

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Minnesota Opera presents the world premiere of *The Manchurian Candidate*

Second opera by Pulitzer Prize-winner Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell

MINNEAPOLIS (January 26, 2015) – Minnesota Opera Music Director Michael Christie leads the world premiere performances of *The Manchurian Candidate*, March 7–15, 2015 in the Ordway Music Theater. Christie is recognized as “... a top-notch conductor of new works ...” by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Based on the novel by Richard Condon and directed by Kevin Newbury, *The Manchurian Candidate* traces the mysterious story of an American soldier decorated during the Korean War who is brainwashed into becoming an unwitting assassin in a conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government. This taut and suspenseful thriller is the highly anticipated second opera by composer Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell, creators of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Silent Night*.

When approaching his second opera with librettist Mark Campbell, composer Kevin Puts said, “the libretto (text of the opera) has to come first. The best thing I can do is react to the libretto and let Mark determine the architecture and the structure and then figure out how musically I can bring that to life. To work on a political thriller, something that’s fast paced and has this American edge to the story – I could hear the music. The audience doesn’t get to take a breath. It has this constant drive to it with these moments of heart and tenderness in the midst of that – I jumped at the idea.”

Librettist Mark Campbell shares that, “our collaboration has grown. Kevin Puts has an incredible innate sense of theater and drama. He’s telling a story and I completely trust him. Being able to workshop the opera in Minneapolis is a big credit to Artistic Director Dale Johnson and Music Director Michael Christie. We all know how to work together now after *Silent Night*. We have this history together based on our first opera. What really excites me about *The Manchurian Candidate* is its political message and how paranoia is used to attain power in politics. We see it every day in this country.”

“We decided to set the whole production in the ‘boxing ring’ of the political convention,” explains stage director Kevin Newbury. “A lot of it is about being watched, filmed and photographed. We’re really using media in an interesting way and pushing the art form forward a little, in bringing some of the elements of live video, sound effects and photography into the production. Of course, first and foremost, it’s about the relationship between these characters but we wanted to find something as visually exciting and communicative as Puts and Campbell’s work.”

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Rock the Ordway

The Manchurian Candidate performances are part of Rock the Ordway: 22 Days of Opening Nights, marking the grand opening of the new state-of-the-art Concert Hall at Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. Rock the Ordway is organized by The Arts Partnership, a nonprofit collaboration among Minnesota Opera, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) and The Schubert Club. A Grand Opening Celebration Concert featuring the SPCO in collaboration with Minnesota Opera Music Director Michael Christie, Minnesota Opera Chorus and soloists, pianist and SPCO Artistic Partner Jeremy Denk, mezzo-soprano Sasha Cook and others is scheduled for February 28.

Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative

The Manchurian Candidate is part of Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative (NWI), a landmark program designed to invigorate the operatic repertoire with an infusion of contemporary works. Composer Kevin Puts reflects, "Minnesota Opera has this incredible history of developing new opera and to be a part of that and to be brought into this genre is something that I had always thought about doing, but Dale Johnson had the idea that I could write opera. I feel very indebted to Minnesota Opera and very excited to be back." *The Manchurian Candidate* follows Kevin Puts' Pulitzer Prize-winning first opera *Silent Night*, also led by Michael Christie and with a libretto by Mark Campbell, which Minnesota Opera premiered in 2011.

Since the NWI was launched in March 2008, it has produced the American premiere of Jonathan Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*; revivals of Bernard Herrmann's *Wuthering Heights*; and Dominick Argento's *Casanova's Homecoming* and *The Dream of Valentino*; and the world premieres of Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell's *Silent Night*, winner of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music; and Douglas J. Cuomo's *Doubt*, with a libretto by John Patrick Shanley. *The Shining*, with music by Paul Moravec and a libretto by Mark Campbell, based on Stephen King's 1977 best-selling novel, will premiere in 2016 in performances led by Michael Christie. During the 2016–2017 season, Minnesota Opera will premiere *Dinner at Eight*, a new comic opera by composer William Bolcom and librettist Mark Campbell, based on the play by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. In May 2016, Project Opera, Minnesota Opera's youth training program for students in grades 4–12, will premiere *Memory Boy* as an extension of the NWI. This new opera by composer Reinaldo Moya and librettist Mark Campbell is based on the novel by Will Weaver. *Black Sox*, with music by Joel Puckett and a libretto by Eric Simonson, will premiere during the 2018–2019 season and tells the story of the 1919 Chicago White Sox team that threw the World Series that year.

***The Manchurian Candidate* Synopsis**

The Manchurian Candidate is based on a 1959 novel by Richard Condon, which inspired two film adaptations. In the story, Captain Ben Marco, Sergeant Raymond Shaw and the rest of their infantry platoon are kidnapped during the Korean War and brainwashed to believe that Shaw saved their lives in combat – for which Congress awards him the Medal of Honor. Years after the war, Marco begins having a recurring nightmare about Shaw murdering two of their men while under observation by Chinese and Soviet officials. When Marco learns that another soldier from the platoon has been suffering the same nightmare, he determines to solve the mystery.

Community Events Surrounding *The Manchurian Candidate*

In celebration of *The Manchurian Candidate*, Minnesota Opera invites audiences to discover the musical and cinematic interpretations of this political thriller. Visit mnop.co/manchurian-community-events for more details on upcoming events surrounding *The Manchurian Candidate*.

Trylon Microseries: Masterpieces of Paranoia

Minnesota Opera has partnered with the Trylon microcinema to present Masterpieces of Paranoia, a series involving handsome protagonists who find their everyday lives surrounded by shadowy, nebulous forces.

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Films include *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Blow Out* (1981), *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Three Days of the Condor* (1975). Films are shown every Monday and Tuesday in February at the Trylon in south Minneapolis. Tickets: \$8 at takeup.org.

Behind the Curtain

Minnesota Opera's Head of Music Rob Ainsley explores the world-premiere production with members of *The Manchurian Candidate* cast and creative team. Monday, February 16 at 7:00 p.m. Tickets \$10-\$35 at mnop.co/btc.

Composer Conversation with Kevin Puts

The SPCO, Minnesota Public Radio, Minnesota Opera and American Composers Forum present an informal Composer Conversation with Kevin Puts, hosted by Classical MPR's Emily Reese on February 18 at 7:00 p.m. at Amsterdam Bar & Hall in downtown St. Paul. Event is free, but registration required at thespco.org.

Opera Viva! How an Opera Comes to Life

Minnesota Opera's season-long residency at Hennepin County Libraries continues with this special two-part series. *The Manchurian Candidate* artists and creators will give a special behind-the-scenes peek at how a new work comes to life, from commission to final performance. Part I on February 24 at 6:30 p.m. features composer Kevin Puts, librettist Mark Campbell and Artistic Director Dale Johnson. Part II on March 10 at 6:30 p.m. highlights Minnesota Opera Production Director Karen Quisenberry. Tickets are free, but reservations required at hclib.org.

More About *The Manchurian Candidate*

At the final workshop for *The Manchurian Candidate* in December 2014, *MinnPost* praised that "Campbell's libretto distills Condon's 1959 Cold War thriller into ... action, revelation and paranoia, with occasional breaks for romance. Puts' score is complex and colorful."

The Manchurian Candidate cast includes baritone Matthew Worth as Sergeant Raymond Shaw, soprano Brenda Harris as Eleanor Iselin, tenor Leonardo Capalbo as Captain Ben Marco and bass Daniel Sumegi as Senator Johnny Iselin.

Visit mnop.co/manchurian to find creative team and artist biographies, video clips, show synopses and background notes.

What: *The Manchurian Candidate* by composer Kevin Puts. Libretto by Mark Campbell.
Based on the novel by Richard Condon.
A Minnesota Opera New Works Initiative Production.
Sung in English with English captions projected above the stage.

Where: Music Theater at Ordway, 345 Washington Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102.

When: Saturday, March 7, 7:30 p.m. Sunday, March 8, 2:00 p.m.
Thursday, March 12, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 14, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 15, 2:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$25 – \$200. Call the Minnesota Opera Ticket Office at 612-333-6669, Monday–Friday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., or purchase online at mnopera.org.

Media: An online press room (available at mnop.co/dropbox) includes workshop photos, artist headshots, costume sketches, set designs and marketing artwork. Check back for updated resources and information.

Contact Communications Manager Julie Behr to take advantage of interview, photo and video opportunities at *The Manchurian Candidate* dress rehearsals at Ordway: **Wednesday, March 4, 7:30 p.m.** and **Thursday, March 5, 7:30 p.m.**

Preview: Minnesota Opera hosts a **Social Media Preview Night** for press members, bloggers and tweeters to attend *The Manchurian Candidate* dress rehearsal at Ordway on **Thursday, March 5, 6:00 p.m.** The evening begins with refreshments, a cash bar and a pre-rehearsal discussion with Minnesota Opera artistic staff. R.S.V.P. by March 3 at mnop.co/preview.

The Creative Team

Conductor.....Michael Christie
Stage Director.....Kevin Newbury
Set Designer.....Robert Brill
Costume Designer.....Jessica Jahn
Lighting Designer.....Japhy Weideman
Projections Designer.....Sean Nieuwenhuis

The Cast

Sergeant Raymond Shaw.....Matthew Worth
Eleanor Iselin.....Brenda Harris
Captain Ben Marco.....Leonardo Capalbo
Senator Johnny Iselin.....Daniel Sumegi
Rosie Chayney.....Adriana Zabala
Jocelyn Jordan.....Angela Mortellaro
Senator Thomas Jordan.....Christopher Job
Mrs. Lowe.....Victoria Vargas
TV Announcer.....John Robert Lindsey
Secretary of Defense.....Stephen Cunningham
Dr. Yen Lo.....Philip Zawisza*
The Nominee.....Philip Zawisza*
The Nominee's Wife.....Shannon Prickett+
Dora the bartender.....Shannon Prickett+
Andrew Hanley.....Will Liverman*
Holborn Gaines.....Gerard Michael D'Emilio+
Major General Bollinger.....Cooper Nolan+
General Tracy.....Christian Zaremba+
Young Raymond.....Andrew Lovato+

*Minnesota Opera Debut
+Minnesota Opera Resident Artist

The 2014–2015 Minnesota Opera season is supported by Target.

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Minnesota Opera combines a culture of creativity and fiscal responsibility to produce opera and opera education programs that expand the art form, nurture artists, enrich audiences and contribute to the vitality of the community.