

PRESS RELEASE
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Soprano Sara Gartland Unable to Sing Leading Roles in *Die tote Stadt* Due to Laryngeal Nerve Paresis

Condition Most Likely Caused by Past COVID-19 Infection

New Production Moves Forward with Kara Shay Thomson Singing While Gartland Acts

Denver, CO (February 20, 2023)— Opera Colorado announces the following change to the cast of Korngold’s *Die tote Stadt* (*The Dead City*), opening February 25 at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House: soprano Sara Gartland, cast in the roles of Marie and Marietta, is unable to sing due to a neurological condition likely caused by a past COVID-19 infection. Providing vocals for the four performances will be soprano Kara Shay Thomson, while Ms. Gartland acts the role on stage.

Shortly after Ms. Gartland arrived in Denver, she began experiencing intense vocal fatigue and visited an ear, nose, and throat doctor for evaluation. What she suspected might be a case of acid reflux was in fact paresis, or near-paralysis, of her superior laryngeal nerve, which causes the nerve to stop functioning and part of the larynx to collapse. Dr. David Opperman with the Colorado Voice Clinic was surprised she was still able to speak and sing because of what he saw in her imaging—which can be attributed to her outstanding vocal technique.

This paresis is typically caused by injury, obstruction, or viral infection. Ms. Gartland and her doctors ruled out the first two causes and believe this is a long-term complication from a COVID-19 infection she had in August. Ms. Gartland is currently receiving weekly voice therapy from Kate Emerich, B.A., M.S., CCC-SLP, who has seen this condition more frequently as COVID-19 infections continue and long-term impacts of the virus reveal themselves. She is expected to make a full recovery in six to eight weeks with steroid medication and therapy.

“I am devastated to not be able to sing the roles of Marie and Marietta in *Die tote Stadt* with Opera Colorado due to a paresis of my superior laryngeal nerve. I am receiving the most amazing medical care and guidance from Dr. David A. Opperman and Kate Emerich,” says Gartland. “I want to thank Greg Carpenter and the entire Opera Colorado team for their support and love and for bringing in the stunning soprano Kara Shay Thomson to sing the role while I walk and act the part on the stage. This production is filled with colleagues whom I love and treasure with all my heart. I am so thankful to be a part of the production and help bring this story to life.”

This new production of the rarely performed opera *Die tote Stadt*, directed by Chas Rader-Shieber and designed by Robert Perdziola, presented many challenges to forging a path forward without canceling or postponing the production. The dual role of Marie and Marietta is one of the most demanding in the repertoire, and there are very few singers who know it, which makes securing an understudy or cover difficult. The diagnosis came weeks into the rehearsal process, with staging for the complicated work nearly complete—a point at which it would be impossible to introduce a new singer into the role.

Enter Kara Shay Thomson, one of the very small handful of sopranos in the world that knows the roles, let alone lives in North America and would not be delayed by visa processes. Not only was Ms. Thomson available but was on a plane to Denver within eight hours of receiving the phone call from Opera Colorado. Ms. Thomson has spent the last week receiving coaching from Music Director Ari Pelto and will sing the parts of Marie and Marietta for the production's four performances.

“This unexpected turn of events will not stop Opera Colorado from bringing Korngold's masterpiece to Denver. We are grateful that Sara Gartland is still able to lend her talents to *Die tote Stadt*, and it is nothing short of a miracle that Kara Shay Thomson was immediately available to sing these extremely difficult roles. We hope audiences will come support all the artists and crew of *Die tote Stadt* as they embark on this challenging and exciting new production,” says Greg Carpenter, the Ellie Caulkins General & Artistic Director.

Tickets for *Die tote Stadt*, ranging from \$39-\$210, are available at operacolorado.org. For more information, contact Jennifer Colgan at jcolgan@operacolorado.org.

Die tote Stadt is sponsored by an Anonymous Donor in honor of Dr. James K. Todd, with additional support from Robert R. Montgomery. The Orchestra for *Die tote Stadt* is sponsored by Kevin O'Connor and Janet Ellen Raasch, with additional support from Gerald & Ann Saul, Jeff Baldwin, and Joyce de Roos.

The 40th Anniversary Season is generously sponsored by Marcia & Dick Robinson.

DIE TOTE STADT

(THE DEAD CITY)

Music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold
Libretto by Julius Korngold

February 25, 28 & March 3, 5

Ellie Caulkins Opera House at the Denver Performing Arts Complex
Performed in German, with English and Spanish subtitles at every seat.

A PORTRAIT OF OBSESSION

Opera Colorado presents a new production of composer Erich Korngold's rare operatic gem, *Die tote Stadt* (*The Dead City*). We follow Paul, a widowed painter unraveled by grief over the death of his wife, Marie. Even the city he lives in—Bruges—haunts him. Life is turned upside down when Paul meets the bright and passionate Marietta, the mirror image of Marie. This psychological drama filled with lush cinematic music will leave you questioning what is real and what is only a dream.

Cast

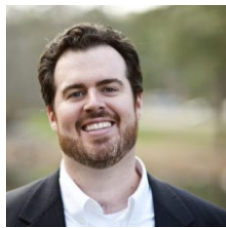
Paul | Jonathan Burton
Marie/Marietta | Sara Gartland (staging), Kara Shay Thomson (vocals)
Frank/Fritz | Daniel Belcher
Brigitte | Elizabeth Bishop

Victorin/Gastone | Jonathan Johnson
Opera Colorado Chorus
Opera Colorado Orchestra

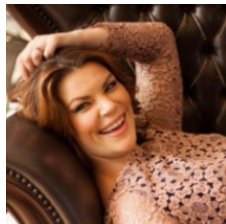
Creative Team

Conductor | Ari Pelto
Chorus Master & Assistant Conductor | Sahar Nouri
Director | Chas Rader-Shieber
Set & Costume Designer | Robert Perdziola
Lighting Designer | Yi Zhao

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Jonathan Burton (Paul) is engaged to sing the most demanding roles in the tenor repertoire including *Tosca* (Cavaradossi), *Turandot* (Calàf), *Fanciulla del West* (Dick Johnson), and *Aida* (Radames). He regularly receives rave reviews for his “...bright, heroic tone, [and] clarion power...” For his performance in *Tosca* (Cavaradossi) with Opera Omaha, one reviewer said: “Tenor Jonathan Burton was revelatory as the painter and revolutionary sympathizer. His voice never faltered through the demands of the role and his tortured humanity was palpable.” Recently, Burton joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for the first time for their production of *Turandot* (Calàf) and also performed the role with Maryland Lyric Opera. He also sang in *Carmen* (Don José) for Palm Beach Opera and covered the title role in *Tristan und Isolde* for Santa Fe Opera.



Sara Gartland's (Marie/Marietta - Staging) engagements for the 2021-2022 Season included the world premiere opera *A Thousand Acres* (Rose) with libretto by Mark Campbell and music composed by Kristin Kuster for the fiftieth anniversary season at Des Moines Metro Opera, and exciting role and company debuts with Opera San Antonio and Dallas Opera. A lover of opera and operetta as well as contemporary works, Ms. Gartland has sung a plethora of roles displaying her talent for dramatic storytelling and comedy. She has also developed close working relationships with some of the best regional opera houses in the country. Some of her performances include: the title roles in *Rusalka* and *Jenůfa*, *Wozzeck* (Marie), *Roméo et Juliette* (Juliette), and *Regina* (Alexandra) with Des Moines Metro Opera; *La bohème* (Musetta), *Carmen* (Micaëla), *Norma* (Adalgisa, cover), and Michel van der Aa's 3D opera *Sunken Garden* (Zenna Briggs, cover) with Dallas Opera; *Die Fledermaus* (Rosalinde), *La traviata* (Violetta), *Of Mice and Men* (Curley's Wife), and *Regina* (Alexandra) with Utah Opera; *La traviata* (Violetta), the title role in *Rusalka*, and *HMS Pinafore* (Josephine) with Arizona Opera, *Fidelio* (Marzelline) with Opera Omaha; *Hansel and Gretel* (Gretel) with Opera San Jose; *Hansel and Gretel* (Gretel) and *La bohème* (Musetta) with San Diego Opera; *L'elisir d'amore* (Adina) with Austin Lyric Opera; and the title role (cover) in *Rusalka* with the Canadian Opera Company.



Dramatic soprano, **Kara Shay Thomson**, has built an expansive stage career by creating characters that push the limits both musically and dramatically. Ms. Thomson's major roles include the iconic Puccini heroines, *Turandot* and *Tosca*. Additional dramatic roles include the title role in Strauss' *Salome*, *Fidelio* (Leonore), *Cavalleria rusticana* (Santuzza), and *Don Giovanni* (Donna Anna). Kara Shay is well known for taking on rarely performed dramatic roles including *Erwartung* (The Woman), *Les Troyens* (Cassandra), *Bluebeard's Castle* (Judith), *Tiefland* (Marta), *Der Freischütz* (Agäthe), the title role in *Vanessa*, *Aleko* (Zemfira), *Die tote Stadt* (Marietta), *The Consul* (Magda), the title role in Blitzstein's *Regina*, and as Balkis in Odyssey Opera's live recording of the US premiere of Gounod's *La Reine de Saba*. Company appearances include Lyric Opera of Chicago, Santa Fe Opera, New York City

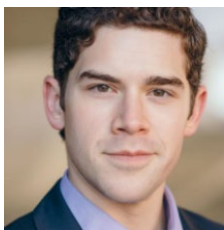
Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, Virginia Opera, Utah Opera, Portland Opera, Atlanta Opera, Dayton Opera, Opera Omaha, Kentucky Opera and Sarasota Opera. Miss Thomson will perform the role of Turandot for Opera Colorado's 40th Anniversary Season in May of 2023.



GRAMMY® Award-winning baritone **Daniel Belcher (Frank/Fritz)** has performed in many of the world's music capitals. With a repertoire of more than eighty roles, Belcher has championed roles from the Baroque to those composed expressly for him. He came to international attention in 2004 creating the role of Prior Walter in Peter Eötvös's *Angels in America* for the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. In the 2021-22 Season, Mr. Belcher joined the Metropolitan Opera for *Ahknaten* and *Rigoletto*. Recent engagements also included *The Fall of the House of Usher* (William) with Boston Lyric Opera, a return to On Site Opera for *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (Melchior), a concert with the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and *Glory Denied* (Older Thompson) with Berkshire Opera Festival. In the 2018-19 Season, he created the role of Alfred Stieglitz in Laura Kaminsky, Mark Campbell, and Kimberly Reed's world premiere of *Today it Rains* with Opera Parallele, made role debuts in *Madame Butterfly* (Sharpless) at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, *A Little Night Music* (Fredrik Egerman) at Madison Opera, and John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* (Beaumarchais) as well as reprising his role in *The Barber of Seville* (Figaro) at Chautauqua Opera.



Recent highlights for American mezzo **Elizabeth (Betsy) Bishop (Brigitte)** include her return to The Metropolitan Opera in their celebrated new production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* as Marcellina; Dallas Symphony Orchestra in *Salome* as Herodias; and at Lyric Opera Chicago she stole the show as Madame de la Haltière in *Cendrillon*. Further Metropolitan Opera engagements include Second Norn/Fricka (c)/Waltraute (c) in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In the 2021-22 season, she revives the role of Marcellina at the Met, and with Atlanta Symphony Orchestra she makes her debut as the Witch in *Hansel und Gretel* under the baton of Donald Runnicles. Past successes include her debut at Florida Grand Opera as Herodias in *Salome*, Mary in *Der fliegende Holländer* at Cincinnati Opera, the role of Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle* at Portland Symphony; at Washington National Opera as Mère Marie in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Fricka in *Das Rheingold*, and *Die Walküre*; Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Donald Runnicles and at the Grand Teton Music Festival, Verdi's *Requiem* with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Brangäne *Tristan und Isolde* in concert at North Carolina Opera.



Tenor **Jonathan Johnson (Victorin/Gastone)** returns to Opera Colorado for the first time since the 2020 production of *Pagliacci* (Beppe). In the 2021-22 Season, he made his debut at the Tulsa Opera in *Gianni Schicci* (Rinuccio), returned to Opera Omaha in *Sweeney Todd* (Anthony), and in *Harvey Milk* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. He recently appeared as in *The Love for Three Oranges* (The Prince) at Opera Philadelphia's Festival O19 and in *Silent Night* (Jonathan Dale) at Utah Opera. In concert, Mr. Johnson appeared as a soloist with Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri*, with the Detroit Symphony for *Messiah*, and in recital with the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago. A graduate of the Patrick G. & Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center, the Lyric Opera of Chicago's professional artist-development program, he appeared in the house's main productions of *Les Troyens*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *The Merry Widow*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Capriccio*, *The Magic Victrola*, and Mieczysław Weinberg's Holocaust opera *The Passenger*.



Known both for his bold and inventive productions and for his acute musical instincts, **Chas Rader-Shieber (Director)** has established himself as one of the most innovative opera directors of his generation. Reviewing his staging of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Toronto's Classical 96.3 FM praised Mr. Rader-Shieber's "daring and visionary approach to staging" and declared him "a force to be reckoned with in the opera world." In the 2021-2022 season, Mr. Rader-Shieber continued his close collaboration with the Curtis Institute of Music, directing *Dangerous Liaisons*, and returned to Des Moines Metro Opera for Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Recent work includes a new production of Rameau's *Platée* at Des

Moines Metro Opera, *Shining Brow* at Arizona Opera, and a return to Curtis Institute of Music to direct their production of *The Barber of Seville*. Other past season highlights include Hasse's *Artaserse* and Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* with Pinchgut Opera, *La finta giardiniera* Portland Opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Kentucky Opera, *Rusalka* with Des Moines Metro Opera. Gluck's *Orfeo* with Portland Opera, *La traviata* with Pittsburgh Opera, and *Capriccio* with the Curtis Institute of Music. Mr. Rader-Shieber has also become well known for his interpretations of Mozart operas. Among others, he has directed *Die Zauberflöte*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* at companies including Opera Pacific, Opera de Montreal, Santa Fe Opera, and the Juilliard Opera Center.



Robert Perdziola (Set and Costume Designer) has designed sets and costumes for American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Saito Kinen Festival, San Francisco Opera, Opéra Monte Carlo, Garsington Opera, Opera Australia, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Cincinnati Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Opera Boston, and Glimmerglass Opera. Among these designs are those for *Capriccio* and *Il Pirata* for the Met, *La Grande Duchesse* for Opera Boston, and *Falstaff* for the Saito Kinen Festival. In 2017 he designed two productions of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, one for Garsington Opera in Wormsley, England, and the other for Hyogo Performing Arts Center, Japan. In fall 2016, Perdziola created sets and costumes for the Finnish National Ballet's *Alice In Wonderland*. His productions of *The Nutcracker* (2012) and *Swan Lake* (2014) are regularly seen at Boston Ballet. For American Ballet Theatre, Perdziola has designed costumes and scenery for the revival of Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire* (2003), for Alexei Ratmansky's *Harlequinade* (2018), and for Ratmansky's *The Seasons* (2019). Perdziola was nominated for a 2019 Benois de la Danse award.



Yi Zhao (Lighting Designer) is a Beijing-born, Paris-raised and U.S.-educated lighting designer currently based in Berlin and working internationally, whose designs for theater, opera, live music and dance are informed by a background in fine art photography and a passion for music. His lighting designs have been seen at Lincoln Center Theater, Sasha Waltz & Guests (Germany), New York Theatre Workshop, Signature Theatre, Soho Rep., Ars Nova, the Guthrie Theater, Mark Taper Forum, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, American Conservatory Theatre, Dallas Theater Center, The Wilma Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Opera Omaha, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Curtis Institute of Music, ArtsEmerson, Philadelphia FringeArts, Ballet de Lorraine (France), and Festival d'Automne à Paris (France), among others.



Ari Pelto (Conductor) was appointed in 2015 as Opera Colorado's first-ever music director. His "breathtaking wizardry in the pit" (*The Denver Post*) has been widely celebrated, with Pelto in demand at opera houses and concert halls throughout the United States. At the age of 24, Pelto was appointed Assistant Conductor at the Spoleto Festival, and he has since gone on to conduct worldwide. International engagements include performances with Bochumer Philharmoniker and opera productions at New National Theatre of Tokyo and the Teatro Nacional Sucre in Quito, Ecuador. In 2004 he made his highly-praised debut with New York City Opera, conducting *La traviata*, after which he became a regular, returning for productions of *Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème*, and *Carmen*. Recent successes include performances of *The Nutcracker* with Atlanta Ballet and *The Flying Dutchman* with Utah Opera.



Sahar Nouri (Chorus Master & Assistant Conductor) serves as the company's chorus master, assistant conductor, and pianist coach. Ms. Nouri is the newly appointed music director of the Lamont Opera Theatre at the University of Denver. While being based in Denver, she continues to serve as guest coach/faculty with various organizations including San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Opera North Carolina, Opera Steamboat and more.

Previously, Ms. Nouri has been a member of the music staff at Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Utah Opera, Aspen Opera Center, Opera Parallèle, and Opera in the Heights. Her repertoire includes numerous classic operas as well as many world premieres such as: *Prince of Players* (Carlisle Floyd), *O Columbia!* (Gregory Spears), *Steal a Pencil for Me* (Gerald Cohen), and *Today It Rains* (Laura Kaminsky). A multi-lingual, Nouri has done studies in the Czech Republic, Italy, and Austria, and is frequently in demand as a language coach and recitalist.

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ABOUT OPERA COLORADO

Opera Colorado has served as a cornerstone of Denver's cultural community since 1983. In addition to its mainstage performances at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House each season, the company affirms its commitment to the future of the art form by annually presenting new works; with its nationally recognized Artist in Residence Program that trains the next generation of opera performers; and by each year reaching more than 45,000 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region. For more information, visit operacolorado.org.