



# Hewlett Foundation Announces Largest Ever Commissions in Folk and Traditional Arts

***New Round of Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions honors world-class artists steeped in diverse cultural traditions***

(Menlo Park, Calif. - October 26, 2021) — [The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#) announced today the recipients of this year's Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions in Folk and Traditional Arts. The commissions will support 10 master artists in the development of major new works in traditional art forms and cultural practices, in concert with an array of Bay Area cultural institutions and nonprofit organizations. This year's commissions represent the largest-ever single infusion of support into the historically underfunded space, and will facilitate both the preservation and evolution of traditional arts by framing them in contemporary contexts.

Launched in 2017 in honor of the Hewlett Foundation's [50th anniversary](#), the five-year, \$8 million Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions are a symbol of the foundation's commitment to artistic expression and public engagement with the arts in the San Francisco Bay Area. Each year, they provide grants of \$150,000 each to 10 Bay Area nonprofits to bring world-class art in one of five performing arts disciplines to communities across the Bay Area, with the commissioned projects going on to inspire, engage, and challenge audiences across the country and around the world in years to come. A minimum of \$50,000 of each grant goes directly to the commissioned artist, and the balance to the nonprofit to fund development and production of the commission.

The 10 new commissions showcase the urgency of cultural preservation by honoring a broad array of artistic, musical, and cultural traditions. While the awards are rooted in the experiences of communities in and around the Bay Area, their significance extends far beyond it. Many of the commissions involve extended periods of international travel and field research and will represent cultural milestones. For example, these commissions include the first-ever American

presentation of a two-day Tibetan opera in the Ache Lhamo tradition, as well as the largest Indian Nautanki folk opera ever staged in the United States.

"These commissions in Folk and Traditional Arts celebrate a group of outstanding artists and culture bearers who are advancing rich cultural traditions from the Bay Area and around the world," said **Emiko Ono**, director of Hewlett's Performing Arts Program, "We're honored to support these vital efforts, which simultaneously deepen the knowledge these traditions carry and renew them by incorporating new perspectives and new contexts."

This year's Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions, selected through a process administered for the foundation by the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, will premiere over the next three years at a range of Bay Area cultural centers and institutions.

The lead artists for this year's projects are: Brazilian American capoeira master and teacher **Marcia Treidler**; African American blues and jazz vocalist **The Dynamic Miss Faye Carol**; Iranian singer and musician **Mahsa Vahdat**; Tibetan American musician, dancer, and Tibetan opera singer **Tsering Wangmo**; seventh-generation Nautanki opera performer, writer, director, and guru **Devendra Sharma**; Afro-Cuban choreographer **Susana Arenas Pedroso**; Ghanaian American choreographer and master drummer **CK Ladzekpo**; Cambodian American dancer/choreographer and culture bearer **Charya Burt**; Native American (Tongva/Acjachemen/Raramuri) artist **L. Frank Manriquez**; and composer and Vietnamese master traditional artist **Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ**.

This year's commissioning organizations are: **ABADÁ-Capoeira San Francisco, Art + Soul Oakland** (dba Heart of the Town), **Berkeley Society for the Preservation of Traditional Music** (dba Freight & Salvage), **Chaksam-pa, Dance Brigade** (aka Dance Mission Theater), **Devendra Sharma Nautanki Folk Opera Ensemble** (with fiscal sponsorship by CounterPulse), **East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, Musical Traditions, Queer Cultural Center**, and **Vietnamese American Nongovernmental Organization Network (VANGO)**.

More information about all of the commissions and presenting organizations is below.

"I'm thrilled to receive this esteemed commission that will allow me to bring together the rich history of Black American music from blues to hip-hop with an all-star ensemble incorporating the greatest jazz musicians of our time, one of Oakland's finest homegrown rappers, and a string quartet," said vocalist **The Dynamic Miss Faye Carol**, one of the commissioned artists. "This commission is an invaluable opportunity to celebrate our culture at Oakland's 2022 Art + Soul Festival and present the breadth of music of my culture to Bay Area audiences in free performances in the Black communities of Richmond, Pittsburg, East Palo Alto, and Bayview."

Applications for the next and final round of the Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions, supporting Media Arts, will open later this year. More information can be found on the [Hewlett Foundation website](#).

## **The 2021 Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions in Folk and Traditional Arts**

### **ABADÁ-Capoeira San Francisco**

*Marcia Treidler*

ABADÁ-Capoeira is commissioning Brazilian American capoeira master and teacher Marcia Treidler to conduct research and interviews to uncover the story of pioneering women in the Brazilian traditional arts. The work will focus mainly on the story of Marcia Treidler's 40-year history of teaching, preserving, and performing capoeira. It will include elements of acrobatic movement, self-defense, theater, and music. The project title is "Cigarra," and the premiere will take place in 2024.

### **Art + Soul Oakland (dba Heart of the Town)**

*Faye Carol*

Art + Soul Oakland is commissioning African American blues and jazz vocalist The Dynamic Miss Faye Carol to create an evening-length suite of music for a cross-genre ensemble of vocals, piano, acoustic bass, drum set, string quartet, and a rapper. The work will reimagine traditional blues pieces and tell a sweeping story of Black Americans in transit from the shores of Africa, to the plantations of the American South, through the Great Migration. The title of the project is "Blues, Baroque, and Bars: From the Streets to the Symphony," and it will premiere in 2022.

### **Berkeley Society for the Preservation of Traditional Music (dba Freight & Salvage)**

*Mahsa Vahdat*

Iranian singer and musician Mahsa Vahdat, in collaboration with Freight and Salvage, has been commissioned to create and perform an evening-length song cycle set to interwoven classical and contemporary Persian texts. Presented over two nights, "Woven Verses: Poetic Resistance and Resilience" will activate voices from past and present in "a collage of text." The melodies will be a collection of rhythmic and free-metered songs, rooted in traditional and regional Persian music's complex system of modes, meter, and ornamentation used to create organic, layered, and seamless dialogue between vocals, instrumentation, and projected visual elements. The work will premiere in late 2024, accompanied by public engagements, artist talks, educational workshops, and radio interviews.

### **Chaksam-pa**

*Tsering Wangmo*

Chaksam-pa is commissioning Tibetan American musician, dancer, and Tibetan opera singer Tsering Wangmo to develop and present the first-ever American presentation of a two-day

Tibetan Opera in the Ache Lhamo tradition. She will work closely with a team of Tibetan opera artists who will perform traditional Tibetan opera as reimagined and reinterpreted by her and the collaborators. An overriding goal of the project is to preserve traditional Tibetan cultural expressions in the face of political repression of the Tibetan people in the homeland, and the looming threat of cultural erasure. The title of the project is “Celebration of the Great Shoton Festival of Tibet in the Bay Area,” and it will premiere in 2022.

### **Dance Brigade/ Dance Mission Theater**

*Susana Arenas Pedroso*

Dance Mission Theater is commissioning Afro-Cuban choreographer Susana Arenas Pedroso to collaborate with Duniya Dance and Drum Company. The work will illuminate Cuba and Guinea’s cultural and political relationships, drawing on Pedroso’s unsparing choreography, Regla de Ocha (Santería) spiritual practices, Guinea’s legacy of national dance and music companies, Cuba’s global artistic influence, and Afro-Latinx and African immigrant identities. Both Pedroso and musical director/collaborating artistic director Alpha Oumar “Bongo” Sidibe will be advised by masters of Cuban and Guinean ballet and drumming, and elders with firsthand experience of Cuba and Guinea’s political/artistic exchanges. The project title is “Raíces et Révolution” (“Roots and Revolution” in Spanish-French), and it will premiere in 2024.

### **Devendra Sharma Nautanki Folk Opera Ensemble (with fiscal sponsorship by CounterPulse)**

*Devendra Sharma*

Devendra Sharma Nautanki Folk Opera Ensemble will partner with CounterPulse to commission seventh-generation Nautanki opera performer, writer, director, and guru Devendra Sharma to create a contemporaneously interpreted, woman-centered production. Nautanki is an Indian folk opera, often produced with modest resources these days. For this reason, the lead artist and his collaborators are excited to use the Hewlett 50 Arts Commission to present a Nautanki opera at a scale never before seen in the United States. The title of the project is “Princess Nautanki,” and it will premiere in 2024.

### **East Bay Center for the Performing Arts**

*CK Ladzekpo*

East Bay Center is commissioning Ghanaian American choreographer and master drummer CK Ladzekpo to create a work that will use drumming, dancing, and ritual to reenact the Anlo-Ewe people’s historic flight from servitude in Togo – and ultimately from European coastal raiders – to freedom in Ghana. Resettling near the shallow coastal lagoons of Keta, Ghana eventually served as a defense against slave ships. This story is commemorated annually in a multi-day Ghanaian festival known as Hogbetsotso Za. CK Ladzekpo will reimagine what is traditionally a week-long reenactment performance and ritual into an evening-length performance that incorporates dance, regalia, ceremonial cleansing, and ceremonies for the renewal of justice. The work is titled “Hogbetsoto – Day of Crossing Over,” and will premiere in the summer of

2023.

### **Musical Traditions**

*Charya Burt*

Musical Traditions is commissioning Cambodian American dancer/choreographer and culture bearer Charya Burt to create a dance/theater work that will feature a reimagined Khmer classical dance set to new music by celebrated Cambodian composer Chinary Ung. The work will explore how Khmer arts have embodied the essence of Cambodian culture from ancient mythology to its post-1970s genocide revitalization. The project will bring together four generations of multi-disciplinary Cambodian American artists (composer, theatermaker, poet, and dancers) and other collaborators. The project title is “The Rebirth of Apsara: Artistic Lineage, Cultural Resilience, and the Resurrection of Cambodian Arts from the Ashes of Genocide.” The work will premiere on Cambodian Victory Over Genocide Day, which is January 7, 2024.

### **Queer Cultural Center**

*L. Frank Manriquez*

The Queer Cultural Center is commissioning Native American (Tongva/Acjachemen/Raramuri) artist L. Frank Manriquez to create a traditional ti’aat plank canoe. She will work closely with artisans and culture bearers of local California Indian Tribes, organizations, and groups to create the canoe, hold rituals together as part of the process, and conduct outreach to the intertribal diaspora of urban and other Indigenous peoples in the San Francisco Bay Area. The project title is “Eyoomkuuka’ro Kokomaar” (“We Paddle Together”). The world premiere community ritual and maiden voyage of the boat will take place in 2024 in a San Francisco Bay waterway to be determined.

### **Vietnamese American Nongovernmental Organization Network (VANGO)**

*Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ*

Composer and Vietnamese master traditional artist Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ, in collaboration with VANGO Network, has been commissioned to create “Mekong: Life,” a multimedia work that not only celebrates the cultures of people who live along the Mekong River, but showcases how environmental change has shaped Southeast Asian cultures. The commission will demonstrate how artists can contribute to the environmental justice movement and bring culture, humanity, and tradition into the cause and into our collective responses to the environmental crisis. “Mekong: Life” will be the first American production to celebrate the diverse but interconnected cultures of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. “Mekong: Life” will premiere in spring of 2023 at Stanford LIVE.

For more information on the Hewlett 50 Commissions and the Hewlett Foundation’s Performing Arts Program, please visit [hewlett.org](http://hewlett.org).

### **About the Hewlett Foundation**

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is a nonpartisan, private charitable foundation that advances ideas and supports institutions to promote a better world. For more than 50 years, the foundation has supported efforts to advance education for all, preserve the environment, support vibrant performing arts, strengthen Bay Area communities, make the philanthropy sector more effective, and foster gender equity and responsive governance around the world. Today, it is one of the largest philanthropic institutions in the United States, awarding over \$465 million in grants in 2020 to organizations across the globe to help people build better lives.

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