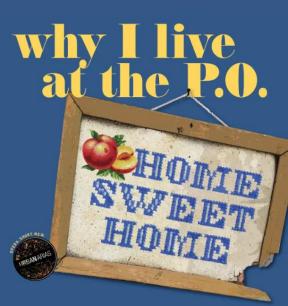
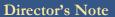
UrbanArias presents



World Premiere UrbanArias' Commission

Stephen Eddins, composer Michael O'Brien, libretto Based on the short story by Eudora Welty





What an honor to be UrbanArias's first staged production in 2022 and serve as the stage director of this

world premiere written by Stephen Eddins and Michael O'Brien. This composer/lyricist team spent countless hours refining text and music, taking Eudora Welty's short story of a "typical" family living in the 1940s in the Deep South of rural Mississippi to the genre of comic opera. What a task indeed, and of course, it was our challenge as director and performer to channel our collective thoughts into creating the dramatic and comic physical vocabulary that depicts the absolute mayhem and complicated dysfunctional madness of familial relationships. Interestingly enough, we discovered that members of this family aren't too far removed from members of our own family in some ways, or at the very least, people we knew. It became apparent that Eudora Welty left us an excellent roadmap to discover and develop the family dynamics that are relatable and universal. She had a deft ability to describe both a person's positive and negative attributes discretely and with southern charm. In her descriptions of people and situations, one could hear the narrator's bias, which, at times, causes the reader to question their reliability. But of course, we leave the question of an "unreliable" narrator up for you to decide and hope you find how much we all have in common regarding family and the relationships we build with the ones we love – even when they drive us crazy!

Composer's Note

Stephen Eddins

It takes a lot of nerve for a composer to look at a literary masterpiece and say "What I have to say about this

work is significant enough to justify turning it into an opera," so it was with loads of trepidation that I approached *Why I Live at the P.O.*, one of the greatest comic stories ever written. But here it is, in a gorgeous production with a wonderful cast!

This story was begging to be made into an opera...
* The world needs more operatic comedies that are actually funny. Eudora Welty's zany story, in

Michael O'Brien's smart libretto, provides foolproof material for an opera that leaves audiences

(and the singers!) laughing.

* Sister is such a vivid and memorable character, how could you not love her? She's cantankerous, unreliable, self-pitying, but can't we all relate to at least *some* of that? And the fabulously idiosyncratic language Welty gives her! Who wouldn't want to spend a warm summer morning leaning in at the Post Office window, listening to her colorful tales of family woes?

* The characters are *all* lovable, even the Machiavellian Stella-Rondo. I longed to see and hear them alive on a stage, embodied by singing actors. My goal was to create characters that would delight singers and give them opportunities to shine. These singers have fallen in love with the characters; I hope you will, too.

Cast

Sister 1 Emily Pulley

Sister 2 Kyaunnee Richardson

Mama Alissa Anderson

Stella-Rondo Melissa Wimbish

Papa-Daddy Eric McKeever

Uncle Rondo Ian McEuen

Conductor Robert Wood

Director Dennis Whitehead

Darling



Designers

Set Designer <u>Brian Ruggaber</u>

Costumes <u>Austin Blake Conlee</u>

Lighting Tao Wang

Wigs and Makeup Austin Blake Conlee

Props Coordinator Paul Peers Associate Lighting Designer

Chanelle Dau Pino

Associate Costume Designer

Channing Tucker



Production

Production Stage Manager Assistant Stage Manager Director of Production Set Construction Master Electrician Props Coordinator Wardrobe Supervisor Lighting Intern Rebecca Talisman
Trever Comeau
Reuben Rosenthal
Complete Fabrications
Ben Harvey

Ben Harvey Paul Peers Miguelina Jones Jordan Francis *



Jordan Francis' internship is made possible through our collaboration with Joe's Movement and GreativeWorks.

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Members of Inscape Chamber Or<u>chestra</u>

Flute/Piccolo Jeanette-Marie Lewis

Clarinet 1 David Drosinos

Clarinet 2 / Evan Ross Solomon

Bass Clarinet

Soprano/Alto Noah Getz

Tenor Saxophones

Bass Trombone Zenas Kim-Banther

Percussion Eric Plewinski
Piano Josephine Riggs
String Bass Jessica Powell-Eig





Stephen Eddins

Composer

Stephen Eddins' first compositions, written when he was nine, were songs for his church's children's choir, and music for voice has continued to be a significant part of his creative output. A fascination with literary texts and the interplay between words and music has been the catalyst for much of his work.

Stephen received music degrees from Oberlin, the University of Akron, the University of Michigan. His operas include Paranoia: A Psycho-Opera for Caterwaul Opera and A Devil's Deal for Opera Theatre Unlimited. Three Canadian companies have mounted his opera, The Doll's House, as part of a showcase of short musicals, with one production nominated for seven Toronto Theatre Guild awards, including Outstanding New Musical and Outstanding Sound Design/Composition.

He has made a specialty of working with found instruments, using choirs of glass bowls, wine glasses, pans, flowerpots, metal pipe, and industrial scrap material. He has been active as a seminar leader and teacher with groups of all ages, from pre-school to college students and adults, working in the cultivation of aural creativity, with special interest in people who have had little formal musical training.

Michael O'Brien

Librettist



Michael O'Briens' works have been seen across Canada/USA/UK. His stage works & adaptations include The Magician's Nephew (Shaw Festival, Ontario, 2018), Mad Boy Chronicle (Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary), Restitution (Factory Theatre, Toronto), The Miracle Man (a musical with Allen Cole; Two Planks & a Passion, Nova Scotia), The Barber of Seville (freely adapted from Rossini/Beaumarchais: Soulpepper/Columbus Theatre, Toronto), The Invisible Man(Shaw Festival 2006), Treasure Island (Young People's Theatre, Toronto), Oliver Twist (Young People's Theatre), Hard Times (National Arts Centre of Canada, Ottawa) and A Christmas Carol (Young People's Theatre). For CBC Radio Drama, he created original dramas Shores of Wonder, Winter's Tales and Hearts of the World, as well as adaptations of Margaret Atwood's The Blind Assassin and The Handmaid's Tale. He is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada (Montreal), has been nominated for Governor-General's Awards, Writer's Guild of Canada Awards, Chalmers Awards and Dora Mayor Moore Awards. He lives in Toronto.

Robert Wood

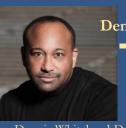


Conductor, UrbanArias Founder and Artistic Director

Robert Wood is UrbanArias' founder. Under his leadership the company has achieved national recognition and has given over 125 performances, including nine commissions and 13 world premieres.

Notable productions have included After Life/Josephine, and Glory Denied (Cipullo), The Last American Hammer and Blue Viola (Hilliard), Paul's Case (Spears), Why Is Eartha Kitt Trying to Kill Me?: A Love Story (Smith), Independence Eve (Boquiren), As One (Kaminsky), and Three Decembers (Heggie). Maestro Wood made his debut at the San Francisco Opera with Verdi's La traviata (starring Rolando Villazon), and has also conducted L'italiana in Algeri and several concerts there. He recently conducted Rigoletto at Austin Opera, Silent Night at the University of British Columbia, As One at Hawaii Opera Theatre and Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Three Decembers at Kentucky Opera, Die Fledermaus at Hawaii Opera Theater, and Roméo et Juliette and Carmen at Opera Colorado.

Mr. Wood was Conductor in Residence at the Minnesota Opera from 2006-2008, leading productions of L'italiana in Algeri, Le nozze di Figaro, La donna del lago, Rusalka, and Il barbiere di Siviglia. Mr. Wood has also conducted L'italiana in Algeri at Vancouver Opera, Le Comte Ory and Die Zauberflöte at Wolf Trap Opera, and The Nutcracker for San Francisco Ballet.



Dennis Whitehead Darling

Director

Dennis Whitehead Darling is an international award-winning director based in Philadelphia. In 2017, after an extensive career in theatre, Dennis entered the opera world with a production of *Blue Viola* produced by Opera Memphis. The following year he was selected as their Inaugural McCleave Fellow in Directing – one of the first fellowships dedicated to fostering the careers of Stage & Music Directors of color.

His recent directing credits include: World Premiere of Marian's Song (Houston Grand Opera), La Boheme (Opera Columbus), Giulio Cesare in Egitto (Carnegie Mellon University), The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (Red Mountain Theatre), Independence Eve (Opera Birmingham), Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill (Hattiloo Theatre/Spazio Teatro No'hma – Milan), Ain't Mishehavin' (Spazio Teatro No'hma – Milan), Intimate Apparel (University of Memphis), Movin' Up in the World (Opera Memphis), Sunset Bahy (Hattiloo Theatre), James and the Giant Peach (Circuit Playhouse), Blue Viola (Opera Memphis)

Upcoming productions include: Sanctuary Road (North Carolina Opera), World Premiere - The Secret River (Opera Orlando), The Magic Flute (Pensacola Opera), Why I Live at the PO (UrbanArias), The Gershmin's Porgy and Bess (Hattiloo Theatre).

Emily Pulley

Ms. Pulley's appearance is sponsored by an anonymous donor.



Emily Pulley has spent over a quarter of a century appearing with opera companies and orchestras across the country and around the world, including nearly 200 performances with the Metropolitan Opera, with roles ranging from Marguerite in Faust to Gerhilde in Die Walküre to Valencienne in The Merry Widow. Long established in the classical soprano repertoire and also having collaborated in numerous world premieres of contemporary works, Emily is currently enjoying a successful exploration of mezzo soprano and musical theatre roles, recently taking on the title role in Carmen, Mrs. de Rocher in Dead Man Walking, and Desirée in A Little Night Music. She spent much of the 2019 season as the standby for Renée Fleming in the US tour of The Light in the Piazza, in association with Los Angeles Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. During the 2020 shutdown, Emily participated in several virtual projects: Julia Child in Bon Appétit! for UrbanArias, her debut as

Zita in Gianni Schicchi for Opera Ithaca, and Jaclyn in the premiere of The Roost, part of the award-winning Decameron Opera Coalition. Emily made her professional directorial debut with La bohème at Opera Ithaca and will direct The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Il barbiere di Siviglia for Opera Steamboat this summer. Upcoming engagements include creating the role of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in Opera Orlando's world premiere of The Secret River in December and her debut as Mrs. Lovett in Sweeney Todd with Opera Omaha this



February.

Kyaunnee Richardson

Magic Flute with the Festival of the Arts Boca in 2016. Recently, Kyaunnee made her debut as Adele in Die Fledermaus with Opera Orlando. Other highlights from the last few seasons include the roles of Gretel in Hansel and Gretel, Frasquita in Carmen with Opera Orlando; Clara in Porgy and Bess; Alice/Dr. Marigold in Adolphe's The Adventures of Alvin Alegretto; Esther in the concert National Press Club in Washington, D.C.; Pamina in The Magic Flute with Orchestra Miami; and Najade

in Strauss' Ariadne auf Naxos with Opera Fusion's).

2018 Emerging Artists Project, An Evening of Puccini, she sang arias by Lisette in La rondine, Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi and Mimi in La bohème. A frequent soloist with local orchestras and ensembles, she has performed as the Soprano Soloist in Handel's Messiah with the Civic Chorale of Greater Miami and the Alhambra Orchestra and Vivaldi's Gloria with the Delray Orchestra. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic she has perfumed virtually, including Opera Fusion's #SongStrong and Music to Eat Chocolate By econcerts, Hued Songs in Make Music Miami, and Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber's International online Cadenza Competition. Upcoming performances for the 2021-22 season will be the world premiere of Stella Sung's The Secret River in the role of Calpurnia.

2017 Emerging Artists Project. In Opera Fusion's

Melissa Wimbish

In the world-premiere of Josephine with
UrbanArias, "... the afternoon belonged to Melissa

UrbanArias, "... the afternoon belonged to Melissa Wimbish, who was creating the role of Josephine Baker ... Beautifully prepared, vocally stunning, and theatrically riveting, Wimbish effortlessly held the audience in her hand throughout this one-woman show." (Washington Post) In 2016, she made her Carnegie Hall solo recital debut after winning the prestigious NATS Artist Award.

Career highlights include Mysteries of the Macabre and Candide with Baltimore Symphony, Paul's Case with UrbanArias and Prototype Festival, Nimue in Shakespeare Theatre Company's Camelot, Carmina Burana and A Midsummer Night's Dream with Washington Ballet at The Kennedy Center, and Mozart's Requiem with Richmond Symphony.

Her work is relentless in variety, spanning classical, contemporary, and popular styles. In the 2020-21 season, Wimbish self-directed a groundbreaking recital for the INVISION recital series and sang the roles of Alberto Gonzales in Melissa Dunphy's Gonzales Cantata as well as Pamina in a brand new production of The Magic Flute, set to a revamped script and libretto by an all-Black creative team and cast. In addition to returning to UrbanArias for the 2021-22 season, Melissa will make her soloist debut with the Vermont Symphony, workshop Jessica Meyer's 20 Minutes of Action with Sandbox Percussion Ensemble at Yellow Barn's Chamber Music Residency, and compete at Stockhausen Courses in Kürten. She co-leads the Baroque pop duo, Outcalls, whose song "No King" was named one of Baltimore Sun's Most Defining Songs of 2017. Outcalls was awarded a Baker Artist Award in 2021 and will release their third studio album, Greatest Hits, in fall 2021.



Alissa Anderson

Ms. Anderson's appearance is sponsored by Alan J. Savada and Will Stevenson.

Contralto Alissa Anderson wields her comic prowess, striking features, and powerful vocalism to great acclaim in a wide variety of repertoire. The 2021-2022 season sees her as Dame Quickly in Falstaff with Berkshire Opera Festival, Marcellina in Le nozze di Figaro with Austin Opera, Mother Goose in The Rake's Progress with Angers-Nantes Opera, Mama in why I live at the P.O. with UrbanArias, and Erda in Das Reingold with Opera Santa Barbara. In recent seasons, Ms. Anderson returned to Opera Philadelphia as Princess Clarissa in The Love for Three Oranges, made her triumphant debut with The Royal Danish Opera as Mrs. Lovett in Sweeney Todd, returned to San Diego Opera as Maddalena in Rigoletto, made her debut with Opera San Antonio as Marthe in Faust, and joined Utah Festival Opera as Marcellina in Le nozze di Figaro and Mrs. Andrews/The Bird Woman in Mary Poppins. Ms. Anderson has also bowed as The Witch in Into the Woods with Utah Festival Opera, the title role in La tragédie de Carmen with Opera Birmingham and Opera Louisiana, Frugola/La Zia Principessa in Il trittico with Opera Delaware, Tisbe in La Cenerentola with San Diego Opera, La Zia Principessa/Ciesca in Il trittico with

the Opera Company of Middlebury, La Zia Principessa/Zita in Suor Angelica/Gianni Schicchi with Opera Santa Barbara, and Cleo in The Most Happy Fella with Tulsa Opera. She made her Houston Grand Opera debut in their East + West series in River of Light by composer Jack Perla and librettist Chitra Diyakaruni.

Eric McKeever



American baritone Eric McKeever has won consistent praise for his voice of "power and brilliance" (Chicago Tribune) and "considerable flexibility and a communicative presence enhanced by expressive, crystalline diction." (Opera News) Recently he was Betto, Gianni Schicchi with Opera Columbus and Tonio, I paglicacci with Salt Marsh Opera. He returned to Opera Columbus in the spring of 2021 as Marcello and sang concerts with Baltimore Concert Opera/OperaDelware. Upcoming, Mr. McKeever debuts with UrbanArias, revives the role, Don Giovanni with Indianapolis Opera; and, is Bartolo, Il Barbieri di Siviglia with OperaDelaware.

He has been Sharpless in Madama Butterfly with Opera Columbus, David in L'amico Fritz with Baltimore Concert Opera, Germont, La traviata with Pacific Opera Project and joined Knoxville Opera in concert as Enrico, Lucia di Lammermoor, Mr. McKeever made is his Anchorage Opera debut as Malatesta in Don Pasquale, joined the roster of New York City Opera covering the role of Jake Wallace in La Fanciulla del West and returned to Florentine Opera as The Speaker in The Magic Flute. He was Charlie in Kamala Sankaram's Looking at You at BRIC in Brooklyn and sang with Finger Lakes Opera as Frank in Die Fledermaus. He performed Adam Waters' River of Freedom with the Chautauqua Institution and joined Salt Marsh Opera as a soloist in "Music at the Lighthouse." Other roles include: Sander in Zémire et Azor: Marcello and Schaunard in La bohème: the Revival Singer, Elmer Gantry; Revival Singer in Florentine Opera's Elmer Gantry; and, Michele, Il Tabarro.



Ian McEuen

Tenor Ian McEuen has been praised for his versatility as a performer, impressing audiences with his "sweet lyric tone," a "sharp physicality and expressive stage skills," as well as his ability to evoke laughter "just for walking across the stage." Mr. McEuen began the 2019/20 season with a return to the Regional Tony Award-winning Signature Theatre, appearing as Giuseppe Zangara in Sondheim's Assassins. This production not only opened Signature's 30th anniversary season, but it

anniversary season, but it is their 30th production of a Sondheim Musical. Mr. McEuen will continue the season with two role debuts: Niko Magadoff in Menotti's The Consul with Baltimore Concert Opera and Little Bat in Floyd's Susannah with Annapolis Opera. He will also continue his long relationship with UrbanArias, appearing in their Opera Improv Series.

Mr. McEuen began the 2018/19 season with his role and company debuts as Lt. Torasso in Signature Theatre's production of Sondheim's Passion. He continued the season with another role and company debut as Ramendado in Annapolis Opera's Carmen. Throughout the season, he brought audiences to tears of laughter with his appearances in UrbanArias' popular Opera Improv series. He finished out the season as a member of the prestigious Filene Artists at Wolf Trap Opera, portraying one of his favorite roles, Der Tanzmeister in Ariadne auf Naxos. The 2017/18 season afforded Mr. McEuen the rare opportunity to cover roles in two world premiere operas, Elizabeth Cree (Dan Leno) and We Shall Not Be Moved (John Little), as part of Opera Philadelphia's inaugural festival, O17. He continued the season with another world premiere, creating the many roles portrayed by Redwood Son in the UrbanArias production of Randall Eng's Florida. The season wrapped up with Mr. McEuen returning to one of his beloved signature roles, Tobias Ragg in Sweeney Todd, for his company debuts with Baltimore Concert Opera and Atlanta Opera.

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