

HUB CITY
OPERA AND DANCE™
COMPANY NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ



east brunswick
arts commission

FOOD MEETS OPERA: A DOUBLE BILL

BON APPÉTIT!

THE
JULIA CHILD
OPERA

Composer: Lee Hoiby

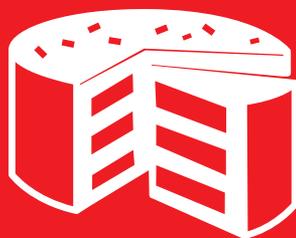
Words by Julia Child, adapted by Mark Shulgasser

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

in partnership with

East Brunswick Arts Commission:

President: Carin Baum

presents:

Food Meets Opera: A Double Bill

BON APPÉTIT!

THE JULIA CHILD OPERA

Music by Lee Hoiby

Words by Julia Child, adapted by Mark Schulgasser

Sung in English with projected English supertitles

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THE COOK-OFF

Music by Shawn E. Okpebholo & Libretto by Mark Campbell

Commissioned by Chicago Opera Theater's Vanguard Initiative

Sung in English and Spanish with projected English supertitles

Saturday, May 21 2026

Sunday, May 22, 2026

East Brunswick Community Arts Center

Elliot Taubenslag Theater

ABOUT HUB CITY OPERA AND DANCE

Hub City Opera and Dance Company —Founded in 2017, Hub City Opera and Dance, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, based in New Brunswick, NJ, whose mission is to produce new and innovative works in opera and dance that educate and entertain. Hub City Opera and Dance is dedicated to providing the Central Jersey community with high-quality, professional productions that give a fresh view of opera and dance, bringing together singers, dancers and other artists to create something new. The works we choose introduce our audiences to artistic experiences that are novel or throw a fresh light on a known work. The company's mission includes enriching the community and bringing music education to the area through outreach programs offered to schools, colleges, and civic institutions. For more information about Hub City Opera and Dance, please visit www.hubcityopera.org.

ABOUT THE EAST BRUNSWICK ARTS COMMISSION

The East Brunswick Arts Commission (EBAC) brings the arts to life for the entire community and serves as the township's cultural hub. Founded more than 50 years ago, EBAC advances a vision of making the arts accessible to all by presenting high-quality concerts, visual art exhibitions, family programs, festivals, and immersive learning experiences for diverse audiences. In recent years, EBAC has produced more than a dozen programs per year, reaching thousands of attendees, launching young musicians into professional careers, and supporting local artists. EBAC is committed to expanding participation, increasing free and low-cost programming, and continuing to cultivate a vibrant, inclusive cultural life in East Brunswick and surrounding communities.

For upcoming programs, please visit
<https://www.eastbrunswick.org/326/East-Brunswick-Arts-Commission>

PROGRAM TEAM

Conductor: **David Brown**

Stage Director: **Annamaria Stefanelli**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Assistant Director: Rachel Resnik

Scenery: **Rory Angelicola**

Stage 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**

Performance Pianist: **Mingke Zhu**

Production Member: **Rory Angelicola**

THE COOK-OFF CAST (in order of appearance)

Kenny Kincaid: **Tom Sitzler**

Beryl Bennett: **Emma Mitrović**

Álvaro Mendez: **Theron Cromer**

Kendra Smith: **Blessing Ogbor**

Ivy Sweet: **Alize Francheska Roszynai**

THE COOK-OFF ORCHESTRA:

Conductor: **David Matthew Brown**

Piano: **Mingke Zhu**

Violin: **Vincent Novellino**

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 mu-sical 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 tran-script of this chocolate cake episode (the totality of Hoiby's libretto) pres-ents 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 - What 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 manifesta-tion 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 aspira-tions, 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 osten-tatious 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/mltiu92/29171409535/>

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

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 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.

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

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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 in January of last year After singing Álvaro in last year's East Coast premiere of *The Cook Off*, Theron is elated to have the opportunity to revisit this challenging but heart-filled piece with HCODC.

Emma Mitrović (Beryl Bennett) — A native of New Jersey, originally from North Bergen, Hudson County, Emma was most recently described in Opera News: “The seamless fusion of vocal excellence and comedic acrobatics of the Stepmother, Emma Mitrović, and stepsisters...added balanced levity to the exquisite romantic yearning of Cendrillon and the Prince.” Recent credits include *Madame de la Haltière* (Cendrillon), *Madame Rossini* in the world premiere of David Winkler's *Rossini Perduto*, *La Frugola* (Il Tabarro), *Annabella* in the world premiere of Jason Overall's *The Doctor & the Devils*, *Madame de Croissy* (Dialogues of the Carmelites), and *Zita* (Gianni Schicchi). Emma is on the voice faculty at The Wharton Institute of the Performing Arts, an ongoing member of Bard Festival Chorale, The American Spiritual Ensemble, and she is honored to join the company in this evening's performance!

Blessing Ogbor (Kendra Smith) — Blessing Ogbor is a doctoral student in vocal performance at Rutgers University. She holds a Master of Music degree from James Madison University. Her operatic experience includes major roles in opera scenes and full productions such as Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito*, the Abbess in *Suor Angelica*, Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, and Maria Callas in *Jackie O*, among others.

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*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* with Iolanthe Opera Company, Euphrosyne in Thomas Arne’s *Comus* with Brandywine Baroque, the Turnspit and 1st Nymph cover in Dvořák’s *Rusalka*, and cover for Violetta in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, with invited final dress performances, for her company debuts with New Jersey Opera Theatre. She makes her role debut as Zerbinetta in Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Trentino Music Festival, under the baton of Arthur Fagan and stage direction by David Gately, and a return to one of her favorite roles, Morgana in Handel’s *Alcina*, conducted by Neal Goren and directed by José Maria Condemí. She joins the Poconos Chorale and Orchestra in the role of Gabriel in Haydn’s *Creation* in April of 2026. As an orchestral soloist this season, Alize joins the New City Sinfonia of San Diego for Joseph Canteloube’s *Chants d’Auvergne* and an excerpt from the role of Amina in Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*, and as the Soprano Soloist in Handel’s *Messiah* with the Haverford Orchestra.

Recently, she appeared at St. Petersburg Opera as an Emerging Artist for Morgana in Handel’s *Alcina*, Frasquita in *Carmen* with Boheme Opera NJ, and 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*).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Tom Sitzler (Kenny Kincaid) — Tom Sitzler, baritone, has been capturing audiences with his warm, generous voice and convincing stage presence since 2009, when he made his professional debut as the Old Gypsy in *Il Trovatore* with Union Avenue Opera. This is his third performance with Hub City Opera and Dance. Most notable roles include Escamillo (*Carmen* and *Tragedy of Carmen*) and Leporello (*Don Giovanni*) with Boulder Opera and Painted Sky Opera, Germont (*La Traviata*) and Scarpia (*Tosca*) with Painted Sky Opera and Long Island Lyric Opera, and Prophet (*Dark Sisters*) with Opera Fayetteville. He has also sung the bass solos for Handel's *Messiah*. His most recent performance was Andrew Borden (*Lizzie Borden*) with Painted Sky Opera.

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 five productions for Hub City Opera and Dance: *Goyescas* by E. Granados, *Le Pauvre Matelot* by D. Milhaud, *La Serva Padrona* by G. B. Pergolesi, *Murasaki's Moon* by Michi Wianko and Deborah Brevoort and the 2025 production of *Bon Appetit!* and *The Cook-Off*.

Ms. Stefanelli 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. She also teaches private voice and piano in the Central NJ area.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Kaitlyn Waterson (Julia Child) — is a Philadelphia-based lyric soprano and co-founder of the violin-voice-piano chamber ensemble, illumine. Kaitlyn has been a featured soloist with the Csik Chamber Orchestra of Csíkszereda, Romania 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, Alter Ego Chamber Opera, and the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir.

Mingke Zhu (Collaborative Pianist, Bon Appétit, Orchestral Pianist, The Cook-Off) — Pianist Mingke Zhu, a native of Hunan, China, is an internationally active soloist and chamber musician whose performances have captivated audiences across the United States, Europe, and Asia. She has appeared on distinguished stages including Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York, the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage in Washington, D.C., Harris Concert Hall at the Aspen Music Festival, the Cascais Cultural Center in Portugal, and the Embassy of Bulgaria in Washington, D.C. In 2015, she made her European orchestral debut performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Orquestra de Câmara de Cascais e Oeiras. Mingke is a prizewinner of several international competitions, including the International Young Artist Piano Competition and the Lancaster International Piano festival Competition. She has also received the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music Instrumental Performance Award and the Presser Foundation Undergraduate Scholar Award.

An active participant in major international festivals, Mingke has performed at the Aspen Music Festival, the Orford Music Festival, the Lancaster International Piano Festival, and the Washington International Piano Festival.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

She has worked with many distinguished artists including Michel Béroff, Anton Nel, Gary Graffman, and Jeremy Denk. Mingke received her Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance, with a minor in Mathematics, from The Catholic University of America, where she studied with Dr. Ivo Kaltchev. She later earned her Master of Music from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, studying with Brian Ganz. She is currently pursuing the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts, where she studied with the late John Perry.

THANK YOU

This production is made possible in part through the generous support of individual donors and sponsors, as well as: grant funding from the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners, the Anna Brisco Memorial Fund, and the Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund.

Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners through a grant award from the Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund.

Program funded by Middlesex County, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



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