

Award-Winning Composer Brings Opera to Real People in Florida Frontiers Lecture

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GAINESVILLE – For one New York composer, opera is not the foreign form it is often perceived to be. Add rock music and a talk show host, and the composer’s new genre is one for a “real” person.

Award-winning composer and director Mikel Rouse will present “Real Opera for Real People” on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Black Box Theatre, as part of the Florida Frontiers Lecture Series. The event is free and open to the public.

In 2002, The New York Times hailed Rouse as “. . . a composer many believe to be the best of his generation.” Known for what he calls “counterpoetry,” Rouse’s works combine sung and spoken words to appeal to the average person while including the intricacies of jazz and African musical structures. The technique is seen in several of his works, including the 1996 opera Dennis Cleveland – a rock-influenced, talk-show opera performed as part of the Lincoln Center’s 2002 Great Performers New Visions series.

“Mikel Rouse is one of the new visionaries in terms of contemporary music,” said Michael Blachly, University of Florida performing arts director. “As a composer he is working to involve music, film, digital technology, and complex poetry in a way that redefines the art form.”

Rouse, a graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute and the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, moved to New York City in 1979, where he studied African and other world music and began his study of the Schillinger Method of Composition.

His works have been throughout the U.S. and Europe. He has received numerous grants and awards, including several American Society of Composers and Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) awards. Rouse has recorded more than 10 works spanning a variety of genres, directed three films, produced more than five contemporary operas, and is currently in production for a feature-length, film adaptation of Dennis Cleveland.

The Phillips Center for the Performing Arts also will host the world premiere of Rouse’s cameraworld on March 1 at 8 p.m. A collaboration with filmmaker Cliff Baldwin, the production fuses rap music with live media to take its audience on a tour of the United States in mobile surveillance. For more information about the performance, contact the Phillips Center Box Office at (352) 392-ARTS.

Rouse is the seventh speaker in the Florida Frontiers Lecture Series celebrating UF’s sesquicentennial celebration. Organized by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the series brings to campus prominent speakers and performers who lead the frontiers of modern research. Speakers are hosted every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

The lecture series continues March 5 with UF associate professor of journalism Laurence Alexander delivering a lecture concerning journalists’ role in airport safety. On March 19, Richard Rorty, professor of comparative literature at Stanford University, will present “Analytic Philosophy and Narrative Philosophy” at the Harn Museum of Art.

For more information about the Florida Frontiers Lecture Series visit www.clas.ufl.edu/150. For more information on Mikel Rouse visit www.mikelrouse.com.