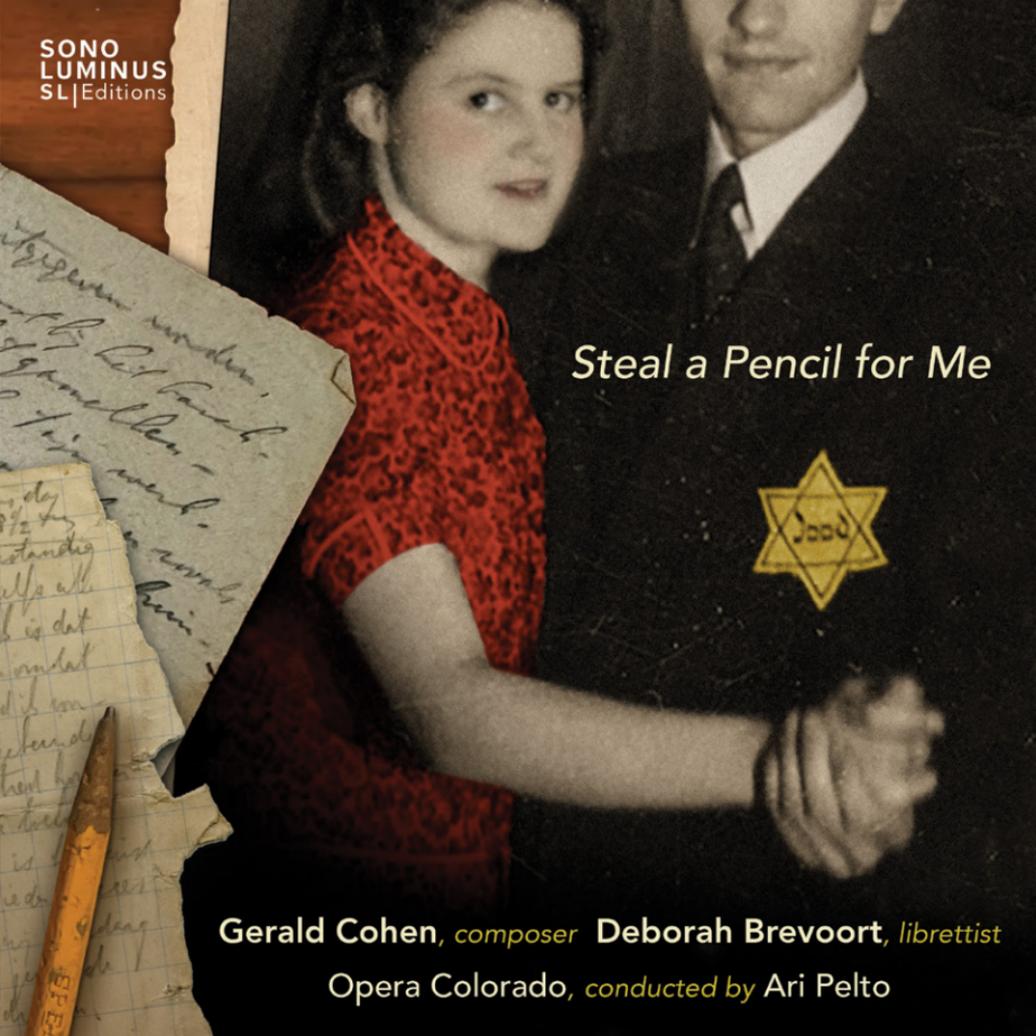


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*Steal a Pencil for Me*

**Gerald Cohen**, *composer* **Deborah Brevoort**, *librettist*  
**Opera Colorado**, *conducted by Ari Pelto*

# Steal a Pencil for Me

Opera in two acts

Music by **Gerald Cohen** Libretto by **Deborah Brevoort**

Based on the book of the same title by **Jaap Polak** and **Ina Soep Polak**

**Jaap Polak** ..... Gideon Dabi  
**Ina Soep** ..... Inna Dukach  
**Manja Polak** ..... Adriana Zabala  
**Lisette** ..... Kira Dills-Desurra  
**Rudi Acohen** ..... Daniel McGrew  
**Abraham Soep** .. Andrew Garland  
**Commandant** .... Ricardo Rivera  
**Nazi Guard 1** .... Thomas Lynch  
**Nazi Guard 2** .... Phillip Lopez

Opera Colorado · **Ari Pelto**, conductor

## ORCHESTRA

**Byron Hitchcock** ... *Violin/Concertmaster*  
**Takanori Sugishita** . *Violin*  
**Matthew Dane** .... *Viola*  
**Michael Brook**.... *Viola*  
**Andrew Klob**..... *Cello*  
**David Crowe**..... *Bass*  
**Susan Townsend**... *Flute/Piccolo*

## CHORUS

**Allen Adair**  
**Deborah Anderson**  
**Daniela Guzmán Équiez**  
**Jennifer Harpel**  
**Justin Kerr**  
**Bella Mallow**  
**Zeky Nadji**  
**Madison Williams**  
**Joshua Zabatta**  
**Sahar Nouri**, Chorusmaster

**Sarah Bierhaus** .... *Oboe/English Horn*  
**Michelle Orman** ... *Clarinet*  
**Heidi Mendenhall**... *Bass Clarinet*  
**Charles Hanson**... *Bassoon*  
**Michael Yopp**..... *French Horn*  
**Peter Cooper**..... *Timpani/Percussion*  
**Sahar Nouri** ..... *Piano*

## CD1: Act 1

- 1 Scene 1: A party in Amsterdam ..... 8:05
- 2 Scene 1: A party in Amsterdam (cont'd) ..... 9:33
- 3 Scene 2: Journey to Westerbork ..... 4:26
- 4 Scene 3: Arrival in Westerbork/Tuesday Transport .... 5:07
- 5 Scene 4: Jaap swings into action. .... 1:50
- 6 Scene 5: Ina talks to Rudi ..... 6:34
- 7 Scene 6: Behind the barracks. .... 6:35
- 8 Scene 7: A pencil is stolen ..... 5:43
- 9 Scene 8: Messenger of love ..... 5:22
- 10 Scene 8: Messenger of love (cont'd) ..... 7:14
- 11 Scene 9: Gossip..... 6:54

## CD2: Act 2

- 1 Scene 1: Roll Call in Bergen-Belsen ..... 8:03
- 2 Scene 2: The things I want to tell you ..... 6:34
- 3 Scene 2: The things I want to tell you (cont'd) ..... 5:01
- 4 Scene 3: Steal a pencil for me ..... 7:25
- 5 Scene 4: Darkness descends ..... 3:27
- 6 Scene 5: I can't remember your face ..... 4:53
- 7 Scene 6: Passover/Roll Call contemplation..... 8:19
- 8 Scene 7: Final transport..... 2:52
- 9 Scene 8: Liberation..... 7:18
- 10 Scene 9: A reunion in Amsterdam..... 5:54
- 11 Scene 9: A reunion in Amsterdam (cont'd)..... 9:22



# Creating *Steal a Pencil for Me*

## From Composer Gerald Cohen:

It is a unique responsibility to bring the story of real people and real events to the opera stage. *Steal a Pencil for Me* is a tale of bearing witness to the lives of those impacted by the Holocaust, told through the experiences and love story of a couple that I had the honor to know for many years.

I have been listening to the stories of Holocaust survivors my entire life, first from my parents who both escaped from Europe in the 1930s. My mother lived as a young teen through the rise of the Nazis and Kristallnacht in Germany. My father's mother and many other relatives and friends did not escape and were killed by the Nazis in Poland. Survivors in my community and my synagogue shared their personal, intimate, and tragic experiences. These were people that I knew well, ordinary people living through extraordinary and terrifying times, whose lives had been held in the grip of the Nazis. I knew that such a narrative could be the basis of an opera, one that I longed to tell; I hoped that my music, once connected with the right words and dramatic pacing, could bring the rawness and complexities of such an emotional story to the stage.

In 1987, I became Cantor at Shaarei Tikvah in Westchester, NY. Like the community of my childhood, the congregation also had quite a few members that were survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. These included a very dynamic couple, Jaap and Ina Polak, who were originally from Amsterdam. I gradually became more aware of their story as Jaap spoke to us about the Holocaust, and their personal experiences in the concentration camps. He always emphasized the necessity of learning from the example of the Holocaust so as to guard against all forms of discrimination and racism—to use those lessons to speak out vigorously against these and other injustices.

In the early days of raising their family, Jaap and Ina had not spoken much to their three children about their painful concentration camp experiences. In the 1970s their daughter

Margrit found in their attic the letters that Jaap and Ina had secretly passed to each other while imprisoned in the Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, and began translating them. After this, the Polaks began the process of relating their experiences, so much so that Jaap became a devoted Holocaust educator, speaking to groups, especially of schoolchildren, all around the U.S. In 2000 they published the letters from the camps, in a book entitled *Steal a Pencil for Me*. Director Michele Ohayon was inspired by the letters and their story to create a documentary film of the same title, which was released in 2007.



Ina and Jaap, 1995

In reading the book and seeing the documentary, I realized that the story of my friends Jaap and Ina was more emotionally fraught than I had before known. Jaap fell in love with Ina at first sight when they met at a friend's birthday party before their internment—but Jaap, 30 years old, was already married. He and his wife Manja had a difficult marriage and were planning to eventually divorce, but were staying together during the war to protect each other's lives. Meanwhile, Ina, 20 years old, was deeply in love with her boyfriend Rudi—but Rudi had been seized in a raid by the Nazis, and Ina had no idea of his fate. Now, as I became more familiar with the story of Jaap and Ina, I realized that a perfect operatic idea had been right under my nose for more than 20 years. Ina and Jaap's story was about intimate romantic complications between good people who were very clearly human, brave in their own way, just trying to survive. Their personal narrative was set against the larger historical tragedy of the Holocaust, and so was a way of dramatizing that overwhelming historical period, while inspiring a strong connection to the main characters.

I called up Ina and Jaap to tell them I was interested in writing an opera about them. Their first reaction was great astonishment; then Jaap, who was 97 at the time, told me, "Well, write it quickly!"—he wanted to be sure to have a chance for them to see the opera!

My friend and mentor, the dramaturg Cori Ellison, suggested that playwright Deborah Brevoort would be an excellent collaborator for this project. Deborah and I were both recent

alumni of the Composer-Librettist Development Project of American Lyric Theater. Deborah had many other projects underway, but once she read the letters, she felt that she must be part of telling this story as well.

Then began one of the extraordinary parts of creating the opera. Normally in writing an opera, one does not get a chance to have direct contact with its principal characters (especially, of course, fictional ones!). We, however, had the very special privilege of spending many hours speaking with Jaap and Ina, getting much rich detail about their lives, the world in which they grew up in Amsterdam before the war, and their experience of deprivation, loss, love, and hope while in the concentration camps. They spoke very openly and honestly about the emotional complications of their story. It was clear that Ina, 70 years later, still deeply felt the loss of her boyfriend Rudi—who had indeed been killed almost as soon as he was taken prisoner, though Ina did not know this until the end of the war. Jaap always had great affection for his first wife Manja, who also survived the war, and he and Ina kept in touch with her for the rest of Manja’s life. They told us about the details of life in Westerbork, where even in their imprisonment there was still a sham normalcy to life, but from where every Tuesday a group of prisoners were selected to be sent away “to the East” never to be heard of again; and about their life in Bergen-Belsen, where prisoners were made to stand each day for hours of endless and senseless roll calls, and where many died of disease and from the effects of the hard labor that they were forced to perform.

Our plan was to present the complete opera in a semi-staged concert version at our synagogue in the Spring of 2013, to celebrate Jaap’s 100th and Ina’s 90th birthdays. And since I only finally began the composition of the music in early 2012, I did indeed need to “write it quickly.” It was very inspiring, while writing the opera, to have regular contact with the “real” characters of the opera. Ina had, in spite of her 90 years, become a quite steady user of the internet, and I would quite often send her email questions about historical or personal details, which she quickly answered.

The semi-staged workshops were performed in April 2013 at Shaarei Tikvah and at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan. Cori Ellison again was key in this, acting as casting director and finding a marvelous and dedicated cast, and in Ari Pelto, a superb conductor. And once again, the presence of the Polaks at this time transformed the process into something quite extraordinary. The cast met them early in the rehearsals; Jaap and Ina told them many stories and totally charmed everyone (and Jaap flirted with the singers playing his two wives). At the performances, they sat in the front row. There was a special electricity in the

room and emotions were heightened as they experienced their story portrayed on stage, while the performers felt the power of Jaap and Ina watching them. I saw Jaap weeping, not surprisingly, at a scene showing his parents being sent on a train to Auschwitz—a scene that he had often described in his talks.

Ari Pelto, the conductor of the 2013 workshops, found the opera compelling, and soon after he became Music Director of Opera Colorado the company, with Greg Carpenter as General and Artistic Director, decided to present the premiere production. I had so wanted Jaap and Ina to see the opera in its fully produced form, but unfortunately, they were no longer alive. Ina, who was a radiant, young 90-year old at our 2013 performance, developed cancer the next year and died in 2014; Jaap died at age 102 in 2015. I am so grateful that they were able to experience the workshop performances.

The Opera Colorado production in January 2018 was everything that Deborah and I could have dreamed for in a premiere production of the opera, with the brilliant musical and directorial leadership of Ari Pelto and Omer Ben Seadia, and moving portrayal of the lead roles (Jaap, Ina, and Manja) by Gideon Dabi, Inna Dukach, and Adriana Zabala. Opera Colorado’s decision to produce the opera in the 400-seat Wolf Theatre at the Mizel Arts and Culture Center meant that this staging was a very intimate and immediate experience for the audience. Jaap and Ina’s daughter Margrit, who had first brought the letters to light, was there, and spoke at several panel discussions we had in conjunction with the performances. Her presence gave the audiences a chance to deepen their connection to her parents’ story.

This album reunited many of the forces of the fully staged production, featuring many of the same cast, chorus and orchestra members, again with Maestro Ari Pelto as conductor. Opera Colorado graciously agreed to take the lead in providing logistical and personnel support. The ensemble gathered in Denver for a week of rehearsals and three intense days of recording in June 2022, with the recording process masterfully led by Marlan Barry. The process of once again working together to tell this story, now for the medium of an audio recording, was a moving experience for all involved.

Many Holocaust survivors have felt an urgent need to share their experiences publicly—to bear witness, to make sure that their stories are passed on, and in the hope that such a tragedy could not happen again. Deborah and I, and so many others, had the great privilege of knowing Jaap, Ina, and other survivors of the Holocaust, but the generation of

survivors is growing old, and soon it will be up to subsequent generations to continue to share and remember their stories. We hope that our opera *Steal a Pencil for Me*, with its tale of everyday survival in the course of the horror of war and imprisonment, and its special origins from a deep personal connection with its main characters, will help to continue to pass on the lessons of that time, the humanity of those who suffered through it, and the memory of those who lost their lives.

## From Librettist Deborah Brevoort:

The first thing that struck me about the letters that Jaap and Ina passed back and forth during their internment by the Nazis was how ordinary they were. There were occasional bursts of poetic sentiment, to be sure—they were love letters after all—but for the most part, their missives were quotidian, concerned with everyday matters and the need to simply keep up their spirits in order to survive. It was this ordinariness that was most moving and powerful for me.

There is a tendency in stories like this to turn the characters into larger-than-life heroes and to make them nobler or better than everyone else. But Jaap and Ina were neither heroic nor noble; they were simply human, with flaws and foibles that all of us possess. They were ordinary people caught in an extraordinary situation; lacking any superhuman qualities beyond basic kindness and decency, they were nevertheless able to triumph. This is what makes their story so powerful and meaningful. It tells us that we, too—ordinary people all—possess the ability to survive and thrive when the tides of history turn against us.

*Steal a Pencil for Me* is an uplifting story about many things, most notably the enduring power of love and the imagination to help people survive horrors like the Holocaust. One of the things that stood out to me in this beautiful tale was how important stories were to Ina and Jaap's survival. Every day they would meet behind the barracks to imagine what their future life could be. Those imaginings formed a story that sustained them. It was a simple story—of ordinary breakfasts and butter for the bread—but it nevertheless held great power and ultimately enabled them to survive. *Steal a Pencil for Me* shows us what is essential: love, stories with meaning, and the necessity of the imagination, which, once it has envisioned something, then has the power to make that vision real.

## From Margrit Polak, daughter of Jaap and Ina:

My childhood was filled with hints about the Holocaust, but never any facts or information. Too delicate a subject for my mother; my father was too busy, and also protecting her. My parents cried when we went to see *The Garden of the Finzi Continis* together, with me sitting in the middle—I can't remember having seen them cry before. Proof that art can open up doors. I must have been about 15 or 16 when I started asking questions. Not long thereafter, my father showed me a letter he had found, one written to my mother while they were in the camps. Love!!! They fell in love during the horror! There must be more, I said. I honestly don't remember if it was me alone or us together, but in the attic, which always scared me, the place where I had childhood dreams about Nazis coming to get me...there were the letters, 130 letters in a big plastic bag! It took me several years to translate them, as my Dutch was poor. I'd go to my dad's office in New York City on 42nd Street as often as I could and I'd bring one letter. He'd do a loose verbal translation for me which I scribbled, and I went home and used my Dutch dictionary to finesse the translations. I delicately approached my mother with some questions, when I felt she could handle it, and she started sharing stories for the first time with me. I presented the bound letters to my parents on their 40th wedding anniversary. Their friends encouraged them to get the letters published. I helped. Then—how could we have ever imagined!—it was made into a fantastic documentary by Michele Ohayon, and this wonderful opera by Gerald Cohen. My parents got to read the book, fill in the blanks, facilitate it being published in Dutch, attend the famous SXSW film festival in Austin for its premiere, and see the first semi-staged workshops of the opera. I watched my mother emerge from her shell of silence and own her experience with regal grace, and my father grabbed EVERY opportunity well into his 90s to speak about his experiences, and the dangers of bias and discrimination.



Ina and Jaap's wedding day, 1946

# Synopsis

For complete opera libretto, and further information and images, go to [tinyurl.com/StealAPencilCohen](http://tinyurl.com/StealAPencilCohen)

## Act One

### **June 1943 – Amsterdam**

☐ The Nazis have occupied Holland for over three years. Although restrictions for Jews continue to mount, private gatherings are still tolerated. The opera opens at Lisette’s birthday party in Amsterdam. Jaap laments his unhappy marriage with his wife Manja, who brazenly flirts with other men. He and Manja are planning to divorce, but have decided to delay their divorce until after the war. Ina and her boyfriend Rudi, deeply in love, arrive with Ina’s parents. ☐ Jaap is instantly smitten when he sees Ina, saying to himself, “There’s the girl I should have married.” The party is brutally interrupted when the Nazis arrive and seize several people, including Rudi.

### **September 1943 – Arrival at Westerbork Transit Camp**

☐ Jaap, Manja, his parents, and Lisette are deported from Amsterdam to Westerbork, taking a grim train ride to arrive at the camp. ☐ As everyone arrives, they are submitted to “Administration” and assigned to a barrack. Westerbork is a transit camp; the new inmates learn of the dreaded “Tuesday Transports” where every week many are sent on trains to unknown futures—what the Nazis call “resettlement to the east.” Ina enters with her parents. ☐ Jaap arranges for Manja and himself to be in the same barrack as Ina and her family.

☐ Frightened and alone, Ina has an imaginary conversation with Rudi, who tells her to do everything she can to survive so that they can be reunited in the future. ☐ Jaap approaches Ina, who agrees to take a walk with him. He tells her that one way to survive the present horror is to tell each other everything, even the smallest details of everyday life, in order to

have some sense of normalcy and hope amidst the brutality of their lives in the camp. She is skeptical of him at first, but eventually is won over by his enthusiasm, and agrees to his suggestion.

☐ The Commandant enters and announces that it is time for Tuesday Transport; he reads a list of names. Jaap’s parents are on the list; Jaap escorts his parents to the train for transport where he gives his own shoes to his father, which will be more comfortable for the hard labor in Poland. Once everyone has boarded, the Commandant checks off the names and discards his pencil; Jaap picks up the pencil and pockets it. ☐ Jaap writes a love note to Ina and gives the letter to Lisette to deliver to Ina. ☐ Ina writes back, with Lisette again as messenger; Lisette grows curious and reads the letters.

### **February 1944 – Deportation from Westerbork**

☐ Lisette, excited, gossips about the budding romance between Jaap and Ina. As word spreads, it ultimately reaches Manja, who feels humiliated that everyone knows of her husband’s disaffection. The next Tuesday Transport comes; Jaap and Manja are ordered to leave for Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Ina despairs.

## Act Two

### **May 1944 – Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp**

☐ Jaap and Manja have been in the camp for three months. The curtain rises on Roll Call, a daily process that takes hours. The Nazis count everyone obsessively. At the end of the scene Ina enters. She and her family have also been sent to Bergen-Belsen.

☐ Jaap and Ina meet behind the barracks. They talk about their dreams for the future and especially of their dreams of an “ordinary breakfast”: simple things, like eating at a table, sitting in a chair and buying a loaf of bread. Manja and Abraham Soep (Ina’s father) enter, finding Jaap and Ina behind the barracks. ☐ Manja and Soep insist that Jaap and Ina stop seeing each other. Jaap and Ina agree to carry on their relationship only by writing letters.

☐ But Jaap, without a pencil, again asks Lisette to be his messenger—to tell Ina, who works

in the Commandant's office, to "Steal a pencil for me." Lisette delivers the message to Ina. Ina writes a letter to Jaap, but the Commandant catches her and confiscates the pencil and paper. He angrily sends her to the other side of the camp on an errand where she overhears the Nazis talking about Jews being killed at Auschwitz. Ina has another imaginary conversation with Rudi, realizing that he may not have survived. She asks him if he is still alive but he doesn't answer.

### **March-April 1945 – Passover; Liberation**

Months have passed. Jaap and Ina cannot write letters because they have no pencils. On Passover, the Jews are called once again for Roll Call; to endure the hours of endless counting, they allow their thoughts to run free, inspired by Jaap's telling the Passover story of liberation. Ina sneaks off to the Commandant's office to steal a pencil for Jaap. When she returns with the pencil, the Nazis suddenly receive orders to vacate the camp. Jaap and Manja are put on a train heading east; Ina, on a train headed west. Jaap writes a final letter to Ina, but it isn't delivered. As Jaap and Ina travel on trains going in opposite directions, people are dying from typhus fever. Liberation finally comes for both Ina's and Jaap's groups, but when it does, Jaap succumbs to the fever and collapses with Manja by his side. The survivors bury the dead.

### **June 1945 – Amsterdam, after the war**

Those who survived the war wait for news of missing loved ones; Ina has been searching every day for Jaap. Manja finally arrives and reunites Ina with Jaap, who is recovering from typhus fever. Before they can begin their new life together, they both say goodbye to their pasts; Ina emotionally releases Rudi, who died two years before in Auschwitz, and Manja grants Jaap a divorce. Jaap and Ina can now join their lives together; to celebrate, they sit down to their long-imagined ordinary breakfast.





## GERALD COHEN | Composer

Composer Gerald Cohen has been praised for his “linguistic fluidity and melodic gift,” creating music that “reveals a very personal modernism that...offers great emotional rewards” (Gramophone Magazine). His deeply affecting compositions have been recognized with numerous awards and critical acclaim. The music on his 2014 album *Sea of Reeds* (Navona) “is filled with vibrant melody, rhythmic clarity, drive and compositional construction...a sheer delight to hear” (GappleGate Music Review).

Cohen’s opera, *Steal a Pencil for Me*, based on a true concentration camp love story, had its world premiere production by Opera Colorado in January 2018; his earlier opera *Sarah and Hagar*, based on the story from the book of Genesis, received a concert performance in 2005. Cohen is a noted synagogue cantor and baritone; his experience as a singer informs his dramatic, lyrical compositions. Cohen’s “shimmering setting” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) of Psalm 23 has received thousands of performances from Carnegie Hall to synagogues and churches around the world. Among his recent chamber music works are *Playing for our Lives* and *Voyagers*; these compositions, composed for the Cassatt String Quartet, are the centerpieces of the album *Voyagers* (innova Recordings, 2023), which contains “vivid, creative works in superb readings” (American Record Guide).

Recognition of Cohen’s body of work includes commissioning grants from Meet the Composer, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, American Composers Forum, residencies including those at Copland House, The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and American Lyric Theater, as well as the Hallel V’Zimrah Award from the Zamir Choral Foundation.

Cohen holds music composition degrees from Yale and Columbia Universities. He is cantor at Shaarei Tikvah, Scarsdale, NY, and is on the faculties of The Jewish Theological Seminary and Hebrew Union College.

[www.geraldcohenmusic.com](http://www.geraldcohenmusic.com)



## DEBORAH BREVOORT | Librettist

Deborah Brevoort writes plays, musicals and operas. In 2023, she was awarded the Campbell Opera Librettist Prize from Opera America and served as the Librettist Mentor for Washington National Opera’s American Opera Initiative at the Kennedy Center. Deborah is best known for her plays *The Women of Lockerbie*, which has been produced internationally many times, and *My Lord, What a Night*, about Marian Anderson and Albert Einstein, which was produced at the historic Ford’s Theatre in Washington DC.

A three-time winner of the Frontiers Festival at Ft. Worth Opera, she has written 10 opera librettos which were commissioned and produced by leading companies in the U.S. such as Glimmerglass, Cincinnati Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, On-Site Opera, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Opera Colorado, American Lyric Theater, The Decameron Opera Coalition, and Fargo Moorhead and Ft. Worth Operas. Her operatic works include: *Steal a Pencil for Me*, with Gerald Cohen; *The Knock*, with Aleksandra Vrebalov (made into a film, available on YouTube); *Murasaki’s Moon* with Michi Wiancko; *Embedded* and *Albert Nobbs* with Patrick Soluri; *Dinner 4 3* with Michael Ching; *Quamino’s Map* with Errolyn Wallen; and new adaptations of Strauss’s *Die Fledermaus* (The Polar Bat) and Mozart’s *The Impresario* for the Anchorage Opera. She teaches in the NYU Graduate Musical Theatre Writing program and is a mentor to the NBO Musical Theatre Initiative in Nairobi, Kenya.

In 2024 she was named a Fulbright Specialist in theater, musical theater and opera by the U.S. State Department.

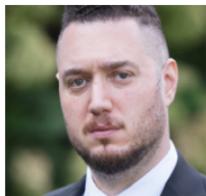
[www.deborahbrevoort.com](http://www.deborahbrevoort.com)



**Ari Pelto** studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem and at Indiana University. At the age of 24 he was appointed Assistant Conductor at the Spoleto Festival, followed by his appointment to the Sarasota Symphony, then known as Florida West Coast Symphony, as Associate Conductor. He has conducted some of America's leading symphonic orchestras, among them Detroit Symphony, San Diego Symphony, St Louis Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Virginia Symphony, as well as opera orchestras in repertoire that includes Bartok, Boccherini, Britten, Debussy, Gluck, Korngold, Laitman, Gershwin, Haydn, Kodaly, Mozart, Mahler, Prokofiev, Puccini, Respighi, Schoenberg, Tchaikovsky, Verdi and Wagner.

Appointed Music Director at Opera Colorado in 2015, Ari Pelto has conducted acclaimed performances of *La Traviata*, *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Aida*, *La Boheme*, *Falstaff*, *La Fanciulla del West*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *I Pagliacci*, *Otello*, *Carmen*, *Rigoletto* and *Die Tote Stadt* among others for the company to date, and contemporary titles include *The Shining*; the world-premiere of Lori Laitman's long-awaited work, *The Scarlet Letter* (a recording of which was released on the Naxos label); and the world premiere of Gerald Cohen's new opera, *Steal a Pencil for Me*, based on a true love story set in a concentration camp during WWII.

In 2023, Maestro Pelto was appointed Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor at Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera.



Baritone **Gideon Dabi** continues to receive great acclaim delivering "powerfully felt, beautifully performed and articulated" performances across a wide array of genres and styles. His "earnest interpretations" have thrilled audiences throughout the United States, to Israel, Italy, and back again. He has performed with Dallas Opera, Opera Columbus, Sarasota Opera, Jerusalem Opera, the New York Philharmonic, Annapolis Opera, Opera Colorado, Chautauqua Opera, and many others. Gideon was a soloist for the Grammy Award-winning Anthology of Jewish American Composers. He was a featured singer on *Full Frontal* with Samantha Bee, and the feature film *Magnetosphere* with Stephen He and Colin Mochrie.

others. Gideon was a soloist for the Grammy Award-winning Anthology of Jewish American Composers. He was a featured singer on *Full Frontal* with Samantha Bee, and the feature film *Magnetosphere* with Stephen He and Colin Mochrie.



Soprano **Inna Dukach** has been praised as "a fine actress" (Opera News), "stunning" (BBC Music Mag), "exceptionally sensitive" (Musicweb-International.com), with "a spell binding pianissimo (MusicOMH.com)", "considerable power" (Opera News), "appealing emotional vulnerability" (NY Sun) and "warm corners to a voice that moved smoothly up and down the staff and was enlisted in the service of the acting" (NYTimes).

Dukach made her Metropolitan Opera debut in the title role of *Madama Butterfly*, and she debuted with the Royal Opera House Covent Garden as Musetta in *La bohème*. Internationally, Dukach has performed leading roles at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Israeli Opera, Savonlinna Opera Festival, Opéra Lyra Ottawa, Opera de Oviedo, Theater Pforzheim, Opera Hong Kong, Croatian National Opera, and Kaohsiung Symphony Orchestra. Regionally in the US, Ms. Dukach has appeared New York City Opera, San Diego, Opera, American Symphony Orchestra at Alice Tully Hall, Opera Colorado, Florentine Opera, Kentucky Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Anchorage Opera, Opera Omaha, Orlando Opera, Portland Symphony, Hartford Symphony, and Rochester Philharmonic and Sacramento Philharmonic. Frequently performed roles include Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, Mimi in *La bohème*, Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*, Violetta in *La Traviata*, Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra*, Antonia/Giulietta in *Les contes d'Hoffman*, Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus*, Nedda in *Pagliacci*, Contessa in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Liù in *Turandot*, and Marguerite in *Faust*.

Bringing to life this deeply moving and beautiful namesake role of Ina Soep has been a true honor and highlight of her career.



Having performed more than 55 roles with companies nationally (Seattle, Minnesota, San Diego Operas, etc.) and abroad, mezzo soprano **Adriana Zabala** has also created roles in 7 American operas and dramatic works, including the title roles in *Sister Carrie* and *The Trial of Susan B. Anthony*, and the role of Sister James in *Doubt*, recently broadcast on PBS' Great Performances. She has been a guest soloist with orchestras including the Minnesota Orchestra, the Orchestra of

St. Luke's, the New Jersey Symphony, the Jerusalem Symphony, and The Handel and Haydn Society. In 2021, Ms. Zabala was named a Distinguished Vocal Artist of the American Prize. Recent engagements include the title role of Nadia Boulanger in the chamber music play

*Nadia*, a reprisal of the role of Paula in the Spanish premiere of *Florenzia en el Amazonas* with Opera Tenerife, and her role debut of Madeline in *Three Decembers* with Berkshire Opera. Zabala is a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, The National Opera Association, and Opera America. She was Fulbright Scholar at the Mozarteum and is an associate professor of voice at Yale University. Professor Zabala is passionately committed to helping each singer uniquely experience and share the transformative art of singing—her students perform on stages throughout the world.

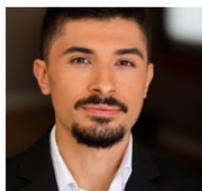


**Kira Dills-DeSurra** is a vibrant American mezzo-soprano whose magnetic stage presence communicates effortless charm and authenticity. Hailed as a nuanced singer and talented comedic stage actress, Kira cultivates skills in musical improvisation and circus arts as part of her broad-ranging palette of storytelling tools.

A champion of new and rarely performed works, Dills-DeSurra has appeared in many American and World Premieres. Most recently Kira was seen captivating audiences as Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Other roles include Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Prince Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*), Gertrude Stein (*After Life*), Lola (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), Zweite Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*), and Mercédès (*Carmen*). Hailing from Petaluma, California, Kira's musical odyssey embodies creativity, innovation, and boundless artistry in opera's ever-evolving world.



**Andrew Garland** has performed recitals at Carnegie Hall, NYFOS, Ravinia, Cleveland Art Song Festival, Andre-Turp Society Montreal, Vocal Arts DC, and venues in Italy, Croatia, Greece, and Turkey. He has premiered works by Jake Heggie, William Bolcom, Stephen Paulus, Steven Mark Kohn, Lee Hoiby, Tom Cipullo, and Gabriela Frank. He has performed with the Boston Pops, Atlanta Symphony, Boston Baroque, Handel and Haydn, at the Kennedy Center, and Lincoln Center, and has sung with Seattle Opera, New York City Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Cincinnati Opera, Minnesota Opera, and many others. Garland is a mentor with Bel Canto Boot Camp, and teaches at the University of Colorado.



Described by Opera News as having a “...resonant bass-baritone,” and as “...a performer to watch for on the operatic horizon,” **Phillip Lopez** has performed in a wide variety of operatic repertoire since his graduation from Yale University in 2021. Important roles include Don Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Opera Louisianae, Don Parmenione in *L'occasione fa il Ladro* with Opera Southwest, Geronimo in a Spanish-language version of *Il matrimonio segreto* with Florida Grand Opera, Father in Kamala Sankaram's *Thumbprint* with Chautauqua Opera, Angelotti in *Tosca* with Florida Grand Opera and Opera Colorado, and Zuniga in *Carmen* with Opera Colorado.



**Thomas Lynch**, baritone, received his Bachelor's in Voice Performance from Westminster Choir College at Rider University and his Master of Music degree at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee.

He has been included in renowned opera companies and programs such as Bel Canto at Caramoor, Seagle Music Festival, Hawaii Opera Theater, Opera Colorado, and the Merola Opera Program. His recent performances include *The Manchurian Candidate* (Sgt. Raymond Shaw), *The Consul* (John Sorel), *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (Marquis de la Force), *The Shining* (Horace Derwent), *Tosca* (Sciaronne), *Carmen* (Dancairo/Escamillo) and *Rigoletto* (Rigoletto). Other performances include soloist in Beethoven's 9th Symphony with the Princeton Symphony Orchestra under Rossen Milanov, and baritone soloist for Goodall's *Eternal Light: Requiem* with the MIT Cambridge Chinese Choral Society.



**Daniel McGrew** is a versatile performer of a broad range of repertoires spanning opera, early music, contemporary music, and music theatre. As a winner of the 2021 Young Concert Artist Auditions, where recently he and pianist Sophia Zhou presented debut recitals at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and Merkin Hall in New York City. No stranger to the operatic stage, Daniel's credits include: François in Bernstein's *A Quiet Place*, Harlekin in Ullman's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, Candide in Bernstein's *Candide*, Orphée in Charpentier's *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*, Albert in Britten's *Albert Herring*, Orfeo in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Contino Belfiore

in Mozart's *La finta giardiniera*, Ecclitico in Haydn's *Il mondo della luna*, and Toquemada in Ravel's *L'heure Espagnole*. Daniel holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory, Yale School of Music, and University of Michigan.



Iranian conductor and pianist, **Sahar Nouri** serves as Music Director of Lamont Opera Theatre at University of Denver where she has recently conducted *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, and *The Little Prince*. At Opera Colorado, she has led the chorus in numerous productions and conducted *Don Giovanni*, *Rigoletto*, *Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Carmen*. Previously a member of music staff at Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, Ms. Nouri has pioneered world premieres of *Today It Rains* (Kaminsky), *Prince of Players* (Floyd), *O Columbia!* (Spears). A multilingual speaker, she has studied in the Czech Republic, Italy, and Austria.



**Ricardo Rivera**, a baritone and Met Opera National Council Auditions semi-finalist, has performed leading roles in world premieres and established operas across the United States. Highlights include debuts at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and San Diego Opera in *El pasado nunca se termina*; opera

performances with Santa Fe Opera, Musica Viva Hong Kong, and Opera Philadelphia; and concert appearances at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. A graduate of Mannes College of Music, Ricardo is committed to contemporary music and has won numerous awards including the Richard F. Gold career grant and prizes from the Met Opera National Council Auditions and Gerda Lissner Competition.



The entire recording team, 2022

Steal a Pencil For Me, Opera Colorado 2018



# Acknowledgments from Gerald Cohen:

This recording is a testament to all those who have been inspiration, partners, and supporters, who have played a role in shepherding this story into a musical and theatrical tribute—both to the lives lost and to the survivors of the Holocaust.

First and foremost, a great thanks to Ina and Jaap Polak for sharing their lives with us with such open hearts, as we created this opera and produced its first workshops.

Second, gratitude to my family—my wife Caroline and daughter Cass. Caroline is my supportive, astute, and loving partner in all of my creative work, and we have spent so much time together thinking through and planning every aspect of this deeply personal project.

For those who took a leap of faith and shared their expertise and loving support, I am forever grateful to Deborah Brevoort, Cori Ellison, Margrit Polak, Ari Pelto, and Greg Carpenter.

For the 2013 workshop production: Shaarei Tikvah Congregation, the Jewish Theological Seminary, director Beth Greenberg, vocal coach Lynn Baker, and the principal cast: Ilana Davidson, Robert Balonek, Toby Newman, Nils Neubert, Cherry Duke, Ricardo Rivera, Matthew Singer, Miloslav Antonov, and Enrico Lagasca. For the 2018 premiere: Director Omer Ben Seadia, the entire production team, and the principal cast that do not appear on this album: Katherine Beck, Nicholas Krieder, Andrew Hiers, Heath Martin, and Nathan Ward (in loving memory). For this recording: the amazing audio production of Marlan Barry, with Scott Burgess as co-engineer. As wonderful catalysts in the fundraising efforts: Gloria Fields, Arthur Glauberman, and Rachel Lazin.

## Donors to production of this album:

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