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Opera Colorado receives NEA grant to support professional premiere of “The Scarlet Letter”

Staging is the Culmination of Company’s 30th Anniversary Season

Denver, CO— National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Rocco Landesman recently announced that Opera Colorado is one of 832 non-profit organizations nationwide to receive an NEA Art Works grant. Opera Colorado is recommended for a \$30,000 grant to support the professional premiere of the new opera *The Scarlet Letter* by composer Lori Laitman and librettist David Mason, Colorado’s Poet Laureate. Known for presenting contemporary and rarely performed works as well as more traditional productions of classic opera repertoire, Opera Colorado will be presenting *The Scarlet Letter* as part of the Company’s 30th anniversary season.

This new adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s iconic American novel will feature soprano Elizabeth Futral, baritone Morgan Smith, and tenor James Valenti under the stage direction of Beth Greenberg. Performances will take place on May 4, 7, 10, and 12, 2013, at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House in the Denver Performing Arts Complex. Tickets are available at www.operacolorado.org or 303.468.2030.

“We are thrilled to have the support of the NEA for this very important, truly American opera,” noted General Director Greg Carpenter. “Opera Colorado selected Lori Laitman’s *The Scarlet Letter* as the first in our history main stage premiere because of Lori’s incredible talent for writing sensitive lyrical music, and for librettist David Mason’s intensely dramatic verse. We are deeply appreciative of the NEA’s commitment to supporting new American opera, and to keeping this wonderful art form alive for future generations.”

"I am proud to announce these 832 grants to the American public including Opera Colorado’s new production of this pillar of American literature," said Chairman Landesman. "These projects offer extraordinary examples of creativity in our country, including the creation of new work, innovative ways of engaging audiences, and exemplary education programs." Since 2006, Opera Colorado has received funding from the NEA for education initiatives and the commission of *La Curandera*, a bilingual opera by composer Robert Xavier Rodriguez for the Opera Colorado Outreach Ensemble.

In March 2012, the NEA received 1,509 eligible applications for Art Works requesting more than \$74 million in funding. The 832 recommended NEA grants total \$22.3 million, span 13 artistic disciplines and fields, and focus primarily on the creation of work and presentation of both new and existing works for the benefit of American audiences. Applications were reviewed by panels of outside experts convened by NEA staff and each project was judged on its artistic excellence and artistic merit.

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For a complete listing of projects recommended for Art Works grant support, please visit the NEA website at arts.gov. Additional information on *The Scarlet Letter* and the artists is available on www.OperaColorado.org.

About *The Scarlet Letter*

In old Boston, a young woman, Hester Prynne, has been charged with adultery and forced to wear the scarlet letter “A” embroidered on her breast. Just as she mounts the scaffold to receive her sentence, her husband, long presumed dead and newly escaped from captivity among the Indians, arrives and recognizes her. This man, renamed as Roger Chillingworth, begins a quest to discover the father of Hester's child. As the community wrestles with whether or not to allow Hester to continue raising her daughter, Chillingworth moves in with the pale young minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, who hides the fact that he is the father of Hester's child. In a dark night of the soul, Arthur is taunted by a local witch, and it becomes clear that he is overcome with guilt and inner conflict about his past with Hester. The two lovers meet in the forest, plotting their escape, sure they can escape the laws and mores of men in this new world. But Dimmesdale cannot forget his guilt, and during an election day ceremony he confesses his sin to the crowd, exposing a branded letter “A” over his own heart. Dimmesdale dies at the moment of his confession, and the opera moves out into a broader, lyrical sense of time in which its stories are at least partly resolved.

About Opera Colorado

A cornerstone of Denver’s cultural community, Opera Colorado presents an annual season of three operas at its downtown Denver home, the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. The Company presents new works alongside standard repertoire, and reaches more than 35,000 students and community members throughout the Rocky Mountain region through a variety of education and outreach programming. Opera Colorado Young Artists, a seven-month residency for singers at the beginning stages of their careers, provides training for the next generation of American opera performers. Founded in 1983, the Company celebrates its 30th anniversary season in 2013 with Charles Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet* (February 9-17), Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (March 30-April 7) and the professional premiere of Lori Laitman’s *The Scarlet Letter* (May 4-12). www.operacolorado.org.

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