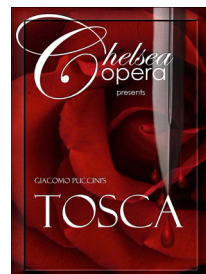
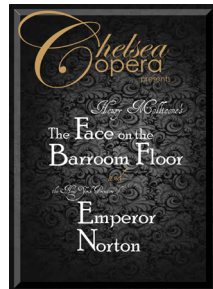


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## THE FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR and EMPEROR NORTON CASTS

### THE FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR



Molly Mostonen  
as Isabel/Madeline



Benjamin Robinson  
as Larry/Matt



John E. Callison  
as Tom/John

### EMPEROR NORTON



Vira Slywotsky  
as Marla



Justin Ryan  
as The Intruder



Rosa Betancourt  
as Diana



David Gordon  
as Michael

### THE TENDER LAND (cont'd)



Peter Kendall Clark as Top  
Chad Kranak as Martin



"Stomp your foot"

#### Chelsea Opera Spotlight – Fall 2014

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### SEASON ELEVEN NOVEMBER PRODUCTIONS

#### TWO ONE-ACTS BY HENRY MOLLICONE

Last year, West Coast-based composer Henry Mollicone contacted Chelsea Opera, seeking a company to give the NY premiere of his one-act opera *Emperor Norton*. Discussions resulted in an agreement to produce *Norton* with his more familiar work, *The Face on the Barroom Floor*. Both are scored for solo singers and piano trio, with libretti by John S. Bowman. Mollicone also wrote: "On several occasions, I have served as music director for this work, and very much enjoy conducting from the piano. Should you be interested, I would be delighted to consider doing this." Thus it was agreed to schedule both operas for November 7/8, 2014 to open Season Eleven and invite Mr. Mollicone to join the production midway through rehearsals.



*The Face on the Barroom Floor* was commissioned by Central City Opera in 1978. Its libretto is drawn from an 1872 poem written by John Henry Titus, supposedly inspired by an actual happening at Joe Smith's saloon at Fourth Avenue and 14th Street in Manhattan! The "Old West" score for flute, cello and piano is equal parts honky-tonk piano and nostalgic lyricism. The three solo singers become characters from the past in a flashback to explain why a woman's face was painted on the barroom floor. Back in "today", there is a tragic ending to the story. The New Yorker's Andrew Porter wrote, "As a drama, *The Face on the Barroom Floor* ... is predictable but strangely powerful; the audience is gripped. I found it even more gripping a second time round. It is a very skillful score."

*Emperor Norton* was commissioned by San Francisco Opera and the Kurt Herbert Adler Award Fund. It is written for four solo singers, piano, violin and cello. The story is a fanciful encounter between Marla, a writer, and the subject of her play, Joshua Abraham Norton, the self-proclaimed Emperor of America: a colorful figure who actually lived in San Francisco in the mid-1800s. As they reenact scenes from Norton's life, Marla is drawn to the charismatic stranger who takes her away with him into the shadows. Allan Ulrich of the San Francisco Examiner claimed "It is expressively and even beautifully written for the voice and the ensembles are cohesive, soaring affairs."

Featured in the *Barroom* cast are Molly Mustonen and Benjamin Robinson making their Chelsea Opera debuts, and John Callison who sang in *The Tender Land*. The *Norton* cast includes returning Chelsea Opera artists Rosa Betancourt and Justin Ryan, plus debut artists Vira Slywotzky and David Gordon. Performances will be at St. Peter's Church in Chelsea on Nov. 7 (7:30PM) and Nov. 8 (4:00PM). For discounted general admission tickets, use the promotional code SPOTLIGHT.

### NEA GRANT AWARD

#### CHELSEA OPERA AWARDED \$12,500 GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

As if reaching its 10th season were not enough cause for celebration, the year was capped by the news that Chelsea Opera was the recipient of one of 886 awards made to arts organizations nationally by the NEA – Art Works program! The grant will allow the company to take its production of *A Distant Love: Songs of John and Abigail Adams* by Gary Fagin and Terry Quinn to the Adams family homestead, now a national museum, in Quincy MA, on June 21, 2015. The performance coincides with Father's Day and will celebrate one of America's most passionate founding fathers, John Adams and his wife Abigail Adams. The event further celebrates the 250th wedding anniversary of America's first couple.

*A Distant Love* received its Manhattan premiere by Chelsea Opera in June 2013. In the audience was Caroline Keinath, assistant director of The Adams National Historical Park, who drove from Quincy MA to see the performance, enjoyed it, and on the spot invited Chelsea Opera to perform on the ANHP site. Ms Keinath later wrote, "The words of John and Abigail Adams are poetic and the singers' voices captured the strength and emotion of every word. I appreciated that a specific time and place was chosen for the opera, especially a period that carried such importance in our young nation's history AND the experiences and sacrifices of two of the most important patriots of their time."

Co-producers, Leonarda Priore and Lynne Hayden-Findlay love history as much as they love opera. "We believe in the power that music has to transform a person. Layer onto that the incredible story presented through the words of John and Abigail Adams, and you have an exceptional hour of theater! We are so excited to be given this rare and special opportunity to take *A Distant Love* "home".

NEA – Art Works grants support the creation of art that meets the highest standards of excellence, public engagement with diverse and excellent art, lifelong learning in the arts, and enhancement of the livability of communities through the arts. The NEA received 1,515 eligible applications under the Art Works category, requesting more than \$76 million in funding, of which, 886 were recommended for grants totaling of \$25.8 million.



Victoria Tralongo as Abigail Adams  
Peter Kendall Clark as John Adams

Now the real work begins! NEA – Art Works grants must be matched dollar for dollar by Chelsea Opera. So keep on the look out for opportunities to make this project truly possible. In fact, you can help now by making a secure contribution on the [NYCharities.org](http://NYCharities.org) website.







## MEET THE STAFF



**Kristen Kemp** first joined Chelsea Opera as a rehearsal pianist in fall 2013 for Ballymore – Part One: Winners and La Pizza con Funghi, and resumes that position for both the Mollicone operas and Tosca. She has been a vocal coach and accompanist for over 20 years, working at Cincinnati Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Opera Pacific, Opera New Jersey, the Opera Theater and Music Festival of Lucca, among others. At Sarasota Opera, she is the Program and Music Director of the Studio Artists.

In addition to her opera work, Kristen has given collaborative recitals in New York, Washington DC, Seattle, Cincinnati, and Sarasota. She has also been a member of the coaching staff for V.O.I.C.E.xperience, directed by Sherrill Milnes and Maria Zouves. She received her Master's Degree in Vocal Accompaniment and Artist Diploma in Opera Coaching from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music where she studied with Kenneth Griffiths and Donna Loewy. She now lives in NYC with her trumpeter husband, Andy Kemp, but returns to Sarasota every January through March for their winter program.

### When you are coaching a singer on an operatic role, what kinds of things do you work on with the singer?

I like to start with the text so the singer can find the natural rhythm of the language, be it Italian, French, etc. Very often a singer will carefully study the text and the music together, but I find that singers can always spend more time simply reciting the text away from the music. This accomplishes many things: it simplifies the dramatic objective; it produces a natural legato [smoothness] once singing is added back into the mix; it speeds up memorization because it forces the singer to focus on just one aspect of the score, rather than immediately combining pitches, rhythm, and text; and finally, I think it gives a much greater insight into why a composer sets the text a certain way. The high notes are not always the most important part of the phrase.

### What is meant by “being a collaborative artist” when working with a singer?

I think that “collaborating” means having a plan, as well as the flexibility to adjust the plan in the moment. A singer’s voice is susceptible to many variables on any given day: allergies, cold and heat, fatigue, nerves, etc. As their pianist, it is my priority to give them the musical support they need in order to deliver their best performance. I can hear when the voice is strong, which means a tempo might expand, or perhaps they might take more time on a high note. But I can also hear when the voice might be slightly off and a phrase might need a boost in tempo so the singer does not run out of breath. These are split-second decisions that I am always weighing as I listen intently to the singers that I accompany.

### Is there a performance experience that stands out in your mind? If so, what made it so special?

I think it would be difficult to narrow this answer down to one performance. For me, performing is so much about the process leading up to the performance. As we rehearse the music and experience its evolution toward a final product, we are also forging a relationship of trust in creating that music together. This probably is an extension of my definition of “collaborative pianist”. I have so many special memories in mind, ranging from graduate recitals at Cincinnati Conservatory, to full-scale productions with numerous opera companies, to even simple outreach performances with singers to an audience of less than 50.

### After 20 years of coaching singers, what one piece of advice would you want singers to think about above all else?

Find your own artistic expression and your own interpretation of the music. Singers these days have voice teachers, coaches, directors, conductors, acting coaches, diction coaches, recordings and YouTube all telling them how to perform a certain piece of music. Young singers are so caught up in trying to be perfect that they forget that the rules are meant to be a guide in helping them sing well and discover their own strengths. Opera is storytelling and the audience wants to be taken on an emotional journey. It is the singer’s responsibility to be technically secure in their vocal production so that they are free to then paint beautiful stories through the emotional power of the voice.

## WHAT A PERFORMANCE!

As a volunteer with Chelsea Opera I have been privileged to see many amazing productions. Typically, I work the front of the house as an usher, getting to see the final full performances in all their polished glory. This season however, I had a very different experience, with not only the opportunity to volunteer in several different positions but also to see the development of a performance from auditions through to final performance.

I began my journey back in January when I was asked to greet singers at the auditions for *The Tender Land*. It was a wonderful way to start the season, listening to a huge variety of talented singers as they added their own individual touches to their audition arias. I’m glad I didn’t have to choose the final cast!! In March, I helped stuff envelopes and mail out the newsletters, not as musical as my usual jobs but a necessary part of the volunteer position. In May, I attended a rehearsal to help collect cast member measurements for costumes and that brings us to June, performance month!

A week of volunteer days started the Sunday before the final performance with organizing and labeling costumes. While audiences only see a final performance, they don’t see a week of hard work, preparations, last minute changes and a lot of fun! Each night leading up to the final performances, I was backstage listening to singers warm up, joke around and then perform each rehearsal as though it was the final show. I mended costumes, tied bows and ribbons, and helped singers to adjust their costumes. The atmosphere backstage is joyful. The rehearsals are intense. The final performance was sublime. I am delighted I was able to see *The Tender Land* develop from beginning to end. I now have a whole new perspective on the life of Chelsea Opera and a huge respect for the incredible work and dedication it takes to bring their wonderful productions to life.

*Born in the UK, Rachael Skinner has been living in NYC since 2007 and works with students and adults with multiple disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. She has been a volunteer with Chelsea Opera since 2010, most recently as a costume assistant.*

**Buy your tickets to *The Face on the Barroom Floor* and *Emperor Norton* now.**

Use this special promotional code SPOTLIGHT to obtain discounted general admission seats.  
<https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/923973>

## REFLECTIONS ON THE TENDER LAND

Audiences at two sold-out performances of *The Tender Land* were thrilled and appreciative to be treated to Aaron Copland’s only major opera in “a rare revival” (Woolfe/NYTIMES). One audience member wrote that the production was “very moving, strong, with optimal instrumentalists and a perfect cast!” Renowned dramaturg Cori Ellison shared her thoughts: “Chelsea Opera did yeoman work in giving us a chance to see this important but neglected piece of Americana, and your clear and resourceful storytelling, well-cast ensemble, and fine conductor and orchestra truly did it justice.” Producer Nancy Rhodes agreed: “What a lovely and touching *Tender Land*! It was wonderful to hear the chamber orchestra version live with such a lovely and sincere cast of singers who brought such an authentic voice to the piece.” While some critics faulted the opera itself for not



Joanie Brittingham as Laurie Moss  
Chad Kranak as Martin

being “grand enough”, Chelsea Opera received consistent praise. Conductor Murry Sidlin, composer of the orchestra reduction used, attended the orchestra sitzprobe rehearsal and commented that despite some less than glowing comments from a few of the critics, “You got through [to audiences]! It’s a beautiful opera, and a very touching story as much for what is not said as what is sung”. In fact, Zachary Woolfe of The New York Times commended Chelsea Opera: “The finest passage in the score is the aching quintet that closes the first act, and here the performance was at its finest, too: polished and eloquent.”



Leonarda Priore as Ma Moss  
with members of the  
Chelsea Opera Ensemble

