



CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

[DETROIT OPERA](#)

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

# Detroit Opera

Aspen Leadership Group is proud to partner with Detroit Opera in the search for a Chief Development Officer.

The Chief Development Officer will be responsible for all contributed revenue for Detroit Opera. Through a positive and progressive leadership approach, guided by the artistic mission of the organization, the Chief Development Officer will provide the direction necessary to ensure Detroit Opera's contributed revenue goals are met, ensuring mission focus and financial strength in the short and long term. The Chief Development Officer will have oversight of and play an active role in leading annual, capital, and endowment fundraising strategies and activities as well as special campaigns for monies raised from individual, corporate, foundation, and government sources.

Detroit Opera owes much to its founding director, David DiChiera, who in 1971 created the Michigan Opera Theatre. DiChiera worked tirelessly, not only in Michigan but across the country, to bring music theater and opera to previously underserved segments of the population. The company's first home was in Detroit's Music Hall Theatre. Not only did this ensure a home for opera in the city, but it also sparked the rebirth of Detroit's magnificent theater and entertainment district. Over the next several years, the Michigan Opera Theatre toured the state, bringing musical theater and opera to audiences and gaining acclaim in 1976 with the company's first world premiere, Thomas Pasatieri's *Washington Square*. For the next two decades, the company expanded and presented the very best opera and music theater in its mainstage productions. After a successful fundraising campaign, the mammoth task began of constructing a new 75,000-square-foot stage opera house on the site of the former Capitol Theatre, a 1922 movie palace. The Detroit Opera House officially opened in April 1996 and has been the home of opera, dance, and music theater in Detroit ever since. Among those who sang at Michigan Opera Theatre early in their careers are Kathleen Battle, Ben Heppner, Catherine Malfitano, and Leona Mitchell.

Known as Michigan Opera Theatre for most of its existence, the company changed its name in 2022 to Detroit Opera. The company is in an exciting period of transition that began with the appointment of Yuval Sharon as the Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director in 2020. His vision is to transform Detroit Opera's programming model toward more self-produced and original productions. Under his artistic direction, recent highlights include 2020's *Twilight: Gods*, a drive-through experience of Richard Wagner's opera *Götterdämmerung (Twilight of the Gods)*, staged in the Detroit Opera's Parking Center. This was followed in 2021 by a new staging of Ragnar Kjartansson's performance piece *BLISS* and the world premiere in 2022 of a new co-production of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, the first revival of Anthony Davis and Thulani Davis's opera since its 1986 premiere.

In 2022 Sharon introduced his acclaimed *La bohème* staging, which presented the four acts of Puccini's classic opera in reverse order, and *The Valkyries*, which used virtual reality, filmmaking technology, and graphics engines to bring Act III of Wagner's *Die Walküre* to life. Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar (Fountain of Tears)* in April 2023 represented another major milestone: Detroit Opera's first international co-production, in collaboration with Opera Ventures, Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera, where it will be staged in the 2024–25 season. In October 2023, the Detroit Opera's co-production of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, directed by Matthew Ozawa, was enthusiastically received by critics and audiences.

Under Sharon's leadership, Detroit Opera has attracted an extraordinary artistic team including the appointment of world-renowned soprano Christine Goerke as its Associate Artistic Director in 2021 and Mexican American conductor Roberto Kalb as its Music Director in 2022. They join Artistic Advisor for Dance Jon H. Teeuwissen in leading Detroit Opera as the foremost producer and presenter of opera, music theater, and dance in the Great Lakes Region. The organization engages artists of national and international stature for mainstage and community performances and provides cultural-enrichment programs for a broad range of audiences and communities. It is one of Detroit's leading arts and culture organizations.

Detroit Opera is committed to bringing music to all people of Detroit. *Opera in the Parks* are free, outdoor performances that take place during the summer and feature members of the company's Touring Ensemble. There are also summer programs for young people that allow students to gain experience in not only performing, but also creating their own compositions and dances. Detroit Opera also works closely with area schools to ensure that all children can experience opera, music theater, and dance throughout the school year, offering trips to the Detroit Opera House for backstage tours as well as the opportunity to experience dress rehearsals. Detroit Opera Touring Ensemble brings performances to area schools that are suitable for all audiences. For teens interested in opera, Detroit Opera is part of "Opera Teens," a national movement that empowers teenagers to pursue their interests in opera, share opera with others, and leverage the power of the art form to serve local communities. Teens in the program attend performances, explore careers in opera, and connect with peers and professionals nationwide.

For Fiscal Year 2024, annual contributed revenue goals are approximately \$7.5 million, with a strategic goal to grow to \$10 million in alignment with the new trajectory of original productions and co-productions, and within an overall annual budget of \$18 million. Detroit Opera is also pursuing a capital campaign of \$15 million to address necessary upgrades that will make the Detroit Opera House more accessible.

## REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

The Chief Development Officer will report to the President & CEO, Patty Isacson Sabee, and will work in close collaboration with the artistic team led by Artistic Director, Yuval Sharon, the Board of Directors, led by Board Chair Ethan Davidson, and staff in the development, planning, and execution of relevant and strategic fundraising initiatives. The Chief Development Officer will be an engaged member of the Senior Leadership Team and will work with Board members, Development Committee members, and volunteer leadership to achieve annual budget targets. The Chief Development Officer will oversee a team of six staff and contractors.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

*As the incoming Chief Executive Officer and President of Detroit Opera I am looking for a partner to join our extraordinary team in a resoundingly positive response to the question posed by The New York Times “Is the future of American opera happening in Detroit?”*

*The forward motion of that promise will inspire our new Chief Development Officer in their work with an outstanding artistic team, a dedicated, tenacious, and passionate Board of Directors and Trustees, and a talented community of staff and crew, musicians, and volunteers. It’s an undertaking that promises new ways to engage with art and with the community, to be a part of the driving, propulsive force of change that allows the art form to continue to connect soulfully and meaningfully to our lived experience.*

*Detroit Opera has an indelible legacy in the cultural landscape of Detroit. Founded in 1971 with a mission to be the premier producer and presenter of opera and dance in the Great Lakes region, Detroit Opera curates a wide variety of opera and dance repertoire on the stage of the Detroit Opera House, delivers robust portfolios of educational and community engagement opportunities, performs in regional venues across southeast Michigan, and hosts touring productions, civic events, and other major public gatherings each season. We contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of our region through meaningful and inclusive arts programs that serve more than 250,000 annually. Since Yuval Sharon was named as its second-ever Artistic Director in 2020, the company has received national recognition for its daring productions, beginning with our site-specific Wagner *Götterdämmerung* adaptation “*Twilight: Gods*,” set in the Opera House Parking Center. Today, Detroit Opera productions are being premiered at opera companies around the nation, including the Metropolitan Opera, and around the world.*

*To honor a beloved legacy and to embrace a new vision of what opera and dance can mean for our unique community requires a candidate with the ability to understand diverse perspectives and acknowledge the significance of differences and complexities in backgrounds, cultures, values, and viewpoints. We understand this as the foundation for an inclusive and creative environment.*

*I look forward to meeting you.*

— Patty Isacson Sabee, President & CEO

## PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

### **Organizational Leadership and Strategy**

The Chief Development Officer will

- provide innovative, visionary, and strategic operational planning and leadership for all development activities;
- work closely with the President & CEO and other members of the Senior Leadership Team to develop and accomplish goals and strategic plans;
- collaborate with the Senior Leadership Team to develop and implement plans for the operational infrastructure of systems, processes, and personnel designed to accommodate the rapid change objectives of the organization;
- motivate and lead a high-performing team, mentoring direct reports to cultivate skills and to increase consciousness of the interrelationships between each department;
- work to develop a positive, effective culture of equity, transparency, teamwork, accountability, and passion for the mission of the organization; and
- serve as the staff liaison to the Board’s development committee, providing leadership to maximize their role in fundraising.

## **Fundraising and Stewardship**

The Chief Development Officer will

- lead the process for developing Detroit Opera’s overall fundraising strategy, enabling sustainable growth in individual, foundation, corporate, and government sources with the support of the six-member development team;
- successfully solicit leadership gifts;
- ensure high-quality and appropriate stewardship of donors at all gift levels, including legacy donors and planned gifts; and
- build and steward infrastructure systems that support long-term fundraising strategies.

## **LEADERSHIP**

### **Patty Isacson Sabee**

#### **President & CEO**

On January 2, 2024, Patty Isacson Sabee will become President & CEO of Detroit Opera. She will be only the third person to lead Detroit Opera since its founding as Michigan Opera Theatre in 1971 by the late David DiChiera. Isacson Sabee has most recently served as the inaugural Executive Director and founding staff member of Planet Word, an immersive language experience in Washington, D.C. that opened in October 2020 and celebrates the fun, beauty, and power of words, language, and reading. At Seattle’s Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP), founded in 2000 as the Experience Music Project, she served as Deputy Director of External Relations and Development before being named CEO and Director. She oversaw MoPOP’s national programming and \$213 million in assets and was responsible for bringing in more than 600,000 annual visitors.

She began her career in arts administration at the Seattle Symphony, where over the course of two decades she held positions in operations, artistic administration, and development before serving as Interim Executive Director. Her accomplishments at Seattle Symphony include directing the start-up operations of Benaroya Hall, a \$118 million dedicated symphonic concert hall that opened in September 1998.

### **Yuval Sharon**

#### **Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director**

Described by *The New York Times* as “opera’s disrupter in residence,” director Yuval Sharon has been creating an unconventional body of work that seeks to expand the operatic form.

Sharon founded and serves as Artistic Director of The Industry in Los Angeles, a company devoted to new and experimental opera that has brought opera into moving vehicles, operating train stations, Hollywood sound stages, and various “non-spaces” such as warehouses, parking lots, and escalator corridors. He conceived, directed, and produced the company’s acclaimed world premieres of *Sweet Land*, *Hopscotch*, *Invisible Cities*, and *Crescent City*. He also devised and directed the company’s two performance installations, *In C* at the Hammer Museum and *Nimbus* at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Sharon is recipient of the 2014 Götz Friedrich Prize in Germany for his production of John Adams’s *Doctor Atomic* (Karlsruhe, Germany and Seville, Spain). He directed a landmark production of John Cage’s *Song Books* at the San Francisco Symphony and Carnegie Hall with Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, and Jessye Norman. His 2016 production of Peter Eötvös’s *Three Sisters* at the Wiener Staatsoper led *Opernwelt* to call him “one of the most interesting arrivals on the musical landscape.”

His production of *The Cunning Little Vixen*, originally produced at the Cleveland Orchestra, was the first fully staged opera ever presented in Vienna's Musikverein in October 2017. In 2018 Sharon became the first American director at the Bayreuther Festspiele with his production of *Lohengrin*.

From 2016 to 2019, Sharon was the first Artist-in-Residence at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, creating nine projects, including a major revival of Meredith Monk's opera *ATLAS*, which made him the first director Monk entrusted with a new production of her work. Other projects included an original setting of *War of the Worlds*; a staging of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*; and rare stagings of Lou Harrison's *Young Caesar* and John Cage's *Europas 1 & 2*.

In 2022, Sharon was recognized by *Time Magazine* as one of 100 rising stars from across industries and around the world in its [2022 TIME100 Next](#) list. Recipients of this honor are united by their extraordinary efforts to shape our world—and to define our future. The magazine noted, "To see the most innovative opera company in America, visit Motor City," adding, "Yuval Sharon has long used unconventional settings in unexpected ways, but now, as the artistic director of the Detroit Opera, he is breaking new ground."

### **PREFERRED COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS**

Detroit Opera will consider a broad array of candidates, including those with diverse workplace experiences and backgrounds. Candidates returning to work after a gap in employment, simply looking to transition, or taking the next step in their career path are encouraged to apply.

Detroit Opera seeks a Chief Development Officer with

- a commitment to the mission of Detroit Opera—to engage artists of national and international stature for stellar main stage and outreach performances, and provide compelling cultural enrichment programs for the diverse audiences and communities that it serves, as one of Detroit's pillars of arts and culture;
- a commitment to expanding access to opera and the live performing arts, and directly working to counteract elitist and exclusionary attitudes;
- a history of successfully managing a robust development department for a non-profit or performing arts entity;
- a history of managing donor prospects and successfully cultivating and closing leadership gifts;
- an understanding of the importance of and opportunities presented by a unified patron view, and the ways in which a cohesive organizational identity and voice can lead to increased awareness, loyalty, and civic engagement;
- a deep commitment to team building;
- the drive needed to achieve consistently excellent results;
- strong leadership and relationship-building skills and an ability to use these skills to positively build a powerful fundraising program and a cohesive and motivated team;
- a commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in all matters, both internally within the company culture and externally with regard to community and audience relations; and
- the experience and ability needed to develop and implement compelling messaging campaigns.

A bachelor's degree or an equivalent combination of education and experience is required for this position as is at least seven years of senior management experience. Although direct experience of opera is not required, the successful candidate must have a passion for the performing arts.

### SALARY AND BENEFITS

The salary range for this position is \$150,000 to \$175,000 annually. Detroit Opera offers a comprehensive package of benefits.

### LOCATION

This position is in Detroit, Michigan.

### APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

All applications must be accompanied by a cover letter and resume. ***Cover letters should be responsive to the mission of Detroit Opera as well as the responsibilities and qualifications stated in the position prospectus.*** Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the successful candidate has been selected.

To apply for this position, visit: [Chief Development Officer, Detroit Opera](#).

To nominate a candidate, please contact Anne Johnson, [annejohnson@aspenleadershipgroup.com](mailto:annejohnson@aspenleadershipgroup.com).

*All inquiries will be held in confidence.*