



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

BEYOND *INNOCENCE*

May 31–June 21, 2024

Resilience and Healing, Prevention of Gun Violence and
the Collective Power of Community and the Arts

sfopera.com/beyond-innocence



BEYOND *INNOCENCE* symposium participants include:

(top row) Co-Curators Ryan Marchand, Elena Park and Pastor Mike McBride; W. Kamau Bell, Mina Kim
(second row) Ewan Barker Plummer, Chinaka Hodge, Dr. Rochelle A. Dicker, Gabriela Lena Frank, Vilma Jää

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 3, 2024) — In conjunction with the U.S. premiere of *Innocence* this June, San Francisco Opera will present **BEYOND *INNOCENCE***, a convening for the public and for local and national community organizations representing fields including advocacy, social justice, education, medicine and the arts. Launching on May 31 and continuing through June, **BEYOND *INNOCENCE*** provides a framework for discussion around

Kaija Sariaaho's gripping and timely opera, which unfolds during a wedding reception as horrific events from a school shooting ten years earlier come to light.

Using the opera as a stepping off point, the multi-faceted initiative includes a free daylong symposium, activations for audience members and trauma-informed training for artists and Company members. *BEYOND INNOCENCE* will bring together community leaders, artists, activists and the public around themes explored in the opera, including resilience and healing; innocence, guilt and forgiveness; the prevention of gun violence and communal action. San Francisco Opera's *BEYOND INNOCENCE* partners include **Collective Impact, Community Arts Stabilization Trust, GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Live Free USA, Lumahai Productions, UCSF San Francisco Wraparound Project** and the **William James Association**.

Events include a free daylong symposium on May 31, "**BEYOND INNOCENCE: The Power of Community and the Arts & the Prevention of Gun Violence**," co-presented by San Francisco Opera, Live Free USA and Lumahai Productions. The event will feature panels, conversations and performances and showcase speakers such as symposium co-curator **Pastor Mike McBride** of Live Free USA, San Francisco Human Rights Commission Executive Director **Sheryl Davis**, UCSF trauma surgeon **Rochelle A. Dicker**, GIFFORDS' policy expert **Mike McLively**, San Francisco Youth Commission Chair **Ewan Barker Plummer**, composer **Gabriela Lena Frank**, *Innocence* cast member **Vilma Jää** and librettists **Aleksi Barrière** and **Sofi Oksanen** and moderators including **W. Kamau Bell**, KQED's **Mina Kim**. Performers include **Gunna Goes Global** and **Chinaka Hodge**.

After each performance of *Innocence*, San Francisco Opera's Department of Diversity, Equity and Community (DEC) and local *BEYOND INNOCENCE* partners will offer audience members space for dialogue, reflection and connection in post-show activations within the War Memorial Opera House.

"*Innocence* portrays how a community is affected by an atrocity and questions the very notion of innocence as it relates to the tragedy," shares **Ryan Marchand**, San Francisco Opera's Director of Diversity, Equity and Community. "My team and I were inspired by the opera and its characters. We wondered what they needed from the world, from their community and if the violence could have been prevented. That's almost impossible to say, but it still made us wonder—what can we participate in to make the all too resonant story of *Innocence* an unnecessary one? Envisioning a connected, resourced and creative

community resulted in our reaching out to the partners taking part in *BEYOND INNOCENCE*, all of whom are doing deep work around social justice and fostering community. Through these partnerships, I hope people walk away understanding that there are actionable things that we can do today to envision and create safer, more vibrant communities. And that the arts have a vital role to play in all of this."

"The movement to secure peace in our time requires a multi-sector approach. For well over 15 years, directly impacted leaders in LIVE FREE have been working to leverage the power of organizing people, transforming culture and securing policy reform to reimagine community safety and security," said Live Free USA Executive Director **Pastor Mike McBride**. "This partnership with San Francisco Opera and its *Innocence* show is another critical step to ensuring our communities across neighborhoods, cities and region are united in both conversation and action to address shared pains with targeted solutions."

"It is a great privilege to be bringing *Innocence* to American audiences for the very first time. Kaija Saariaho's opera is a searingly impactful theatrical experience and one that brings audiences into the complexity of gun violence and trauma in a life-changing way," said San Francisco Opera Tad and Dianne Taube General Director **Matthew Shilvock**. "The piece is a lens into an issue deeply felt throughout our country. I am so grateful to our community partners and Company members who are creating spaces in *BEYOND INNOCENCE* in which we can all engage with this hugely important artistic moment at even deeper levels of connection and understanding. Art allows us to process life's realities in ways not otherwise possible, and I hope that Bay Area audiences will feel welcomed into this critical conversation through art and dialogue this June."

Friday, May 31, Noon to 5:30 p.m.

BEYOND INNOCENCE SYMPOSIUM—

The Power of Community and the Arts & the Prevention of Gun Violence

Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater (Veterans Building, 4th floor, 401 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco)

On Friday, May 31, a free daylong symposium, "**BEYOND INNOCENCE: The Power of Community and the Arts & the Prevention of Gun Violence**," curated by **Pastor Mike McBride** (Executive Director, Live Free USA), **Ryan Marchand** (Director of Diversity, Equity and Community, San Francisco Opera) and **Elena Park** (Founder & CEO, Lumahai Productions), will take place from noon to 5:30 p.m. at San Francisco Opera's Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater.

The gathering, presented by San Francisco Opera, Live Free USA and Lumahai Productions, will address topics such as full circle advocacy, depicting trauma in the arts and the power of community. This event is designed for an audience of peacemakers, community organizers and representatives from a host of community- and faith-based organizations whose work is connected to the convening themes. Conceived to help attendees bring together resources, share disparate perspectives and foster new and existing relationships, the goal is to create connectivity across sectors to help achieve deep and focused collective action.

A limited number of symposium seats may become available to the public at a later date. The event will also be livestreamed for free, with selected clips made available for viewing following the event. For updates and more information, visit sfopera.com/beyond-innocence.

Symposium highlights include:

- Panel discussions: *Full Circle Advocacy: From Grassroots to Assembly Halls; A Delicate Balance: Depicting Trauma on Stage, Screen and in Music* and *The Power of Community: Community Vitality, Resilience & Healing*; with speakers including W. Kamau Bell, Sheryl Davis, Dr. Rochelle A. Dicker, Gabriela Lena Frank, Mina Kim, Mike McLively, Ewan Barker Plummer and from *Innocence*, Vilma Jää, Aleksi Barrière and Sofi Oksanen.
- Reflections on guilt, innocence and forgiveness by Pastor Mike McBride.
- Introduction from San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock, and conversations with the librettist and translators of *Innocence*, Sofi Oksanen and Aleksi Barrière, and cast member Vilma Jää.
- Live performances and remarks by Bay Area hip-hop artist Gunna Goes Global and poet Chinaka Hodge.

The three panel discussions will explore:

- *Full Circle Advocacy: From Grassroots to Assembly Halls*
A discussion about violence prevention, community activism and justice policy reform featuring Tinisch Hollins (Executive Director, Californians for Safety and Justice), Mike McLively (Policy Director, GIFFORDS Center for Violence Intervention) and David Muhammad (Executive Director, National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform). Mina Kim, host of KQED's *Forum*, will moderate.

- ***A Delicate Balance: Depicting Trauma on Stage, Screen and in Music***
This panel will address the impact and responsibility of artists using the arts and entertainment as a medium for presenting trauma and how it might encourage resilience, recovery and healing. What is the responsibility of the artist to the audience? What healing might result from the artistic expression of such experiences? Speakers will include recording artist and angel parent **Karega Bailey**; poet and educator **Chinaka Hodge** and multi-genre instrumentalist and vocalist **Vilma Jää**, who makes her American operatic debut as the student Markéta in *Innocence*. TV host, author and community activist **W. Kamau Bell** (*1000% Me: Growing up Mixed, United Shades of America*) will moderate.
- ***The Power of Community: Community Vitality, Resilience & Healing***
Hosted by Pastor **Mike McBride**, this expansive dialogue will gather together **Sheryl Davis** (Executive Director, San Francisco Human Rights Commission), **Dr. Rochelle A. Dicker** (Advisor to UCSF's San Francisco Wraparound Project and Section Chief, Acute Care Surgery), composer **Gabriela Lena Frank** (Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music), youth activist and organizer **Ewan Barker Plummer** (Chair, San Francisco Youth Commission) and **Tyese Wortham** (Director of Community Engagement, Community Arts Stabilization Trust).

Jeff Tang is producer, and Jennifer Lynch is project advisor for the BEYOND *INNOCENCE* Symposium.

June 1–21

PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVATIONS

San Francisco Opera/War Memorial Opera House (301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco)

Immediately following all performances of *Innocence* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco Opera's Department of Diversity, Equity and Community (DEC) and BEYOND *INNOCENCE* partner organizations will offer spaces for collective reflection, dialogue and healing. The activations will provide audience members different spaces to reflect on, emotionally process, discuss and delve deeper into the production and mobilize around promoting safe, vibrant and healthy communities. All Opera House offerings are open to *Innocence* audience members. Events are subject to change, for updates and schedule, visit sfopera.com/beyond-innocence.

Post-show events within the Opera House include:

- Talkbacks with artists and creative team members centered on the opera and production.
- Reflective space for quiet, grounding activities guided by UCSF Wraparound counselors.
- Arts-based activities to help patrons process through tactile and sensory expression, led by Community Arts Stabilization Trust and their affiliates.
- An advocacy space where Live Free USA and GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence will be available to discuss advocating for safe communities from both grassroots and legislative perspectives.

Additional offerings at the Opera House include:

- In partnership with the William James Association's Prison Arts Project, an art exhibit created by artists from San Quentin State Prison. Program participants read the *Innocence* libretto and explored themes of innocence and guilt—prompts for the resulting artwork that will be displayed. The installation is designed to help viewers reflect on the idea that everyone has an inherent capacity to create harm.
- Pre-performance talks about *Innocence* led by San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Alla Gladysheva (an audio recording of the talk will also be available online).

San Francisco Opera's full circle approach to presenting *Innocence* has also included trauma-informed training for Company members, artists and staff, led by the DEC Department. In recognition that *Innocence* portrays the aftermath of an atrocity, a custom workshop was conceived to help establish a culture of care and support in the opera's production process. Company members developed an understanding of the unique positioning of the opera in the American context, exploring aspects of how gun violence is experienced in this country. Sessions covered basic elements of the psychological and physiological components of trauma, how to recognize it in oneself and in others and how the creative process might be supported by having a preliminary comprehension of trauma. Company members viewed footage from *Innocence* to explore examples of how trauma can present in people, and teams discussed measures they could take to bring trauma informed practices to their workday, as well as strategies for accessing mental health resources and support.

For updates and complete schedule for all BEYOND *INNOCENCE* events, visit sfopera.com/beyond-innocence.

Further information about BEYOND *INNOCENCE* partners, speakers and performers is available at sfopera.com/press/press-releases/BEYOND-INNOCECE/.

San Francisco Opera's BEYOND *INNOCENCE* partners include [Collective Impact](#), [Community Arts Stabilization Trust](#), [Live Free USA](#), [UCSF San Francisco Wraparound Project](#), [GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#), [Lumahai Productions](#) and [William James Association](#).

June 1–21

U.S. PREMIERE OF *INNOCENCE*

San Francisco Opera/War Memorial Opera House (301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco)



The late Kaija Saariaho, composer of *Innocence* (Photo: Andrew Campbell);
Scenes from *Innocence* (Photos : Jean-Louis Fernandez/Festival d'Aix-en-Provence)

San Francisco Opera presents the U.S. premiere of luminary Finnish composer **Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence***. The work, which had its world premiere at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in 2021, is a co-commission of San Francisco Opera and features an original libretto by Finnish novelist Sofi Oksanen with multilingual translation by dramaturg Aleksis Barrière. The story opens at a wedding reception where a horrific tragedy from the past reemerges. A waitress, Tereza, is serving guests when she recognizes the groom as the brother of the student who killed her child during a mass shooting at a Helsinki international school ten years earlier. Unfolding along two simultaneous timelines—the wedding and memories of the violent incident—the opera explores questions of innocence, guilt and the attempts to heal in the wake of painful truths. The unforgettable work, Saariaho's final opera (she passed away in June 2023), has been hailed “a masterpiece” (*New York Times*).

Sung and spoken in nine languages with English and original language supertitles, the six performances of *Innocence* take place June 1–21 at the War Memorial Opera House. The

June 12 performance will also be livestreamed. For tickets and more information, visit sfopera.com/innocence.

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Innocence is a co-commission and co-production of Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, San Francisco Opera, Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam, Royal Opera House-Covent Garden, London and Finnish National Opera and Ballet, Helsinki.
In partnership with the Metropolitan Opera.

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