



ARTS & CULTURE

New York Met Opera Reopens after 18 Month-long COVID Closure

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“We bend, we don't break. We **sway!**” the performers sing in the second act of Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*.

That message of survival in dark times was well-received by the thousands watching the Metropolitan Opera in New York City this week. Its theater went dark in March 2020 in reaction to the COVID-19 crisis. It reopened Monday night at its Lincoln Center home.

The suspension had lasted 566 days. COVID may have bent The Met, but the Met did not break.

The showing made Met Opera history: Blanchard became the first Black **composer** to have his work performed by the Met.

About 4,000 people attended the event. Many in the crowd wore costly clothes and shiny jewels. The fans met with each other warmly, seeming to share in the joy they felt to be back at Lincoln Center.

At the end of the opera, the crowd went wild --- **applauding** for more than eight minutes.

Kasi Lemmons wrote the words to *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* based on a story by Charles M. Blow, a New York Times opinion writer. Blow and Lemmons both received loud cheers when they appeared on stage with Blanchard.

The night was a great victory for the 59-year-old composer and trumpet player. Like Blow, Blanchard is from Louisiana. That southern state is where the story takes place. It explores child sex abuse in **segregated** northern Louisiana during the 1970s.

This was Blanchard's second opera after 2013's *Champion*, based on the life of professional fighter Emile Griffith.

Blanchard and Lemmons shrink a largely descriptive book to some main events in Blow's telling of his life experience: his family life as the youngest of five children, the abuse by a relative, his religion, and his time in college. It also explores Blow's search for love, first with Evelyn and later Greta. The audience's biggest reaction was for the dancing college students, who **stole the show**.

Blanchard and Lemmons move the **plot** along by having the adult Charles, performed by Will Liverman, sing alongside the young Charles. Walter Russell III, a 13-year-old who plays the young Charles, got the biggest cheers individually for his moving performance.

I'm Caty Weaver.

Ronald Blum reported this story for the Associated Press. Caty Weaver adapted it for Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.

Words in This Story

sway - *v.* to move slowly back and forth

composer - *n.* a person who writes music

applaud - *v.* to strike the hands together over and over to show approval or praise

segregated - *adj.* restricted to members of one group or one race by a policy of segregation

stole the show - *verb phrase* to get more attention and praise than anyone or anything else, by doing something better than others do

