

Hartford Opera Theater Presents
THE TENDER LAND

Music by Aaron Copland

Libretto by Horace Everett

Directed by Kristy Chambrelli

Music Direction by Joseph A. Hodge

June 2 & 4, 2017 at The Aetna Theater at the Wadsworth Atheneum of Art

HARTFORD, CT (March 1, 2017) – **Hartford Opera Theater** is pleased to present **THE TENDER LAND** with music by **Aaron Copland**, libretto by **Horace Everett**, as its main stage production. Directed by **Kristy Chambrelli** with music direction by **Joseph Hodge**, **THE TENDER LAND** tells the story of a young girl, who finds herself on the cusp of adulthood and must choose whether to remain in her small town or experience what the world has to offer. Themes of love, communication, and what it means to belong are explored in the piece. This interpretation of the opera will incorporate American Sign Language. **THE TENDER LAND** will play **Friday, June 2 at 7:30 PM** and **Sunday, June 4 at 3:00 PM** at **The Aetna Theatre at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**, 600 Main Street, Hartford, CT. There will be an ASL interpreted performance on June 2 and a touch tour and audio describe for the June 4 performance. Tickets will be available starting May 1 at 9:00 AM at hartfordoperatheater.com as well as at the door.

THE TENDER LAND will feature Lisa Williamson as Laurie, Janelle Robinson as Ma Moss, Robert Barefield as Pa Moss, Darius Gillard as Martin, Michael McAvoy as Top and Nikita Mallach as Beth.

THE TENDER LAND tells the story of Laurie, on the eve of her high school graduation. She is faced with the decision of remaining in her small town or leaving to strike out on her own and discover what the world has to offer. Struggles with communication and the concept of the "outsider" are present throughout as drifters Martin and Top are falsely accused of a rape by the community. Fear of individuals who are classified as "others" is a timeless story that still resonates in our current cultural climate.

Hartford Opera Theater is taking their mission of "Opera for Everyone" further this season by reaching out to more communities in the Hartford area. They are expanding accessibility and welcoming the deaf and hearing impaired community to the opera. "Everyone in **THE TENDER LAND** is struggling to be heard. Each character faces this challenge in their own way. Ma is completely invested in her eldest daughter and does not pay much attention to her younger child.," comments **Kristy Chambrelli**. "When the eldest daughter decides to leave home to

find her own voice, Ma is faced with her role having to change and needing to find a way to connect with her younger daughter. I wanted a deaf actress to play the traditionally spoken role of Beth in the opera. By incorporating ASL, we are hoping to tell the story of this family and the need to be heard in a new way.” **THE TENDER LAND** will have an interpreted performance for the deaf community on Friday, June 2 and will feature a touch tour and audio describe to aid the blind and visually impaired community for the Sunday, June 4 performance. The performance will be interpreted by Source Interpreting at the American School for the Deaf with **Elena Blue** as Sign Director.

The production team for **THE TENDER LAND** includes: **Kristy Chambrelli** (Director), **Joseph A. Hodge** (Conductor), **Elena Blue** (Sign Director), **Ashley Atencio** (Scenic Designer), **Damian Dominguez** (Costume Designer), **Paige Nee** (Lighting Designer), **Caitlin Leigh Flemming** (Asst. Director/Stage Manager), **Lisabeth Miller** (Executive Producer), **Charity Clark** and **Michelle Murray Fiertek** (Co-Producers).

PRODUCTION DETAILS:

Title: **The Tender Land**

Music: **Aaron Copland**

Libretto: **Horace Everett**

Director: **Kristy Chambrelli**

Musical Director: **Joseph A. Hodge**

Sign Director: **Elena Blue**

Cast: Laurie Moss – Lisa Williamson; Ma Moss – Janelle Robinson; Grandpa Moss – Robert Barefield; Martin – Darius Gillard; Top – Michael MacAvoy; Beth Moss – Nikita Mallach; Mrs. Jenks – Schauntice Marshall-Shepard; Mrs. Splinters – Caroline Ismail; Mr. Splinters – Nigel Rowe; Mr. Jenks – Jermaine Woodard Jr.; Soprano – Alyson Sheehan; Alto – Lindsay Cabaniss; Tenor – Caleb Alexander; Bass – Thomas Laskowski

Location: **The Aetna Theatre at The Wadsworth Atheneum**, 600 Main Street, Hartford CT

Dates: **Friday, June 2, 2017 at 7:30PM and Sunday, June 4, 2017 at 3:00PM.** Please note, there will be a pre-show lecture beginning at 7 PM. The June 2 performance will be fully ASL-interpreted. The June 4 performance will have a pre-show touch tour and audio describe for the performance.

Tickets: \$25 Preferred Seating/\$15 General Admission/\$10 Seniors & Students. Tickets will be on sale Monday, May 1, 2017 at 9AM via hartfordoperatheater.com and will also be available at the door.

CREATIVE BIOGRAPHIES

Aaron Copland (Music)

Aaron Copland (1900—1990) was one of the most respected American classical composers of the twentieth century. By incorporating popular forms of American music such as jazz and folk into his compositions, he created pieces both exceptional and innovative. More than two

decades after his death, Copland's life and work continue to inspire many of America's young composers.

Copland was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 14, 1900. At the age of sixteen he went to Manhattan to study with Rubin Goldmark, a respected private music instructor who taught Copland the fundamentals of counterpoint and composition. At the age of twenty, he left New York for the Summer School of Music for American Students at Fontainebleau, France.

In France, Copland found a musical community unlike any he had known. He studied under the legendary pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger, from 1921-24, and she became one of the most important influences on his compositional career. It was through Boulanger that Copland's first composition was published: a work for piano solo, *The Cat and the Mouse* ("Scherzo Humoristique"), it was completed in March 1920, and published by Durand and Sons in 1921.

While in Europe, Copland met many of the important artists of the time, including the famous composer Serge Koussevitsky, who requested that Copland write a piece for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The piece, "*Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*" (1925), was Copland's entry into the life of professional American music. He followed this with "*Music for the Theater*" (1925) and "*Piano Concerto*" (1926), both of which relied heavily on the jazz idioms of the time. For Copland, jazz was the first genuinely American musical movement. From jazz he hoped to draw the inspiration for a new type of symphonic music, one that could distinguish itself from the music of Europe.

In the late 1920s, with his friend Roger Sessions, he began the Copland-Sessions concerts, dedicated to presenting the works of young composers. By the mid-1930s Copland had become not only one of the most popular composers in the country, but a leader of the community of American classical musicians.

In his search for the widest audience, Copland began composing for the movies and ballet. Among his most popular compositions for film are those for "*Of Mice and Men*" (1939), "*Our Town*" (1940), and "*The Heiress*" (1949), which won him an Academy Award for best score. He composed scores for a number of ballets, including two of the most popular of the time: Agnes DeMille's *Rodeo* (1942) and Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* (1944), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. Both ballets presented views of American country life that corresponded to the folk traditions Copland was interested in. Probably the most important and successful composition from this time was his patriotic *Lincoln Portrait* (1942). The piece for voice and orchestra presents quotes from Lincoln's writings narrated over Copland's musical composition.

Throughout the 1950s, Copland slowed his work as a composer and began to try his hand at conducting. Over the next twenty years he traveled throughout the world, conducting live performances and creating an important collection of recorded work. In 1983 Copland conducted his last symphony. His generous work as a teacher at Tanglewood Music Center, Harvard University, and the New School for Social Research gained him a following of devoted musicians. As a scholar, he wrote more than sixty articles and essays on music, as well as five books. He traveled the world in an attempt to elevate the status of American music abroad, and to increase its popularity at home. Through these commitments to music and to his

country, Aaron Copland became one of the most important figures in twentieth-century American music. On December 2, 1990, Aaron Copland died in North Tarrytown, New York.

SOURCE:

PBS <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/aaron-copland-about-the-composer/475/>

Horace Everett (Libretto)

Erik Johns was born Horace Eugene Johnston in Los Angeles, and was a dancer, painter, and poet. In 1946, when Johns was 19 years old, he met Aaron Copland at a New Year's Eve party in New York. The two began a close relationship, and for the next several years, Mr. Johns was Copland's secretary. The two eventually lived together for several years.

In 1952, Copland and Johns began work on an opera based on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the James Agee and Walker Evans book of photographs of Depression-era sharecroppers. Johns devised the story of a poor farming family in the Midwest changed by the arrival of two drifters, and he wrote the libretto for *The Tender Land* under the pseudonym Horace Everett.

Copland and Johns parted in 1954 but remained close, and Johns served as an adviser to the board of Copland House, a composer's retreat in Copland's residence in Peekskill, N.Y. In the 1950s Johns formed the company Party Decorators with Jack Kelly. The company decorated the inaugural dinner of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and the inaugural parties of President Jimmy Carter in 1977. The two men also ran an antiques business.

Johns later wrote the librettos for *Tea Party*, an opera by Jack Gottlieb, and *Mission to the World*, an oratorio by John Schlenck, commemorating the centenary of the Vedanta Society of New York. Erik Johns died in 2001 at age 74 at his home in Fishkill, N.Y.

SOURCE:

The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/18/arts/erik-johns-74-librettist-of-copland-s-tender-land.html>

Kristy Chambrelli (Director)

Kristy Chambrelli has mounted Operatic and Musical Theatre productions throughout the United States and Europe. She is the Associate Artistic Director for Hartford Opera Theater and a previous resident opera director for the Asolo Art Song and Aria Festival in Asolo, Italy. She has taught and directed for New England Conservatory, The Hartt School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Florida State University, Clark University, and The College of New Jersey. Her production of *Jekyll & Hyde* was awarded the 2014 Moss Hart Award in the College/University Division for "...fresh, imaginative, creative treatment within the intent of the playwright". (NETC)

She recently directed plays at 13th Street Rep, Leela NYC Festival and Manhattan Rep She was named to the SDCF Observership Class for 2015-2016. Kristy has been nominated for several Broadway World CT & RI awards in Directing. She is a semi-finalist for this year's American Prize in Opera Direction. She was an SDC Respondent for KCACTF Region 1. Kristy served as the Youth Director assisting Maxwell Williams on A Christmas Carol (Hartford Stage). She worked with Michael Bolton, Shelton Becton and the New Haven Choir in preparation for BBC/NBC's Clash of the Choirs.

Kristy is a Co-Founder and Artistic Director of IN MEDIAS ARTS - a new media and performance art collective. She has a BM from The Boston Conservatory. She studied Film Scoring and Composition at Berklee College of Music and Opera Directing at Florida State University. She is a Directors Lab North Alum and is a proud associate member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. <https://www.kristychambrelli.com>

Joseph A. Hodge (Music Director)

Praised for his "musicianship and energy on stage" (Journal Inquirer), Joseph Hodge currently serves as the Music Director of the Manchester Symphony Orchestra & Chorale, Connecticut Valley Symphony Orchestra, and Hartford Opera Theater. Joseph graduated from the Hartt School of Music in 2012, where he studied conducting with Edward Cumming and was the Assistant Conductor of the Hartt Symphony Orchestra.

As Music Director of Hartford Opera Theater, Joseph recently led performances of Robert Ward's *The Crucible*, and will conduct Copland's *The Tender Land* in June, 2017. Guest conducting engagements bring him to Texas each year to work with the Abilene Opera Association, and he is the Assistant Conductor of the Ash Lawn Opera Festival in Charlottesville, VA.

Also a graduate of the University of Virginia, Joseph has worked with orchestras in Virginia, including the Charlottesville Symphony Orchestra, Youth Orchestra of Central Virginia, and the Wintergreen Festival Orchestra. He has previously studied conducting with Edward Cumming, Christopher Zimmerman, Kate Tamarkin, Kenneth Kiesler, and Joseph Gifford. <http://josephahodge.weebly.com/bio.html>

Elena Blue (Sign Director)

Elena Blue traveled nationally and internationally for over 30 years as an actress, director, educator and consultant. A strong advocate who is committed to equal access to communication arts, her early efforts began at the Julliard School of Drama where she revived the training of future performance interpreters. Elena has consulted on numerous productions for The Shakespeare Company, Dance Theatre Workshop, Hartford Stage Company, Manhattan Theatre Club, Gloucester Stage Company, Kennedy Center, Canadian National Arts Center, Southern Jersey Regional Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Yale Repertory Theatre, Deaf West Theatre and National Theatre of the Deaf. From the CT Commission on Culture and

Tourism, Elena was the first deaf person to be nationally certified as a Master Teaching Artist. She was the Integrative Arts Director for SummerArtsSedona, in Sedona, AZ for both national and international artists. Taught young artists at the Youth Scholar Program in Washington, DC and at the New School for the Arts, in Tempe, AZ, integrating American Sign Language and Deaf Culture from photography to dance.

About Hartford Opera Theater

Hartford Opera Theater, Inc. is dedicated to enriching the lives of all members of the Greater Hartford community by offering quality, innovative, and affordable opera. Our organization commits itself to keeping the genre of opera relevant for patrons and artists through the presentation of productions that are both culturally topical and true to opera as an art form. We foster a safe environment in which emerging and established artists can feel free to collaborate and create. In addition, HOT promotes arts education and appreciation by providing free outreach programs to members of our community. At HOT, we believe that all people deserve to experience the beauty and total art that is opera. Hartford Opera Theater - Opera for Everyone.