



The Secret Garden

By Nolan Gasser & Carey Harrison
Blaisdell Concert Hall

Friday, October 14 | 7:30 pm
Sunday, October 16 | 4:00 pm



Aloha

Welcome to your Hawai'i Opera Theatre's 2022/2023 Season!

This is HOT's 63rd year of bringing the very best opera performances and education programs to our beautiful island home, and that is only possible with the generous support of people like you who believe in the power of live opera in our community.

Emerging from a pandemic that has lasted over two years, we've created a season that explores the happier side of opera with three productions where no one dies. Don't get me wrong:

I love a good cathartic experience in theatre, when I'm reduced to tears as the hero or heroine (or both!) meet their untimely demise over an extended aria or duet. (I mean, what other art form but opera can do that?). But there's an amazing breadth of operas where everyone... well, at least nearly everyone...lives "happily ever after."

We start with an operatic adaptation of one of the most charming children's novels of all times, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The opera, by composer Nolan Gasser and librettist Carey Harrison, premiered in 2013, a co-commission by San Francisco Opera and Cal

Performances in Berkeley. I was working at San Francisco Opera at the time, and I can say that audiences were captivated by this charming telling – and I know you will be too!

We've created a brand-new production, directed by Karen Tiller with media designed by Dave Hunt – the same creative team behind HOT's digital world premiere, *Hometown to the World*, in May 2021, and our recent mainstage production, *The Tragedy of Carmen*. The cast features some exciting company debuts, and you'll see some familiar faces including Taka Komagata, Goro in our April performances of *Madame Butterfly*.

I'm extremely proud of the many accomplishments HOT has made during my tenure as your General Director, building on an impressive 60+-year history. Whether this is your first time attending an HOT production or you've been with us since the beginning, mahalo nui loa for believing that opera has a place in our community. You make great art possible!



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Mahalo

Aloha Hawai‘i Opera Theatre Ohana,

Many exciting and wonderful changes are happening at HOT. The energy and creativity of our staff and its leadership are working hard to develop stimulating musical programs for us all, from traditional mainstage shows at the Blaisdell to Avant Garde pieces in intimate settings. After all, *The Secret Garden* reminds us that treasures can be found in unlikely places.

For example, Studio 101, HOT’s new and unusual venue, presents cabaret-style entertainment for every musical taste. If you haven’t yet made it to one of the programs, you’ll definitely want to check it out soon. We showcase the best local talent in a relaxed and creative environment, and drinks are always included, of course!

And HOT’s 2022/2023 mainstage season presents opportunity after opportunity to experience opera in a fun, light-hearted way. *The Secret Garden* will draw in the entire family with its enchanting magic. *The Elixir of Love* is a romantic comedy that takes place in a quaint town outside of a rum distillery. And *Gianni Schicchi* will fill you with laughter as you fall in love with its recognizable music.

This is your opera company, and we will continue to tell stories for everyone—my personal mahalo for supporting Hawai‘i Opera Theatre.



Steven Prieto
President of the Board
Hawai‘i Opera Theatre

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The Secret Garden

based on the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Music by Nolan Gasser

Libretto by Carey Harrison

Cast

Mary Lennox

Laura Corina Sanders

Martha Sowerby / Officer's Wife

Abi Levis

Colin Craven / Rajah

Taka Komagata

Dickon Sowerby / Porter

Logan Webber

Mrs. Medlock / Nursemaid

Alissa Anderson

Archibald Craven / Mr. Lennox

Damien Geter

Susan Sowerby / Mrs. Lennox

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Elizabeth Askren

Director

Karen Tiller

Repetiteur

Sunny Yoon

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Choreographer

Christine Kaminski

Lighting Designer

Tlálóc López-Watermann

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Katherine James

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Mia Yoshimoto

Synopsis



Mary Lennox is a little girl born in India to British Colonial parents, comfortable and well-to-do. She has everything any child could wish for. Then, out of nowhere, illness strikes. Mary loses her parents to a terrible disease called cholera. She is sent home to England to stay with an uncle she has never met.

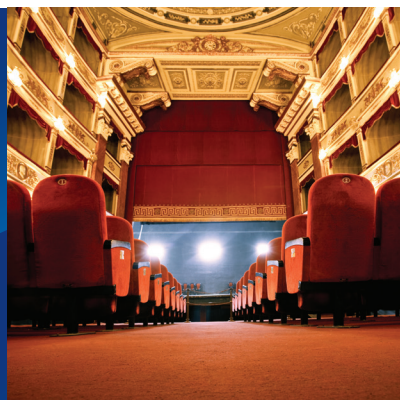
The uncle, Mr. Craven, lives in a world that is shockingly different to the one little Mary has lived in, with its games and sunlit fun and parties and servants at her command. Craven, the uncle, lives in a gloomy dark old house. He himself is an unhappy person. Like Mary, he has known misfortune: his wife died, and he is still grieving. He takes no interest in Mary, and leaves to go traveling.

Alone in the big old house, with a housekeeper and a nursemaid, Mary hears long sad moans in the corridors of the house.

Soon she discovers that the suffering person is her cousin, Craven's son Colin, an unloved boy who believes himself to be a cripple. Mary soon establishes that Colin is perfectly healthy, and she persuades him to join her in the garden she has discovered. This is the garden created by her aunt, whose death doomed the garden to neglect and secrecy - the secret garden! The door had been lost behind ivy, and the key had vanished. A bird - a robin who has noticed the flash of sun on metal - helps Mary find the key.

As well as the robin, Mary has friends who help her bring Colin back to a happy existence: she has Martha, her merry maid, and Martha's nature-loving brother Dickon, and Ben the gardener. But what will happen when Mr. Craven catches wind from Mrs. Medlock, the housekeeper, who is supposed to be keeping Mary and Colin under control, that they are gallivanting around the secret garden, planting plants and delighting in blossoming trees and bushes that had been lost for years?

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Director's Notes

I am truly excited to be working with HOT again and thrilled to create an entirely new production of *The Secret Garden*.

I immediately turned to the novel and refreshed my memory; it was great fun to read with my daughter Sophia, now ten, who was quite intrigued by how the story could become an opera. Watching her wonderment at a video of another company's production, I knew I wanted to make this a show about, and for, families.

I am also very excited to explore the creation of a truly magical landscape through the use of projection and video. I believe that we should actually see the garden come to life.

We have been diligently working to create the scenic landscape for our production, and ideas of how to incorporate the magical, the surprising, and, yes, even the tropical abound. We also have incorporated Ballet Hawai'i into the creative team for building our garden. Their young dancers will spring from our new green shoots, breathing hope and life back into all of our characters.



"...I cannot think of a better moment for us all to celebrate the hope and life that children bring."

I generally begin my thoughts on an opera's dramatic arc at the end, and work my way back and then forward again. There is no better opera for this method because it is indeed the last moments that capture what we have truly been working toward our entire evening. And I cannot think of a better moment for us all to celebrate the hope and life that children bring.

"Open the windows, throw back the shutters, let the springtime in. Learn from the children what to be."

Karen Tiller
Stage Director

Cast

Laura Corina Sanders

Mary Lennox

HOMETOWN: San Francisco, CA

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Gilda, *Rigoletto* (Shreveport Opera)
- Susanna, *Le nozze di Figaro* (Shreveport Opera)
- Belinda, *Dido & Aeneas* (Central City Opera)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Winner of the Lotte Lenya Competition 2018
- Adele, *Die Fledermaus* (Oswego Opera Theatre)
- Wilhelmina, *Listen Wilhelmina!* (Wolf Trap Opera)

HOT DEBUT: Yes!



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**

“I don’t need a ladder, I’ll just climb’
and other short stories.”

Abi Levis

Martha Sowerby / Officer’s Wife

HOMETOWN: Portland, Maine

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Componist, *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Lakes Area Music Festival)
- Annio, *La clemenza di Tito* (Opera Nantes)
- Alto Soloist, *Messiah* (Portland Baroque)
- Prince Charmant, *Cendrillon* (Promfest Estonia)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Dido, *Dido and Aeneas* (Deutsche Oper Berlin)
- Rose/Dinah, *Trouble in Tahiti* (Opera Parallele)
- Testo, *War Stories* (Opera Philadelphia)

HOT DEBUT: Yes!



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**

“Eat, Knit, Sing”

Taka Komagata

Colin Craven / Rajah

HOMETOWN: Tokyo, Japan

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Goro, *Madame Butterfly* (Hawai’i Opera Theatre)
- Bastien, *Bastien & Bastienne* (Hawai’i Opera Theatre)
- Manny, *Ellis* (Guerilla Opera)
- Male Lead, *I’ll Be Home for Christmas* (Asakusa Kyugeki Theater)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- HOT Mae Z. Orvis Opera Studio Artist
- Encouragement Award, 7th K Vocal Competition
- Co-founder, Balcony Series

HOT DEBUT: *Madame Butterfly*, 2022



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**

“My Trip to the Earth”

Logan Z. Webber

Dickon Sowerby / Porter

HOMETOWN: Colorado Springs, CO

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Ercole, *Ercole su’l Termodonte* (Pacific Opera Project)
- Rolf, *Sound of Music* (Charlottesville Opera)
- Eduardo, *King for a Day/Un giorno di regno* (Opera Orlando)
- Gastone, *La Traviata* (Opera Orlando)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Tito, *La clemenza di Tito* (A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute)
- Jonathan Dale, *Silent Night* (Piedmont Opera)
- Dallas, *Service Provider* (Hawai’i Opera Theatre/Virginia Opera)
- Rapunzel’s Prince, *Into the Woods* (Charlottesville Opera)

HOT DEBUT: *The Daughter of the Regiment*, 2018



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**

“o-6o and no
in-between.”

Cast

Alissa Anderson

Mrs. Medlock / Nursemaid

HOMETOWN: San Antonio, TX

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Mother Goose, *The Rakes Progress* (Opéra de Rennes & Nantes Opéra)
- Baba, *The Medium* (Nashville Opera)
- Florence Pike, *Albert Herring* (Chicago Opera Theatre)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mrs. Lovett, *Sweeney Todd* (Royal Danish Opera)
- Erda, *Das Rheingold* (Opera Santa Barbara)
- Marcellina, *Le nozze di Figaro* (Austin Lyric Opera)

HOT DEBUT: Yes!



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**
"She Who Laughs... Lasts"

Damien Geter

Archibald Craven / Mr. Lennox

HOMETOWN: Chicago, IL

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Angelotti, *Tosca* (Portland Opera)
- Quamino, *Quamino's Map* (Chicago Opera Theater)
- Soloist, *Beethoven's Symphony No. 9* (Richmond Symphony)
- Soloist, *Messiah* (North Carolina Symphony)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Four Villains, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Pacific Northwest Opera)
- Undertaker, *Porgy and Bess* (The Metropolitan Opera)
- Colonel, *The Falling and the Rising* (Seattle Opera)

HOT DEBUT: Yes!



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**
"I know how to order
a blue hamburger"

Leslie Goldman

Susan Sowerby / Mrs. Lennox

HOMETOWN: Honolulu, HI

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Nella, *Gianni Schicchi* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)
- Mother, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (HOT Digital)
- Featured Soloist, *Studio 101: Water Songs* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)
- Anina, *La Traviata* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Frasquita, *Carmen* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)
- Titania, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chautauqua Opera)

HOT DEBUT: *Carmen*, 2017



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**
"I'm Pretty Too: The Dieting
and Dating Diaries of a Desperately
Dramatic Diva (pub. 2024)"

Robert Feng

Ben Weatherstaff / Gardener

HOMETOWN: Kailua, HI

RECENT & UPCOMING:

- Padre Antonio, *Juana* (dell'Arte Opera Ensemble)
- Il Tempo, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (dell'Arte Opera Ensemble)
- Soloist, *Dichterliebe* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)
- Betto di Signa, *Gianni Schicchi* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Bonze/Prince Yamadori, *Madame Butterfly* (Hawai'i Opera Theatre)
- Mad Hatter, *The Garden of Alice* (US Premiere) (City Lyric Opera)
- Rev. Joseph Twichell, *Harmony* (World Premiere) (Seagle Festival)

HOT DEBUT: *Re-emerging*, 2022



**If my life were a book,
it would be called:**
"A Punderful Life"

Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra

VIOLIN

Jeanine Markley
Asia Doike
Nicole Ebisu

VIOLA

Anna Womack
Alexander Peña
Lynn Tamayoshi

CELLO

Jeffrey Hamano
Aris Doike

BASS

Randall Wong

FLUTE

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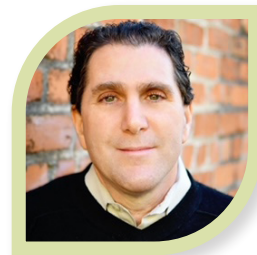
Sunny Yoon

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Composer's Notes

In the summer of 2009, I performed a solo piano concert that included several original works; in the audience, happily, was David Gockley — then General Director of the San Francisco Opera. Mr. Gockley and I began a conversation that culminated in the commission of a “family opera” for SF Opera’s 2012-2013 season.

“...*this was my first opera, and thus an opportunity I found both thrilling and daunting.*”

Although I was well versed in a wide array of compositional approaches, this was my first opera, and thus an opportunity I found both thrilling and daunting. For my collaborator, I turned to my good friend and brilliant playwright, Carey Harrison, and the two of us began a furious search for

the perfect source upon which to base our family opera — one, as Mr. Gockley put it, to be both “timeless and operatic.” After much deliberation, we settled on Francis Hodgson Burnett’s 1911 classic, *The Secret Garden* — a deep and meditative story ideal for the entire family while allowing a more accurate adaptation than the 1991 musical.

Given the practical constraints of the forthcoming performance, I was asked to limit the forces to eight singers and ten instrumentalists; for the latter, I settled on a wide representation of orchestral forces: four strings, two winds, two brass, piano, and percussion — which indeed enable a rich and eclectic variety of sounds and effects.

Stylistically, I was intent on writing a work that struck a balance between tuneful and accessible on the one hand and serious and operatic on the other — especially given then, at times, dramatic and emotionally dense moments that Hodgson-Burnett’s

story yields. The opera thus includes relatively simple, lyrical numbers such as “I Found the Secret Garden,” “My Crooked Shape,” “When I Was India,” “That Bird,” and “I’ll Make a Man Yet”; as well as darker, more complex moments, such as Mary’s first encounter with Colin early in Act 2 — and everything in between. It was an additional treat to compose, in the Prologue, music with Indian elements — a musical language I have long studied and incorporated into multiple works.

This is the third performance of *The Secret Garden*, and I am extremely grateful to Andrew Morgan, Maestro Elizabeth Askren, Karen Tiller, our wonderful cast and orchestra, and the entire Hawai’i Opera Theatre team for enabling this exciting new production — for which Carey and I took the opportunity to make a few impactful modifications (“writing is re-writing”). Enjoy and mahalo!

 **Nolan Gasser**
Composer

Opera

Sunny Side Up

Opera has no shortage of juicy drama, but you might be surprised to learn that not every opera ends with death from consumption, a stabbing, or jumping off a tower. There's an amazing breadth of operas that have happy endings, and we feel that now, more than ever, is the time to embrace some of these joyful works.

HOT, like all arts organizations, is in a rebuilding phase after two years without live performances and events, and this season has been designed to be welcoming to new audiences. So all three operas are under three hours, two are sung in English, and at least two are suitable for all ages, depending on how you view *Gianni Schicchi*...

We start the season strong with a family-friendly classic, *The Secret Garden*. With its hopeful story and its melodic music, it's an opera anyone could love.

Visit hawaiiopera.org or call our Box Office at (808) 596-7858 to get your tickets for the rest of our sunny season.

In February, we bring Donizetti's charming comedy, *Elixir of Love*, to the stage and sung in a witty English translation. This fantastic ensemble cast will melt your heart in this delightful story about a poor peasant who falls in love with a beautiful landowner. Our production is perfectly set in present-day Hawai'i, in a fictional town outside a rum distillery. Think of it as the rom-com of opera.

The final offering for the mainstage season is Puccini's only comic opera, *Gianni Schicchi*. This hilarious farce is filled with ridiculous plans, hijinks, and trickery. It is the perfect opera for first-timers and includes one of opera's most famous arias, "O mio babbino caro."

We welcome you to experience opera in a different light... a brighter light. So sit back and enjoy the season of sunshine.

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on the ground floor of the Hawai'i Opera Plaza.



Librettist's Notes

I am thrilled about Hawai'i Opera Theatre's production of *The Secret Garden* and have been delighted to work with composer Nolan Gasser on the original libretto for the San Francisco Opera.

This time, Nolan and I have gratefully seized the opportunity to re-frame elements of the opera which the previous productions exposed (to our minds) as worthy of some reconstruction, given the chance.

We can't wait to see this new, definitive version. For me, despite having watched rehearsals of many productions of my stage, screen, and TV work, all of it pales when compared to the artistic wing-span of opera. Acting - and singing at the same time!

Hard to understand why anyone would bother with any lesser form of drama if they could work in opera.

Carey Harrison
Librettist



“Hard to understand why anyone would bother with any lesser form of drama if they could work in opera.”

Inspiring the Community with Opera

“I’ve had two daughters in [Orvis Young Voices] and it made a world of difference in their lives.”

- Luciane (Parent)

“My heart is still smiling. I’m touched beyond words.”

- Elementary Student (Opera Express Attendee)

“Thank you [HOT] for all you’ve done for me in my vocal journey. This past semester at Brigham Young University has been a dream come true, and I know I never would have made it here if it weren’t for your dedication and patience in developing and honing my voice.”

- Sanae (Young Voices Alumnus)

Our nationally recognized education outreach programs reach more than 25,000 students on O’ahu and neighbor islands annually.

Spark creativity.

STUDENT DRESS REHEARSALS

Established in 1991, HOT’s Opera for Everyone program offers students from elementary through high school and college classes the opportunity to enjoy the live opera experience for just \$7! Teachers and others working with youth in Hawai’i may reserve seating for the final full orchestra dress rehearsal on the Wednesday before each opera opening.

TOURS TO SCHOOLS

Each year, Hawai’i Opera Theatre produces an opera specifically designed to take “on tour” to schools all around the state. In addition to being a great experience with music and drama, this show can also be used to enhance curriculum.

SCHOOL RESIDENCY

Turn your school, grade level or participating classrooms into an opera production company! The opera residency program has become an annual learning program for the schools and is available for elementary, middle and high schools. Our opera education team leads your students and teachers through the process of producing and performing an opera.

Learn the craft.

ORVIS YOUNG VOICES

Started in 2014, HOT’s Education & Outreach created the Orvis Young Voices Studio for singers grades 9 through 12. With group workshops, one-on-one opportunities, performing and watching performances, singers grow as artists and improve themselves as performers. Workshops will cover topics such as diction, acting, interpretation, performance practice, use of the voice, college auditions, and more.

Hone your skills.

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Our professional training program provides opportunities for dozens of premiere vocal artists to shine. Last season, nearly every Hawai’i Opera Theatre performance included artists from this program. The guest artists and master teachers are some of the finest in the United States and Europe, and are working professionals in the field of opera.

Arghhh you ready kids?

HOT’s Education department is touring Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* during the 22-23 school year. This operetta has been re-worked to tell the entire story in a 30-minute show that is set in Hawai’i, and will run in the fall and spring on O’ahu and neighbor island schools.



Would you like to participate in our education programs?

Please call us at 808-596-7372 or email us at education@hawaiiopera.org

Acknowledgements

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