



## **AUSTIN OPERA CELEBRATES A DOUBLE FIRST: NEW BUTLER PERFORMANCE CENTER OPENS WITH HISTORIC WORLD PREMIERE**

**\$500,000 Gift from Sangeeta Teresa Mai and Hai Nguyen names theater within Austin Opera's new home**

**Community Day and Ribbon Cutting set for Saturday, September 26**

***Ofrenda* World Premiere has seven performances, October 1–11**

**AUSTIN, TX (Wednesday, September 23, 2026)** — Austin Opera is ushering in a new era for the company—and for Austin's performing arts community—with a historic double first: the opening of the **Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Center**, Austin's newest performing arts venue, and the world premiere of ***Ofrenda***, the first new opera ever commissioned by the company.

The opening celebrations begin this Saturday, September 26, with a Community Day and Ribbon Cutting from 2–6 p.m. at the new Butler Performance Center. The event will offer the public its first opportunity to explore the new venue, experience performances by Austin Opera's Resident Stars in the new theater, participate in a Community Altar honoring Día de los Muertos and the world premiere of *Ofrenda*, and enjoy family-friendly activities including an orchestra petting zoo. Austin Opera leadership and Sarah and Ernest Butler will officially cut the ceremonial ribbon at 3:00 p.m.

Adding to the celebration, Austin Opera today announces a \$500,000 gift from **Sangeeta Kaur and Hai Nguyen**, which will name the theater within the Butler Performance Center the **Sangeeta Teresa Mai and Hai Nguyen Theater**.

The gift brings the total raised through Austin Opera's **Inspire 2030** campaign to \$6.44 million toward its \$8.5 million goal, marking the campaign's transition into its public phase with 75 percent of the goal already raised.

The two milestones converge in October when *Ofrenda*, by composer Jorge Sosa and librettist John de los Santos, officially inaugurates the new Butler Performance Center as Austin Opera's first production in its new home. The 90-minute bilingual chamber opera, sung in Spanish and English with projected English titles, runs October 1–11 during Hispanic Heritage Month.

“This is one of those extraordinary moments when the future of an organization and the future of a city come together,” said **Annie Burrridge**, General Director & CEO of Austin Opera. “We are opening a new home built to expand what is possible for Austin's artists, audiences and arts organizations, and we are opening it with a work that could only have been created here. Now, thanks to Sangeeta and Hai's extraordinary generosity, this theater will also carry the names of two people who embody Austin's commitment to artistic excellence, innovation and community. *Ofrenda* and the Butler Performance Center together represent an extraordinary new chapter for Austin Opera.”

### **A New Home for Austin's Performing Arts Community**

The Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Center represents a major expansion of Austin Opera's role in the city's cultural life. Located at 5811 Trade Center Drive in Southeast Austin, the new center transforms Austin Opera's headquarters into a year-round cultural destination offering performance, rehearsal, educational and gathering spaces for Austin Opera and other local arts organizations.

The Center features a 189-seat theater with retractable, tiered seating, four rehearsal rooms, a conference center, indoor and outdoor event spaces and approximately 300 parking spaces. The facility is designed not simply as a home for Austin Opera, but as a resource for Austin's broader creative community, providing affordable spaces for artists and organizations while creating new opportunities for collaboration and cultural exchange.

The Center is named in honor of **Sarah and Ernest Butler**, longtime Austin philanthropists and among the company's most significant supporters. The Butlers previously established the Butler Fund for Spanish Programming, an endowment that supports Spanish-language programming at Austin Opera and helped establish the company's Curator of Hispanic and Latinx Programming.

The new theater will now bear the name of **Sangeeta Teresa Mai and Hai Nguyen**, whose \$500,000 gift supports Austin Opera's vision for a vibrant, accessible and artistically ambitious new home.

A 2022 GRAMMY Award winner, Sangeeta is a Vietnamese American singer based in

Austin, a Trustee of Austin Opera and a member of the Recording Academy. She and her husband, Hai Nguyen, recently opened Studio Hill Austin, a world-class Dolby Atmos-equipped recording studio in Lakeway, Texas.

“Hai and I are honored to have the opportunity to support Austin Opera and to have our names associated with this extraordinary new theater,” said **Sangeeta Teresa Mai**. “Austin is a city that embraces creativity, innovation and artists from around the world. We hope this gift helps create a space where artists can take risks, audiences can discover something new and our community can come together for generations to come.”

The gift brings Austin Opera 75 percent of the way toward its \$8.5 million [Inspire 2030](#) campaign goal, with \$6.44 million now raised. Austin community members can also become a permanent part of the company’s history through the **5811 Club**, which offers the opportunity to name a seat in the new theater. Named for Austin Opera’s new home at 5811 Trade Center Drive, the 5811 Club recognizes the founding supporters whose investment is helping transform the vision for the Butler Performance Center into a vibrant new center for arts and culture. Twenty-six seats have already been named.

### **Community Day Opens the Doors**

Austin Opera will welcome the community to its new home on **Saturday, September 26, from 2–6 p.m.** for a free Community Day and Ribbon Cutting.

Visitors will be able to:

- Explore the new Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Center
- Experience performances by Austin Opera’s Resident Stars in the new theater
- Participate in a Community Altar honoring Día de los Muertos and the world premiere of *Ofrenda*
- Enjoy family-friendly activities, including an orchestra petting zoo
- Meet members of the Austin Opera community and experience the new spaces firsthand

The ceremonial ribbon cutting with Austin Opera leadership and Sarah and Ernest Butler will take place at 3 p.m. The event offers the public its first chance to experience the building that will serve as Austin Opera’s new artistic home and a resource for the broader Central Texas arts community.

### ***Ofrenda*: A New Opera Rooted in Austin**

The opening production, *Ofrenda*, brings together Sosa and de los Santos in a new work inspired by family, cultural memory, Día de los Muertos traditions, healing and the sacrifices made across generations.

At its center is Macaria (mezzo-soprano **Kelly Guerra**), an immigrant mother and hospital custodian who encounters death while traveling to work. After La Señora (mezzo-soprano **Victoria Vargas**) gives her a tear of life that grants her the power to heal, Macaria begins using that gift to help those around her—until the price of her newfound power comes due.

The story unfolds through a bilingual libretto and combines contemporary opera with elements of magical realism, creating a work that explores the enduring connections among family, memory, sacrifice and love.

“*Ofrenda* is a story about remembrance, devotion and the power to heal,” said **Jorge Sosa**, composer of *Ofrenda*. “It is also a story about the sacrifices we make for the people we love and the ways our traditions connect us to those who came before us.”

The opera is the culmination of Austin Opera’s investment in developing new artistic voices through its Residency for Latinx Creatives, which provided a foundation for the collaboration between Sosa and de los Santos. *Ofrenda* is Austin Opera’s first commissioned work and the first new opera commissioned to premiere in Austin.

“Creating *Ofrenda* has been an extraordinary journey,” said **John de los Santos**, librettist of *Ofrenda*. “This opera has grown through collaboration, conversation and a deep connection to the community that Austin Opera serves. To now see it become the first new opera commissioned by Austin Opera and performed in this remarkable new space is incredibly meaningful.”

Demand for *Ofrenda* has been strong from the start. The production’s initial five performances sold out, prompting Austin Opera to add two additional midweek performances in response. *Ofrenda* runs October 1–11, during Hispanic Heritage Month. Tickets remain available for the Tuesday, October 6 performance.

### **A Milestone for Austin Opera—and Austin**

The opening of the Butler Performance Center and world premiere of *Ofrenda* come as Austin Opera launches its largest season in decades. The 2026–2027 season combines new work and established repertoire, with *Ofrenda* followed by Massenet’s *Thaïs*, the Texas premiere of Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce’s *Fellow Travelers*, and Verdi’s *La*

*traviata* at the Long Center for the Performing Arts.

Together, the new building, new theater and new opera signal Austin Opera's expanding ambitions: to commission and develop new work, provide a permanent home for its artists and audiences, and help address Austin's growing need for accessible performance, rehearsal and gathering space.

"Opening a new venue with a brand-new opera is more than a celebration—it is a statement about where Austin is going," said BurrIDGE. "We want this building to be filled with music, ideas, artists, audiences and community for generations to come. This is just the beginning."

### ***Ofrenda* Performances**

*Ofrenda* will be performed October 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11, 2026, at the Sangeeta Teresa Mai and Hai Nguyen Theater at the Sarah and Ernest Butler Performance Center. Performances run approximately 90 minutes without intermission. The initial five performances have sold out, and two additional performances were added in response to demand. Tickets remain available for Tuesday, October 6. For tickets and information, visit [austinopera.org](https://austinopera.org)

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