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World Premiere of New American Opera *The Scarlet Letter* to be Presented by Opera Colorado This May

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

DENVER, CO— February 3, 2016—This May, Opera Colorado will present the world premiere of *The Scarlet Letter*—a new adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's iconic American novel by composer Lori Laitman and librettist David Mason. The premiere marks yet another major milestone for Opera Colorado, which recently announced a return to a three-production season in 2016-17.

Directed by Beth Greenberg, who is making her Opera Colorado debut, and conducted by Music Director Ari Pelto, with set design by Erhard Rom and costume design by Terese Wadden, Opera Colorado's premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* will feature soprano Laura Claycomb as Hester Prynne in her Opera Colorado debut. Claycomb takes the place of Elizabeth Futral, who has had to withdraw from the production due to personal health reasons. Additional cast members include: baritone Malcolm MacKenzie as Roger Chillingworth; tenor Dominic Armstrong as Arthur Dimmesdale; mezzo-soprano Margaret Gawrysiak as Mistress Hibbons; baritone Daniel Belcher as Governor Bellingham; and tenor Kyle Erdos Knapp as John Wilson.

"Opera Colorado is committed to presenting new American opera—from our co-production of John Adams' *Nixon in China* in 2008, to the presentation of Daniel Catan's *Florencia En El Amazonas* in 2012, to our upcoming presentation of Laura Kaminsky's *As One* in 2017, and now the world premiere of *The Scarlet Letter*," stated General Director Greg Carpenter. "Lori Laitman and David Mason have created a truly American opera which speaks to social issues that are just as relevant today as they were over 160



years ago when Hawthorne first published his celebrated novel.” Carpenter continued, “We are sorry that Elizabeth has had to withdraw from the production and wish her all the best. We are thrilled that Laura Claycomb was available to step into the role of Hester Prynne. We know that Laura will bring this role to life in a most compelling way and we look forward to introducing her to our audiences.”

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. Since that performance, Laitman has updated the opera’s score—re-orchestrating the entire work, expanding the choral writing, and tightening up the dramaturgy.

“David Mason and I are thrilled to have Opera Colorado present the world premiere of our opera *The Scarlet Letter* at the beautiful Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver,” said composer Lori Laitman. “Greg Carpenter and Ari Pelto have assembled an unparalleled cast and artistic team. *The Scarlet Letter* is a timeless American tale which addresses the plight of individuals in conflict with a severely repressive and uniform society. Hester Prynne’s unflagging strength serves as an inspiration to all. I have composed the score with the goal of honoring the text by creating memorable melodies, complex harmonies, and powerful orchestrations to reveal the inner psyche of each character and illuminate the drama of every scene. We all look forward to sharing this new work with the public.”

“Nathaniel Hawthorne’s classic American text is rich with themes that are very much at the forefront of our country’s cultural and social challenges today—from the role of religion in our society, to women’s rights, to the nature of community,” said librettist David Mason. “In *The Scarlet Letter*, we breathe new life into these themes and invite the audience to see them in a new light. I am thrilled that Opera Colorado will present the work to the Rocky Mountain Region, and share the work with my fellow Coloradans.”

“Staging a new work, especially one as beautiful and resonant as *The Scarlet Letter*, is an exciting challenge 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.”

In addition to the main stage production, Opera Colorado commissioned Laitman to create a one-hour, touring version of the full-length opera to share with communities across the United States. The work will be toured with Opera Colorado’s Young Artists at various locations throughout the Colorado Front Range beginning in the fall of 2016. 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.

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*. In addition to the 2008 performance by the University's faculty and students, excerpts of this early version of the work were also presented at the Clinton Presidential Library in 2009 and at the OPERA America Salon Series.

Opera Colorado's premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* is another major milestone for the Company, which recently announced the return to a three-production season in 2016-17, the appointment of Ari Pelto as the first Music Director in its history, and a new five-year strategic plan as it looks to increase and diversify its programming and repertory, build the national scope of its Young Artists program, and further extend the Company's reach through engagements in venues outside of the traditional opera house. The Company preemptively embarked on a reorganization initiative in 2012 to address an operating deficit from lower-than-anticipated ticket sales and fundraising shortfalls. The reorganization included postponing the premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* by three years and moving to a two-production season, as well as introducing other measures to reduce operating overhead. Since the restructuring, Opera Colorado has garnered valuable support from the community, achieved higher-than-anticipated ticket sales and sold-out performances, and ended the past three fiscal years with operating surpluses.

Opera Colorado's 2016-17 season will include an inventive new staging of Giacomo Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*; the Colorado premiere of *As One*, a groundbreaking multimedia chamber opera by Laura Kaminsky; and Gaetano Donizetti's classic work *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

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 Native Americans, 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 to plot their escape, sure they can flee 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.

The Scarlet Letter by Lori Laitman

May 7, 10, 13, 15, 2016

Cast

Laura Claycomb, Hester Prynne
Dominic Armstrong, Arthur Dimmesdale
Malcolm MacKenzie, Roger Chillingworth
Daniel Belcher, Governor Bellingham
Margaret Gawrysiak, Mistress Hibbons
Kyle Erdos Knapp, John Wilson

Creative Team

Lori Laitman, Composer
David Mason, Librettist
Ari Peltó, Conductor
Beth Greenberg, Director
Erhard Rom, Set Design
Terese Wadden, Costume Design
Robert Wierzel, Lighting Design
Topher Blair, Projection Design

For full biographical information on the cast and creative team, as well as high-resolution sketches and images, please visit Opera Colorado's website here: <https://www.operacolorado.org/the-scarlet-letter/>

About Opera Colorado

A great city needs great art, and for more than three decades Opera Colorado has brought world-class performing arts to Colorado audiences. Today Opera Colorado serves as a cornerstone of Denver's



cultural community, bringing live opera experiences to audiences throughout the state of Colorado and at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, its Denver home since the grand opening in 2005. Each season, the company reaches more than 35,500 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs. Opera Colorado's Young Artists, singers at the beginning stages of their careers, perform during their eight-month residency with the company in schools and community centers across the State – including an annual tour on the Western Slope. Recognized nationally for its excellence, the Young Artists program provides training for the next generation of American opera singers. Opera Colorado's Inside OC initiative for young professionals brings together like-minded individuals for networking, learning and attending opera performances. Presenting new works and productions, alongside standard repertoire in the grand opera tradition, Opera Colorado contributes artistically to the advancement of the art form. The 2015-2016 Season productions at the Opera House featured sold out performances of *Aida* (November 7-15, 2015) and will feature the world premiere of a new American opera, *The Scarlet Letter* (May 7-15, 2016). www.operacolorado.org

About Greg Carpenter

The fourth General Director in Opera Colorado's 31-year history, Greg Carpenter guides both the artistic and administrative operations of the company. His role as General Director began in 2007, prior to which he served as Opera Colorado's Director of Development from 2004 – 2007, overseeing all fundraising and Board of Directors activities. Prior to joining Opera Colorado, he worked for four years for the National Symphony Orchestra at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. His work there included Special Projects Manager for the President of the National Symphony Orchestra from 2000 – 2001 and Manager of Development from 2001 – 2004. Carpenter's extensive experience working in the arts also includes two years as the Artist and Event Services Manager for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland and Special Projects Coordinator for the University of Maryland School of Music. From 1986 – 1998, Greg Carpenter performed as a professional opera singer. His work as an opera singer included both lead and supporting roles at Glimmerglass Opera, Central City Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia, Cleveland Opera and Lyric Opera Cleveland. Carpenter currently serves on the Board of Directors for OPERA America, the national service organization for the opera industry. For the 2008 National Performing Arts Convention held in Denver, he served as Chairman of the Fundraising Committee. In 2009 Carpenter received a Livingston Fellowship Award in Leadership from the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation. He also regularly serves as a judge for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has served as a judge for the Fritz and Lavinia Jensen Foundation Competition. Greg Carpenter received a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance from Wittenberg University, a Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Michigan State University, and he completed post-graduate studies at the University of Maryland School of Music.



About Lori Laitman, composer

Composer Lori Laitman has been described as “one of the most talented and intriguing of living composers” by Fanfare Magazine. To date, she has composed three operas, an oratorio, choral works, and over 250 songs, setting texts by classical and contemporary poets, including the lost voices of those who perished in the Holocaust. A *magna cum laude* Yale graduate with a Master of Music from Yale’s School of Music, Laitman’s music has been featured on Thomas Hampson’s *Song of America* radio series and website and in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*. Her songs are widely performed internationally and throughout the USA, and her recordings have garnered exceptional praise. *The Three Feathers*, Laitman’s one-act children’s opera with librettist Dana Gioia, was commissioned by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech, and premiered October 2014 in a production directed by Beth Greenberg. Laitman continues her work with poet David Mason, and they are currently developing *Ludlow*, a new opera based on Mason’s verse novel about the 1914 Colorado mining town disaster.

About David Mason, librettist

Born and raised in Bellingham, Washington, David Mason’s award-winning collections of poetry include *The Buried Houses* (1991), *The Country I Remember* (1996), *Arrivals* (2004), the verse novel *Ludlow* (2007), and *Sea Salt: Poems of a Decade: 2004 – 2014*. He has also published a memoir, two collections of essays, and several anthologies. His work appears in *Best American Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. As a librettist, Mason collaborated with Lori Laitman on her opera *The Scarlet Letter* and on an opera adaptation of *Ludlow*, for which Mason received the 2009 Thatcher Hoffman Smith Creativity in Motion Prize. He wrote the libretto for her oratorio, *Vedem*, and for Tom Cipullo’s opera, *After Life*. He has also been awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Greece. Mason teaches at Colorado College and was appointed the Colorado poet laureate from 2010-2014.

About Ari Pelto, Music Director designee and Conductor

In May 2015, Opera Colorado appointed Ari Pelto as the first Music Director in its history. He will serve as Music Director designee beginning July 1, 2015 and take the helm as Music Director beginning July 1, 2016. Pelto is in demand at elite opera houses, ballets, symphonies, and conservatories throughout the United States. After his highly praised 2004 début at New York City Opera with Verdi’s *La Traviata*, Pelto was engaged as a regular guest there, returning for *Madama Butterfly*, Jennifer Griffith’s *The Dream President*, *La bohème*, and *Carmen*. Recent highlights include *La bohème* with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis and the St. Louis Symphony; *The Cunning Little Vixen* at Chautauqua; *Rusalka* and *La bohème* at Boston Lyric Opera; *Romeo et Juliet* at Minnesota Opera; *The Magic Flute*, *Figaro*, and *Hansel and Gretel* at Portland Opera; as well as *Carmen* and *Hansel and Gretel* at Utah Opera. He has also been a regular



guest conductor of the Atlanta Ballet. In 2012, he collaborated with Twyla Tharp on the premiere of her new ballet, *The Princess and the Goblin*. Peltó has conducted operas of Mozart and Stravinsky at the Curtis Institute of Music, Gluck and Mozart at the Juilliard School, Puccini and Massenet at San Francisco Conservatory, and Stephen Paulus and Raffaello de Banfield at the Manhattan School of Music. At the Oberlin Conservatory, he has led works of Mahler, Mozart, and Poulenc, and at New York University, works of Sibelius, Brahms, Dvořák, and Martinu. He has also conducted in Italy, Germany, and Bulgaria. Peltó studied violin performance at Oberlin and conducting at Indiana University.

About Beth Greenberg, Director

Beth Greenberg is renowned for her work with the New York City Opera. For the Lincoln Center company she directed original mainstage productions of *Tales of Hoffmann* and *Turandot*, as well as many revivals including *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Tosca*, *La Traviata*, *Intermezzo*, and *La bohème*. Across the East River, aboard an historic oil tanker moored in Red Hook, Brooklyn, she recently directed a site-specific production of Puccini's *Il Tabarro*. Beth Greenberg has earned a solid reputation for her collaborations with contemporary composers. She works on all phases of a new show's development, from early libretto and workshop readings to fully-staged productions. Recent world premieres include *The Three Feathers* children's opera by Lori Laitman and librettist Dana Gioia and *The Red Silk Thread* by Stella Sung. She's also currently involved with many operas in development, including *Steal a Pencil for Me* by Gerald Cohen and Deborah Brevoort, Nkeiru Okoye's *Harriet Tubman*, and *The Enchanted Organ* by Gordon Beeferman. Her original productions have been seen worldwide with *Carmen* in Tokyo and *Tosca* in Lima, Peru. In America she has staged *Aida* for Utah Festival Opera; *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Don Pasquale* for the Pittsburgh Opera Center; *Eugene Onegin* for Opera Delaware; *Rigoletto* for the Crested Butte Music Festival in Colorado; and *Madama Butterfly*, *Rigoletto*, and *Barber* for The Phoenicia International Festival of the Voice. She was awarded a Fulbright to Germany where she apprenticed with Gotz Friedrich at Berlin's Deutsche Oper. As an educator she has been a Mentor Director for the SDC (Stage Directors and Choreographers) Foundation, and has taught master classes at SongFest and Mannes.

About Laura Claycomb, Soprano

Grammy® Award winning soprano Laura Claycomb has firmly established herself as one of the finest operatic coloratura sopranos of her generation, best known for her ethereal high notes, impeccable musicianship, and dramatic stage presence. Ms. Claycomb has appeared repeatedly with the Paris Opera, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, Théâtre de la Monnaie, the London Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Le Concert d'Astrée, and the Cleveland Orchestra. Recent roles have included Amina in *La sonnambula* at the Bolshoi Theater, *Lucia di Lammermoor* with New Orleans Opera, and Cunegonde in



Candide with the Maggio Musicale in Florence, as well as Ophélie in *Hamlet* with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Tytania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Bergen National Opera, and her return to the San Francisco Symphony for Strauss' *Brentano Lieder*.