

DES MOINES  METRO OPERA

AMERICAN APOLLO

WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCES OF
A NEW AMERICAN OPERA: JULY 13, 18 & 19, 2024

MUSIC BY DAMIEN GETER | LIBRETTO BY LILA PALMER

American Apollo is a story forged at the crossroads of race, celebrity, class, and power in America, examining the personal and professional relationship between John Singer Sargent, the closeted artist, and the Black contortionist, veteran, and artists' model Thomas Eugene McKeller.

The story is inspired by the January 2017 discovery of a file of previously unknown, signed sketches by Sargent depicting a Black male, left to his best friend, the patron Isabella Stewart Gardner. Further investigation revealed the model to be McKeller, the model for many of Sargent's masterworks in the final decade of his career and the subject of his only uncommissioned monumental male nude. Thanks to the actions of Sargent's estate, sketches of McKeller, some still unidentified, exist in fine art museums across the U.S. and internationally. A still-evolving public legacy for a model erased and previously forgotten.



Equal parts portrait and romance, *American Apollo* imagines the evolution of the relationship between the artist and model and the interplay of three unlikely friendships: those of Sargent, McKeller and Gardner, none of whom would leave direct descendants, but who together would change the course of art history.

American Apollo is a bittersweet, strikingly contemporary story of love, creativity and friendship that reaches across what divides us; to reveal the complex characters behind a quintessentially American legacy—and its true inspiration—for the very first time.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN AND VOICE TYPE

Thomas Eugene McKeller – baritone

John Singer Sargent – tenor

Isabella Stewart Gardner – soprano

Ida Mae McDonald – mezzo-soprano

Nicola D'Inverno – tenor

Florence McKeller/Mrs. Smithson – mezzo-soprano

Willie McDonald – baritone

Clarence/Master of Ceremonies – bass/bass-baritone

George – tenor

Walter – tenor

Jimmy O'Donnelly/Mr. Carhart – bass/bass-baritone

Mr. Sparhawk – tenor

Mrs. Sparhawk – supernumerary

INSTRUMENTATION

25 players total –

1 Flute

1 Oboe

1 Clarinet

1 Bassoon

1 Horn

1 Trumpet

1 Harp

1 Percussion

1 Timpani

1 Piano

Strings: 4/3/3/3/2

LEADERSHIP FUNDING FROM
HARRY BOOKEY AND PAMELA BASS BOOKEY





THE CREATORS



DAMIEN GETER is an acclaimed composer who infuses classical music with various styles from the black diaspora to create music that furthers the cause for social justice. His rapidly growing body of work includes chamber, vocal, orchestral and full operatic works, with his compositions being praised for their “Skillful vocal writing” (*Wall Street Journal*). He is Composer-in-Residence at the Richmond Symphony through the 2024-25 season and serves as Interim Music Director and Artistic Advisor at Portland Opera, as well as the Artistic Advisor for Resonance Ensemble.

In the 2023-2024 season, Des Moines Metro Opera presents the full-length world premiere of his opera, *American Apollo*, while Virginia Opera holds a workshop of *Loving v. Virginia*, a new major work co-commissioned by Virginia Opera and the Richmond Symphony which will premiere as part of Virginia Opera’s 50th Anniversary Season in May 2025. Geter’s *Annunciation* is featured on Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s concert *Montgomery and the Blacknificent 7*, and Richmond Symphony will premiere a brand new work to be conducted by Music Director Valentina Peleggi. Additionally, The Recording Inclusivity Initiative records String Quartet No. 1 “Neo-Soul”.



LILA PALMER is a British and American librettist whose warmth, clarity, and stylistic flexibility have made her a favored partner of established and emerging composers alike. An advanced vocal performer herself, Lila’s skill in advocating for and writing to the classically trained voice has enabled her to bridge the gap between the world of interpreter and creative. She is proud to be the only dual graduate of both the Royal Opera House London - Guildhall Opera Makers MA program and American Lyric Theater’s Composer Librettist Development Program.

Recent and upcoming works include her children’s opera with Clarice Assad, *The Selfish Giant* (Opera Saratoga); *Shell Shaker* with Chickasaw composer Jerod Impichchaachaaha’ Tate, and *Splintered* with Jorge Sosa and Justine Chen. Lila serves as ALT’s Associate Director for Partnerships & Promotions following a year as Interim Managing Director. In addition to supporting Artist Development at ALT, she has served as Artist Leader/Dramaturgy Mentor in new works development for Boston Opera Collaborative and Loose Tea Music Theater, Canada.