



University of North Texas
College of Music

Opera Production | Friday, April 11, 2025 | 7:30 p.m.
Lyric Theater - Murchison Performing Arts Center

University of North Texas Opera Theatre presents

Proving Up

Jonathan Eaton, director
Sharon Bjorndal Lavery, conductor

Proving Up (2018) Missy Mazzoli
Sung in English with English supertitles (b. 1980)

Proving Up
Composed by Missy Mazzoli
Libretto by Royce Vavrek
Adapted from the short story by Karen Russell
Presented under license from G. Schirmer Inc., copyright owners
Commissioned by the Washington National Opera
by Opera Omaha
and by Miller Theatre at Columbia University

Presented in one act without intermission

Program five hundred fifty-four of the 2024–2025 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

Synopsis

Proving Up is an opera about the American Dream, told through the story of Nebraskan homesteaders in the 1870s. A family dreams of “proving up” and obtaining the deed to the land they’ve settled. They obsessively list the requirements of the Homestead Act: five years of harvest, a sod house dwelling, and perhaps the most elusive element—a glass window. With their eldest son incapacitated, Ma and Pa Zegner send their youngest living child Miles on a mission to share the valuable commodity with their distant neighbors who are expecting a visit from the government inspector. Miles mounts his gray mare with the window wrapped in burlap and gallops across the land. The elements, natural and otherwise, have other plans, and Miles comes face to face with a strange man who turns out to be the ghost of a neighboring farmer, driven mad by the requirements of “proving up.” The willowy figure knows all too well the cost of the American Dream, and the window soon becomes a broken mirror reflecting great tragedy.

Soloists

Character	Voice type	Performer
Miles Zegner	tenor	Kun Zhang
Mr. Johannes “Pa” Zegner	baritone	Yonghyun Kim
Mrs. Johannes “Ma” Zegner	soprano	Kara McBain
Littler Zegner Sister	soprano	Beatrice Kim
Taller Zegner Sister	mezzo-soprano	Maiya Williams
The Sodbuster	bass-baritone	Colin Busch-Kennedy
Peter Zegner	silent role	Cian Sheridan

Opera Orchestra Personnel

Catherine Beck, violin I	Carter Reynolds, flute
Chloe Svadlenka, violin II	Mitchell Sidden, clarinet
Joseph Reding, viola	Sam Viebrock, bassoon
Chase Teague, cello	Lexy Kilgore, trumpet
Joseph La Marca, bass	Daniel Castillon, horn
Yu-Hsuan Lu, keyboard	
Hannah McDowall, percussion	
Eliza Fichialos, harp	

Artistic Team

Stage Director..... Jonathan Eaton
Conductor..... Sharon Bjorndal Lavery
Music Director..... Stephanie Rhodes Russell
Costume Designer..... Michael Robinson
Lighting Designer..... Elijah Reed
Make-up Designer..... Diane Tiscareño
Assistant Director..... Tyler Warwas
Collaborative Pianists..... Joohee Jeong, Lauren Koszyk, Yu-Hsuan Lu

Production Team

Production Manager..... Julie Hohman
Resident Stage Manager..... Sorrel McCarthy
Production Stage Manager..... Abigail Bahng
Assistant Stage Managers Ben Bassett, Mason Clarkson, Ramero Vargas
Supertitles..... Chandlar Head

Biographies (Artistic Team)

Sharon Bjorndal Lavery, (Conductor) Sharon Bjorndal Lavery began her career as an Assistant Chorus Master at New York City Opera. She went on to serve as Chorus Master and Assistant Conductor for productions at the Bard Summerscape Festival, Opera Philadelphia, and Utah Opera. Dr. Lavery has served as coach, conductor, pianist, and singer for opera companies and symphonies around the country, including Wolf Trap Opera, San Diego Opera, San Diego Symphony, Kentucky Opera, Louisville Orchestra, American Symphony Orchestra, Juilliard Orchestra, Waco Symphony, Vox Seraphim Choir and Orchestra, and McLennan Opera. She has worked closely with living composers Jake Heggie, Marc Adamo, Deborah Drattell, and Daron Hagen, as well as the late Stephen Sondheim, interpreting premieres and reviving classics. A champion of underrepresented composers, Dr. Lavery performed the Florence Price Piano Concerto in One Movement and the American premiere of the Agathe Backer Grøndahl Piano Concerto this past year.

Sharon Bjorndal Lavery received the Doctor of Musical Arts in Collaborative Piano from The Juilliard School, Master of Music from the Manhattan School of Music, and was a double major in Piano and Vocal Performance for the Bachelor of Music degree at Oberlin College Conservatory.

Jonathan Eaton, (Stage Director) serves UNT as Director of Opera and the Winspear Chair in Opera Studies. His work as a stage director has been seen in North America at many opera companies, including Chicago Lyric, San Francisco Opera, Philadelphia Opera, New York City Opera (with productions broadcast nationwide on "Great Performances Live from Lincoln Center"), Indianapolis, Memphis and Syracuse operas, the Santa Fe and Spoleto festivals, the Canadian Opera, Vancouver Opera, and here in Texas at Dallas Opera. In Europe he has directed at The Royal Opera Covent Garden, the English, Welsh and Dutch national operas, the operas of Lyons, Nantes and Nancy, and several German opera houses, including Hannover, Bielefeld, Dessau, Würzburg and Bochum. He led !SING for Ruhr 2010, Cultural Capital of Europe, with a million singers in 53 cities singing 500 concerts, culminating in the world's largest staged concert with 58,000 singers in a soccer stadium, televised by WDR and broadcast across Europe. He served for 21 years as Artistic Director of Pittsburgh Festival Opera, where he directed more than forty operas, including their first Ring cycle with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and a string of new works he commissioned under the rubric Music that Matters. These include an eco-opera inspired by Rachel Carson, and a jazz/gospel opera addressing issues of racial tension. Mr. Eaton is a celebrated interpreter of the works of Kurt Weill with several British and American premieres of Weill's works to his credit, including *Der Protagonist*, *Der Tsar läßt sich photographieren*, *Der Silbersee*, *Royal Palace* and *Die Bürgschaft*.

Mr. Eaton has also held professorships at CCM in Cincinnati, Carnegie Mellon University and Cleveland Institute of Music.

Stephanie Rhodes Russell, (Music Director) recently completed a residency as Conducting Fellow with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra where she appeared regularly with the ensemble leading education, family, and community concerts while serving as cover conductor for the symphonic subscription series. She is the recipient of a 2019 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award, designed to aid outstanding young conductors in developing their talents and careers. She has served on the music staff of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia, The Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, LA Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Washington National Opera, amongst others, and her extensive operatic experience in the roles of assistant conductor, prompter, chorus master, rehearsal pianist, and diction coach, brings a comprehensive understanding to her work. Other recent engagements include concerts with the American Festival Chorus and Orchestra, performances of Handel's *Alcina* at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, an engagement with Washington National Opera's forum for new works, the American Opera Initiative, and *The Magic Flute* and *Dido and Aeneas* with the Miami Music Festival.

Tyler Warwas, (Assistant Director) is based in Denton, TX, recently he has sung the role of Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) with Varna International Music Academy. In the coming months, he will sing the role of Garcia (*Notes on Viardot*) with Music on Site, Dr. Blind (*Die Fledermaus*) with UNT Opera and will be making his debut in directing by Assistant Directing Mazzoli's *Proving Up* with UNT Opera. Currently, Mr. Warwas is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance at the University of North Texas and studies voice under the direction of Carol Wilson.

Joohee Jeong, (Collaborative Pianist) is a doctoral candidate and teaching assistant at the University of North Texas, in piano performance. Previously, she served as the accompanist for *The Telephone* and *The Medium* by Gian Carlo Menotti, as well as *Proving Up* by Missy Mazzoli with the Opera University of Notre Dame, where she also taught individual lessons as an Adjunct Piano Faculty member. Currently, she is an Opera Teaching Assistant at UNT. Joohee holds a Master of Music in Collaborative Piano from Illinois State University, along with another Master of Music and a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from the University of Indiana South Bend. She studies under Liudmila Georgievskaya and has received the COM/DT Award and COM/DT Competitive Merit Scholarships at UNT.

Lauren Koszyk, (Collaborative Pianist), is currently pursuing her Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Business Administration at the University of North Texas. Originally from Normal, Illinois, Ms. Koszyk has given performances across Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, and the United States. In capacities as an opera pianist, coach, or music director Ms. Koszyk has worked with Illinois Festival Opera, Midwest Institute of Opera, Music Onsite Inc., Musiktheater Bavaria, Opera Seme, and UNT Opera. She has accompanied masterclasses given by renowned Metropolitan Opera soprani Angela Brown and Yvonne Redman.

Ms. Koszyk has prepared productions of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *La bohème*, *La rondine*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Mese mariano*, *Suor Angelica*, *That Hellbound Train*, *The Beautiful Bridegroom*, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, and *The Pirates of Penzance* and has assisted in productions of *Aïda*, *Carmen*, *Cendrillon*, *Cavalleria rusticana*, and *Don Giovanni*. Ms. Koszyk holds degrees in piano performance, collaborative piano, and German and currently serves as the Rehearsal Coordinator and Music Staff Teaching Assistant for UNT Opera.

Yu-Hsuan Lu, (Collaborative Pianist) originally from Taiwan, Ms. Lu has an affinity with both opera and the voice. She has performed regularly with musicians around the US, Taiwan, and China. She was a pianist-coach at the Music On Site for their production of *Carmen* in 2022 and will return for *Notes on Viardot* in the winter of 2024. Yu-Hsuan is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in collaborative piano at the University of North Texas, where she is a graduate assistant for UNT Opera. Yu-Hsuan freelances throughout North Texas and maintains an active performance schedule. She holds two Master of Music degrees, one in Collaborative Piano and the other in Performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. She also held the position of associate professor of piano at Huaiyin Normal University, China in 2017.

Abigail Bahng, (Stage Manager) is a third year from Katy, Texas, and is currently studying Vocal Performance with Mary Mills and is currently a member of both the UNT A Cappella choir and Vox Aquilae. This is her second year in the UNT Opera program, her previous UNT Opera work includes Stage Manager (*Cendrillon*) and Echo (*Hänsel und Gretel*). Other recent works include playing the role of Hänsel in VIMA's *Hänsel und Gretel*. This season with UNT Opera she will be in the chorus for *Die Fledermaus*, as well as Stage Manager for the production of *Proving Up*. This upcoming summer she will be performing the title role in Handel's *Silla* at The Chicago Summer Opera.

Ben Bassett, (Assistant Stage Manager) is an excellent and well-rounded musician from Katy, Texas studying to receive a bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas in performance and studies with William Joyner. Featured works Benjamin has been involved in are as follows: Chorus (*La bohème*) at Fort Worth Opera, Le Surintendant & chorus (*Cendrillon*), Crébillon & chorus (*La Rondine*), The Phantom (*The Phantom of the Opera*), and Frank (*Die Fledermaus*). He has also received some accolades throughout the start of his career such as: 2nd place in the DFW NATS competition in classical singing in 2023, 5th place in the DFW NATS competition in musical theater.

Mason Clarkson, (Assistant Stage Manager) is a sophomore from Magnolia, Texas, studying Music Education and Vocal Performance with William Joyner. This is Mason's first year involved in the UNT opera. Upcoming roles include chorus and props coordinator (*Così fan tutte*), chorus and Rasmusin (*Die Fledermaus*), and Assistant Stage Manager (*Proving Up*). Mason is the recipient of the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion Scholarship and the Texas Master Chorale Scholarship, as well as many UNT academic and music scholarships.

Ramero Vargas, (Assistant Stage Manager) is a junior from Cedar Creek, Texas studying voice performance and music education with Mark Tempesta. This summer he attended Opera In Concert - a summer program - located in Urbino, Italy. Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Dr. Blind (*Die Fledermaus*) and chorus (*Così fan tutte*).

Chandler Head, (Supertitles) is a Teaching Fellow and doctoral student at the University of North Texas studying with Carol Wilson. Chandler received her Bachelor of Music from Eastern New Mexico University; Master of Music from Texas Tech University and she also is a recipient of the Winspear and Slator Opera scholarships. Her featured roles include, Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*), Jo March (*Little Women the Musical*), Suor Angelica (*Suor Angelica*), Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*). Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*). Her oratorio work includes *Mozart Requiem*, *Vivaldi Gloria*, *Considering Matthew Shepard*, selections from *Elijah* and tours in Spain, Italy, London and Paris. Chandler has also performed as a featured soloist with the Texas Tech Symphony Orchestras on multiple occasions. In addition to performing, Chandler enjoys teaching her studio of talented students.

Biographies (Soloists, in Alphabetical Order)

Colin Busch-Kennedy, (The Sodbuster) is a 4th semester vocal performance major from Plano, Texas. He is studying voice performance with Stephen Morscheck and sings with the UNT A Cappella choir led by Allen Hightower. In the fall of 2023, Colin achieved 3rd place in the TEXOMA NATS competition inside of the classical category and was invited to compete in the National Auditions. Upcoming roles with UNT Opera include Caricone and Chorus (*Die Fledermaus*) and The Sodbuster (*Proving Up*).

Beatrice Kim, (Littler Zegner Daughter) is a Korean-American soprano working as a doctoral student and teaching fellow at the UNT College of Music under the tutelage of Carol Wilson. Stage credits include Gretel (*Hansel und Gretel*), Noémie (*Cendrillon*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Amore (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Laura (*Goblin Market*), and L'Enfant (*L'enfant et les sortilèges*). She was selected as a Young Artist for Cedar Rapids Opera and performed in the chorus and as a cover for Despina (*Così fan tutte*). Kim holds a Performer Diploma from Indiana University, a Master of Music from the Eastman School of Music and a Bachelor of Music from the University of Oklahoma. Her solo concert work ranges from Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light*, Haydn's *Heiligmesse*, and three concerts in Germany. Off stage, Beatrice is also an avid supporter of opera outreach education programs and has worked for the non-profit organizations "What is Opera, Anyway?" and "Reimagining Opera for Kids".

Yonghyun Kim, (Pa Zegner) from South Korea, is a third-year DMA student studying under Stephen Morscheck. Previous credits include Marcello (*La bohème*), Don Giovanni (*Don Giovanni*), Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*), Peter (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Escamillo (*Carmen*) and Il Conte di Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*). Upcoming performances at UNT include Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), and "Pa" Zegner (*Proving Up*). He is a graduate of Seoul National University (BM) and Manhattan School of Music (MM) where he studied with James Morris. He trained at the Accademia AMO of the Teatro Coccia di Novara in Italy and made his Italian Opera debut. He made his operatic debut in Korea at the Sejong Grand Theater in 2021. He won the UNT concerto competition (2022), Barry Alexander International Vocal Competition (2023), and AIMS Vocal Competition (2024). He participated in the Aspen Music Festival as a fellowship singer with a full scholarship and recently attended in the American Institute of Musical Studies program where he performed as Scarpia (*Tosca*) in the Puccini Concert at Musikverein and Valentin (*Faust*) in the Meistersinger Concert at Helmut-List-Halle in Graz, Austria.

Kara McBain, (Ma Zegner) studies at the University of North Texas in the Doctor of Musical Arts program with Carol Wilson. Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, she earned her Bachelor of Music *summa cum laude* from Missouri State University in 2020 and received her Master of Music in 2022 from the University of North Texas. She is a recipient of a Teaching Fellowship in the Voice Department at UNT, won first place in the 2021 Texoma NATS competition, was a finalist in the 2021 Colorado Bach Ensemble Young Artist Competition, and won first prize in the 2021 GCC Series "Best Handel Performance". Recent roles include Magda (*La Rondine*) at the University of North Texas, La Contessa (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at the University of North Texas, Magda (*La Rondine*) at Opera in the Ozarks, La Musique (*Les arts florissants*) with the Dallas Bach Society, and Marenka (*The Bartered Bride*) at the University of North Texas. Upcoming engagements include the soprano solos in Handel's *Messiah* with the Dallas Bach Society, and a recital with the Lewisville Lake Symphony International Chamber Series.

Cian Sheridan, (Peter Zegner) is a first-year history major from Orange, California, who studies voice under UNT Teaching Fellow, Chandlar Head. Cian has performed in various operas throughout high school such as *Die Fledermaus* with Chapman/OCSA Opera and *La fille du régiment* with the SOKA Performing Arts Center.

Maiya Williams, (Taller Zegner Daughter) a native of Hutto, TX, Maiya is a Graduate Artist Certificate student studying Voice Performance at the University of North Texas where she currently studies under the tutelage of Molly Fillmore. In addition to opera, she has a notably rich background in both concert and choral music, having been the Alto soloist for Duruflé's Requiem, Handel's Messiah, and Thomas' Fern Hill; as well as performing with Fort Worth Opera for Geter's African American Requiem and numerous projects with Orpheus Chamber singers under J. D. Burnett. Recent engagements include The Dallas Opera's production of Gounod's Romeo et Juliette as an auxiliary chorus member, Spoleto Festival, and an Emerging Artist position with Seagle Festival. Upcoming engagements see Ms. Williams back with the Dallas Opera Chorus for their production of La Traviata, Mezzo soloist for Duruflé's Requiem, Alto soloist for Mozart's Coronation Mass, returning for the 30th season with Orpheus Chamber Singers, and singing the role of Taller Zegner Daughter in UNT Opera's production of Proving Up.

Kun Zhang, (Miles Zegner) tenor, from China, is a first-year doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas studying under the tutelage of William Joyner. He received his bachelor's degree from the Henan Polytechnic University, and his master's degree from the University of Szeged in Hungary. In 2023 he performed as a soloist in the Easter Temesi Maria Charity Concert at the Óbudai Társaskör in Budapest, Hungary. Past roles include Qi Jia Jun in the original symphonic choral drama *Hero Qui Jiguang* at Henan Polytechnic University; Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), and Don José (*Carmen*) at the University of Szeged. Upcoming roles include Miles Zegner (*Proving Up*) with UNT Opera.

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UNT Opera appreciates all that they do to make this production possible.

Program Note

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