

# UCSB DEPARTMENT of MUSIC

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## **UCSB OPERA THEATRE PRESENTS DOMINICK ARGENTO CHAMBER OPERA COMPETITION FINALISTS**

*UCSB students present excerpts from operas chosen as finalists for the Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition at Hahn Hall at the Music Academy of the West*

SANTA BARBARA, December 12, 2016—UCSB's Opera Theatre program will present excerpts from the three operas chosen as finalists for the 2016-2018 Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition on Friday, January 6, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. at Hahn Hall at the Music Academy of the West. The performance is part of the National Opera Association's annual convention, which will be held for the first time in Santa Barbara from January 4-8, 2017 at the Fess Parker Hotel. Following UCSB Opera Theatre's presentation of the opera excerpts, a panel of judges—including Kostis Protopapas, Henry Price, Robin Guarino, and Michael Ching—will select the winning opera, which will be performed in its entirety at the 2018 convention.

The Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition encourages the composition and performance of short operas especially useful in opera workshops and other training venues. The 2016-2018 finalists include *After Life* by Tom Cipullo (composer) and David Mason (librettist); *Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain* by Jeremy Gill (composer & librettist); and *The Scarecrow* by Joseph Turrin (composer) and Bernard Stambler (librettist).

The collaboration between the UCSB Voice Program and the National Opera Association is one that UCSB Associate Professor and UCSB Opera Theatre's producer, Benjamin Brecher, is looking forward to: "The Voice Area and Department of Music at UCSB are very excited to be a part of the National Opera Association's National Conference, and perform as a part of the Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition. Our performance at Hahn Hall will be a great opportunity to show opera directors and producers from all over North America the quality of students and teaching we have here. The three operas we will be performing are fantastic vehicles for our students in terms of their growth as singing actors and musicians. It has been a fantastic experience so far, and we are all looking forward to giving these three operas justice with our spirited and thoughtful performance."

Sara Widzer, whom the Department of Music is bringing in from Los Angeles to direct the NOA production, bills UCSB Opera Theatre's upcoming performance as "an evening of magic, memory and mystery, in which three exceptionally different and extraordinarily imaginative chamber operas grace the same stage in one program. One world is 'once upon a time' with an unknown 'happily ever after'; while another in an unthinkable place with an unlikely reunion about a not so uncommon bond; and the last in what might be the present, yet feels like a memory, but might be a dream. This drastically wide span of subject matter does not preclude these three pieces from having the same themes of 'love,' 'life,' and 'art,' which ties them together and breathes a universal human truth into each word and note. One character so astutely proclaims, 'I see ahead of me a world of many problems and few solutions. The way lies open for me to perform great deeds.' These themes indeed make great deeds."

### **About the composers and their works**

## **Tom Cipullo (*After Life*)**

Hailed by the American Academy of Art & Letters for music of “inexhaustible imagination, wit, expressive range and originality,” composer Tom Cipullo’s works are performed regularly throughout the United States and with increasing frequency internationally. He is the winner of the 2016 Pellicciotti Opera Composition Prize from SUNY/Potsdam, a 2012 Guggenheim Fellowship, the 2013 Sylvia Goldstein Award from Copland House, and the 2013 Arts & Letters Award from the American Academy. Cipullo’s music is published by Oxford University Press and Classical Vocal Reprints, and recorded on the Naxos, Albany, CRI, PGM, MSR, GPR, Centaur, and Capstone labels. Cipullo’s first opera, *Glory Denied*, is based on the true story of America’s longest-held prisoner of war. It has enjoyed numerous productions around the US, and the Fort Worth Opera recording on Albany Records was cited by *Opera News* as among the best of 2014. Reviewers have hailed the work as “intriguing and unconventional (*New York Times*),” praising its “luminous score (*Washington Post*)” and noting “the dramatic tension was relentless (*Opera News*).”

In Cipullo’s opera *After Life*, Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso are conjured back to life to debate their legacies as well as their activities in WWII Paris. Their confrontation is interrupted by a Holocaust victim who forces them to reconsider the meaning of death.

## **Jeremy Gill (*Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain*)**

Described as “vividly colored (*The New York Times*)” and “exhilarating (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*),” Jeremy Gill’s music has earned him residencies and fellowships with Copland House (2015), American Opera Projects (2013–14), and the MacDowell Colony (2013), as well as major grants from New Music USA (2015) and Chamber Music America (2011). In November 2015, he traveled to Cuba with the first Artist Delegation to the Havana Contemporary Music Festival, a historic trip documented by NPR. During the 2015–16 season the Dallas Symphony premiered *Serenada Concertante*, featuring DSO principal oboe Erin Hannigan and conducted by Jaap van Zweden, and Duo Cortona premiered *Carmen de Boheme* during the SONiC Festival in NYC. Other notable performances included a staged *Helian*, conceived by director Copeland Woodruff for baritone Jonathan Hays with Jeremy on piano, and the staged premiere of his chamber opera *Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain* by Lyric Theatre @ Illinois and the Illinois Modern Ensemble, conducted by Jeremy. Jeremy was the first Composer in Residence with Chautauqua Opera (2016), where three new works of his were premiered, and also served as cover conductor to General and Artistic Director Steven Osgood and as a member of the coaching staff.

In *Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain*, Vanessa, a young writer, awakens one morning in Quebec to find her companion, Petrus, musing over some letters he’s found in an old book. The contents of the letters set Vanessa on a path of self-discovery and reveal dark truths about her recent life. *Letters from Quebec to Providence in the Rain* is a short opera for four singers and chamber ensemble based on the play of the same name by Don Nigro.

## **Joseph Turrin (*The Scarecrow*)**

Joseph Turrin’s music has been commissioned and performed by some of the world’s leading orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists. His work encompasses many varied forms, including film, theater, opera, orchestral, chamber, jazz, electronic, and dance. Several of his films and recording projects have been nominated for Emmy and Grammy Awards. His works have been recorded on RCA, EMI, Teldec, Naxos, Summit, Klavier, Cala, Albany, Crystal, and others. Not only a recipient of several commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Live from Lincoln Center, his works have been championed by such noted musicians as Kurt Masur, Zubin Mehta, Erich Leinsdorf, Wynton Marsalis, Beverly Sills, the Canadian Brass, Anne-Sophie Mutter, and others. In 2006 he was awarded an honorary Master of Humane Letters from the Eastman School of Music and the University of Rochester. He is currently on the faculty of the Hartt School and Montclair State University.

Turrin’s opera *The Scarecrow* is a chamber opera in two acts, and is based on a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The work was commissioned by a consortium of twelve universities and had its premiere at the University of Texas at Austin, where Mr. Turrin was Composer in Residence in 2006.

## **About the judges**

**Michael Ching** is completing his second one act opera for the Savannah Voice Festival, *Anna Hunter*. *Anna* is a story about historic preservation in the 1950s. His first opera for SVF, *Alice Ryley*, was premiered in 2015 and revived in 2016, and featured a cameo role for SVF’s co-founder Sherrill Milnes. *Alice* will receive its first performance outside of Savannah this spring at Drake University. As a composer, Michael is now best known for his opera *Speed Dating Tonight!* Since its premiere at the Janiec Opera of the Brevard Music Center in 2013, *Speed Dating Tonight!* has had nearly forty productions scheduled, including fifteen in the 2016-17 season. *Speed Dating Tonight!* has new dates written for productions at Amarillo Opera and

Emerald City Opera in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Michael was Artistic Director of Opera Memphis from 1992-2010. He was a member of the Houston Opera Studio and studied composition with Carlisle Floyd and Robert Ward. He is the Board President of the Douglas Moore Fund for American Opera. The fund is currently interested in helping encourage performances of Moore's lesser known operas such as *Carrie Nation* and Moore's art songs.

**Robin Guarino** joined the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music after most recently serving on the faculty of The Juilliard School. Additional teaching and directing engagements have included the Manhattan School of Music, Mannes College of Music, New York University, and UCLA. She has worked as a stage director with The Metropolitan Opera, where she directed and restaged productions of *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Magic Flute*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Lohengrin*. Additional directing engagements have included Glimmerglass Opera, Seattle Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Virginia Opera, Chautauqua Opera, and the American Symphony Orchestra in performances at Avery Fisher Hall and Alice Tully Hall. Recent directing engagements include *The Marriage of Figaro* and *L'Étoile* for the Wolf Trap Opera Festival, *La Calisto*, *Iphigénie en Aulide* and *The Magic Flute* for Juilliard Opera Theatre, *Il Signor Bruschino* for Gotham Chamber Opera, and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* for Seattle Opera. Guarino directed *Six Ten-Minute Operas I & II* for the Eos Orchestra (New York City), which included the world premieres of chamber operas by Jake Heggie (*Again*) and Mark Adamo (*Avow*), the world premiere of David del Tredici's monodrama, *Dracula* (also with Eos), and the American premiere of Heinrich Sutermeister's *Die Schwarze Spinne* for Gotham Chamber Opera. Also a filmmaker, she has produced and directed four independent films including *Crossing the Atlantic*, which was shown on PBS' "Independent Focus."

**Henry Price** is Professor of Voice at Pepperdine University. A well-known tenor, he first appeared at the New York City Opera in *La traviata*. Through 1980, he was seen with that company in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Lucrezia Borgia* (opposite Beverly Sills in Tito Capobianco's production), *La belle Hélène* (as Paris), *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Die Fledermaus* (as Alfred), *Manon*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Die lustige Witwe* (as Camille de Rosillon), *Il turco in Italia*, *The Student Prince*, and *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. He later returned to City Opera for Prince Félix Youssouпов in the world premiere of Jay Reise's *Rasputin*. Dr. Price appeared with opera companies throughout North America, and from 1982 to 1988 was resident tenor with the state operas in Mainz, Germany and Linz, Austria. He is perhaps best known for his national telecasts opposite Beverly Sills: *La traviata* (Wolf Trap, 1976), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (City Opera, 1976), *Manon* (City Opera, 1977) and *Il turco in Italia* (City Opera, 1978). Their EMI recording of *Die lustige Witwe* (in English translation, 1978) won a Grammy Award. In 1978, he also appeared in the televised *Vanessa* from the Spoleto Festival USA.

**Kostis Protopapas** was named Artistic Director of Opera Santa Barbara in August 2015. The company's 2016-17 season, the first to be planned entirely by Kostis, will also include two company premieres: Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Puccini's *La rondine*. 2016 saw the end of Kostis' long association with Tulsa Opera, where he served as Artistic Director from November 2007 until May 2016, as Interim Executive Director from November 2011 until February 2013, and as Associate Conductor and Chorus Master from 2001 until 2007. During his 15-year tenure with the company, Kostis conducted 30 productions of a diverse repertoire extending from popular classics like *Carmen* to contemporary American works like *Elmer Gantry* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Between 2002 and 2008 Kostis was also an Assistant Conductor for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, LA Opera, and Santa Fe Opera. At the Lyric Opera of Chicago, he also served as Assistant Chorus Master under Donald Palumbo for two seasons. Kostis started his career on the music staff of Virginia Opera and Opera Memphis; he conducted at Opera in the Ozarks every summer from 2000 to 2004; has been a regular guest conductor at Union Avenue Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Columbus, and Shreveport Opera.

## About the UCSB Opera Theatre team

### Sara Widzer, Director

Sara Widzer is a stage director and acting coach based out of Los Angeles, CA. Recent operatic engagements include Virginia Opera and Hawaii Opera Theatre for *Der fliegende Holländer*, original production directed by Francesca Zambello; Pasadena Opera for *Susannah*; the Royal Opera House, Muscat for *The Music Man*; the Glimmerglass Festival for *A Celebration of Benjamin Britten*; Opera in the Ozarks for *Don Giovanni*, *Tosca*, *Pagliacci* and *Hänsel und Gretel*; Celestial Opera for *Faust* and *Giulio Cesare*; and the Florida State Opera for *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame* and an original adaptation of *L'elisir d'amore*. A selection of theatre engagements include *Reasons to be Pretty*, *Bury the Dead*, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* with the Lee Strasberg Creative Center; *Bootleggers* with The Actors' Studio, Los Angeles; *Spring Awakening* with Connecticut College; and *In Their Own Words: Verdi, Wilson, & Weill* with the Glimmerglass Festival. Widzer recently served as Assistant Director with Washington National Opera for Robert Longbottom's new production of *Le Fille du Régiment* starring Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She has also assistant directed at Portland Opera for *Showboat*; the Glimmerglass Festival for *Der fliegende Holländer*, *The Music Man*, and *King for a Day*; and UCLA Opera for *L'enfant et les*

*sortilèges* and *Il segreto de Susanna*. Widzer has served as assistant under notable directors including Francesca Zambello, Marcia Milgrom Dodge, Peter Kazaras, Matthew Lata, Ray Roderick, Robert Egan, Salome Jens, Casey Stangl, and Mark Rydell. Widzer has also served as guest coach at UCLA, Cal State University Long Beach, and Florida State University as well as staff instructor at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in Los Angeles for over ten years. She received her MM in Opera Directing from Florida State University, her BA in theatre from Connecticut College, and has an Artist's Diploma from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in Shakespeare.

### **Benjamin Brecher, Producer and UCSB Associate Professor of Voice**

The American tenor Benjamin Brecher has gained great acclaim with his many performances on the opera and concert stages. Mr. Brecher has performed over fifty operatic roles at many of the world's most prestigious venues and has sung with over forty orchestras spanning from New York to Tel Aviv. He has performed over thirteen roles with The New York City Opera; appearing in their productions of *Il Viaggio a Reims*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, *Carmen*, *Seven Deadly Sins*, and the New York premiere of *Central Park*. Other engagements include: *La Sonnambula*, *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, and *Otello* with Opera Orchestra of New York; Lindoro in *L'Italiana in Algeri* with Opera de Montreal, Tel Aviv, and Opera de Nice; Camille in *The Merry Widow* with the Palm Beach Opera; *Candide in Rome*; and *Viaggio a Reims* at The Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, Italy. On the concert stage, Mr. Brecher has performed a wide range of repertoire with the world's finest symphonies, including the orchestras of Chicago, Chautauqua, Mexico City, Rome, Budapest, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Indianapolis, Ft. Worth, Pittsburgh, Virginia, Seattle, Florida, Detroit, Naples, Baltimore, Seattle, Portland, Toronto, Buffalo, Edmonton, Milwaukee, Columbus, National Arts Orchestra Ottawa, and the National Symphony at Kennedy Center, among many others. Mr. Brecher has many recordings including *The Barber of Seville* with The Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, the 2010 release of Bernstein's *Candide* recorded live in Rome, along with two live PBS concerts from Carnegie Hall, "Ira Gershwin at 100" and "The Music of Lerner and Lowe." Mr. Brecher is a graduate of The Juilliard Opera Center, New England Conservatory of Music, and Bowling Green State University. Before joining the UCSB faculty in 2008, he served as Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay from 2006-2008, where he directed the opera and taught voice.

### **[UCSB Opera Theatre presents NOA Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition finalists](#)**

Friday, January 6, 2017. 7:30 p.m. Hahn Hall at the Music Academy of the West (1070 Fairway Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93108).

### **Tickets**

There are a limited number of general admission tickets available for this event, all of which are \$10. Tickets may be purchased online at [music.ucsb.edu/news/purchase-tickets](http://music.ucsb.edu/news/purchase-tickets), at the door, at the AS Ticket Office window (UCEN Room 1535, across from Corwin Pavilion), or by calling the AS Ticket Office at **(805) 893-2064**.

For press tickets, additional information, photos, or to request an interview with an artist, please contact Adriane Hill at [ahill@music.ucsb.edu](mailto:ahill@music.ucsb.edu) or **(805) 893-3230**. To sign up for the Department of Music's newsletter, please [click here](#). Follow the Department of Music on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

### **About the National Opera Association**

The National Opera Association promotes excellence in opera education and pedagogy through its support of a diverse community of opera educators and professionals. To learn more about the NOA, please visit [www.noa.org](http://www.noa.org).

### **About the UC Santa Barbara Department of Music**

From an institution that began life dedicated to training the next generation of music educators, to what is now a fully established research and professional graduate program, graduates of the UC Santa Barbara Department of Music have distinguished themselves both nationally and internationally. Many have gone on to teaching, either privately or in outstanding secondary school positions, and in more recent years, graduates have joined the faculties of major colleges and universities in the United States and abroad. A number have become widely recognized and published scholars; some are now prize-winning and frequently performed composers, while others are writing for television and film. Alumni are also establishing fine reputations as conductors of orchestras, opera, and choruses. Graduates of the instrumental programs have gone on to solo and orchestral careers with leading orchestras, and our singers can be heard in opera companies around the world.

With over 200 events presented annually, the UC Santa Barbara Department of Music offers something for every music lover. The department boasts 26 unique performing ensembles, each with a quarterly concert

calendar. Chamber music, large ensembles, opera, contemporary groups, world music, and jazz ensembles make up the department's rich performance calendar, along with lectures, master classes, and presentations from the ethnomusicology, musicology, theory, and composition programs. For a complete listing of upcoming performances and lectures, please visit the UC Santa Barbara Department of Music website at [www.music.ucsb.edu](http://www.music.ucsb.edu).

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