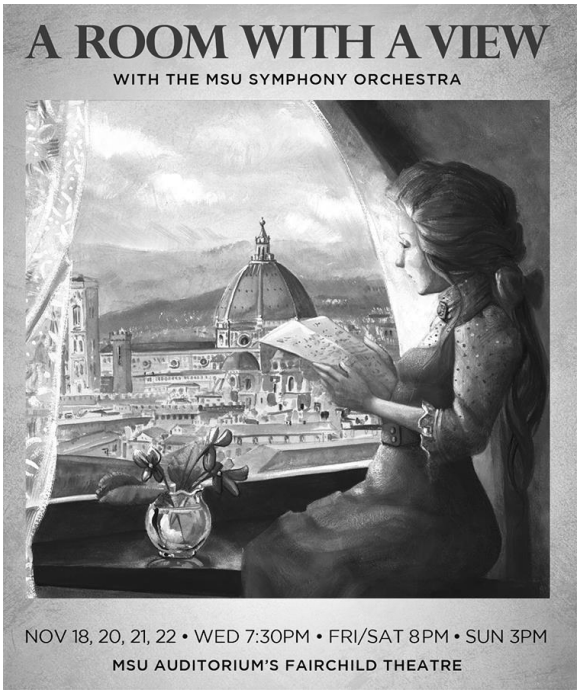
MSU Music

Opera Theatre

PRESENTS:



Music by Robert Nelson
Libretto by Buck Ross

The 2015-2016 MSU Opera Theatre season
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A Room with a View is generously sponsored by
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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | College of Music

A Note from the Director

One of the most exciting developments in the world of opera is the absolute explosion of new American opera. Almost every American company is now commissioning and presenting new works every season. MSU recently had a visit from Darren Woods, director of Forth Worth Opera and one of the most prolific commissioners of new opera. In his sessions with our students, he stressed that he now wants to hear late 20th/21st century opera arias as part of their audition packages.

In addition to professional companies, universities are a fertile proving ground for new works. In that spirit, we are proud to present *A Room with a View* by Robert Nelson (composer) and Buck Ross (librettist). This enchanting 1993 adaptation of the classic novel by E.M. Forster is a perfect vehicle to present our young singers, both as actors and vocalists. The lush melodies require Puccini-scaled voices, and the naturalistic style of acting is a new style for their repertoire.

Forster's novels were clear-eyed but affectionate examinations of the changes in society in Edwardian England before the Great War. The characters in *A Room with a View* are both free thinkers (the Emersons) and rules-bound Victorians (the Honeychurches). Somehow, the magic of Tuscany loosens the corsets of the Victorians as they move into a new era of freedom to feel … and to love … as they will. As expatriates traveling in Tuscany, Lucy and Charlotte are somewhat strangers in a strange land. Charlotte is terrified of doing the wrong thing, and Lucy seeks to unleash the passion that is within, as evidenced by her passionate piano playing.

Forster was homosexual, closeted publicly but open to his friends. His circle included composer Benjamin Britten and the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Christopher Isherwood. There is often a theme of isolation in his novels, and there are definitely homosexual characters (whether acknowledged or not) in all of his novels. In *A Room with a View*, Mr. Beebe intimates that Cecil Vyse is just like him, the sort of man destined to be a bachelor. Forster's posthumously published novel *Maurice* was

actually written 60 years previous, but its coming of age story of a young homosexual man was not considered publishable until after his death.

The filmmaking team of Merchant and Ivory made several extremely successful adaptations of Forster novels, including *Howard's End*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Maurice* and *A Passage to India*. These films underscored Forster's themes of a world beginning to lose its order. After the Great War, Forster declared that he was so confused by the new world that he couldn't comment on it. Although he was a prolific essayist for the rest of his life, he never wrote another novel after 1924.

There was a period in American opera where musical and vocal beauty was not considered as an important part of any new production. Those of us in the industry are certainly happy to recognize that over the past 25 years that tide has turned. A singer's instrument is capable of eliciting not only an emotional but a visceral response in an audience member. Certainly the combination of the music of Robert Nelson and the words of E.M. Forster as interpreted by Buck Ross evoke that in our audiences.

Enjoy!

Mark your calendars for

MSU Opera Theatre's

Spring Production celebrating the 10th anniversary of the MSU/China Project

The Savage Land *by Jin Xiang*

and

Bernstein Sings America

(A Celebration of the Theatre Music of Leonard Bernstein)

March 23-27, 2016

Cast of Characters
(In order of appearance)

Charlotte Bartlett, an old maid, cousin of Lucy	Rachel Shaughnessy* Jenna Buck**
Lucy Honeychurch, a middle class English girl	Katie Bethel* Jenna Washburn**
Mr. Emerson, an elderly free thinker	Zaikuan Song* Aaron Petrovich**
George Emerson, his free thinking son	Nicholas Kreider* Andrew Breuninger**
Mr. Beebe, an English reverend traveling in Italy	Kyle White* Tyler Martin**
Miss Eleanor Lavish, an expatriate writer of lurid novels	Alina Tamborini* Mary Garner**
Miss Alan #1, an elderly traveler	Lindsay Snyder* Sarah Brzyski**
Miss Alan #2, her sister	Caite Lenahan* Angela Lee**
Mr. Eager, the expatriate English curate in Firenze	Jon Oakley* Jonathan Walker VanKuren**
An Italian Carriage Driver	Quentin Fettig
An Italian Woman	Emma Parravano
Mrs. Honeychurch, Lucy's mother	Kate DeYoung* Keileigh Koch**
Freddy Honeychurch, Lucy's teenage brother	David Anderson* Keane Garcelon**
Cecil Vyse, Lucy's fiancé	Steven Martin* Isaac Frishman**
An English Driver	Matt Riutta
Italian vendors, passers-by:	Charlotte Darr, Melissa Houghton Christine Roberts, Veronica Polischuk, David Anderson, Quentin Fettig, Keane Garcelon, Tyler Martin, Kyle White

Conductor	Stage Director
Marcello Cormio* **	**Melanie Helton**

**Friday, November 22 & Sunday, November 24;*
***Wednesday, November 20 & Saturday, November 23*
****Guest Artist*

Staff for MSU Opera Theatre

Music Director	Marcello Cormio*
Producer	Melanie Helton
Scenic Design	Lex Van Blommestein
Set Construction	Mark R. Willoughby
Lighting Design	Brent Wrobel*
Costume Design	Emma Rossi*
Hair and Makeup Design	Martha Ruskai*
Production Stage Managers	Emma Gregory, Sarah Reed
Technical Director	Mark Willoughby
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Rehearsal Accompanists	Hyegi Seo, Yoomin Jung

**Guest artist*

Grateful Acknowledgments

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A Room with a View: The Story

Act One: *Florence, Italy, Spring 1907*

Act One, Scene One: *The Bertolini*

During dinner, Lucy Honeychurch, a young Englishwoman, and Charlotte Bartlett, her cousin and chaperone, meet the other English guests at their pension, the Bertolini. They include a lady romance novelist, Miss Lavish, and the free thinking Mr. Emerson and his taciturn son, George. Rounding out the guest list is Mr. Beebe, Lucy's pastor in England, and elderly spinster sisters, the Miss Alans. Mr. Emerson and his son offer to exchange rooms with Lucy and Charlotte so that the women can have a view. The offer is reluctantly but gratefully accepted.

Act One, Scene Two: *In Santa Croce without a Baedeker*

Out on the streets, Miss Lavish introduces the hesitant Lucy to the sights and smells of Italy. Left to wander the church of Santa Croce by herself, Lucy encounters the Emersons. Mr. Emerson encourages Lucy to try to understand and help George out of his depression. Lucy is confused.

Act One, Scene Three: *The River*

In a piazza by the river Arno, Lucy witnesses a traumatic murder and George comes to her rescue. Something has snapped in George's mind and he puzzles over its meaning. Lucy is intrigued but unsure of her feelings.

Act One, Scene Four: *Possibilities of a Pleasant Outing*

The next morning on the same piazza, Miss Lavish records details of Lucy's previous day as background for her new novel. Lucy and Charlotte are invited for a drive in the hills the next day by Mr. Eager, the English chaplain in Florence. They accept. Charlotte delivers a letter to Lucy informing them that friends of theirs, the Vyses, are in Rome. They discuss the possibility of going to Rome instead of the drive.

Act One, Scene Five: *The Reverend Arthur Beebe, The Reverend Cuthbert Eager, Mr. Emerson, Mr. George Emerson, Miss Eleanor Lavish, Miss Charlotte Bartlett, and Miss Lucy Honeychurch Drive Out in Carriages to See a View:*

Italians Drive Them.

On a carriage ride in the hills of Fiesole, Mr. Eager and Miss Lavish compete in their knowledge of Italy. Their Italian driver stops to pick up a rather amorous woman whom he claims is his sister. The disbelieving Mr. Eager huffily insists that she get out of the carriage. Mr. Emerson protests but Mr. Eager prevails. The driver shows his displeasure by whipping the horses faster and faster.

When they arrive the group splits up and, while Charlotte and Miss Lavish gossip, Lucy finds herself once again on her own. She inquires of the driver where the other people are and he leads her to a field of violets where to the dismay of Charlotte, George kisses Lucy.

Act One, Scene Six: *They Return*

In Lucy's room at the pension later that night Lucy and Charlotte argue about George. Lucy is in a muddle. George returns to see Lucy but Charlotte prevents an encounter. She tells Lucy to rest. They leave for Rome in the morning.

Act Two: *Summer and fall of the same year. In and around Windy Corner, Lucy's country home in England.*

Act Two, Scene One: *Medieval*

Back in England, Lucy becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse, a rather priggish man. Lucy's mother is pleased but her brother is indifferent. Mr. Beebe brings extraordinary news. The Emersons have leased a house nearby. Lucy tries to control her feelings. Cecil kisses her for the first time with less than passionate results.

Act Two, Scene Two: *The Bathe*

Lucy's brother Freddy invites George Emerson and Mr. Beebe to come swimming with him in a nearby pond. While at the pond, they accidentally encounter Mrs. Honeychurch, Cecil, and Lucy who are chagrined. It is Lucy's first sight of George since Italy and she is confused.

Act Two, Scene Three: *The Disaster Within*

On a lazy afternoon on the garden terrace of Windy Corner, George has come to play tennis with Freddy and Charlotte has also come for a visit. Cecil reads aloud a passage from a trashy novel he has gotten from the library. It turns out to be Miss Lavish's novel and its hero and heroine are suspiciously like George and Lucy. George kisses Lucy again and she runs into the house.

Act Two, Scene Four: *Lying to George*

Inside, Lucy is furious with George and with Charlotte for revealing so many intimate details to Miss Lavish. She orders George out of her life. George resists and Charlotte privately prays for Lucy to follow her heart. Lucy insists that George leave but she also now knows that she cannot marry Cecil either.

Act Two, Scene Five: *Lying to Cecil*

That night Lucy breaks off her engagement to Cecil who surprisingly rises to the occasion. Lucy is left alone.

Act Two, Scene Six: *Lying to Mr. Beebe, Mrs. Honeychurch, and Freddy*

Mr. Beebe has received a letter from the Miss Alans. They are traveling to Greece. Lucy hopes that her mother will let her go to Greece to escape her troubles. Charlotte enlists Mr. Beebe's help to encourage Lucy's mother to let her go. Mrs. Honeychurch reluctantly consents. A parlor song sets a melancholy mood.

Act Two, Scene Seven: *Lying to Mr. Emerson*

In a carriage, Mrs. Honeychurch objects to Lucy's plan to run away but Lucy is adamant. While waiting to pick up Charlotte from church, Lucy encounters Mr. Emerson in the rectory. He convinces her that her destiny is with George.

Act Two, Scene Eight: *The End of the Middle Ages*

On their honeymoon in Florence, Lucy and George realize that Charlotte helped them after all, and gaze rapturously at the view.

MSU Symphony Orchestra
Kevin Noe, Director of Orchestras

Violin I
Samvel Arakelyan
I-Pei Lin*
Saikat Karmakar
Anna Khalikova
Davit Kosemyan
Ji Eun Lee
Megan Wixom

Violin II
Young Dokko*
Alison Holden
Seakyung Hur
Eun Sol Lee
Yingli Pan
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Viola
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Clarinet
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Ryan Gerhardt

Horn
Andrew Dodson
Sam Gowen

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Trombone
Andrew Allmon
Matthew Nienow

Bass Trombone
Steve Gellerson

Percussion
Liz Karney

Harp
Alisa Hickox

Piano
Bronwen McVeigh

**Section Leader*

Guest Artists

Conductor **Marcello Cormio** recently made "a notable conducting debut" at the 2014 Sarasota Opera Festival, with performances of Il barbiere di Siviglia praised for a "lovely, light touch with the music": "the young Italian drew vital and spirited playing, with the fizzing ensemble exciting yet with a fine balancing of solo voices, chorus and orchestra." His 2014-2015 engagements included Cosí fan tutte at Michigan State University and Le nozze di Figaro at the 2015 Sarasota Opera Festival. In the 2013-14 season, Mr. Cormio has been also seen as music director and conductor of the 2013 Opera Scenes production at the Manhattan School of Music in New York, and as cover and assistant conductor for a new production of Turandot at the Opéra National de Lorraine in Nancy, France.

Mr. Cormio has appeared with orchestras around the United States and Europe, including the San Antonio Symphony, the Orchestra della Società dei Concerti di Bari, the Bacau Symphony, the Orchestra Sinfonica del Conservatorio di Bari, the Bay View Festival, and the collegiate festival orchestra at Georgia All-State. He has also led the different orchestras of the Indiana University School of Music and the University of Kentucky Symphony Orchestra in several performances. He recently had his conducting debut in China, performing at the head of the University of Kentucky Symphony in concert halls in Hangzhou, Tianjin, and at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Beijing.

Mr. Cormio has led productions of Die Zauberflöte at the Bay View Music Festival, and of Gounod's Romèo et Juliette with the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre. He has collaborated with internationally renowned soloists, such as pianists Aldo Ciccolini and soprano Cynthia Lawrence. In recent years, Mr. Cormio has been regularly invited as guest lecturer and conductor for opera workshops at prestigious academic institutions, such as the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music in New York; this summer he was on the faculty of the Opera Studio do Recife master class in Brazil. In 2010 he was first assistant conductor and cover conductor at the Sarasota Opera, where he conducted staging and full dress rehearsals in productions of Cavalleria

Rusticana, Pagliacci, Giovanna d'Arco, and La Cenerentola. Mr. Cormio has served on the music staff of the Indiana University Opera Theatre and of the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre as opera coach, chorus master, and assistant conductor. In 2005 he was conductor and music director of the Contemporary Music Ensemble "Makrokosmos" in Italy.

Mr. Cormio earned a Master of Music in Instrumental Conducting at the Jacob School of Music of Indiana University, studying with Professors David Effron and Arthur Fagen. He has also worked with conductors Leonard Slatkin, Jorge Mester, Herbert Blomstedt, Larry Rachleff, Donato Renzetti, Alexander Mickelthwate, and Carl Topilow. His previous musical studies in Italy had earned him diplomas in Piano, Instrumental Conducting, Composition, as well as a Master's Degree and a PhD in History and Critical Study of the Musical Heritage. In 2006 Mr. Cormio was a "Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar", being the recipient of a prestigious scholarship, which first brought him to the United States.

Martha Ruskai, Wigmaker, Makeup Artist and Designer, began her career working with such legendary singers as Jerome Hines and Dame Joan Sutherland. During her 30-year career she has designed more than 200 productions at over 25 companies. Career highlights include TV ads for Miller Light Beer; styling properties wigs for the motion picture "Sleeping with the Enemy"; building Bryn Terfel's wig for his U.S. debut; and making her NYC design debut in 2009 with *Tartuffe* at The Pearl Theater. She earned a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and an M.F.A. in Theatre Design from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music. Ms. Ruskai served on the faculty at UNCSA for 23 years as well as presenting Master Classes at Indiana University, The Cleveland Institute of Music, UNC-Greensboro, Ohio University & University of Alabama. Ms. Ruskai co-authored Wig Making and Styling; A Complete Guide for Theatre & Film with Allison Lowery, published by Focal Press.

Robert Nelson received his DMA from the University of Southern California where he studied composition with Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens and opera production with Walter Ducloux. He is currently Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Moores School of Music. He has long been interested in theatrical music, both as a composer and coach/conductor. This interest meshes with a life-long interest in the widest range of musical idioms - from the most avant garde contemporary effects to the most current jazz and popular styles. Writing for the theatre has allowed him to explore all these various idioms and employ whichever were most appropriate to the project at hand.

His theatrical experience has included a long involvement as composer for the extraordinary mime troupe in the University of Houston's School of Theatre. His collaborations with director Claude Caux resulted in music that ranged from an acid rock score for an adaptation of Poe's Tell-Tale Heart to a highly expressionist score for a dramatization of Schiller's Darkness to a neoclassic suite composed for an extended Pilobolus-like mime based on the graphics of M.C. Escher. He also served for fifteen seasons as music director and composer for the Houston Shakespeare Festival, during which time he composed songs and incidental music for nearly the entire canon of Shakespeare plays.

Nelson has always loved the voice and has composed numerous choral works and music for solo voice. His interest in both vocal music and theatrical music led him naturally to opera. In addition to A Room With a View, with libretto by Buck Ross, his operatic works include Tickets, Please and The Demon Lover, both one-act chamber operas with libretto by Sidney Berger. Tickets, Please has been staged by, among others, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Milton Keynes in England, Flordia State University, and the University of Houston. His most recent collaboration with Buck Ross is Shadows and Music, a dramatic cycle for soprano, mezzo-soprano, violin, and piano based loosely on the lives of Lillian and Dorothy Gish.

Buck Ross is the director and founder of the Moores Opera Center at the University of Houston where he has staged over 50 productions of operas from the standard repertoire as well as new works including The Ghosts of Versailles and The Dangerous Liaisons. This season he directed Cavallerla Rusticana and Pagliacci for El Paso Opera, Regina for Augsta Opera, and will be directing Barber of Seville for Nevada Opera. He has staged productions for the Houston Grand Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Kentucky Opera, the Houston Symphony, San Antonio Opera, Sarasota, Sacramento, and Utah Opera among others. For many years he was Director of Dramatic Studies for the Houston Opera Studio and co-director of the apprentice program of the Des Moines Metro Opera. He was librettist for an opera adaptation of E.M. Forster's A Room With A View with music by Robert Nelson that will be released as a CD on the Albany label this year. He is the author of english singing versions of several operas including Don Pasquale, La Finta Glardiniera, and Orpheus In The Underworld which is being performed by the Des Moines Metro Opera this summer. He holds degrees in music and theatre from Bucknell University and an MFA in stage direction from the University of Minnesota where he was assistant to H. Wesley Balk.

MSU Opera Society Donors
2015 – 2016 Season

MSU Opera Society is the community support organization of the MSU Opera Theatre. We are grateful to our members for their generous contributions.

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