

Our Town

An Opera in Three Acts

Music by

Ned Rorem

Libretto by

J. D. McClatchy

After the play by

Thornton Wilder

Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

Stage Manager

Matthew DiBattista

Dr. Gibbs, the town doctor

Donald Wilkinson

Mrs. Soames

Glorivy Arroyo

George Gibbs
the son of Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs

Brendan Buckley

Emily Webb
daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Webb

Margot Rood

Mrs. Webb

Angela Gooch

Joe Crowell
Frank
Sam
friends of George

Stefan Barner
Jonas Budris
Jason Connell

Lady in the Balcony

Rachele Schmiege

Man in the Audience

Graham Wright

Mr. Webb
the newspaper editor

David Kravitz

Simon Stimson
the choirmaster

Stanley Wilson

Mrs. Gibbs

Krista River

Chorus

Sopranos

Lindsay Conrad
Rachele Schmiege
Sarah Kornfeld

Mezzos

Thea Lobo
Christina English
Stephanie Kacoyanis

Tenors

Stefan Barner
Jason Connell
Jonas Budris

Baritones

Jonathan Nussman
Jacob Cooper
Graham Wright

Monadnock Music
Gil Rose, conductor

The entire opera takes place in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire.

DISC ONE [55:00]

ACT I

1. Opening 2:36
2. The earth turns, just a simple turn 5:17
3. See what I mean? 2:35
4. Why, hello, George Gibbs 4:40
5. What a lot of beans 3:28
6. Thank you, Emily. Thank you, Mrs. Webb 5:48
7. It's evening now in Grover's Corners. 4:08
8. Oh George, can you come down a minute? 4:42
9. Can you get home safe, Louella? 4:19
10. Emily! Are you still there? 4:03

ACT II

11. Well, friends, three years have gone by 3:26
12. Well, Mother, you're losing your chick today 2:36
13. Morning, everybody! Only five more hours to live 2:56
14. Well, George, how are you? 4:28

DISC TWO [68:25]

ACT II (conclusion)

1. Thank you, Thank you. I have another question here 3:05
2. Emily, can I carry your books home for you? 3:35
3. Hello there, George. Howdy, Emily 2:05
4. These are so expensive 5:14
5. And now we'll get on with the wedding 12:38

ACT III

6. This time nine years have gone by, friends 6:48
7. We're all coming up here 3:58
8. Hello. 4:57
9. Little cooler than it was 1:17
10. One can go back again . . . into living 3:52
11. Look! There's the church where I got married! 3:54
12. Coming! Morning, Mama. Morning, Papa 6:06
13. Seen enough? 5:13
14. Were you happy, Emily? 3:17
15. Most everyone's asleep in Grover's Corners 2:26

When Thornton Wilder's 1938 meta-theatrical triptych of portraits of American Life *Our Town* (which, no matter when it is staged, always takes place in 1938) was produced at the McCarter Theater in Princeton, twenty years had passed since the American Dream had been convulsed by the "War to End all War." That which burns away any Rockwell-esque nostalgia and powers the drama of the play is the "Damoclesian sword" that was the rise of fascism and the impending outbreak of World War II—only months away. The audience was invited to grieve for the characters from the moment that they met the omniscient, fourth-wall-piercing character of the Stage Manager. It was in the air: Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, (with Blitzstein and Orson Welles on stage essentially splitting the role that Wilder would transform into the Stage Manager for his *Our Town*) had electrified the American theater during summer 1937. Louise Talma (the only composer besides Hindemith to convince Wilder to pen a libretto, in German, no less—for her earnest, turgid *Alceste*—in the '50s) told me at Yaddo during the '90s that "Thornton certainly knew Marc's opera. The Depression was winding down. We saw Hitler coming to power. People were mourning Good Old Days that never were."¹

Arguably, Wilder's "continual dryness of tone"—as he described it in the introductory note to the 1938 "acting edition" of the play—found its ideal composer in Aaron Copland's seminal 1940 musical score (dedicated to Leonard Bernstein) for the original film.² Copland, according to Vivian Perlis, stated, "For the film version, they were counting on the music to translate the transcendental aspects of the story. I tried for clean and clear sounds and in general used straightforward harmonies and rhythms that would project the serenity and sense of security of the story." Rudolf Bing, then general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, approached Copland in 1951 with the idea of expanding his score into a full-length operatic version. Wilder, according to Perlis, quashed the idea, responding, "my texts 'swear at' music; they're after totally different effects."³ What was required, as Wilder wrote in his introduction to the play was, "the New England understatement of sentiment, of surprise, of tragedy. A shyness about emotion ... a sharpening and distinctness of the voice."

Fast forward. Wilder said no to many composers during his lifetime, though he did permit Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart to turn *The Matchmaker* into *Hello Dolly* and, in 1965, did grant rights to Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green to adapt *The Skin of Our Teeth* into a musical. Musical theater collaborations are fickle—everything's got to fall into place or the producers bolt and the soufflé falls. Everything didn't, and the project collapsed. When Lenny returned to Wilder, seeking operatic rights, Wilder shut him down. We are the poorer for his decision.⁴

I studied with composer Ned Rorem during the early '80s while a student at the Curtis Institute, and served as his copyist for half a decade after that. I knew his music from the inside out, and I knew particularly well his short operas. Art song composer nonpareil, he and Kenward Elmslie had adapted August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* in 1965 with mixed success, and many thought him not suited to the demands of large-scale lyric theater. But Ned persevered, and garnered universal praise from opera stalwarts when, in 1994, he returned to *Miss Julie*, trimming it into a

¹ Louise Talma in conversation with the author at Yaddo, summer 1995.

² Thornton Wilder's "Some Suggestions for the Director" from the 1938 "acting edition" of the script.

³ Vivian Perlis quotes Aaron Copland in a letter to the *New York Times*, January 31, 1998.

⁴ Tappan Wilder, program notes for "Thornton Wilder and Music," a program by the American Symphony Orchestra, December 19, 2014.

“taut and persuasive” 90-minute one act, according to James Oestreich in the *Times*.⁵

J.D. (Sandy) McClatchy, the svelte poet, erudite editor, and versatile librettist for *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (Daron Hagen), *Miss Lonelyhearts* (Lowell Liebermann), *1984* (Lorin Maazel), *Dolores Claiborne* (Tobias Picker), and *A Question of Taste* (William Schuman) among others, and I met when translator William Weaver commissioned me to compose some songs in memory of James Merrill—Sandy was Merrill’s executor. I admired his libretti and told him so. He said that Tappan Wilder had agreed to loosen the bonds on the *Our Town* rights, and that he, Sandy, was looking for the right composer. How, he asked me, would I proceed if I took on the job? I don’t recall now what I said, but I do recall ending the conversation by saying, “You know, the man you’re looking for is really Ned Rorem. Ned’s Quakerism provides the proper emotional repose; his age the appropriate cultural reference points. Most importantly, he’s entirely secure in his own voice, and will be comfortable letting Wilder’s play take the lead.”

I doubt that Sandy chose Ned because of what I said, but I knew then (and now) that I was right. *Our Town* the opera was premiered by Indiana University Opera Theater with student singers and orchestra on February 25, 2006. Its professional debut was at the Lake George Opera on July 1, 2006. Intended from the start to be a chamber opera, the orchestration is small, and the scoring is light and transparent throughout—consistent with a work best suited to young voices. The formal structure follows Wilder’s play closely. Minor deviations from the original play seem to have been made (the fleshing out of the role of Simon Stimson, the creation of choral numbers, for example) to provide opportunities for musicalization. Rorem moves in and out of speech and utilizes more elevated recitative (*parlando*) than in his previous theatrical works.

Playing through Ned’s first manuscript vocal score with Gilda Lyons shortly after he finished his first draft, we pounced upon the opportunity of giving the concert première of the (now classic) aria for Emily. (Notably, the opera’s only freestanding set piece.) In it, the ironic union of opposites that make the opera *Our Town* the immediate American classic that it is were on full display—economy of construction, absolute, unwavering resistance to unnecessary emotionalism, frankly open textures, wisps of Poulenc at his driest, and the sort of stunning Protestant hymns that only an atheistic alcoholic Quaker whose life partner was a church organist can pen. Everywhere in the music there is a sort of cool, self-contained regretfulness—the regret so central to the play’s initial impetus, a regret so intense as to border on dread—that perfectly underpins and undercuts the sentimentality of the portraits.

Rorem uses three compositional strategies to hold the opera together structurally, track the story’s narrative, and to keep his musical rhetoric coherent.

First, he manifests Wilder’s “emotional shyness” with abrupt stylistic cross-cutting (in mid-thought, sometimes in mid-musical phrase) between Americana (Thomsonian faux-Protestant hymns, plush sustained cinematic strings, Copland-esque woodwind solos, Ivesian collages), transatlantic modernism (the tartly-scored “sting” chords, jagged, off-kilter ostinatos in close-canon, denatured melodic fragments in place of memorable tunes), and Gallic lyricism (rapturous string obbligatos, sudden snatches of emotionally-vibrant melody, Debussy-esque orchestration).

⁵ James Oestreich, *New York Times* review of the Manhattan School of Music production of the revised *Miss Julie*, spring 1994.

SIGNATURE CHORDS

[Fig. 1]
Regina (1954)
 Blitzstein

[Fig. 2]
A Quiet Place (1983)
 Bernstein

[Fig. 3]
Shining Brow (1994)
 Hagen

[Fig. 4]
Our Town (2005)
 Rorem



The first sixty seconds of the opera deftly arrays all three techniques. The pungent bell-tone chord that strikes 5AM declares that *Our Town* is part of a continuum of American operas that frankly destabilize traditional harmony by thrusting, like a billy to the ribs, an unresolved fourth into the triad. Blitzstein's poisoned capitalists, Bernstein's tragic suburbanites, my tormented architect, and Rorem's dread-filled citizens of Grover's Corners all inhabit the same American operatic landscape. Ned immediately crosscuts to another of his favorite tropes—the faux Protestant chorus underpinned harmonically by parallel unresolved sevenths in the bass—before overlaying a sudden, Gallic, sensually-arresting obbligato in the high strings. When the action begins, the *parlando* (passages of elevated speech that do not quite rise to song) section that follows is typical of the handling of dialogue throughout the opera: The characters unpretentiously skitter halfway between speech and recitative over a plush, comforting pad of sustained, Copland-esque strings.

[Fig. 5]
Dialogues of the Carmelites (1957)

[Fig. 6]
 "For Poulenc" (1963)

[Fig. 7]
 Emily's Aria
Our Town (2005)

Second, throughout the opera, beginning in the background during the first moments as a woodwind obbligato like a nettlesome foreigner, is a “deedle-dum” figure that unmistakably evokes the falling motif associated with the doomed nuns in Poulenc’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites* [Fig. 5]. Rorem’s personal association with the motif inspired him to quote it in his own song, “For Poulenc” [Fig. 6], and, over the years, a dozen instrumental works, large and small. In the score of *Our Town*, it completes its transit (in Ned’s life as a composer and in his catalogue) in his characterization of Emily [Fig. 7].

The motif evolves inexorably over the course of the opera, generating tension the way that someone playing with their hair during a serious conversation is at first slightly distracting and, over time, enervating. It begins to take on a life of its own as the second act unfolds, the curling of melodies in the background behind the characters' parlando turning in on themselves in an Ouroboros-like way, transforming the fragments into slowly unraveling ostinati that are both claustrophobic and comforting—like the family life Rorem's music limns. Characters begin taking on the background ostinati and incorporating them into their parlando in odd melismatic passages that heighten words in a baroque fashion. As the second act closes and the young couple marry, the dread given us by the first acerbic chord of the opera returns, literally underscoring the fragility of their happiness. A violin solo gives another fleeting taste of sensual pleasure before Rorem snuffs it as, again, “too much” to close with an anything but comforting, dread-filled, Ives-ian mash-up of the “Mendelssohn Wedding March.”

Pedal points in the strings, quizzical quasi-chorales in the winds and brass, the “deedle-dum” curling wind obbligati, all return in the third act; the opera continues to unfold, but all the vocal lines are heightened above parlando (they're taken closer to “song” and effusive tunefulness by making their tunes less abstract and more traditionally singable and giving the phrases more melismas) in a way that they weren't in the first two acts. This “gradual emotional warming” manifests Ned's third, and most subtle, strategy for giving the opera emotional depth, the character of Emily emotional verifiability, and the piece a satisfying emotional trajectory.

This is how he did it. Gradually, Rorem invests the chorus with more and more emotional warmth so that they—in death, but not in life—create the sort of musico-emotional landscape into which Emily can step. The apotheosis of the opera is, of course, Emily's aria, wherein Rorem combines at proximity all the musical gestures laid out in the first two acts. In this, the “eleven o'clock” spot, he gives Emily the only unabashedly rapturous music in the opera, and on the most regretful sentiment: “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?” The composer's self-control in finally allowing us to “feel” is masterful; the effect is devastating. His obvious identification with Emily, Poulenc, and the nuns is an astonishing personal revelation for a composer so famously public in his prose and yet so resolutely private in fact. Emily concludes, as Ned (a writer who eschews exclamation points and composer who famously hates repeating words, breaks his own rules) sums up a world-view, “That's all human beings are. Blind!”

[Fig. 8]
End of Emily's Aria

The image shows a musical score for the end of Emily's Aria. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "That's all hu-man be-ings are. Blind! Blind! Blind! Blind!". The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, starting with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a key signature of one flat. It begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) *tutti* dynamic. The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, creating a baroque cantata texture. The score ends with a final chord in the piano part.

But why did *Our Town* need to be made into an opera? Just 80 years have elapsed since the 1937 premiere of Wilder's play, yet a 1938 audience's dread is like that felt in many quarters in 2017. Spring 2017 may find Americans in greater need of the sort of narrative that *Our Town* provides than they have been since the '30s. The "Damoclesian sword" of rising fascism has returned with a vengeance; we're told that we're not experiencing a Depression, yet unemployment isn't being measured in a way that considers how many people have simply stopped looking for work, or the fact that retired people are working at Walmart to supplement their pensions. The Peterborough, New Hampshire, that Wilder used as a model for Grover's Corners had faded to the margins by the time I began visiting the MacDowell Colony during the early '80s. Nobody in Wilder's play could afford to live in the Peterborough of today.

Ned has told me that Satie's *Socrate* may be "the greatest of all operas." Certainly, he exploits in his score for *Our Town* the same kind of baroque cantata textures and affects as Satie did in his 1920 masterpiece and that Wilder (according to Mabel Dodge)⁶ most preferred. But the Rorem and McClatchy *Our Town* also contains—in the propulsive, off-kilter ostinati percolating uneasily beneath the Nantucket matter-of-factness of its musical surfaces and its stubborn unwillingness to wear its heart on its sleeve—an astonishing undercurrent of unanticipated, and highly effective dramaturgical fury.

—Daron Hagen

Daron Hagen is the composer of nine regularly-revived operas (among hundreds of other works large-and-small), a stage and artistic director, conductor, collaborative pianist, and essayist who lives in Rhinebeck, New York with his wife and two children.

⁶ Mabel Dodge is quoted by Tappan Wilder in his American Symphony Orchestra program note.

Scattered Notes

Ned Rorem

What can be said about the music that the music can't say better? Only how it came to be written.

Prior to *Our Town*, I composed seven operas (or 12, if you count all of *Fables*). Such as it is, my reputation seems to center around vocal music (although the 1976 Pulitzer Prize was for straight orchestra, *Air Music*). Besides the operas, there are perhaps 500 hundred songs including several cycles, some with small ensembles.

It does not follow that “vocal” composers are equally comfortable in both song and opera. Puccini, Verdi, and even Wagner are not known for their songs; Fauré, Duparc, and even Brahms are not known for their operas. Some are at home in each medium: Richard Strauss, Poulenc, and even Virgil Thomson.

Myself, I'm more at ease with song. Opera is prose and spins a yarn, while song is poetry and depicts a state of mind. With a song on a pre-existing text, I know the end before I begin. Whatever my songs may be worth, I flatter myself that my choice of texts is first rate. Do I set my own words to music—for I am an author too? No. If Ned-the-writer were good enough to please Ned-the-composer, the text would be self-sufficient, and hence untouchable.

Our Town by Thornton Wilder is internationally the best-known play of the 20th century. The 1940 movie version has a heartbreakingly simple background score by Aaron Copland. Since then, many a musician, including Copland, has applied in vain for operatic rights. Did Wilder feel that the play contained its own “music,” and that real music would be gilding a very fragile lily?

The idea of doing it was not my own, but that of Sandy McClatchy. Sandy, a friend of Wilder's nephew Tappan, procured the rights from the Wilder Estate and wrote the libretto. The libretto, pared down and with a few set pieces, is otherwise faithful to the original.

Does it need to be sung? Am I the one to make it singable? And is it Ned-the-songwriter or Ned-the-operawriter who makes it work?

Celebrated as one of the world's best composers of art song, Pulitzer Prize– and Grammy Award–winning composer **Ned Rorem** (b. 1923) has written hundreds of songs and cycles, as well as ten operas, three symphonies, four piano concertos, and an array of works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, chorus, and ballet. He is the author of sixteen books, including five volumes of diaries and collections of lectures and criticism.

Rorem is the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship (1951) and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1957) and has received multiple ASCAP Deems Taylor Awards for his literary work. His suite *Air Music* won the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Music. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's recording of *String Symphony*, *Sunday Morning*, and *Eagles* received a 1989 Grammy Award for Outstanding Orchestral

Recording. In 2000 he was elected president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in 2001 he was made a Chevalier of France's Légion d'Honneur. He received ASCAP's Lifetime Achievement Award (2003) and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Music (2003).

Among the distinguished conductors who have performed Rorem's music are Bernstein, Masur, Mehta, Mitropoulos, Ormandy, Previn, Reiner, Slatkin, Steinberg, and Stokowski. His most recent opera, *Our Town*, premiered at Indiana University in 2006.

J. D. McClatchy has written twenty libretti for such composers as Ned Rorem, Tobias Picker, Bernard Rands, and William Schuman—works performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden, La Scala, the San Francisco Opera, the Los Angeles Opera, and other prominent houses around the world. The *New York Times* has called him “the dean of American opera librettists.” In addition, he has written eight books of poetry, many of prose, and edited dozens of other books as well. He teaches at Yale where he also serves as editor of *The Yale Review*.

Founded in 1966, **Monadnock Music** enriches lives and deepens a sense of community by means of diverse classical programming throughout the Monadnock region of New Hampshire. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Gil Rose, it annually mounts a summer festival situated in iconic and intimate New England settings less than two hours from Boston. Among the many distinguished artists whose work Monadnock Music has presented or commissioned are Aaron Copland, Peter Sellars, Richard Goode, Sanford Sylvan, James Maddalena, Russell Sherman, John Adams, Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, Dominick Argento, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Craig Smith, and Ursula Oppens. In addition to its Peterborough Town House Series, Monadnock Music also presents its renowned Village Concerts, bringing distinguished artists to historic meeting houses throughout the region free of charge, making some of the greatest classical music accessible to all. During the school year, Monadnock Music provides vital music education support to the region's elementary schools through its Lend an Ear! program. Since its establishment in 1985, Lend an Ear! has enriched the lives of over 25,000 children in more than 25 towns.

Gil Rose is a conductor helping to shape the future of classical music. His dynamic performances and many recordings have garnered international critical praise. Over the past decade, Mr. Rose has built a reputation as one of the country's most inventive and versatile opera conductors. He is the founder of Odyssey Opera, a highly acclaimed new company dedicated to eclectic and overlooked operatic repertoire. Mr. Rose led Opera Boston as its Music Director starting in 2003, and in 2010 was appointed the company's first Artistic Director. With Opera Boston and the contemporary festival Opera Unlimited, he conducted multiple New England, American, and world premieres. Mr. Rose is also a frequent guest conductor, appearing most recently in his 2016 New York City Opera debut at Jazz at Lincoln Center, and in his 2015 Japanese debut substituting for Seiji Ozawa at the Matsumoto Festival.

In 1996, Mr. Rose founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), whose unique programming and high performance standards have earned the orchestra fourteen ASCAP awards for adventurous programming, the John S. Edwards Award, and Musical America's 2016 Ensemble of the Year Award. An active recording artist, he serves as the executive producer of the BMOP/sound label, which has received widespread praise for its contemporary and 20th-

century catalog of more than 50 releases. He has led the longstanding Monadnock Music Festival in historic Peterborough, NH, since 2012. Mr. Rose's accolades include Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Award, an ASCAP Concert Music Award for exemplary commitment to new American music, and four Grammy Award nominations.

Mezzo-soprano **Glorivy Arroyo** has performed with Opera Boston for more than ten seasons, making her debut as Secretary to Mao in John Adams's *Nixon in China*, and most recently as Roggiero in Rossini's *Tancredi*. Recent engagements include her European debut in Toledo, Spain as Concepción in Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*, Trinculo in *The Tempest* with The Shakespeare Concerts, and the Sorceress in *Dido and Aeneas* at the Connecticut Early Music Festival, returning after a successful turn as Arsamene in Handel's *Xerxes*. Past seasons include appearances as Angelina in *La Cenerentola* with Opera del West, Anna I in *The Seven Deadly Sins* and Dinah in *Trouble in Tahiti* with Opera Boston Underground, and Lolette in *La Rondine* with the Utah Symphony and Opera. Ms. Arroyo can also be heard on Boston Modern Orchestra Project's world-premiere recording of Lukas Foss's *Griffelkin* (Chandos). She was the founding host and headliner of Opera Boston Underground.

Tenor **Stefan Barner**'s notable performances include Beppe in *I Pagliacci* and the Younger Brother in Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins* with Virginia Opera, Frank Shallard in Robert Aldridge's *Elmer Gantry*, Jay Gatsby in John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, Tybalt in *Romeo et Juliette* with Tulsa Opera, Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* and Monastatos in *Die Zauberflöte* with Salt Marsh Opera, and the title role in *Faust* and *Idomeneo* with Boston Opera Collaborative. Barner has performed internationally with the Glimmerglass Festival as Jacey Squires in Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man* at the Royal Opera House in Muscat, Oman; and as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with La Musica Lirica in Novafeltria, Italy.

Tenor **Brendan P. Buckley** can be heard in Cape Ann Opera's recording of Robert J. Bradshaw's new steampunk opera *Deus Ex Machina*, which received three Global Music Awards. He recently received critical praise in the role of Nurse in the debut production of Hannah Lash's *Beowulf* with Guerilla Opera. Favorite opera roles include Howard Boucher in the New England premiere of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Laurie in Mark Adamo's *Little Women*, Le Remendado in *Carmen* and First Tenor in Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Concert performances include engagements with the Nashua Symphony, Greater New Bedford Choral Society, Choral Art Society of the South Shore, and MIT Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Buckley is a member of the voice faculty at Plymouth State University and currently studies with Elisabeth Phinney. For more information, please visit www.brendanpbuckley.com.

Tenor **Jonas Budris** is a versatile soloist and ensemble singer, engaging new works and early music with equal passion. Featured in Boston Baroque's Grammy-nominated recording of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, he also sings with the Handel and Haydn Society, Blue Heron, Spire, and the Skylark Vocal Ensemble. With Emmanuel Music, he performs regularly in their Bach Cantata series and evening concerts. On the opera stage, he has performed principal and supporting roles with Opera Boston, OperaHub, Guerilla Opera, and Odyssey Opera. Originally from Martha's Vineyard, Mr. Budris holds a degree in Environmental Sciences & Engineering from Harvard College.

Tenor **Jason Connell** now performs frequently with opera companies and ensembles throughout the East Coast. His recent opera roles include Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Don Ramiro (*La Cenerentola*), Ralph Rackstraw (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*) and Nanki-Poo (*The Mikado*). Mr. Connell has cultivated strong relationships with several professional ensembles—Odyssey Opera Chorus, Night Song’s compline series in conjunction with the Boston Early Music Festival, Seraphim Singers, and Labyrinth choir, with whom he recently toured in the Baltic countries.

Matthew DiBattista, tenor, has performed opera and concert works on some of the world’s most prestigious stages throughout the United States and Europe. He has sung with such conductors as Charles Dutoit, Seiji Ozawa, Keith Lockhart, Sir Andrew Davis and Robert Shaw. Known for an exceptionally varied repertoire, Mr. DiBattista has performed over 65 different roles to date, spanning the entire operatic repertoire at companies such as Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glimmerglass Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Cincinnati May Festival, Chicago Opera Theatre, New Orleans Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Opera Omaha, Tulsa Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Colorado, Long Beach Opera, Tanglewood Music Center, Boston Lyric Opera, and Opera Boston. He has been on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera and has appeared for eight of the last nine seasons as principal artist with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Angela Hines Gooch has performed as Voice of the Fountain in Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar* under the direction of Peter Sellars, in Robert Ward’s opera *The Crucible*, and Eric Sawyer’s *Our American Cousin*, in which she created the role of Mary Lincoln. Other credits include *Der Freischütz*, *Don Pasquale*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Fidelio*, and *Candide*. She has been a featured performer with the Alabama Symphony, at Alice Tully Hall, the United States Presidential Yacht, the U.S.S. Sequoia, and at the Casa Verdi in Milan. Ms. Gooch serves on the faculty of Boston University Opera Institute, Tanglewood Young Artist Vocal Program and at The Walnut Hill School for the Arts, where she served ten years as the Head of the voice program. She has been honored by the NFAA and named in the Who’s Who Among American Teachers as one of the arts’ most distinguished teachers.

David Kravitz’s recent opera engagements include lead roles at Washington National Opera (Davis Miller in the world premiere of D.J. Sparr’s *Approaching Ali*), Chautauqua Opera (Captain Balstrode in *Peter Grimes*), Skylight Music Theatre (Scarpia in *Tosca*), Opera Santa Barbara (The Forester in *The Cunning Little Vixen*), Grand Harmonie (Don Pizarro in *Fidelio*), Opera Saratoga (Don Magnifico in *La cenerentola*), Ash Lawn Opera (Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*), Boston Lyric Opera (Abraham in *Clemency*), Emmanuel Music (Nick Shadow in *The Rake’s Progress* and Nick Carraway in Harbison’s *The Great Gatsby*), and the New England Philharmonic (Wozzeck in *Wozzeck*). His many concert appearances include the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony, the Virginia Symphony, Boston Baroque, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Emmanuel Music, under such conductors as James Levine, Andris Nelsons, Bernard Haitink, and Charles Dutoit.

Mezzo-soprano **Krista River** has appeared as a soloist with the Boston Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the North Carolina Symphony, the Cape Cod Symphony, the Santa Fe Symphony, Handel & Haydn Society, the Florida Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, Odyssey

Opera, Baltimore Choral Arts Society, and Boston Baroque. Winner of the 2004 Concert Artists Guild International Competition and a 2007 Sullivan Foundation grant recipient, notable performances include the International Water and Life Festival in Qinghai, China, and recitals at Jordan Hall in Boston and the Asociación Nacional de Conciertos in Panama City, Panama. Ms. River began her musical career as a cellist, earning her music degree at St. Olaf College. She resides in Boston and is a regular soloist with Emmanuel Music's renowned Bach Cantata Series.

Soprano **Margot Rood** performs a wide range of repertoire. Recent and upcoming appearances include those with Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, Handel and Haydn Society, Seraphic Fire, A Far Cry, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Blue Heron, Lorelei Ensemble, Cape Symphony, Bach Collegium San Diego, and Grand Harmonie, as well as onstage with Boston Early Music Festival, Monadnock Music, St. Petersburg Opera, Helios Early Opera and Green Mountain Opera Festival. Ms. Rood is the recipient of prestigious awards, including the St. Botolph Emerging Artist Award (2015), the Lorraine Hunt Lieberson Fellowship at Emmanuel Music (2015), and The American Prize (2016). Her debut solo recording with composer Heather Gilligan, *Living in Light*, is now available from Albany Records. Ms. Rood holds degrees from the University of Michigan and McGill University.

Rachele Schmiege's recent appearances include Anne Truelove in *The Rakes Progress* (Pacific Opera Project), Lucette in *Cendrillon* (Resonance Works), Soprano II in Philip Glass's *Hydrogen Jukebox* (Nashville Opera), *La Voix Humaine* and Amy in Adamo's *Little Women* (Opera on the James), and Violetta in *La traviata* (Hubbard Hall Opera Theater), among others. Recent concert appearances include Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Mahler's Symphony No. 4, Canteloube's *Chants d'Auvergne*, Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, Mozart's *Requiem*, *Exsultate Jubilate*, and *Mass in C minor*.

Bass-baritone **Donald Wilkinson** has appeared throughout the United States and Canada. He made his European debut performing the role of Dionysos in the world premiere of Theodore Antoniou's opera *The Bacchae* at the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Since that debut, he has appeared in Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Germany, France, England, and Holland. Mr. Wilkinson has performed as soloist with Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Hogwood and the Handel and Haydn Society, and the symphony orchestras of Pittsburgh, Evansville, Jacksonville, Springfield (MA), Portland (ME), and Vermont. He is celebrating his 33rd season as both soloist and ensemble member of Emmanuel Music, under the direction of Ryan Turner. He has recorded on BMOP Sound (Abraham Lincoln in Eric Sawyer's *Our American Cousin*), Koch International, Erato Disques, Albany Records, and Dorian Recordings. He is the founder and Artistic Director of the Nahant Music Festival.

Stanley Wilson, tenor, is equally at home singing opera, oratorio, concerts, and recitals. Some of his opera credits include Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Bardolfo in *Falstaff*, Tanzmeister in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Le Remendado in *Carmen*, Kaspar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, Gherardo in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Bardolf in Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love* with Odyssey Opera. Oratorio credits include Handel's *Messiah*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and the Theodore Dubois' *Seven Last Words of Christ*. Mr. Wilson is the Executive Director of Worcester Schubertiade, a chamber music performing arts organization in Worcester, MA. His

love of this genre has motivated him to release two CDs of art song: *Art Songs of the British Romantics* and *Robert Schumann: Dichterliebe & Liederkreis*.

Graham Wright, bass-baritone, performs regularly in opera and concert, having frequently appeared with Boston Lyric Opera, Opera Boston, and as a Choral Scholar at Boston University's Marsh Chapel. Sought after as a consultant to arts and culture organizations, he is the founder of Opus Affair and a winner of BostInno's 50 on Fire award, recognizing inventors, disruptors, luminaries, and newsmakers across all industries. Ongoing projects include collaborations with the Boston Center for the Arts, Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, Boston Baroque, Boston Lyric Opera, Boston Early Music Festival, and A Far Cry Chamber Orchestra.

Synopsis

Time and Place

Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, 1901

Act I

As the opera opens, a funeral procession is crossing the stage to the strains of the old hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." From the midst of the mourners, the Stage Manager comes forward and introduces us to Grover's Corners, New Hampshire on May 7, 1901—a small, typical American town where some ordinary and extraordinary things are about to happen. We meet two families, first Doc Gibbs and his wife (the Doc is with a patient, Mrs. Soames), and then Editor Webb and his wife. Both couples are upstanding pillars of the community. The wives have identical gardens and two dissimilar children—George Gibbs, star of the high school baseball team, and Emily Webb, the best student in class. Though drawn to one another, their differences chafe. Emily, in a talk with her mother, wonders if boys will ever notice her. "You're pretty enough for all normal purposes," Mrs. Webb assures her. The Stage Manager continues to fill us in on Grover's Corners, and even answers questions from the audience. Choir practice has started, and Simon Stimson, the church organist, is drunk and unhappy again ("Leave loudness to the Methodists"). Meanwhile, at their opposite bedroom windows, Emily and George figure out a problem—until Doc Gibbs calls George downstairs to reprimand him for ignoring his chores. Mrs. Gibbs returns from choir practice, and she and her husband stay out on the porch in the moonlit night, reminiscing, even as George and Emily, back at their windows, also stare at the moon, and at each other.

Act II

Three years have gone by and Emily and George are about to get married. Doc and Mrs. Gibbs think back on their own marriage, while George impetuously dashes over to see his bride—to the consternation of a superstitious Mrs. Webb, who won't let him see Emily until they meet in the church, and insists Editor Webb give him some stern advice for the future. But the Stage Manager again interrupts the story, wanting to show how the young couple fell in love. So we're suddenly back two years in time, while George and Emily are having an important talk about their future lives, each frankly discussing feelings that upset the other. A turn into Mr. Morgan's drugstore for a soda seems the best way to prevent tears, and while sitting at the counter they both discover what is the most important thing in their lives.

We now jump to July 7, 1904, three years into the future—the church on the day of the big wedding. But the bride and bridegroom sing separately of their fears . . . until their parents push them towards the altar. The service is read, the choir sings, the townfolk are clucking, and the happy couple race down the aisle and into married life.

Act III

It is the summer of 1913. We are in the town cemetery. The dead are gathered on chairs to one side, and we can recognize some of them—Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Soames, Simon Stimson. They seem calmly detached. As the Stage Manager describes some of the changes that have occurred, we suddenly notice a funeral procession approaching. They are singing the same hymn heard at the beginning. Mrs. Gibbs explains that it is Emily who has died, giving birth to her second child.

This is her funeral. The Stage Manager meditates on life and death, and on the fact that the dead “are waiting for something they feel is coming.” As the coffin is lowered, Emily herself suddenly appears among the dead, and has already taken on some of their detachment. But she still misses George and their life, and wonders if she can return, just for a day, just to be part of life one last time. The dead warn her not to, that it will only add to her unhappiness. But Emily insists, and the Stage Manager agrees to accompany her back to the day of her thirteenth birthday.

Suddenly, she is back in Grover’s Corners. Her father and mother—how young they look! she thinks—are preoccupied with the small unimportant tasks and routines of the day. George enters, and gifts are given to the birthday girl, but no one seems to realize the importance of each moment, or how fleeting are joy and life. In tears, Emily begs the Stage Manager to take her back to the dead. As she leaves with him, she sings one last farewell to Grover’s Corners, lamenting “Oh, earth, you are too magical for anyone to know your miracle.” The dead welcome her back, and together they sing of the living, “they don’t understand, do they?” The Stage Manager comes forward again. The stars are criss-crossing the sky, the world is asleep. In an indifferent universe the world keeps on. “Only this place still straining away, straining away all the time, straining away to do its best.”

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Evidence of Things Not Seen. New World Records 80575-2 [2 CDs].
Miss Julie. Albany Records 761-62 [2 CDs].
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NED ROREM (b. 1923)

OUR TOWN

BASED ON THE PLAY BY THORNTON WILDER

LIBRETTO BY J.D. McCLATCHY

Matthew DiBattista, Margot Rood, Brendan Buckley, Donald Wilkinson, Krista River, David Kravitz, Angela Gooch, Glorivy Arroyo, Stanley Wilson
Monadnock Music, Gil Rose, conductor

80790-2 [2 CDS]

DISC 1 [55:00]

ACT I & ACT II (BEGINNING)

DISC 2 [68:25]

ACT II (CONCLUSION) & ACT III

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