

The Three Women of Jerusalem

By Carla Lucero



***The Three Women of Jerusalem* opera will premiere on March 19th at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles**

(Los Angeles) April 1, 2021 — LA Opera has commissioned composer and librettist Carla Lucero to write *The Three Women of Jerusalem* (*Las Tres Mujeres de Jerusalén*), an opera to be performed in 2022 by a cast of hundreds in a monumental staging at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, with hundreds of additional performers joining in virtually from around the world.

Sung in Spanish, the opera is based on the Passion narrative of the Eighth Station of the Cross, depicting the women who weep for Jesus as He is forced toward the crucifixion. The opera imagines who these unnamed women were, showing the experiences of ordinary people sharing their compassion when confronted with evil.

Presented through the LA Opera *Connects* series of community engagement programming, the opera will mark many firsts for the company:

- It is the first by a female composer and the first Spanish-language opera to be commissioned for LA Opera performances at the Cathedral.

- It will be LA Opera's first production at the Cathedral since the pandemic forced the cancelation of planned 2020 and 2021 performances there.
- It will also be LA Opera's first large-scale public performance to incorporate musicians participating via online conferencing, something that the company has embraced throughout the pandemic via the LA Opera *On Now* platform of digital programming.

With two performances taking place at the Cathedral on March 19, 2022, *The Three Women of Jerusalem* will premiere under the baton of James Conlon, the company's Richard Seaver Music Director.

Eli Villanueva will direct the production, which will feature LA Opera's professional singers and orchestral musicians performing alongside hundreds of nonprofessional cast members and musicians drawn from local Catholic schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and public schools.

Not only is Carla Lucero the composer of *The Three Women of Jerusalem*, she also wrote the

libretto. While the opera will be performed in Spanish, neither cast members nor audience members will need to understand Spanish to participate; the presentation will include projected English translation of the lyrics.

"I grew up hearing my father and grandparents speaking Spanish," said Lucero. "It's a passionate and beautiful language that I am proud to have as part of my heritage. My siblings and I understood it and spoke it on a basic level until learning it formally in school.

Then, as an adult, my music has taken me all over Latin America and Spain, and my parents retired in Mexico 30 years ago. I am able to speak it more naturally now and really love the nuances of the language, some of which don't exist in English. I'm hoping that the Spanish-speaking communities of Los Angeles and beyond will accept this as a love letter from me to them."

Lucero notes that the major themes of her opera, while drawn from the New Testament, "are universal concepts to me, and not specific to any religious belief. The Passion can be uplifting and motivating and I really hope this comes through in *The Three Women*."

Traditionally, participation in LA Opera's productions at the Cathedral—one of many LA Opera *Connects* engagement initiatives—hasn't been limited to the hundreds of performers appearing on the stage. The entire audience, numbering in the thousands, is also encouraged to take part by singing congregational hymns incorporated into each opera.

The Three Women of Jerusalem will take audience participation several steps further. Singers from around the world—particularly from Spanish-speaking nations—will be invited to participate virtually in the performance by singing the congregational hymns that Carla Lucero is including in her score. Angelenos who are unable to attend the Cathedral presentations in person can also participate by singing along on their home

screens. These global performances will be shown on large screens inside the Cathedral during the performance, bringing everyone together.

Major support for this production is provided by a generous grant from the Dan Murphy Foundation, which has underwritten these community productions at the Cathedral since their inception in 2007.

Composer/Librettist Carla Lucero

Originally from Los Angeles, Carla Lucero studied composition at CalArts with Rand Steiger, Morton Subotnick and Leonard Rosenman. Her work has been performed internationally by orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists in Mexico, Chile, Cuba, Canada, Germany, Spain and Italy.

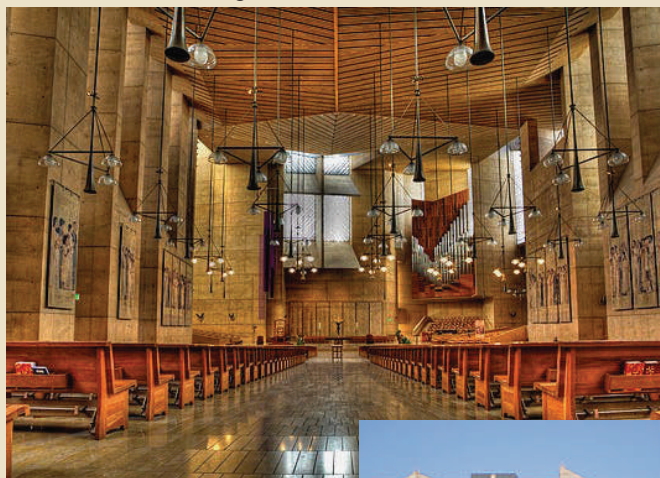
Her 2001 opera *Wuornos*, about the tragic life of serial killer Aileen Wuornos, premiered at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, winning "10 Best of Stage" from *Ad-*

vocate and *Out* magazines. Her second opera, *Juana*, with co-librettist Alicia Gaspar de Alba, premiered in 2019 with Opera UCLA. A Spanish-language opera about 17th-century feminist icon, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Juana* will have its New York premiere later this year with dell'Arte Opera. Currently in development is an opera about Helen Keller, with co-librettist Marianna Mott Newirth, which will premiere at Opera Birmingham in 2024.

She recently completed two dance commissions: *House of Names* for San Francisco's Marika Brussel Dance and *Reckoning Ramona* for Heidi Duckler Dance in Los Angeles. Later this year, her song cycle *El Castillo Interior* will have its UK premiere during the London Festival of American Music.

Community Opera at the Cathedral

Beginning with the hugely popular company premiere of Britten's *Noah's Flood* in 2007, LA Opera has opened its stage doors to aspiring performers of all ages in the Los Angeles community—including singers, dancers and musicians—to perform along with professionals in those fields in a fully-staged springtime opera. The Cathedral at Our Lady of the Angels has generously donated their facility for the program's use since its inception. Participation isn't limited to the



Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, inside and building outside



The company premiere of Noah's Flood in 2007

hundreds of performers on the stage; the entire audience is also encouraged to join in the fun by singing along. While the stories of the operas presented at the Cathedral are based on biblical subjects, people of all beliefs and backgrounds are encouraged to participate and attend.

About La Opera

Los Angeles is a city of enormous diversity and creativity, and LA Opera is dedicated to reflecting that vibrancy by redefining what opera can be with thrilling performances, thought-provoking productions and innovative programming. The communal and curative power of opera is needed now more than ever before, given the extraordinary challenges of the time. As LA Opera awaits its cue to return to the stage with world-class productions in theaters, the company is offering a multitude of content including live recitals, opera broadcasts and learning opportunities via its LA Opera On Now digital offerings, which have accumulated more than 800,000 views since launching last spring. The company is grateful to its supporters for helping to ensure that it has the resources needed to get through this unprecedented period through the LA Opera Relief Fund. Those wanting to support LA Opera can visit www.LAOpera.org/donate.



The Opera brings to mind *Las Tres Marias* (oil on canvas) by San Antonio artist, Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz. It depicts three contemporary women (from San Antonio) as the three Marys (Mary Salome, Mary of Callas (mother of James) and Mary Magdalene) at the tomb of Jesus on Resurrection Day. Commissioned by the Archdiocese of San Antonio for the 275th anniversary of San Fernando Cathedral, it was unveiled in 2006 and graced the entryway of the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio. — *The Editor of La Voz*

Composer Carla Lucero and the Three Women of Jerusalem



Interview: Carla Lucero is breaking boundaries. The world premiere of her opera *The Three Women of Jerusalem* (*Las Tres Mujeres de Jerusalén*), LA Opera's 2022 community opera production at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, will mark several firsts. It's the first opera by a female composer (she's also the librettist) and the first

Spanish-language opera to be commissioned for the Cathedral.

The family-friendly opera will premiere on March 19, 2022, with James Conlon conducting hundreds of amateur singers, dancers and instrumentalists of all ages, along with LA Opera's professional soloists and musicians. Singers from around the world will also sing along (virtually) with the congregational hymns. These global performances will be shown inside the Cathedral, bringing everyone together.

The opera depicts the moment when Jesus pauses to comfort weeping women along the way to the crucifixion. (This event is commemorated in Roman Catholic services as the Eighth Station of the Cross.) Ultimately

it's all about hope and compassion, something we all need after the past year. And it's suitable for audiences of any faith (or none at all); its themes of compassion and community are universal. We asked the composer to talk about her new opera.

The Bible Only Has One Sentence About These Women. How Did You Fill Out The Story?

Yes, there is little information about them. They weep for Jesus when they witness His pain and understand, on some level, that there has been no crime committed that could justify such torture and humiliation. Jesus understands their weeping as an acknowledgment of their own human frailty. In essence, the tears they shed are tears of grief for the darker side of human nature, something that we all carry inside of ourselves to varying degrees.

I introduce the women at the beginning of the opera, as they shop in the marketplace. This gives the audience a bit of backstory on their individual characters. I also give them names. I don't want to give too much away about the main characters, but let's just say that they end up living up to these names: Sacrifice, Love and Purpose.

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inside the unit will be new. The back and forth is completely counterproductive. Many individuals are under the impression that when we say preserve, we mean keep exactly the same. That couldn't be farther from the truth. We aren't talking about slapping some paint on the inside and calling it new. It means completely new insides while keeping the outside. My question to those who demand complete demolition, if we can address all the construction related concerns while still preserving historical buildings, why is demolition necessary? Why are you so adamantly against saving anything?

There are also security and infrastructure concerns from many residents. First, a reality check is needed here. Razing a community to lower the crime rate is ridiculous. Brand new buildings will not change that. Forcing out the current population will not address the problems. In the 4 hour orientation all SAHA tenants take prior to moving in, the security officer does a presentation for future tenants. Part of this presentation is statistics like 95% of all crime on SAHA properties are not committed by tenants. It's people that come to public housing properties. I have had plenty of personal experience with this. Some keep shooting out the street lamps in the parking areas and green spaces in between buildings. The parking lot behind my unit is

pitch black and hidden at night. I've seen cars come and go, parking for a while. I've seen people participating in lewd acts inside their vehicles and drug deals etc. But they don't live here. It's a spot that they know is dark, in an area that people are afraid to speak up. As residents, we know that any police reports or calls tied to a SAHA address automatically goes to the front office. We don't want the trouble on our doorstep. The problem is not the buildings.

It is not the residents. It is the people from other areas that use our community in a negative way. Better lighting, more security on the properties, even video cameras in parking lots would help combat these issues.

In closing, I want to remind everyone that discrimination comes in many forms. It's so easy for the oppressed to become the oppressors out of fear, trauma and a lack of information. It is time to stop villainizing public housing. Stop visualizing scenes from "Boyz in the Hood" every time you think about the courts. It's important to see the whole picture. This is an opportunity for our community to shine. To heal. It's time we dream up a positive future.

BIO: Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazan/Apache Courts.



REIMAGINE ALAZAN COURTS

SAHA is kicking off a new master planning process to determine the future of Alazan Courts. The design team hopes to learn from Alazan residents about their priorities and how SAHA housing can best serve them. Please join us for the Reimagine Alazan Courts Kick Off or stop by the Open House at Alazan Courts Community Center for a one-on-one conversation.

FEBRUARY 1ST
TUESDAY
4:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Master Plan Virtual Kick Off

FEBRUARY 2ND - 18TH
M-F 3PM - 4PM
Saturday 11AM - 1PM

Open House the Alazan Courts Community Center

JOIN ON ZOOM OR FACEBOOK LIVE
To sign up for the zoom
bit.ly/alazan-zoom

JOIN US IN PERSON AT
THE ALAZAN COURTS COMMUNITY CENTER
1011 S Brazos St, San Antonio, TX 78207

If you have any questions email us at community@able.city

Composer Carla Lucero

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What Do You Hope That Audiences Will Take Away From The Opera?

I hope that audiences identify with the tests of faith and conscience that the three women in the opera face. In the end, following our conscience is having faith in the goodness within us and acting accordingly. This is a universal concept to me, and not specific to any religious belief. Through empathy comes tangible goodness and change for the better, if we put away our fears. The Passion can be uplifting and motivating. I really hope this comes through in The Three Women.

Could You Talk A Bit About Having The Piece Performed In Spanish?

It's a passionate and beautiful language that I am proud to have as part of my heritage. I have written

operas in both Spanish and English, and honestly, both languages work wonderfully when they are set to music. Spanish is softer on the tongue and on the ear with rich and round vowel sounds. Spanish is not my first language, so I enlisted the assistance of an amazing poet and translator, Dr. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX who is also a theater artist. She translated my original libretto from English to Spanish very carefully, so that it would register culturally and poetically with the audience. I hope that the Spanish speaking communities of Los Angeles and beyond will accept this as a love letter from me to them. See: bit.ly/threeWomen



Dr. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, Trinity University