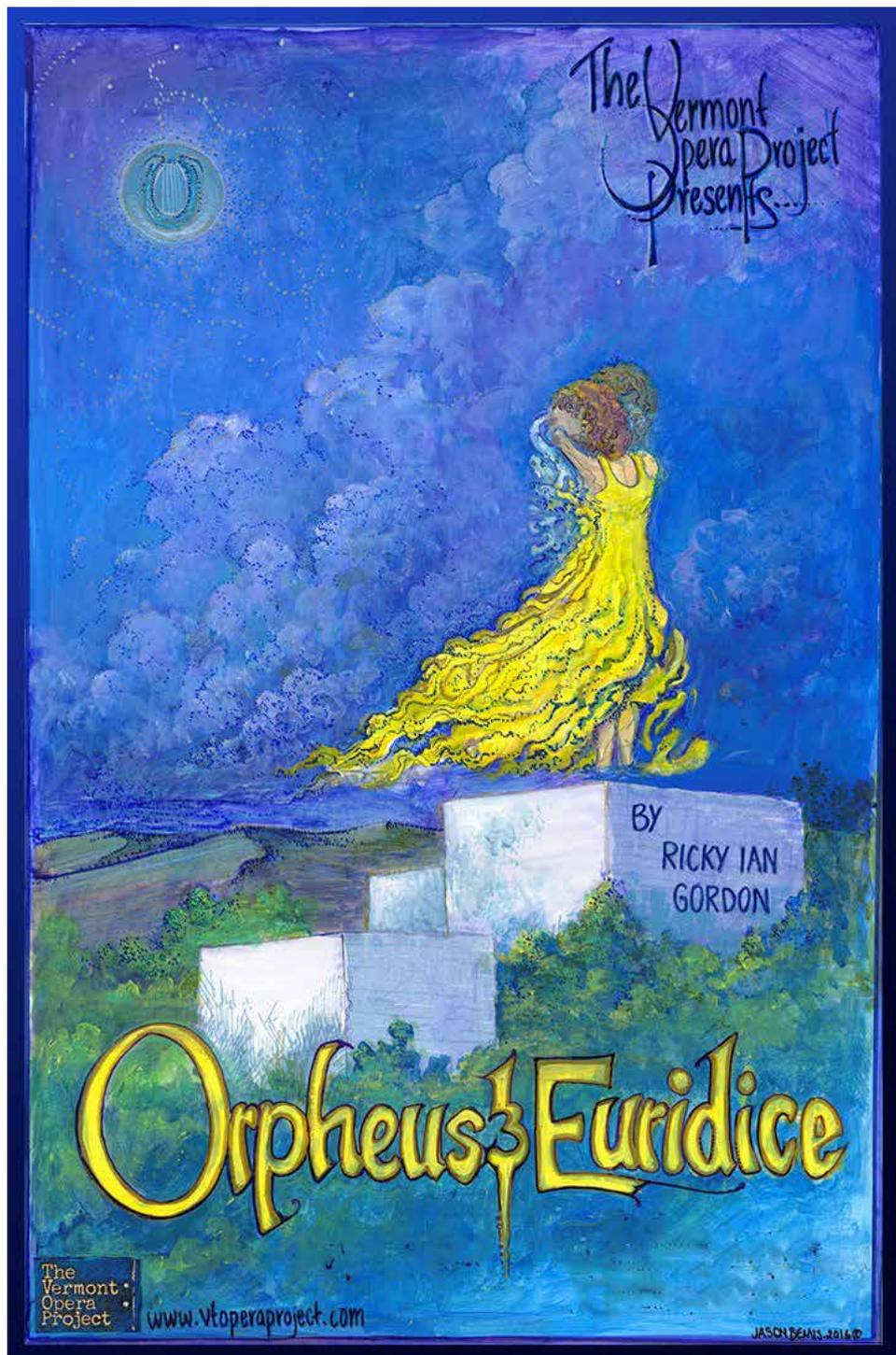


75TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

SEPTEMBER 10 AND 11, 2016 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART





Euridice's death. Photo by Justin Jankus

PROGRAM

3:00 • West Building, West Garden Court

The Vermont Opera Project

Ricky Ian Gordon's *Orpheus and Euridice*

Quincy Bruckerhoff, General Director

Jeff Bruckerhoff, Managing Director

Act I

Part 1 Orpheus

Part 2 Euridice

Part 3 Bliss

Part 4 Home

Part 5 They Dance

Part 6 The Song

Act II

Part 7 Illness

Part 8 Death

Part 9 The Underworld

Part 10 The Journey Back

Part 11 Song 2

Part 12 Conclusion

Part 13 Epilogue

Cast

Wesley Christensen, Orpheus

Suzanne Kantorski, Euridice

Dancers

Ben Delony

Caitlin Klinger

Zoë Marr Hilliard

Liam Saito

Orchestra

Robert Wood, Conductor

Laurie Rogers, piano

Kei Sugiyama, violin

Steffani Kitayama, violin

Tiffany Richardson, viola

Danielle Cho, cello

Ali Cook, bass

Director/Choreographer

Keturah Stickann

Costume Designer

Anya Klepikov

The Vermont Opera Project

The Vermont Opera Project brings new and rarely performed operas to unexpected locations in Vermont. Its inaugural production of *Orpheus and Euridice* was performed at an old manufacturing space known as the Small Monuments Room of the former Vermont Marble Company, which once carved headstones for Arlington Cemetery.

The Composer

Ricky Ian Gordon was born and raised on Long Island. After studying piano, composition, and acting at Carnegie Mellon, he settled in New York City, where he quickly emerged as a leading writer of vocal music that spans art song, opera, and musical theater. Gordon's songs have been performed and recorded by such renowned singers as Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Nathan Gunn, Judy Collins, Kelli O'Hara, Audra MacDonald, Kristin Chenoweth, Nicole Cabell, Frederica von Stade, Andrea Marcovicci, Harolyn Blackwell, Betty Buckley, and the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson. Recent productions of his work include *Morning Star*; *27*; *A Coffin in Egypt*; *Rappahannock County*; *Sycamore Trees*; *The Grapes of Wrath*; *Green Sneakers*; *My Life with Albertine*; *Orpheus and Euridice*; and *Bright Eyed Joy: The Music of Ricky Ian Gordon*. His upcoming projects include an opera for the Metropolitan Opera and Lincoln Center Theater, *Intimate Apparel*, and *A House Without a Christmas Tree* for Houston Grand Opera.

The Musicians

Clarinetist Wesley Christensen (Orpheus) has played with the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra, Shrewsbury Chamber Music Society, University of Vermont Symphony Orchestra, the Vermont Mozart Festival, and the Opera Theatre of Weston, Vermont. An active orchestral player, Christensen has played at the Flynn Theater in Burlington, Vermont, and Carnegie Hall in New York. He currently teaches clarinet at the Monteverdi Music School in Montpelier, Vermont.

Soprano Suzanne Kantorski (Euridice) created the role of Mary in the internationally acclaimed operatic tableaux *Oh My Son*, by Marcos Galvany, and sang on the recording as well as on tour. Kantorski has recently completed a feature film called *The Bohemians* slated for worldwide release in 2016. She has also performed the roles of Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*, Leila in *The Pearl Fishers*, and Mimi in *La Bohème* for the Opera Company of Middlebury.

Synopsis

Orpheus enchants the world and all of its creatures with his music, in this case a clarinet. One day, while strolling along and playing, he sees a vision of beauty and perfection — Euridice. It is love at first sight and he is completely entranced. She is equally smitten and they unite. They dance. They set up a home welcoming to all around them. Orpheus feels that he is a part of the world in a way he has never felt before — a oneness with everything and everyone.

One day, Euridice notices that she lacks her usual energy and is soon overcome by fatigue. She takes to her bed and sleeps all the time. Orpheus tries to wake her and cheer her, but she just cries. Orpheus grows despondent and desperate as Euridice fades away in front of him, for he cannot live without her.

Orpheus goes to the underworld to beg the gods to let him have Euridice back. He plays every song he knows in an attempt to convince them. They agree, but on the condition that he does not look back at her until they are both returned from the underworld. He has to trust that she is behind him until they have both crossed that threshold. Euridice is unaware of this condition and believes he is ignoring her. She dogs him and cajoles him in a way that she has never done before. In a moment of weakness, he turns to reassure her and she disappears forever.

Alone again, he continues to play his music, but it becomes so dark and disjointed that instead of charming the creatures, he depresses them and eventually they attack him. They tear him to pieces so that “down the river floats his head from which, it is said, music never ceases.”

The Origins of Orpheus and Euridice

I first met Todd Palmer some years ago at a Christmas party given by Neil Goren, the pianist, coach, and conductor of Gotham Opera. After that, he attended many of my performances and one day said he would like to commission a piece. Because many of the performances he had come to had been vocal, he thought it would be good to have a clarinet, piano, and voice piece, and in particular, since he had been touring with many sopranos playing Schubert's "Shepherd on the Rock," he thought he could get some kind of contemporary companion piece for that. I started musing on what it could be.

In 1995, my partner at the time, Jeffrey Grossi, started to become very ill. What a maelstrom it is when someone is being taken from you incrementally and you are at a monumental loss of control. Thus, it was not a particularly inspired time for me. I kept meeting with Todd about which text to use, or wondering if I should write my own, but essentially, I was rudderless, and for him, I'm sure, frustrating, in my lack of direction. Finally, I decided to do a piece just for piano and clarinet, which I know, did not make Todd happy, but by then, anything would have sufficed.

When I was little, one of the foreign films my sister took me to see was Marcel Camus's beautiful *Black Orpheus* with Breno Mello and Marpessa Dawn. I became quite obsessed with that myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and read several versions.

One night, during this difficult period for me, I had a vision and rose from sleep, went to the dining-room table, and wrote the entire text for what became my *Orpheus and Euridice*. It seemed I suddenly had a deep identification with Orpheus... only my Euridice was not bitten by a snake, but robbed slowly by an incurable virus. Somehow, in my mind's eye and ear, I saw Todd as the "Orpheus" playing his "pipe," instead of a lute or a lyre. Euridice (I changed the y to an i) was both herself and the storyteller... the notes belonged to Orpheus and the pianist, and the words belonged to Euridice.

When I was done, I saw that I had created a two-act structure, which seemed very clear to me. Act I was about the birth of love, and Act II was about the birth of art through suffering. Jeffrey woke at five a.m. from the strange energy that had taken over our apartment. I read the text to him in a sort of sweaty amazement. I called Todd at about eight-thirty to share my great news, which was met with some trepidation because the whole notion of a short little companion piece to the Schubert was now dashed. Still, he was a good sport and allowed me to proceed. The strings were added for a production in Long Beach, California, which took place in a swimming pool. I am so happy the strings are being used for the production at the National Gallery of Art, as I like the lushness and otherworldliness they add.

Are we taught myths so that later on when we need them we can tell our own stories through them? Is that how they came about? At that moment in my life, it is as if this myth and its eruption inside me — the window it created — saved me.

Program notes by Ricky Ian Gordan

Upcoming events of the Seventy-Fifth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

NGA GuitarFest
September 15 – 18
West Building, West Garden Court

Celil Refik Kaya
Albeniz, Morel, Rodrigo
September 15, 12:10

Gohar Vardanyan
Aguado, de Falla, Piazzolla
September 15, 1:10

Scott Borg
Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Granados
September 16, 12:10

Adam Kossler
de Falla, Ponce, Ravel
September 16, 1:10

Jorge Caballero
García de León, Ginastera, Villa-Lobos
September 17, 3:00

Pablo Villegas
Mangoré, Bonfá, Gutiérrez
September 18, 3:30

No BS! Brass Band
September 25, 12:00 and 2:00
Mall Steps

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

Concerts are made possible in part through the generosity of donors to the National Gallery of Art through The Circle. Reserved seating is available in recognition of their support. Please contact the development office at (202) 842-6450 or circle@nga.gov for more information.

www.nga.gov
www.instagram.com/ngadc
www.twitter.com/ngadc
www.facebook.com/nationalgalleryofart

The department of music produced these program notes. Copyright © 2016 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Cover Cover art by Jason Bemis for Vermont Opera Company

Back cover *West Building, Constitution Avenue entrance, viewed from Sixth Street NW, 1941, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gallery Archives*

