



The Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize

2022–2023 Guidelines and Application Procedures

Important Dates

- **Application available online:** July 2022
- **Intent to apply deadline:** August 31, 2022, at 11:59 p.m. ET
- **Application deadline:** September 16, 2022, at 11:59 p.m. ET
- **Applications adjudicated:** October 2022
- **Awards announced:** November 2022
- **Showcase Presentation:** May 2023, Pittsburgh, PA

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Purpose

The Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize is a biennial program offered as part of OPERA America’s continuing effort to foster emerging opera artists. The program is intended to bring new talent to the forefront and connect directors and designers early in their careers with those who are in a position to advance their work. Designer- or director-driven teams must select a work that is deeply resonant with the team from an OPERA America-approved list of operatic works. Original submissions will translate the team’s meaningful response into a unique concept and design for the selected work. Four teams will be invited to turn speculative ideas into a full design presentation.

Award

Awarded teams will receive the following:

- \$2,000 award to more fully render the proposed design project;
- Presentation of the project at the Director-Designer Showcase at Opera Conference 2023 in Pittsburgh, attended by general, artistic, and production directors;
- An online video broadcast of the Showcase that will be available to all opera company members and archived for the team’s future use;
- A six-month installation of the project in the National Opera Center exhibition gallery at a mutually scheduled time during the two-year period from July 2023 through June 2025;
- An assigned advisor to coach the team in preparation for the final presentations;
- Exhibition space in the Exhibit Hall for the duration of Opera Conference 2023 to display the team’s work and marketing materials;
- Announcement on the team and project in an issue of *Opera America Magazine*, as well as a follow-up when the project is exhibited at the National Opera Center.

In support of the presentation at Opera Conference 2023 in Pittsburgh, awarded teams will also receive complimentary:

- Conference registrations for all members of the team;
- Round-trip travel to/from Pittsburgh for two members of the team;
- Two nights lodging for two members of the team.

Teams will receive no additional cash award but will be able to meet with company representatives at an event to be held immediately after the presentation.

The work of each applicant remains the property of the director-designer team.

Supported Activities

Supported activities include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting further research and/or team meetings to inform the production concept development;
- Purchasing supplies for the creation of more complete renderings and models;
- Creating print or digital marketing materials to promote the production concept for a showcase presentation at Opera Conference 2023 and an exhibition display at the National Opera Center.

Eligibility

- The program is open to emerging designer-director teams in opera regardless of their OPERA America membership status.
- Members of the team must be early in their careers in opera. This program does not fund artists who already have a significant body of work in the field of opera.
- Each team must comprise a minimum of one stage director and a minimum of two creative designers.
- Each application must indicate a team representative who will serve as the project's fiscal agent and as OPERA America's primary contact.
- At least 50 percent of team members must have United States citizenship, permanent residence, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.
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- An artist can be a member of only one applicant team with one project.
- Previous Director-Designer Prize awardees are not eligible to apply.

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How to Apply

- Read the guidelines carefully before completing any application materials.
- All materials must be submitted online via the [Grants Portal](#).
- Intent to apply forms must be submitted by August 31, 2022, 11:59 p.m. ET. Only applicants who submit an intent to apply may submit a full application.
- Applicants will receive notification if the intent to apply form has been advanced to the application stage.
- Complete applications, including all supplementary materials, must be submitted by September 16, 2022, 11:59 p.m. ET. Applications that are incomplete, late, or sent via mail or email will not be accepted. No final applications will be accepted unless an intent to apply form has been submitted on or before August 31, 2022, 11:59 p.m. ET.

Application Review

All final applications for the Director-Designer Prize are reviewed by an independent panel drawn from a pool of experts approved by the board of directors of OPERA America. The panel will consist of professionals of varied gender identity, race, and ethnicity, representing diverse disciplines involved in directing, designing, and producing opera. Panelists will be selected to reflect the United States' geographic diversity.

No current OPERA America board member or employee may serve on any panel. Individuals who stand to benefit from a grant are also ineligible to serve.

All panel decisions are final.

Panelists evaluate the applications based on the following criteria:

- **Artistic Ability:** The artistic quality of the proposal — including the work samples and the narrative, which should clearly describe the skills and techniques of the participating artists and the vision and perspective of the project, all as influenced by the musical storytelling of the selected work.
- **Quality and Distinction in Concept and Planning:** Applications are evaluated on the appropriateness, effectiveness, and thoroughness of the planning process guiding the proposed concept and presentation.
- **Robust Partnership/Collaboration:** Successful applications will demonstrate a team dynamic and collaborative spirit. Where appropriate, applications must articulate the ways project participants will collaborate in planning and design.
- **Feasibility:** Each application must convey that the production is executable according to venue capacities, as well as industry technical and safety standards.

Narrative

Applications may be submitted by teams that are driven by either a director or designer. Each application must indicate a team representative who will serve as the project's fiscal agent and as OPERA America's primary contact. Each team must create a production proposal for one of the works on the following list:

Blue
Tesori/Thompson

Champion
Blanchard/Cristofer

Cold Mountain
Higdon/Scheer

Hansel and Gretel
Humperdinck/Wette

Les contes d'Hoffmann
Offenbach/Barbier

Otello
Verdi/Boito

Fellow Travelers
Spears/Pierce

Salome
Strauss

Florencia en el Amazonas
Catán/Fuentes-Berain

Sweeney Todd
Sondheim/Wheeler and Quentin

(Reference scores are available upon request. Please contact Noelle Deutsch at NDeutsch@operaamerica.org if you would like to access these for research.)

Describe the proposed production, including your responses to the prompt questions.

Applicants must be able to articulate the concept broadly and provide details of the implementation plan that would be helpful for the adjudication panel.

The proposal should include a complete production concept, including an explanation of the staging approach; ideas and initial research for scenery, props, costumes, and personnel to be involved (chorus, extras, etc.); and suggestions for adaptations and/or editing, if relevant.

The concept should be executable in the theater described in the guidelines section, taking into account size and technical capabilities. Identifying and addressing technical challenges for the design execution is required in the narrative. Production costs are to remain reasonable, but an itemized budget is not required.

Application Supplements

In addition to the narrative response to the prompt questions, OPERA America requests supplemental materials, including work samples. Samples that best represent the work should be the prevailing factor in an applicant's choice. No preference is given to video samples; static images are equally acceptable. Please submit the following:

- A ground plan and section to the specifications provided. Address sightlines and any technical barriers (e.g., breaking the proscenium) that may be part of the design.
- Samples of preliminary image ideas, renderings, and/or video. Basic illustrations (research images and designer sketches) are required, but fully developed designs or models are not necessary or accepted at this stage.

Clarity and brevity are strongly encouraged. Please be judicious with the supplementary materials. Suggested guidelines include:

- Supplementary materials should be (20) twenty 8.5" x 11" pages or less, including all images and additional narrative.
- PDF files are preferred for static supplementary materials. All files must be uploaded as one document submission, including sketches and renderings.
- Label supplementary materials clearly and concisely.

- YouTube and Vimeo are preferred hosts if submitting video samples or digital submissions. Please provide passwords for any private sites.

Any applications that do not comply with these guidelines may be declined for noncompliance. The program staff may remove excess materials without consulting the applicant.

Award Announcement

- All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their requests after the adjudication.
- Awarded applicants will receive an award letter explaining the grant's terms and conditions.
- Awardees may request up to 75% of the \$2,000 award in advance of the Director-Designer Showcase.
- The balance of the award will be paid after the Director-Designer Showcase.
- All OPERA America grants are intended to support the activity described in the application. Significant changes to the activities or goals must be discussed with and approved by OPERA America staff.
- The receipt of a grant at any stage of a project or activity does not guarantee continued support from OPERA America.

Reporting Requirements

Awardees are required to acknowledge OPERA America and other funders, including Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, in the manner described by OPERA America in the award letter. Awardee team members should feature OPERA America's logo, including a hyperlink to OPERA America's website, on any website(s) related to the artist(s) and/or project.

Periodic reports and career updates from awarded artists may be requested by OPERA America staff during the two years following the Showcase presentation at Opera Conference 2023.

Staff Contact Information

For more information, contact Diana Hossack, director of grantmaking, at DHossack@operaamerica.org or 646.699.5236.

Funder

Tobin Theatre Arts Fund