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## Concert: Opera Workshop Presents The Wolf by the Ears

Dana Wilson

Brian DeMaris

Ithaca College Opera Workshop

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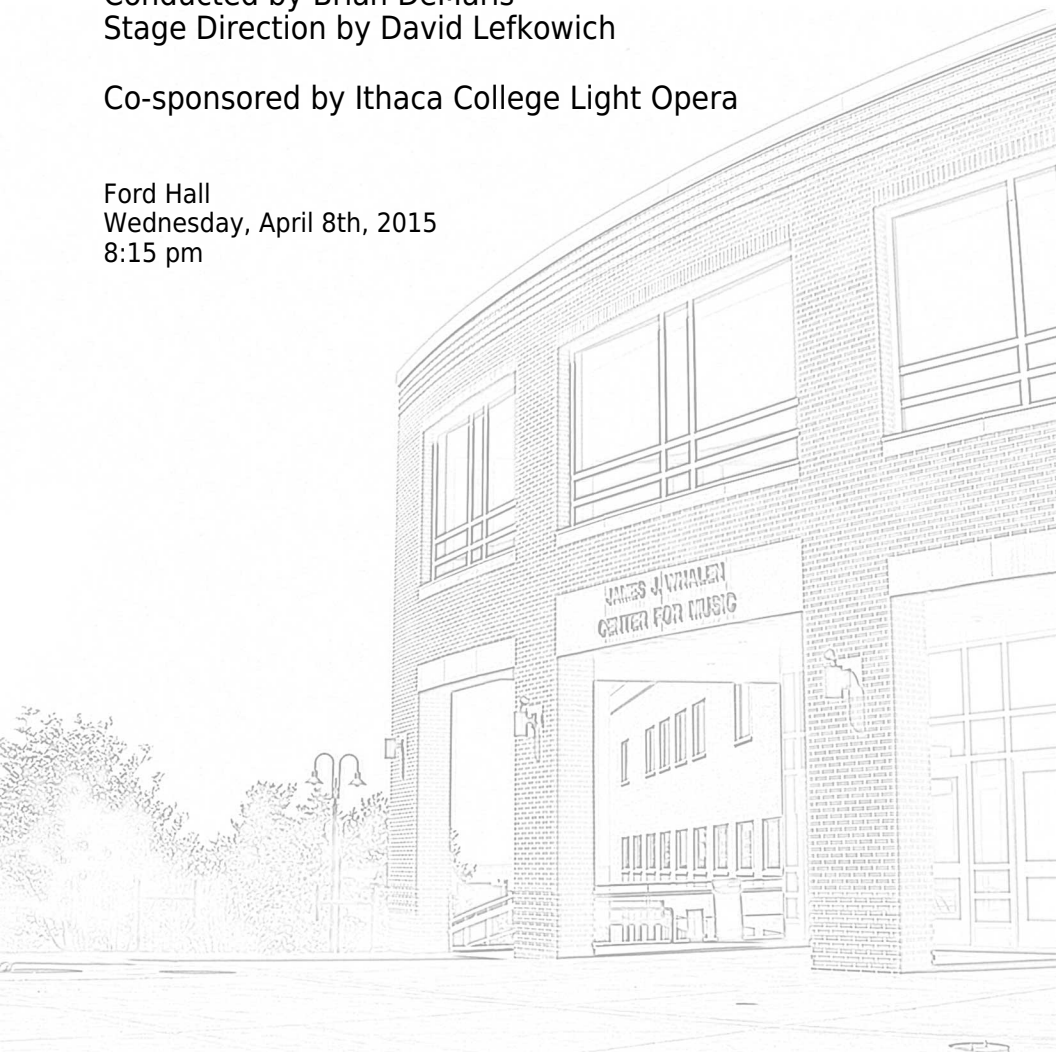
# Opera Workshop Presents: *The Wolf by the Ears*

Composed by Dana Wilson  
Libretto by J. Robert Lennon & Dana Wilson

Conducted by Brian DeMaris  
Stage Direction by David Lefkowich

Co-sponsored by Ithaca College Light Opera

Ford Hall  
Wednesday, April 8th, 2015  
8:15 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

## **Notes from the Composer**

This opera has been for me many years in the making—from a lifetime of interest in Jefferson to the DNA analysis linking him to Sally Hemings (and all of its social implications), to hammering out the opera's dramatic shape, to an exhilarating collaboration with author John (J. Robert) Lennon.

And now I'm thrilled to have the incredible talents of Brian DeMaris and David Lefkovich bring the piece to life on every level—from planning to logistics, to rehearsals, and finally to this evening's performance. And, finally, I'm excited to witness the coming together of the boundless talent and dedication of principal singers Cherisse Williams and Zach James, and of the entire Ithaca College Opera Workshop cast and orchestra.

I learned so much about this opera in this process, but mainly I learned what commitment and fortitude are required to launch such a project, for which I am deeply grateful.

--Dana Wilson

## Artistic Staff

Conductor  
Director  
Production Design  
Costume Design  
Associate Designers

Brian DeMaris  
David Lefkowich  
Steve TenEyck  
Sarah Bertolozzi\*  
E-Hui Woo  
Paul Radassao

## Cast

Thomas Jefferson  
Sally Hemings  
James Hemings  
Polly Jefferson  
Martha Jefferson  
Maria Cosway  
John Adams  
Marquis de Lafayette  
Benjamin Franklin  
James Callender  
Slave Woman  
Slave Man  
Young Sally  
Young Polly

Zachary James\*  
Cherisse Williams  
Eliodoro Castillo  
Julie Allison  
Meredith Morse  
Abigail Doering  
Stephen Tzianabos  
Timothy Powers  
Nathan Haltiwanger  
Fred Diengott  
Heather Barnes  
D'quan Tyson  
Vera Mae Camel  
Linnea Melo

Dancers

Deanna Payne  
D'Laney Bowry

Chorus

Leanne Averill  
Sherley-Ann Belleus  
Emily Beseau  
D'Laney Bowry  
Wei En Chan  
LiAn Chen  
Xavier Edwards  
Cynthia Mickenberg  
Josi Petersen  
Johanna Ruby  
Taylor Smith  
Kristi Spicer  
Kelly Timko  
Sarah Welden  
Mimi White

\* Ithaca College alumnus

## Covers

Thomas Jefferson  
Sally Hemings  
James Hemings  
Polly Jefferson  
Martha Jefferson  
Maria Cosway  
John Adams  
Marquis de Lafayette  
Benjamin Franklin  
Slave Man

Nathan Haltiwanger  
Heather Barnes  
D'quan Tyson  
Cynthia Mickenberg  
Josi Petersen  
Kelly Timko  
Timothy Powers  
Stephen Tzianabos  
Fred Diengott  
Eliodoro Castillo

## Orchestra

Violin

Natalie Brandt\*  
Joseph D'Esposito  
Jenna Jordan

Viola

Colleen Mahoney

Cello

Daniel Martinez\*  
Joseph Fleischman

Bass

Emily Faris

Flute

David Fenwick

Oboe

Tristen Jarvis

Clarinet

Sophia Ennocenti\*

Bassoon

Hannah Cerezo

Trumpet

Nikhil Bartolomeo

Horn

Sean Harkin

Trombone

Jason Ferguson

Percussion

Aubrey Landsfeld

Piano

Benjamin Allen

Andrew Garay

Amy Brinkman-Davis

\* Ithaca College alumnus

# Synopsis

This opera explores the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, his slave "mistress," within the many contradictory and hypocritical social structures of their time. Jefferson's considerable power 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.

The opera is based entirely on historical information. The chorus serves at various times as town's people in Paris and America, and as personal and social conscience.

## *Prelude*

The opera begins with a solo violin accompanying a ballerina, symbolizing the European-American world that Thomas Jefferson inhabits. Then a djembé (African drum) accompanies a jazz/"African" dancer, symbolizing the slave world of Sally Hemings. A brief, awkward duet emerges, though the dancers barely interact.

This leads into the music of the orchestra, followed by the chorus meditating on truth and blood, Jefferson and slavery.

## *Act I - Monticello*

### 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. 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 flitting leads to an awkward embrace, as Adams and Franklin discuss some business. As the two duets merge to a quartet, Franklin tires of the discussion and implores the other 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 - on board ship, looking over the railing

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.

Scene Three - 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.

Scene Four - Jefferson's house in Paris

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.

Scene Five - Jefferson's house in Paris

Jefferson and 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.

Scene Six - Jefferson's house in Paris, with the Revolution exploding outside

Revolutionaries march amid chaos in the streets, as 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.

**There will be one 15-minute intermission.**

## Act III - Virginia

### Scene One - A tavern scene

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.

### Scene Two - Monticello

Jefferson's 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.

### Scene Three - Monticello

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 his 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.

### Scene Four - Monticello

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.

- Dana Wilson



## **Production Staff**

Associate Producer  
Associate Conductor &  
Chorus Master  
Assistant Conductor  
Assistant Director  
Assistant Stage Managers  
  
Associate Costume Design  
Production Electrician  
Vocal Coach

Meredith Morse  
Aimee Radics  
  
Randi Ellen Rudolph  
Kelly Timko  
Fred Diengott  
Stephan Tzianabus  
Anna Grigo  
Evan Herman-Chin  
Blaise Bryski

## **Acknowledgements**

Amani Gospel Singers  
Dorothy Cotton Jubilee  
Singers  
First Presbyterian Church of  
Ithaca

Ithaca College Light Opera  
Ithaca High School  
Voices Multicultural Chorus  
Mu Phi Epsilon  
Sigma Alpha Iota

Ithaca College Faculty &  
Staff:

Barbara Anger  
Randie Blooding  
Amanda DeMaris  
Diana Dimitrova  
Anthony DiRenzo  
Mat Fournier  
Sara Haefeli  
Brad Hougham  
Paula Ioanide  
Carl Johengen  
Jennifer Kay  
Erik Kibelsbeck

Caitlin Mathes  
Carol McAmis  
Scott Mello  
Deborah Montgomery  
David Parks  
Patrice Pastore  
James Pfrehm  
Dawn Pierce  
Kasey Stewart  
Jenny Stockdale  
Ivy Walz  
Marc Webster

Karl Paulnack, dean

## Biographical Notes

Cast & Production Staff biographies can be found at:  
[www.ithaca.edu/music/ensembles/opera/thewolfbytheears/](http://www.ithaca.edu/music/ensembles/opera/thewolfbytheears/)

**Zachary James**, bass, created the role of Abraham Lincoln in the world premiere of Philip Glass' opera *The Perfect American* at the Teatro Real in Madrid, a role he reprised for London's English National Opera and Australia's Opera Queensland. He created the operatic roles of Oberon in the world premiere of Kristin Hevner Wyatt's *Il Sogno*, at the Teatro Citta della Pieve in Umbria and Rebbe in Andy Teirstein's *A Blessing on the Moon* at Vancouver's Chutzpah Festival. He created the role of Lurch in *The Addams Family* on Broadway, Hassinger in the Tony Award winning Broadway revival of *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center, and sang Handel's *Messiah* in the 2007 Broadway play, *Coram Boy*. A winner of the 2009 Lotte Lenya Competition, Zach has been engaged by US opera companies including Opera Philadelphia, Opera Roanoke, Shreveport Opera, Central City Opera, Ash Lawn Opera and Knoxville Opera and in concert with The New York Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Collegiate Chorale, American Symphony Orchestra, Symphony of the Mountains and Knoxville Symphony Orchestra. In addition to originating in three Broadway shows, Zach played Off-Broadway as Pasquale in *The Most Happy Fella* and Jo-Jo in *Irma la Douce*. Zach is a 2005 graduate of the Musical Theatre program at Ithaca College where he received the Outstanding Young Alumni Award. Upcoming: Bernstein's *Mass* with The Philadelphia Orchestra, World Premiere of *Breaking The Waves* with Opera Philadelphia, World Premiere of *Do Not Go Gentle* with The Phoenicia Festival, Handel's *Susanna* with NYC's Collegiate Chorale. @zjamesoperabass  
[www.ZachJames.com](http://www.ZachJames.com)

## Artistic Staff

**Sarah Bertolozzi** is a costume designer from Beacon, New York, currently based in New York City. Raised with a performance background, Sarah discovered her passion for working with costumes while studying theatre at college. She went on to graduate with Distinction from the B.F.A. Theatrical Design program at Ithaca College. Since then, Sarah has enjoyed designing productions ranging from intimate, one performer plays to large-scale musicals with casts of sixty. Design Work Includes: *Shear Madness* - 1st Nat'l Tour (Troika Entertainment); *Spamalot* (Florida Studio Theatre); *Snow White Zombie: Apocalypse* (State of Play). Assistant Design work includes: *Sister Act* - First Nat'l Tour (Troika Entertainment); *New Girl in Town* (Irish Rep); *Carrie* (MCC); *The Atmosphere of Memory* (Labyrinth Theater Company). Sarah is an Artistic Associate/Resident Costume Designer for FullStop Collective.

**Brian DeMaris** currently serves as Music Director of Mill City Summer Opera, Director of Opera and Musical Theatre at Ithaca College, and Artist-Faculty at the Aspen Music Festival. He has worked with New York City Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Theater of Saint Louis, Syracuse Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, American Opera Projects, American Lyric Theater, Ash Lawn Opera Festival, Music Saint Croix and the Israel Chamber Orchestra. He has appeared at the United Nations, the Aspen Music Festival, Boston's Jordan Hall, New York's Studio 54, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Symphony Space,

Alice Tully Hall, and in recitals, competitions, and master classes throughout the United States and abroad. He is the 2nd place winner of the 2013 American Prize in Opera and Musical Theater Conducting. DeMaris has also taught at Lawrence University, New England Conservatory School of Continuing Education, George Mason University's International Opera Alliance, the International Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv, and "Meet the Artist" at Lincoln Center. He has served on panels with Opera America and the National Opera Association, and presented master classes with the National Association of Teachers of Singing, New York State Music Teachers Association and New York State School Music Association. His students have performed on Broadway, film and television, and at opera companies and festivals throughout the world.

**David Lefkowich** 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 *Don Giovanni*, *Idomeneo*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *L'Histoire du Soldat* at the Ravinia Music Festival with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Maestro James Conlon conducting. David also directed and choreographed *L'Histoire du Soldat* at the Juilliard School, with Maestro Conlon. He made his European debut directing *Le Portrait de Manon* at the Gran Teatre Liceu in Barcelona, Spain and followed with *The Rake's Progress* at La Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium. Other credits include directing and choreographing new productions of *Simon Boccanegra* (Kentucky Opera), *La fille du Regiment* and *Acis and Galatea* (Madison Opera), *Salome* (Minnesota Opera), *Roméo et Juliette* (Florida Grand Opera, Minnesota Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Tampa, Seagle Music Colony), *Tosca* at Boston Lyric Opera, *Così Fan Tutte* (Opera Saratoga), *La Traviata* (San Francisco Opera, Lake George Opera), *Le Portrait de Manon* (Glimmerglass Opera), and *Il Trovatore* (New Orleans Opera, Fort Worth Opera). David is currently the Artistic Director of the Mill City Summer Opera in Minneapolis, Minnesota where he will direct the upcoming *Daughter of the Regiment*.

**J. Robert Lennon** is the author of two story collections, *Pieces For The Left Hand* and *See You in Paradise*, and seven novels, including *Mailman*, *Familiar*, and *Happyland*. He holds an MFA from the University of Montana, and has published short fiction in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Playboy*, *Granta*, *The Paris Review*, *Electric Literature*, and elsewhere. He has been anthologized in *Best American Short Stories*, *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, and *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, and his story "The Rememberer" inspired the detective TV series *Unforgettable*. He co-hosts the podcast *Lunch Box*, with poet Ed Skoog. His book reviews have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The London Review of Books*, and he lives in Ithaca, New York, where he teaches writing at Cornell University.

**Steve TenEyck** is an Associate Professor and the Associate Chair for the Department of Theatre Arts. Design work has been seen both nationally and internationally. Companies include Syracuse Stage, Pennsylvania Shakespeare, TACT-NYC, Big Art Group NYC, Tacoma Opera, Madison Opera, Syracuse Opera, Minnesota Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Mill City Summer Opera, Kitchen Theatre Company, St. Louis Rep. and Hangar Theatre. Designs for live events with the Herson Group Ltd. for such

institutions as Northwestern, Princeton, Cornell, Texas A&M, and the University of Tennessee, to name a few. Steve received his M.F.A. from the University of Washington in Seattle and is a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829.

The compositions of **Dana Wilson** have been performed throughout the United States and Europe, and in much of East Asia and Australia. He has received grants from, among others, the National Endowment for the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, New England Foundation for the Arts, New York State Council for the Arts, Arts Midwest, and Meet the Composer. His music can be heard on Klavier, Albany, Summit, Centaur, Innova, Meister Music, Elf, Open Loop, Mark, Redwood, Musical Heritage Society, and Kosei Recordings. Dana Wilson is currently Charles A. Dana Professor of Music in the School of Music at Ithaca College, and holds a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. He is co-author of *Contemporary Choral Arranging*, and has written on his own compositional process in *A Composer's Insight* and *Composers on Composing for Band*. He has been a Yaddo Fellow (at the artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York), a Wye Fellow at the Aspen Institute, and a Fellow at the Society for Humanities, Cornell University.

## **Student Assistants**

### Stage Crew

Eliodoro Castillo  
Nathan Haltiwanger  
Cynthia Mickenberg  
Josi Petersen  
Tim Powers

### Wardrobe Assistants

Johanna Ruby  
Karimah White  
Leanne Averill  
Sherley-Ann Belleus  
Emily Beseau  
Wei En Chan  
LiAn Chen

### Publicity Assistants

Kristi Spicer  
Sarah Welden  
Julie Allison  
Heather Barnes  
Abigail Doering  
Meredith Morse

### Social Media Assistants

Cherisse Williams  
Taylor Smith  
D'quan Tyson