



**Opera Colorado to Present Professional  
Premiere of New American Opera,  
*The Scarlet Letter*  
May 4-12, 2013**

**Nathaniel Hawthorne's American Classic Set to Music by Composer  
Lori Laitman, With Libretto by Colorado Poet Laureate David Mason**

**Soprano Elizabeth Futral to Star as Hester Prynne**

**Staging is the Culmination of Company's 30th Anniversary Season**

DENVER, CO—November 13, 2012—Opera Colorado will present the professional premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* by composer Lori Laitman and librettist David Mason, May 4-12, 2013. This new adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's iconic American novel will be part of Opera Colorado's 30th anniversary season, and marks the first time the work will be presented by a major, professional opera company. Known for presenting contemporary and rarely performed works as well as more traditional productions of classic opera repertoire, Opera Colorado is the preeminent grand opera company in the Rocky Mountain region.

"We believe that supporting new work is essential for keeping the art form always moving forward, speaking to contemporary audiences, and retaining opera's place as a vital part of our cultural landscape," noted General Director Greg Carpenter. "Part of Opera Colorado's mission is to make opera exciting and accessible, and by staging a contemporary work like *The Scarlet Letter* we are able to bring

a classic American story to life in an electrifying new way. Lori Laitman and David Mason's brilliant adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel speaks to issues that continue to resonate today and we are thrilled to present this new work in Denver, where our audiences have come to expect the unexpected."

Opera Colorado's production of *The Scarlet Letter* will be the first professional staging of the opera, which was commissioned by The University of Central Arkansas in 2007 and performed by students and faculty in 2008. For the production at Opera Colorado, Laitman has updated the opera's score, including new vocal lines tailored for the Denver performance, and the addition of interstitial music between scenes to allow for set changes. Under the direction of Beth Greenberg, who is making her Opera Colorado debut, and with set design by Erhard Rom and costume design by Terese Wadden, Opera Colorado's premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* will feature soprano Elizabeth Futral as Hester Prynne; baritone Morgan Smith as Roger Chillingworth; tenor James Valenti as Arthur Dimmesdale; mezzo-soprano Catherine Cook as Mistress Hibbons; baritone John Hancock as Governor Bellingham; and tenor Joel Sorensen as John Wilson. The cast will include a 24-person chorus comprised of 12 women and 12 men, including all five of Opera Colorado's 2012-2013 Young Artists in featured roles.

Opera Colorado has also commissioned Laitman to create a one-hour, one act version of *The Scarlet Letter*, which the company's Young Artists will present in Colorado schools in fall 2013 following the main stage production. Young Artists are emerging opera professionals who come to Denver for a seven-month residency, during which they receive training and coaching from Opera Colorado staff and guest artists. Young Artists perform in schools and education programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region, and often perform supporting roles in the company's three main stage productions.

"I am thrilled to have *The Scarlet Letter* receive its professional debut at Opera Colorado under the visionary direction of Beth Greenberg," said composer Lori Laitman. "Over the past year, I have re-orchestrated the work to take advantage of Denver's larger, more acoustically grand Ellie Caulkins Opera House. I am grateful to Opera Colorado for assembling such an unparalleled cast and artistic team, and I cannot wait for everyone's creative energy to bring this opera to life."

"The drama at the heart of *The Scarlet Letter* still resounds with America at large," noted librettist David Mason. "I'm grateful that Opera Colorado will be giving this work its professional premiere in the Rocky

Mountain Region, allowing my fellow Coloradoans to be the first to experience this wonderful new opera.”

“Staging a new work, especially one as beautiful and resonant as *The Scarlet Letter*, is one of the most exciting challenges for a director,” said Director Beth Greenberg. “I heard about ten seconds of Lori's music, stopped the CD, and immediately called her. Her musical voice is so clear, so compelling, and so original. Together, Laitman and Mason are an extraordinary team — they get straight to the heart of a character, resulting in a listener's effortless engagement.”

Laitman and Mason's collaborations also include *Vedem*, an oratorio based on writings by children from the Terezin concentration camp and a new opera, *Ludlow*, based on Mason's epic verse novel about the tragic Colorado mining town massacre that took place in 1914. Laitman and Mason began working together in 2004, when Laitman was asked by The West Chester University Poetry Conference to set Mason's poem *Swimmers on the Shore* to music. When the University of Central Arkansas approached Laitman about creating a new opera, she asked Mason to write the libretto, and together they chose *The Scarlet Letter*. *The Scarlet Letter* was first performed as a faculty and student performance at the University of Central Arkansas in 2008. Excerpts of the work were performed at the Clinton Presidential Library in 2009 and at the OPERA America Salon Series.

### **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 a new production of 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](http://www.operacolorado.org).

**About Lori Laitman, composer**

Lori Laitman is one of America's most prolific and widely performed composers of vocal music. She has composed two operas, an oratorio and over 200 songs, setting the words of classical and contemporary poets to music, among them the lost voices of poets who perished in the Holocaust. Laitman's one-act opera, *Come to Me in Dreams*, was premiered by Cleveland Opera in 2004, and her oratorio, *Vedem*, a commission by Music of Remembrance (another collaboration with poet David Mason), saw its world premiere in May of 2010 in Seattle, WA. A recording of *Vedem* was released on the Naxos label in May 2011. Laitman and Mason are currently working on the creation of a new opera based on *Ludlow*, Mason's award-winning epic verse novel. Since launching her career in 1991, many of Laitman's songs have entered the standard repertoire. Among them is Laitman's cycle, *The Seed of Dream* (2004), settings of Abraham Sutzkever's poems from the Vilna Ghetto. Laitman graduated magna cum laude from Yale College and received her Master of Music degree from The Yale School of Music. Her recordings are available via her website, [www.artsongs.com](http://www.artsongs.com), and on Amazon and iTunes.

**About David Mason, librettist**

David Mason was named Poet Laureate of Colorado in 2010. His books of poems include *The Buried Houses* (winner of the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize), *The Country I Remember* (winner of the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award), and *Arrivals*. His verse novel, *Ludlow*, was published in 2007, and named best poetry book of the year by the Contemporary Poetry Review and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. It was also featured on the [PBS News Hour](http://www.pbs.org). Author of a collection of essays, *The Poetry of Life* and the *Life of Poetry*, his memoir, *News from the Village*, appeared in 2010. Mason has also co-edited several textbooks and anthologies, including *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*, *Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism*, *Twentieth Century American Poetry*, and *Twentieth Century American Poetics: Poets on the Art of Poetry V*. His poetry, prose, and translations have appeared in such periodicals as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Poetry*, *Agenda*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The New Criterion*, *The Yale Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Irish Times*, and *The Southern Review*. Mason has also written the libretti for composer Lori Laitman's opera of *The Scarlet Letter* and her Holocaust oratorio, *Vedem*. In 2009 he won the Thatcher Hoffman Smith Creativity in Motion Prize, allowing him to adapt *Ludlow* into a new libretto for Laitman. Mason is a former Fulbright Fellow to Greece.

**About Dean Williamson, Conductor**

Dean Williamson is widely known throughout the United States for his perceptive and commanding conducting. His ambitious and versatile career in standard and contemporary repertoire earns the conductor worldwide acclaim. *The Washington Post* says "a brilliantly directed, beautifully sung and endlessly funny *Barber of Seville*...the orchestra, which played the sparkling overture and the vivid storm music with grace and color under the expert baton of Dean Williamson." *The Seattle Times* says "Williamson keeps a sure, steady hand on the singers and the orchestra...realizing the shimmering and otherworldly textures of the score." Upcoming engagements and recent highlights include *La Fanciulla del West* at the Nashville Opera, *La Bohème* with Opera Santa Barbara, performances with Seattle Opera, Opera Colorado, the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Boston Lyric Opera, Minnesota Opera, Nashville

Opera, the New England Conservatory, Wolf Trap Opera, and the San Francisco Opera Merola young artists. For more information, visit his [website](#).

**About Beth Greenberg, Director**

Beth Greenberg is a veteran director of classic opera and has been associated with the New York City Opera for over twenty years. For City Opera at Lincoln Center she has directed original main stage productions of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and *Turandot*, and revivals of *Der Rosenkavalier*, *La Traviata*, *Intermezzo*, *La Bohème*, and *Tosca*. Her production of *Hoffmann* was singled out by critic Terry Teachout as one "directed with spectacular flair." Her original productions have also been seen worldwide, represented by her staging of *Carmen* in Tokyo, and *Tosca* in Lima, Peru. In America she has staged *Aida* for the Utah Festival Opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Don Pasquale* for the Pittsburgh Opera Center, and *Eugene Onegin* for Opera Delaware. With a curious imagination about new possibilities for 21st-century opera and its productions, Greenberg focuses on new American work and the challenge of redefining where and how opera can be performed, earning a solid reputation for her collaborations with American opera composers. She has been involved in all phases of new work, from libretto development and workshop readings to fully-staged premieres and has collaborated with many American composers including Elliot Goldenthal, John Musto, and Mark Adamo.

**About Elizabeth Futral, Hester Prynne**

American soprano Elizabeth Futral has established herself as one of the leading coloratura sopranos in the world today. With her stunning vocalism and vast dramatic range, she has embraced a repertoire that ranges from the Baroque to world premieres by the leading contemporary composers. She joined the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and won the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions in 1991. Ms. Futral was catapulted to stardom with critically acclaimed performances of Delibes' *Lakmé* at the New York City Opera in 1994. Career milestones soon followed, cementing her star status: a win in Plácido Domingo's Operalia Competition, the title role in Rossini's *Matilde di Shabran* in Pesaro, her debut at the San Francisco Opera as Stella in the world premiere of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and her Metropolitan Opera debut in a new production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She has notable relationships with the Washington, Houston, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, New York City, Vancouver, and Minnesota opera companies. Futral made her debut at Opera Colorado in 2004 in *La Traviata*. For more information, visit her [website](#).

**About Morgan Smith, Roger Chillingworth**

Since his professional debut in 2001 at the Seattle Opera, Morgan Smith has established himself as one of the most exciting young baritones in the opera world today. Returning to Opera Colorado following his 2010 debut in *La Bohème*, Smith is known in particular for the musical versatility, athleticism and dramatic intensity that he brings to his performances. Smith was recently heralded for his creation of first mate Starbuck in the "triumphant" world premiere of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Moby Dick* at the Dallas Opera. Critics praised his portrayal of Starbuck as "superb," "intelligent," "handsomely portrayed," – a "standout performance." Recent performances include *La Bohème*, Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied*, and the world premiere of the new version of Jake Heggie's dramatic chamber work, *For a Look or Touch*, with the Seattle Men's Chorus. For more information, visit his [website](#).

**About James Valenti, Arthur Dimmesdale**

Making his Opera Colorado debut, American tenor James Valenti has been hailed for having a voice of Italianate beauty, for his handsome stage presence, ardent singing, and for his elegant musicianship in performances with the leading opera companies of the world. He studied at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia and made his professional debut at the age of 25 as Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (Rome Opera).

Other performances include Alfredo Germont in *La Traviata* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden and Japan Tour with Anna Netrebko, Simon Keenlyside and Antonio Pappano, Metropolitan Opera New York with Angela Gheorghiu and Thomas Hampson, Canadian Opera Company Toronto, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Salzburg Festival), Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* (Maggio Musicale Florence, Dallas Opera, Palm Beach Opera), and Rodolfo (La Scala Milan with Gustavo Dudamel, Dresden Semperoper; Miami; Santander, Spain; Tokyo, Japan), among many others. Considered one of the brightest rising stars of his generation, James was the winner of the prestigious 2010 Richard Tucker Award and 2009 Maria Callas Award. For more information, visit his [website](#).

**About Catherine Cook, Mistress Hibbons**

Returning to Opera Colorado following her 2011 debut in *Rusalka*, American mezzo-soprano Catherine Cook has excelled in a wide range of roles with leading companies throughout the United States. The *Cincinnati Post* wrote that she “more than once recalled the great mezzo Marilyn Horne: her luxurious voice showed remarkable flexibility.” Her exciting characterizations garner acclaim as well. Following recent performances of *La Cenerentola*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* exclaimed, “As Tisbe, the younger of the two stepsisters, mezzo-soprano Catherine Cook continued her seemingly endless streak as one of the company’s great underused treasures, combining forceful singing and sly comic charm into an irresistible package.” Recent engagements include performances with Houston Grand Opera (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and San Francisco Opera (*Le nozze di Figaro, Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica, Gianni Schicchi, Faust, The Bonesetter’s Daughter*).

**About John Hancock, Governor Bellingham**

Making his Opera Colorado debut, baritone John Hancock has received wide acclaim for his refined vocalism and theatrical versatility. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as le Gendarme in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* under the baton of James Levine. He has since appeared in a dozen roles with the company, including: Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Falke in *Die Fledermaus*, Albert in *Werther*, Brétigny in *Manon*, Capulet in *Roméo et Juliette*, and both Marcello and Schaunard in *La Bohème*. At San Francisco Opera, he sang the roles of Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Yeletsky in *Queen of Spades*, and Lescaut in *Manon Lescaut*. He has also sung leading roles with companies including Washington National Opera, New Israeli Opera, Opéra du Rhin, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and Cincinnati Opera. A gifted interpreter of contemporary opera, John Hancock has created leading roles in several world premieres, notably Lowell Liebermann’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at Opéra de Monte Carlo, Stephen Paulus’s *Heloise and Abelard* as an alumni artist at the Juilliard School, and *Central Park*, a trilogy of American operas, at Glimmerglass Opera and New York City Opera (also broadcast on PBS Great Performances).

**About Joel Sorenson, John Wilson**

Making his Opera Colorado debut, Joel Sorensen is recognized as one of the finest tenors to specialize in character repertoire, regularly praised for the clarion quality of his voice and a superlative vocal technique that supports his consummate musicality and impeccable diction. In recent seasons, he has excelled in the German repertoire in performances worldwide as Andres in *Wozzeck*, Herod in *Salome*, and Loge and Mime in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. *The Independent* (London) said, “Joel Sorensen, well known to both New York City and Metropolitan Opera audiences, is a beautifully expressive tenor, gifted at characterization, who made Mime rise above caricature to emerge as a surprisingly lyrical, put-upon creature.” In the current season and beyond, Joel returns to the San Diego Opera to perform First Tempter/First Knight in Pizzetti’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, Beppe in *I Pagliacci*, and Rodriguez in *Don Quichotte*; sings Zorn in *Die Meistersinger* with the Lyric Opera of Chicago; returns to San Francisco Opera for performances as Spoletta in *Tosca*, Dr. Caius in *Falstaff*, and Mr. Pease in the World Premiere of Tobias Pickers’ *Dolores Claiborne*.

**About Erhard Rom, Set Designer**

Erhard Rom has designed over 150 productions across North America and was the designer of Vancouver Opera’s highly acclaimed 2010 Canadian Premiere of John Adam’s opera *Nixon in China*. Several of his designs have been featured in the Prague Quadrennial, internationally recognized as the most important scenographic and architectural exhibition in the world. He has been responsible for many world premieres throughout the country including the 2011 Glimmerglass Festival production of *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* with music by Jeanine Tesori and libretto by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner. He has worked with many leading directors including: Francesca Zambello, Nicholas Muni, Leon Major, Lillian Groag, Colin Graham, James Robinson, Rhoda Levine, Thaddeus Strassberger, and Michael Cavanagh, just to name a few. Mr. Rom received his M.F.A. in Scene Design from the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU and his BA in Music from the University of Washington. He is an Assistant Professor at Montclair State University where he teaches Production and Design in the Department of Theatre and Dance.

**About Terese Wadden, Costume Designer**

Terese Wadden’s recent projects include *House For Sale* (Transport Group), *As You Like It* (The Acting Company), *A Florentine Tragedy & Gianni Schicchi* (Canadian Opera Company - Dora Award Nomination), *Così fan tutte* (New York City Opera), and *Don Giovanni* (New York City Opera and Portland Opera), *La Clemenza di Tito* (Canadian Opera Company and Chicago Opera Theatre), and Elliot Carter’s only opera, *What Next?* (The Miller Theatre at Columbia University). Other projects include Lyric Opera of Chicago and Central City Opera’s productions of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the documentary film *Bill W. and the History of AA*, the short films *The Getaway* and *Next Life*, and the world premiere of *Asylum, The Strange Case of Mary Lincoln* (York Theatre). She has also collaborated with the architectural firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro on the exhibit, *How Wine Became Modern*, at the San Francisco MoMA. Terese is a graduate of the Motley Theatre Design Course in London, UK and Vassar College.

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