LYRIC OPERA KC

THE 2025–2026 ANNUAL REPORT



Photo © Andrew Schwartz

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A WORD FROM DEBORAH SANDLER KEMPER

The 2025–2026 season was one of new horizons and renewal. While opera companies across the country have reduced programming, Lyric Opera of Kansas City returned to presenting four fully staged productions at the Kauffman Center—the same number as before the pandemic—while continuing to expand our learning and community engagement programs.

We opened with a brand-new production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, or *Cinderella*. Directed by Michael Shell, with scenic design by Steven C. Kemp and a marvelous cast led by Siphokazi Molteno and Jack Swanson, it sparkled with humor, invention, and Rossini's irresistible music.

We then turned to Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, featuring Yunuet Laguna, Ann Toomey, Matthew White, Jarrett Ott, and former Lyric Opera apprentice artist Alice Chung. Watching Alice return as Suzuki after building a successful career was a gratifying full-circle moment.

In the second half of the season, we celebrated American opera, music, and poetry as the nation prepared to commemorate its 250th anniversary. Our long-awaited company premiere of The Gershwins®' *Porgy and Bess* brought this landmark work to our stage with a tremendous cast, including Eric Greene and Michelle Bradley, led by Missouri-born conductor Michael Ellis Ingram.

Through complementary programming honoring Missouri poet Langston Hughes, we placed the opera within a broader celebration of enduring American voices.

We concluded with Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*, based on John Steinbeck's novel. Created with Houston Grand Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, and Florida State University, this new production also commemorated the centennial of Floyd's birth.

As I look toward my retirement in June 2027, I do so with pride and gratitude. Leading Lyric Opera has been one of the great honors of my life. Together, our artists, staff, board, donors, audiences, and community partners have built a strong organization prepared to embrace new horizons and flourish under its next generation of leadership.



Deborah Sandler Kemper, General Director and CEO

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Expenses

In the 2025–2026 season, every expense incurred by Lyric Opera helped support ambitious year-round programming onstage at the Kauffman Center and in venues throughout the community.

Production, artistic & learning expenses (71%) were the majority of the Lyric's budget, including opera performances at the Kauffman Center, K-12 education programs, and community events. The Lyric employed artists and professionals in more than 500 roles, including singers, orchestra musicians, set designers, directors, stage technicians, costumers, teachers, and painters. Learning programs expanded community access to the arts across dozens of schools in Kansas City.

Administrative & general expenses (19%) included our permanent staff of twenty-five full-time and nine part-time employees, as well as facilities like our robust state-of-the-art set-building and rehearsal workshop, office space, and opera set storage facilities.

Fundraising expenses (10%) made up the smallest part of our budget while accounting for the majority of our budgeted revenue. Philanthropic support from individuals, businesses, foundations, and government entities helped keep opera accessible to everyone in Kansas City.

Revenue

In the 2025–2026 season, Lyric Opera grew revenue in three strategic areas by developing new and returning audiences, creating new artistic assets, and building the endowment.

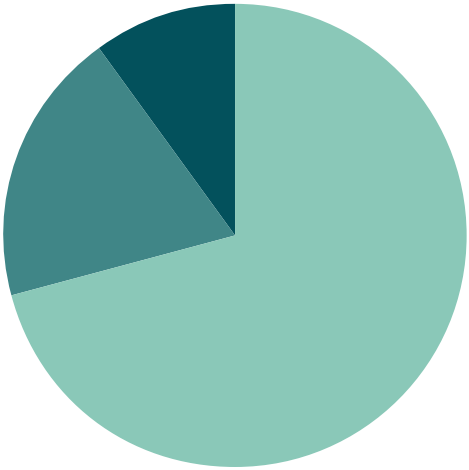
Philanthropy (63%) from individuals, foundations, and businesses accounted for more than half of our revenue, with a total of 710 donors and 210 first-time gifts. Gifts from individual households exceeded our annual goal by 21%, totaling $815,644 with 40 new or upgraded Angel Donors (those who contribute $3,000 or more per year).

Earned revenue (24%) from ticket sales and asset rentals to other performing arts companies provided vital support for our programs. Ticket sales continued to grow, with a total of 15,106 tickets sold, a 6% increase over the previous year. We also strategically invested in growing our portfolio of rentable assets, completing three new productions and beginning work on a fourth.

Endowment distributions (13%) formed an important backbone of support accounting for 13% of revenue. We made significant progress to raise additional, non-operational funds toward the Our Next Act Endowment Campaign, successfully completing the first half of a $2 million matching grant from the Muriel McBrien Kauffman Family Foundation.

All financials are preliminary until approved with a final audit by the end of the 2027 fiscal year. A history of our audited financial statements can be found on our website.

FY26 EXPENSES

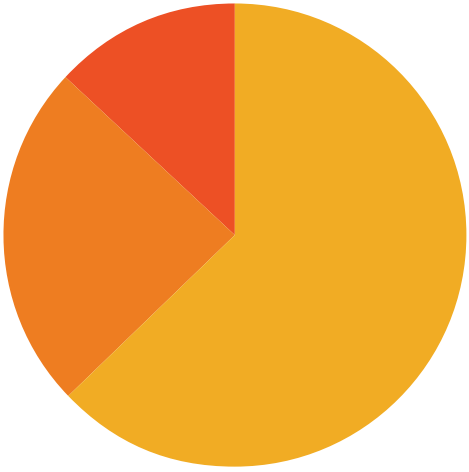


71% Production, artistic & learning expenses

19% Administrative & general expenses

10% Fundraising expenses

FY26 REVENUE



63% Philanthropy

24% Earned revenue

13% Endowment distributions



Photo © Andrew Schwartz

2025–2026
MAINSTAGE ATTENDANCE

During the 2025–2026 season, Lyric Opera of Kansas City successfully presented four productions on the stage of the Muriel Kauffman Theatre at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. The season featured artistically excellent, fully staged productions, a core component of our artistic identity and a direct response to audience demand. We also presented both a new Lyric Opera production and a new co-production, enriching the operatic artform for audiences in Kansas City and across North America.

We opened the season with Rossini's *Cinderella*, a comedic masterpiece featuring a brand-new production built entirely by Lyric Opera of Kansas City, with the vision of set designer Steven C. Kemp and costume designer Amanda Seymour. Next followed *Madame Butterfly*, moving audience members with Puccini's lush, timeless exploration of love, betrayal, and clashing cultures.

In late February, The Gershwins®' *Porgy and Bess* performed with outstanding success to sold-out audiences, launching our America 250 celebration. Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* ended the season with an exciting new co-production created by Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Houston Grand Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, and Florida State University.

We achieved a 5% increase in new audience households (1,591 total) and an 11% increase in season ticket subscriptions, totaling 1,951 packages. We also saw substantial increases in charitable donations, with first-time gifts from 210 new donors, demonstrating the power of artistic excellence to inspire philanthropic support.

Performances in the 2025–2026 season at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts sold a total of 15,106 tickets, a 6% increase over the previous year.

CINDERELLA
September 27–October 5, 2025

3,416
Tickets sold

MADAME BUTTERFLY
November 14–16, 2025

4,199
Tickets sold

PORGY AND BESS
February 28–March 8, 2026

4,773
Tickets sold (sold-out!)

OF MICE AND MEN
May 1–3, 2026

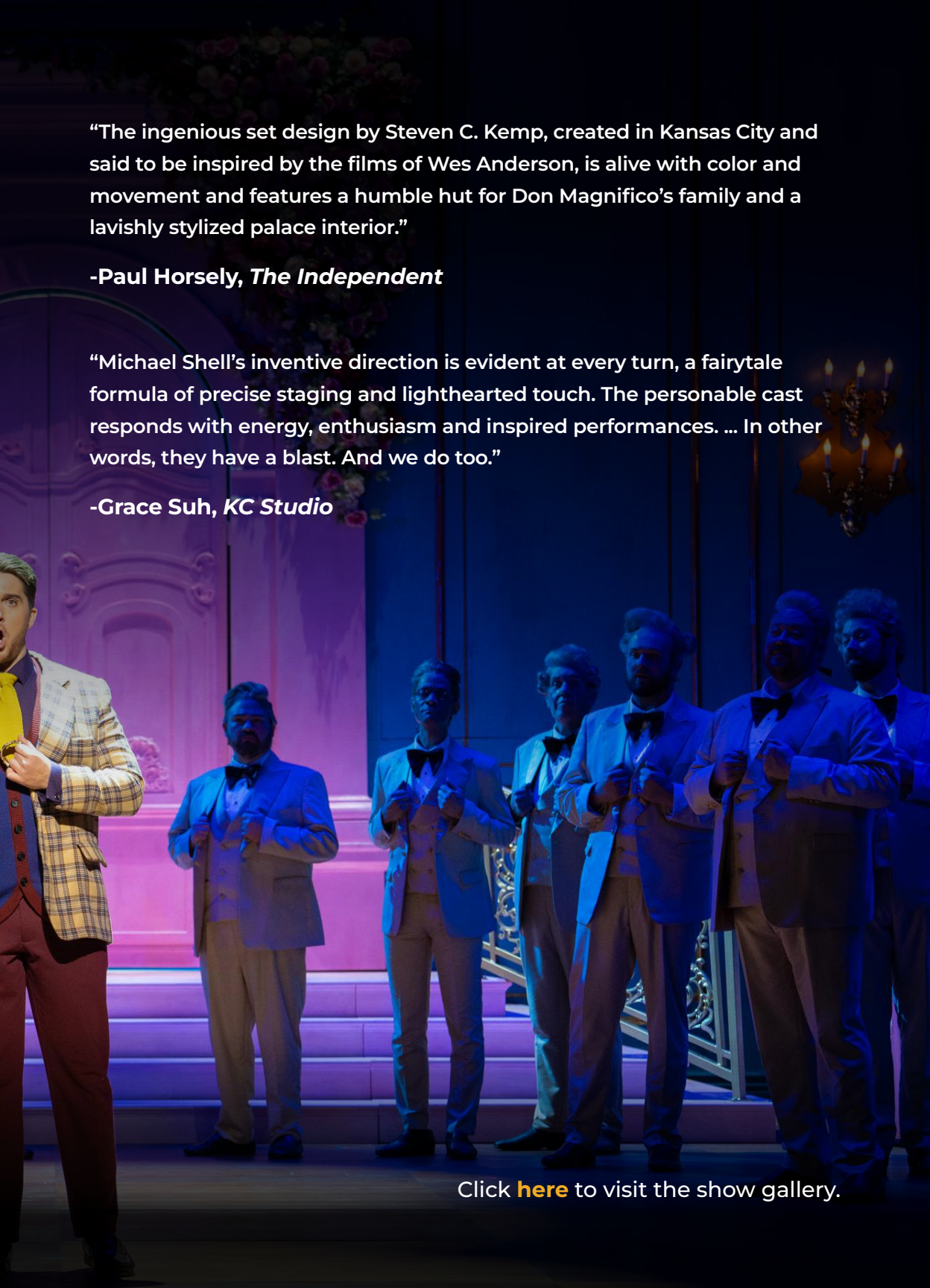
2,718
Tickets sold

Cinderella

A magical opera with dazzling singing, Rossini's glittery fairytale lets our heroine shape her own fate—no fairy godmother needed. Love and kindness triumph over greed, with vocal fireworks, lyrical beauty, and zany hijinks. Director Michael Shell amps up the playfulness in a Wes Anderson-inspired production that sparkles.



Photo © Andrew Schwartz



"The ingenious set design by Steven C. Kemp, created in Kansas City and said to be inspired by the films of Wes Anderson, is alive with color and movement and features a humble hut for Don Magnifico's family and a lavishly stylized palace interior."

-Paul Horsely, *The Independent*

"Michael Shell's inventive direction is evident at every turn, a fairytale formula of precise staging and lighthearted touch. The personable cast responds with energy, enthusiasm and inspired performances. ... In other words, they have a blast. And we do too."

-Grace Suh, *KC Studio*

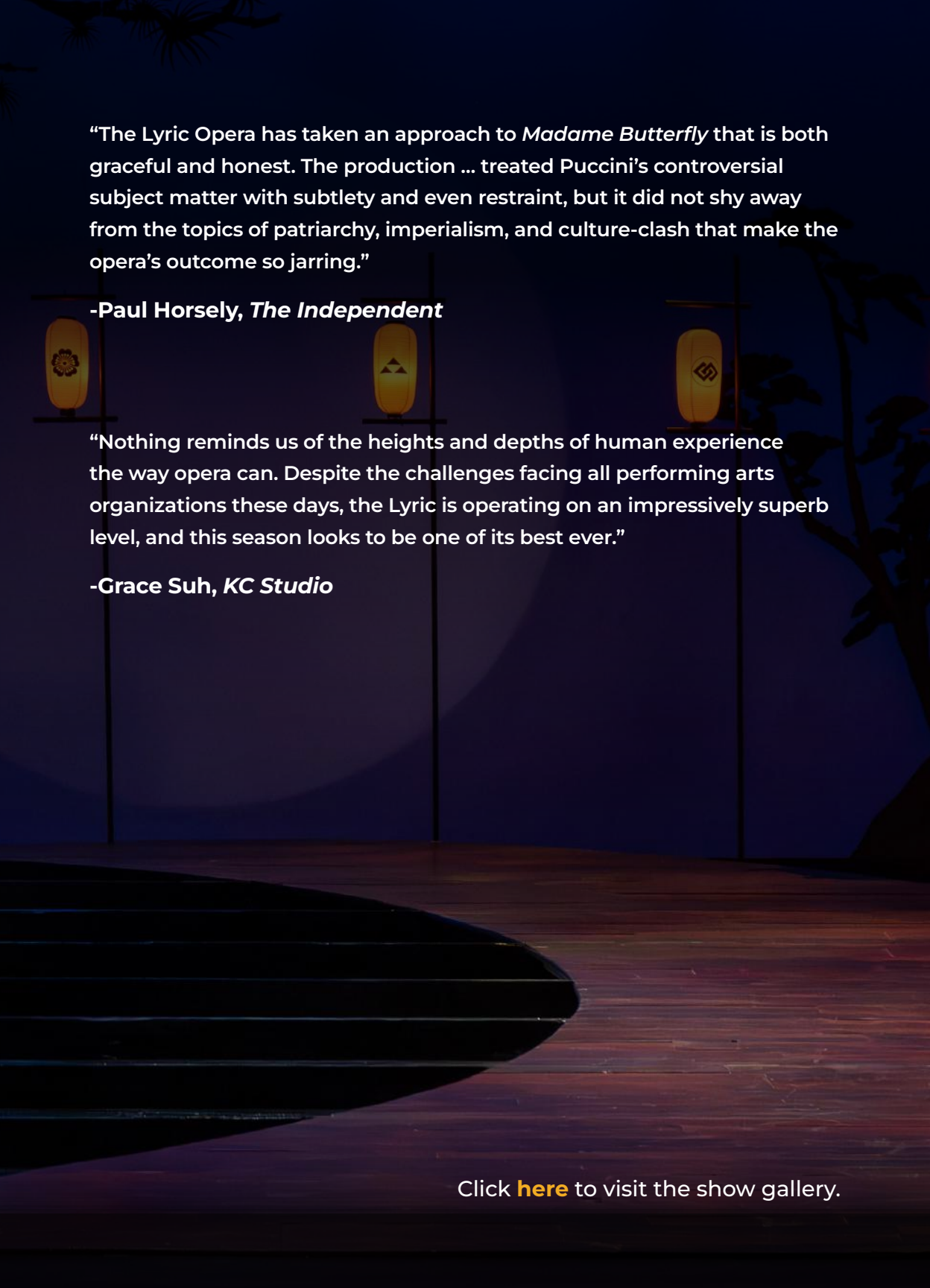
Click **here** to visit the show gallery.

Madame Butterfly

Through a cruel marriage of convenience, American naval officer Pinkerton weds Cio-Cio-San, leading her to a tragic fate. A masterpiece of Italian opera, *Madame Butterfly* soars with a lush score and a timeless tale of love, betrayal, and cultural clash. Its enduring power lies in its ability to touch the deepest corners of the heart, leaving audiences devastated.



Photo © Don Ipock



"The Lyric Opera has taken an approach to *Madame Butterfly* that is both graceful and honest. The production ... treated Puccini's controversial subject matter with subtlety and even restraint, but it did not shy away from the topics of patriarchy, imperialism, and culture-clash that make the opera's outcome so jarring."

-Paul Horsely, *The Independent*

"Nothing reminds us of the heights and depths of human experience the way opera can. Despite the challenges facing all performing arts organizations these days, the Lyric is operating on an impressively superb level, and this season looks to be one of its best ever."

-Grace Suh, *KC Studio*

Click **here** to visit the show gallery.

PORGY AND BESS

For the first time in Lyric Opera history, *Porgy and Bess* takes the stage—an essential American opera. With its jazzy, timeless score and beloved songs like Summertime, this masterpiece vividly captures life in the Charlston neighborhood, Catfish Row. Amid tragedy and triumph, a poignant romance unfolds, showcasing the strength of a united community.

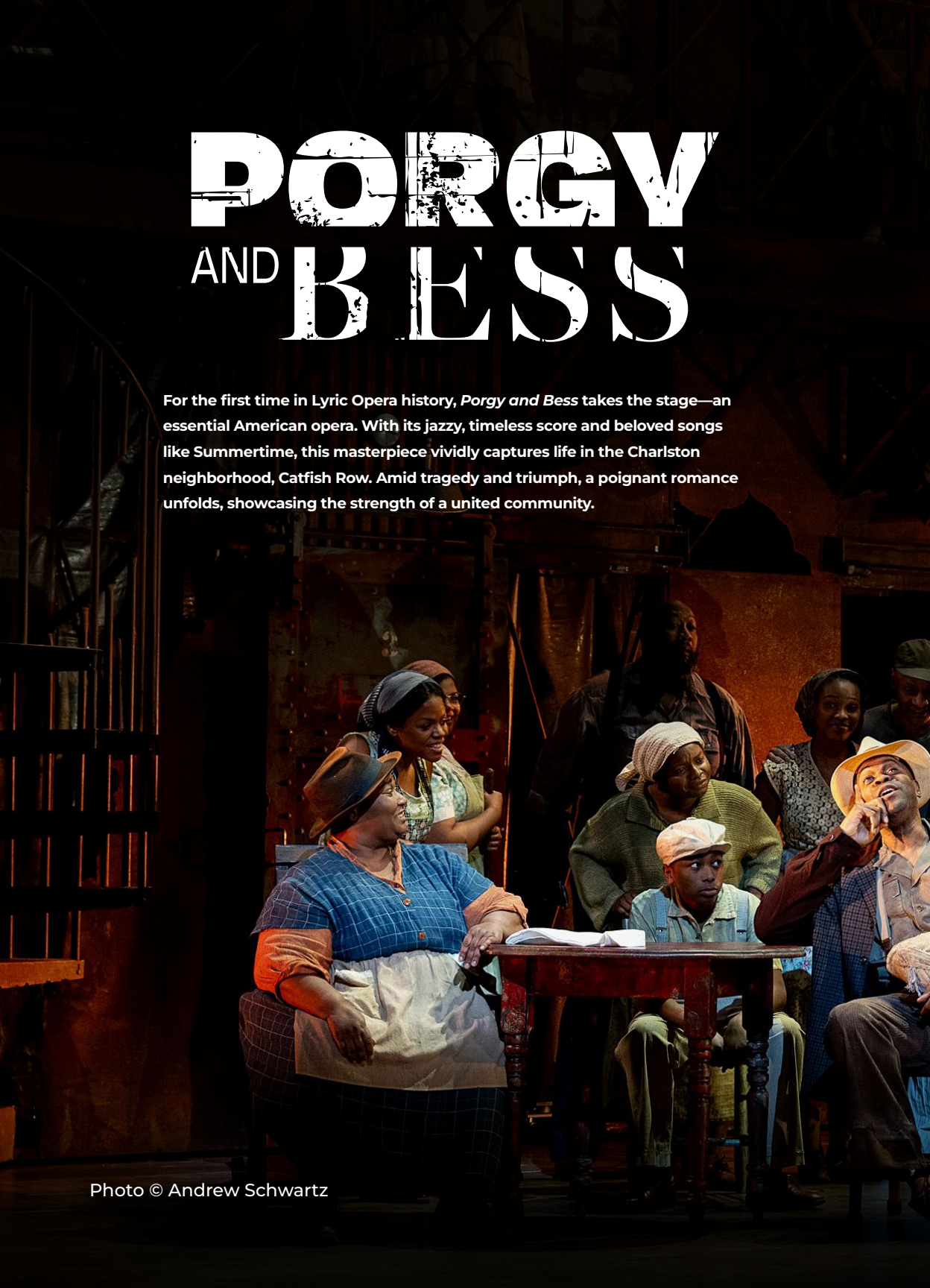


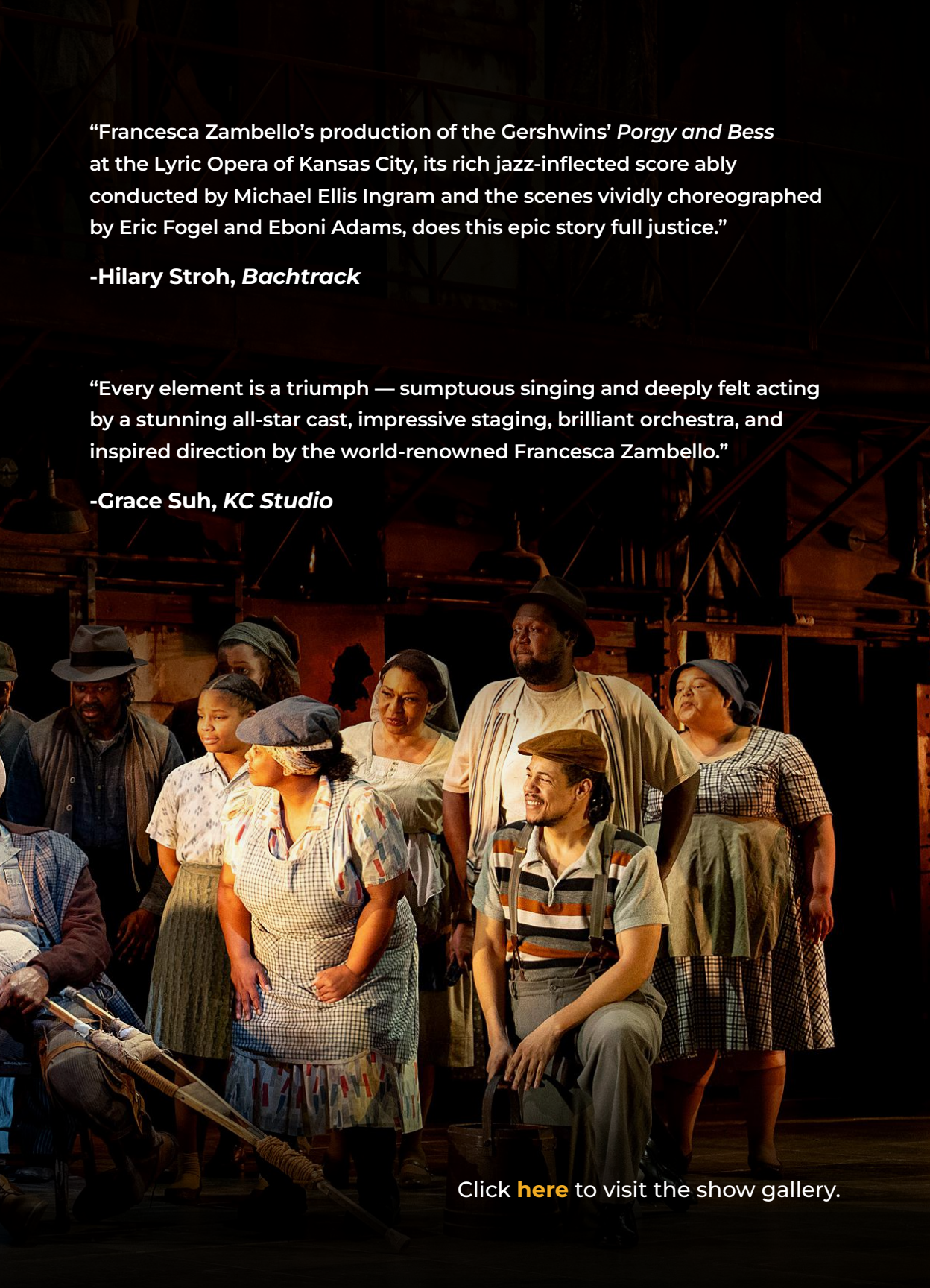
Photo © Andrew Schwartz

“Francesca Zambello’s production of the Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess* at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, its rich jazz-inflected score ably conducted by Michael Ellis Ingram and the scenes vividly choreographed by Eric Fogel and Eboni Adams, does this epic story full justice.”

-Hilary Stroh, *Bachtrack*

“Every element is a triumph — sumptuous singing and deeply felt acting by a stunning all-star cast, impressive staging, brilliant orchestra, and inspired direction by the world-renowned Francesca Zambello.”

-Grace Suh, *KC Studio*



Click **here** to visit the show gallery.

Of MICE *and* MEN

We closed the season with Carlisle Floyd's powerful adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. This gripping opera explores the deep bond between George and Lennie, migrant workers chasing the American Dream. Directed by Kristine McIntyre, the production uses projections to immerse audiences in Lennie's world, blending intimate humanity with cinematic scope on a tragic journey. world, blending intimate humanity with cinematic scope on a tragic journey.



Photo © Don Ipock

“Sits with you - even burns into you afterwards. ... The *mise-en-scène* was altogether first-rate.”

-Hilary Stroh, *Bachtrack*

“This production reveals the emotional volatility hidden beneath the mythology of the American Dream — where loneliness, labor, masculinity, disability, poverty, and friendship collide under the crushing weight of survival during the Great Depression.”

-Andrew Burrill, *BroadwayWorld*



Click **here** to visit the show gallery.





“In a world that seems to want us to be numb and compliant, the Lyric reminds us that we are alive and that we can indeed, reach our hands and hearts into the past, present, and future.”

– Community Performance Attendee





Photos © Andrew Schwartz

LANGSTON HUGHES
A LYRICAL LIFE

Lyric Opera debuted *Langston Hughes: A Lyrical Life*, a new semi-staged touring program celebrating the life and work of American poet Langston Hughes. Performances were held March 17–April 2, 2026, at 11 schools and 9 community spaces, reaching a total of 2,448 participants, including 1,473 students and 975 adults.

This series of performances occurred shortly after our production of *Porgy and Bess* at the Kauffman Center. Both pieces explored stories from the Harlem Renaissance and centered African American voices and identity, launching our season-long celebration of the 250th anniversary of the United States of America. We were proud to present *Langston Hughes: A Lyrical Life* in partnership with the Black Archives of Mid-America, the Kansas City Public Library, The Black Repertory Theater, the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Center, and 21 other partners that served as both host sites and community liaisons.

Langston Hughes: A Lyrical Life was directed by Alyson Cambridge with music direction by Piotr Wiśniewski, scenic design by Steven C. Kemp, and costume design by Nancy Robinson. The program's cast featured mezzo-soprano Deanna Ray Eberhart and Lyric Opera resident artists soprano MiKayla Lynn Hatfield, mezzo-soprano Christina Grohowski, tenor David Pelino, baritone Alex Smith, and pianists Piotr Wiśniewski and Neal Long. Celebrated Kansas City artist Nedra Dixon narrated. The program included songs by composers H. Leslie Adams, Jasmine Barnes, Margaret Bonds, Christine Jobson, Ricky Ian Gordon, Robert Owens, Florence Price, Sarah Ruff, and Damien Sneed.

Each performance was followed by a guided discussion with audience members that explored themes of identity, resilience, and social justice that shaped Hughes's life and work.

Click here to visit the show gallery.

“My favorite memory from choir was when I was struggling with singing, and Mr. Sanders took the time to help me after school and showed me ways I could improve.”

– Middle School Student Enrolled in Lyric Opera In-School Residency Courses



2025–2026
LEARNING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In coordination with onstage offerings, Lyric Opera of Kansas City offers free and accessible arts experiences that meet Kansas City audience members where they are, building and representing the culture of our city while minimizing the barrier of cost.

In the 2025–2026 season, we actively shaped learning programming to meet evolving community needs throughout the region. Lyric Opera's efforts to bring arts opportunities to area schools deepened through our second year of in-school residency courses. In partnership with Kansas City Public Schools, 7 teaching artists provided at least 1,226 instructional hours to 468 students.

This season also marked the debut of a new program entitled *Langston Hughes: A Lyrical Life* that celebrated the life and work of the renowned Missouri poet and author. *The Haberdasher Prince*, one of the series of 3 new opera productions designed for children and families, completed a successful tour to 16 elementary schools across the metro area.

In total, 2025–26 learning programs reached 10,095 participants, including 5,963 students—the majority from underserved schools in the Kansas City metro.

K–12 EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1,507
partcipants

TOURING PERFORMANCES

5,658
partcipants

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2,930
partcipants

LEARNING PROGRAM REFLECTIONS

“My favorite part was the singing and how the music matched the emotions of the characters. I was surprised by how powerful the story was and how the performers acted with so much emotion. It was a great experience, and I enjoyed visiting the Kauffman Center and seeing a professional performance up close.”

-Seventh Grade Student Dress Rehearsal Attendee

“My students had not seen an opera in person before, so it was wonderful to see this show! The performance was FANTASTIC and we had MANY conversations about the style of the show. In my advanced classes we have been learning about styles of directing and concepts of directing visions and designer visions.”

-Teacher at Partner School Participating in Student Dress Rehearsal



“My favorite part was learning about the history of all the versions of Cinderella and how Rossini created this opera. I honestly would have been a little lost had I attended this opera without first going to this Opera Dives Deep session.”

-Opera Dives Deep Attendee

“Our clients had really positive feedback after the tour. Most of them stated that watching the performers up close and listening to them sing was their favorite part. On the ride home, three of our female clients were discussing going to an opera and thinking of new ideas for our annual talent show. It was a really big hit!”

-Client Services Provider at The Farmer’s House



Photos © Andrew Schwartz

LYRIC OPERA IN ACTION

















LYRIC
OPERA KC

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING
LYRIC OPERA
OF KANSAS CITY



Photo © Andrew Schwartz

To our generous donors and sponsors,

Lyric Opera of Kansas City's 2025–2026 season was a celebration of artistic excellence, bold creativity, and the power of opera to bring people from all communities together. Because of you, we were able to dream bigger, create new productions, and share extraordinary opera with audiences in Kansas City and beyond.

This season, we proudly unveiled a brand-new production of Rossini's *Cinderella*, bringing fresh energy and imagination to this beloved story. Your support made it possible for our artists and creative teams to pursue the highest standards of artistry, creating a production that was uniquely Lyric Opera and built right here in Kansas City.

In the spring, we reflected on the richness of the American story and the powerful voices that have shaped it as our nation marked its 250th anniversary. You helped us sell out performances of The Gershwins®' *Porgy and Bess*, bringing audiences together for this powerful American masterpiece, and supported our new co-production of Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* in celebration of his 100th birthday. Through *Langston Hughes: A Lyrical Life*, a new touring community program, we brought the works of one of America's most celebrated poets to community spaces throughout the Kansas City region. Together, these projects demonstrated the many ways opera can tell our stories, connect our communities, and deepen our understanding of the American experience.

These accomplishments reflect what is possible when a community believes deeply in the value of a vibrant hometown opera company. Your partnership allows Lyric Opera to invest in artistic innovation, showcase exceptional artists, and ensure that opera remains a vital part of Kansas City's cultural life.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, staff, and artists, thank you for your generosity, your belief in Lyric Opera, and your commitment to the future of opera in Kansas City. We are grateful to share this work with you and look forward to all that we will create together in the seasons ahead.

Season Sponsors:

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