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Concert: The Wolf by the Ears: An opera in three acts

Brian DeMaris

Ithaca College Light Opera

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The Wolf by the Ears **An opera in three acts**

Music by Dana Wilson

Libretto by J. Robert Lennon and Dana Wilson

Brian DeMaris, Conductor

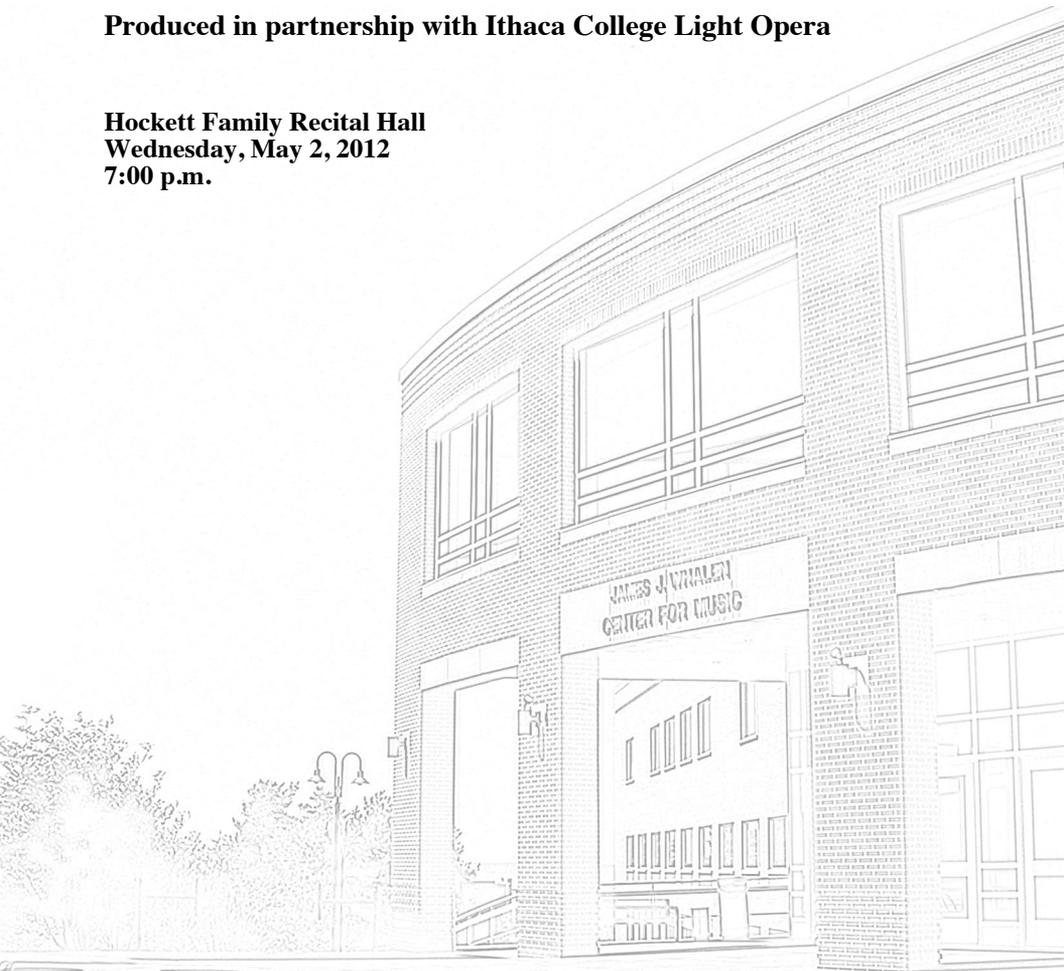
David Lefkovich, Stage Director

Produced in partnership with Ithaca College Light Opera

Hockett Family Recital Hall

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

7:00 p.m.



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

The Wolf by the Ears

This is the story of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, his slave "mistress," within the many contradictory and hypocritical strictures of their time. Jefferson's considerable power and influence, yet inability to live his own ideals, are what make him both tragic and enduringly human. Sally's ability to negotiate a meaningful life within the context of slavery exhibits her remarkable fortitude and resilience. In the end, it is the story of a family and of a nation.

Act I - Monticello, Va. (Jefferson's home)

Scene One

Jefferson and his wife Martha express their mutual affection over breakfast. He talks of the burdens surrounding the creation of a new nation, while she complains of her intense pain from complications during her recent childbirth. Their young child, Polly, comes in from play with her slave friend, Sally. Martha suddenly collapses.

Scene Two

Martha lies dying as Thomas ruminates on her illness and then tries to comfort her. She begs him to promise her that he will never remarry, and he agrees. Upon her death, he grieves his loss, and laments the difficult position of the newly formed country and the tragic reality of slavery (despite his own ownership of 200 slaves).

He decides to go to Paris to represent the young country as ambassador and try to escape his misery. He summons his slave and personal attendant, James Hemings (Sally's older brother), to prepare for the journey. Returning to his own family, James reacts to this demand aggressively.

Act II - Paris

Scene One - Jefferson's house in Paris

John Adams and Benjamin Franklin discuss Jefferson's successes after two years in Paris. Adams' puritanical streak and Franklin's "dirty old man" nature are suggested. Jefferson enters and complains that he finds Paris foreign to both his political and cultural sensibilities, and declares his longing for Monticello. Adams and Franklin beg him to stay, as France is on the verge of revolution and there is much work to be done. Maria Cosway, a married belle de Paris who has been pursuing Jefferson, arrives hoping to take him to lunch. Their mutual attraction and flirting leads to an awkward embrace, as Adams and Franklin discuss a letter from Washington concerning Shay's rebellion back in America. As the two duets merge to a quartet, Franklin tires of the

discussion and implores the others to join him for lunch. Jefferson remains, pondering in an aria the dichotomy created by the logical sense of his head and the longing of his heart.

Scene Two - Onboard a ship crossing the Atlantic

Polly, Jefferson's daughter, now in her early teens, is en route to Paris to join her father. Sally Hemings, now 14 years old, is her slave and companion for the journey. They sing of their respective frustrations on having to make the journey and of their aspirations.

Scenes Three to Six - Jefferson's house in Paris

Jefferson and Polly are reunited. Thomas acknowledges Sally, now as a young woman. Thomas and the chorus reflect on the ambiguity of relationships in the South, and the fact that Sally and his dead wife, Martha, are actually half-sisters.

Sally and her brother James (Jefferson's slave and personal attendant) are reunited. James explains that in Paris they are not bound by slavery, and the issues of freedom and loyalty are explored. Sally reflects on the toll slavery has taken on her brother and family.

Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette discuss the rising discontent in Paris (leading soon thereafter to the French Revolution). Polly and Sally enter for their French lesson with Jefferson, during which he becomes aware of his attraction to Sally. Polly departs and he talks with Sally and seeds for a relationship are formed.

With the French Revolutionaries exploding outside and chaos in the streets, Jefferson's and Sally's relationship develops inside. Eventually they discuss their bond in both romantic and social terms. He realizes he can't do anything more in Paris and wants her to return with him to Monticello; she realizes she is technically free in Paris, and wants him to grant her and her brother freedom should they return to the U.S. She announces that she is pregnant, and finally agrees to return with him, even though he can't promise her freedom. They declare their love for each other, but wariness and fear are always present.

— **Intermission** —

Act III - Virginia

Scene One - A tavern With Jefferson now elected President, an unscrupulous newspaperman, James Callender, investigates and spreads stories that Jefferson and Sally Hemings are intimate and have had several children together who are now slaves at Monticello (some even with fair skin and red hair). Folks express the widespread belief in this story by singing a song published and quite popular at the time.

Scenes Two to Four - Monticello

Jefferson and Sally's relationship continues, though difficulty with its nature and ramifications persists. Another slave woman questions Sally as to how she can continue the relationship. Meanwhile, Polly learns of, and is enraged by, Callender's claims; Jefferson refuses to acknowledge or deny them. Overhearing this, Sally sings of her love, her family, and her plight.

The orchestra plays a European-style minuet as guests dance and socialize. Jefferson mingles, revealing his flamboyant side--taking generous gulps of wine and charming the women. His daughter Polly joins the fun, while Sally is serving food (and the two occasionally exchange glances, Polly's menacing). Eventually Jefferson is asked to play his violin. When the music ends, guests applaud, say good night and depart. Jefferson, Sally, and Polly then prepare for bed and retire.

Meanwhile, slave music begins intensely outside the house: a spiritual ("You gonna reap what you sow") which then evolves into a ritualistic dance of exorcism. Eventually, the slaves draw knives and stealthily enter the house in a ritualistic dance; screams are heard as they slash Polly's throat and then Sally's. As they are just about to slash Jefferson's, he bolts upright in bed and screams--realizing it has all been just a nightmare. The drums suddenly stop and the slaves vanish. He bemoans the fact that America's relationship to slavery is like having the wolf by the ears: you can't hold on much longer, yet you can't let go.

Accompanied by a chant-like refrain, individual chorus members take turns explaining what became historically of many of the characters mentioned in the opera. This is followed by a brief recapitulation of the opening chorus, but now as Jefferson is dying. Gradually all principals join in, singing from their own perspective: Jefferson ("All men are created equal", etc.), Sally (about truth and love), and Polly (promising her father that no one will learn of his relationship with Sally).

A main musical theme returns, now with a ghostly aura, and the lights fade to black.

Cast

<i>Thomas Jefferson</i>	Zachary James ('05)
<i>Sally Hemings</i>	Carami Hilaire ('09)
<i>Polly Jefferson</i>	Robyn Lustbader
<i>Martha Jefferson</i>	Meghan Kelly
<i>James Hemings</i>	Steve Wilkins
<i>John Adams</i>	Nick Reynolds
<i>Benjamin Franklin</i>	Ryan Zettlemoyer
<i>Marquis de Lafayette</i>	Tom Riley
<i>Maria Cosway</i>	Carli Mazich-Addice
<i>James Callender</i>	Jason Peterson
<i>Slave Woman</i>	Adiza Jibril
<i>Young Sally</i>	Adiza Jibril
<i>Young Polly</i>	Emily DeMarzio
<i>Aides</i>	Fred Diengott, Brett Pond, Torrence Gricks
<i>Americans</i>	Michael Kallgren, Jennifer Guistino, Rachel Mikol
<i>Citizens</i>	Shaylyn Gibson, Kailey Pulos, Janine Colletti, Michelle Cosentino, Megan Wright, Zohaniris Torres-Rosado
<i>Doctor</i>	Joseph Kaz
<i>Guest</i>	Amberlee Weber
<i>Maidservant</i>	Ana Strachen
<i>Slaves</i>	Joseph Fritz, Andrew Mattfeld
<i>Townspeople</i>	David Klodowski, Eric Flyte, Shelley Attadgie

Chorus

Soprano

Shelley Attadgie
Lyndsey Boyer
Michelle Cosentino
Emily DeMarzio
Shaylyn Gibson
Alexandra Haines
Mollie Hamilton
Haelin Kim
Amberlee Lynn
Rachel Mikol
Hillary Robbins
Ana Strachan*
Megan Wright
Wenhui Xu
Mengchun Yang

Alto

Janine Colletti
Mel Daneke
Jennifer Giustino
Kat Krampf
Kailey Pulos
Zohaniris Torres-
Rosado

Tenor
Eric Flyte*
Joseph Fritz*
Torrance Gricks
Michael Kallgren
Andrew Mattfeld
Joshua Vanderslice
Ted Zimnicki*

Baritone/Bass

Eliodoro Castillo*
Fred Diengott
Joseph Kaz
David Klodowski
Michael Lewis
Brett Pond
Matthew Recio
Skyler Schlenker

* denotes soloist

Production Staff

Conductor Brian DeMaris
Stage Director David Lefkowich
Stage Manager Samantha Cotton
Assistant Conductor Jonathan Musgrave
Rehearsal Pianist Samuel Martin

Chamber Orchestra

Flute/Piccolo

Sophia Ennocenti

Oboe

Chloe Washington

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Michael Reinemann

Bassoon

Ross Triner

Horn

Emma Staudacher

Trumpet

Keli Price

Trombone

Kai Johnson

Percussion

Sean Harvey

Piano

Samuel Martin

Violin I

Natalie Brandt, *concertmistress*

Joseph D'Esposito

Colleen Mahoney

Nils Schwerzmann

Violin II

Samantha Spina

Brian Schmidt

Marcus Hogan

Viola

Dan Martinez

Max Aleman

Isadora Herold

Cello

Tristan Rais-Sherman

Thillman Benham

Katie McShane

Bass

Kyle Kresge

Biographies

Brian DeMaris (*Conductor*) has served as Associate Conductor for New York City Opera, Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master for Florida Grand Opera, Assistant Conductor for Glimmerglass Opera, and Resident Conductor of the Ash Lawn Opera Festival in Virginia. He has appeared with the Israel Chamber Orchestra and is presently Artistic Director of the New York based Alpha Omega Ensemble and Conductor of Music Saint Croix in Minneapolis. He has served as Resident Conductor for The American Lyric Theater, and on the music staff of Opera Theater of Saint Louis, Opera Festival of New Jersey, Lancaster Opera Company, Emmanuel Music, Actor's Company of Pennsylvania, and The American Music Theater, and has taught at Lawrence University, New England Conservatory School of Continuing Education, George Mason University's International Opera Alliance, and the International Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv. He is the Director of Opera and Musical Theater at Ithaca College and on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival.

Carami Hilaire (*Sally Hemings*) is a graduate of Ithaca College where she has performed in the production of Ravel's opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* as the squirrel and the armchair, and well as the Puccini heroine Suor Angelica. Since graduation Carami has been a studio artist at Lake George Opera (Opera Saratoga) as well as an apprentice artist with Sarasota Opera. She has been a finalist in the Harlem Opera Theatre competition and has been asked to perform a series of concerts with them in spring of 2012.

Zachary James (*Thomas Jefferson*) has appeared on Broadway as Lurch in *The Addams Family*, in the ensemble of the Tony Award-winning Broadway revival of *South Pacific*, and in the choir of *Coram Boy*. Other New York credits include the role of Oberon in the world premiere of Kristin Hevner's *Il Sogno in Citta Della Pieve*. As an operatic singer, he has sung with the Ash Lawn Opera (*Madama Butterfly*) and Knoxville Opera (*Little Women*). Regional theatre credits include the baritone soloist in *Carmina Burana*, Miles Gloriosus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Colline in *La Boheme*, Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, and Sweeney Todd in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. James also appeared in his own one man opera, *Imbecile d'Amour*, that played in Chicago in late 2009. In 2008, James made a small cameo appearance as the character "Carl" in the *30 Rock* episode "Gavin Volure," as well as appeared in the film as Ballion.

David Lefkowich (*Stage Director*) is an accomplished stage director and fight choreographer and has enjoyed success with different companies including the Metropolitan Opera, Teatre alla Scala, New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Glimmerglass Opera. Directing credits include *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *L'Histoire du Soldat*, and *Don Giovanni* at the Ravinia Music Festival with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Maestro James Conlon conducting. He was also thrilled to fight direct the world premieres of

Appomattox (Philip Glass) at San Francisco Opera, and *Miss Lonelyhearts* at the Juilliard Opera Center, *La fanciulla del west* at the New York City Opera and the New York off-Broadway run of *A Clockwork Orange*. A graduate from Northwestern University with a Bachelor's of Science in Theatre, David has a certificate from Ecole Jacques-Lecoq in Paris, France. Upcoming projects include directing and choreographing *Romeo et Juliette* at Florida Grand Opera and *La Boheme* at the Fort Worth Opera Festival.

J. Robert Lennon (*Librettist*) J. Robert Lennon is the author of several acclaimed novels, the most recent of which, *Castle*, was described in The New York Times Book Review in 2009 as "a terrific story, dire and confusing and convincing...It richly deserves to be read." *The Light of Falling Stars* (winner of Barnes & Noble's 1997 Discover Great New Writers Award) was described as an "ambitious, elegiac debut...[Lennon] paints a world tinged with loss, adeptly showing us sentiments left unspoken, relationships forever left dangling, silent moments of grief...lucid and graceful even in his characters' darkest hours." (Publisher's Weekly). Lennon's short stories have been published in "The New Yorker," "Harper's," and "Playboy" and have been featured on NPR's This American Life and Selected Shorts.

The works of **Dana Wilson** (*Composer*) have been commissioned and performed by such diverse ensembles as the Chicago Chamber Musicians, Formosa String Quartet, Detroit Chamber Winds and Strings, Xaimen Symphony, Voices of Change, Netherlands Wind Ensemble, Syracuse Symphony, and Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. Solo works and concerti have been written for such renowned artists as Gail Williams, Larry Combs, James Thompson, Rex Richardson and David Weiss. He has received grants from, among others, the National Endowment for the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, and Meet the Composer, and his music has received many recordings, as well as several awards from such organizations as the International Trumpet Guild, International Horn Society, and the Sudler Foundation.

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