

OPERA THEATRE **OTSL** of SAINT LOUIS



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

All performances are sung in English with projected English supertitles and accompanied by members of the Grammy Award-winning **St. Louis Symphony Orchestra**.

Opera Theatre is funded in part by  

Opera Theatre gratefully acknowledges our sustaining partner 

Opera Theatre affirms its ADA compliance and is proud to promote diversity and inclusion in all activities.

mission

Opera Theatre’s mission is to shape a vibrant future for opera by connecting, inspiring, and entertaining our communities through the power and beauty of the art form; to foster the next generation by empowering a diverse group of artists, artisans, and administrators at the highest level; and to make opera accessible and inclusive through innovative and collaborative storytelling that reflects, engages, and strengthens the St. Louis community, and attracts national and international audiences.

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from the **GENERAL DIRECTOR**

Our 50th anniversary was a joyous celebration of Opera Theatre’s remarkable trajectory. This milestone anniversary gave us cause to celebrate and to reflect on our storied past. Reaching 50 years made us keenly aware that this company was built over decades, through an incalculable amount of talent and time from countless members of our community, all in service of inviting audiences — generation after generation — to experience unforgettable performances.

Our semicentennial season opened in a fittingly celebratory style, with a laugh-out-loud production of Johann Strauss’ *Die Fledermaus*. A new staging of Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* — the first opera OTSL ever presented — was a wonderfully full-circle moment with the return of stage director Christopher Alden and soprano Sheri Greenawald, who were part of the 1976 production. The season also included a beautiful presentation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, particularly meaningful given OTSL’s long association with Benjamin Britten. Finally, *This House*, our 45th world premiere, was met with great acclaim and continued our proud tradition of championing new work, proving that opera is a relevant, vibrant, and growing art form that can continue to inspire and shape our world today.

The last year was also momentous in an entirely different way: following a rigorous international search, we announced the appointment of Patricia Racette as the company’s third Artistic Director, effective October 1, 2025. An internationally acclaimed soprano, master teacher, and lauded stage director, she has served as the head of Opera Theatre’s Young Artist Programs since 2019 and continues the work of previous Artistic Directors James Robinson (2009–2024) and Colin Graham (1985–2007). Patricia is an artist known for her emotional honesty, vocal power, and dramatic intelligence, and we are excited to see where her artistic vision will lead us.

Thank you for being on this thrilling journey. Your support has made our first 50 years possible and lights the way for the next 50.


Andrew B. Jorgensen
General Director

from the **BOARD CHAIR**

Being a part of the Opera Theatre community is always a true pleasure and, as our 50th anniversary unfolded, this year was truly a time for celebration. The opportunity to honor OTSL’s incredible accomplishments throughout the decades — from the many artists and artisans whose careers have been launched here to the 45 world premieres we have presented — brought into sharp focus the depth and breadth of this company’s impact.

It was especially rewarding to receive national and international recognition in this landmark year. OTSL was nominated as Best Festival by the International Opera Awards, while our world premiere of *This House* received a nomination for Best World Premiere. Locally, St. Louis Theater Circle presented Opera Theatre with a Milestone Anniversary award, honoring OTSL “as an opera of local, national, and international acclaim.” Bob Trump, our head draper who retired last season after more than 40 years of exquisite work, received a richly deserved lifetime achievement award.

None of this would have been possible without the support of our community. Despite an atmosphere of change and challenge for nonprofits, Opera Theatre remains as resilient as ever. We are ever so thankful to the nearly 1,200 households among our subscribers and the over 850 households that are donors. Every single audience member that walked through our doors made us feel certain that opera is a living art form with a bright future.

I also want to thank the Opera Theatre team — from the artists and artisans who build each season to our dedicated annual staff. In addition, the Guild and the Board are exceptionally engaged and benefit this organization in a myriad of ways. Their work has been pivotal in allowing us to move through a challenging landscape with grace.

As an organization, we are deeply proud of our history and enormously excited for all that is to come. We remain grateful to all our partners and supporters who help us pave the way forward to a vibrant future.


Kim Eberlein
Chair, Board of Directors



Meet The Makers, 2025.
PHOTO © JAMIE PERKINS

OUR IMPACT *in 2025*

27

live performances

45

*world premiere operas
produced by OTSL
as of the 2025 season*

48

*years of partnership
with the St. Louis
Symphony Orchestra*

19,444

audience members

75,976

*students reached
in **312** schools*

500+

*employed during
the Festival Season*

2,253

*free tickets provided
through Phyllis' Seats*

42

*states and Canada
reached through
education programs*

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright green short-sleeved dress with a white ruffled skirt and a white hair accessory, is lying on her back on a black and white checkered floor. She is propped up on her left arm, looking upwards with a joyful expression. The background features a retro diner aesthetic with light blue cabinets, a red and black checkered wall, and a white bar counter. A white table with two white chairs with red seats is visible to the right. A small pile of feathers lies on the floor near the woman.

*“For nearly half a century Opera Theatre of Saint Louis has
been bringing quite glorious opera to our fair city.”*

— BROADWAYWORLD

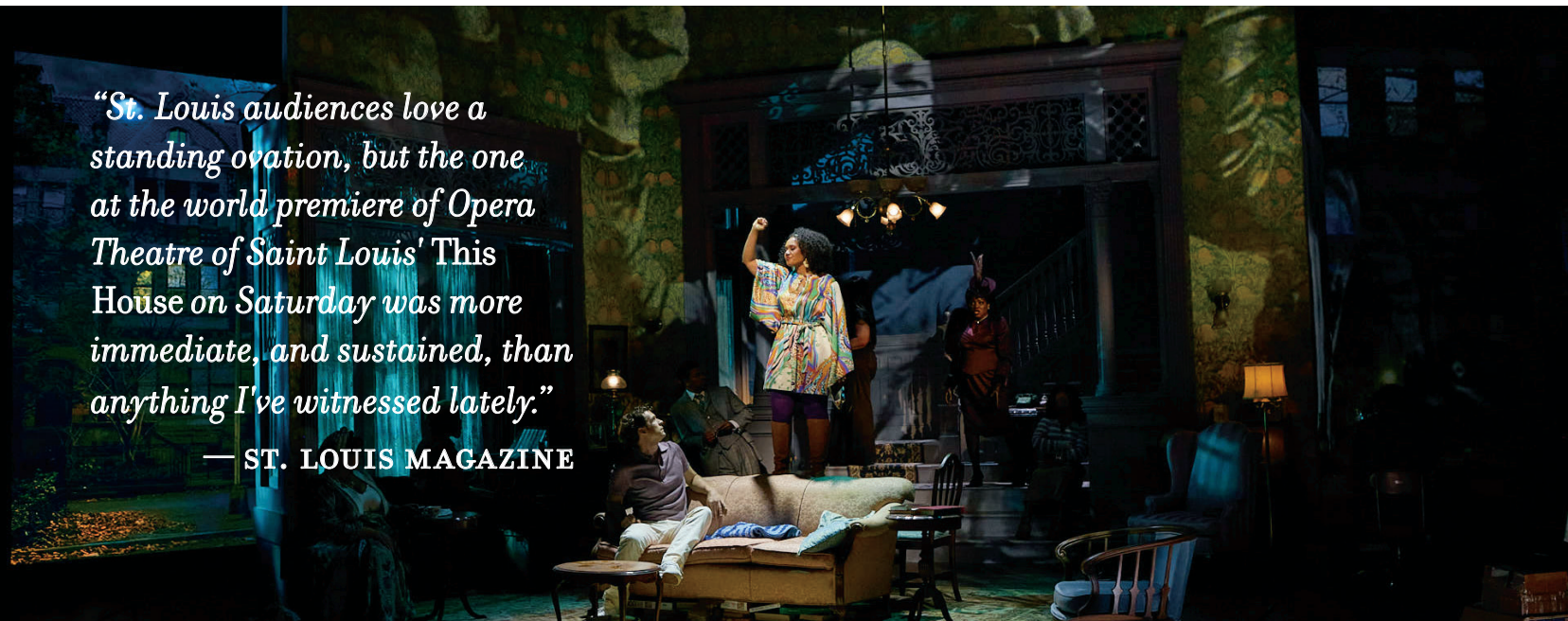
“It is unlikely you could find a better sung Fledermaus anywhere in the country, nay, on the planet.”

— OPERA TODAY



“St. Louis audiences love a standing ovation, but the one at the world premiere of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis’ This House on Saturday was more immediate, and sustained, than anything I’ve witnessed lately.”

— ST. LOUIS MAGAZINE



Die Fledermaus was underwritten by **Roma B. Wittcoff**.

Leadership support for *This House* came from **Noémi K. Neidorff**, the **Berges Family Foundation**, and the **Whitaker Foundation**.



WHITAKER
FOUNDATION

This House was made possible in part by the **Fred M. Saigh Endowment at Opera Theatre** and the **Sally S. Levy Family Fund for New Works**.

Daniela Candillari’s engagement was made possible with generous support from **Kim & Tim Eberlein**.

Funded in part by **The Amphion Foundation, Inc.**

DON PASQUALE

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

“Funny from start to finish, this landmark production fires on all cylinders, making it a can’t-miss theatrical experience of the summer.”

— REVIEWSTL



“This profoundly successful interpretation at OTSL is a nonpareil resounding success, and one of the very best in my experience. Happy Fiftieth Anniversary! May your next fifty midsummers of operatic achievements be as shining and bright.”

— OPERA TODAY

Leadership support for *Don Pasquale* came from the **Steward Family Foundation**.



Don Pasquale was supported by a gift honoring the memory of **Sally S. Levy** from **The Saucy Foundation** by her children: **Lucy & J. David Levy, Diane & Paul Jacobson,** and **Karen & Mont Levy.**



Center Stage shines a spotlight on Opera Theatre's Richard Gaddes Festival Artist and Gerdine Young Artist Programs as these rising opera stars perform iconic melodies from opera's greatest hits and cherished rarities. The 2025 event was co-curated by Artistic Director Designate Patricia Racette and Director of Artistic Administration Yvette Loynaz.

Patricia Racette's engagement was made possible with generous support from **Tim & Robin Wentworth**.



Our Songs features a different guest curator every year, giving artists the opportunity to honor the voices and influences most important to them. From classical music to folk songs to contemporary harmonies, this is a night where every voice has a place, and all are welcome. The 2025 concert was curated by tenor Joshua Blue.

INCREASING ACCESS *to opera*

Opera Theatre is deeply committed to increasing access to opera and convening our communities through operatic storytelling. The following initiatives in 2025 allowed us to show up for our community in meaningful ways.

ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAMS

Opera Theatre welcomes around 20,000 audience members annually to our Festival Season, and we seek to make this experience as welcoming as possible for people with disabilities. Access services include accessible parking and drop-off areas, audio description and American Sign Language interpretation at select performances, sensory-conscious performances, disability equity training for Opera Theatre staff, and Braille and large-print versions of the Opera Theatre program book.

PHYLLIS' SEATS

Named in honor of the late Phyllis Brissenden, one of Opera Theatre's dearest friends and most generous supporters, the Phyllis' Seats initiative reserves at least 50 tickets for each performance to be offered free of charge. This ground-breaking program, first launched in 2021, is a first for our company and for the national opera scene.

FREE ACTIVITIES ACROSS ST. LOUIS

Opera Theatre's free community activities in 2025 included Artwork & Arias at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, the Belonging in Opera series at Washington University in St. Louis, season preview concerts at the the St. Louis County Library, and the St. Louis Place Park Concert, as well as sponsorship of Black Pride St. Louis, Pride Night at the Opera, and Tower Grove Pride. Thanks to the collaboration of more than 75 partner organizations, these programs served 8,400+ participants across St. Louis.

IN THE 2025 SEASON...

2,253

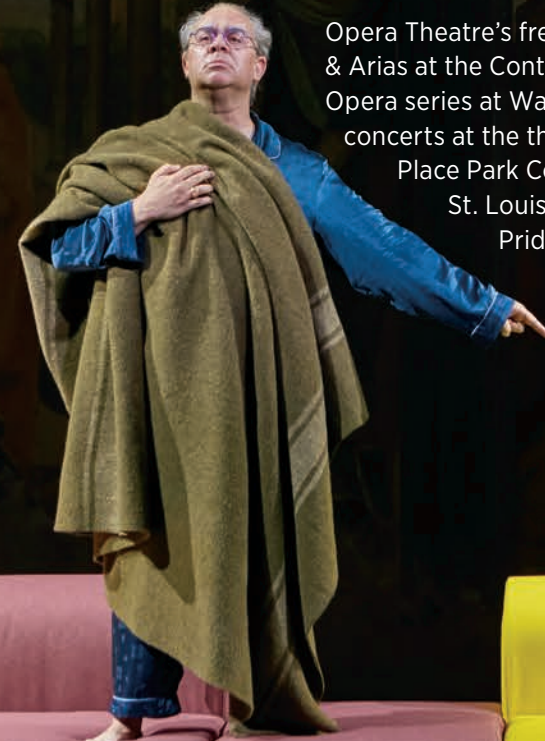
free seats given away during the 2025 Festival Season

621

households reserved Phyllis' Seats tickets

15.5%

of Phyllis' Seats users were new to OTSL!



Don Pasquale, 2025.

BUILDING THE FUTURE *of opera*

Opera Theatre is committed to nurturing the next generation of artists, artisans, and administrators. The Mabel Dorn Reeder Young Artist Education & Development Programs help aspiring opera professionals develop their skills and fuel their creativity.

GERDINE YOUNG ARTISTS

Named after Opera Theatre's founding board chairman, Leigh Gerdine, and his wife Alice, the Gerdine Young Artist (GYA) Program is one of the most sought-after training programs for young opera singers in the country. This season, just 29 young singers were selected from 1,139 applications. In addition to singing in the mainstage production choruses, GYAs are featured in supporting roles, cover all roles in mainstage productions, and perform as soloists in the annual *Center Stage* concert.

EMERSON BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Opera Theatre celebrated the 22nd year of this technical training program in 2025, made possible with generous support from Emerson. The program gives 22 students the hands-on experience and skillsets necessary for successful careers in theater production. Students receive a competitive hourly salary, a housing stipend, and lifelong connections in the technical theater field.

MABEL DORN REEDER FOUNDATION PRIZE

The Mabel Dorn Reeder Foundation Prize recognizes extraordinary artistic potential in early-career artists and provides support for their continued artistic development. The award was made possible by a \$2 million gift from the Mabel Dorn Reeder Foundation to help endow the company's acclaimed professional development programs.

Donors to these programs are recognized on pages 26-33.

2025 Prize recipient Hongni Wu with Dr. Mabel Purkerson, Mabel Dorn Reeder Foundation trustee and OTSL Board member.



educating and inspiring **YOUNG PEOPLE**

Each year, thousands of students across the St. Louis region and beyond learn how to appreciate and even create opera through Opera Theatre's nationally recognized education programs.

BAYER FUND ARTISTS-IN-TRAINING PROGRAM

The Bayer Fund Artists-in-Training Program (AIT) is a nationally acclaimed initiative that identifies, coaches, and encourages promising young high school singers both on and offstage. Each year, approximately 24 local students are selected through an open and free audition process. In the decades since the program's inception, more than 300 students have participated in the AIT program and more than \$730,000 in scholarships has been awarded.

Special thanks to lead sponsor,  **Bayer Fund**.

Special thanks to **Ann Carole Gaspar** and the late **Peter Gaspar** for establishing the **Dee Pavelka Scholarship**, honoring Ms. Pavelka's 20 years of exemplary and inspired teaching.

Special thanks to **Mr. and Mrs. Jermaine Smith** for their generosity in supporting the **Jermaine Smith First Prize Award**.

OPERA ON THE GO!


Opera Theatre's annual education program, Opera on the Go!, introduces students to the world of opera through fun and accessible performances, interactive workshops, and comprehensive classroom resources. In 2025, *The Pirates of Penzance* reached over 2,500 students in 18 St. Louis schools while a digital adaptation of *The Barber of Seville* was rereleased and experienced by over 70,000 students in 194 schools across 42 states and Canada.


Made possible in part by the **Bayer Fund** and the **Saigh Foundation**.

 **Bayer Fund**  the**SAIGH**foundation

ARTS INTENSIVES

Opera Theatre teaching artists spent semester-long residencies and over 280 teaching hours at BiOME School, City Academy, Grand Center Arts Academy, Griffith Elementary, Kratz Elementary, Loyola Academy, Marian Middle School, McCluer North High School, McKinley Classical Leadership Academy, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School, and St. Frances Cabrini Academy. Over 370 students created and performed their own world premiere operas.

Programs at McKinley Classical Leadership Academy, Grand Center Arts Academy, BiOME School, and City Academy were funded in part by 

Programs at Loyola Academy, St. Frances Cabrini Academy, Marian Middle School, Our Lady of Guadalupe School, and Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School were funded in part by 

35TH anniversary


TRAILBLAZERS IN OPERA

This interactive lesson series spotlights groundbreaking past and present Black opera singers and composers who blazed the trail in both opera and in American history. More than 500 students were visited by OTSL performers who guided them through the lives and legacies of Grace Bumbry and Robert McFerrin, Sr.



Bayer Fund Artists-in-Training Spring Recital, 2025



THE NEW WORKS COLLECTIVE

From our beginnings, Opera Theatre has been dedicated to expanding the American opera canon with original, innovative productions. We are committed to not only creating new works, but to creating these works in a way that authentically represents the stories of our community. To accomplish this, in 2022, Opera Theatre launched the *New Works Collective* — a dynamic group of St. Louis-based artists, activists, and educators. We asked them to commission works that felt relevant and relatable for the broader St. Louis region. The third group of commissions — chosen from over 150 open-call submissions — premiered in February 2025. These performances continue to bring in higher-than-average numbers of new audiences for Opera Theatre, a testament to the power that new voices and stories have in uniting different segments of the community through art. All three operas were directed by Richard Gammon and conducted by Darwin Aquino.

Black Coffee, by composer Concert Black and librettist Alicia Revé Like

As a recent St. Louis transplant, Makena is struggling to find community. After all, how exactly does one make friends as a grown-up? From googling “how to make friends” to trying a local book club, Makena isn’t ruling anything out. As her dad often reminds her, “Have patience and you’ll land the friends of a lifetime.” Poignant and funny by turns, Makena’s story is immediately relatable to anyone who has ever searched for a village of their own.

Family Style, by composer Meilina Tsui and librettist Melisa Tien

17-year-old Mia lives with her father, Ping. They’ve scrimped and saved for years so that Ping can open his own Taiwanese restaurant after a lifetime of working as a dishwasher. However, Ping refuses to pursue his dream until Mia graduates and goes to college. Her education must come first. One day, a promisingly large envelope arrives from Mia’s top-choice university...but will her own dream come at too steep a price?

Kandake, by composer Tim Amukele and librettist Jarrod Lee

In the ancient African kingdom of Kush, queens were known as the Kandake. Discover the true story of Kandake Amanirenas, the warrior queen who defied the might of the Roman Empire. When Amanirenas learns that a Roman army has captured the Kush city of Philae, she’ll stop at nothing to protect her people’s liberty...including single-handed combat against a deadly centurion. This action-packed opera brings to vivid life one of history’s greatest unknown heroines.

Leadership support for the *New Works Collective* came from the **Mellon Foundation** and the **Edward Jones Foundation**.



Accessibility enhancements for the *New Works Collective* were made possible by **PNC Arts Alive**.



Additional support for the *New Works Collective* came from **Sara Burke, Allen & Merry Richon, Annemarie & Matt Schumacher, Dr. Pamela Stuerke, and Susan & David Young**.

SPOTLIGHT *on our* 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Though officially founded in 1976, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis began to take shape in 1975 when an energetic group of St. Louis civic leaders led by Leigh Gerdine, then president of what today is Webster University; James Van Sant, president of General Steel Industries; and Laurance L. Browning, vice-chairman of Emerson Electric, came together to explore establishing a permanent opera company in St. Louis. In November 1975, this group invited Richard Gaddes, then artistic administrator of The Santa Fe Opera, to come to St. Louis and consult on the viability of a new opera company.

During a chance visit to a dress rehearsal at the Loretto-Hilton Center, Gaddes — who would go on to become OTSL's first general director — envisioned what the incipient opera company could be. In a 1996 interview, Gaddes explained, “The idea came to me that, given the fact that...they had very little money...that an opera company could be started that would give performing opportunities to young singers...and the way to do it would be to single out young singers whom we believed would become major international artists in future years and present them on the stage in St. Louis.”

The company's 1976 debut, *Don Pasquale*, sold only 137 of 924 seats on opening night. However, word spread quickly about the company's stylish work and, by the end of the first three-week season, performances were drawing full houses. Directed by Christopher Alden, the production featured soprano Sheri Greenawald in a star turn as Norina. The 2025 production of *Don Pasquale* offered a full-circle moment: Alden returned to direct, and Greenawald had a cameo appearance as the Notary. In 1976, Alden was an emerging stage director fresh on the scene, and Greenawald was an exciting young soprano who had made her professional debut just a year earlier. By 2025, they had both become major international artists. And it was soprano Susanne Burgess' own star turn as Norina in 2025 that highlighted Gaddes' enduring vision of a company designed to nurture young talent. This innovative and strategic approach, borne out of necessity five decades ago, continues to shape OTSL's values, practices, and mission as we shape a vibrant future for opera.

Leadership support for Opera Theatre's 50th Anniversary Season came from **Noémi K. Neidorff**.



General Director Andrew Jorgensen delivers remarks at the 2025 Spring Gala. Photo © John Gitchoff

FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION*

ASSETS

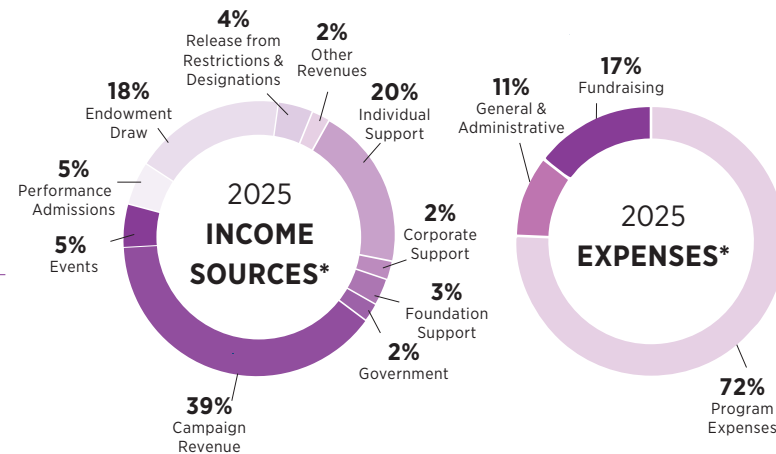
Cash and cash equivalents.....	\$4,659,999
Investments	\$113,623,497
Contributions receivable, net	\$7,558,777
Notes and other receivables.....	\$238,769
Beneficial interest in lead trust.....	\$197,464
Prepaid expenses	\$248,230
Right of use asset - operating lease, net.....	\$525,291
Earnest money	\$500,000
Facilities and equipment, net	\$3,594,376
Total assets	\$131,146,403

LIABILITIES

Accounts payable and accrued expenses.....	\$330,117
Box office liability	\$34,115
Deferred revenue.....	\$1,025,051
Annuities liability	\$13,154
Operating lease liability.....	\$625,478
Total liabilities	\$2,027,915

NET ASSETS

Without donor restrictions	\$4,771,151
With donor restrictions.....	\$124,347,337
Total net assets.....	\$129,118,488
Total liabilities and net assets.....	\$131,146,403



*As of September 30, 2025

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES*

REVENUES AND SUPPORT

	w/o Donor Restrictions	w/Donor Restrictions	Total
Grants, contributions, and bequests	\$5,952,168	\$9,952,649	\$15,904,817
Performance admissions	\$1,232,381	-	\$1,232,381
Benefits	\$1,046,802	\$44,340	\$1,091,142
Program advertising	\$13,079	-	\$13,079
Rentals and other activities	\$393,926	\$125	\$394,051
Net assets released from restrictions	\$5,345,041	(\$5,345,041)	-
Total operating revenue and support	\$13,983,397	\$4,652,073	\$18,635,470
Program services	\$10,551,030	-	\$10,551,030
General and administrative	\$1,643,011	-	\$1,643,011
Fundraising	\$2,498,556	-	\$2,498,556
Total expenses	\$14,703,597	-	\$14,703,597

NON-OPERATING REVENUE & EXPENSES

Investment return, net	\$124,008	\$12,896,404	\$13,020,412
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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

	(\$596,192)	\$17,548,477	\$16,952,285
Net assets, beginning of year	\$5,367,343	\$106,798,860	\$112,166,203
Net assets, end of year	\$4,771,151	\$124,347,337	\$129,118,488

*As of September 30, 2025

THANK YOU

2025 PATRONS AND FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL

This list represents contributions of \$1,000 or more made to the Annual Fund in fiscal year 2025 (October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025). We are deeply grateful to our donors at all levels — and to those who supported capital and endowment projects — and regret that we do not have space to recognize all donors here.

LEADERSHIP CIRCLE: \$100,000+

Anonymous Donor (1)	The Saigh Foundation
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DIRECTORS' CIRCLE: \$50,000-\$99,999

Anonymous Donors (2)	William T. Kemper Foundation
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[⋆] *In Memoriam*
[○] *In Kind*

THANK YOU

2025 PATRONS AND FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL

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PATRONS: \$2,500-\$4,999

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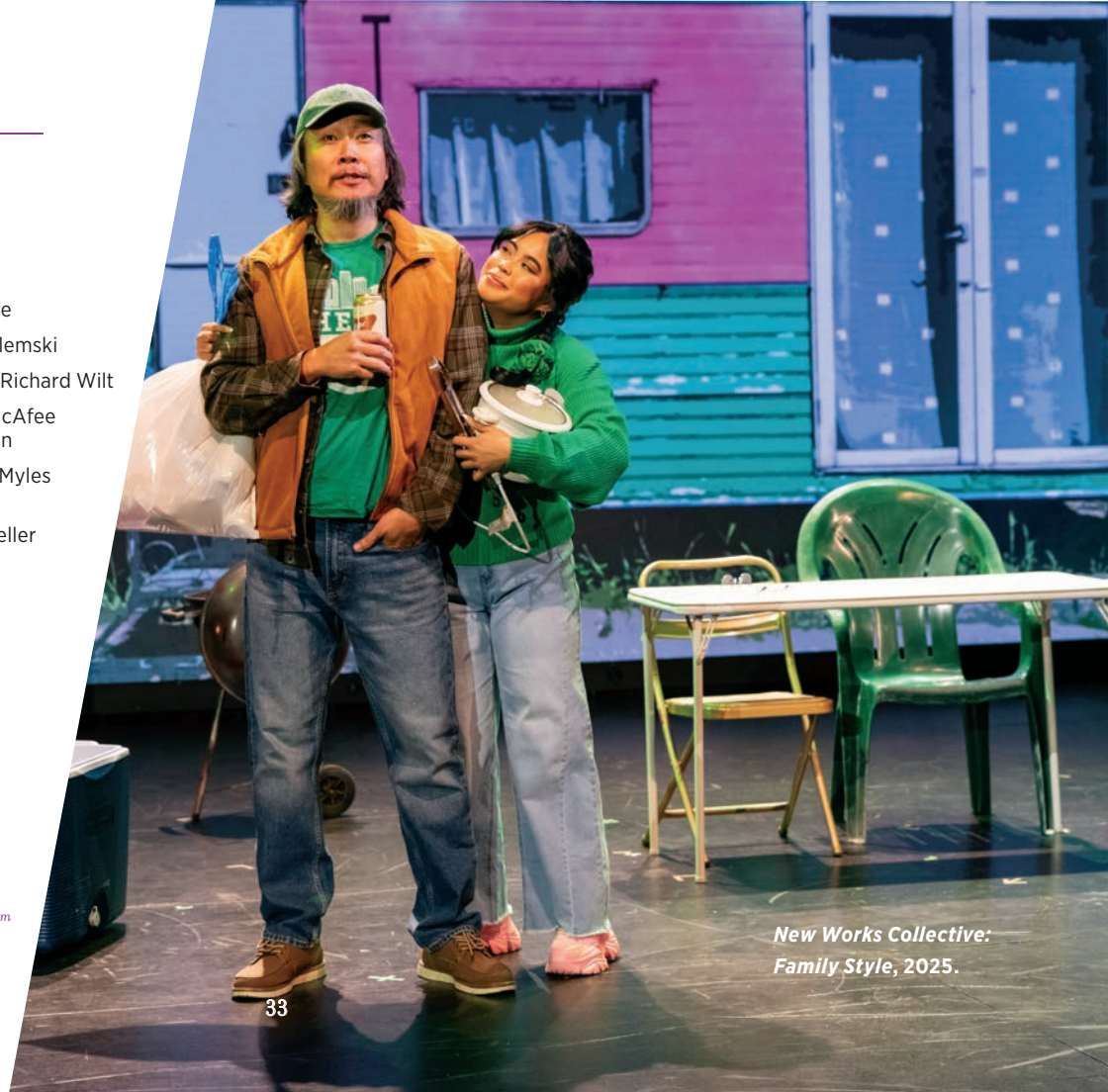
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