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## Long Beach Opera

### Community Conversations

A set of five free community programs centering on *Justice*  
LBO's 2019 season theme

Featuring speakers, performances and audience engagement

February 9<sup>th</sup>, March 10<sup>th</sup>, April 30<sup>th</sup>, May 25<sup>th</sup>, June 6<sup>th</sup>

Locations throughout Long Beach

Long Beach, CA January 18, 2019 -- Long Beach Opera believes that discussions inspired by art should extend beyond the lobby of the theater. For this reason, LBO is using its 40th anniversary season theme, *Justice*, as a catalyst to present its brand new five-event series called *Community Conversations* – February 9 through June 6.

These five programs center on the themes of race, equity and justice and complement the programming for the current season -- *In the Penal Colony* (April 25-May 5), with score by Philip Glass and based on the Kafka short story which details the twilight of an uncivilized world order and the dawn of a humane justice system, and Anthony Davis' long awaited *The Central Park Five* (World Premiere June 15, 22, and 23) which tells the true story of five African American and Latino teenagers who were unjustly convicted of a crime in 1989 but exonerated through DNA evidence thirteen years later.

The Community Conversations will bring together multiple organizations, artists, and community leaders for what are expected to be fascinating events of great interest and available and accessible to all.

Jennifer Rivera, Long Beach Opera Executive Director said, "Our season this year has operas which take their themes from observing justice – one from a famous literary exploration and the other from recent historical events. By gathering together artists, thinkers and community leaders, we are hoping that the public can walk away from these Community Conversations with new ideas and a deeper understanding of our world, and at the same time be able to have a better appreciation of the operas themselves."

*Community Conversations* will feature keynote speakers, panel discussions, live performances featuring singers from *In the Penal Colony* and *The Central Park Five* and beyond, and audience engagement opportunities through question-and-answer talkbacks.

The programs are:

- February 9<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM at the Michelle Obama Library | "Dismantling Racism as a Community"
- March 10<sup>th</sup> at 4 PM at the Museum of Latin American Art | "Equity and Diversity in the Arts"
- April 30<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM at the CSULB Studio Theater | "Life Beyond Prison"
- May 25<sup>th</sup> at 3 PM at Long Beach City College, Dyer Hall | "Guilty Until Proven Innocent"
- June 6<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM at the Long Beach City Council Chamber | "Black Lives, The Arts, and Mattering" –
- Featured speakers include Dr. Derrell Acon, Dr. Naomi André, Rising Scholars Justice Lab, Gary Tyler, Anthony Davis, and performers from *The Central Park Five*.

All conversations are free, ticketed events, and will be live-streamed on Facebook. This Community Conversation Initiative also includes three youth programs (not open to the public).

For information, or to make reservations (recommended) for Community Conversations, and to purchase tickets for *In the Penal Colony* and *The Central Park Five*, please visit [www.longbeachopera.org](http://www.longbeachopera.org). Please Note: performers and panelists subject to change

Support for the Community Conversations Initiative is provided by the Knight Foundation fund, a fund held at the Long Beach Community Foundation.

### **About Community Conversations**

#### **Conversation #1: "Dismantling Racism as a Community"**

Led by operatic bass-baritone and self-proclaimed Blacktivist Dr. Derrell Acon, this conversation explores the creative ways in which Long Beach can leverage all its resources towards racial equality and justice.

**Date: February 9th at 2 pm**

**Location: Michelle Obama Neighborhood Library, 5870 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach 90805**

Moderator: Dr. Sabrina Sanders

Panelists: Katie Balderas (Manager of Office of Equity for the City of Long Beach), Audrena Redmond (Black Lives Matter Long Beach Co-Founder), and others

#### **Conversation #2: "Equity and Diversity in the Arts"**

Dr. Naomi André, author of *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, leads this discussion on the challenges of artists of colors and how we seek truer representation in the arts.

**Date: March 10th at 4 pm**

**Location: Museum of Latin American Art, 628 Alamitos Avenue, Long Beach CA 90802**

Performers: Bernardo Bermudez, Joanna Ceja

Moderator: Tasha Hunter

Panelists: Dr. Naomi André, Anthony Davis, and others

#### **Conversation #3: "Life Beyond Prison"**

Speakers from The Rising Scholars Justice Lab at California State University Long Beach are featured in this powerful look at the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons and their pursuits in education and beyond.

**Date: April 30th at 6 pm**

**Location: CSULB Studio Theater (California State University Long Beach), corner of 7th Street & East Campus Drive**

Performers: Lindsay Patterson, Victoria Lawal

Moderator: Isaac Bryan

Panelists: Jasmin Harris (California Innocence Project), CIP exonerees, CSULB Rising Scholars Justice Lab members

#### **Conversation #4: "Guilty Until Proven Innocent"**

Featured speaker Gary Tyler, the youngest person ever convicted of the death penalty in the United States, sets the stage with his own tragic story for this conversation on racism and discrimination in the American criminal justice system.

**Date: May 25th at 3 pm**

**Location: Long Beach City College, Dyer Hall, 4901 East Carson Street, Long Beach CA 90808**

Performers: Cast members from *The Central Park Five*

Moderator: Kimmy Maniquis

Panelists: Carl Kemp (Long Beach lobbyist and community leader) and others

#### **Conversation #5: "Black Lives, the Arts, and Mattering"**

Activist and composer of *The Central Park Five* Anthony Davis leads this provocative discussion on the role of the arts and African Americans in veritable social activism -- historically and moving forward.

**Date: June 6th at 6 pm**

**Location: Long Beach City Council Chamber, 333 W. Ocean Blvd. Long Beach, CA 90802**

Performers: Anthony Davis, Nicole Mitchell

Moderator: Chris Anthony

Panelists: Councilmember Rex Richardson, Marcina Riley (My Brother's Keeper Initiative Coordinator, City of Long Beach), and others

**Long Beach Opera (LBO)** is internationally known for its cutting-edge interpretations of unconventional repertoire. LBO creates immediate, inventive, and often boldly avant-garde productions for an adventurous audience and stands apart from most opera companies in the number of world, American, and West Coast premieres the company has staged. Founded in 1979, it is the oldest professional opera company in the Los Angeles/Orange County region with a performance history of more than 110 operas, ranging from the earliest works of the 17th century to operas of the 21st. LBO's ever-growing repertoire has provided stimulus for the subsequent founding of other local opera companies, catapulting Southern California into the spotlight as a major opera epicenter. LBO is a recognized and respected member of the U. S. cultural community, receiving funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, the County of Los Angeles, and the City of Long Beach, along with generous support from individual donors, local businesses, public corporations and private foundations

### **Speaker / Performer Biographies:**

**Dr. Derrell Acon** is LBO's Manager of Education and Engagement and the Community Conversations Initiative Project Director. He is a uniquely accomplished bass-baritone and an international scholar on topics ranging from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Opera to American Blacktivism. He has made his debut in the roles of Jake and Jim in *Porgy and Bess* at Semperoper Dresden, Hamburgische Staatsoper, Deutsches Theater München, Kölner Philharmonie, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Haifa Congress Center, Tel-Aviv Charles Bronfman Hall, and Teatro Petruzzelli di Bari. Dr. Acon is a 2013-2014 Fulbright scholar to Italy, where he researched the operas of Giuseppe Verdi and lectured on the Black American Experience, an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grantee for his work in Verdian scholarship and performance, and a frequent presenter throughout the U.S. at such venues as conferences for the National Association for Ethnic Studies, National Association of Negro Musicians, and National Men of Color Summit and internationally at venues in Europe and Africa. Dr. Acon has also been seen as an opera lecturer at The Chautauqua Institution, Portland Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, and Des Moines Metro Opera.

**Dr. Naomi André** is Associate Professor in Women's Studies, the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, and the Associate Director for Faculty at the Residential College at the University of Michigan. She received her BA in music from Barnard College and MA and PhD in musicology from Harvard University. Her research focuses on opera and issues surrounding gender, voice, and race. Her publications include topics on Italian opera, Schoenberg, women composers, and teaching opera in prisons. Her books, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (2006) and *Blackness in Opera* (2012, edited collection) focus on opera from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries and explore constructions of gender, race and identity. She recently published *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* with University of Illinois Press, a monograph on staging race and history in opera today in the United States and South Africa. She has served on the Graduate Alumni Council for Harvard University's Graduate School of Art and Sciences, the Executive Committee for the Criminal Justice Program at the American Friends Service Committee (Ann Arbor, MI), and has served as an evaluator for the Fulbright Senior Specialist Program.

### **Rising Scholars at California State University, Long Beach, James M. Binnall (Faculty Advisor):**

Rising Scholars, a student organization at CSULB is dedicated to bringing together students who have been impacted by our criminal justice system. Their voices contextualize the struggles of formerly incarcerated students, while also offering hope to those who will undoubtedly come after them. In sum, the group offers support and advocacy for those directly or indirectly impacted by our criminal justice system and who are trying to change their lives through higher education. The Education Lab, housed monthly at the Gathering Church in Long Beach, brings together formerly incarcerated and systems impacted college students and at risk youth/other formerly incarcerated or systems impacted citizens who are seeking educational opportunities. Counseling is provided to other former offenders and at risk youth as they attempt to navigate higher education. An individualized education plan is developed for each client that addresses financial aid concerns, testing prerequisites, college visits, interviewing tips, enrollment, matriculation, and campus life.

**Gary Tyler** is a former prisoner at the Louisiana State Prison in Angola, Louisiana. He was freed after 41 years in jail after being tried as an adult and convicted of first-degree murder at age 17 by an all-white jury; he received the mandatory death sentence for that crime, according to state law. He had been convicted of the October 7, 1974 shooting death of a 13-year-old white boy and wounding of another, on a day of violent protests by whites against black students at Destrehan High School in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, even though no proof was ever found of his involvement in the crime. Tyler's cause was taken up again in 2007 by human rights organizations and a variety of public figures after a columnist of the New York Times reviewed his case. In 2012 the United States Supreme Court ruled that persons who were minors at the time of a crime for which they were convicted, could not be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, and applied this retroactively. He was released in 2016. While in Angola, he became the most respected of inmates among the prison population and staff and wardens. He ran the drama club for decades and produced and directed a three-hour play on the life of Christ, and he was one of the first volunteers in the hospice program, which he continued for nearly twenty years. Upon release from prison, Gary was flown to Los Angeles to begin a new life in a supportive community. He has been working with homeless youth for two years at SPY (Safe Place for Youth). In addition he has volunteered his time to speak out for Death Penalty Focus and has also taken his message to colleges, churches and community groups including UCLA, CSUN, CSULB, Loyola Marymount University, USC Loyola Law School, Hastings Law School, UC Irvine, All Saints Episcopal, Tim Robbins Actors Gang Theatre, Cal Tech University, Scott United Methodist, and many other venues.

**Anthony Davis** (born February 20, 1951), is an American pianist and composer, and is the creator of *The Central Park Five*, which Long Beach Opera will premiere in June 2019. He incorporates several styles including jazz, rhythm 'n' blues, gospel, non-Western, African, European classical, Indonesian gamelan, and experimental music. He is best known for his operas. *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which played to sold-out houses at its premiere at the New York City Opera in 1986, was the first of a new American genre: opera on a contemporary political subject. The recording of *X* was released on the Gramavision label in August 1992 and received a Grammy Nomination for "Best Contemporary Classical Composition" in February 1993. Davis's second opera, *Under the Double Moon*, a science fiction opera with an original libretto by Deborah Atherton, premiered at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in June 1989. His third opera, *Tania*, with a libretto by Michael-John LaChiusa and based on the abduction of Patricia Hearst, premiered at the American Music Theater Festival in June 1992. A recording of *Tania* was released in 2001 on Koch, and in November 2003 Musikwerkstaat Wien presented its European premiere. A fourth opera, *Amistad*, about a shipboard uprising by slaves and their subsequent trial, premiered at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in November 1997. *Wakonda's Dream* premiered at Opera Omaha in 2007.