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OPERA SARATOGA ANNOUNCES RECEIPT OF TWO NEW GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *THE LONG WALK* AND COMMUNITY EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE PREMIERE

FIRST FREE EVENT

'SARATOGA SINGS OF WAR AND HOMECOMING – THE MAKING OF A WORLD PREMIERE'
TO TAKE PLACE AT THE NEW YORK STATE MILITARY MUSEUM
ON THURSDAY, MARCH 12TH, 2015 AT 7:00 PM

Lawrence Edelson, Artistic and General Director of Opera Saratoga, announced today that the company has received two important new grants to help support the world premiere of *The Long Walk*, a new opera by composer **Jeremy Howard Beck** and librettist **Stephanie Fleischmann**, based on the critically acclaimed memoir of war and homecoming by **Brian Castner**. *The Long Walk* will be presented as part of Opera Saratoga's upcoming Summer Festival. This is the first time Opera Saratoga has received grants from either of these prestigious organizations.

The first grant, in the amount of \$5,000, was awarded to Opera Saratoga by **The Aaron Copland Fund for Music**, to help underwrite the production of *The Long Walk* this July at The Spa Little Theater as part of the company's 2015 Summer Festival. The Aaron Copland Fund for Music was created by the great American composer, who throughout his career, nurtured the careers of others, including Leonard Bernstein. The Aaron Copland Fund now supports performing organizations whose artistic excellence encourages and improves public knowledge and appreciation of serious contemporary American music.

The second grant, in the amount of \$12,000, was awarded to **Opera Saratoga by OPERA America: The Opera Fund**, which provides technical and financial support to OPERA America Professional Company Members and their partners as a part of a North American effort to enhance the quality, quantity and creativity of new opera and music-theater. Funds from OPERA America will be used to support free programs and events leading up to the premiere of *The Long Walk* in conjunction with the **New York State Military Museum** and other community partners, which explore the highly topical and important issues of veteran reintegration; PTSD and Blast Induced Traumatic Brain Injury; and the challenges faced by the family members of those who have served our country so bravely.

Edelson commented, "We are deeply grateful for both of these new grants. Through the presentation of *The Long Walk* and related events leading up to the premiere, we will be able to introduce our core audience to the vibrancy of what is happening in American opera today, while simultaneously opening the door to new audiences. In addition, with these programs, we look forward to opening a meaningful dialogue about the challenges face by veterans returning to our communities, and hope to promote greater public appreciation, understanding, and compassion toward veteran-related issues."

The first free event will take place on **Thursday, March 12th, 2015 at 7:00 PM: SARATOGA SINGS OF WAR AND HOMECOMING - THE MAKING OF A WORLD PREMIERE**. This free event will be hosted by the New York State Military Museum, 61 Lake Avenue, in Saratoga Springs. The event will include a discussion with Brian Castner, moderated by Lawrence Edelson, about why he wrote his memoir, and how *The Long Walk* relates to the museum's Oral History Program, which collects interviews of New York State Veterans from all eras. The event will also feature readings from both Castner's memoir and excerpts from the upcoming world premiere opera, performed by **Daniel Belcher** and **Heather Johnson**, as well as a discussion with composer Jeremy Howard Beck and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann about how the opera was developed at American Lyric Theater in New York City.

Additional events supported by the grant from OPERA America leading up to the World Premiere will include:

- A reading group on April 24th at Northshire Bookstore, led by librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, to explore Castner's memoir upon which the opera is based.
- *Of Arms and the Man I Sing*, a free concert on Sunday July 12th at the New York State Military Museum featuring members of Opera Saratoga's Young Artist Program in a program of scenes from other operas that deal with issues of war and homecoming, from Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, to the 2012 Pulitzer Prize award winning *Silent Night* by Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell.
- *A World War I Tribute Recital* by baritone John Brancy on July 16th that explores the thoughts, emotions and psyche of the great composers during that tremulous time. The program will include a performance of George Butterworth's (who died in combat during the Battle of the Somme in 1916) famously beautiful settings of poetry from A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, as well as songs by Gerald Finzi, Claude Debussy, Carl Orff, and Charles Ives.
- A writing seminar in July (dates to be announced), led by author and veteran Brian Castner, to provide other veterans and their families an outlet to give voice to their experiences.
- A free open dress rehearsal of the world premiere production for veterans, current military and their families.
- Pre-performance discussions, moderated by Opera Saratoga's Artistic and General Director Lawrence Edelson, in tandem with each of the four performances of *The Long Walk* on July 10th, 13th, 17th, and 25th.

Additional details about all of these events will be announced by Opera Saratoga in the early spring.

Tickets for *The Long Walk*, and all other events that comprise Opera Saratoga's 2015 Summer Festival, are on sale now. Please visit www.operasaratoga.org/tickets for more information.

ABOUT THE LONG WALK

The Long Walk is a new opera by composer Jeremy Howard Beck and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, which is based on Brian Castner's critically acclaimed book of the same name. The opera is a deeply personal exploration of a soldier's return from Iraq where he served as an officer in an Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit and his battle with what he calls "the Crazy" as he tries to reintegrate into his family life upon returning from the war. Opera Saratoga is honored to present the world premiere of *The Long Walk* in partnership with American Lyric Theater, who commissioned the opera in 2012. Internationally renowned theater and opera director David Schweizer makes his Opera Saratoga debut directing the production, with celebrated American conductor Steven Osgood on the podium. Grammy Award winning Baritone Daniel Belcher returns to Opera Saratoga to create the role of Brian, alongside mezzo-soprano Heather Johnson, who makes her company debut as his wife Jessie. The cast also includes the company debuts of sopranos Caroline Worra and Donita Volkwin, tenors David Blalock and Javier Abreu, and bass baritone Justin Hopkins. The design team for the production includes scenic designer Mimi Lien, costume designer Nancy Leary, and lighting designer Jeff Bruckerhoff. The production opens on July 10th, with additional performances on July 13th, 17th and 25th.

JEREMY HOWARD BECK – COMPOSER

Jeremy Howard Beck (b. 1985 Huntington, NY) is an award-winning composer whose adventurous, eclectic and emotionally immediate music—recently described as "sparse and haunting" by NPR's Weekend Edition, and hailed by the American Composers Forum for its "thrilling aural twists and bends"—has been performed throughout the country: at the Opera America National Conference, the Bang on a Can Marathon, InsightALT, Eastern Trombone Workshop, International Trombone Festival, the Norfolk and Bang on a Can Summer Festivals, and throughout New York City. His works for trombone quartet have received a 2012 JFund/ACF grant (In Wait) and a 2011 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award (*Awakening*). Recent commissions include the evening-length opera *The Long Walk*, with a libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann based on the memoir of the same name by Iraq veteran Brian Castner (American Lyric Theater); *ROAR* (Gaudete Brass Quintet); *In Wait* (The Guidonian Hand) and *Annunciation* (Choral Chameleon). Jeremy is a Resident Artist with American Lyric Theater and a Composer-in-Residence with the Guidonian Hand trombone quartet, whose recording of *Awakening* is now available on iTunes, Amazon, and bandcamp. He studied with John Corigliano and Christopher Rouse at The Juilliard School and with Mark Adamo and Deniz Hughes at NYU.

STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN – LIBRETTIST

Stephanie Fleischmann is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Libretti include: *The Property*, music by Wlad Marhulets (Chicago Lyric's Lyric Unlimited); *Red Fly/Blue Bottle*, music by Christina Campanella (Latitude 14: HERE; Noorderzon Festival, NL; EMPAC); *Far Sea Pharisee*, music by Miki Navazio (NEA Opera/Music-Theater); TINDER, (L14: Exit Festival, Paris), Olga Neuwirth's "ecstaloop" & "The Cartographer's Song" (Basel, Berlin, Graz, Stockholm, Aldeburgh); *The Hotel Carter*, music by Jenny Giering (Frederic Loewe Award); *What the Moon Saw*, music by Sxip Shirey, Brendan Connelly, Daniel Corral (Son of Semele); *The Secret Lives of Coats*, music by Christina Campanella (Red Eye, Anna Sosenko Assist Trust, Playlabs), lyrics/dramaturgy for *The Greeks* and *The Americans* (Juilliard, with Brian Mertes, music by Phil Roebuck and Jim White). Selected plays: *Tally Ho* (Round House Studio, London; Synchronicity), *Omonia-3* (Athens), *The World Speed Carnival* (Soho Rep), *Eloise & Ray* (New Georges). Additional venues: Asolo Rep, Roadworks, Integrity, Prelude, Knitting Factory, Hollywood Bowl. Collaborations: Chekhov at Lake Lucille; *The Russian Doctor* (with Andy Dawson; Mass MoCA, Birmingham Rep, U.K.). Published by PLAY, A JOURNAL OF PLAYS, playscripts.com. Stephanie teaches playwriting at Skidmore College, and holds an MFA from Brooklyn College. She is currently a 2014–25 Howard Foundation Fellow in Playwriting, and Resident Artist at American Lyric Theater. Grants include: OPERA America, NYSCA Individual Artist Commission, Greenwall Foundation, NY State Music Fund, 2 NYFA fellowships, Whitfield Cook Award. Residencies: New Dramatists, MacDowell, HARP, Playwrights Center Core Writer, Hedgebrook, Mabou Mines/Suite, Chocolate Factory. Tennessee Williams Fellow in Playwriting, Sewanee.

BRIAN CASTNER, AUTHOR (whose memoir, *The Long Walk*, inspired the opera)

Brian Castner is the author of "The Long Walk," an Amazon Best Book of 2012 and Chautauqua Scientific & Literary Circle selection for 2013. Previously, he served as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal officer in the US Air Force from 1999 to 2007, deploying to Iraq to command bomb disposal units in Balad and Kirkuk in 2005 and 2006. After leaving the active military, he became a consultant and contractor, training Army and Marine Corps units prior to their tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. His writing has appeared in a number of national and regional publications, including Wired, The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Foreign Policy, Publisher's Weekly, and Garry Trudeau's The Sandbox anthology. Brian lives outside of Buffalo, New York with his wife and four sons.

ABOUT OPERA SARATOGA

Opera Saratoga, formerly known as Lake George Opera, began with a production of *Die Fledermaus* at the Diamond Point Theatre on July 5, 1962, playing to an audience of 230. The Company now calls Saratoga Springs home and performs for more than 25,000 people annually. Opera Saratoga serves the communities of Saratoga Springs, the Lower Adirondack and New York State Capital areas by providing access to world-class opera through the production of an annual Summer Festival, as well as year-round activities including extensive educational programs, mentorship of emerging operatic artists, and unique opportunities for the public to experience opera in both our home theater and non-traditional venues that leverage and embrace the unique cultural, historic, and natural resources of the area. To date, the Company has performed ninety different fully-staged works by fifty-two different composers, including thirty-three works by American composers and five world-premiere productions. Throughout its history, the Company's success has been shaped by visionary leaders, talented artists, and critically acclaimed productions. In 2014, the Board of Directors appointed Lawrence Edelson as the new Artistic and General Director. Edelson's leadership marks a new chapter in the company's history, plans for which include greatly expanded community partnerships throughout the year, diversification of the company's repertoire, and a reaffirmed commitment to both the presentation of American opera and the mentorship of emerging artists as core activities in the company's programs each season. The 2015 summer season marks the first festival under his leadership. For more information, visit www.operasaratoga.org.