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Sarasota Youth Opera Presents *Rootabaga Country* November 7 & 8

September 22, 2026 – On November 7 and 8, 2026, [Sarasota Youth Opera](#) will present Rachel J. Peters' one-act opera *Rootabaga Country*, a whimsical journey of imagination, family, and self-discovery based on Carl Sandburg's 1922 book, *Rootabaga Stories*.

Since its inception in 1984, the Youth Opera Program at Sarasota Opera has become a national model for opera education, offering instruction from noted professionals in the opera industry and participation in main stage opera productions, concerts, and summer programs. Each year, the Sarasota Youth Opera presents a fully staged production with Sarasota Opera's world class orchestra, sets, and costumes, with Youth Opera members aged 8-18 performing alongside professional artists.

Youth Opera member Abril Sanchez-Rodriguez, 12, who plays Please Gimme in this year's production, said: "This is my first main role, and it is amazing to be in the center of the story. I love everything about this magical and whimsical opera. I hope the audience will feel what I feel and be uplifted by the beautiful music."

Rootabaga Country was first commissioned and performed by the Sarasota Youth Opera in 2017 as part of the company's mission to foster new operatic works for children and young adults. Inspired by legendary poet Carl Sandburg's book of *Rootabaga Stories*, this colorful adventure follows a father and his two children as they journey through the imaginative landscape of Rootabaga Country to learn more about the mother they miss. Along the way, they discover that love and belonging come in many forms, offering a gentle, resonant reflection on curiosity, courage, and the shape of family. Musically crafted for young voices yet rich in character, *Rootabaga Country* blends playful storytelling with heartfelt themes.

Composer and librettist [Rachel J. Peters](#) always felt a kindred spirit in Carl Sandburg's writing. "With *Rootabaga Stories*," she writes, "he struck an uncanny balance of silliness and profundity, resulting in a tone and landscape like nothing I have yet witnessed in the youth opera repertoire. The delightfully odd characters and their shenanigans comprise a world that feels familiar yet reaches far beyond our everyday experience. From the Potato Face Blind Man's accordion-

accompanied life lessons to Henry Hagglyhoagly's frozen guitar serenade, so much music already lives in these tales that it is impossible not to imagine it while reading them. I can think of no better vehicle than opera to introduce this uniquely American literary master and folk hero to a new generation.”

Artists and Creative Team

Joining the Sarasota Youth Opera are two returning members of Sarasota Opera’s Studio Artist program. Tenor **Dylan Schang** performs the role of Gimme the Ax, while baritone **Riley Findley** plays the Potato Face Blind Man. The production will be conducted by **Jessé Martins** and directed by **Martha Collins**. Scenic design is by **Sheryl Liu**, with costumes by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**.

Performance Dates

Saturday, November 7 at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 8 at 12:00 p.m.

Rootabaga Country will be performed in English with an estimated run time of 1 hour.

Explore and Engage

For a deeper understanding of *Rootabaga Country* guests are invited to visit the [Digital Content Guide](#). The next episode of Sarasota Opera’s [Behind the Blue Curtain Podcast: Rootabaga Country: From Page to Stage](#)—featuring composer Rachel J. Peters, stage director Martha Collins, and conductor Jessé Martins – will drop on Friday, October 9.

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. Sarasota Opera • 61 N. Pineapple Avenue • Sarasota, FL 34236 • (941) 366-8450 • SarasotaOpera.org