



SARASOTA OPERA

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Sarasota Opera Receives \$25,000 Grant from 1st Source Foundation to Support Opera House Centennial Documentary

March 2, 2026 — Sarasota Opera is pleased to announce that it has received a \$25,000 grant from the [1st Source Foundation](#) in support of its upcoming feature-length documentary celebrating 100 years of the historic Sarasota Opera House, originally opened in 1926 as the Edwards Theatre.

The documentary, tentatively titled *The Sarasota Opera House: A Centennial Celebration*, is being produced by Steve Sabato in collaboration with Rene Gilmore of ABC7's Empowering Voices. The film will explore the Opera House's architectural, cultural, and performance history, tracing its evolution from a landmark silent-movie palace to one of the most respected opera venues in the United States. Through rarely seen archival footage, newly recorded interviews, and narrative storytelling, the project will highlight the building's enduring role in the artistic life of Florida's Gulf Coast.

"This centennial is more than a milestone for the company," said Sarasota Opera General Director Richard Russell, "It is an opportunity to honor a cultural institution that has helped shape Sarasota for generations."

The documentary will feature perspectives from local historians, artists, longtime patrons, and community members whose stories reflect the Opera House's century of transformation, from its early days as the Edwards Theatre to its revitalization and expansion into a world-class opera venue.

"1st Source Foundation is pleased to support Sarasota Opera's 100th anniversary documentary," said Cynthia Miller, Vice President at 1st Source Bank. "This documentary will highlight the opera house's incredible history of enriching the community by creating cultural experiences that bring people together."

The documentary will premiere at the Opera House on Sunday, April 12 at a community open house event and will premiere on television on PBS WEDU on April 9. The film will be shared through community screenings, Sarasota Opera's digital channels, educational outreach, and partnerships with local cultural organizations. The project is one of several initiatives marking Sarasota Opera's yearlong centennial celebration.

For more information about Sarasota Opera and its centennial initiatives, please visit <https://www.sarasotaopera.org/Centennial>

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 67th 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 and rehabilitation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi and the administrative leadership of General Director Richard Russell since 2012. In June 2026 Maestro DeRenzi will be stepping down from the company and Mr. Russell will add Artistic Director to his responsibilities. 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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