

***This Is the Rill Speaking,*
Lee Hoiby's operatic portrait of life in small town America,
premieres in New York area in April 2008**

NEW YORK, NY, March 24, 2008- **American Opera Projects**, the Brooklyn-based company “known for bringing cutting-edge vocal productions to the masses” (New York Magazine), **presents the world premiere professional production of Lee Hoiby's *This Is The Rill Speaking*** on April 26 (Purchase) and April 28 (Symphony Space). The **one-act opera based on Lanford Wilson's play** about young love & rural life in the Ozarks will be performed by singers William Ferguson, Abigail Fischer, Andrew Garland, Malinda Haslett, Nicole Joy Mitchell, and Justin Petersen accompanied by an eleven-piece orchestra under the baton of Benton Hess. Both performances will be paired with the composer's acclaimed opera ***The Tempest*** presented by Purchase Opera and will feature stage conversations with Mr. Hoiby, Wilson and others. AOP and Purchase Opera will also honor Mr. Hoiby with a benefit dinner at Purchase Performing Arts Center on April 26.

The Purchase College performance (735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, NY) will take place at the Conservatory of Music's Recital Hall at 4:30pm on Saturday, April 26, 2008. This hour-long opera will be followed by the New York area premiere of Hoiby's ***The Tempest*** at 8:00pm at Purchase College's Performing Arts Center. In between the performances Mr. Hoiby will join a festive benefit dinner in honor of his contribution to American opera and song over the past 60 years.

This Is the Rill Speaking, will receive its **NYC premiere** by American Opera Projects on April 28 at 8:00 PM at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space (2537 Broadway at 95th Street, NYC). Lee Hoiby and playwright Lanford Wilson will join moderator and librettist/playwright William Hoffman in discussion. Excerpts from *The Tempest* will also be performed in a semi-staged concert version by the award winning Purchase Opera.

Mr. Hoiby's one-act opera, *This Is the Rill Speaking*, is based on Lanford Wilson's work of the same title, which was first produced in 1965 at Café Cino. *This Is the Rill Speaking* is of the genre of plotless, multivocal evocations of the 20th century small town, the genre embodied in such well-known works as **Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood***, **Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology***, the stories of **Sherwood Anderson**, and **Thornton Wilder's *Our Town***.

Librettist Mark Shulgasser, in discussing the *Rill's* subject matter and the conversations between Lee Hoiby, Lanford Wilson and himself, has said, “Into this theme [of small town life] Lanford Wilson introduced that of the birth of the writer, and his short play represents the powerful recursive source of creativity, observing the seed of itself, stirring in its growing medium. Lee Hoiby's musical setting is water to that seed, bringing forth new branches, leaves and berries, and in the spectacular sextet finale [of *Rill*], a wholly unexpected bloom, created at the request of Lanford Wilson himself, who, after hearing the original version, asked us to bring “all the voices together.”

The performances of *Tempest* and the *Rill* on April 26 are part of a **day of events honoring Mr. Hoiby**, who turned 82 on February 17, 2008. In addition to full-length productions of both operas, there will be a half-hour Q & A panel discussion with Mr. Hoiby, librettist Mark Shulgasser, AOP Executive director Charles Jarden, *Rill* Conductor Benton Hess, *Rill* Director Ned Canty, *Tempest* director Jacque Trussel and *Tempest* conductor Hugh Murphy following American Opera Projects' performance of *This Is the Rill Speaking*. After cocktails and a seated dinner, *The Tempest* will be presented by Purchase Opera. Benefits from the event will go to support the creation of new operas by AOP and Purchase Opera. Tickets to both operatic performances on April 26 may also be purchased separately.

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Mark Shulgasser, librettist

Since 1979 Mark Shulgasser has been Lee Hoiby's literary collaborator on numerous projects, including the libretti of all of Hoiby's operas and vocal chamber works. He has produced and directed Hoiby's works at venues throughout the United States. For several years he operated a photography gallery in West Palm Beach, Florida and he now runs a used book business called *Who Killed Kenny?* in Callicoon, NY. Under a nom de plume, unknown even to his closest associates, he writes extensively on the subject of astrology.

Lanford Wilson, playwright, guest speaker in Q & A panel at Symphony Space, April 28

Born on April 13, 1937, in Lebanon, Missouri, Lanford Wilson began writing at the University of Chicago in 1959 after enrolling in a playwriting class. Upon graduation, he moved to New York City where he soon became involved with a group of theatrical artists at the Café Cino, one of many tiny coffeehouses Off-Off-Broadway that presented edgy, avant-garde works. Wilson served not only as playwright, but also as director, actor and designer. His first play, *So Long at the Fair*, was produced at the Café Cino in 1963 followed by a one-act entitled *Home Free* (1964). Several months later, *Balm in Giliad* (1965), a massive, 56 character piece that incorporated simultaneous scenes and overlapping dialogue, opened at the Café LaMama. In 1969, Wilson co-founded Circle Repertory Company with a group of friends that included director Marshall Mason. The company's first major success was Wilson's *Hot L Baltimore* (1973), the story of a group of drifters, prostitutes, and aging residents in an old, run-down hotel. Other Wilson plays include *The Mound Builders* (1975), *Serenading Louie* (1970), *Angels Fall* (1982), and *Talley's Folly* (1979), for which Wilson won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Wilson's other awards include, among others, the Vernon Rice Award for *Rimers of Eldritch* (1965), the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Outer Circle Award, and an Obie for *Hot L Baltimore* (1973), and another Obie for *The Mound Builders* (1975).

Benton Hess, conductor

Benton Hess has built an international reputation as conductor, pianist, and pedagogue. He is Distinguished Professor of Voice and Musical Director of Eastman Opera Theatre at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. He is also Co-Artistic Director of Mercury Opera Rochester. For seven years prior to going to Eastman, Hess was the Covington Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has also served on the faculties of Boston University, New England Conservatory, Boston Conservatory, Hartt School of Music, Mannes College of Music, and Rutgers University. As one of New York City's most sought-after vocal coaches, Benton Hess maintained a studio with a roster that reads like a "Who's Who" in operatic performance, from Eleanor Steber and Nicolai Gedda to Renée Fleming. Hess has conducted literally hundreds of operatic performances for dozens of companies throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East in repertoire that ranges from early Baroque to premieres of contemporary works. Hess is also a composer and has received a number of important commissions. His first opera, *Felice* was premiered in Raleigh, NC in 2000. In addition to his responsibilities in Rochester, he is Artistic Director of "Si parla, si canta," an Italian language program for young singers and pianist coach/accompanists in Urbania, Italy and conductor for the International Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Ned Canty, director

Ned Canty most recently directed the world premiere of the AOP developed *Lost Childhood* in Tel Aviv. Other recent productions include *The Mikado* at Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and *L'italiana in Algeri* at Connecticut Opera, listed by the Hartford Courant as #2 on a list of the Top Ten Arts Events of the year. Prior to that he directed the critically acclaimed revival of Lee Hoiby's *A Month in the Country* at the Manhattan School of Music. Other favorites include *Don Giovanni* at Florida Grand Opera; *Lucky Girl* at the McCarter Theatre; four shows at Wolf Trap Opera (*Don Giovanni*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *L'italiana in Algeri*, and *The Rake's Progress*); *L'elisir d'amore* in Shanghai; and *Orpheus in the Underworld* at Juilliard. He is Festival Director of the New York Television Festival and Director of Libretto Development for AOP. Future projects include *Daughter of the Regiment* for OTSL.

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American Opera Projects (AOP) is a driving force behind the revitalization of contemporary opera and music theater in the United States through its exclusive devotion to creating, developing and present new American Opera and music theatre projects. AOP's mission is to champion innovative works of music theater, to expand the art form, and to identify, develop and present new works by emerging and established talent. Our goal is to create a lasting legacy of relevant music theater and to inspire new audiences with a fresh appreciation for new opera and theater.

AOP productions have appeared at the Lincoln Center Festival, Skirball Center at NYU, the Guggenheim Museum, Symphony Space, the Annenberg Center in Philadelphia, the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, The Goethe Institute, Berlin's Stükke Theater and Max Kade Auditorium, Aleksander Fredro Teatr in Poland, the Ensemble Theater am Petersplatz in Vienna, TADA! Children's theater, The Center for Jewish History, 1794 Meeting House, the Daryl Roth 2 Theatre, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and at many out-of-doors performances sponsored by the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation. AOP won a 2005 *Encore* Award from the Arts & Business Council of NY for its innovative work.

Lee Hoiby's *This Is The Rill Speaking*, is AOP's 14th world premiere.

TO PURCHASE TICKETS TO *THIS IS THE RILL SPEAKING*:

Celebrating Lee Hoiby – Gala Event April 26, 2008

Tickets: \$150 (Includes both operas, panel discussion from the stage, and a festival dinner with Lee Hoiby)

Tickets to *This Is the Rill Speaking* only: \$25

Purchase College Conservatory of Music- Recital Hall, Music Building

Tickets to *The Tempest* only: \$25

Purchase College Conservatory of Music- Recital Hall, Performing Arts Center

TEL: 914.251.5925 Monday – Friday 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, NY 10577

This Is the Rill Speaking with Excerpts from The Tempest April 28, 2008

Tickets: \$30/\$25; Members, Students, Seniors, Children \$27/\$23; Day of show \$35/\$30

Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Symphony Space

TEL: 212.864.5400 FAX: 212.932.3228

2537 Broadway at 95th Street, New York, NY 10025-6990

Press photos and further info on *This Is the Rill Speaking* can be found at www.operaprojects.org


