



Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond

**Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond,
Texas Performing Arts at the University of Texas in Austin, Virginia Arts
Festival and Virginia Opera**

**Co-commission a new musical work by
Ricky Ian Gordon and Mark Campbell**

Rappahannock County

(Norfolk, VA) In conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War, a new musical work by composer Ricky Ian Gordon and librettist Mark Campbell will have its world premiere performances beginning April 12, 2011 the same day that Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in 1861. The new work has been co-commissioned by the **Virginia Arts Festival, Virginia Opera, the Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond, and the Texas Performing Arts at the University of Texas in Austin.**

Rappahannock County will premiere during the Virginia Arts Festival, offering multiple public performances as well as student matinees in the Harrison Opera House in Norfolk, Virginia from April 12-17, 2011. This will be followed by performances in Richmond at the Modlin Center, September 9-16, and at the Texas Performing Arts in Austin, September 18-25.

Rappahannock County is a fictional song cycle inspired by diaries, letters, and personal accounts during the period of the Civil War, and explores the war's impact, from secession to defeat, on a community of Virginians—black and white, rich and poor, soldiers, nurses, widows, and survivors. The production is a multi-media event, enhanced by projections of Civil War photography, illustrations, documents, and other moving visuals—and features five principal singers performing more than 30 roles, backed by an ensemble of 15 musicians.

About the Creative Team

Composer **Ricky Ian Gordon** is equally at home writing for the concert hall, opera, dance, theater and film, and his songs and song cycles have been performed, as well as recorded, by many internationally acclaimed singers. As part of The American Songbook Series, the composer's *Bright Eyed Joy: The Music of Ricky Ian Gordon* was presented at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 2001. *The New York Times* wrote, "If the music of Ricky Ian Gordon has to be defined by a single quality, it would be the bursting effervescence infusing songs that blithely blur the lines between art song and the high-end Broadway music of Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim...It's caviar for a world gorging on pizza."

In 2005, Gordon's song cycle *Orpheus & Euridice* won the OBIE Award after its Lincoln Center premiere. Writing in *New York Magazine* Peter G. Davis offered this assessment: "Both Gordon's text and music are couched in an accessible idiom of disarming lyrical directness, a cleverly disguised faux naiveté that always resolves dissonant situations with grace and a sure sense of dramatic effect – the mark of a born theater composer." Mr. Gordon and librettist Michael Korie's *The Grapes of Wrath*, based on the Steinbeck novel, premiered at Minnesota Opera in February, 2007, and has had subsequent productions at Utah and Pittsburgh Operas. Commenting in the *Los Angeles Times*, critic Mark Swed wrote, "The greatest glory of the opera is Gordon's ability to musically flesh out the entire 11-member Joad clan... Each has a distinct musical style. Each is sympathetic."

Gordon's other great achievement is to merge Broadway and opera...and it is greatly enhanced by his firm control over ensembles and his sheer love for the operatic voice. Gordon and Korie, through sheer conviction, and Minnesota Opera, through a brilliant production and cast, have found the timeless and timely essence of Steinbeck's epic." Gordon's recent work, "Green Sneakers," was hailed "A Masterpiece" in *Opera Today*, after its premiere at Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival.

Mark Campbell's career as a librettist and lyricist has successfully bridged the worlds of both opera and musical theatre. Since 2004, four of his commissioned operas received enthusiastic premieres: *Volpone* (Wolf Trap Foundation for the Arts, 2004 and 2007, music by John Musto); *Later the Same Evening* (National Gallery of Art/University of Maryland, 2007, music by Musto), *Bastianello/Lucrezia* (New York Festival of Song, 2008, music by Musto and William Bolcom).

As a lyricist, Mark penned all of the lyrics for *Songs from an Unmade Bed*, a theatrical song cycle with music by 18 composers, which was produced by New York Theatre Workshop in 2005. Other productions for which he has written lyrics include: *The Audience* (The Transport Group), *Splendor* (Bay Street Theatre, American Place Theatre), *Akin* (Music-Theatre Group at LaMama, music by Richard Peaslee), *Ring Around the Rosie* (Music-Theatre Group) and *Light Shall Lift Them* (Harvey Theatre, Brooklyn Next Wave Festival).

Mark's awards include: First recipient of the Kleban Foundation Award for Lyricist, two Richard Rodgers Awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a New York Foundation for the Arts Playwriting Fellowship, an National Endowment for the Arts grant, 3 Drama Desk Award nominations, a Rockefeller Foundation Award, a Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Award and a Grammy nomination.

Serving as creative advisor to the production is **Edward L. Ayers**, president of the University of Richmond. A historian of the American South, Ayers has written and edited ten books. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: Civil War in the Heart of America* won the Bancroft Prize for distinguished writing in American history and the Beveridge Prize for the best book in English on the history of the Americas since 1492.

About the Co-Commissioners

The Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond features state-of-the-art performance venues, galleries, studios and classrooms. Called "a work of art itself" by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the \$22.5 million, 165,000 square foot facility is home to the departments of music, art and art history, and theatre and dance. Many of the events presented at the Modlin Center feature an academic component designed specifically for Richmond students. These activities, all of which are free and open to the public, include master classes and lecture demonstrations, as well as pre-concert and pre-exhibition lectures. In 2009, a work by Steve Reich, commissioned and premiered at the Modlin Center, won the Pulitzer Prize for music.

Since opening its doors in 1981, the **Texas Performing Arts at the University of Texas at Austin** has evolved into one of the leading university-based arts presenters in the country. Texas Performing Arts presents, produces and commissions international performances otherwise unavailable locally to the Central Texas community. Driven by a commitment to the educational mission of the University of Texas, Texas Performing Arts works with faculty and staff experts across the university, to provide context and content for the works we produce and present and lead the ongoing conversation about how arts and culture can help transform the life and work of the community in which we live.

Since 1997, the **Virginia Arts Festival** has brought great artists from around the world to the cities and communities of Southeastern Virginia, making this historic, recreation-rich region a center for culture and the arts. The Festival is committed to presenting, commissioning, and creating the best of the performing arts, and to making the region a cultural destination for travelers from across the country and around the world. In 2010, the 14th annual Virginia Arts Festival will present the exclusive United States performances of Britain's acclaimed Birmingham Royal Ballet; a spectacular new staging of Leonard Bernstein's Mass; an all-new Virginia International Tattoo featuring hundreds of performers from seven countries; plus riveting modern dance and contemporary ballet, colorful performance traditions from around the world, and concerts reflecting an array of musical styles, from classical artists to bluegrass, jazz, rock and more.

Under the artistic leadership of Maestro Peter Mark, the **Virginia Opera** is known and respected nationwide for the identification and presentation of the finest young artists, for the musical and dramatic integrity of its productions, and for the ingenuity and variety of its education and outreach programs. The company produces 32 main stage performances in three markets, reaching nearly 50,000 attendees in Hampton Roads, Central Virginia and Northern Virginia. In March of 1994, by unanimous vote of the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Opera was named The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia in recognition of the organization's contribution to the Commonwealth, and to the world of opera.

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