

MEDIA ALERT

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Tomasz Jedrowski's Acclaimed Novel *Swimming in the Dark* Reimagined as an Opera: Love, Politics, and Identity Take Center Stage in Key West

Key West, FL — The Studios of Key West will host an extraordinary cultural event as Tomasz Jedrowski's acclaimed LGBTQ novel, *Swimming in the Dark*, hailed as a modern literary classic for its poignant exploration of love and identity under political oppression, is reimagined as a compelling opera. A pivotal milestone in the project—a developmental staged concert featuring Act One of the opera—will premiere at The Studios on Friday, March 21, and Saturday, March 22, 2025.

This bold adaptation is a collaboration between composer Martin Hennessy, librettist Stephen Kitsakos, and Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music Opera & Ballet Theater. Featuring 18 artists from Jacobs, the production highlights the significance of adapting powerful literary works into opera, a medium uniquely capable of expressing the depth and complexity of human emotion.

"The story unfolds in 1980, as the communist Polish People's Republic teeters on the edge of collapse," said librettist Stephen Kitsakos. "At its heart is a passionate love affair, but it's also a gripping political thriller set in a country being torn apart by upheaval."

The opera follows Ludwik and Janusz, two young men whose love is tested by the political turmoil of their time. Their romance begins during a mandatory agricultural camp, where they bond over James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. Ludwik, drawn to acts of subversion, aligns with the Solidarity movement, while Janusz clings to survival within the communist system. The result is a heartbreaking exploration of love, identity, and the cost of living authentically in an oppressive society.

Directed by Michael Shell, Resident Opera Stage Director at the Jacobs School, the 85-minute Act One will be performed in English by 12 singers and a chamber ensemble. This workshop not only introduces the first act of the opera to audiences but underscores its place in the larger developmental process, showcasing the cultural importance of adapting landmark queer stories for the stage.

Kitsakos and Hennessy have a long history of presenting innovative operas, including *Single Occupancies*, which premiered at The Studios in 2020, and *The Pleasing Recollection*, which debuted there before its New York premiere at Feinstein's/54 Below. Kitsakos's adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, with music by Sheila Silver, premiered with Seattle Opera in 2023 and was shortlisted for Best New Opera at the International Opera Awards. Hennessy's recent commission with Madrid's Teatro Real features a libretto by Spanish poet Irma Correa.

The Jacobs School of Music Opera & Ballet Theater has collaborated with renowned companies such as the Santa Fe Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Seattle Opera. Recently, it partnered with the Metropolitan Opera to workshop *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon.

Swimming in the Dark is a poignant reminder of how love and art can challenge political oppression, a message that feels especially urgent today as LGBTQ rights face renewed attacks.

Whether you're a seasoned opera fan or completely new to the genre, *Swimming in the Dark* promises an unforgettable experience and a powerful evening of love, art, and resistance. Experience a story that dares to explore the intersection of passion and politics, brought to life through the transformative power of opera.

About The Studios of Key West:

The Studios of Key West is a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to supporting artists, inspiring creativity, and building community. Located in the heart of Old Town Key West, The Studios offers exhibitions, performances, workshops, and artist residencies. Known for fostering cutting-edge projects and innovative collaborations, The Studios serves as a vibrant hub for art and culture in the Florida Keys.

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