

News Release

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CONTACT: JULIE BEHR 612-342-1612, JBEHR@MNOPERA.ORG

Minnesota Opera announces *Memory Boy* and *The Black Sox Scandal*

**National Endowment for the Arts grants \$75,000 to support the world premiere of
The Manchurian Candidate, a New Works Initiative Production**

Minneapolis – Minnesota Opera announces two commissions as an extension of the New Works Initiative which includes *Memory Boy* in 2016 and *The Black Sox Scandal* in the 2018-2019 season.

In addition, the National Endowment for the Arts grants \$75,000 to support the world premiere of *The Manchurian Candidate* in March 2015.

Memory Boy

Project Opera, Minnesota Opera's youth training program for students in grades 4 – 12 commissions *Memory Boy* for a fully staged production at the Minnesota Opera Center in Minneapolis in May 2016. This new opera by composer Reinaldo Moya and librettist Mark Campbell is based on the novel by Will Weaver.

Memory Boy is a popular young adult science fiction novel about a Minnesota family trying to survive the aftermath of several volcanic eruptions. As ash continues to fall two years after the catastrophe, food is hoarded and violence is everywhere. Sixteen-year-old Miles Newell and his family come to the realization that they need to leave their suburban Minneapolis home for their cabin in the woods if they are to survive. By building the Ali Princess, a vehicle that is part bike and part sailboat, the family quickly learns about the level of desperation that has descended upon Minnesota.

Project Opera is an important component of Minnesota Opera's award-winning education department. The program features two ensembles – Ragazzi and Giovani. Led by Music Director Dr. Dale Kruse, students learn healthy vocal technique, perform repertoire in the major operatic languages, and study the fundamentals of acting. *Memory Boy* is the follow up to Project Opera's incredibly successful commission of *The Giver* (2014), based on the novel by Lois Lowry.

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About Reinaldo Moya

Reinaldo Moya is a Venezuelan-American composer and recipient of the Van Lier Fellowship from Meet the Composer and the Aaron Copland Award from the Copland House, which led to a residency at Aaron Copland's historic home in NY state in 2012. Mr. Moya was awarded the Special Judges' Award at the first Simón Bolívar Young Composers' Competition in Venezuela for his orchestral work *Always Monday, Always March*. He was twice awarded Honorable Mention at the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Awards. Mr. Moya is on the faculty at St. Olaf in Minnesota and is a member of the Theory and Composition Faculty at the Interlochen Arts Camp.

About Mark Campbell

Mark Campbell was cited by *Opera News* as being one of twenty-five artists "poised ... to become major forces in opera in the coming decade." His most known opera is *Silent Night*, which premiered at Minnesota Opera and garnered the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music for composer Kevin Puts. The opera appeared on PBS' Great Performances, was produced in Philadelphia, Ft. Worth, Cincinnati, Calgary, a new production in Wexford, and is coming soon to Montreal and Kansas City. Mark is currently working on nine new operas, including: *The Manchurian Candidate* (Minnesota Opera; Kevin Puts, composer), *As One* (Brooklyn Academy of Music/American Opera Projects; Laura Kaminsky, composer), *The Shining* (Minnesota Opera; Paul Moravec, composer), *Burke + Hare* (Music-Theatre Group; Julian Grant, composer), *Elizabeth Cree* (Opera Philadelphia; Kevin Puts, composer) and *Dinner at Eight* (Minnesota Opera; William Bolcom, composer).

About Will Weaver

Will Weaver was born in northern Minnesota in 1950 and grew up on a dairy farm. His novels and short stories have earned the praises of reviewers from coast-to-coast for their unflinching realism. Will Weaver has written several successful novels for young adults. *Memory Boy* (2001) is used widely in schools across the United States.

The Black Sox Scandal

This new opera by composer Joel Puckett and librettist Eric Simonson is based on one of the most notorious scandals in American history. The 1919 Chicago White Sox were arguably the best team in the history of the game – they were also the most poorly paid, always at odds with their penny-pinching owner. Resentment, revenge, and ambition gone awry were the motivating factors that led eight players to conspire with gamblers and throw the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds. Rich with characters such as Shoeless Joe Jackson, Ring Lardner, and Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, *The Black Sox Scandal* is a tragic tale of mythic proportions, ripe with greed, power, romance, and redemption, all set against the backdrop of America's favorite pastime.

Celebrated composer Joel Puckett says, "I am thrilled to tell this incredible American story of deception, heartbreak, and disillusionment with an establishment. I am even more thrilled to be bringing this story to life with the amazingly supportive team at Minnesota Opera."

About Joel Puckett

Named as one of National Public Radio's favorite composers under the age of 40 by their listeners, Joel Puckett is a composer who is dedicated to the belief that music can bring consolation, hope, and joy to all who need it. *The Washington Post* has hailed him as both "visionary" and "gifted" and the *Baltimore Sun* proclaimed his work for the Washington Chorus and Orchestra, *This Mourning*, as "being of comparable expressive weight" to John Adams' Pulitzer Prize-winning work.

Puckett is currently on the full-time faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music of Johns Hopkins University where he teaches courses in music theory, co-teaches the composition seminar, and recently finished a term as the composer-in-residence for the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras.

About Eric Simonson

Eric Simonson recently directed *The Dream of Valentino*, *Silent Night* and *Wuthering Heights* for Minnesota Opera and *Rusalka* for Colorado Opera. Other credits include *The Grapes of Wrath* at Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera and Carnegie Hall; numerous plays for Steppenwolf Theatre; and productions. His production of *The Song of Jacob Zulu* played on Broadway and received six Tony Awards including Best Director. His film directing credits include *A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin* (Academy Award), *On Tiptoe* (Academy Award nomination) and *Studs Terkel: Listening to America*, all of which aired on HBO (Emmy Nomination). Mr. Simonson is a member of Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

New Works Initiative Productions

Memory Boy and *The Black Sox Scandal* are an extension of the New Works Initiative (NWI). A pioneering movement in new opera when it was launched in 2008, Minnesota Opera's NWI was designed to invigorate the operatic art form with an infusion of contemporary works and formalized the company's commitment to artistic growth, leadership, and innovation. Its first iteration – a seven-season commitment to producing premieres and revivals of new works – funded the commissions of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Silent Night* (Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell), *Doubt* in 2013 (Douglas J. Cuomo and John Patrick Shanley), and the upcoming political thriller, *The Manchurian Candidate* (also by Puts and Campbell), which premieres in March 2015.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's generous gift launched the second phase of the NWI with its major support of *The Shining*, by composer Paul Moravec and librettist Mark Campbell, based on the novel by Stephen King (scheduled for a world premiere in May 2016), and *Dinner at Eight* by William Bolcom and librettist Mark Campbell, based on the play by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman (scheduled to premiere in 2017).

Composer of *The Shining*, Paul Moravec, described the first October workshop of Act I “a thrilling experience.” He continues, “the workshop process is absolutely indispensable - there is simply no substitute for hearing a work with actual performers in its early stages, and having the time to make the all-important revisions before processing to the next phases of production. I couldn't have a better librettist/collaborator than Mark Campbell. A million thanks to artistic director Dale Johnson and everybody at Minnesota Opera.”

Librettist Mark Campbell also commented on his experience saying, “Minnesota Opera sure does workshops right. The whole staff helps create a nurturing environment so that we can make the onstage drama better. When you have a composer and librettist click like Paul Moravec and I do, the energy becomes both fun and palpable.”

Minnesota Opera receives \$75,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts to support the world premiere of *The Manchurian Candidate* by composer Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell. Based on the novel by Richard Condon (1959), the story portrays a former prisoner of war, decorated during the Korean War, who is brainwashed by Communists into becoming a political assassin. This new production will incorporate 21st-century technology with multimedia visual projections and state of the art sets brought together by a creative team that includes music director and conductor Michael Christie, director Kevin Newbury, costume designer Jessica Jahn, and set designer Robert Brill.

General Director Nina Archabal states that “support from the National Endowment for the Arts is particularly important to us, as it represents national support and also because requests to the endowment involve a peer review process. This grant demonstrates recognition of the importance of the Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative to the world of opera in the United States.”

The final workshop for *The Manchurian Candidate* (Dec. 4-6) at the Minnesota Opera Center in Minneapolis, reunites the same creative team as *Silent Night* (Mark Campbell, Kevin Puts, Michael Christie), and includes stage director Kevin Newbury. This third and final workshop will be the first time that this new music comes together with the Minnesota Opera orchestra and many of the principal artists who will sing in the premiere.

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Minnesota Opera combines a culture of creativity and fiscal responsibility to produce opera and opera education programs that expand the art form, nurture artists, enrich audiences and contribute to the vitality of the community.