

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:**

Jennifer Colgan  
Director of Marketing and Communications  
303.468.2025 | [jcolgan@operacolorado.org](mailto:jcolgan@operacolorado.org)



**Opera Colorado Co-Commissions Dramatic Song Cycle for the 100th Anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**

*Creative team includes acclaimed composer Shawn Okpebholo and poet laureate Marcus Amaker*

**Denver, CO (September 28, 2021)**—Opera Colorado joins UrbanArias, Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, Minnesota Opera, and Birmingham Opera to present *UNKNOWN*, a song cycle honoring the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on the centennial of its founding. Major support is also provided by Stephen E. and Dorothy P. Bird of Denver, Colorado.

UrbanArias, an opera company based in Arlington, Virginia, commissioned the composer Shawn Okpebholo and the poet Marcus Amaker to write a series of connected art songs to mark this occasion. The two previously collaborated on the acclaimed work, *Two Black Churches*.

*UNKNOWN* explores the ideas of war, honor, and memory through the eyes of soldiers, family members, and Tomb Guards. Every one of these individuals is connected to each other and the Tomb through their mutual service and sacrifice. The Tomb Guards' motto, "Soldiers never die until they are forgotten. Tomb Guards never forget," captures the solemn and profound significance of their duty.

**The world premiere performance of *UNKNOWN* is Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at the Barns at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia.** Featured performers are baritones Michael Mayes and Schyler Vargas and mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven, accompanied by members of the Inscape Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Robert Wood, the Founder and Artistic Director of UrbanArias.

**The online premiere of the film of *UNKNOWN* is Thursday, November 11, 2021, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.** The film is available to stream on demand on the UrbanArias website through November 18, 2021. Access is free.

UrbanArias will donate 50% of any donations made at the time of registration to the scholarship programs of the [Society of the Honor Guard](#).

For more information about current and future programming at Opera Colorado, visit [operacolorado.org](http://operacolorado.org) or contact Jennifer Colgan at [jcolgan@operacolorado.org](mailto:jcolgan@operacolorado.org).

---

## Creative Team Biographies



**Shawn Okpebholo** (composer) creates music that is diverse, dynamic, and genuine. He has been described by Augusta Read Thomas as "...a beautiful artist... who has enormous grace in his music, and fantasy and color." His artistry has resulted in numerous prizes and honors, including The American Academy of Arts and Letters Walter Hinrichsen Award in Music, First Place Winner of the 2020 American Prize in Composition (professional/wind band division), the Inaugural Awardee of the Leslie Adams-Robert Owens Composition Award, and many others. He is Professor of Music Composition and Theory at Wheaton College Conservatory of Music in Illinois.



**Marcus Amaker** (poet) was named Charleston, South Carolina's first Poet Laureate in 2016. He's also the award-winning graphic designer of a national music journal (*No Depression*), an internationally-known electronic musician, the creator of a poetry festival, and a mentor to hundreds of students. In 2019, he won a Governor's Arts award in South Carolina, and was named the artist-in-residence of the Gaillard Center, a world-renowned performance and education venue. His poetry has been studied in classrooms around the world, and has been interpreted for ballet, jazz, modern dance, opera, and theater. Marcus Amaker has recorded three albums with Grammy Award-winning drummer and producer Quentin E. Baxter.

###

### ABOUT OPERA COLORADO

Opera Colorado has served as a cornerstone of Denver's cultural community since 1981. In addition to its mainstage performances at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House each season, the company affirms its commitment to the future of the art form by annually presenting new works; with its nationally recognized Artist in Residence Program that trains the next generation of opera performers; and by each year reaching more than 45,000 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region. For more information, visit [operacolorado.org](http://operacolorado.org).