

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE

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Pittsburgh Opera presents *The Grapes of Wrath*: World premiere of the revised opera by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie



Pittsburgh, PA (November 3, 2008) . . . Pittsburgh Opera announces the world premiere of the revised version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a new opera based on John Steinbeck's novel, by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie. Both Gordon and Korie will be in Pittsburgh to supervise the production.

**Michael Korie and Ricky Ian Gordon.
Photo: Gregory Downer**

WHAT: *The Grapes of Wrath* by composer Ricky Ian Gordon and librettist Michael Korie, based on the novel by John Steinbeck. A co-production by Pittsburgh Opera, The Minnesota Opera, Utah Symphony & Opera, and Opera Pacific.

WHERE: Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

WHEN: Saturday, November 15 at 8:00 PM Tuesday, November 18 at 7:00 PM
Friday, November 21 at 8:00 PM Sunday, November 23 at 2:00 PM

RUN TIME: Three hours and 30 minutes including two 15-minute intermissions

LANGUAGE: Sung in English with projected English texts

TICKETS: Start at \$16. Call (412) 456-6666, visit www.pittsburghopera.org, or at the Theater Square box office at 665 Penn Avenue.

MORE INFO: For an enhanced version of this release, and related events, see

<http://www.pittsburghopera.org/pressroom/pressroom.shtml?search=action&category=H000>.

The Grapes of Wrath follows the Joad family as they pursue the American Dream from Oklahoma to the orchards of California. OBIE-winning composer Gordon (*Orpheus and Euridice*, 2005) and Tony-nominated librettist Korie (*Grey Gardens*, 2007) fuse the traditions of opera and Broadway with blues, Appalachian music, and echoes of Copland and Gershwin.

Pittsburgh Opera's production reflects the substantial revisions Gordon and Korie have made to the score since the world premiere at Minnesota Opera in January 2007, including a reconfigured first act and expanded choral writing.

Richard Buckley takes the podium to lead members of the original Minnesota Opera cast, as well as former Resident Artists of Pittsburgh Opera in major roles: Craig Verm (Tom Joad), Sean Panikkar (Jim Casy), and Jason Karn (Al Joad). WQED's Anna Singer plays Granma. New to Pittsburgh are soprano Danielle Pastin as Rosasharn (a first-year Resident Artist making her company debut), Jesse Blumberg as Connie Rivers, and Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Bishop as Ma Joad.

The cast of 19 soloists includes three children and an ensemble of bit players who—along with the impressive chorus—portray waitresses, truck drivers, politicians, field hands, and townspeople.

The Production

As co-producer of this inspiring new opera, Pittsburgh Opera presents *The Grapes of Wrath* in its innovative set by opera and Broadway designer Allen Moyer (*Grey Gardens* on Broadway; Pittsburgh Opera productions *The Elixir of Love* and *The Flying Dutchman*). Moyer uses a vintage Ford truck and animated front and rear projections by Wendall K. Harrington to portray the different locations as the Joads travel across Route 66 to California.

Director/dramaturg Eric Simonson, the Academy Award®-winning film and stage director who has also acted in *The Grapes of Wrath* theater production, has been involved with the work from the beginning. Director/choreographer Doug Varone, who won a 2006 OBIE award for his work on Ricky Ian Gordon's *Orpheus and Euridice*, works with Simonson to create some of the most striking scenes in the opera.

- Gordon and Korie have found the timeless and timely essence of Steinbeck's epic.
—*LA Times*
- This is not a happy story, but its telling is nothing short of incandescent
—*Variety*
- Gordon, who first made his name in the theatre and as a composer of Broadway-style songs, fills his score with...Gershwin-esque song-and-dance numbers, a few sweetly soaring love songs in the manner of Jerome Kern, banjo-twanging ballads, saxed-up jazz

choruses, even a barbershop quartet. Yet, with a slyness worthy of Weill, Gordon wields his hummable tunes to critical effect.

—*The New Yorker*

PRINCIPAL CAST & CONDUCTOR

Conductor	Richard Buckley	
Rosasharn	Danielle Pastin+*	
Ma Joad	Elizabeth Bishop+	
Granma	Anna Singer	
Jim Casy	Sean Panikkar**	
Tom Joad	Craig Verm**	
Pa Joad	<i>Peter Halverson+</i>	
Uncle John	<i>Robert Orth</i>	
Connie Rivers	<i>Jesse Blumberg+</i>	
Noah Joad	<i>Andrew Wilkowske+</i>	
Granpa	Joseph Frank	
Al Joad	Jason Karn**	
Featured Ensemble	<i>Anna Jablonski+</i>	Mae, the Waitress
	<i>Greg Pearson+</i>	
	<i>Theodore Chletsos+</i>	
	<i>Karin Wolverton+</i>	
	<i>Kelly Markgraf+</i>	The Ragged Man

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Original Stage Director and Dramaturg	<i>Eric Simonson+</i>
Original Choreographer	<i>Doug Varone+</i>
Production	Co-Commissioned by The Minnesota Opera and Utah Opera
Orchestration	<i>Ricky Ian Gordon and Bruce Coughlin</i>
Set Designer	<i>Allen Moyer</i>
Costume Designer	<i>Kärin Kopischke+</i>
Lighting Designer	<i>Robert Wierzel</i>
Video Designer	<i>Wendall K. Harrington+</i>
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Sound Designer	Chris Evans
Chorus Master	Mark Trawka
Asst. Stage Director/Fight Choreographer	<i>Doug Scholz-Carlson</i>
Aerial work	<i>Flying by Foy</i>

Italics denote members of world premiere company at The Minnesota Opera

- + Pittsburgh Opera debuts
- * Pittsburgh Opera Center artists
- ** Pittsburgh Opera Center alumni

Original scenery and costumes are jointly owned by Pittsburgh Opera, The Minnesota Opera, Utah Symphony & Opera, and Opera Pacific and were constructed at The Minnesota Opera and Utah Symphony & Opera shops.

This production is generously sponsored by *Nova Chemicals*.
WPXI-TV is the media sponsor of *The Grapes of Wrath*.
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Links:

Pittsburgh Opera www.pittsburghopera.org

Ricky Ian Gordon www.rickyiangordon.com

Collected reviews <http://www.rickyiangordon.com/grapes-press.html>

Pittsburgh Opera, now celebrating its 70th season, is one of America's leading opera companies. It produces a range of programs, from mainstage productions to free community concerts to intimate cabarets. Pittsburgh Opera's internationally renowned resident artist program is among the country's top five training centers for rising opera stars. More than 20,000 students, families, and educators participate in Pittsburgh Opera educational events annually. The company's newly designed administrative and rehearsal space is housed in a 140-year-old air brake factory in the city's Strip District.

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