



COLLEGE OF MUSIC

University of North Texas
College of Music

Opera Production | Saturday, April 12, 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

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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-five 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	David Ferguson
Mr. Johannes “Pa” Zegner	baritone	Isaac Carlin
Mrs. Johannes “Ma” Zegner	soprano	Xiaojing Luo
Littler Zegner Sister	soprano	Maryn West
Taller Zegner Sister	mezzo-soprano	Genevieve Cardos
The Sodbuster	bass-baritone	Christopher Gray
Peter Zegner	silent role	Cian Sheridan

Opera Orchestra Personnel

Grace Kang Wollett, 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)

Genevieve Cardos, (Taller Zegner Daughter) originally from The Gambia. She earned a BA in Music at Spelman College and MM at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she was a Graduate Teaching Assistant. She is currently a Teaching Fellow at UNT Denton, in her second year as a DMA resident student in vocal performance, studying with Jennifer Lane. Genevieve has understudied as the "mother role" twice at UNT, first as Madame de la Haltière (*Cendrillon*) and then as Gertrud (*Hänsel und Gretel*). She has also performed as The Mother (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Aunt Cecilia (*Little Women*) and was a chambermaid in *Don Pasquale*, while at University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Other previous roles include Angelina (*Trial by Jury*) by Gilbert & Sullivan. She has been featured in Arts After Dark in Eugene, Oregon, solo performances at 2015 Spelman/Morehouse College Glee Club Christmas Carol Concert, A Night of Soloists with Atlanta University Centre Orchestra, and recital performances at Peachtree Road Lutheran Church in Atlanta Georgia. Upcoming roles include Taller Zegner Daughter (*Proving Up*) with UNT Opera.

Isaac Carlin, (Pa Zegner) is a second-year doctoral candidate from Omaha, Nebraska, studying under the tutelage of Stephen Morscheck. Isaac recently returned from southern France where he performed as Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) with Opéra Bastide, singing the role in the medieval French dialect of Occitan. Recent roles include Sacristan (*Tosca*) in concert with the UNT Symphony Orchestra, and Peter (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Pandolfe (*Cendrillon*), and Escamillo (*Carmen*), all with UNT Opera. This season with UNT Opera he will perform as Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*), Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), and Mr. Johannes "Pa" Zegner (*Proving Up*).

David Ferguson, (Miles Zegner) from Conroe, Texas, is currently a second-year master's student at the University of North Texas studying with Stephan Morscheck. This season's engagements include tenor soloist in Vox Aquilae's all Bach program, tenor soloist in the Mozart Requiem with St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, a featured performer in the St. Thomas Aquinas New Year's Celebration Chamber Concert and finishing his exciting season as Miles Zegner in Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up*. David's previous engagements on the operatic stage include Le Doyen de la Faculte (*Cendrillon*), Young Martin (premiere of *That Hell-bound Train*), Chorus (*The Wreckers*) with Houston Grand Opera, The Mayor (*Albert Herring*), Orpheus (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), Dandy (*The Ballad of Baby Doe*), and Chorus (*La Bohème*) with the Mendelssohn Hochschule Oper. David's schooling includes a Bachelor of Music in voice performance at the University of Houston, and an exchange semester at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater „Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy“ Leipzig, Germany. He is the recipient of The Gilman Foundation Scholarship, The COM Beasley Vocal Scholarship, and the COM Competitive Merit Scholarship.

Christopher Gray, (The Sodbuster) from Dallas, TX, is in his third year of undergraduate studies in Vocal Performance at the University of North Texas under the tutelage of Stephen Morscheck. Christopher was a semifinalist in this year's UNT College of Music Concerto Competition. Recent roles include Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) with Varna International Music Academy, and the Professor (*That Hell-Bound Train*) with UNT Opera. This season, Christopher will sing the role of Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) with UNT Opera, Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) with Music On Site Inc., as well as the Sodbuster (*Proving Up*) with UNT Opera. Christopher is a recipient of the UNT Opera Scholarship, the Mirabeau B. Lamar Award of Excellence, and the Marca Bee Lircher Vocal Performance Scholarship.

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.

Xiaoqing Luo, (Ma Zegner) is a GAC student from China, studying with Carol Wilson. She holds a master's degree from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where she studied with Carlos Montane and Deanne Meek, and a bachelor's degree from the Central Conservatory of Music. Recent roles include Angelica (*Suor Angelica*) and Lauretta (*Gianni Schicchi*) in Lucca, Italy; Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) in Weimar, Germany, and Tisbe (*La Cenerentola*) with Central Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra. Upcoming roles with UNT opera include Mrs. Johannes "Ma" Zegner (*Proving Up*) and Rosalinde (understudy in *Die Fledermaus*). She is a recipient of the Competitive Graduate Voice Performance scholarship.

Maryn West, (Littler Zegner Daughter) is a junior from Houston, Texas studying voice at the University of North Texas with Carol Wilson. Maryn is a past finalist in the Schmidt Undergraduate Vocal Competition as well as a semi-finalist in the UNT Concerto Competition, and recently placed 5th in her division at the Texoma NATS competition. Recent roles include Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) at Varna International Music Academy and the Sandman (*Hänsel und Gretel*) with UNT Opera. Upcoming roles include Desirée and Voice Student (*Notes on Viardot*) with Music On Site, Inc. and Littler Zegner Daughter (*Proving Up*) with UNT Opera. Maryn is a recipient of the UNT Undergraduate Choral Performance Award Scholarship, as well as the Woodlands Pavilion Partners Fine Arts Scholarship.

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

Program Note

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