



For Immediate Release

**OPERA PARALLÈLE OPENS 12TH SEASON  
WITH LIVE, IN-PERSON PERFORMANCES NOVEMBER 13 & 14:  
WORLD PREMIERE INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE VERSION OF  
*HARRIET'S SPIRIT* BY COMPOSER MARCUS SHELBY AND LIBRETTIST ROMA OLVERA;  
ONE-ACT OPERA INSPIRED BY CELEBRATED ABOLITIONIST HARRIET TUBMAN  
PRESENTED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE BAYVIEW OPERA HOUSE**

[www.operaparallele.org](http://www.operaparallele.org)

SAN FRANCISCO (October 29, 2021) — **Opera Parallèle** will launch the company's 12<sup>th</sup> season with the world premiere instrumental ensemble version of *Harriet's Spirit*, a one-act opera by award-winning jazz artist **Marcus Shelby**, set to a libretto by recognized Bay Area arts educator **Roma Olvera**. The story regards a young girl who is inspired by her hero, celebrated 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist Harriet Tubman, to find the courage and empowerment to overcome bullying, a resonant topic of the present day. Opera Parallèle will present three performances of *Harriet's Spirit* November 13 and 14 in collaboration with San Francisco's historic **Bayview Opera House Ruth Williams Memorial Theatre**, the cultural hub of the Bayview Hunter's Point neighborhood.

The cast will feature Opera Parallèle veteran jazz soprano **Tiffany Austin** as Harriet Tubman, soprano **Christabel Nunoo** as Modesty, baritone **Bradley Kynard** as Montgomery, and the "Say Nothing" and "Do Nothing" Choruses sung by the **San Francisco Girls Chorus**, Artistic Director **Valérie Sainte-Agathe**. Opera Parallèle General and Artistic Director **Nicole Paiement**, with an international reputation as a conductor of contemporary music and opera, will lead the premiere. Award-winning actor, director, and Artistic Director of the African American Shakespeare Company, **L. Peter Callender**, will direct. Assistant Conductor **Jaymes Kirksey** will pace the Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> performance.

A free open rehearsal and family engagement event will occur on November 7. The community is invited to see behind the scenes in the creation of this opera by Marcus Shelby and Roma Olvera. Guests will be introduced to the opera, listen to a working rehearsal, and participate in activities led by the company's newly appointed Community Programs Ambassador, **Michael Mohammed**.

The genesis of this family opera began in 2018 when Opera Parallèle presented a workshop production at the African American Arts & Culture Complex. Since then, the work has been revised

and now includes a new orchestration for 10 musicians (flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, strings and percussion).

*Harriet's Spirit* is the latest of a series of operas for youth commissioned by Opera Parallèle as part of the company's "Hands-on-Opera" community engagement program. All of these new works have been created by BIPOC artists primarily to address the interests and concerns of Bay Area youth from African-American, Latinx and other underserved communities. To date, OP has offered world premieres of *My Head is Full of Colors*, *Amazing Grace*, *Xochitl and the Flowers* (2016 & 2019) by **Chris Pratorius Gómez**, and the original workshop production of *Harriet's Spirit*.

Marcus Shelby is a composer, bassist, and educator whose work focuses on the history, present, and future of African American lives, social movements, and music education. Currently, Shelby is an artist-in-residence with the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival and was the resident Artistic Director for the San Francisco Jazz Festival 2019-2020. In 2020, he was appointed as the new Artistic Director for the Healdsburg Jazz Festival, where he has been an artist-in-residence for more than 10 years. *Harriet's Spirit* is Shelby's first opera.

Roma Olvera contributes her third libretto to OP's "Hands-on-Opera" program for youth, following up on *Amazing Grace* and *Xochitl and the Flowers*. Olvera worked as the Educational Programs Director for Opera Parallèle where she helped to develop a three-tiered community engagement program that commissioned new works for children and families. Olvera also developed original curricula for engaging local communities in main-stage contemporary opera productions. Born in Mexico City, Olvera is currently the Music Director for Woodland School in Portola Valley.

The company's season continues with the West Coast premiere of critically acclaimed opera, *Sophia's Forest*, by composer **Lembit Beecher** and librettist **Hannah Moscovitch**, February 24 – 26, 2022 at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral.

Opera Parallèle will conclude the 21/22 season with **Philip Glass'** opera *La Belle et la Bête* based on the epic 1946 romantic fantasy film by French poet and filmmaker, **Jean Cocteau**. This surreal new interpretation on a timeless tale, fusing opera and film live on stage will be performed July 15 – 17, 2022 in collaboration with SFJAZZ. These performances will be presented in celebration of the composer's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In addition to live performances, two Opera Parallèle productions are available on digital platforms pay-per view/on-demand viewing. The 2021 production of Joby Talbot and Gene Scheer's ***Everest – A Graphic Novel Opera*** is offered exclusively on thedallasopera.TV until January 16, 2022. Tickets are available at [operaparallele.org/Everest](https://operaparallele.org/Everest). OP's 2018 co-production with the Days and Nights Festival of Philip Glass' ***In the Penal Colony*** is available at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/penalcolony>.

**The Bullhorn** is Opera Parallèle's year-long community engagement program of activities created in partnership with The Transgender District, the California College of Arts, San Francisco Gay Men's

Chorus, and Ruth's Table. The program aims to be a 'Bullhorn' for the community and exemplifies the company's commitment to amplifying unheard stories.

Generous support for *Harriet's Spirit* was provided by **The Future Fund, JW & HM Goodman Family Foundation, Sam Mazza Foundation, and Denise Young.**

Major support for Opera Parallèle is provided by **Adobe, City & County of San Francisco Grants for the Arts, Donna Dubinsky & Len Shustek, Bob Ellis, Gordon P. Getty, Stephen & Diane Heiman, Horizons Foundation, Paul L. King, The Lemala Fund, Steven M. Menzies, National Endowment for the Arts, and The Shenson Foundation.**

The Bullhorn: Amplifying Unheard Voices is funded by a Civic Practice Grant from **OPERA America's** Opera Fund.

Major support for the Bayview Opera House Ruth Williams Memorial Theatre is provided by **City & County of San Francisco Grants for the Arts, San Francisco Arts Commission, and San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development.**

For more information about Opera Parallèle, visit [www.operaparallele.org](http://www.operaparallele.org).

### **CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE**

**Marcus Shelby**, *composer*

**Roma Olvera**, *librettist*

World Premiere of Chamber Orchestra Version

### ***Harriet's Spirit***

*A young girl's story of courage and empowerment, inspired by Harriet Tubman.*

Saturday, November 13, 2021 at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Sunday, November 14 at 1 p.m.

Presented in collaboration with Bayview Opera House at the Ruth Williams Memoria Theatre, 4705 Third Street, San Francisco

Tickets via Eventbrite: \$10, \$25, \$50 (pay what you can); Under age 21 free admission (reservation required)  
[operaparallele.org/harriet](http://operaparallele.org/harriet)

Open Rehearsal and Community Event

Sunday, November 7 at 3 to 4 p.m.

Presented in collaboration with Bayview Opera House at the Ruth Williams Memorial Theatre, 4705 Third Street, San Francisco

Reservations via Eventbrite: Free

<https://harrietenopenrehearsal.eventbrite.com/>

### **Creative Team**

*Conductor*, Nicole Paiement

*Director*, L. Peter Callender

*Concept*, Brian Staufenbiel

*Assistant Conductor*, Jaymes Kirksey

*Artistic Director, San Francisco Girls Chorus*, Valérie Sainte-Agathe

*Director of Choral Studies, San Francisco Girls Chorus*, Laney Armstrong

*Set and Costume Designer*, Rachel Heiman

*Lighting Designer*, Kevin Myrick  
*Creative Contributor & Supporter*, Denise Young &  
Blue Organza Productions

*Harriet Tubman*, Tiffany Austin  
*Modesty*, Christabel Nunoo  
*Montgomery*, Bradley Kynard  
“Say Nothing” & “Do Nothing” Choruses, San  
Francisco Girls Chorus

**Cast**

**###**

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**Please connect for interviews with the creative team and cast, and press credentials for the three live performances.**

**For images, please visit**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iHh053s32471KEqUHeKZlpT1BlwXsn88?usp=sharing>

