounter with Hawkins Fuller, a State Department official, results in Tim’s first job and his first romantic relationship with a man. As Tim struggles to reconcile his newfound love with his beliefs, the baleful force of McCarthyism threatens to cost Hawkins his job and his freedom.

Austin Opera’s performances in February 2027 kick off the second year of a national tour that will bring this story to multiple cities across the US in 2026 and 2027, one of the largest consortium projects ever attempted in the US opera industry. The tour is being co-produced by the **Up Until Now Collective**. In 2026, the tour begins with Seattle Opera (February 21-March 1), Portland Opera (March 7–15), San Diego Opera (July 10–12) and New York’s Glimmerglass Festival (July 18–Aug. 16).

“At a time when living ‘in the closet’ is becoming increasingly rare, it seems important to put characters like Tim and Hawk on stage,” said composer **Gregory Spears** and librettist **Greg Pierce**. “Not just as historical victims struggling against homophobia, but also as ordinary people fighting through life in an era where a public expression of love could threaten to destroy one’s world. Our hope is that the nuanced machinery of opera might play some small part in reminding us of this history, while also preserving onstage the dangerous counterpoint that so often defined the gay experience in the mid-20th century.”

“As we prepare to celebrate the opera’s tenth anniversary, I have been reflecting on my values as an artist, especially as a Queer artist making work during these uncertain times,” says stage director **Kevin Newbury**, who also directed the premiere of *Fellow Travelers* at Cincinnati Opera in 2016. “I believe that we stand on the shoulders of the people who came before us and who fought so hard and sacrificed so much for us to have the rights we have today. I believe in the power of art to build community. And I believe in the power of a good love story. And *Fellow Travelers* is, first and foremost, a good love story.”

To explore the opera’s broader impact, the *Fellow Travelers* tour consortium is partnering with the American LGBTQ+ Museum on the **Lavender Names Project**, a nationwide, grassroots archival research and community outreach initiative that will share the stories of LGBTQ+ community members.

Fellow Travelers is based on **Thomas Mallon**’s best-selling 2007 novel. In 2023, CBS/Paramount premiered the Emmy-nominated mini-series adaptation of the novel starring Matt Bomer and Jonathan Bailey.

Verdi’s *La traviata*

Sunday, April 18, 2027, at 2:00 pm

Thursday, April 22, 2027, at 7:30 pm

Saturday, April 24, 2027, at 7:30 pm

Austin Opera and Opera San Antonio team up once again following the successful and groundbreaking 2025 co-production of Puccini's poignant *Madame Butterfly*. This year's co-production of *La traviata* is made possible with support from The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation.

Featuring Verdi's most timeless and lyrical score, *La traviata* has continued to captivate audiences for more than 150 years. Within the glamorous, clamorous social whirl of sophisticated Paris, the courtesan Violetta lives purely for pleasure but longs for true love. She finds the right man in Alfredo, but their happiness is cut short: at his father's insistence, Violetta leaves Alfredo for the sake of his family. Her spirit broken, her health shattered, Violetta now lives only with the hope that Alfredo will return to her.

Praised by *Opera News* for her "gleaming column of sound" and "individual timbre," American soprano **Sara Gartland** is garnering critical acclaim for her powerful portrayals of some of opera's leading lyric heroines, including *La traviata*'s Violetta. Having impressed Austin audiences as Pinkerton in 2025 performances of *Madame Butterfly*, lyric tenor **Kameron Lopreore** returns as Alfredo. Called "a most impressive Germont" by *Opera News*, Korean baritone **Joo Won Kang** makes his Austin Opera debut as Alfredo's disapproving but noble father.

Conducted by Sarah and Ernest Butler Music Director **Timothy Myers** and directed by **E. Loren Meeker**, Opera San Antonio's General Director, this vibrant production from Lyric Opera of Chicago features set and costume design by **Desmond Heeley**.

ABOUT AUSTIN OPERA

Austin Opera leverages the multidisciplinary, collaborative, and transcendent power of opera to increase the quality of life for its diverse community by bringing together local and national artists to create outstanding, meaningful operatic performances and experiences; partnering with local schools and community groups to provide robust, responsive educational programs that inspire and engage; and leading the development of new, innovative strategies that increase the scope and impact of the operatic medium in Austin and beyond. Over a four-decade history, Austin Opera has presented over 100 opera productions with coinciding engagement programs, enriched the lives of more than 200,000 children through arts education programming, and developed robust partnerships with educational and nonprofit institutions across Central Texas. Austin Opera is a Founding Resident Company of the 2,400-seat Long Center for the Performing Arts.

Under the visionary leadership of General Director & CEO Annie Burrige and Music Director Timothy Myers, Austin Opera has reached new heights of artistic excellence, innovation, and impact in recent years. The company serves more than 25,000 community members annually through a curated season at the Long Center for the Performing Arts and other venues across Austin. The company's community engagement programs, such as Conductor Cues, Opera Overtures, and Masterclass with the Artists, provide unique opportunities for audiences to connect with the music, the artists, and the creative process behind each production.

In 2021, Austin Opera partnered with the Consulate General of Mexico in Austin to create Concerts at the Consulate, a performance series to spotlight Latinx artists and Hispanic culture held at the Consulate and led by Claudia Chapa, the company's Curator of Hispanic and Latinx Programming. The Austin Opera Residency for Latinx Creatives provides a workshopping home for the development of new Spanish language works.

Austin Opera works directly with educators in 15 local school districts and nonprofit organizations like Austin Public Library to offer inspired educational programming for students of all ages, offering much of its programs free of charge. Opera Treasure Chest and Access Opera provide 12,000 students annually with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills-aligned curriculum and live opera.

Austin Opera offers on-demand broadcasts of Concerts at the Consulate, episodes of the Tetzlaff & Tiblier Conductor Cues Series, and Opera Overtures created by Scholar-In-Residence Dr. Charles Carson. Thousands of patrons tune into the Sunday Matinee Broadcast on KMFA 89.5. Austin Opera has filmed concerts for PBS and PBS affiliates including An All-Star Concert (2021), Bella Noche de Música (2023), and Ryan Speedo Green in Concert (2023), to bring opera into the homes of millions of people across the U.S.

Austin Opera anchors Austin's cultural ecosystem by providing employment, mentorship, and career opportunities to hundreds of artists throughout the region.

To learn more about Austin Opera, visit austinopera.org or follow along on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), at [@austinopera](#).