



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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University of Toronto Faculty of Music Commissions New Opera

Toronto, ON: The University of Toronto Faculty of Music is pleased to announce the commissioning of a new opera, *Fall River, the legend of Lizzie Borden*, slated for premiere in November 2026 by U of T Opera.

The new work will be composed by Cecilia Livingston with libretto by Michael Patrick Albano. *Fall River* will be an 80-90 minute opera for five leading roles, seven secondary roles, a choral ensemble, and a chamber orchestra of 10-12 musicians. This will be the third opera commissioned by U of T Opera in its history, and the first one written by a non-faculty member.

Fall River will explore the story of Lizzie Borden, who was tried and ultimately acquitted for the 1892 brutal axe murders of her father and stepmother. The crime was not only a sensation in Fall River, Massachusetts but became a *cause célèbre* which morphed into urban myth throughout the world, to this day revisited in novels, plays and films. There have been many theories regarding Lizzie's potential motives but none can be proven, adding to her mystique.

The opera reflects the period immediately before and after the notorious crime. While acknowledging agreed upon facts in the historical record, *Fall River, the legend of Lizzie Borden* imagines the psychology, struggle and unfulfilled dreams of a young woman allegedly driven to brutal murder.

Fall River, the legend of Lizzie Borden composer Cecilia Livingston is currently composer-in-residence with the Canadian Opera Company (COC). Her writing boldly mixes musical styles in a uniquely lyrical compositional language that Zachary Woolfe in *The New York Times* describes as “music that asks slow burning, sometimes fiery questions.”

During Livingston’s three-year residency at Glyndebourne, the festival wrote that her “projects often tell women’s stories, inviting audiences to reconsider familiar literary and historical characters,” making her uniquely qualified to tell this story. Livingston holds a Bachelor of Music, a Master of Music, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Toronto.

The libretto is by Michael Patrick Albano, who has written over twenty-five works for the stage including librettos for the Washington Opera, the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and the Canadian Children’s Opera Company as well as U of T Opera’s last commission, *The Last Duel*, composed by

Gary Kulesha. His opera, *The Very Last Green Thing*, will be given its UK premiere by the Welsh National Opera in May 2024.

The opera will be conducted by Professor Sandra Horst, the Head of Opera at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. In addition to her leadership role there, she also holds the position of Price Family Chorus Master of the Canadian Opera Company. Ms. Horst's extensive knowledge of operatic repertoire is augmented by her passion and expertise in the creation of new work.

U of T Opera is one of the leading operatic training programs in North America, offering both a Master's degree and a Diploma in Opera. With an average of 20 students, U of T Opera is modelled on Young Artist programs at professional opera companies and the limited enrolment ensures that every student benefits from the exceptional training offered by the renowned faculty and guest instructors. Preparing a new composition for premiere with a living composer and librettist will complement the existing curriculum, allowing students to grow as musicians and prepare them for work as professionals.

For more than 100 years, the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto has been Canada's leading institution for music creation, performance education, and research. As a cultural cornerstone in one of the world's most diverse and dynamic cities, we prepare future generations of arts leaders—hundreds of performers, composers, scholars, and educators who shape tomorrow's music experience, sustain Canada's cultural economy, and have significant global impact.

This commission is made possible through the generous support of Mr. Denton Creighton and Ms. Kristine (Kris) Vikmanis. Vikmanis, currently a director on the board of the COC, and Creighton are longtime supporters of new music and opera in Canada, and the Faculty of Music is grateful for this opportunity to tell a woman's story in a new way. Additional support for the commission is made through the Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition fund at the Faculty of Music.

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For more information on the project, please contact:

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