

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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MINNESOTA OPERA PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *THE SONG POET*—THE COMPANY'S 50TH NEW WORK

Based on the memoir of the same title by Minnesota author Kao Kalia Yang, *The Song Poet* is the first Hmong story to be adapted for the operatic stage.

MINNEAPOLIS (February 21, 2023) – Minnesota Opera, in collaboration with two celebrated Minnesota artists—author Kao Kalia Yang and composer Jocelyn Hagen—presents an operatic adaptation of Yang's nonfiction book, *The Song Poet*. This new opera offers a glimpse into the Twin Cities Hmong community's history with a story that shares the challenges, losses and triumphs of a young refugee, his family and their shared love and perseverance. The world premiere is presented in partnership with Theater Mu, and will be Minnesota Opera's second production in its new North Loop venue, the Luminary Arts Center.

This world premiere follows the story of Yang's family and her song poet father as war drives them from the mountains of Laos into a Thai refugee camp and ultimately on to the challenging world of life as a refugee in Minnesota. With his poetry and melodies, Yang's father inspires hope in his family, polishing their reality so that they might shine.

The libretto is adapted from the book by author Kao Kalia Yang herself. Yang is a Hmong-American author of the memoirs *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, *The Song Poet* and *Somewhere in the Unknown World*. Yang is also the author of the children's books *A Map Into the World*, *The Shared Room*, *The Most Beautiful Thing*, *Yang Warriors* and *From the Tops of the Trees*. She co-edited the ground-breaking collection *What God is Honored Here?: Writings on Miscarriage and Infant Loss By and For Native Women and Women of Color*. Yang's work has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Chautauqua Prize, the PEN USA literary awards, the Dayton's Literary Peace Prize, the Heartland Bookseller's Award and four Minnesota Book Awards. Her stories have been included as Notable Books by the American Library Association and Kirkus Best Books of the Year.

The opera's music is composed by Minnesota based composer, Jocelyn Hagen, with additional Hmong lyrics set by Bee Yang, Kao Kalia Yang's father. Hagen's music has been described as "simply magical" (*Fanfare Magazine*) and "dramatic and deeply moving" (*Star Tribune*). She is a pioneer in the field of composition, pushing the expectations of musicians and audiences with large-scale multimedia works, electro-acoustic music, dance, opera and publishing. Her first forays into composition were via songwriting, still very evident in her work. The majority of her compositions are for the voice: solo, chamber and choral. Her melodic music is rhythmically driven and texturally complex, rich in color and deeply heartfelt.

"*The Song Poet* was originally commissioned as an exciting opportunity for our youth opera program nearly 5 years ago," says President and General Director Ryan Taylor. "As we explored

the project, it began to take a life of its own, and we realized that the depth of storytelling might be better served by more experienced artists.” The success of the original novel was in large part due to the rich life journey that Yang depicts throughout the book. “Many of the themes in *The Song Poet* are familiar to opera, but this particular story has yet to be heard on an operatic stage,” says Taylor. “We are honored that Kalia has entrusted us with this important opportunity to honor her family’s legacy, and are excited to offer our full support to this beautiful new work that she and Jocelyn have created.”

“We’re privileged to help bring one of Minnesota’s most treasured writers to the stage with her heartfelt, beautiful story of finding home and belonging, a narrative that represents one of the largest Asian American communities we serve,” says Theater Mu Artistic Director Lily Tung Crystal. “*The Song Poet* stands at the intersection of art and immigration, a point where we at Theater Mu often find ourselves, and we’re grateful to MN Opera for inviting us to be part of this groundbreaking journey.”

Known for his work on both coasts, Korean-American baritone Museop Kim makes his Minnesota Opera debut as Bee Yang. He is joined by soprano Corissa Bussian as Chue Moua who is making her principal debut with Minnesota Opera and has sung roles at companies across the Twin Cities. Hai-Ting Chinn (Youa Lee/Dawb Yang) and Laura Sanders (Joua Thao/Kalia Yang) make their Minnesota Opera debuts. After joining Minnesota Opera in the chorus for *The Daughter of the Regiment* earlier this year, Nathan Romportl (Hue Yang) and Huiyin Tan (Young Bee Yang) make their principal debuts with Minnesota Opera. Haozhen Wen (Lion Dog), Xi Yuan (Jackie Chan Dog) and Resident Artist Charles H. Eaton round out the cast alongside youth performers Mina Moua, Lavender Vy Truong, Audrey Mojica and Claire Luoxi Kruger.

Maestro Tiffany Chang will conduct the Minnesota Opera Orchestra and the Minnesota Opera Chorus in this world premiere. Rick Shiomi, founding member of Theater Mu and a leader in the Asian American theater movement for over 35 years, will direct this production.

What: *The Song Poet*
Based on the book by Kao Kalia Yang
Music by Jocelyn Hagen
Libretto by Kao Kalia Yang
Sung in English and Hmong with English and Hmong captions projected above the stage.

Where: Luminary Arts Center, 700 N First Street, Minneapolis, MN 55401

When: Thursday, March 9, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, March 11, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 12, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.
Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, March 16 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, March 18 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 19 at 2:00 p.m.
Tuesday, March 21 at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, March 23 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 26 at 2:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$50-\$80. *The Song Poet* has limited availability; remaining seats will be released for sale on Monday, February 27; Call Minnesota Opera Patron Services at 612-333-6669, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. for availability.

Media: Digital assets are available on our [Online Press Room](#).

Creative Team

Conductor | Tiffany Chang
Stage Director | Rick Shiomi
Scenic Designer | Mina Kinukawa
Costume Designer | Khamphian Vang
Lighting Designer | Karin Olson
Sound Designer | Rachel Brees
Choreographer | Penelope Freeh
Intimacy Director | Alessandra Bongiardina

Cast

Bee Yang | Museop Kim
Chue Moua | Corissa Bussian
Youa Lee/Dawb Yang | Hai-Ting Chinn
Joua Thao / Kalia Yang | Laura Sanders
Hue Yang | Nathan Romportl
Young Bee Yang | Huiyin Tan
Lion Dog | Haozhen Wen
Jackie Chan Dog | Xi Yuan
Young Kalia | Mina Moua, Lavender Vy Truong
Young Dawb | Audrey Mojica, Clare Luoxi Kruger
A Supervisor | Charles H. Eaton*

*MN Opera Resident Artist

To learn more about *The Song Poet*, please visit mnopera.org/the-song-poet.

To learn more about Theater Mu, please visit theatermu.org.



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