

PITTSBURGH OPERA

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Pittsburgh Opera to continue performing for live, in-person audiences with dramatic opera *Soldier Songs*

Pittsburgh, PA...



Building on the success of its 82nd season-opening opera, Mozart's [Cosi fan tutte](#), which concluded a run of six sold-out, socially-distanced performances on October 29th, Pittsburgh Opera will present six performances of [David T. Little's Soldier Songs](#) in front of live audiences at its headquarters at 2425 Liberty Avenue in Pittsburgh's Strip District.

Pittsburgh Opera is keeping the successful COVID-19 safety protocols it had established for **Cosi fan tutte** in place for **Soldier Songs**. This includes measures such as reduced seating capacity, mandatory mask wearing, health screenings and temperature checks for all people entering the building, and more. Full details are available on Pittsburgh Opera's [COVID-19 Safety Protocols webpage](#).

The six performances will be from December 5th through 17th. Although the first four performances are currently sold out, limited seating is still available for the Dec. 15th and 17th performances. Tickets are available [online](#).

The Friday, December 11th performance at 7:30PM will be livestreamed free of charge on both Pittsburgh Opera's [YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#).

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- Patrons may sign up at pittsburghopera.org/livestreamRSVP to receive a reminder email one hour before the broadcast that will contain links to view the livestream.
- Patrons also have the option of unlocking premium content, including the official program book and the Pre-Opera talk podcast, by making a gift at pittsburghopera.org/unlock.

Overview of *Soldier Songs*

Soldier Songs combines elements of theater, opera, rock-infused-concert music, and animation to explore the perceptions versus the realities of the Soldier, the loss and exploitation of innocence, and the difficulty of expressing the truth of war.

The libretto was adapted from recorded interviews with veterans of five wars. **Soldier Songs** traces the shift in perception of war from the age of six to the age of 66. We follow the abstract character through three phases of life: Youth (playing war games) Warrior (time served in the military) and Elder (aged, wise, reflective).

Each of the 11 songs in the production explores a different aspect of the soldier's experience, ranging from rage, to fear, to joy, to grief. Multi-media is employed as a critique of the media's ability to both glamorize and falsify the truth of combat.

Soldier Songs asks tough questions and tells tough stories through its poignant libretto, driving and devastating music, and surprising visual counterpoint. The tension between the visual and aural experience works to dispel any potential numbness felt by those lucky enough to only experience war through the comfort of their living rooms.

Originally commissioned by the [Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble](#), which premiered the work in 2006, **Soldier Songs** received its workshop premiere in New York on 2008 by [Beth Morrison Projects](#), and directed by [Yuval Sharon](#). The full world premiere production took place in 2011 at the [International Festival of Arts & Ideas](#) in New Haven, CT. Pittsburgh Opera's performances are by arrangement with Hendon Music, Inc., a [Boosey & Hawkes](#) company, publisher and copyright owner.

Performance Schedule

- Saturday, December 5, 2020 8:00PM
- Tuesday, December 8, 7:00PM
- Friday, December 11, 7:30PM
- Sunday, December 13, 2:00PM matinee
- Tuesday, December 15, 7:00PM
- Thursday, December 17, 7:30PM

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Cast and Artistic Team

Soldier	Yazid Gray*
Conductor	Mark Trawka
Stage Director	Kaley Karis Smith*
Set Designer	Mengyi Liu
Costume Designer	Jason Bray
Lighting Designer	Todd Nonn
Projection Designer	Joe Spinogatti
Stage Manager	Cindy Knight

* [Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist](#)

The story, in brief

Soldier Songs contrasts the perceptions and realities of a soldier from the age of six through 66. Based on interviews with veterans, and the culmination of nine years of work by composer David T. Little, **Soldier Songs** is constructed in three sections: Child, Warrior, and Elder, yet the movements flow seamlessly from start to finish.

CHILD

A boy first encounters war through toys and games, playing with action figures available with an arsenal of accessories. As he grows, video games replace these dolls. These games offer an immersive, combat-like experience in which the player kills countless "enemies," and where the only consequence of the player's death is a brief wait while the game reloads. As the boy becomes a young adult, the game becomes more real. He registers for the draft at age eighteen. Reflecting on the highly randomized selective service process from the Vietnam War, he counts each day with a passing dread at the thought of combat. Once deployed, he counts the days again, but differently: down from 365, hoping he makes it to one.

WARRIOR

The boy is now a modern-day soldier. As technology has changed the tools and language of war, it has also changed the experience of combat. The soldier creates his own soundtrack: piping heavy metal into ear buds, he recreates the feeling of the video game, shooting abstract enemies that appear as pixels on a screen. But the game becomes too real, and the brutality of war sets in. Images of death, destruction, and killing that may have been exciting in action movies back home, now play out with horror before his eyes. He seeks refuge from incoming ordnance; an unbearable experience that he knows will stay with him for the rest of his life.

ELDER

The stories diverge. Veterans reflect on their experiences in combat, or discuss the challenges of reintegration into civilian life. One man reflects on the futility of an endless war. Another confronts the bereavement team sent to notify him of his son's death in

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combat. The opera concludes with recorded interviews—the composer’s family and friends: the soldiers who inspired this work—as our soldier opens his mouth to tell his story.

—David T. Little

Sponsors

- [PNC](#) is the 2020-21 Pittsburgh Opera Season Sponsor.
- [UPMC](#) is the Livestream Sponsor
- [Ambridge Regional Distribution and Manufacturing Center](#) is the Tuesday Performance Sponsor
- [WQED-FM](#) is Pittsburgh Opera’s Media Sponsor

Other Information

- The performances will be sung in English, with English supertitles projected both above the stage and on-screen during the livestream
- Run Time: Approximately 60 minutes, with no intermission
- Pittsburgh Opera’s popular [Audio Commentary](#) program for visually-impaired patrons is available at the Tuesday, December 15th performance.