



DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
City of Los Angeles

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THE TREE

A NEW OPERA AT THE DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES THEATRE CENTER

March 2006, Los Angeles – The Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), in conjunction with The Mesopotamian Opera Company, Inc., are pleased to present the world premiere of **THE TREE**, a new opera, a vibrant and witty combination of Eastern and Western narrative structures that form a contemporary performing arts experience. **THE TREE** is an exciting re-telling of an ancient Shinto myth combined with the reality of today's struggle to save our old-growth forests and to stop "the sprawl." The production, which runs March 30 through April 16 at the Los Angeles Theatre Center in downtown Los Angeles, is written and directed by **Peter Wing Healey**, with music by **Linda Dowdell**, costume design by **Karolyn Kiisel**, lighting design by **David Toledo**, conducted by **David O**, decor by **Jim Boutin** with L.A. artists **Claire Keith**, **Max Hendler** and sculptor **Tanya Kovalski**.

Using opera, dance, comedy, poetry, and melodrama to tell its original story, **THE TREE** displays the abundant gifts present in Los Angeles' community of serious singers, dancers, actors, and designers. Dowdell's melodic score and Wing Healey's surprising lyrics pull together a new look at urban density, the encroaching sprawl, the vanishing forests, and the unsustainable future, while expanding the expressive possibilities of sung narrative.

SYNOPSIS: The spirit of a centuries-old oak tree on a ridge outside a small town falls in love with a poetic young man from the town. She comes out of her tree and marries the man when his first marriage falls apart. The man and the tree spirit, as husband and wife, move to the big city where he will pursue his dream to become an architect. His ex-wife, taking custody of their son, re-marries to a local developer. Years later, when the developer decides to build a mall outside the now growing town it becomes clear that he plans to cut down the old oak tree. The town is instantly polarized and the son joins with a band of tree-sitters to protest the construction. The architect and the tree spirit watch helplessly as the situation deteriorates. When the tree is finally felled the tree spirit dies but in the process the man receives the gift of a vision of a new city that will enable him to transform the world.

CENTER FOR THE ARTS, EAGLE ROCK: It aims to present innovative and multicultural arts programming to the communities of northeast Los Angeles. The Center serves as an incubator for performing arts workshop productions, generating work that moves on to bigger venues. It has quadrupled its size in budget and outreach over the last three years. This past year the Center commissioned four new works, including the current production of **THE TREE**, which also received a grant from The James Irvine Foundation New Connections Fund.

THE TREE is being presented by the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock and the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), in association with The Mesopotamian Opera Company, Inc., with funding from The James Irvine Foundation and from The Noah Wyle Foundation, and generous support of the Latino Theater Company and the Latino Museum of History, Art and Culture. **THE TREE** production highlights Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's environmental agenda and the Plant One Million Trees Campaign, a Mayoral initiative scheduled for launch later in 2006. In addition, the Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock and the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) are dedicating this world premiere production of **THE TREE** to local nonprofit environmental and smart growth organizations.



THE FACTS

- WHAT:** **THE TREE**
Written and Directed by **Peter Wing Healey**, Music by **Linda Dowdell**
- WHEN:**
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| Previews – | Thursday, March 30 @ 8 p.m.
Friday, March 31 @ 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, April 1 @ 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 2 @ 5 p.m. |
| Press Opening – | Thursday, April 6, 8 p.m. |
| Gala Opening – | Friday, April 7 @ 7:30 p.m. |
| Limited Run – | Saturday, April 8 @ 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 9 @ 5 p.m.
Thursday, April 13 @ 8 p.m.
Friday, April 14 @ 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, April 15 @ 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 16 @ 5 p.m. |
- WHERE:** **Los Angeles Theatre Center / Theatre Three**
Downtown L.A.
514 S. Spring St., Los Angeles 90013
- TICKETS:** Previews \$25, Press Opening \$30, Gala Opening \$75, Limited Run \$30
Reservations may be made by calling **323.226.1230**
Beginning March 1, tickets will be available online at www.centerartseaglerock.org

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Peter Wing Healey is a librettist, choreographer, director, and founder of The Mesopotamian Opera Company, Inc., whose original operas have been presented in New York at *P.S. 122*, *The Judson Church*, *The Vineyard Theater*, *The Middle Collegiate Church*, *The R.A.P.P. Arts Center*, *H.E.R.E.*, *The Greenwich House*, and *Alice Tully Hall*, now lives and works in Los Angeles. He has a long association with The Mark Morris Dance Group both as a performer and as rehearsal director. He worked on The White Oak Project with Mikhail Baryshnikov and has been balletmaster on the John Adams/Peter Sellars opera *Nixon in China* from its inception at the Houston Grand Opera. In Los Angeles he has danced original works at The Getty Center, 2100 Square Feet, UCLA, the Los Angeles Theatre Center, and Highways. His operas and plays include *The Mummy*, *Jane Heir*, *Sunset Salome*, *The Ben Franklin Opera*, *Thyestes' Feast* and *The Tree*. His screenplay *Grand Central* was given a reading in New York and *Thyestes' Feast* was published, in part, in the online journal *Papotage* after winning their writer's competition. He has received support for his work from American Opera Projects, TWEED Productions, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The Jim and Ellen Marcus Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock.

Linda Dowdell is a New York-based composer, arranger, and musical director. Specializing in new work, she is a regular at the NYC International Fringe (*Ellen Craft*, *a New Opera* and *All American Boy*), and produced her own mini-opera *The Big Window* (text by New York playwright Kate Browne) at the Edinburgh Fringe where she was praised as "showing a very rare instinct for word-setting." For her 1991 opera *The Norma* for The Mesopotamian Opera she was hailed by New York critic Bruce Michael Gelbert as a "stirring and contemporary voice," her score combining "Baroque and Romantic influences, with sides of Broadway flash and early rock." She was Musical Director of Adam Guettel's *Floyd Collins* at Berkshire Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. In the dance world she was, for her ten years, musical director of the Mark Morris Dance Group, and was the original pianist and musical director of Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project. As a conductor she has made appearances with many orchestras including the Brooklyn Philharmonic and the Virginia Symphony. Currently she is composer/lyricist of *Parlour Song* (collaborator Lynn M. Thomson, dramaturg, *Rent*) and has been named a Tribeca Performing Arts Center Artist-in-Residence 2004-05.

THE CAST

The singers are some of the top young operatic talent in the Los Angeles area. Tenor **Mathew Edwardsen** sweeps the stage in his role as the young architect of the story. **Khorshed Dastoor and Lucia Lynn**, the two sopranos sharing the role of the tree spirit, have magnificent voices and astonishing coloratura technique. We're catching them just before they rise to international fame. Both **Dastoor** and **Edwardsen** are Metropolitan Opera Western Regional Winners and **Lynn** was just voted "Audience Favorite" at the Memphis Metropolitan Opera Contest. **Catherine Ireland**, the *seconda donna*, is a well-known resident artist with San Diego Opera, Long Beach Opera and Los Angeles Opera and received the prestigious Royal Opera House Covent Garden/Shell scholarship. Mark Swed of the LA Times said she is "the kind of fresh singer whose combination of musical skills and fearless acting ability encourage hope for opera's future." Bass **Mathew Acuff**, who performs regularly with Opera Pasadena and tours in France, Holland, and Germany, plays Red, The Giant Sequoia Chief. This is an emotional role for Acuff because he hails from Humboldt County and witnessed the clear cutting of ancient Redwood groves in his own backyard. The mezzo soprano, playing the Duenna, is **Marya Bassaraba**, a native of Montreal, who has performed roles ranging from Aida to Carmen at Bel Canto Opera, Long Beach Opera, and Grand Theatre de Geneve.

The ensemble is topped off by the glamorous mezzo **Elender Wall** known for her recital of "The Poetry of Donald Rumsfeld"; former ice-skating champion turned theatrical dynamo **Clint Steinhauer**; the powerful young African American tenor **Kalil Wilson**; the droll tenor **Bruce Anderson**; and the beautiful soprano **Lisa Boyd**. In a variety of comic parts is **Trader Selkirk**, a Toronto actor trained in London at RADA who has been turning heads recently here in L.A. with his fiery intensity and classical training. Joining him is **Cynthia Sanders**, a long-time veteran of L.A. theatre who has appeared in many memorable roles at such venues as The Fountain Theater, Actor's Co-op, and Mojo Theater. Also featured, from Oaxaca, Mexico, is dancer **Dino Castro**, a regular with The Bilingual Foundation for the Arts' productions.

The role of the Narrator will be played, in a dramatic return to the stage, by actress **Laurie Hendricks**. Her 15 years on "Days of Our Lives" and many film appearances ("Fast Times at Ridgemont High," etc.) are just the tip of the iceberg in a prestigious career spanning stage, screen, and television.

The lead conductor and pianist is **David O**. He is an award-winning composer, performer, and musical director. O's work has been heard at Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Kennedy Center, The Mark Taper Forum, and the Hollywood Bowl, as well as other venues in Los Angeles and around the U.S. He has been a featured pianist at Walt Disney Concert Hall in concerts with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, including "The New Broadway" and "Toon Tunes," for which he created the original arrangement Princess Dreams, a medley of songs from Disney movies.

