Oahu: March 24, 25, 26, 2017 at Hawaii Theatre
Big Island: March 29 at Kahilu Theatre
Kauai: March 31 at KCC Performing Arts Center
Maui: April 1 at Maui Arts & Cultural Center
We are thrilled to have world-renowned mezzo-soprano, Frederica von Stade, here in Hawaii to perform what the Houston Chronicle called “the role of a lifetime.” Recognized as one of the most beloved musical figures of our time, Miss von Stade has enriched the world of classical music for many years with her appearances in opera, concert, and recital.

Joining her in the cast are the other two members of the original production of Three Decembers when it was premiered in Houston in 2008, Kristin Clayton and Keith Phares. The performances will be conducted by Adam Turner, Principal Conductor of Virginia Opera, and directed by Karen Tiller, HOT’s former Executive Director. We are also pleased to welcome the creators of Three Decembers, composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer, to Hawaii for these performances.

We’re delighted to report that this production will be touring to four islands for the first time in the company’s history. This will be the first time that HOT has presented an opera production at the historic Hawaii Theatre in downtown Honolulu, at the Kahilu Theatre in Waimea on the Big Island, and at the Kauai Performing Arts Center. And only the third time that we have performed at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center. This special tour has been made possible by generous funding from the State of Hawaii, the Atherton Foundation, the Fred Baldwin Foundation, and Alexander and Baldwin Inc.

And we still have several additional performances to look forward to this season. In April, our season ends with a spectacular production of Offenbach’s The Tales of Hoffmann, newly created for HOT by Peter Dean Beck and Adam Larsen, and directed by Henry Akina. We also have two special concerts to enjoy: the return of the Samoan vocal trio Sol3 Mio on Saturday April 22 and our Mele under the Stars, featuring Amy Hānaiali‘i, Audrey Luna, and the HOT Chorus and Youth Opera Chorus in a program of Hawaiian music and opera at the Waikiki Shell on Saturday May 27.

As always we are grateful to you, our audience, for attending our performances and for the support you give us in so many ways throughout the year. Without your help we simply could not continue to bring the world’s best opera to Hawaii each year.

But now sit back and enjoy Three Decembers!

MAHALO

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Three Decembers

Music by Jake Heggie

Libretto by Gene Scheer | Based on an original play by Terrence McNally
Commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera

CAST

FREDERICA VON STADE®
Madeline Mitchell

KRISTIN CLAYTON®
Beatrice

KEITH PHARES®
Charlie

*HOT debut

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isn’t life simply grand? I’m so awfully glad I showed up for it.” (Madeline Mitchell in Three Decembers)

Shortly after the premiere of my first opera Dead Man Walking in 2000, the librettist – the great American playwright Terrence McNally – mentioned a short script he’d written for an AIDS benefit in 1999. He gave me a copy of Some Christmas Letters (And a Couple of Phone Calls) and from the first words, the story sang to me. It felt true, honest, emotionally big, and exactly what I was looking for as a chamber opera. I started sketching musical ideas in the margins and knew I wanted to compose it for the great, inspiring American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade. She and I have a rich history of collaborating, and by then I’d already written many songs for her as well as a major role in Dead Man Walking. She was on board right away.

A brief but powerful fourteen pages long, the script is about the stormy, emotional lives of a famous stage actress named Madeline Mitchell and her two adult children, Bea and Charlie. The script was created for an AIDS benefit at Carnegie Hall in New York and was performed one time only by the astonishing cast of Julie Harris (Madeline), Cherry Jones (Bea) and Victor Garber (Charlie). Told through letters and phone calls, the story follows these characters through three decades of their lives.

It is a play about identity and family, discovering the truth of who we are and who our parents are. Hovering over it all is the difficult, tense history of the AIDS crisis in America. Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera co-commissioned the piece as a chamber opera that could be done in different sized venues with three singers and 11 instrumentalists all onstage together.

I first read the script in 2001, but due to several detours it wasn’t until 2007 that librettist Gene Scheer and I were finally able to get going. It was our first opera collaboration. Taking this 14-page script and turning it into a viable opera was a big leap requiring imagination, invention and vision, all of which Gene has in spades. He enlarged the story and gave it dramatic conflicts and actions not found in the original script; he also invented the big family secret at its core. After considering several titles for the opera, we settled on Three Decembers.

With Gene’s clear libretto, I was able to compose the opera in about six months. The flavor of musical theater heard throughout is due to the dominance of Madeline Mitchell, the famous Broadway star who is also the matriarch of this family. Though Bea and Charlie each have their own musical personalities, Madeline’s influence and gravitational pull is inevitable.

The premiere of Three Decembers took place at Houston Grand Opera’s Cullen Theater on Feb. 29, 2008 with Frederica von Stade (Madeline), soprano Kristin Clayton (Bea) and baritone Keith Phares (Charlie). The cast reunited later that year for a production by San Francisco Opera at UC Berkeley. Though Three Decembers has now received some 20 international productions, the production here in Hawaii is the first to reunite that spectacular, indelible, dazzling original cast.

Jake Heggie
Synopsis

PART I, 1986

SCENE I
Siblings Charlie (in San Francisco) and Beatrice (in Hartford, CT) read their mother’s annual Christmas letter together on the phone. Their mother, Madeline (Maddy), writes that she wishes she could be with them for Christmas, but she is working in the Caribbean for the holiday. They share laughs and unapologetic sarcasm over their mother’s writing style, their attempt at glossing over their often strained relationship with her. Maddy reminisces about Christmas in San Francisco with the children’s father before they were born. Beatrice admits that she hardly remembers their dad, as she was just seven and Charlie five when he died, but they miss him nonetheless.

Maddy announces that she will be starring in her first Broadway musical, which Charlie refuses to attend. Maddy concludes the letter with goodbyes; however, she mistakenly addresses Charlie’s partner, who is sick with AIDS, as Curt. Charlie becomes increasingly upset, having hoped that after five years with Burt, his mother would have at least remembered his name.

SCENE II AND III
Beatrice joins Maddy in her dressing room after a performance of Maddy’s new Broadway show. Bea praises her mother’s performance as she instinctively helps her mother with the post-show dressing room routine.

Beatrice is very concerned for Charlie and Burt, as Burt’s health deteriorates. She accuses Maddy of being an absent parent, unsupportive of her children. Defending herself, Maddy claims she was only away from her children because she had to provide for the family as a single mother.

SCENE IV
Beatrice visits Charlie in San Francisco. Burt is not doing well and Charlie is coming to terms with Burt’s looming death. Charlie feels that their mother continues to disapprove of his lifestyle; assuming that she believes AIDS is a punishment for being gay. The siblings reminisce on their childhood; what they remember, specifically of their father, and what they wished they remembered.
PART II, 1996

SCENE I
Charlie is alone in his apartment, surrounded by packed and sealed boxes. He sits flipping through his journal, disclosing that Burt died seven weeks ago. Maddy eventually came to visit right before Burt died. Maddy’s voice comes in, singing the lullaby Charlie’s father used to sing to him, and which she sang to Burt when she visited.

SCENE II
Maddy has been nominated, again, for a Tony Award. Bea and Charlie plan to join their mother for the award ceremony. All three in their respective locations sing the father’s lullaby; encouraging each of them to let go of their fears and frustrations.

Alone in Maddy’s apartment on the night of the Tony Awards, Bea stands in front of a full-length mirror. She is trying on her mother’s clothes as she sips from a glass of wine. Beatrice is slowly unraveling in her insecurities: her mother’s criticism and neglect, her unfaithful husband and her drinking habits. Charlie rushes in with shopping bags. He notices that Bea is upset, but she denies it. He attempts to cheer her up with impersonations of their mother.

Madeline enters, interrupting the sibling banter. She is preparing for the Tony Awards, and discussing her acceptance speech. She plans to acknowledge Charlie and Burt’s relationship and how no one is immune to tragedy. Charlie and Beatrice are unimpressed. Maddy accuses Bea of being drunk and acting just like her father, revealing the grim truth that their father was a drunk who could not maintain a job. The children believed that their father had been killed in an accident, but Maddy finally shares the truth about his death, making up the car accident to protect them. Charlie and Beatrice are devastated.

The argument is interrupted, unresolved, as Maddy has to leave to go to the awards. Bea and Charlie, feeling victimized, refuse to accompany Maddy to the Awards.

DECEMBERS

PART III, 2006

SCENE I
Maddy has died quietly in her sleep after writing her latest Christmas letter. Beatrice and Charlie speak at Maddy’s memorial service held at a Broadway Theatre. Bea gives tribute to both her parents’ souls. The service concludes with a few lines from Maddy’s last Christmas letter; “All in all isn’t life simply grand? I’m so awfully glad I showed up for it.”
PRINCIPAL CAST

In order of vocal appearance

Frederica von Stade
Madeline Mitchell

Kristin Clayton
Beatrice

Frederica von Stade has loved a nearly 45-year career on opera stages all over the world beginning with a debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1970. She has made over 80 recordings and has been a part of many television performances. For the last 15 years she has enjoyed creating music programs at a school in West Oakland, California, and has joined forces with the wonderful Daisy Newman in championing young people from low-income families in an effort to help them get into college. She has also had the great joy of singing with Laurie Ruben, who with her spouse, Jenny, created Ohana Arts here in Honolulu, and have written together a wonderful opera for kids which will soon be touring in California. She is grateful for the joy of performing one of the wonderful works of Jake Heggie, whom she admires and loves and is thrilled to be joining Kristin Clayton and Keith Phares for our debuts with Hawaii Opera.

Kristin Clayton has enjoyed portraying some of the great leading ladies in the operatic repertoire with companies such as Houston Grand Opera, Opera Colorado, Opera Theater of Saint Louis, and San Francisco Opera, where she is a graduate of both the prestigious Merola and Adler Fellow Programs. Well known for her interpretations of contemporary work, she made her San Francisco Opera debut in the world premiere of Conrad Susa’s The Dangerous Liaisons. She also performed the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally’s one-woman opera At the Statue of Venus, and most recently premiered the role of Mrs. Gloop in Peter Ash’s The Golden Ticket. She created the role of Beatrice for the world premiere of Jake Heggie’s Three Decembers with the Houston Grand Opera and the San Francisco Opera.
All in all, isn’t life simply grand? I’m so awfully glad I showed up for it.”

Mr. Keith Phares’ 2016-2017 engagements include Hurstwood in the première of Robert Aldridge’s *Sister Carrie* with Florentine Opera, Maximilian in *Candide* with New York City Opera, Elder Tull in the première of Craig Bohmier’s *Riders of the Purple Sage* with Arizona Opera, Albert in *Werther* with Manitoba Opera, Philip Glass’ *The Trial* with Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Belcore in *L’elisir d’amore* with Boston Midsummer Opera.

Phares created the role of Charlie in the première of *Three Decembers* with Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera. His career highlights include appearances with Washington National Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, Santa Fe Opera, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Glimmerglass Opera, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Opera and Florida Grand Opera in a range of repertoire that includes Monteverdi, Mozart, Rossini, Puccini, Britten and many of today’s living composers.
ARTISTIC TEAM

Adam Turner  
Conductor  

Maestro Turner is Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor at Virginia Opera, where this season he conducts performances of Der Freischütz and a double bill of The Seven Deadly Sins/Pagliacci. Other engagements this season include a workshop of Theo Popov’s The Halloween Tree with American Lyric Theater, a Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program concert with Washington National Opera, The Tender Land at Northwestern University, and a return to Central City Opera to conduct Carmen. Last season, as the inaugural recipient of the Julius Rudel/Kurt Weill Conducting Fellowship, he collaborated with renowned conductor John DeMain on Washington National Opera’s production of Weill’s Lost in the Stars. Other recent highlights include: Roméo et Juliette at Lyric Opera Baltimore; Sweeney Todd at Hawaii Opera Theatre and Eugene Opera; Man of La Mancha with Central City Opera; and La bohème, Der fliegende Holländer, Carmen, and Ariadne auf Naxos for Virginia Opera.

Karen Tiller  
Director  

Ms. Tiller served as the ED of HOT for over nine years, leaving that role in 2013 to take on the challenging position of mother to Sophia, adding Eli in 2016. Throughout her time at HOT, she also directed several critically acclaimed HOT productions including: Susannah, Jun Kaneko’s Madama Butterfly, The Pearl Fishers, and the 2013 production of Turandot. Other notable productions in her career include: Sweeney Todd at HOT, The Turn of the Screw at Opera Memphis and Orpheo et Euridice at OFNJ. In addition to directing for HOT, Karen serves as Treasurer for the national board of the Joyful Heart Foundation and sits on the board of the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific. Ms. Tiller also serves as an Oahu Commissioner for the Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.

Jeremy Reger  
Rehearsal Pianist  

Jeremy Reger is an international performer and educator. He serves as the head coach of Ekland Opera at the University of Colorado in Boulder, after holding positions at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, and Christopher Newport University. He has taught at the Music Academy of the West, and the Opera Studio of Recife, Brazil. He has served on the music staff of Virginia Opera, Minnesota Opera, Eugene Opera, Skylark Opera, and Hawaii Opera. Passionate about new works, Reger has served to workshop several new works and serves as musical director for CU Now in Boulder. He has degrees from Cincinnati Conservatory and University of Michigan.

Peter Dean Beck  
Scenery and Lighting  

Peter Dean Beck is back for his 31st season with HOT. Some of his productions here are Don Carlo, Elektra, Andrea Chenier, Dialogues of the Carmelites, A Little Night Music, and four Turandots. Among his other opera credits are Falstaff, Ballo in Maschera, Manon, Don Giovanni, Madama Butterfly, Hansel and Gretel, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Roméo et Juliette for such companies as Atlanta, Florida Grand, Glimmerglass, Virginia, and Chautauqua Opera. His musical theater credits include West Side Story, Sound of Music, Candide, Les Misérables, and Fiddler on the Roof for Skylight Music Theatre and Eklund Opera at CU Boulder, among others. His ballet designs include Nutcracker for Ballet Hawaii.
Helen E. Rodgers has been with HOT since 2002, and her favorite costume designs for the company include Die Walküre, Il barbiere di Siviglia, Susannah, La bohème, and Cosi fan tutte. Other credits include Mannes Opera, Hong Kong Opera, San Diego Opera, Lincoln Center Festival, Baryshnikov Productions, Chautauqua Opera, New Orleans Opera, Sarasota Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Virginia Opera, Opera Memphis, Miami City Ballet, and Radio City Music Hall.

Kacy Todd started with theater as a child and grew to love the details that the teams behind the scene put into the characters. Eventually, she went on to learn all she could from the colorful world of hair and makeup. She has worked in this field in an array of locations, including Chicago, New York, and her hometown of Austin, Texas. She’s very proud of the HOT team and thrilled to be part of this production.

Born in Newton, MA but now calling San Francisco, CA home, Gretchen Mueller has been a longtime member of the HOT family. Her recent work includes Lulu and Cunning Little Vixen (West Edge Opera). Over the course of her distinguished career she has twice worked on War and Peace, as well as stage managing two productions of Der Ring des Nibelungen. Other highlights include The Tale of Genji, Das Verratene Meer, and tours with the Rustavi of Georgia and with Peking Opera of Chongqing.
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**Simon Crookall**
General Director

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