GUERRILLA OPERA

BLASTING OPERA INTO A REALM OF IMMEDIACY AND NEWNESS
Guerilla Opera is one of Boston’s most thrilling young companies creating brave new works. Founded in 2007, the ensemble has accumulated a repertoire of 40 new works, which continues to grow, by the most exciting composers of our generation. In daring performances, they have garnered a national reputation for innovative contemporary opera, with The Boston Globe raving that “radical exploration remains the cornerstone of everything it does.”

This artist-led ensemble wields a mission to commission and reenvision new experimental works that are custom-tailored to their artists; champion cutting-edge music; immerse audiences in profound experiences; be a model for creative authenticity and inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA); and inspire, influence and amplify emerging generations of artists.

Their vision is to generate a unique body of work that ferociously confronts the status quo, eschews antiquated and stereotypical traditions of the art form of opera, examines stories through culturally focused and contemporary lenses, and brings new music to new audiences.
“Creative, passionate, skilled, and transforming, which is all opera ever has or should be.”
North Shore Art Throb

“Exceptional”
The Boston Globe

“Deliciously inventive”
WBUR's The ARTery

"Exquisite"
Gramophone
Guerilla Opera redefines the opera experience.

GUERILLA OPERA RELISHES confrontation and upending conventions. Founded in Boston in 2007, the company has no conductor, chorus or orchestra. The pieces it commissions, which never exceed ninety minutes and are often closer to ten, feature no more than four instruments and four singers. In some instances, they have no vocal music at all. Whether their productions should even be called operas was once discussed within the group.

“When you say ‘opera,’ a very specific image and definition comes to people’s minds,” says Cuban-American soprano Aliana de la Guardia, who formed the company with fellow Boston Conservatory graduates and frequent new-music collaborators Mike Williams and Rudolf Rojahn. “For me, ‘operatic’ encompasses an experience as opposed to a set of rules to follow. [Opera’s] about immersion in music and spectacle. By taking that very bare definition, the possibilities of what Guerilla Opera can do as a company and the kinds of artists we can engage become very open.”

Over thirteen seasons, the twenty-five productions she and her colleagues have created reflect that boundary-pushing spirit. Sonically, they challenge the mainstream aversion to...
“Opera is about immersion in music and spectacle.”

Exit (2008), based on Jean-Paul Sartre’s play; Hannah Lash’s Beowulf (2016)—to unexpected texts such as the 2008 Vice Presidential debate transcript in Curtis K. Hughes’s Say it Ain’t So, Joe (2009). Settings and costumes, too, are not what audiences would likely see at Boston Lyric or the Met: Ken Veno’s Gallo (2014) featured a stage covered in Cheerios and a countertenor donning a chicken suit; Nicholas Vines’s Loose, Wet, Perforated (2011) is a twenty-first-century morality tale that takes place on a futuristic game show.

The primary factor that unites these disparate works is the ensemble itself. Guerilla’s organization is more akin to that of experimental theater groups such as SITI Company (with whom de la Guardia trained) or the Wooster Group, in that composers write specifically for the company’s core members, who work as a collective. “We don’t have departments, like other opera companies,” she says. “The artists design, produce and perform. Because we’re part of a whole, it’s a rewarding experience for those that come in. And when the artist experience is great, the audience’s will be great.” This dynamic also avoids the hierarchical structure that can diminish artists’ voices within institutional bureaucracies.

The group’s goals for transforming opera extend to broader industry issues as well. For example, they have grown increasingly concerned with what happens to new music such as their commissions after the premiere run. “These works are being forgotten, because they’ve lost their ‘shine,’” says producer and designer Julia Noulin-Mérat, Guerilla’s co-artistic director.

“You know, there’s so much to learn from having produced a work, letting it sit, and then doing a second production with new creatives. It will make the work grow. To me, that feels like success, because the piece isn’t frozen in time.” Both women applaud Opera America’s Next Stage Grants for funding second productions of new works, which can help propel into wide circulation pieces that initially may have been controversial, as well as reform the canon.

Accessibility, from issues of cost to enriching the experiences of underrepresented groups in opera audiences, is also a focal point. Their ticket prices are kept low, tactile tours are arranged for visually impaired individuals, and patrons with service animals are given reserved seating, among other initiatives. Guerilla Opera also produces work in Haverhill, MA, a small city thirty-five miles north of Boston where de la Guardia lives. “For people who live in non-hub cities, traveling to arts experiences can be prohibitive,” she says. “We’re a company that can produce performances in multiple cities, which opens up the possibility of doing cool things in unexpected places for people who are not generally exposed to this kind of progressive art, like site-specific or immersive work.”

Guerilla’s 2020–21 smaller-scale, live-streamed season reflects many of these goals. In October, the company conceived Caroline Louise Miller’s Ofelia’s Life Dream (2009)—a poet’s psychedelic journey within herself that follows her transformation into a mushroom, moth and palm tree—as an experimental film. “They’re giving it an entirely new interpretation, which is exciting,” Miller says. “Having some distance from the piece enabled me to have a more laid-back conversation about it with my collaborators, and to let them do amazing things with it.”

Miller appreciates the ease with which those conversations took place with the entire company, as that access doesn’t always exist for composers. She also admires Guerilla’s willingness to tackle even the most difficult or unexpected ideas and music. “They get really into weird stuff and take it seriously, and I’m impressed by that,” she says. “After working on Ofelia with them, I feel they’re willing to think big before tearing down [ideas] based on real-world constraints. They do a lot with a little and figure out a way to make it happen, no matter what.”

Charles Shatz is an arts journalist whose work has appeared in The New Yorker, The Irish Times and other international publications.
40 NEW WORKS
30 COMPOSERS
15 SEASONS
100+ PERFORMANCES
WORKS IN DEVELOPMENT

Anahita Abbasi
Distorted Attitudes III / Scattered (2014)

Georges Aperghis
Le corps à corps (1978)

Victoria Cheah
Etiquette (2020)
You should have come over (2020)

Anthony R. Green
A Rip Snorting Idea (2020)

Emily Koh
HER: alive|un|dead (2022-2023)

Lansing McLoskey
The Captivity of Hannah Duston (2023-2024)
Librettist Glen Nelson

Bahar Royai
Salt (2021)
Libretto by Deniz Khateri

Mischa Salkind-Pearl
A Dead Body (working title) (2022-2023)
Librettist Franny Zhang

Tina Tallon
SHRILL (2023-2024)

Gabriele Vanoni
ELLIS (2024)
Librettist Ewa Chrusciel

Beth Wiemann
I Give You My Home: Rose Standish Nichols (working title) (2021-2022)

*“ELLIS” by Gabriele Vanoni and Ewa Chrusciel, April 2021. Photo by Jeffrey Means, (workshop)*
What audiences are saying:

- striking
- engaged
- memorable
- unique
- depth
- professional
- not boring
- challenging
- engaged
- wonderful
- mesmerizing
- intimate
- different every time
- cool
- visceral
- intriguing
- rewarding
- amazing
- loved the music
- intense
- impressed
- world
- mesmerized
- unexpected
- engaged
-bbb

*ELLIS* by Gabriele Vanini and Ewa Chrusciel. April 2021. Photo by Jeffrey Means.
“New operatic work of refreshing distinctiveness and complexity..."

"Works with qualities I genuinely haven't seen before in the artistic form."

“The experimentation with non-traditional storytelling and unique ensemble.”


“Terrific new opera with great musicians in an intimate setting.”

“Alternative non-conventional opera.”

“It’s innovation in opera!”

“All new - experimental, artistry in motion. Keeping new art alive in Boston like no other!”

“Innovative performance experience. Guerilla Opera makes bold choices in every way and it is fascinating to watch.”
A voracious interpreter of repertoire old and new, this Cuban-American artist enjoys a multifaceted career as a vocalist, entrepreneur, actor, and educator.

A co-founding artist and now Artistic Director of Guerilla Opera, Aliana has 15 years of experience leading this Boston-based, artist-led performing ensemble. As an active artist and administrator for the ensemble, she has produced numerous newly commissioned operas with roles tailor-made for her ferocious stage presence.

Recent projects include the premiere of Hannah Lash’s Beowulf, in which she enraptured audiences with her “beautiful fragility and strength” (I Care If You Listen), the commercial recording of Loose, Wet, Perforated by Nicholas Vines on Navona Records, an evocative opera in which de la Guardia “struts her stuff” (Opera News), and recently producing and starring in the experimental film, Ofelia’s Life Dream by Caroline Louise Miller, heralded by the Boston Musical Intelligencer as a “veritable feast of drama, film, and music.”

Her work as a Latinx arts leader advocates inclusivity and multicultural collaboration. She leads Guerilla Opera’s initiative to bring new multisensory and operatic experiences to the Visually Impaired community of Boston.

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As an active soprano vocalist, Aliana de la Guardia has garnered acclaim for her “dazzling flights of virtuosity” (Gramophone) in “vocally fearless” performances that are “fizzing with theatrical commitment” (The Boston Globe).

A graduate of the Boston Conservatory and consummate interpreter of new classical concert repertoire, she has enjoyed collaborations with many ensembles featuring today’s most eminent composers including “Scenes from a Novel” and “Kafka Fragments” with violinist Gabriela Diaz by György Kurtág, “Aspen Suite” by Salvatore Sciarrino, “Nenia: the Death of Orpheus” by Harrison Birtwistle conducted by Jeffery Means, and the world premiere of “Earth Songs” by Ronald Perrera with New England Philharmonic, among others.

Some favorite new operatic roles include the Doctor in Persona by Keeril Makin, based on the Ingmar Bergman film, under the music direction of Evan Ziporyn with Beth Morrison Projects, and the Voice in Oration by Line Tjönoi with the Center for Contemporary Opera under the music direction of Lidiya Yankovskaya. She has enjoyed additional collaborations featuring today’s most eminent composers with American Lyric Theater, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Boston New Music Festival, Dinosaur Annex, Enigma Chamber Opera, Ludovico Ensemble, Monadnock Music, New Gallery Concert Series, the PARMA Festival, Transient Canvas, and Winsor Music, among others.

As a recording artist, she can be heard singing the title role of “Loose” on Guerilla Opera’s Loose, Wet, Perforated by Nicholas P. Vines, and in compilations of music by composers Alan Beeler, Gordon Eagle, Carl Vollrath, and Marvin J. Carlton on Navona and Ravello Records. Aliana can also be heard on classical label imprints of PARMA Recordings, on BMOP Sound singing lead roles in the opera Cymbeline by Charles Fussell, as well as on independent labels featuring compilations of music by composers Andy Vores and Oliver Caplan, and of Curtis K. Hughes in the lead role of Sarah Palin on Guerilla Opera’s Say It Ain’t So, Joe and in the compilation album Danger Garden.

The Arts Fuse lauds de la Guardia’s sound as "lovely, natural" and “as clear and powerful as grain alcohol.”

A skilled actor and theater artist who specializes in new music, Aliana de la Guardia is especially fit for premiering new operas, genre-bending performance art, devised works, video and film projects, and intimate performances such as with Mountain Time Arts “Stand by Snow: Chapter One” and the multidisciplinary work of Atlas Unlimited. She has also been featured on television guest-starring on ABC’s “Body of Proof.”

As an educator, she has been a featured artist at Harvard University, Lawrence Conservatory, Vermont College of Fine Arts, University of Memphis, and served on the performance faculty at Hubbard Hall Opera Theater for three seasons, as well as in 2021 at the New England Foundation for the Arts National Dance Project Regional Dance Development Initiative.

Other guest speaking engagements include roundtable discussions sponsored by Washington National Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Boston Singers Resource, and the Classical Singer Convention, as well as a lecture entitled “Guerilla Opera - Ensemble Opera” at the National Opera Association Convention.

Active in her local community, she is the owner and founder of Dirty Paloma Voice Studio in Haverhill, MA, treasurer of Granite State National Association of Teachers of Singing, and served as a member of the 2020 Haverhill Multicultural Festival planning committee.
ARTIST TESTIMONIALS

TINA TALLON, COMPOSER
"GO is one of the organizations that is consistently doing the work that needs to be done in opera (and in the new music community at large), and has been committed to doing that work since long before many other companies began pushes to diversify their repertoire and audience engagement practices. We are all better for GO's example and contributions to the field." (tinatallon.com)

EMILY KOH, COMPOSER
"Guerilla Opera occupies a unique space within the new music, opera and theatre communities with their innovative, creative, and intersectional productions. As an artist, I feel incredibly supported by my creative collaborators, and for this all to happen during one of the darkest times of my creative career, was what kept me thinking forward and going despite everything that was happening around me. I am grateful and blessed to have the incredible women of Guerilla Opera as collaborators for this project that is very important to me." (emilykoh.net)

KEN UENO, COMPOSER
"Moving towards an opera culture which aligns closer to 21st century American ideals, is Guerilla Opera, one of the very few opera companies dedicated to radical, new works of opera. The repertoire they have created in the past 14 years exemplifies their commitment to represent BIPOC artists and women in all aspects of their productions - from composers, production staff, and performers. They are the only opera company in America with this track record." (https://kenueno.com/)

MARTI EPSTEIN, COMPOSER
"Guerilla Opera brings diverse, valuable new opera to the Greater Boston area audiences- music that would not otherwise be commissioned and performed, thereby increasing the depth and variety of the arts available in Greater Boston. It’s amazing that Guerilla has single-handedly increased the modern chamber opera repertoire; the repeat performances that they have presented are invaluable." (martiepstein.com)

DENIZ KHAZERI, THEATER ARTIST & ANIMATOR
"I can't imagine a more fearless and sensitive group of artists to collaborate with." (denizkhateri.com)
CAROLINE LOUISE MILLER, COMPOSER
“I was able to collaborate with Guerilla Opera as we were right on the brink of the world shutting down. I’m super thankful that this brave group of artists pulled together to premiere our works. A few months later, during quarantine and the complete shutdown of live music, I was absolutely thrilled at their interest in my piece Ofelia’s Life Dream. From exacting and emotional performances to brilliant direction and design, Guerilla Opera took Ofelia’s Life-Dream to the next level! I am so thankful for this extremely rewarding collaboration.“ (carolinelouisemiller.com)

DANIEL REZA SABZGHABAEI, COMPOSER
“Through their long track record of commissions, performances, and workshops of works by both established and emerging artists of diverse backgrounds and practices, GO continues to fill a much needed space for incubation and presentation of new musical theatrical works in the Boston-metro area. GO is a much needed outlet in a field persistently hard to break-in to: with most companies continuing obsession with the works of those long dead, GO offers a platform for new opera creators to flourish. (danielsabzghabaei.com)

MATTIA MAURÉE, COMPOSER
“It had somehow never occurred to me to try to write a libretto until I came across the [Guerilla Opera] Libretto Lab program. Now I know I can one day write the weird opera I want to write. I’m grateful for the programs and the scholarships I received to help me grow as an artist and collaborator. Guerilla Opera helps keep artists like me supported, creative and engaged in our art making.” (mattiamauree.com)

LAINE RETTMER, MULTIMEDIA ARTIST & DIRECTOR
The company is always pushing the boundaries of operatic form and taking risks in the pursuit of artistic invention, collaboration, and integrity. I believe that the future of the stage depends on companies like Guerilla, both for artists who are privileged to be involved with them and the audiences who witness their creations. (lainerettmer.com)

NICHOLAS MARTINEZ, BOARD OF ADVISORS, ACCESSIBILITY
“The work that Guerilla Opera is putting forth in creating an accessible experience for visually impaired patrons has profoundly affected my ability to understand the story and therefore, loving the experience all the more. My idea of opera was completely changed.”
Artistic Director, Aliana de la Guardia and a patron at a tactile event, March 2019. Photo by Salt Arts.
“Ofelia’s Life Dream” a film by Laine Rettmer, music and libretto by Caroline Louise Miller, October 2020.

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“Ofelia’s Life Dream” a film by Laine Rettmer, music and libretto by Caroline Louise Miller, October 2020.