



For Immediate Release

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## Michigan Opera Theatre Wins Knight Arts Challenge for Race, Arts and Sports Initiative

*“Take Me Out to the Opera” to Explore Role of Arts and Sports in Social Equity and Inclusion*

*MOT to Host Event Nov. 1 at Detroit Public Library*

Oct. 26, 2017, Detroit - Michigan Opera Theatre has won a \$45,000 grant to support its “Take Me Out to the Opera” initiative, exploring the role of arts and sports in improving racial equity and inclusion. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Knight Arts Challenge grant, awarded Wednesday at the Fillmore Detroit, funds ideas that engage and enrich Detroit through the arts.

“Through this initiative, ‘Take Me Out to the Opera,’ we have the opportunity to showcase the people and institutions who broke racial barriers and explore ideas that can make positive changes for the future,” said MOT CEO and President Wayne S. Brown.

The year-long initiative includes a series of educational and humanities programs that explores and celebrates the distinction of arts and sports as institutional leaders in breaking racial barriers. With numerous community partners, MOT will present events throughout the city that combine baseball, music, and local history, including public concerts and lectures, youth workshops, historical exhibits and family activities that give voice to the community’s past and present commitment to equity and inclusion.

The program will culminate with MOT’s May production of “The Summer King,” an opera about baseball player Josh Gibson, who dominated Negro League baseball but was denied the opportunity to play in the Major Leagues due to segregation.

In one of its first engagements, MOT will co-host an event with the Detroit Tigers at the Detroit Public Library, Wednesday, Nov. 1. The event will showcase the significance of the Detroit Negro Civic Opera Company and the Detroit Stars Negro Leagues baseball team in setting the stage for cultural change.

Featured guests include:

**George Shirley**, the first African-American tenor to perform a leading role at the Metropolitan Opera. He is also a former singer with the Detroit Negro Civic Opera Company.

**Ron Teasley**, a former Negro Leagues baseball player who played for the New York Cubans. He was also among the first Black players to sign with the Major Leagues and played for the Olean (NY) Oilers of the PONY (Pennsylvania-Ontario-New York) League, breaking the color barrier in the Class D circuit.

The Ernie Harwell and E. Azalia Hackley collections from the Detroit Public Library will be on view, and the event will include a performance of an aria from "The Summer King."

The event is free but an RSVP is requested. For more information visit <http://www.michiganopera.org/special-event/dpl/>.

Other "Take Me Out to the Opera" events planned throughout the year include:

- A creative residency at a Detroit Public Schools Community District high school where students will create their own operatic piece which relates the history of the Detroit Stars with modern-day themes of equity and inclusion.
- Youth workshops in Detroit schools and libraries which highlight the stories of barrier-breaking African-American artists and athletes and engage children in hands-on creative work (singing, composition, poetry, etc.) to bring these stories to life.
- Performances and lectures at various locations (The Charles H. Wright Museum, Rosedale Park Community House, etc.) which illustrate the trailblazing achievements of featured individuals from the worlds of music and sports.
- An updated production of MOT's "I, Too, Sing America" which integrates live music, video, oral history, monologue, and poetry to recognize the stories and experiences of little-known personalities who planted seeds for social uplift in the days before integration.

MOT will present "The Summer King" May 12-20 at the Detroit Opera House. For more information visit [www.MichiganOpera.org](http://www.MichiganOpera.org).

### **"Take Me Out to the Opera" at the Detroit Public Library**

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 5-8 p.m. at the Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward Ave. Detroit

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### **About Michigan Opera Theatre**

Michigan Opera Theatre (Wayne S. Brown, President and CEO; Stephen Lord, Principal Conductor; Dr. David DiChiera, Founder and Artistic Director Emeritus), one of the nation's most vibrant nonprofit arts organizations, is committed to presenting opera and dance of the highest artistic caliber. Founded in 1971, the company's mission is to serve as a major cultural resource to the state of Michigan and the city of Detroit. Visit the website at [www.michiganopera.org](http://www.michiganopera.org).

### **About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy.