



news release
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Opera based on Joy Kogawa novel introduces students to one of the most significant events in BC history

NAOMI'S ROAD

On tour throughout BC in 2012-2013

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera In Schools introduces children to an important event in Canadian history through the moving and dramatic *Naomi's Road*, on tour to schools and community centres throughout British Columbia from September - November 2012 and April - May 2013.

Set during World War II and adapted from Joy Kogawa's novel for young readers, *Naomi's Road* depicts the dramatic journey of nine-year-old Naomi and her Japanese-Canadian family from Vancouver to an internment camp in the interior of B.C. This sensitive and compelling story is told through four talented singers, accompanied by a pianist. The production will travel across the province with stops in Smithers, Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat, Stewart, Creston, Redstone, Nanaimo, Victoria, Ucluelet, Whistler and other locations, reaching 30,000 children from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

2012 marks the 70th anniversary of the internment of Japanese Canadians. The Order in Council PC 1486, passed by the Canadian government on February 23, 1942, authorized the removal of all "persons of Japanese racial origin" and gave the RCMP the power to search without warrant, enforce a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and to confiscate personal property. More than 20,000 Japanese Canadians were affected.

Naomi's Road directly addresses one of the most significant incidents in recent Canadian history, ensuring that its painful lessons are not forgotten by younger generations of British Columbians.

THE TOUR – INSPIRING YOUNG MINDS

The experience of seeing and hearing *Naomi's Road* will be enhanced with study materials that are provided by Vancouver Opera to each school. By the time of the actual performance, in the school

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gymnasium or auditorium, children are primed for an exciting up-close experience – often their first one – of live opera.

“I believe opera education in schools is important because what students learn by studying and participating in the arts will benefit them in all that they do for all of their lives,” comments VO General Director **James W. Wright**, “Exposing young people to the wonders of the arts is one of the most important things we can do for them and for our society. People who know and appreciate and participate in the arts are better rounded, better educated people – thinking, sensitive, alive and aware!”

THE CREATION PROCESS

The creation of *Naomi's Road* began with the decision to commission a work based on Joy Kogawa's novel. “I read *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa's novel for adult readers, and I was greatly moved by the story,” comments Mr. Wright. “I thought the subject – about this place, its people, an important chapter in their history, and their possible future – would make a terrific opera for young audiences in B.C.”

The commission was awarded in the fall of 2003 and the process of writing and composing began. **Ann Hodges** penned the libretto in the winter of 2003/2004; composer **Ramona Luengen** wrote the last notes of her score in September of 2004. That same month, the libretto was read at a special event at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historical Site in Steveston, the site of the 1942 seizure of hundreds of fishing boats owned by Japanese Canadians. Workshops were conducted to develop and refine the work, and in May 2005 portions of the opera were performed for an international audience at the annual OPERA America conference. Selections from the opera were also performed at the 2005 UBC-Laurier Institution Multiculturalism Lecture in Vancouver. The performance and the lecture, by poet and writer Roy Miki, were later broadcast on the CBC Radio program IDEAS.

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Joy Kogawa - Author

Ms. Kogawa was born in Vancouver in 1935. Her family was interned in Slocan and later sent to Coaldale, Alberta after World War II. She is a recipient of numerous honorary doctorates as well as national and international awards for her writing. In 1986, she was named a Member of the Order of Canada. She is also a member of the Order of B.C. and the Order of the Rising Sun.

Ramona Luengen - Composer

Dr. Luengen has composed more than 40 choral works, which have been performed, broadcast and recorded in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Her *Stabat Mater* was awarded 'Outstanding Choral Composition of the Year' and 'Outstanding Choral Event of the Year' by the Canadian Association of Choral Conductors. Dr. Luengen taught at UBC and SFU for 12 years, and is also known for her work as a choral conductor.

Ann Hodges - Librettist and Stage Director

Ms. Hodges has directed several Vancouver Opera In Schools productions and has served as Resident Assistant Director on 11 mainstage productions. In demand as a theatre and opera director, her recent credits include *The Secret Mask* (Great Canadian Theatre Company), *Cenerentola* (Opera Lyra), *Bashir Lazhar* (Theatre Projects), *Other People's Money* (Manitoba Theatre Centre) and *Jail Baby* (Sarasvati). Ms. Hodges is a graduate of the National Theatre School.

Leslie Uyeda - Music Director

Ms. Uyeda is a composer, conductor and pianist and an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre. Her many songs, song cycles, choral and instrumental works have been performed throughout Canada, the U. S. and New Zealand. To honour her Japanese-Canadian heritage, Ms. Uyeda composed *Offerings*, *Stations of Angels*, and *Flower Arranger* using the poetry of Joy Kogawa. Her current project is *When The Sun Comes Out*, a chamber opera commissioned by the Queer Arts Festival.

Christine Reimer - Set & Costume Designer

Ms. Reimer has designed many school touring and mainstage shows for Vancouver Opera including *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *La Cenerentola*, *The Barber of Barkerville*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, *Aida*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Carmen* and *The Magic Flute*. She has also designed for Anchorage Opera, Pacific Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Lyra, Arts Club Theatre, Caravan Farm Theatre, Bard on the Beach and Vancouver Playhouse.

Hiather Darnel-Kadonaga - Naomi

Ms. Darnel-Kadonaga is a lyric soprano of Japanese and Finnish descent, born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She studied at Mount Royal College the University of British Columbia, graduating with a Masters in Voice and Opera Performance from McGill University. Ms. Darnel-Kadonaga has sung several roles, including Geraldine in Barber's *A Hand of Bridge*, Miss Jessel in *Turn of the Screw*, Despina in *Così fan Tutte*, Musetta in *La bohème*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, and the comical role of

Gianetta in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Gondoliers*. She also sang the role of Piper/Pitch Pine in VOIS's commissioned opera *Jack Pine*.

Sam Chung - Stephen

Originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, tenor Mr. Chung was last seen on the VO mainstage as Gastone in 2011's *La Traviata*. He has sung with Burnaby Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera Studio Weimar and has understudied several roles for Vancouver Opera.

Erica Iris - Mother, Mitzi, Obasan

Mezzo-soprano Erica Iris has been praised for her "gorgeous big voice, seamless from top to bottom, dramatic, and highly expressive." (Howard Dyck). She has sung Tituba in *The Crucible*, Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*, Komponist in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and Carmen. Winner of the 2011 Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition, she toured Canada in 2011.

Henry Chen - Daddy, Bully, Rough Lock Bill, Trainmaster (Spring Tour)

Bass-baritone Mr. Chen recently completed his training at the Vancouver Academy of Music. He has performed in many operas and concerts with various companies in Vancouver. His most recent performance was Papageno in the Vancouver Academy of Music Summer Opera Workshop's *Die Zauberflöte*.

Sung Taek Chung - Daddy, Bully, Rough Lock Bill, Trainmaster (Fall Tour)

Bass-baritone Mr. Chung's recently sang Kutusov's Adjutant in the Canadian Opera Company's production of *War and Peace*. He created the role of Minik in Linda Caitlin Smith's *Facing South*, which had its world premiere at the World Stage Festival in Toronto. Other performances include soloist in Stravinsky's *Le Renard* in Clermont-Ferrand, France; Sid in the 50th anniversary production of *Albert Herring* at the October Britten Festival in Aldeburgh, England and Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* in Košice, Slovakia. Originally from Winnipeg, Mr. Chung received his diploma in Operatic Performance at the University of Toronto and his masters in opera at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, Scotland.

Candy Siu - VOIS Pianist

Originally from Hong Kong, Ms. Siu received her Master of Music degree in Piano Accompaniment from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, England. Upon graduation, she relocated to Dublin, then to Belgium to further her training as a répétiteur at the Flanders Operastudio. Ms. Siu has attended Centre for Opera Studies in Italy and worked as a répétiteur for the Irish Vocal Masterclass, for the Zêzere Arts Festival for Opera in Portugal, and for Montalto Musica in Italy.

Melania Radelicki - Stage Manager

Ms. Radelicki studied at the University of British Columbia and worked as a stage management apprentice on VO's *Eugene Onegin* (2008) and as an assistant stage manager on 2011's *West Side Story*. She has stage managed for Eastern Front Theatre, Sour Brides, Hart House Theatre, Classical Theatre Project and Opera Erratica, and assistant stage managed for Lighthouse Festival, Neptune Theatre and The Banff Centre.

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VO's 2012-2013 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp.