



For Immediate Release

CONTACT:

Erica Hobbs
(313) 237-3403
ehobbs@motopera.org

**Michigan Opera Theatre's 2017-18 Opera Season Concludes in Walk-Off Style with
"The Summer King"**

May 12-20 at the Detroit Opera House

American Opera Explores the Life of Negro League Baseball Legend Josh Gibson

*Opening Night Includes Panel Discussion with Baseball Great, Willie Horton
and Opera Great George Shirley*

DETROIT, May 2, 2018 - Michigan Opera Theatre's (MOT) 2017-18 opera season concludes with "The Summer King" May 12-20 at the Detroit Opera House. A co-production with Pittsburgh Opera, the story is about Negro League baseball player Josh Gibson, and MOT will be the second company to produce it following its April 2017 premiere. A series of special events will complement the mainstage performances, including an opening night panel discussion with African-American trailblazers in arts and sports including former Detroit Tiger Willie Horton and singer George Shirley, the first African-American tenor to sing at the Metropolitan Opera.

"Michigan Opera Theatre's production of 'The Summer King' is greater than simply the final production of our opera season. This highly-anticipated event represents the culmination of a year of community engagement and partnerships that explore the relationship between the arts and sports and celebrate African-American trailblazers," said MOT CEO and President Wayne S. Brown. "We are proud to share this important work as it is designed to be a meaningful community experience."

Set throughout the 1930s and 1940s, "The Summer King" follows Gibson's tumultuous journey as a young baseball star. Despite his tremendous talent, the opera chronicles Gibson's struggle to overcome prejudice, discrimination, and heartache in his attempt to become the first African-American baseball player to play for Major League Baseball.

"Josh Gibson is considered to be one of the greatest baseball players of all time but one with an important story which is too often forgotten," said MOT Principal Conductor Stephen Lord. "This is a story about perseverance in the face of adversity set to a backdrop of one of Detroit's favorite sports: baseball. Its themes resonate today across all of society and leave us all a little bit better for it."

The May 12 opening night performance coincides with the Detroit Tiger's home game against the Seattle Mariners and will feature day-long events and activities in celebration of arts and sports. From 2-6 p.m., MOT will host a free block party on its surface parking lot on the corner of Madison and John R. streets. The event will include family-friendly games as well as hot dogs and beer for sale and is open to the community.

The opening night opera pre-talk will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will be presented in a panel discussion format, featuring Horton, Shirley and "The Summer King" composer, Daniel Sonenberg, moderated by Detroit Free Press columnist Rochelle Riley. Patrons are also invited to an opening night dinner, hosted by Horton and Shirley as honorary co-chairs. The dinner will begin with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres on the Detroit Opera House SkyDeck rooftop at 5 p.m., followed by a seated dinner in the Chrysler Black Box Theatre at 5:30 p.m. Tickets for the dinner are \$150.

"The Summer King" features a libretto by Sonenberg and Daniel Nester, with additional lyrics by Mark Campbell. The cast stars Lester Lynch as Gibson and Deborah Nansteel as Grace and is conducted by Steven Mercurio. The production also features eight returning members of the opera's premiere, including Sam Helfrich (director), Kenneth Kellogg (Sam Bankhead), Sean Panikkar (Wendell Smith), Jacqueline Echols (Helen Gibson), Norman Shankle (Elder Barber & Gus Greenlee), Phillip Gay (Young Barber, Cool Papa Bell), Raymond Very (Radio Announcer, Clark Griffin, Branch Rickey) and Martin Bakari (Scribe, Trash-Talking Player).

The opera is the culmination of MOT's year-long "Take Me Out to the Opera" initiative exploring the role of arts and sports in improving social equity and inclusion. The campaign has been working with community partners including the Detroit Tigers, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Detroit Historical Society, the Detroit Public Library, the Josh Gibson Foundation, Rosedale Park Community House and Hamtramck Stadium to present a series of exhibits, panels, performances, and presentations celebrating those who have broken racial barriers in arts and sports.

Remaining public events of the program include:

- **May: Negro Leagues Exhibit at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History**
An exhibit on the Negro Leagues will open at the Charles Wright Museum in partnership with the Josh Gibson Foundation and the Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium. Items will be on display through June. Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, 315 E Warren Ave, Detroit, Mich.
- **May 5: Take Me Out to the Opera: An Evening at Hamtramck High School**
A free concert inspired by "The Summer King" featuring selections from the opera and music from Josh Gibson's era. MOT singers will be joined by members of Hamtramck High School's choir and band in celebration of the school's R.I.S.E Grant, given by NBC to select schools nationwide. 6 p.m. Hamtramck High School, 11410 Charest St, Hamtramck, Mich.
- **May 12: Arts and Sports Youth Clinics**
In celebration of Hamtramck Stadium, one of only a handful of historic Negro Leagues stadiums still in existence, and a location where Josh Gibson played, MOT is partnering with Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium and the Detroit City Football Club to bring baseball, softball, soccer, cricket, and dance clinics to young people. 10:30 a.m., Hamtramck Stadium, 3201 Dan St., Hamtramck, Mich.

"The Summer King" is sung in English with English supertitle translations projected above the stage.

This production is made possible by 2018 Spring Opera Season Sponsor, General Motors, "The Summer King" Saturday Opera Sponsor, PNC, and "The Summer King" Sunday Opera Sponsor, MGM. It is also supported in part by awards from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts' Art Works.

Ticket prices range from \$30 to \$155. Tickets for the opera and the opening night dinner may be purchased online at www.MichiganOpera.org, by calling (313) 237-7464 or in person at the Detroit Opera House (1526 Broadway, Detroit).

For full casting and additional information visit <http://www.michiganopera.org/opera/the-summer-king/>.

"The Summer King"

Music by Daniel Sonenberg, Libretto by Daniel Sonenberg and Daniel Nester, with additional lyrics by Mark Campbell

Performed at the Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit

Saturday, May 12, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 16, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 19, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 20, 2:30 p.m.

###

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.

