

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE November 5, 2015
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VO tackles sensitive questions of polygamy vs. the State
in Canadian Premiere of
DARK SISTERS

Vancouver, BC ~ Religious and political tension, media hysteria and the lives of six women facing threats to their children, their family and the only way of life they've ever known are at the heart of **Dark Sisters**, Nico Muhly's opera about life in a fundamentalist community. Vancouver Opera stages the Canadian premiere of this astounding work at the Vancouver Playhouse from November 26 - December 12, 2015.

Dark Sisters enters the lives of six women living under extreme pressures in a polygamist community of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS). Co-commissioned by the Gotham Chamber Opera, The Music-Theater Group and Opera Philadelphia, **Dark Sisters** is by New York based composer **Nico Muhly**, creator of the much acclaimed *Two Boys*. The libretto is by the Pulitzer Prize shortlisted playwright and screenwriter **Stephen Karam**.

The opera is inspired by two famous raids on FLDS compounds: one in 1953 at Short Creek, Arizona and the second at the Yearning for Zion Ranch in Eldorado, Texas in 2008, in which children were seized based on allegations of abuse.

Vancouver Opera's **Dark Sisters** will be onstage at the Vancouver Playhouse for 9 performances, November 26 - December 12, 2015.

Thursday, November 26 • 7:30pm • opening night
Friday, November 27 • 7:30pm
Saturday, November 28 • 7:30pm

Thursday, December 3 • 7:30pm
Friday, December 4 • 7:30pm
Saturday, December 5 • 7:30pm

Sunday, December 6 • 2:00pm matinée
Thursday, December 10 • 7:30pm
Saturday, December 12 • 7:30pm • closing night

All performances take place at the Vancouver Playhouse, corner of Dunsmuir and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C.

Dark Sisters will be sung in English with SURTITLES™ projected above the stage. Approximate running time: 2 hours, including 1 intermission.

Tickets are available exclusively through the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre: 604-683-0222 or www.vancouveropera.ca. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. Special pricing for groups of 10 or more is available by phone.

Follow Vancouver Opera on Twitter and Facebook for exclusive offers such as VO's Get O.U.T (Opera Under 35) program, with **\$35 tickets for patrons aged under 35**.

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Conducted by Kinza Tyrrell
Directed by Amiel Gladstone

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Prophet / Larry King | Thomas Goerz |
| Zina, fourth wife | Eve-Lyn de la Haye |
| Eliza, fifth wife | Melanie Krueger |
| Ruth, second wife | Megan Latham |
| Presendia, first wife | Heather Pawsey |
| Lucinda, Eliza's daughter | Eden Tremayne * |
| Almera, third wife | Karen Ydenberg |

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|---|--------------------------|
| Assistant Conductor / Principal Répétiteur | Tina Chang |
| Scenic Designer | Pam Johnson |
| Costume Designer | Parvin Mirhady |
| Lighting Designer | Gerald King |
| Projection Designer | Jamie Nesbitt |
| Wig Designer | Stacey Butterworth |
| Associate Wig Designer | Susan Manning |
| Musical Preparation | Kimberley-Ann Bartczak * |
| Stage Manager | Melissa Rood |
| Assistant Director | Brenna Corner * |

* *Member of the Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program*

ABOUT THE COMPOSER AND LIBRETTIST

Born in 1981, **Nico Muhly** is a composer of chamber music, orchestral music, sacred music, opera, ballet, and music for collaborators across a variety of fields. The Metropolitan Opera recently commissioned him to compose *Marnie* for its 2019-2020 season, based on Winston Graham's 1961 novel that was adapted into an Alfred Hitchcock movie.

Mr. Muhly has scored ballets for choreographer Benjamin Millepied and films including *The Reader*, *Kill Your Darlings*, and *Me, Earl And The Dying Girl*, in addition to arranging music by Antony & the Johnsons and the National. His debut CD *Speak Volumes* (2007) was the first of many collaborations with the artists of Reykjavik's Bedroom Community label, and with singer/songwriter Thomas Bartlett (Doveman), he is half of the gamelan-inspired song project *Peter Pears*. He lives in New York City.

"This is a very complicated sort of modern freedom of religion issue. The idea that a government would break into a community and say, 'You can't live your life this way,' is very radical. Yet this happened twice to the same community. To me, this is sort of a very interesting breakdown of the way we normally talk about people interacting with each other and interacting with their faith." - *Nico Muhly on Dark Sisters*

Stephen Karam is the author of *The Humans and Sons of the Prophet*, a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize and the recipient of the 2012 Drama Critics Circle, Outer Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel and Hull-Warriner Awards for Best Play. Other plays include *Speech & Debate*, the inaugural production of *Roundabout Underground*, and *columbinus* (New York Theatre Workshop).

Mr. Karam has written screenplay adaptations of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, and *Speech & Debate*, both scheduled for release in 2016. He is a MacDowell Colony fellow, and the recipient of the inaugural Sam Norkin Off-Broadway Drama Desk Award and teaches playwriting at The New School.

"For me, it's all just the human dynamics: a mother's love for her daughter, the quest for personal identity and self-discovery. I feel like everybody has a story of self-discovery. There's the family you're born into and the family you establish for yourself as you grow up, the people you decided to stay close to and new friends and lovers. This is the ultimate version of that story. It seems like such an exciting narrative period for entertainment purposes, but at the same time, the emotional core of the story is deeply personal in terms of these women's hopes and fears and struggles with loss and grief." - *Stephen Karam on Dark Sisters*

THE SINGERS

Bass-baritone **Thomas Goerz** sings the roles of The Prophet and Larry King. Noted for his dramatic integrity and vocal clarity, Mr. Goerz has appeared frequently with VO, most recently in 2013's *Tosca* and 2014's *Carmen*.

Soprano **Eve-Lyn de la Haye** sings Zina. Her performances as Nannetta in Calgary Opera's *Falstaff* have placed her in the front ranks of the lyric coloraturas of her generation. Accomplished across a range of musical genres, her recent appearances include Yum Yum in *The Mikado* for Calgary Opera, *Elijah* for the Vancouver Bach Choir, soloist with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and *Messiah* for the Victoria Symphony. This will be her Vancouver Opera debut.

Soprano **Melanie Krueger** sings Eliza. Ms. Krueger has been hailed by *La Scena Musicale* Magazine as having "a voice that simply soars over the orchestra". She has appeared on concert and opera stages throughout Canada and Europe and has been identified as a "show stopper" by the *Vancouver Sun*.

Ms. Krueger last appeared on the VO stage in 2013's *Albert Herring*, and in 2012's *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Mezzo-soprano **Megan Latham** sings Ruth. Raised in Abbotsford, BC, Ms. Latham has been recognized for her opera, oratorio, and recital performances. She last performed with VO to great acclaim as the Grandmother in the 2014 world premiere of *Stickboy*.

Soprano **Heather Pawsey** sings Presendia. Acclaimed for her "gorgeous operatic power" (Vancouver Sun), Ms. Pawsey is a first-prize winner of the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition. In 2009, she was named an ambassador of the Canadian Music Centre. Equally at home in 18th and 19th century repertoire, she is particularly skilled in the music of our time, with a number of world premieres to her credit, and in a broad spectrum of the world's languages.

Soprano **Eden Tremayne** sings Lucinda, Eliza's daughter. Ms. Tremayne is a member of the Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program and will be singing Kate Pinkerton in VO's upcoming production of *Madama Butterfly*.

Soprano **Karen Ydenberg** sings Almera. Ms. Ydenberg has performed with Vancouver Opera several times, most recently in 2015's *Sweeney Todd* and 2009's *Carmen*, as well as with several Canadian opera companies. She is co-creator of the Classical Comedy Duo Leave It to Diva, which has created and performed several staged concerts at Festival Vancouver, the Vancouver Fringe Festival and the Nelson Summer Songfest.

VO's Principal Répétiteur and Assistant Chorus Director **Kinza Tyrrell** will conduct. Dr. Tyrrell is also Music Director of Vancouver Opera In Schools and Head Coach of VO's Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program, and guest faculty at the Canadian Opera Company and Opera Nuova.

Playwright and stage director **Amiel Gladstone** will direct. Mr. Gladstone's plays have been produced across Canada and have toured internationally. His collection of plays, *Hippies and Bolsheviks* was published by Coach House Press and he has won Jessie Richardson Awards for Best Original Script and Body of Work. Most recently, Mr. Gladstone directed *Are We Cool Now?* at Western Canada Theatre and the National Arts Centre tour of *Do you want what I have got? A Craigslist Cantata*.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

In a renegade Mormon community of the American southwest, brave Eliza attempts to escape her life as one of five "sister wives" in a polygamous marriage and save her daughter from the same fate. The women's children have been removed by state authorities and their husband, known as the Prophet, has retreated to the desert, seeking divine guidance. In desperation, the women subject themselves to the glare of the media. While the world watches on television, Eliza bares her heart, unleashes her condemnation of the community's patriarchy, and pleads with her sister wives to break free.

Read a full synopsis at www.vancouveropera.ca.

FULL TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for **Dark Sisters** are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca, or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. Groups: For special pricing for groups of 10 or more, call 604-683-0222.

LEARN MORE

Opera Speaks: Presenting From The Leading Edge

Vancouver Opera in partnership with Music On Main invites you to a lively conversation with Vancouver's leading arts presenters.

Vancouver's diverse performing arts organizations are increasingly producing new work that is both innovative and highly collaborative. In presenting the Canadian premiere of **Dark Sisters** by Nico Muhly and librettist Stephen Karam, Vancouver Opera is exploring the complicated issue of plural marriage through a very contemporary score and set design. Join James Wright, General Director of Vancouver Opera and leading producers of contemporary performance art in Vancouver in an open conversation about the challenges and rewards of presenting new work. This presentation will take place at Vancouver's newest arts space The Post At 750.

Participating in the conversation will be Amiel Gladstone, Director of **Dark Sisters**; David Pay, Artistic Director of Music On Main; Heather Redfern, Executive Director at The Cultch and Jay Hirabayashi, Artistic Director at Kokoro Dance. Excerpts from **Dark Sisters** will be performed.

Thursday, November 12, 2015

7:00 - 8:30 pm

The Post At 750

#110 - 750 Hamilton Street, Vancouver BC

Admission is free. Seating is limited.

RSVP at 604 683-0222 or vointern2@vancouveropera.ca