

The Black Opera Research Network (BORN) is pleased to announce two online panel discussions in June 2021. Panel 1, **‘Charting “Black Opera”’ (17 June)**, continues BORN’s inaugural discussion series about research and practice in the field of Black Opera. Panel 2, **‘Opera, Commemoration, and the Racialized Politics of Place’ (23 June)**, is a special event to mark three June dates central to Black political history around the world. Both conversations feature distinguished participants from the spheres of opera performance, composition, and research. Find further information below and on the [BORN website](#). Register for either or both panels [here](#). We look forward to welcoming you to these exciting events!

Panel 1: Charting ‘Black Opera’

Thursday 17 June 2021, 12pm EST / 5pm BST / 6pm CAT / 9am PDT

What is Black? What is Opera? When does something qualify as ‘Black Opera’? In the second of its series of inaugural panels, BORN grapples with the parameters of its own terms of reference. Taking as a starting point the ‘Black Opera Database’ created by BORN affiliates Allison Lewis and Nicholas Newton, the conversation interrogates the politics of racial categorization and generic classification. We ask what institutional integration might mean for works of art that resist prevailing taxonomies of opera and Blackness. Finally, panellists ask if it is possible to circumscribe the field of ‘Black opera’ without allowing practitioners or their works to be co-opted into a politics of inequality and/or exclusion.

Talking points may include, but won’t be limited to:

- diverse demarcations of Blackness in different times and places
- works of art as ciphers for racialized expectations
- operatic Blackness as ‘vernacular’ or ‘folk’ construct
- opera and its generic others
- what should or shouldn’t be included in a database of ‘Black’ operas?
- the potential co-option of Black opera as an antidote to white liberal guilt

Moderator

Naomi André (USA)

Panelists

Genevieve Arkle (UK)

Mandla Langa (South Africa)

Allison Lewis (USA)

Panelist bios are available on the [BORN website](#).

Read an interview with Allison Lewis and Nicholas Newton on the development of the Black Opera Database [here](#).

Panel 2: Opera, Commemoration, and the Racialized Politics of Place

Wednesday 23 June 2021, 12pm EST / 5pm BST / 6pm CAT / 9am PDT

16 June 1976: the Soweto Massacre, South Africa. 19 June 1865: the official announcement of emancipation is made to enslaved people in Texas, USA. 22 June 1948: the

disembarkation of 1,027 West Indian passengers from HMT Empire Windrush in Tilbury, England.

Commemorating three events that happened in June, BORN draws together an international panel of scholars and practitioners to discuss how Blackness across the Atlantic has been articulated through protest and forced relocation. Shirley Thompson, composer of *Memories in Mind: Women of the Windrush*, Sipumzo Lucwaba, creator of *Imivumba Yamaqhawe: The Scars of Our Heroes*, and Nicole Cabell, co-curator of Opera Theatre St. Louis's *I Dream a World* Juneteenth celebration, reflect on the individual and shared legacies of Youth Day in South Africa, Juneteenth in the US, and Windrush Day in the UK. Drawing on their own projects, the panellists ask what it means to commemorate racialized oppression and liberation on the operatic stage—a place that carries its own histories of segregation and exclusion. They reflect on opera's participation in cultures that both hurt and heal, and discuss their own confrontations with the genre's challenging legacy.

Talking points may include, but won't be limited to:

- the role of opera in commemorating racial violence and/or liberation
- the intersection of opera as 'globalized' practice with localized forms of remembrance
- the re-appropriation of a contentious musical form
- the geo-politics of racial subjugation and commemoration on the operatic stage

Moderator

Juliana Pistorius (South Africa/UK)

Panelists

Nicole Cabell (USA)

Sipumzo Lucwaba (South Africa)

Shirley Thompson (UK)

Panelist bios are available on the [BORN website](#).

Register for either or both events [here](#).

A recording and transcription of each event will be made available on the [BORN website](#).

Participant Biographies:

Genevieve Robyn Arkle is a lecturer and researcher whose work focuses on historical, cultural, and intertextual investigations into 19th- and 20th-Century Austro-German music, specifically the works of Richard Wagner and Gustav Mahler. She is Co-Founder and Deputy Director of the Institute of Austrian and German Music Research (IAGMR) and is the Leader and Co-Founder of the Gustav Mahler Research Centre Postgraduate Forum (GMRC). In 2020, she was awarded the Wagner Society's Young Lecturer's Prize for outstanding research on Richard Wagner and also earned the title of 'PGR Student of the Year' at the University of Surrey's Vice-Chancellor's Awards for exceptional contributions to research. Alongside her research, Genevieve has used her platform as a young, black-mixed, female academic to speak out on issues of black and black-mixed representation in Music Higher Education. She currently sits on the board for the EDI in Music Studies Network (EDIMS) and is Digital Communications Team Lead for the organization. She is passionate

about creating safe and inclusive spaces for people of color in music and educating others on the importance of diversifying and decolonizing our industry.

Mandla Langa comes from Durban. He went into exile in 1976 and has lived in Botswana, Mozambique, Angola, Hungary, Zambia and the United Kingdom. In 1980 Mandla won *Drum Magazine's* Africa-wide story contest and in 1991 was awarded the Arts Council of Great Britain bursary for creative writing. Mandla was the Cultural Representative of the African National Congress (ANC) in the UK and Western Europe. He has been a columnist for various newspapers and was the Convenor of the Task Group on Government Communications (COMTASK) in 1997, which restructured apartheid's communication systems. From 1999 to 2005 he chaired the Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA). In 2007, he received the National Order of Ikhamanga in Silver for his literary and journalistic contribution to democracy. In 1999 to 2000, he wrote the book for the musical, *Milestones*, which featured music by Hugh Masekela and Sibongile Khumalo. His published works include *Tenderness of Blood* (1987), *A Rainbow on a Paper Sky* (1989), *The Naked Song and Other Stories* (1997), *The Memory of Stones* (2000), *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* (2008), which won the 2009 Commonwealth Prize for Best Book in the African Region and *The Texture of Shadows* (2014). He co-authored *Dare Not Linger* with Nelson Mandela's archives (2017) and was a fellow with STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies). A recipient of honorary doctorates from the Universities of Fort Hare and Wits respectively, Mandla has a MA in Creative Writing from Wits. He sits on various boards such as Multichoice's Phuthuma Nathi and Primedia and is a trustee of Media Monitoring Africa.

Allison Lewis is a Doctoral student in the American Studies Department at the University of Kansas. She holds a BM in vocal performance with a focus in operatic studies as a mezzo soprano and an MA in African and African American Studies from the same university. Allison's research focuses on disparities for African Americans in music education and advocates for the use of more Afrocentric teaching techniques in the classroom. Her intent as a researcher and creator is to produce academic and theatrical work that is in conversation with current activist movements and uses operatic studies and stages as a place for radical transformation, Black liberation, and justice. Allison is a two-time FLAS (Foreign Language Area Study) fellow in Wolof. Her previous work includes musical consultant and singer for the KU Theater production of *In the Blood* (2019), director of an outreach program for Black middle school singers at the KC Melting Pot Theater (2019), and co-founder of the activist group KU AESM (Alumni for the Empowerment of Student Musicians), a grassroots organization committed to fighting for decolonial and equitable education for KU's most underserved musician populations.

Nicole Cabell: 2005 winner of the BBC Singer of the World Competition, Nicole Cabell is a sought-after soprano from Panorama City, CA. Ms. Cabell's singing career spans from the Metropolitan Opera stage to Carnegie Hall, and she will be starring in the Opera Theatre of St. Louis's production of William Grant Still's *Highway 1* this Spring. Nicole is also an instructor at the Eastman School of Music and will be co-curating Opera Theatre of St. Louis's Juneteenth Celebration, "I Dream A World".

Sipumzo Lucwaba: Sipumzo Trueman Lucwaba was born in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Having taught himself the bass guitar, he studied music at the University of the

Witwatersrand, and played the bass in professional shows such as *Dreamgirls* and *Dirty Dancing*. It is here that his love affair with musical theatre flourished. In 2017 Sipumzo worked alongside Charl-Johan Lingenfelder as musical director and bandleader of the Fugard theatre's revival of Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong*. The show earned Sipumzo a first Naledi award nomination, and he was selected as a *Mail and Guardian* Top 200 Young South African, 2018. In 2019 Sipumzo created *Imivumba YamaQhawe*, a high school opera, for Cape Town Opera.

Shirley Thompson: The conceptual music of composer Shirley J. Thompson is performed and screened worldwide and often described as 'superbe' (Le Figaro) as well as 'powerful and striking' (Planet Hugill). A visionary artist and cultural activist, Thompson has pushed the boundaries of the classical music with ground-breaking music productions that have attracted new audiences worldwide. Thompson is the first woman in Europe to have composed and conducted a symphony within the last 40 years. *New Nation Rising, A 21stst Century Symphony*, performed and recorded by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, is an epic musical story celebrating London's thousand-year history, and one in which the RPO is accompanied by two choirs, solo singers, a rapper and dhol drummers, a total of nearly 200 performers. This extraordinary work was originally commissioned to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002 and the concept was latterly assumed as a framework for the 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony. She co-scored the ballet *PUSH* that toured to over 40 of the world's major opera houses, including The Mariinsky Theatre, La Scala and Sydney Opera House. Her opera series, *Heroines of Opera*, encapsulating narratives of iconic women in history and challenges the concept of the femme fatale, the usual portrayal of women in the operatic cannon. Thompson has consistently demonstrated in her work a belief in the transformative power of music to affect social, cultural and political change.