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**CHELSEA OPERA TO PRESENT A WORLD PREMIERE:
THE MARK OF CAIN BY MATTHEW HARRIS AND TERRY QUINN
NOVEMBER 8-10, 2012**

“Thou shalt not kill” is a basic principle for most cultures around the world. However, that was not always the case. Christians, Jews and Muslims include in their religious teaching some form of the story of Cain and Abel, and the first murder committed on earth. There are different versions of the story itself, such as the existence of twin sisters (Ona and Zellah) for each of the sons of Adam and Eve, and a decree from God that each son marry his brother’s sister. But what happens if you first kill your brother and then steal his intended wife, who also happens to be your own twin sister. You then flee the Garden of Eden, establish a city, and raise a family until one day, revenge pays a call.

Chelsea Opera opens Season Nine with Matthew Harris and Terry Quinn’s one-act telling of *The Mark of Cain* with the Chelsea Opera Chamber Orchestra, led by guest conductor Steven Crawford, Thursday through Saturday, November 8-10 at 7:30pm with a matinee on November 10 at 4:00 pm at St. Peter’s Church in Chelsea (346 West 20th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues). In addition, Maestro Crawford will accompany tenor Eapen Leubner and treble Benjamin Wenzelberg in Benjamin Britten’s hauntingly beautiful *Canticle II, opus 51: Abraham and Isaac*. Both works will be staged by Lynne Hayden-Findlay. Tickets are \$35 preferred, \$30 general admission and \$20 students/seniors purchased in advance (or \$45, \$40 and \$25 at the door). Tickets may be purchased on-line (link through www.ChelseaOpera.org) or by calling 1-866-811-4111. This production is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and the New York State Council on the

Arts, a state agency, and the Friends of Chelsea Opera. For more information, call 212-260-1796 or visit www.ChelseaOpera.org.

Appearing in the title role of Cain is baritone Brace Negrón who returns to Chelsea Opera after a 7-year absence, having sung The Page in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Singing the revenge-seeking Zillah, Abel's sister (spurned by Cain), is mezzo-soprano Blythe Gaissert who then returns to The Met to cover during *Die Walküre*. The daunting role of God will be sung by bass Tom McNichols and sizzling as the sly serpent is soprano Lyndsay O'Neil. Rounding out the cast are Jonathan Kline (Moradesh) and Jonathan Estabrooks (Caleb), along with a 12-voice ensemble. Costumes will be designed by Lynne Hayden-Findlay, sets by Joseph Croghan, lights by Michael Megliola, and set decoration and props by Leonarda Priore.

Librettist Terry Quinn chose "to re-imagine a key part of the creation myths found in Genesis, the Koran and the Jewish Midrash tradition." He re-examines how greed, lust and sexual jealousy, as well as class and cultural differences, separating the inhabitants of the fertile environs of Eden from the desert dwellers in the Land of Nod, might have caused the very first murder of a brother to lead to a second such act, and beyond. In his approach to Quinn's libretto, composer Matthew Harris brought out "the contrast between the characters and the power struggle resulting from their conflicting desires and showed the transformation of each character as the plot unfolds, musically building the dramatic trajectory of each scene and the story as a whole, thus creating a musical sound-world that evokes in a fresh way the ancient time and place of the action." The one-act opera is through-composed score, built on leitmotifs, with several arias, trios, etc.

Benjamin Britten wrote *Canticle II*, also titled *Abraham and Isaac*, in 1952 (between *Billy Budd* and *Gloriana*) for Peter Pears, Kathleen Ferrier and Britten to perform as a fundraiser for the English Opera Group. The text is based on the Abraham and Isaac story as depicted in the Chester Mystery Plays. Abraham is sung by a tenor and the role of his son, Isaac, can be sung by a mezzo-soprano, counter-tenor or boy soprano (treble), which is how it will be heard in November. The character of God is created through the tight, dissonant harmony sung by both singers.

Chelsea Opera is a professional company presenting fully staged operas with chamber orchestra. The company provides a nationally recognized venue for professional singers to advance their careers while making opera affordable and accessible to a broad spectrum of the community. The fine acoustics of the space provides excellent hearing, and the intimacy of the space allows the audience to feel involved in the opera's story. The company is also committed to providing opportunities for young people to learn about and become interested in opera either as a source of entertainment or future employment. As music writer, Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times* noted in June 2009: "With

American opera companies large and small struggling financially and a few going under, [Chelsea Opera is] a patch of encouraging news...”

Formed in 2004 by two singers, Lynne Hayden-Findlay and Leonarda Priore, the company was launched with an all-volunteer production of *Suor Angelica*. Initially, Ms. Priore and Ms. Hayden-Findlay had only intended to produce this one opera. However, artist and audience response was so compelling that they agreed to move forward, incorporating Chelsea Opera and obtaining their IRS non-profit designation in a record eight days. They have since produced an extensive range of operas including *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (three times), *Pagliacci*, *Don Giovanni*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, *The Scarf*, *The Bear*, the company’s 5th Anniversary production of *Suor Angelica*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *This is the rill speaking/Bermudas*, *The Medium*, and most recently Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, of which Opera News said, “it was a committed and ultimately moving performance. Modest in scale, the production gave us *Butterfly* in full.” Their November 2010 production of Tom Cipullo’s *Glory Denied* garnered rave reviews from both The New York Times and Opera News.

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For further information, visit www.ChelseaOpera.org or write to ChelseaOpera@aol.com.

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