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THE SCARLET LETTER

Opera by Lori Laitman

WORLD PREMIERE

November 6, 7, 9, 2008

Donald W. Reynolds Theater

University of Central Arkansas

**The Scarlet Letter, Lori Laitman's opera adaptation of
Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary masterpiece, to premiere at
The University of Central Arkansas November 2008**

*« This canopy of trees,
Once sheltered us in love.
Why must we suffer here?
What must we prove? »*

Acclaimed American composer **Lori Laitman** has teamed up with award-winning American poet **David Mason** to create a new dramatic opera, **The Scarlet Letter**. The opera is based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's 19th century American novel.

Commissioned by the University of Central Arkansas, the opera will see its world premiere on November 6, 7 and 9, 2008, at UCA in Conway, Arkansas. **Robert Holden**, co-director of the UCA Opera Theater, developed the idea for the commission. *"We are beginning a commissioning project for new operas based on classic American literature.*

*In **The Scarlet Letter**, Lori Laitman and David Mason have created something spectacular that should become part of standard operatic repertoire."*

Hawthorne's book was published in 1850 and is considered a milestone in American literature. The story takes place in seventeenth century Boston and revolves around Hester Prynne, who is convicted of adultery and forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her chest as a sign of her sin. Hester's strength of character and refusal to reveal the father of her child creates enormous psychological tension amongst all the main characters: Arthur Dimmesdale, the Reverend who is the secret father of the child; Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, who had been presumed dead but has reappeared in the community; and the judgmental Puritan townspeople.

Themes of self identity versus community perception have presented poet **David Mason** with a fertile ground for the challenge of creating his first opera libretto. *"**The Scarlet Letter** is better suited to opera than any novel I have ever read. To begin with, its dramatic structure has particular clarity and resonanceThis is an exciting story about duplicity and love, the tragic possibility of America. Hawthorne's prose has offered me several lines for adaptation, but my primary goal has been to use spare, often lyrical verse as a way of revealing character and heightening drama..... I want to make singable lines, but also lines the performers will feel proud to be singing... I was hearing a kind of music when I wrote which corresponds very closely to what **Lori Laitman** has been composing. This is one of the most natural collaborations I have ever engaged in. It's an opportunity for me to grow as a poet, and a profound honor to find words I have written taken up and transmuted by other artists".*

For **Lori Laitman**, a prolific composer of art song, creating this opera has also been an experience of tremendous excitement and growth. *"I am so thrilled to have had this opportunity. My collaboration with **David Mason** has been one of the greatest joys of my life. His talent awes me and his beautiful words gave me all of the inspiration I needed. Although this was my largest musical undertaking to date, the approach to the composition was the same one I always use: to compose dramatic music that underscores the emotional content of the words but that also creates musical lines of great beauty. From start to finish, there is a consistent universe of sound. Scored for three main leads and chamber orchestra, the opera is set in two acts: Act I with four scenes and Act II with two scenes. Approximately 2 hours in length, the dramatic pacing of the music follows the dramatic pacing of the narrative, and although there are no recitative sections, there are several major arias that emerge from the drama. Musical motives are used and reused, and combined in different ways, creating a psychological underpinning for each of the characters."*

Synopsis:

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.

Structure: Opera in two acts for chamber orchestra , three principal singing roles, three secondary roles, chorus and one non-singing role

Music: Lori Laitman

Libretto: David Mason

Creation: 2007-2008

Production: The University of Central Arkansas Opera Theater, World Premiere

Cast:

Conductor: Israel Getzov

Stage Director: Diane Kessling

Set Design, Costumes, Lighting: William Henshaw

Principal roles will be sung by UCA faculty members:

Christine Donahue, Soprano: Hester Prynne, a seamstress

Wolfgang Oeste, Tenor: Arthur Dimmesdale, young minister

Robert Holden, Baritone: Roger Chillingworth, a doctor

Martha Antolik, Mezzo-soprano: Mistress Hibbons, a witch

Performance Details:

Public opening performance: November 6, 2008

Pre-performance talk: 6:45 pm

Opera performance: 7:30 pm

Closed performance: November 7, 2008

Pre-performance talk: 12:15 pm

Opera performance: 1 pm

Public performance: November 9, 2008

Pre-performance talk: 6 pm

Opera performance: 7 pm

Location:

The Donald W. Reynolds Theater, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, AR

Tickets will be on sale as of October 1, 2008 at the UCA Ticket Central Box Office.

Tel: (501) 450-3265; **Email:** boxoffice@uca.edu

Source:

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