

Longue Vue House and Gardens

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Longue Vue Premieres Scenes from *Freedom Ride*, An Opera to Commemorate Civil Rights Freedom Riders

Opera staged for two public performances only, Oct. 20 & 22

NEW ORLEANS, LA—In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the historic Civil Rights Freedom Rides, Longue Vue House and Gardens premieres three vignettes from *Freedom Ride*, a newly commissioned concert opera by composer and Xavier University professor Dan Shore. Tickets are \$500 for the Oct. 20 premiere performance and include admission to Longue Vue's annual gala fundraiser. Tickets for the Oct. 22 performance are \$75.



Freedom Ride Composer, Dan Shore
Photo credit: Susan Wilson

“Longue Vue founders Edith and Edgar Stern commissioned new works, supported emerging artists and engaged the community in social justice discourse,” said Executive Director Joe Baker. “*Freedom Ride* continues the Sterns’ legacy and reinvigorates the museum’s commitment to offering lively, contemporary programs that are significant to the New Orleans community.”

Freedom Ride is set in 1961, as activists who became known as Freedom Riders began traveling on interstate buses into the American South to draw attention to civil rights injustices and challenge the segregated public transportation system. The opera tells the story of Sylvie Davenport, a fictional African American resident of Pontchartrain Park who is preparing to attend college on scholarship. The Freedom Riders have just arrived in New Orleans and are seeking activists to travel to Jackson, Mississippi, where they most likely will be jailed by local police. Although initially wary of joining

the movement, Sylvie is drawn in by Clayton Thomas, an old acquaintance who has become a Freedom Rider. As reports of beatings and mob violence in Mississippi reach New Orleans, Sylvie’s mother forbids her from riding the buses, fearing for her safety and warning her that she stands to forfeit her scholarship if she is arrested. Torn between pursuing her academic career and joining the civil rights movement, Sylvie’s story of self-realization and love highlights the courage and sacrifice of those who pursue social justice.

Staging and Performers

Edith and Edgar Stern used their home as a hub for political activity, organizing debates and discussions about philanthropy, community and civic action. Accordingly, the three scenes from *Freedom Ride* will be staged on the grounds at Longue Vue, in the museum's impressive Spanish Court. This site-specific work will feature internationally acclaimed soloists: Dara Rahming (soprano), Valerie Jones Francis (soprano), Chauncey Packer (tenor) and Anthony Zoeller (baritone). The soloists will be accompanied by celebrated pianist Wilfred Delphin and the Xavier University of Louisiana Concert Choir, directed by John Ware.

A Legacy of Artistic Support

The Sterns passionately supported emerging artists, including internationally renowned soprano and native New Orleanian Annabelle Bernard (1940–2005). In keeping with the Sterns' legacy, composer Dan Shore was commissioned to create an opera for Longue Vue. Baker wanted to create a socially significant work with a local connection and Shore began researching the Freedom Riders. As he crafted the story for the opera, Shore thought about the circumstances of an individual who would defy convention and join the Civil Rights Movement, despite knowing the risks involved.

"Who was the person who had the guts to do this? What is that process? When I thought about that I realized I had my opera," Shore said.

The 2011 recipient of the *Gambit's* Big Easy Entertainment Award for Creative Achievement in Opera, Shore's other operas and plays include *An Embarrassing Position*, *Travel*, and *The Beautiful Bridegroom*, which was awarded first prize in the National Opera Association's Chamber Opera Composition Competition and has been produced over a dozen times across the country. He is an alumnus of the BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop and a Fulbright scholar; he holds a B.M. and M.M. from the New England Conservatory and a Ph.D. from the City University of New York.

Freedom Ride is part of an ongoing effort by Baker to reconnect with Longue Vue's mission of supporting civic engagement, environmental stewardship and artistic practice. In addition to *Freedom Ride*, Longue Vue has embarked on an ambitious agenda that stresses the museum's role as a resource for adult and youth education and a catalyst for social change.

About Longue Vue

Longue Vue House and Gardens is an eight-acre Country Place Era estate comprised of a Classical Revival-style mansion surrounded by 11 different gardens, including an interactive children's garden. The former home of philanthropists Edith and Edgar Stern, Longue Vue now serves as an educational and cultural resource. Longue Vue offers tours daily and holds events and exhibits that fulfill its mission "to preserve and use the historical and artistic legacy of Longue Vue and its creators to educate and inspire people to pursue beauty and civic responsibility in their lives." Longue Vue, a designated National Historic Landmark, is accredited by the American Association of Museums and included on the National Register of Historic Places. For more information, visit www.longuevue.com.