

Atlanta Opera Partners With Dad's Garage For 24 Hour Project

By MYKE JOHNS • MAR 3, 2017

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Atlanta Opera singers Abigail Halon and Jonathan Spuhler in Dad's Garage's production of "ImprOper," a previous collaboration between the two groups.

STACEY BODE

Think of something you could do in 24 hours. You could bake a few pies or read a Harry Potter novel. You could drive to Santa Fe ... but could you write an opera?

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That challenge is on for composers and writers alike this weekend as the Atlanta Opera puts up its seventh annual [24 Hour Opera Project](#). This year, they've added a wild card to the mix and partnered with Dad's Garage Theatre Company.

The project locks teams of composers and lyricists into rehearsal rooms for 12 hours to come up with a 7-to-10-minute opera, which is then rehearsed and staged over the next 12 hours.

With this partnership, composers will be paired with writers and directors from Dad's Garage's ensemble.

"We have been working with the Opera folks for several years and so this felt like a natural extension of that collaboration," Dad's artistic director Kevin Gillese says.

That collaboration includes longform shows like “ImprOper” as well as improv games where Dad’s ensemble members feed lines to singers. But does anyone on the Dad’s team have any experience writing an opera?

“I would say no,” says Gillese, who will be one of the writers taking the challenge this weekend. “Definitely not. This is completely new territory for us. So we get to get in there and do what we do best, which is react in the moment and figure it out on the fly.”

If an improv comedy theater collaborating with an opera company seems odd, it makes sense that it was born out of an odd situation. In 2013, Dad’s lost their theater space in Inman Park and temporarily moved in to 7 Stages. Gillese says that hit them in a couple ways. The company was forced to reduce their programming.

“Simultaneously, we had to prove our merit to the community,” he recalls. Dad’s sought out partnerships with other arts organizations which were unlike them. They wound up working with the Alliance Theatre as well as the Atlanta Opera, and that outreach continues. Gillese just finished directing a show at Theatrical Outfit.

“Now that we’ve moved into our new home,” he says, “instead of those things going to the back burner, quite the opposite. They’re more important than ever it seems.”

And to prove just how important those partnerships are, sometimes, apparently, you just have to lock yourself into a room with them and write an opera.

[The 24 Hour Opera Project](#) takes place Saturday, March 4 at Dad’s Garage at 8 p.m.