



HUB CITY
OPERA AND DANCE™
COMPANY NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

FOOD MEETS OPERA: A DOUBLE BILL

BON APPÉTIT!

THE
JULIA CHILD
OPERA

Composer: Lee Hoiby

Words by Julia Child, adapted by Mark Shulgasser

THE COOK-OFF

Composer: Shawn E. Okpebholo

Libretto by Mark Campbell

Commissioned by Chicago Opera Theater's Vanguard Initiative



PLEASE ENJOY SOME

CHOCOLATE CAKE

DURING INTERMISSION!

Hub City Opera and Dance Company

President: Annamaria Stefanelli

presents:

Food Meets Opera: A Double Bill

BON APPÉTIT!
THE JULIA CHILD OPERA

Words by Julia Child, adapted by Mark Schulgasser

Sung in English with projected English supertitles

THE COOK-OFF

Music by Shawn E. Okpebholo and Libretto by Mark Campbell

Commissioned by Chicago Opera Theater's Vanguard Initiative

Sung in English and Spanish with projected English supertitles

Saturday, May 29 and

Sunday, May 30, 2025

Avenel Performing Arts Center

Avenel, NJ

PROGRAM TEAM

Conductor: **David Brown**

Stage Director: **Annamaria Stefanelli**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Scenic Design: **Rory Angelicola**

Production Manager: **Rachel Resnik**

Assistant Production Manager: **Lauren Cappadona**

Assistant Stage Manager and Prop Master: **David Manning**

Costume Coordinator: **Myrianthe Marton**

Program Notes Design: **Géza G. Schenk**

BON APPETIT CAST

Julia Child: **Kaitlyn Waterson**

Pianist: **Mingke Zhu**

Production Member: **Rory Angelicola**

THE COOK-OFF CAST (in order of appearance)

Kenny Kincaid: **Eric McConnell**

Beryl Bennett: **Kaitlyn Waterson**

Ivy Sweet: **Alize Francheska Roszynai**

Kendra Smith: **Ariel Andrew**

Álvaro Mendez: **Theron Cromer**

THE COOK-OFF ORCHESTRA:

Conductor: **David Matthew Brown**

Piano: **Mingke Zhu**

Violin: **Francine Bloom**

Viola: **Tina Wagner**

Cello: **Elizabeth Lee**

Double Bass: **Justin Lee**

Flute: **Crispian Fordham**

Saxophonist: **Bryan McNamara**

Percussion: **Julian Dippolito**

"WARNING: This content contains flashing lights that may trigger seizures or discomfort in some individuals

CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

Bon Appétit! - It's almost so obvious, it's ingenious: Julia Child's dramatic and melodic voice practically demanded to be set to music. Lee Hoiby's charming, whimsical, and—above all else—hilarious score transports the audience to the set of *The French Chef* (airing from 1963-'73), where every step of a titular chocolate cake recipe is exaggerated by dramatic musical cues and melodic lines that parallel Child's distinguished cadence and contour of speech. From aggressively beating egg whites, to banging pans, to losing herself in the daydream of a soufflé, Child's verbatim transcript of this chocolate cake episode (the totality of Hoiby's libretto) presents a tapestry of dramatic text painting—spinning, pounding, sirening vocal glissandi, and more—all in contrast to an endearing, understated, staccato “theme” that reminds us—in the spirit of the TV show—that at the end of the day, this is a chocolate cake recipe that anyone can make!



CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

The Cook-Off - IWhat could be more brash, mercenary, or tone-deaf (pun intended) than an American cooking competition? But the gaudy veneer of Mark Campbell's captivating and endlessly witty libretto, a manifestation of composer Shawn Okpebholo's original vision, dissipates rapidly as three contestants—sanctimonious Ivy Sweet, humble Kendra Smith, and nervous Álvaro Mendez—reveal their personal stories and aspirations, evolving into a broader commentary on race and history, self-worth, economic hardship, and achieving the “American Dream.” As though mimicking the rapid edits of TV, Okpebholo's exquisitely orchestrated score pivots rapidly between chaotic “game show” music for the ostentatious host, Kenny Kincaid; lyrical, quasi-French impressionism for the sophisticated (and ever-tipsy) judge, Beryl Bennett; pointillistic coloratura for the cutesy Ivy; depth and soulfulness for the introspective Kendra; and musical stuttering and awkward silence for Álvaro that transforms to a Latin groove whenever he finds his nerve. Like a favorite TV show, an hour of opera flies by, leaving the audience hungry for the next episode of America Loves Food!

— David Brown

STAGE DIRECTOR'S NOTES

What is more pertinent in our society than food and how food affects us? Couple this with television, which has become the medium of choice by many, and you get a solid look at the inner workings of our culture.

Julia Child transformed the way America cooked in the twentieth century and introduced the beauty of French cuisine into the United States. More importantly, she demonstrated how cooking is an art that is accessible to anyone and it can be fun in the process! Lee Hoiby's opera fully capture this spirit. As I watched the actual episode of "Le Gâteau au Chocolate Eminence Brune" which was on Season 8 of "The French Chef" (the cooking show that became a household name), I was mesmerized by Julia Child. She was just making a chocolate cake, but it was so interesting to watch and I found myself wanting to try it! It was easy to see why this woman captured the hearts of America. Her enthusiasm and careful instruction made it seem easy to imitate. Anyone could be a good cook if they so desired!



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Child#/media/File:Julia_Child_portrait_by_%C2%A9Lynn_Gilbert,_1978.jpg

Lee Hoiby's short opera, *Bon Appétit!*, using Child's exact words from the show (adapted by Marc Schulgasser), and the music takes us on a culinary journey. We hear the stirring of the chocolate and the grand way Child presents her creation at the end of the opera – it is a wonderful experience and it brings her to us, propelling her into the present. The staging for this opera was guided by the dialogue. What was more important was to make sure that Child's bold and intentional love of what she was doing was represented. Julia Child was a pioneer – she was not stopped by any criticism or doubt – and she was the first to win an Emmy for an educational program.

STAGE DIRECTOR'S NOTES

As a backdrop projection, we used a photo of the actual replica of Julia Child's kitchen that is housed in the Smithsonian Institute:



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mlui92/29171409535/>

Staging and scenery for *Bon Appétit!* was also given a straight-forward approach against the contrasting world of *The Cook-Off*. In this second contemporary opera set in the twenty-first century, the world has changed. Life is very different than the slower-moving world of Julia Child. Steel counters, quick dialogue and a denser, more chaotic reality is present. Lighting for the show emphasizes the faster pace of living in which the characters must compete and brings us into their more intimate moments.

What appears to be one world becomes two, where the world of the show is contrasted with inner snapshots of the contestants. Kenny Kincaid is the full representation of the TV camera host, pointedly concerned with how he looks and how he presents "America Loves Food." *The Cook-Off* gives us a sense of how cultures blend and clash, how domination creeps into interactions, and the power of love and integrity. History is also touched upon, and we learn that Macaroni and Cheese was perfected by Thomas Jefferson's slave. All is not what it seems.

These two operas give us two very different worlds that help us see each one more clearly. What a perfect pairing!

— Annamaria Stefanelli

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ariel Andrew (Kendra Smith) — Known for her deep, rich dramatic sound, Ariel Andrew has recently been seen as a soloist for Fresco Opera in their Opera at Olbrich series, Ouroboros Opera in *The Order of the Virtues* by Hildegard von Bingen (as Victory), soloist for Killer Queen Opera, and Valkyrie Opera, where she played the role of Suor Angelica in Puccini's opera of the same name. She has also performed roles for *Street Scene* (Central City Opera), *La Fanciulla Del West* (Central City Opera), *The Consul* (Third Eye Theater Ensemble) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Glow Lyric Opera Theater). Her voice has been called "a force of nature sound with natural ease" (Parterre Box) and having a "rich, open tone" (Wooten/OperaWire). Ariel obtained her M.A. in Music for Vocal Performance at CSU East Bay and her B.A. in Music at the University of Tampa.

Theron Cromer (Álvaro Mendez) — Tenor and NJ native, Theron Cromer, has performed lead roles in various operas and operettas including *Don Giovanni*, *The Gondoliers*, *Goyescas*, *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Albert Herring*, *Il Giovedì Grasso*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *Norma*, *Nabucco*, amongst many musical theater credits. His concert work includes tenor solos in Verdi's *Requiem*, *Carmina Burana*, Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and concerts of Broadway and popular music with a group of tenors called "Tenors on stage". He received his Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance from Montclair State University and a Master's in Administrative Science from Fairleigh Dickinson University. For 6 years, Theron has worked at First Presbyterian of New Vernon as a soloist and section leader, where in addition to Sunday services, he has had the opportunity to perform recitals and concerts, including singing King Kapsar in a concert version of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* this past January. Singing Álvaro Mendez marks his second engagement with HCODC and he's excited to be a part of the East Coast Premiere.

David Matthew Brown (conductor) — Philadelphian violinist, composer, and conductor David Matthew Brown is a concert producer and recitalist who champions new music, works by composers from marginalized communities, and popular masterworks alike through imaginative concert programming and accessible performance practice. He has performed

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

as a soloist with orchestras including the Csik Chamber Orchestra (Romania)—with which he was also guest concertmaster—the Vidin Sinfonietta (Bulgaria), and the Newark Symphony. David's compositions have been performed by the New Russia State Symphony Orchestra, Csik Chamber Orchestra, Vidin Sinfonietta, International Opera Theater, Network for New Music, LINK Ensemble, 6ixwire Project, Nightingale Vocal Ensemble, Hub City Opera, and Alter Ego Chamber Opera, of which he was a founding member. Moreover, David is a tuba player; Celtic and Klezmer fiddler; and has composed over fifty Celtic jigs, reels, hornpipes, and other dance forms. By day, he serves as Music Director of MLUC, Pennsylvania's largest Unitarian Universalist congregation. By night, he is a grassroots activist, progressive campaign consultant, and a national leader in the Church/State separation movement through his work as Chair of the Secular Democrats of Pennsylvania, and formerly as host of the Unreasonable podcast.

Eric J. McConnell (Kenny Kincaid) — Denver native Eric J. McConnell began his season with a run as the title character in *Sweeney Todd* with the Greenhouse Cabaret in Bend, Oregon. He takes on two contemporary American debuts Spring 2025, first as Kenny Kincaid in *The Cook-Off* with Hub City Opera and then as the Vicomte de Valmont in *The Dangerous Liaisons* with Vegas City Opera.

Previous roles include the D'Ysquith Family in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Opera Saratoga); Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (Sarasota Opera); Sam in *Trouble in Tahiti*, Donner in *Das Rheingold*, and Colline in *La Bohème* (Virginia Opera); Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Olin Blicht in *Susannah* (Opera Fort Collins); Carl-Magnus in *A Little Night Music*, Father in *Ragtime*, and the Wolf in *Into the Woods* (Union Avenue Opera); Escamillo in *Carmen* (Bel Cantanti Opera), Betto in *Gianni Schicchi/Buoso's Ghost* and Orin Scrivello, DDS in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Utah Festival Opera); Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Dr. Grenvil in *La Traviata* (Opera Colorado); the Sodbuster in *Proving Up* (Aspen Music Festival); and Bob Wallace in *White Christmas* (Suncoast Broadway Dinner Theatre). He holds degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Miami. McConnell is also a writer. His debut novel *Mall*, and its sequel, *Park*, are available at all major online book retailers.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alize Francheska Rozsnyai (Ivy Sweet) — Soprano and graduate of The Curtis Institute of Music “displaying profound imagination and control” (Philadelphia Inquirer), is building a diverse and exciting career as a lyrical theatre artist with a “superb voice” (Harrogate News) which is “sparkling” (ArtBlog), all while serving up “deliciously diva performances” (I CARE IF YOU LISTEN). This season she appears with Hub City Opera as Ivy Sweet in *The Cook-Off*, a leading soprano in World Premiere of *Five Ways to Die with Experiments* in Opera NYC, Soprano Soloist in Joseph Canteloube’s *Chansons d’Auvergne* with New City Sinfonia, San Diego, and Juana in *Judia* at Media Theatre with Theatre on the Verge.

Recently, she appeared as a St. Petersburg Opera as an Emerging Artist for Morgana in Handel’s *Alcina*, Frasquita in *Carmen* with Boheme Opera NJ, and as Tzipporah in *Exagoge* with Untitled Theatre Co. 61 at La MaMa, NYC. Ms. Rozsnyai has also performed with Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, Den Nye Opera in Bergen, Norway, Opera Philadelphia, San Diego Opera, Chautauqua Opera, Seattle Symphony [Untitled 3] Series, Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, Opera Fayetteville (*Zina-Dark Sisters*), Center for Contemporary Opera, The Cape Cod Symphony (Soprano Soloist - *Carmina Burana*), and favorite role credits include Adina (*L’elisir d’amore*), Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*), Hilda (*Elegy for Young Lovers-Henze*), and Ilia (*Idomeneo*).

Annamaria Stefanelli (Stage Director) — also serves as the president and artistic director of Hub City Opera and Dance. She is a professional opera singer, director, editor, published poet, and songwriter, playwright, and educator who also owns her own companies, A&R Artists and A&R Music Education. She has a B.A. in Drama and English from Franklin and Marshall College, a Masters in English and American Literature from New York University and a B.A. (Honors) in Opera Studies from Rose Bruford College in the United Kingdom. Annamaria has directed both straight plays, musicals, and operas, including four productions for Hub City Opera and Dance: *Goyescas* by E. Granados, *Le Pauvre Matelot* by D. Milhaud, and *La Serva Padrona* by G. B. Pergolesi and *Murasaki’s Moon* by Michi Wianko and Deborah Brevoort. She is the creator and principal artist of an opera program for children called Opera Fun, which she has performed to over 900 students. She is also the creator of a lecture performance program on the history of Italian Opera. Ms. Stefanelli has also released a CD, *The Gifts of a Classical Christmas*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Kaitlyn Waterson (Julia Child, Beryl Bennett) — is a Philadelphia-based dramatic soprano and co-founder of the violin-voice-piano chamber ensemble, illumine. Kaitlyn has been a featured soloist with the Csík Chamber Orchestra of Csíkszereda, Romania (with which she performed two world premieres) and the Sinfonietta Vidin. Her operatic roles include Marguerite in *Faust* (Gounod), the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (Menotti), Prince Charmant in *Cendrillon* (Massenet), Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel* (Humperdinck), and Mrs. Charlton in *Dead Man Walking* (Heggie). Other affiliations include Opera Delaware, Delaware Valley Opera Company, Alter Ego Chamber Opera, and the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir.

Mingke Zhu (Collaborative Pianist, Bon Appétit) — was born in Hunan, China. In 2009, she went to the middle school of Wuhan Conservatory of Music where she majored in piano performance and studied with Prof. Chongxiao Liu. During high school, she won first place for "The Golden Hall of Vienna New Year Concert Competition" in Wuhan. In 2018, she graduated from The Catholic University of America with a B. M. in Piano Performance and Minor in Mathematics. During her undergraduate studies at CUA, she studied piano with Dr. Ivo Kaltchev. In 2020, she received her Masters of Music in Piano Performance at the Peabody Institute of Music where she studied with Prof. Brian Ganz. Mingke is the winner of the following piano competitions: 2nd Prize and Best Chinese Performance Award, International Young Artist Piano Competition, 2024; 1st Prize, Golden Classical Musical Music Awards International Competition, 2024; 2nd Prize, Concert Artists International Competition, 2023; 2nd Prize, the 5th Catholic University of America International piano Competition, 2018; 1st Prize, Lancaster International Piano Festival Competition, 2017; 2nd Prize, 2016 Xi'an "The Silk Road" International Music Festival Competition, Xi'an, China, 2016. She is the recipient of the 2018 CUA Benjamin Rome School of Music Instrumental Performance Award as well as the 2016 Presser Foundation Undergraduate Scholar Award. Mingke has performed at The Carnegie Weill Hall (New York, NY), the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage (Washington DC), the Ware Performing Arts Center (Lancaster, PA), Cascais Cultural Center (Cascais, Portugal), and Ruy de Carvahio Auditorium (Oerias, Portugal) In 2015, she made her European debut performing the Beethoven Concerto No. 1 with Orquestra de Camara de Cascais e Oerias in Cascais, Portugal.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

She has performed in piano master classes by Meng-Chich Liu, Xun Pan, Alla Voskoboynikova, Jenny Lin, Douglas Humphreys, Gary Graffman, Mikhail Voskresensky and Antonio Pompa-baldi. Currently Mingke is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano performance at the Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts ,where she studies with Prof. John Perry.

THANK YOU

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