

# • • • • THREE DECEMBERS • • • •

*Music by Jake Heggie*  
*Libretto by Gene Scheer*

Playwright Terrence McNally (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Master Class*) suggested his short play, *Some Christmas Letters* to Jake Heggie as the subject for an opera. Heggie, whose first opera *Dead Man Walking* was an immediate hit, liked the idea of writing an intimate story for a cast of only three characters. He knew that every note and every word would count. When McNally was unable to write the libretto due to health concerns, Heggie called on Gene Scheer, who had created librettos for several other composers and showed a great talent for adapting literary works into operas. The result is a sensitive, melodic chamber opera (small cast and orchestra) about the thorny relationships between Maddy and her grown children. We glimpse the lives of these finely drawn characters on three different Christmases – 1986, 1996 and 2006. Maddy is hoping for another hit play, Charlie is dealing with the looming loss of his partner to AIDS and Bea struggles with her own marriage. The climax occurs when Maddy reveals a secret she has kept for over 25 years about the death of her husband, the children's revered father. Can they forgive her for changing their perceptions of themselves and their father forever?



## THE CHARACTERS:

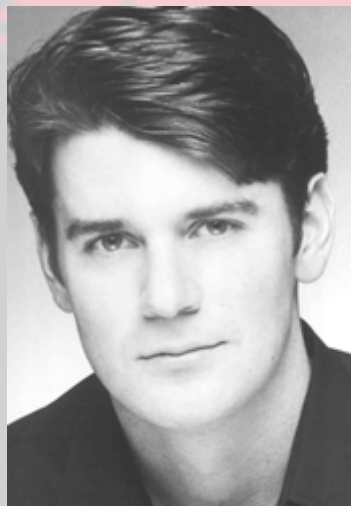
**Madeline (Maddy) Mitchell** – famous stage actress, lives in New York  
**Beatrice (Bea)** – Maddy's daughter, married and lives in Hartford, CT  
**Charlie** – Maddy's son, lives with his gay partner in San Francisco

*"No regrets, no more tears.  
No more lies, no more fears.  
It's daybreak at last."*

*- Madeline*

**CAST**

Madeline: Joyce Castle  
Beatrice: Emily Pulley  
Charlie: Keith Phares



Conductor: John Baril  
Director: Ken Cazan

The regional premiere of a new American opera.  
Performed in English.

**PERFORMANCE DATES:**

July 10, 13, 17, 21, 23, 25, 29, 31  
Aug 4, 6

Opera Notes - Free pre-performance preview in  
Williams Stables at 1:50 and 7:15 pm.

# CREATING *THREE DECEMBERS*

Gene Scheer, Librettist & Jake Heggie, Composer

***Three Decembers'* writing team responded to a request to describe how the opera was created, and on bringing it to Central City Opera this summer. First, we hear from librettist Gene Scheer.**

I have had such wonderful times with the Central City Opera over the years. To have this new production of *Three Decembers* on your stage fills me with great joy and gratitude. There is nothing like the sense of coming home, and bringing this piece that I wrote with Jake Heggie to Central feels like I am doing just that. Of course your historic, incredible jewel of a theater enhances my connection to Central, but primarily the link that I feel is based on the artistic collaborations and friendships that I have developed over the years at your festival.

Joyce Castle [*Three Decembers'* "Madeline Mitchell"], whom I met while living in Penrose [a Central City artist residence], is a great artist and friend. Count me among her many fans who marvel at her commitment and artistry. My first collaboration with Jake was a song cycle written for her entitled "Statuesque." That wonderful experience forged the working relationship I have with Jake---the most significant of my career. There are a number of talented composers working today but few have Jake's gift for theater. His music is beautiful and rich, but its most significant feature is that it always honestly blooms out of each character's essential nature. It sounds so easy to do. It is not.

I'll give you a bit of the inside scoop about how this piece came together, how and why things have been slightly revised. A number of years ago, Terrence McNally wrote a piece for an AIDS Benefit that was performed in New York City. It featured Rosemary Harris, Cherry Jones and Victor Garber. Terrence showed Jake the script and the gestation process began which has now culminated in *Three*

*Decembers*. When the piece premiered at the Houston Grand Opera and the great Frederica Von Stade magnificently performed the role of Madeleine Mitchell, there was one moment that did not ring true to me. It is the moment when Madeleine performs a number from the Broadway show that she is starring in.

I must say it is a writer's dream to have performers like Frederica Von Stade and Joyce Castle perform your work. If a moment does not work on stage, you can be certain the problem lies with you(!) because God knows they are delivering 100% of the potential of the material. In short, the text that I wrote for that moment in the show and the song did not seem to match the truthfulness of the rest of the piece.

That song has been replaced with a new song called "No Regrets." It seems to Jake and me that finally we have provided the right song for the moment. The haunting melody Jake has conjured is wonderful. Having Joyce perform this new song will complete our work on this opera. It now feels that our work is done and we are delighted to be handing the piece on to the interpretive artists.

I have admired director Ken Cazan's work for years and feel so blessed that the production will be in his and conductor John Baril's inspired hands. Both Jake and I are absolutely thrilled to work with these wonderful colleagues.

I should mention that Joyce will be joined by two amazing artists and friends. Emily Pulley, no stranger to Central, has become one of my best friends. And let the record state that Emily commissioned my first song. One day, while sitting in a coffee shop at Lincoln Center, she pulled out her checkbook, wrote me a check and said, "Write me something." I wrote her a song called "Be the Glory." And she certainly is just that on and off stage. I met Keith Phares in Houston when *Three*

The **libretto** contains all of the words of an opera. Italian for "little book," a libretto is usually shorter than the script for a play because it takes longer to sing lines than to say them, and because music is also a very important part of telling the story of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is often a playwright or poet and is called a **librettist**.

The **composer** writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the **score** with separate lines for each instrument and each singer's vocal part. The score, as a piece of music, reflects the mood, events and emotions of the characters in the story.

*You can find more "Words to Know" on page 30.*

*Decembers* premiered. His performance as Charlie was stunning. I am so happy that he will be revisiting the role.

The beauty and wisdom of Terrence's story, and what we have tried to honor in this musical adaptation, lies in its depiction of a family struggling to learn how to love and forgive each other. On Robert Frost's grave the epithet reads: "I had a lover's quarrel with the world." That kind of quarrel, that I believe he was referring to, is what is at the core of this piece. Life, family, and love are hard to juggle in a world challenged by loss and suffering. But in the end, by summoning the courage to embrace things and each other as we truly are, both affection and forgiveness can eclipse anger and frustration, and allow us to feel blessed and grateful for the challenging world, just the way it is. I look forward to seeing my old friends at Central and sharing *Three Decembers* with all of you.

#### **And now from Composer Jake Heggie...**

Thanks so much for asking me to write comments. Gene did so beautifully in his, that I have very little to add ... That said, I'm a composer!! And I am truly so excited about Central City that I feel I need to say SOMETHING, right?

The rich tradition of Central City Opera is one that I have admired from afar for many years. I hope you know how enthusiastically people speak about Central City: with genuine affection and deep respect. What a real honor and thrill it is, then, to be invited into the Central City Opera family and tradition in this extraordinary way. I am over the moon about the new production of *Three Decembers*! It is a stellar cast featuring the divine Joyce Castle (I worship at her altar, truly) and in a hall that is PERFECTLY suited for this intimate, but stormy drama. Selfishly, I am also very grateful for the chance finally to SEE the opera! In all previous productions, I've been one of the pianists ... so I've never actually seen this opera. How crazy is that? And what was I thinking?

Just a little bit of background about the style of the piece... I grew up not really knowing anything about opera, but absolutely loving musical theater. I came to opera in my 20s at UCLA and discovered the trained classical voice, and then the greatness of opera.



Left to Right: Librettist Gene Scheer and Composer Jake Heggie onstage at the opening night curtain call of *MOBY-DICK*. Photo credit: Karen Almond, Dallas Opera

Terrence McNally and I had a pretty successful operatic collaboration with *Dead Man Walking*, and I wanted very much to do another project with him. When I first encountered his short play "Some Christmas Letters", I thought "Aha! My chance to write a musical!" Especially, since the lead is a famous stage actress. In the seven years it took to realize this piece, though, what I discovered is that I really and truly am an opera composer, and my best work is always written for opera singers. BUT, I was able to honor the many musicals that helped shape my creative psyche in writing this piece. The feel of a Broadway show pervades because the character of Madeline Mitchell dominates throughout. Gene Scheer is right in line with that, which is only part of what makes him such a joy to collaborate and create with. I look forward to many more collaborations with him.

*Three Decembers* is a deeply personal, heartfelt and meaningful opera. Whatever your line of work, whatever your path in life, you have belonged to a family -- you have had to deal with hurt, loss, joy, misunderstanding, secrets, and hopefully, forgiveness. This is a story for all of us. I'm eager and excited to share it with you all. And I look forward TREMENDOUSLY to how you will nurture it, rethink it, and present it to your audiences. I will be there opening night to thank you personally. But for now, from San Francisco, my heartfelt thanks to Pat Pearce, John Baril, Ken Cazan, and all of you in the Central City Opera family.

# Character Spotlight:

## *THREE DECEMBERS*'S MADELINE MITCHELL

### Joyce Castle

You have portrayed some pretty powerful characters in operas, both traditional and new works; Queen Elizabeth I in *Gloriana*, Augusta Tabor in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Baba the Turk in *Rake's Progress*, Madame Flora in *The Medium*, Claire Zakanassian in the premiere of Von Einem's *The Visit of the Old Lady* and many others. You will be playing Madeline Mitchell, a famous stage actress, in *Three Decembers*, another new opera. It does seem that mezzo sopranos get the "juicy" roles in opera.



**How do you approach creating a new character? Any special research you will do to create Madeline?**

Some characters just fall into place! Some take a lot of research/looking into. If the music and libretto are strong then the character comes easily. In the case of *Three Decembers* we have the fabulous duo of Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer. It is almost all "there" in the work. Jake and Gene created a song cycle for me (*Statuesque*) so I have worked closely with them before. They have a lot to say and they compliment each other so well. I have also sung many performances of Jake's *End of the Affair*. His vocal lines and music lead right into the characters on stage.

Special research for "Madeline"? Well, I'm studying the roles "she" loved - - she has performed Juliet, Portia (*Merchant of Venice*), Nina (*The Seagull*) and Blanche (*Streetcar Named Desire*).....it's been fun reading those roles and imagining performing them.

**You are celebrating 40 years in the "opera business" (Congratulations!). Could you share one or two special memories from your diverse career?**

Beverly Sills hiring me at New York City Opera (where Ms. Castle has performed 21 roles - 175 performances); James Levine hiring me at the Met (9 roles - 75 performances); Hal Prince casting me in *Sweeney Todd*; Pat Pearce producing *Gloriana* at Central City with Ken Cazan directing.

**You are a teacher as well as an artist. What do you most wish to impart to aspiring young artists?**

Love the music! Enjoy your talents/voice. Work hard. Share what you have. Music is so powerful, you can make someone's world better; you can make someone smile. A life of music is a great blessing.

**What do you do before a performance? Have you developed any special routines or habits?**

Get sleep the night before. Eat healthily on the day of the show. Drink plenty of water. Exercise and stretch to get loose (we are really "athletes"). Vocalize - but not too much. But most of all, gather my forces.



Right: Joyce Castle as Queen Elizabeth I in Central City Opera's *Gloriana* (2001). Photo: Mark Kiryluk.

# FOCUS ON:

## Alison M. Mizerski, Wig & Makeup Design 2010 FESTIVAL

**What steps did you take to become a makeup and wig artist? When did you realize you wanted to specialize in this area and work in the theater? Did you have an artistic background growing up? Did you pursue any formal training after high school?**

I started with a Degree in theatre. I studied costume design, and learned a great deal about building clothes, doing historical research, and developing an eye for looking at performers onstage. Studying costuming was so helpful in discovering what was flattering on all shapes and sizes, how to use color, and how to work with lighting. My theatre degree was very useful to me because I also learned how to look at script and understand a character. When I did a costuming internship at Des Moines Metro Opera, they had hair and makeup artists there. I had not been exposed to that in college (many college theatre programs don't expose you at all). I was completely fascinated by it, and would wander over to their work area every day to see what they were doing. I got obsessed with wanting to try it, and begged them to let me intern for them the next year. Thankfully they agreed and I was able to integrate what I'd learned as a theatre student with what I was learning about hair and makeup. I interned for about a year in various places before I was taken on as an assistant.

**Can you describe a typical working day in the Central City Opera makeup and wig shop? What types of tools would we see in your studio?**

An 8-hour workday is typical. Once I've decided what wigs we need to build, the staff in the wig shop tie hairs into wig foundations all day, closely adhering to the schedule and deadlines I have set. When tech week gets closer, we are washing dozens of wigs, cutting them, setting them in rollers, and styling them. At the same time, I'm also integrating meetings with costume designers and directors, doing research, ordering hair and makeup products, and creating or organizing our

backstage paperwork into all of this. It can get pretty crazy as we approach a first dress rehearsal.

Then it all changes, and we go into working the shows. Some days, we are running a matinee show that starts at 2:00 p.m., and then starting makeup calls for the next show 30 minutes after the previous show went down!

The tools you would find in our shop are numerous and varied, and include sewing machines, human hair in every color, wig lace for foundation building, ventilating needles to tie the hair, canvas head blocks to set the wigs, tons of combs, brushes, styling products, makeup everywhere, special effects stuff like stage blood and latex, baking soda, toothbrushes, a marcel oven, loads of curling irons and rollers, and last and certainly not least, gallons of eyelash glue and Volumax hairspray.

**What would you say is the biggest reward in being an artist working with makeup and wigs? What is your focus and ultimate goal with makeup and wigs when enhancing a costume, actor and production? What is your favorite part of the job?**

The biggest reward and the thing that really makes me feel like a part of this entire creative process, is to have a singer or actor genuinely feel, after I've built a wig for them or created a look, that it has helped them perform. I don't take that lightly. If something I am doing is affecting something that is happening inside for them, then I've done what I was meant to do. People all have insecurities, big or small, about having to stand in front of hundreds of people, all staring at them. There's no way I could do it, and alleviating these fears is a part of my job. If you are supposed to walk out looking glam, I'm going to try everything I've got to make that happen; yet I also love to make people look



old, crazy, deformed, bloody, dead, ghostly, sparkly, ethereal...anything you can imagine. When a performer and I get to a point where we are really in sync about what their character is supposed to look like, and it matches the design, the actor can then help the audience to believe the action on stage. That is the greatest feeling and a connection I love to be able to make.

**What is your advice for someone wanting to start a career in makeup and wigs? What have you done to set yourself apart from other makeup artists?**

This is a very specialized industry, and very competitive. Going to one of the three schools that teach this in the United States is a good start. I have enhanced my career because of connections I made early on while working at Des Moines Opera for eight summers. Also, it is very critical for young artists to know how to build custom-fitting wigs rather than just renting them from somebody else. Wigs are expensive to produce, and I have put thousands of dollars of my own money into building my wig stock. They are also very time consuming, because an average wig takes about 50 hours to build. However, the benefits are worth the time and money in order to build a wig stock and to learn the craft effectively.

**Do you frequently work in media as well as performing arts? How is this different from opera/theater?**

I do photo shoots and commercials when I'm home in Nashville. It's entirely different. Usually for those things you have a lot more time to work on something. But in opera and theater we get a maximum of 30 minutes for each person, and that includes hair and makeup. This has forced me to work very fast without becoming panicked. Opera hair and makeup people have to have nerves of steel, because when we are doing our work there are musicians warming up, people are getting notes while you're putting eyeliner on them, you're hearing calls over the PA, and there are just tons of distractions. When I'm doing a photo shoot, you have a couple people, and you're getting loads of time to get them ready in a quiet environment. I'm glad I learned to work in the theater environment because it forces you to focus very intensely and narrowly, even during a dress rehearsal when I'm getting principals ready while fielding questions, and that focus continues once the rehearsal starts



*Central City Opera's RINALDO (2009) used a variety of wig and makeup techniques, both fanciful and realistic.*

as I run between the house to check the look on stage and then backstage to make changes.

**What is the most exciting and/or challenging opportunity you have had as a makeup and wig artist?**

I love training assistants and interns. I'm very drawn to the idea of teaching the craft I learned in hopes they can pass it on eventually. I like that wigs and makeup are so specialized that a lot of the learning has passed down from hand to hand, rather than in a classroom or finding it online. I want to pass it on correctly. Wig-making is a beautiful art, and something that will always have to be done by hand in order to be completely successful. I like the lack of technology involved in it. It's romantic to me that people have been wearing wigs since the early Egyptians, and that wigmakers have been doing things in almost the same way since that time. There are so few things that remain unchanged in this art. However, the challenge continues to lie in fooling everybody into thinking that what I've done is real.

Take advantage of the many

## ADDED ATTRACTIONS

during the Summer Festival!

Opera Notes – Free previews before every performance at 1:50 p.m. or 7:15 p.m. in Williams Stables

Opera à la Carte – Staged scenes from beloved operas performed by members of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artists Training Program. Select dates at 1:15 p.m. in Williams Stables, prior to matinees. Tickets \$12 (\$8 for season subscribers)

**NEW!**

Signor Deluso – Based on Moliere’s play *Sganarelle*, the comic opera *Signor Deluso* by Thomas Pasatieri follows two couples who suspect their true loves are having affairs. Directed by Central City Opera Artistic Director Emeritus, John Moriarty. Select dates at 1:15 p.m. Tickets \$12 (\$8 for subscribers)

The Face on the Barroom Floor – This 30-minute cabaret opera retells the legend of the famous painting on the Teller House Bar floor. Select dates at 1:15 p.m. Tickets \$12 (\$8 for subscribers)

Salon Recitals – An intimate performance by a young artist in the Teller House Salon. Select Saturdays and Sundays at 12:30 in the Teller House. Tickets \$20

The Nina Odescalchi Kelly Family Matinees – Opera lovers of all ages will enjoy these full-length productions with “what-to-listen-for” introductions and post-performance autograph sessions.

*Madama Butterfly* – Tuesday, July 27 at 2:30 p.m.

*Orpheus in the Underworld* – Tuesday, August 3 at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets \$15 for children ages 6-18, \$20 for adults

Take a Child to the Opera – Enhance your Family Matinee experience! Enjoy lunch with opera singers and activities surrounding each Family Matinee. Price includes ticket and picnic lunch. Sponsored by the Central City Opera House Association Guild. Tickets \$32 for children ages 6-18, \$37 for accompanying adults

Summer Performing Arts Intensive – July 10-24

In collaboration with Central City Opera, the Colorado Springs Conservatory offers a two-week intensive for students ages 14-19 that includes immersion studies in drama, opera and musical theater. Students ages 14-19 are in residence for 10 days in Colorado Springs and then move to Central City where they will attend Festival productions, participate in coachings and classes, and perform their own scenes program for a public audience in Williams Stables. For further information, call the Central City Opera Education & Community Programs Department at 303.331.7026 or Colorado Springs Conservatory at 719.577.4556.

**Public performances July 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> at 8:15 p.m.**

**Tickets \$5.**



Students of the 2009 Performing Arts Intensive. Photo by Erin Joy Swank

For tickets to these events visit  
[www.centralcityopera.org](http://www.centralcityopera.org)  
or call the Central City Opera  
Box Office at 303.292.6700

# RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Bernstein, Richard. The East, the West, and Sex: A History of Erotic Encounters. New York: Knopf, 2009.

Loti, Pierre. Madame Chrysantheme. Project Gutenberg, 2009. 5 May. 2010.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3995/3995-h/3995-h.htm>

Van Rij, Jan. Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San. Berkley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001.

## ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD

<http://www.hipark.austin.isd.tenet.edu/mythology/orpheus.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques\\_Offenbach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Offenbach)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus\\_in\\_the\\_Underworld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus_in_the_Underworld)

## THREE DECEMBERS

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc72.html>

<http://www.fanfaire.com/Heggie/interview.htm>

## MISCELLANY

Music & Math - <http://cnx.org/content/m10945/latest/>

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# BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Check out the Central City Opera Education and Community Programs available during the REST of the year!

**Mozart & Company**, for **elementary** students, introduces the basics of opera – song, story, costumes and props – in arias and short vignettes. Study guide provided in advance.



**Opera Alive!** for **3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades**, provides extended artist residencies for students to engage in performing and creating musical stories.



**The Great Opera Mix-Up**, also for **elementary** students, invites student participation in a mini-opera to provide a deeper acquaintance with story and character. Study guide provided in advance.



**Music!Words!Opera!**, a 5-day workshop for **K-12 teachers** intending to enroll their schools in *Opera Alive!*, prepares teachers for incorporating opera music and stories into curriculum. Free to teachers. Graduate or Continuing Education Credits available.



**How the West Was Sung**, for **upper elementary and middle school** students, establishes the historical contexts for opera as popular entertainment in the days before iPod and DVD and brings Colorado historical characters to life. Study guide provided in advance.



**Performing Arts Intensive**, a two-week summer program in collaboration with the Colorado Springs Conservatory. The Conservatory provides two weeks of instruction and preparation of opera and theatrical scenes for students **ages 14-19**. The group comes to Central City for an intensive four-day experience including attendance at festival operas, workshops and master classes taught by Festival artists and staff, tours and a culminating performance of the students' scenes program in Williams Stables.



**En Mis Palabras (In My Own Words)**, for **middle and high school** students. A bilingual Spanish and English opera follows a 15-year-old girl trying to balance the conflicting influences of her Mexican family cultural traditions and her peer community. Bilingual study guides provided in advance.



**Family Matinees**, for children **ages 6 to 18** and their companion adults, are special performances of Festival repertoire operas (performed by participants in the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artist Training Program) with tickets at significantly discounted prices.



**Opera on the Go**, for **all ages** features arias and scenes from operas and musical theater staged with costumes, props, and musical accompaniment.



**Opera in the Rockies**, touring program, presents community performances and in-school programs in communities throughout the Rocky Mountain region.



**Concerts for family audiences** – **Smooth OPERA**tor and **Love Notes** are available for booking by area concert venues and recreation districts.



Visit [www.centralcityopera.org/education](http://www.centralcityopera.org/education) for more information. To schedule an event or program contact the Education and Community Programs office: 303-331-7026 or [education@centralcityopera.org](mailto:education@centralcityopera.org)