

**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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New Opera Attempts to ‘Slay’ Intolerance

World premiere opera gives villain a chance at redemption.

Philadelphia, Pa. - (September 2, 2011) - Although opera classics are sometimes updated and re-conceived to appeal to newer audiences, only new operas can truly engage us in meaningful dialogue regarding current social conflicts. *Slaying the Dragon*, previewing with music workshops on September 17 in Philadelphia and September 18 in Wilmington, will test the waters of intolerance before its June premiere in Philadelphia, presented by Center City Opera Theater.

“This opera is a powerful vehicle for confronting contemporary themes,” said Ellen Frankel, librettist for *Slaying the Dragon*. “Tolerance, the dangers of inflammatory rhetoric and stereotyping, and the possibilities of atonement and personal redemption.”

Based on a true story depicted in the book *Not by the Sword* by Kathryn Watterson, *Slaying the Dragon* is about a Grand Dragon of the KKK, who in the 1990’s renounced violence and hatred because of his unlikely friendship with a rabbi. The opera is about atonement, forgiveness, and redemption; through their relationship, both men undergo personal transformations and break from the prisons of their dark pasts.

We are all too familiar today with the landscape of intolerance: school bullying, gay-bashing, terrorism, immigration sentiment, and even flash-mobs in Philadelphia. One way to confront intolerance is through a contemporary and non-traditional approach, and composer Michael Ching demonstrates that opera can be that powerful vessel for change.

In Ching’s score for *Slaying the Dragon*, intolerance is countered through the joy of ethnic music, bringing together a wide range of lively and eclectic styles. Ching drew from a variety of

musical genres and sources -- Yiddish folk songs, Vietnamese children's songs, Jewish sacred music, Aryan rock, Broadway scores, and country-western tunes.

"I'm tired of hearing myself sing the show!" said Michael Ching in anticipation of hearing Center City Opera Theater's young artists sing excerpts of his score during the September workshops.

Slaying the Dragon is the latest work to emerge from Center City Opera Theater's Creative Development Projects, an ongoing series of new opera works that are nurtured from inceptions to fully-staged premieres. Fall music workshops for *Slaying the Dragon* are 8 pm on Saturday, September 17 at the Ethical Society in Philadelphia and 3 pm on Sunday, September 18 at Opera Delaware in Wilmington, as a part of Philadelphia's Live Arts Fringe Festival.

Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased by visiting www.operatheater.org

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Center City Opera Theater's mission is to present opera productions of the highest professional quality with a focus on new work and education, recruiting new audiences through intimacy and affordability of performances and providing opportunities for emerging opera professionals. Now in its 13th season, CCOT remains the only professional opera company in the United States whose primary mission is the development and production of new opera works.

About *Slaying the Dragon*

Slaying the Dragon is inspired by real events that took place in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the early 1990's, when Larry Trapp, Grand Dragon of the Nebraska Ku Klux Klan, conducted a hate campaign against minority groups in this predominantly white Midwestern city. But when Cantor Michael and Julie Weisser reached out to Larry, despite his anti-Semitic threats, Larry turned his back on bigotry, and campaigned for tolerance until he died in the Weissers' home from advanced diabetes. Larry's story was chronicled in Kathryn Watterson's 1995 journalistic account, *Not By the Sword*, which subsequently inspired several other imagined and documentary works.

Drawing upon these historical events, *Slaying the Dragon* presents the fictional story of Jerry Krieg, a white supremacist whose life is suddenly transformed thanks to the kindness extended to him by Rabbi Nathan Goodman and his wife, Vera. Won over by their compassion, Jerry renounces his association with the Klan and other hate groups, and begins to speak out publicly for tolerance. However, Jerry's advanced diabetes cuts short his plans for a new life. Unable to care for himself, Jerry moves in with the Goodmans and converts to Judaism before dying.

During the course of the opera, we learn that Jerry was abused as a child. We also learn that Nathan spent part of his childhood in an orphanage and was later imprisoned for robbery before deciding to become a rabbi. In reaching out to Jerry, Nathan succeeds in healing many of the wounds inflicted during his own childhood. Before Jerry dies, he reaches out to his own abuser,

his father, and reconciles with him.

In the end, this story is about two men, each scarred by abuse and the absence of love, who both find redemption from the prisons of their past. The story also presents a powerful portrait of repentance and forgiveness, and the possibility of authentic change.

About the Creators

Michael Ching has written a wide variety of theatrical projects, including full length operas, educational works, adaptations, arrangements, and incidental music.

Mr. Ching is currently finishing a full length treatment of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, a collaboration between Memphis' professional theatre and opera companies and an a cappella group that is scheduled for premiere in January in Memphis. *Buoso's Ghost* is Michael Ching's most popular opera, one for which he wrote both the words and music. *Buoso's Ghost* has played at Chicago Opera Theatre, Pittsburgh Opera Center, Indianapolis Opera, Lake George Opera, Opera New Jersey and several other companies.

Dr. Ellen Frankel served for eighteen years as the Editor in Chief and CEO of The Jewish Publication Society, the oldest and only nondenominational, non-profit publisher of Jewish works in English, and was named its first Editor Emerita upon her retirement in 2009.

For the past ten years, Frankel has been writing libretti, working with Philadelphia composer Andrea Clearfield. In May 2000, the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony premiered Clearfield's cantata, *Women of Valor*, which included two pieces by Frankel, "Sarah" and "Hannah." In 2005, Philadelphia's prestigious Mendelssohn Club Choir commissioned Ms. Clearfield to write a new oratorio; Frankel wrote the libretto.

About Creative Development Projects

Center City Opera Theater is unique in its mission to bring brand new opera works from inception to fully-staged production. **Creative Development Projects** is a series of opera works at various stages of development; each undergo a number of workshops until their world premiere with Center City Opera Theater. Last April, CCOT presented the world premiere of its CDP titled *Danse Russe* by Pulitzer prize winning composer Paul Moravec with original libretto by Wall Street Journal drama critic Terry Teachout at the Kimmel Center as a part of the Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts.

Current CDP's include: *Slaying the Dragon* (music by Ching and libretto by Frankel, world premiere June 2012); *Love/Hate* (music by Perla and libretto by Bailis, world premiere scheduled for 2013); *Maren of Vardo* (music by Myers and libretto by Vavrek, world premiere scheduled for 2013); *The Golem* (music by Clearfield and libretto by Frankel); *The Great Blondin* by (music by Vigue and libretto by Innaurato.)

PRESS RELEASE SUMMARY

WHAT: FALL MUSIC WORKSHOPS FOR *SLAYING THE DRAGON*

WHO: Center City Opera Theater

WHEN: Saturday, September 17 @ 8pm; Sunday, September 18 @ 3pm

WHERE: Ethical Society of Philadelphia (Saturday), Opera Delaware in Wilmington, DE (Sunday)

COST: \$25

Tickets available online by visiting www.OperaTheater.org

For additional information and materials regarding this press release, as well as requests for interviews, quotes, or full season press kit, contact Marketing Associate Eric Brower: **610.547.3476** or **eric@operatheater.org**