

Slaying the Dragon

About the Creators



Michael Ching (Composer)

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*. Scheduled for premiere in Memphis in January, *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, opera a cappella, is a collaboration between Memphis' professional theatre and opera companies – Opera Memphis and Playhouse on the Square – and an a cappella group, Deltacappella. Utilizing only Shakespeare's text, the show has received three workshops from Opera New Jersey, and workshops at Murray State University, Concordia College, and the Harrower Opera Workshop.

Mr. Ching's 2003 opera, *CORPS OF DISCOVERY*, was commissioned by the University of Missouri for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Premiered by Mizzou, the opera was also performed by Opera Memphis, Washington State University, and toured throughout North Dakota by Fargo Moorhead Opera. Excerpts from the opera were performed at Lewis and Clark Bicentennial commemorations, at the Kennedy Center, and by the U.S. Army Field Band and Soldiers Chorus.

BUOSO'S GHOST is Michael Ching's most popular opera, one for which he wrote both the words and music. A comic sequel to Puccini's *GIANNI SCHICCHI*, *BUOSO* has played at Chicago Opera Theatre, Pittsburgh Opera Center, Indianapolis Opera, Lake George Opera, Opera New Jersey and several other companies.

Mr. Ching collaborates frequently with librettist Hugh Moffatt. A well known Nashville songwriter, Moffatt and Ching created *CORPS OF DISCOVERY* and two other works, *KING OF THE CLOUDS* and *OUT OF THE RAIN*. *CLOUDS* was created for the Dayton Opera and *RAIN* for a consortium which included Opera Delaware, Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Opera Memphis. Both of these operas were written for touring in high schools. Mr. Ching's other operas include *THREE PIGS REMIX* for Opera Memphis' educational program; *LEO*, toured extensively by the Texas Opera Theater, and *FAITH*, a science fiction opera which was commissioned by Operafest of New Hampshire and also performed at the world science fiction convention (WorldCon). Another early opera, was *CUE 67*. Cowritten with Sandra Bernhard, *CUE 67* premiered in a double bill with *THE MEDIUM* at the Virginia Opera.

In 2009, Opera Memphis' premiered Mr. Ching's adaptation of Scott Joplin's *TREEMONISHA*. This extensive dramaturgical reenvisioning of the ragtime master's only surviving stagework has Joplin as a central character as he tries and fails to get his opera performed in the early jazz age of New York in 1912. A practical composer, Mr. Ching has created incidental music for several opera productions, including *IL TROVATORE* and *DON GIOVANNI*, and a Japanese influenced overture for Hawaii Opera's production of *THE MIKADO*. He also orchestrated Mike Reid and Sarah Schlesinger's *DIFFERENT FIELDS*, which was premiered by the Metropolitan Opera Guild and Opera Memphis. Outside of Opera, Mr. Ching is a songwriter, performer, and arranger. He has a strong interest in the Negro Spiritual and American folk songs. His *PIANO CONCERTO* was commissioned and recorded by the San Jose Chamber Orchestra and his orchestral works have been performed by the symphonies of Atlanta, Rochester, Virginia, Charlotte, Memphis and other groups.

Michael Ching has conducted over sixty productions with companies in Memphis, Nashville, New Jersey, New York, and Honolulu. For eighteen seasons he served as Artistic Director of Opera Memphis. Mr. Ching has

relocated with his family to Ames, Iowa and is looking forward to creating and collaborating on new projects from his new midwestern home. His upcoming projects include music directing for companies in Fargo, Honolulu, and Memphis and a new opera for a company in Philadelphia, Center City Opera Theater.

Michael Ching is a graduate of Duke University where he studied with composer Robert Ward. He received further training at the Houston Opera Studio, where he studied with Carlisle Floyd.



Ellen Frankel (Librettist)

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. She is the author of nine published books, including *The Classic Tales*, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, *The Five Books of Miriam*, and *The JPS Illustrated Children's Bible*, which won the 2009 National Jewish Book Award. She received her B.A. from the University of Michigan and her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Princeton.

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.

The resulting work, "The Golem Psalms," inspired by the ancient Jewish legend of the Golem, premiered at the University of Pennsylvania in May 2006, performed by the Mendelssohn Club and the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra, with Sanford Sylvan as baritone soloist. Since its premiere, the oratorio has also been performed at Haverford College by the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Choir and Orchestra (April 2007); Indiana University, performed by the Contemporary Vocal Ensemble and the Conductor's Orchestra, under conductor John Leonard, with Kenneth Pereira as baritone soloist (February 2009); and at Verizon Hall in the Kimmel Center, performed by the Temple University Symphony Orchestra and Combined Choirs, conducted by Alan Harler, with Sanford Sylvan again as baritone soloist (March 2010).

Following the success of "The Golem Psalms," Frankel expanded her libretto into a full two-act opera, *The Golem*, retaining several pieces from the initial oratorio. Philadelphia's Center City Opera Theater (CCOT), under artistic director Andrew Kurtz, has signed agreements with Frankel and Clearfield to help develop the work. A staged reading of a full draft of the libretto was held on May 17, 2009, under the direction of Charles Gilbert, artistic director of the Ira Brind Theater School at the University of the Arts. As work progresses, CCOT will schedule other staged readings as well as composition workshops, will spearhead fundraising efforts, and will offer expert consultation.

CCOT recently commissioned Frankel to write the libretto for another new opera, *Slaying the Dragon*, a two-act work inspired by actual events that took place in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the early 1990's. In this true story, Larry Trapp, Grand Dragon of the Nebraska Ku Klux Klan, renounced a lifetime of hatred and violence after being befriended by a Jewish cantor and his wife. Ultimately, the cantor's family took the terminally ill Trapp into their home, and he converted to Judaism before dying there. The opera will be premiered in Philadelphia in June 2012.

Dr. Frankel lives in Philadelphia with her husband. She has two grown children and two grandchildren.