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Sarasota Opera Receives \$25,000 in Grant Support from The Exchange for Youth Opera and Education Programs

October 20, 2026 — Sarasota Opera has received two grants from The Exchange, a Sarasota nonprofit consignment organization that supports arts-related programs and education, in support of the company's nationally recognized youth opera and education programs. The awards include a \$20,000 program grant for Sarasota Youth Opera's 2026 production of Rachel J. Peters' [*Rootabaga Country*](#), which will be on stage this fall for two performances November 7 and 8, and a \$5,000 Elizabeth Lindsay Arts in Education Grant supporting Sarasota Opera's 2026 [Community Outreach and Engagement Program for K–12 students](#) in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

Rootabaga Country, a children's opera with music and libretto by Rachel J. Peters and inspired by Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*, will be presented by Sarasota Youth Opera November 7 and 8, 2026. The production premiered at Sarasota Opera in 2017 and is an imaginative one-act opera that follows a family's journey through Rootabaga Country on the "Zigzag Railroad," blending playful storytelling, colorful characters, melodic music, and themes of family, love, curiosity, and belonging. Sarasota Opera anticipates approximately 80 young performers will participate in the production, with more than 1,100 students expected to attend a special school-time matinee.

Tickets are on sale now for the November 7 and 8 performances at sarasotaopera.org or at the Box Office at 941-328-1300.

"We are grateful to The Exchange for its extraordinary commitment to arts education and to the young people of our region," said Richard Russell, General & Artistic Director of Sarasota Opera. "This generous support helps make it possible for Sarasota Youth Opera members to participate in a professional-level production created especially for young voices, while also expanding access to opera for students throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties."

Sarasota Youth Opera is one of the most comprehensive programs in the United States dedicated to introducing young singers to the art of opera. Since 1984, the program has welcomed thousands of young people through after-school choruses, summer camps, participation in Sarasota Opera mainstage productions, and fully staged Youth Opera productions. The program is open to all interested youth ages 8 to 18, regardless of skill level or financial ability.

The additional \$5,000 Elizabeth Lindsay Arts in Education Grant will support Sarasota Opera's 2026 Community Outreach and Engagement Program, with a focus on K–12 students in Sarasota and Manatee counties. Through the company's Resident Artist Program, Sarasota Opera is delivering age-appropriate opera demonstrations, classroom presentations, educator workshops, two-generation parent-and-student workshops, and Opera House tour opportunities to over 40 schools in the area.

About The Exchange

The Exchange is a Sarasota nonprofit consignment organization supporting arts-related programs and education. Through proceeds generated by its consignment operation, The Exchange provides grants and scholarships to local visual and performing arts organizations, arts education initiatives, and students pursuing studies in the arts.

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 68th season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast and celebrating 100 years of the historic Sarasota Opera House. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984, the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater — now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive youth opera program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, which underwent a \$20 million renovation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Richard Russell has served as General Director since 2012 and added the role of Artistic Director in June 2026. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

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