Opera on the James is ready to grow.

For thirteen seasons, Opera on the James has produced and presented locally designed and directed live opera that has thrilled and inspired the audiences of Central Virginia. We have grown from reaching 900 people in our first season to 9,000 in our 2017-18 season, and our success is a testament to a continually growing desire in the community for locally produced professional opera.

This is a unique moment in our history. In 2017 we engaged community members in a conversation around their hopes for Opera on the James. Having identified key areas of growth, the board of directors has decided to ask the community to support a $1 million campaign. We invite you to help us Turn Up The Lights.

How will we grow:

Our schedule of two productions per year limits the opportunity to enjoy live opera. Our audiences have been drawn largely from the immediate Lynchburg area, but regional performances have received enthusiastic feedback. We are well positioned to develop further based on our high production values and our experience with Central Virginia audiences, and in 2019 we will also take opera to the stage of the Historic Theatre at the Academy Center of the Arts.

The board of directors of Opera on the James has therefore decided to embark on a campaign to:

- increase the number of opera productions we present,
- expand our audience to include more of our region,
- collaborate with sister companies and programs, and
- ensure the sustainability of all of our work for many years to come.

The Campaign:

The campaign, titled “Turn Up The Lights,” will raise $1 million. Half of that will be placed in our endowment at Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation, and the income produced by it, roughly $25,000 a year, will forever support our productions. The other half will be placed in a board-controlled investment fund also to be used as a source of income and, when necessary, to help meet our budget in years when actual income has not matched expenses.

Lead Gift:

We are delighted and honored to announce an exciting start to the campaign with a lead gift from Lamar Cecil of $100,000.

Campaign Timeline and Pledge Length:

The campaign began with a quiet phase through spring and summer of 2018, and continues with a public phase through fall 2019. Campaign pledges may be paid over a period up to five years, and we will remind donors that continuing their annual support is critical to meeting the operating needs of the company.
Our Mission:
Opera on the James will attract and involve Central Virginians in the full range of operatic arts by providing diverse, accessible productions performed by nationally and regionally acclaimed artists that will educate, inspire and engage.

An overview of Opera on the James:
Opera on the James has locally designed and produced two full-length staged operas every year since 2005. We hire professional stage directors, conductors, singers, orchestra musicians, costumers, makeup artists, and technical crew individual by individual for each production from across the world. Our chorus members and dancers are members of local choral and dance groups, and our ushers and house managers are local volunteers. Hundreds of people are involved in each production.

Our Tyler Young Artist Program has presented family and child-friendly opera music and stories in children’s productions, school performances, and community appearances to thousands of area residents every season. For most young people in this area, Opera on the James is their first introduction to live professionally performed classical music.

We take our programming to other regional venues where possible. More than 400 people attended our January Young Artist performance at Averett University in Danville, and we have presented concerts of individual singers in Charlottesville and Lexington in past years. Central Virginia has many companies and programs that are potential partners for us in new productions and new audiences, and we will seek more opportunities to bring opera to the region.

“Opera on the James has established a reputation as one of the premiere small opera companies on the East Coast. Mounting two or three productions each season, the company brings young, up-and-coming professional opera singers to Central Virginia – along with a full orchestra – to stage full productions of some of the greatest operas ever composed. Opera on the James is a cultural crown jewel of Central Virginia.”

Editorial, The News & Advance
March 14, 2018

“I discovered Opera on the James when I attended a free family performance at the office downtown. Having experienced opera previously I was astounded at the quality of this free performance and my children were hooked! To see children of all ages and parts of the city enjoying this rich musical experience was truly joyful. Opera on the James is a critical part of the rich cultural tapestry emerging in this city and access to opera is important for all our city’s children. My son still sings the, “I’m running away” aria by Eddie Penciere - La donna è mobile from Rigoletto in disguise!”

Family Opera Attendee
9,000 Reasons to Support Opera on the James

In 2017, Opera on the James:

Engaged
9,000 students & adults

Produced
3 mainstage productions;
7 performances

Created
11 Random Acts of Culture
20 Community and School performances

Employed
285 singers, musicians, technicians, and craftspeople

Attracted
300 singers to audition for the Tyler Young Artist Program

$684,333
Total economic impact for the region

Campaign Leadership
The campaign is led by Opera on the James board members, key community volunteers and the organization’s staff, and financially supported by every member of our board and campaign committee:

Honorary co-chairs:
Lamar and Geri Cecil

Executive Committee:
David Neumeyer, chair
Bruce Christian
Deirdra Flavin
Lisa Joyner
Doris Peery
Susan Timmons

Advisers:
Steve Baldwin
Kasey Forehand
The Honorable Joan Foster
Frances Giles
The Honorable Joan Jones
Margie Lippard
David Petty
Cary Roberts
Joan Swanson
Robin Wood

Solicitors:
Lamar Cecil
Bruce Christian
Lisa Joyner
Gail Morrison
David Neumeyer
Doris Peery
Marc Schewel
Cecelia Schieve
Judy Schulz
Susan Schulz
Donna Whitehouse
I went to my first opera at least seventy years ago at the opera house in Central City, Colorado, then a pretty decrepit affair but today still in existence but sensitively restored to its original design of the 1870s. The performance was of Donizetti’s “Don Pasquale,” a merry romp that totally enthralled me. It had everything — music, drama, dancing, and staging that took me into another world. Over the years, watching early on from the stratospheric seats of the third balcony, all I could afford, but eventually worming my way into the orchestra I gradually realized that great opera houses, often the largest structures in many a European city, offered as great a pleasure to the opera goer as did what was afoot on the stage. And now we will have all these delights right here in Lynchburg: our splendid 1905 Academy Theater reborn in all its ancient glory and our Opera of the James company ready in its wings to offer us expert productions of the world’s great operas. We are fortunate indeed.

Flourishing arts make Central Virginia a better place for all of us to live and work. We welcome all interest, questions, suggestions and engagement. Please contact:

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