



**Flat-out fun!**

Sal, proprietor of Sal's Place, home of the best fish fry on Lake Cattywampus, needs someone to manage things before she joins the professional pickle ball circuit. She announces a challenge – the person who successfully completes all three tasks will get Sal's secret recipe and the restaurant. There's action, intrigue, and unexpected romance as contestants vie for the top spot, and eccentric tourists hunt the lake's fabled Giant Muskie. Ultimately, everyone gets their just desserts, ensuring a future full of good fun and good flavors.

# It's *Guys on Ice* meets *Chopped* for A *Night at the Opera*.

**Fish Fry** celebrates Wisconsin's beloved dining tradition with comedy, opera, and a secret recipe.

A TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater and Fresco Opera Theatre production, **Fish Fry** plays with the conventions of opera. Featuring arias from well-known operas with new lyrics, the show has fish singing the Papageno/Papagena duet from Mozart's **Magic Flute** and in Verdi's "Parigi o cara," from **La Traviata**, a couple plans the supper club of their dreams.



**Fish Fry** travels with 6 performers, a pianist, and a stage manager. Technical needs are minimal because this production was designed to play venues of all stages, from arts centers to supper clubs, Master classes in singing, playwrighting, and tap dance are available from the artistic leaders of both companies, who perform in the production; Fresco Opera's Dr. Melanie Cain, and the award-winning author and choreographer from TAPIT/new works, Danielle Dresden and Donna Peckett.



TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater was founded in 1985 with the twin goals of artistic innovation and community connection. We pursue these goals through creation and performance of multi-disciplinary productions, arts education, and outreach. We have developed, produced and performed 39 new plays, 15 tap and jazz music performances, and 11 works for young audiences, touring throughout the U.S. and abroad. Through short and long-term residencies, we have reached thousands of under-served arts audiences, from older adults to youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. TAPIT/new works is committed to going beyond the "One Night Only" approach to the performing arts, and we continually strive to deepen and expand the ways in which people from different backgrounds connect with our work.



Founded in 2009, Fresco Opera Theatre has produced 18 original, re-imagined opera productions, from staging opera in a boxing ring in **Dueling Divas** to its popular summer series, **Garage Opera**. Fresco Opera Theatre was voted 2013's best performing arts group by Madison Magazine readers in Wisconsin. Fresco literally takes opera to the people, performing in non-traditional venues such as public gardens, parks, and, of course, suburban garages.

FOR BOOKING INFORMATION, CONTACT

TAPIT/NEW WORKS ENSEMBLE THEATER

[WWW.TAPITNEWWORKS.ORG](http://WWW.TAPITNEWWORKS.ORG) + [INFO@TAPITNEWWORKS.ORG](mailto:INFO@TAPITNEWWORKS.ORG) + 608.244.2938

## Wisc-opera

"Fish Fry" captures the recipe for a cultural touchstone

BY JAY RATH

MAY 16, 2019

RSS



MAX WENDT

Isaac Brieske, left, plays C-Roc "the franchise king" and Liz Light plays Cookie.

Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" — the opera cycle with the Viking helmet woman — features gods, golden apples, a dwarf and a giant who (spoiler alert) is turned into a dragon. So who's to say a new opera about Wisconsin fish fries is crazy?

*Fish Fry*, billed as "comedy, opera and a secret recipe," premieres May 23-June 2 at TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater, in association with Madison's Fresco Opera Theatre.

Playwright and lyricist Danielle Dresden says she came up with the idea about a year ago when she was participating in *Arts Day*, an annual advocacy event sponsored by Arts Wisconsin.

"A person was giving a presentation about the wide range of artistic resources and artistic enterprise in the state of Wisconsin," she says, her voice dropping an octave. "And then I thought *fish fry*."

"And then I thought — I don't know why — with opera!"

Thus was born the story of Sal's Supper Club and Fish Fry on Lake Cattywampus. Holder of the famed secret recipe, Sal is departing to join the professional pickleball circuit. C-Roc,

"the franchise king," makes an appearance, as well as Sue Salamander, editor of *Snootour Magazine*: "for foodies who are too full of themselves to eat anything less than fabulous."

Who should then show up but two tourists auditioning for the Busybodies television network. "They hunt fantastical creatures, and they're looking for the giant muskie of Lake Cattywompus," says Dresden.

Fresco Opera usually performs classic operas as they were written, setting pieces in pop culture settings. This time, lyrics to arias are provided by Dresden, who mined works such as "The Anvil Chorus" from Giuseppe Verdi's 1853 opera, *Il trovatore*.

"To develop the plot I read summaries and took a dive into standard tropes of opera," she says. "The plot incorporates some of the elements of opera, such as challenges. There are magic potions, disguises — and fish singing a long time before they die."

A big assist came from Janet Gilmore, UW-Madison professor of landscape architecture and folklore studies. Gilmore will facilitate audience discussions after performances on May 24, 30 and June 1.

"She's fascinating," says Dresden. "She has actually written papers on the Wisconsin fish fry, and she's also studied fishing communities and fishing families. Her insights helped inform the development of the show: the script, the plot and specific lines about perch fisheries and things like that."

Longtime Madison theater veteran Sarah Whelan directs, and musical direction is by Fresco's Melanie Cain; her husband, Frank Cain, serves as the stage manager.

"Opera purists may come at me with tar and feathers," says Dresden. But, she says, the show was created "in a spirit of fun and inclusiveness in a time when there's not much of that around."

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## COMMENTS

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## RELATED

### Fish Fry

Fresco Opera Theatre & TAPIT/new works collaboration, 7:30 pm on 5/23-24 & 30-31, 3 & 7:30 pm on 5/25 & 6/1 and 3 pm, 5/26 & 6/2, at TAPIT.

JUN 2, 2019, 3:00:00 PM

MAX WENDT

### Atypical mystery

Payton Cardella does a stellar job playing a neuro-atypical protagonist in Strollers Theatre's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time."

MAY 16, 2019

## 'Fish Fry': the opera Wisconsin needed

Fresco Opera, Tap It team up for tasty production

By:

[Greg Hettmansberger](https://www.channel3000.com/meet-the-team/greg-hettmansberger/155251155) (<https://www.channel3000.com/meet-the-team/greg-hettmansberger/155251155>)

 (<mailto:30616554@wisc.example.org>)

Posted: May 21, 2019 01:00 PM CDT Updated: May 21, 2019 02:30 PM CDT

In more than four centuries of opera, audiences have been treated to singing dragons, femme fatale gypsies, all manner of absurd mistaken identities and plots so convoluted that even the greatest music barely helps make the storylines comprehensible.

But what musically adventurous Wisconsinites haven't had to date is an opera about a particularly beloved regional tradition: the fish fry.

The time for that opera has come with "Fish Fry," an out-of-the-box presentation from Madison-based Fresco Opera Theatre and Tap It/new works Ensemble Theater. Fresco Opera has been delighting traditional opera lovers and introducing the form in fresh ways for nearly a decade, while Tap It/new works has been "under the radar since 1985," according to Danielle Dresden of Tap It/new works.

It's not the first time these groups have collaborated, however. The first occasion was in 2014 when the put on "Convenience" in the neighborhood they share near Schenk's Corners on the eastside.

"[Fresco Opera's] artistic perspective matches ours because they want to break opera wide open," says Donna Peckett of Tap It/new works. "Tap It only presents original work that comes from inspirations regarding social justice and artistic excellence, and we seem to mesh."

Dresden says that when the idea came to her last June, she immediately contacted Fresco Opera co-founder Melanie Cain. Cain selected some well-known arias from the likes of Verdi, Mozart and Bizet — to which Dresden composed new lyrics.

"It's really a play, a comedy, but with some music added in," Dresden says.

The plot has enough tomfoolery to satisfy even the most jaded opera buff. The story involves the proprietor of Sal's Place, known for the best fish fry on Lake Cattywompus. When Sal decided to play professional pickleball, she contrives a contest in which the winner gets her secret recipe and the restaurant.

"There's lots of action, intrigue, and unexpected romance," according to the Fresco Opera website. "Ultimately, all candidates get their just desserts, ensuring a future full of good fun and good flavors."

Speaking of jaded opera buffs, if you've heard certain tunes a little too often, there's no better way to freshen them up than by pairing them with a zany story. For example, Dresden's new lyrics set to the famous Papageno/Papagena duet in Mozart's "Magic Flute" include the lines "I am rising to your bait, this must be my wondrous fate."

ADVERTISING

All the singing is handled by Melanie Cain and George Abbott as they play a farm-raised fish and a wild fish. In all there is a cast of six, plus a pianist.

While there are plenty of performances — May 23-25 and 30-31 at 7:30 p.m. and May 25-26 and June 1-2 at 3 p.m. — the Tap It theater at 1957 Winnebago Street seats only about 50 people.

*Greg Hettsmansberger covers the opera, classical and jazz scenes for madisonmagazine.com.*

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**OUR WORK IS ABOUT CONNECTIONS....**  
**BETWEEN PEOPLE**  
**BETWEEN ART FORMS**  
**BETWEEN ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES**

TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater, founded by producing artistic directors Donna Peckett and Danielle Dresden, March 28, 1985, develops and performs new theater, promotes the art of tap dance and strives to create an arts organization transcending the "One Night Only" mindset. A company devoted to new work and based in Madison, Wisconsin, rather than a big city, was not a likely proposition, but close to three decades later, artistic innovation and community connection still

drive us. We pursue these twin goals through performance of multi-disciplinary plays we develop and tour, arts education, residencies and outreach.

## TAPIT/NEW WORKS ENSEMBLE THEATER

Our work combines comedy, drama, and whimsy, and it always addresses matters people care about – life, love, death, food, gardens, zombies, and fish fries. Both at home and on the road, we make a point of involving the community in pre-show developmental and post-performance discussions to deepen their engagement with the arts and make new work more accessible.

We have developed, produced and performed 38 new plays, 15 tap and jazz music performances and 11 works for young audiences. The Company tours throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Rhythm tap dance classes are an ongoing part of our programming, whether we're in Madison or on tour. Since 2000, we have conducted 25 youth arts residencies and developed a model residency format, combining workshops in creative writing, drama and dance with performance practice to boost literacy skills and self-esteem in students from low-income backgrounds.



**Donna Peckett** is a choreographer, actor, tap dancer and arts educator. She received two Choreography Fellowships from the Wisconsin Arts Board and was recognized by the Wisconsin Dance Council for her contributions to the field. She received a BA in Art History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and trained with the Bread and Puppet Theater and at the HB Studio in New York City.

**Danielle Dresden**, playwright, actor and residency artist, is producing artistic director of TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater, which she co-founded in 1985. Dresden has received numerous playwriting awards, including a 2010 Wisconsin Arts Board Literary Arts Fellowship, the 1999 Finalist for the Yukon Pacific New Play Award at the Edward Albee Conference in Valdez, Alaska and the Council for Wisconsin Writers Drama Awards in 2001, 2003 and 2006. Dresden is the author of 40 plays and has served as a panelist and presenter at the Last Frontier Theater Festival since 2002. She has a Masters in Arts Administration from the Bolz Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.





## Fresco Opera Theatre

*Delivering opera to all generations through fresh unique entertainment*

Fresco Opera Theatre strives to bring the beauty of operatic music to current opera fans and also to cultivate a new generation of opera lovers by presenting opera from a modern perspective. Our purpose is to present opera in a fresh accessible way by producing creative versions of operas, new works, themed concerts, scene programs, condensed versions of larger works, and fully staged productions.

We create and provide educational programs that both enrich the operatic experience and encourage future generations of artists and audiences through community outreach, educational initiatives, and collaboration with other arts organizations.

Founded by Frank and Melanie Cain in 2009, Fresco Opera Theatre has produced 18 original, re-imagined opera productions, from staging opera in a boxing ring in ***Dueling Divas*** to its popular summer series, ***Garage Opera***. Fresco Opera Theatre was voted 2013's best performing arts group by Madison Magazine readers.

### MELANIE CAIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/CO-FOUNDER



Melanie Cain, Soprano, holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Vocal Performance and Opera Production and a Masters of Music from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A native of Carroll, Iowa, she received her BA in both Music and Art from Luther College in Decorah, IA.

Ms. Cain was Assistant Director/Stage Manager of the UW Opera's productions of Orpheus in the Underworld, Mozart's Così Fan Tutte and Le Nozze di Figaro, and Carmen under the direction of William Farlow. She was administrator and project manager for Dorian Opera Theatre for several seasons. Currently she operates [Maven Vocal Arts](#). She is also on the Board of Directors of the [National Association of Teachers of Singing](#) and previous Co-Director of [The](#)

## Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Wisconsin District.

Melanie has performed both in the Madison area and nationally receiving rave reviews. The Capital Times wrote, "Melanie Cain sang with a gorgeous range and a strong, thrilling voice that projected to the top row. Cain is a graduate student in vocal performance with a big career ahead of her." Her past roles include Second Lady in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, The Mother and The Witch in Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel, Madame Lidoine in The Dialogues of the Carmelites, Alice Ford in Falstaff, Rosalinda in Die Fledermaus. She has also studied the roles of Leonora in Beethoven's Fidelio, Miss Jessel in Britten's The Turn of the Screw, the title role from Gluck's Armide and Salome in Herodiade by Massenet in UW's Opera Workshop. While at UW, Cain understudied the well-known soprano, Julia Faulkner, in the title role of Vanessa. She has been a finalist and semi-finalist in numerous national vocal competitions including the Orpheus National Vocal Competition in Tennessee and the prestigious Jenson Vocal Competition in New York.

### **FRANK CAIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CO-FOUNDER**



Frank's first love was singing. Most of his life has been devoted to music. His first taste of opera was working as an administrative assistant for Dorian Opera Theatre in Decorah, Iowa. During that time, he learned the ropes which included overseeing the audition process, orchestrating special events, and fundraising. From there, Frank went on to work in the insurance industry as an operations manager. For over 15 years, Frank has implemented successful revenue generating programs in several organizations, and proven to be a leader that generates excitement around a vision and creates a clear path to success. Frank's heart has led him back to his first

passion. He is excited to share his love of Opera with others and develop a fresh approach to the genre that will transcend cultural lines. He holds a Bachelors of Music Management from Luther College and an Executive MBA from Capella University. Frank is originally from Carroll, Iowa where he grew up down the block from his beautiful wife, Melanie. They have two wiener dogs named Mabel and Caesar, and he enjoys riding his bike. I live by this quote: "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." - Anais Nin