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MSU Opera brings *The Grapes of Wrath* to the stage. Season opener presents a reimagined, powerful American masterpiece.

Contact: Michael Sundermann, MSU College of Music Communications, 517-353-2043, sunderm7@msu.edu

EAST LANSING, Mich. – The MSU College of Music presents a uniquely staged production of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the sweeping American opera based on John Steinbeck’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, with music by Ricky Ian Gordon and libretto by Michael Korie. First premiered in 2006, the work continues to move audiences with its emotional depth and sweeping musical narrative. Performances run **November 19, 21–23 in Fairchild Theatre** as part of the Worthington Family Foundation Opera Theatre Season.

This powerful work follows the Joad family as they journey westward from Oklahoma, driven by the Dust Bowl in search of a better life. Gordon’s lyrical score captures the emotional landscape of struggle, hope, and resilience, while Korie’s text brings Steinbeck’s characters to life with both intimacy and grandeur.

Performances are Wednesday, November 19, Friday and Saturday, November 21–22, at 7:00 p.m., and Sunday, November 23, at 3:00 p.m. This fully staged and costumed production features set design by DJ Selmeyer, lighting by Brent Wrobel, with theatrical visuals and rear projections that immerse audiences in the atmosphere of Steinbeck’s story.

Directed by Melanie Helton, professor of voice and director of MSU Opera Theatre, the production features the MSU Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Octavio Más-Arocas, associate professor of music, and director of orchestras at MSU.

“This is an extraordinary opportunity for our students and audiences,” said Melanie Helton, MSU professor of voice and director of opera theatre. “Ricky and I have been friends and colleagues for more than forty years, so collaborating on this production is especially meaningful. Our cast and creative team are thrilled to bring this powerful story to life with music that captures both the heartbreak and the hope at the heart of Steinbeck’s novel.”

Composer Ricky Ian Gordon, acclaimed for his emotionally rich vocal writing and celebrated works such as *Intimate Apparel* and *The House Without a Christmas Tree*, will be guest artist in residence during the production. Gordon will also join Helton for preview lectures held 45 minutes before each performance, offering audience members insight into the opera’s creation and themes. Revised in 2018, *The Grapes of Wrath*—hailed as an “American masterpiece” for its vivid portrayal of the human spirit—makes its university premiere (sung in English with English surtitles).

The Grapes of Wrath performances are generously sponsored by James and Susan Bonfiglio, the Eleanor H. and Harold E. Leichenko Opera Endowment established by Lauren Julius Harris, Friends of Jay D. Meetz, and the Richard and Joan Witter Endowment for MSU Opera Theatre. The entire Opera Theatre Season is underwritten by the Worthington Family Foundation.

Tickets for *The Grapes of Wrath* at the Fairchild Theatre are available through the MSU Music box office at music.msu.edu/events or by phone at 517-353-5340. Reserved seating tickets are \$24 for adults, \$22 for seniors (age 60 and older) and \$14 for students. Information about other concerts, recitals and performances in the 2025-2026 MSU Music Season can be found online.

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