

ORPHEUS LEX

After seeing productions of two of David Kranes' intriguing plays, I decided to ask him to write the libretto for my opera, to tell the story of the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice but place it in a modern setting.

When David moved to the West, he became enthralled with the extraordinary beauty of the mountains in Idaho. He felt that the area of the Wood River with its craggy peaks was a place Orpheus would choose to retire from his career as a popular folk singer – hence, Orfeo in Idaho.

In the original myth, Oprpheus is informed by Hades, king of the underworld, that he could have his wife Eurydice back after her death if she would follow Orpheus to the upper world, with the rule that he not look back. When he no longer hears her footsteps, he does look back and loses her forever.

Kranes' view incorporates the idea of looking back in time – remembering. After Eurydice emerges from the river, Orpheus must not remember her or they are doomed. They sing various songs to avoid this, such as *A Person Imagines* and *Don't Look at My Hair*. Ultimately he does remember her. She sings *I Want to Get Ready* to once more return to the river.

My original work is a full-length, two-act opera. Heard here tonight is a condensed concert version lasting about one hour, divided into two acts.



ACT I

NARRATOR

Orpheus Lex is an opera written to music by Marie Nelson Bennett with a libretto by David Kranes. "Lex" means law, which must be obeyed.

The original Greek myth tells the tragic story of Orpheus and his wife, Eurydice in which she is taken to the underworld following her death when bitten by a snake. The mourning Orpheus follows her to the underworld and begs King Hades to let him have his wife back.

Orpheus' singing enchants all the souls there including Hades, who finally relents and allows Eurydice to return to the upper world. But there is one condition. Orpheus must obey the law, which states that he must not look back or he will lose her forever. When they are almost to the surface, he can no longer hear her footsteps behind him. He does look back, but her hands have turned to dust and she disappears into the darkness.

Our story is set in a rustic cabin by the Wood River in Idaho. Its décor features the stuffed heads of a variety of animals. Orpheus and Eurydice are a modern couple.

In this version, Orpheus cannot look back in time, which means he must not remember Eurydice. If he does he will lose her again. Throughout the opera they devise ways to avoid remembering each other so they can remain together.

The opera opens with Orpheus standing in his retreat. He is playing a CD of himself singing *Red River Valley*, one of the many "river" songs he sang during his lengthy career as a folk and popular singer.

ORPHEUS

1. RED RIVER OPENING

From the valley they say you are going We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile. For they say that you are taking the sunshine That brightens the pathway awhile.

NARRATOR

Orpheus stares at the river, hearing its sounds.

CHORUS

2. SOUNDS OF THE RIVER

ORCHESTRA

3. SOUNDS INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

Orpheus sees Eurydice emerge from the river. She looks dazed and lost. He goes down the stairs to her.

ORPHEUS

4. HELLO

What? Who? How? There's no way, no way in hell I can be seeing what I'm seeing except... Hello? Hey, excuse me. Yoo-hoo, hello ma'am. You there? Hello Miss? Ma'am? Miss? Ma'am? Excuse me, hello. Can I help you? Can I help you?

NARRATOR

Eurydice emerges from the water wearing a smock-like dress. Orpheus leads her up the stairs to the cabin.

ORPHEUS

5. SI OW

Slow, just take it slow

You're very cold. You're very wet.

I understand. Pretend I am a friend.

So just slow, okay?

Very cautious, very careful, very slow.

There's no hurry. We'll go, step, that's a good step.

You're wet. You're cold. I can see that.

Can you talk? Or maybe, second thought, the best thing would be not to.

Maybe if instead you just remained silent.

ORCHESTRA

6. SLOW INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

As Eurydice gets dry and puts on one of Orpheus' shirts, she avoids looking at him. She feels confused, wondering if she is just imagining the whole thing.

EURYDICE

7. A PERSON IMAGINES

A person imagines, you know.

A person imagines a lot of things.

I was aware of it when alone by myself, you there.

A person imagines the things that come close especially the moments.

the particular people, persons.

A person imagines a lot of things.

A person imagines hearing, hearing something an instrument, a voice, a song, sound, melody. But not just that.

In some sequence, phrase, measure, fragment, hearing the entrance of song.

Hearing one's blood, one's bones like a choir.

A person imagines hearing things.

A person imagines another person

A person imagines a lover, which is dangerous

Which is filled with peril.

I can't imagine except I do and do and do

I can't imagine a lover

because the peril is so...

Without the danger, without the peril it's hard to imagine.

It's hard to want.

It's hard to contemplate.

So a person imagines a lover, a person imagines another person.

ORCHESTRA

8. A PERSON INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

What might happen if Eurydice decides to change her looks? Will that make her safe? She says, "Don't look at my hair. I'm in disguise."

EURYDICE, ORPHEUS, CHORUS

9. DON'T LOOK AT MY HAIR

EURYDICE

Don't look at my hair. I'm in disguise. Yes, I'm very imaginative don't you think? Then we are safe? It's not the look. It's not the glance. Do you even recognize my voice? If you don't remember me, do you think we'll be safe?

ORPHEUS

Did you fall in the river?
As whom? You're wearing my shirt.
Okay, I don't recognize you.
Good, yes, okay fine.
It's not the glance.
I don't even know if I recognize your voice.
If I don't remember you,
do you think we'll be safe?

ORCHESTRA

10. HAIR INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

Eurydice recalls her time in the underworld where she heard voices of women in sacred singing.

EURYDICE, WOMEN'S CHORUS

11. LISTS

The voices of women, sacred singing: avocado, ginger, breadfruit, promise.

Cloth, cotton against my skin feeling the piercing teeth of a snake. I can't finish the sentence.

Chalice, altar, wine, breadfruit.

Vows, being a bride, always sent back.

Never finishing the sentence.

The voices of women, women.

ORCHESTRA

12. LISTS INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

Orpheus thinks back fondly about the time when he was a boy, When he was formless, shapeless, unmolded.

ORPHEUS

13. A BOY

A boy, I remember being a boy

But I was formless, shapeless, unmolded.

I carried my heart in my hands

across beflower'd meadows.

I believed in more things that I could never ever disbelieve I was, if you can imagine it, that young.

NARRATOR

Eurydice remembers poignantly about being that young as well.

EURYDICE

14. THAT YOUNG

I was once that young unsung inside my heart. Now I find myself a woman in a mountain cabin, dressed in a quilt.

Now I've invented you.

Invention is a mess, iron fillings, spun-glass in my brain. You desire me, you inspire me, yet you deny me. Inspiration still sounds like love.

It's what love would be like if we made it up, which many do at least once.

NARRATOR

Orpheus and Eurydice look intently at each other. Then Eurydice says, "Will you please this time try to keep the promise and not be afraid?" Orpheus replies, "Can I?" Eurydice declares, "Do you have any idea what it feels like to have to go back? To see your head turn and know the future?" Orpheus wonders. "How does one look back so it doesn't matter?" Eurydice asks, "Can we survive this?" Orpheus answers, "We have to ask at a great risk!"

ORCHESTRA

15. THAT YOUNG INTERLUDE

ACT II

NARRATOR

Act Two repeats the same action as in Act One, with Orpheus helping Eurydice emerge from the river. Though Eurydice is dressed as she was in Act One, now it has all been tucked and arranged, sleeves rolled up, fashioned. She looks like a model, beautiful. She has a red silk scarf as a sash. When they're settled, Orpheus sings an old river song from his past, *Shenandoah*, while Eurydice joins him singing *Up a Lazy River*, accompanied by the chorus depicting the sounds of the river.

ORPHEUS

1. SHENANDOAH
Oh Shenandoah, I long to hear you,
Away you rolling river.
Oh Shenandoah, I long to hear you,
'Cross the wide Missouri.

EURYDICE

UP THE LAZY RIVER
Up the lazy river
In the noonday sun.
Up the lazy river
In the noonday sun
Blur skies up above,
Ev'ryone's in love, in love
Up the lazy river with me.

NARRATOR

Orpheus looks up at the stuffed animals peering down from the cabin walls and wonders what connection they have to him.

ORPHEUS

2. IT'S HARD TO SEE
It's hard to see the connections
In the objects in this house.
For they seem like photographs out of the past.
Did I take them?

Was I present in this landscape?

I see myself as if in a mirror.
I'm not me. I have no body, I have no voice.
I'm just a record that I was once here.

When I built this house so close to the river,
I was hoping it was where
I might go to sing.
By the rocks, by the trees, by the trees, by the water,
I'd sing my own songs by the river.

ORCHESTRA

3. IT'S HARD TO SEE INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

The chorus sings about Orpheus' former career as a folk and popular singer, wandering from place to place with his group.

CHORUS

4. WANDERED
Wandered, wandered,
That's what he did
when he was grown up.
It was his birthright.
He went wandering. He went wandering.
He called it "hitting the road."
It meant he was going on tour.

He left his truck farm in Stillwater, Oklahoma. So he started wandering, wandering and was lost. Wandered, wandered. It was always one-night stands. Always one-night stands

ORCHESTRA

5. WANDERED INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

Eurydice is getting desperate. She must prevent Orpheus from remembering her. She places a cloth over her head to hide her face, which has been cut with glass in an attempt to make her unrecognizable to Orpheus, making them safe.

EURYDICE

6. THE CLOTH

Take off this cloth.

It's hiding my face.

It keeps us strangers.

It keeps us safe. What's under this cloth?

Do I dare look?

It's off, off,

I've taken it off!

EURYDICE, CHORUS

7. THE CLOTH CHORUS

I've been cut.

I'm misshapen, cut on the glass.

I'm spinning, turning,

sucked in the vortex.

ORPHEUS

Eurydice, don't make me be without you!

NARRATOR

Eurydice sleeps for a long time, then emerges from the back room as if nothing had happened. She wants to extend their last precious time together by telling Orpheus he has been very good and loving.

Now Orpheus realizes that he can't help himself. He finally does remember Eurydice. He remembers her mouth. He remembers how he has always felt about her.

EURYDICE

8. YOU'RE BEING VERY GOOD

You're being very good.

You're being very watchful and loving.

It feels as if we're close.

Can you feel it? Almost?

Almost there to the surface and safe

and stand a chance?

I don't know what these questions mean of course. I don't know where they came from.

ORPHEUS

Maybe Montpelier?

EURYDICE

Though I made Montpelier up. Fabricated.

ORPHEUS

Absolutely, whole cloth.
In my mind you know,
In my mind there's the taste.
Taste of where the skin sweats,
just under the slight float
of your breast.

EURYDICE

Orpheus, don't, don't.

BOTH

Orpheus, don't, don't, don't.

EURYDICE

I don't know you. You don't know me.

ORPHEUS

I remember your mouth.

EURYDICE

We have never seen each other. We have never been lovers.

ORPHEUS

I remember how the inside of your lips feels against my tongue

EURYDICE

It is invention. This is a story.

ORPHEUS

The lids of your eyes closing against my skin.

EURYDICE

There's a stretch to go yet, when we see the sun.

BOTH

When the sun is on us!

EURYDICE

Have you looked outside?

ORPHEUS

Look, the sun is setting, we're too late.

CHORUS

9. NEVER

Never! They will never be right.

They will never be right, never be right.

There will always be rules, always be rules.

They will never be permitted,

never ever be allowed.

They will always say no, that's the law.

The sun will always be a world away.

They went into the dark.

And they went past where all pastness stopped.

And now they are not to recollect or recall.

Never, never, never, never, never.

NARRATOR

Eurydice prepares to go back into the river. She says, "I want to get ready. I want trillium in my hair. Listen for me, for us, for what we can't, ever forget."

EURYDICE

10. I WANT TO GET READY

I want to get ready to go back into the river.

There are oils, lotions.

I want trillium in my hair.

I'll call, I'll call you.

Listen for me, listen for me.

My breathing, breathing, breathing.

Listen for the springs lowering on our bed, our bed.

I want to be there properly.

My hands, for us.

For what we can't ever forget.

Yes, please, oh please.

ORCHESTRA

11. I WANT TO GET READY INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

The original scene reappears. Orpheus is in his cabin by the side of the river.

ORPHEUS, CHORUS

12. RIVER ENDING

From the valley they say you are going.

We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile,

That brightens our pathway awhile.

NARRATOR

Orpheus looks out and sees a woman emerge from the river. He goes down to her and the scene begins to repeat again.

ORPHEUS

13. HELLO ENDING

What? Who? How?

Ma'am you there?

Hello Miss?

Ma'am, Miss, Ma'am?

Excuse me, hello.

Can I help?

Can I help you?

Help you?

MARIE NELSON BENNETT COMPOSER



Photo: Paul Fraughton, Salt Lake Tribune

Marie Nelson Bennett grew up in Salt Lake City UT surrounded by music, her mother being a professional soprano. She wanted to be a composer since childhood. She would write down melodies and secretly stash them away, hoping to someday use them in an opera on her favorite myth, Orpheus and Eurydice.

This project had to wait awhile. She graduated from the University of Utah, then from the Yale School of Music where she studied with famed composer, Paul Hindemith. Later she returned to the University of Utah to earn a Ph.D. in composition. She is now making a name for herself nationally and abroad, recording on Master Musicians Collective under Thomas McKinley. She has composed eight symphonies, five concertos, an opera, an oratorio, a string quartet, trio for flute, clarinet, and piano, seven musical plays and numerous songs and sonatas for solo instruments.

Orchestras who have premiered or recorded her works include the London Symphony, Prague Symphony, Slovak Radio Symphony, Czech Radio Symphony, New York Chamber Orchestra in Avery Fisher Hall, Seattle Symphony, Concordia in Alice Tully Hall, Boston Modern Orchestra; Whatcom Symphony Orchestra of Bellingham WA, Utah Symphony, Salt Lake Symphony, and Paradigm Chamber Orchestra.

Conductors she has worked with include: Gerard Schwarz, Joseph Silverstein, Marin Alsop, Gil Rose, Robert Stankovsky, Vladimir Valek, Roger Briggs, Joel Rosenberg, David Cho, and Harold Rosenbaum. Bennett is a recipient of the Merit of Honor Award from the University of Utah, where her works are featured in a special collection. She has also been nominated for the Kennedy Center Friedham Award in Washington DC.

HAROLD ROSENBAUM CONDUCTOR

Harold Rosenbaum is one of the most accomplished and critically acclaimed choral conductors of our time. He is the 2010 winner of ASCAP's Victor Herbert Award, and the 2008 winner of the American Composer Alliance's Laurel Leaf Award. Rosenbaum established The New York Virtuoso Singers, an all-professional choir now in its 24th season. They are regularly invited to perform with leading orchestras, and at prestigious institutions such as The Tanglewood Music Festival and The Juilliard School. The choir has premiered over 350 new works. Prior to the formation of The NYVS, Rosenbaum had already established his all-volunteer choir, The Canticum Novum Singers, as one of New York's premiere choirs presenting the music of all periods, with a special focus on early music, performing over 500 concerts in this country, and on four European tours. Rosenbaum has collaborated over 100 times with leading orchestras such as The New York Philharmonic, The Brooklyn Philharmonic, The American Symphony, The American Composers Orchestra, The Riverside Symphony, The Orchestra of St. Luke's and many, many more. He has also conducted more than 100 concerts throughout Europe, and has been appointed Lead Choral Conductor for PARMA Recordings.

THE NEW YORK VIRTUOSO SINGERS

Founded in 1988 by conductor Harold Rosenbaum, The New York Virtuoso Singers has become this country's leading exponent of contemporary choral music. Although the chorus performs music of all periods, its emphasis is on commissioning, performing and recording the music of American composers.

The New York Virtuoso Singers have won the prestigious ASCAP-Chorus America "Award for Adventuresome Programming of Contemporary Music" three times, and has been given Chorus America's "American Choral Works Performance Award." It appears on over 20 commercial albums on labels including SONY Classical, Soundbrush, Albany, CRI, Bridge, Koch International, Capstone, KASP, DRG, Ravello Records, and Navona Records. NYVS's performance of Andrew Imbrie's *Requiem*, performed by The Riverside Symphony under George Rothman, received a Grammy® nomination in 2000 and was voted by Fanfare as Critic's Choice, Best of Year.

They have premiered approximately 350 works by composers such as Luciano Berio, John Harbison, Hans Werner Henze, Louis Andriessen, John Corigliano, Mark Adamo, Shulamit Ran, George Perle, Harrison Birtwistle, Ernst Krenek, Thea Musgrave, Jonathan Harvey, Arvo Paert, and Andrew Imbrie.

DAVID ARNOLD BARITONE

David Arnold, born in Atlanta GA, made his debut with the Metropolitan Opera as Enrico in *Lucia de Lammermoor*, and has scored success in symphonic music performing the Bach *Passion* with Helmuth Rilling, Richard Westenburg, Harold Rosenbaum, Blanche Moyse, Sergio Comissiona, Tom Hall, Richard Yang Yuk, Robert Shaw, and Norman Scribner. For six seasons, Seiji Ozawa chose him as a soloist with the York Concerts at Carnegie Hall. He recorded Gurrelieder with Ozawa and with the orchestra of Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Baltimore, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Hartford, St. Louis, New Haven, The American Symphony, the American Composer Orchestra, et al. His debut with Andrew Previn was made in the Brahms *Requiem*, where he performed the Beethoven *Ninth Symphony* with the San Francisco Symphony. His Beethoven *Ninth Symphony*, with Maestro Slatkin was broadcast nationally, and he has sung the same work with Maestro Yakov Kreitzberg. *Messiah* is also a work he has sung with the orchestras of San Francisco, Indianapolis, Hartford, the Handel & Haydn Society of Boston and the Boston Boroque. For a number of years, Arnold was the *Messiah* baritone soloist in Winston-Salem NC, under the direction of sir David Willcocks. The title role in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, is a work for which Arnold is frequently sought.

In 2004, Arnold stepped in on three days notice to sing a demanding role in the world premiere of *Gaian Variations* with the Brooklyn Philharmonic at Fisher Hall in Lincoln center, NY, with conductor Harold Rosenbaum. Also in the summer of 2004, Arnold performed two concerts of The American Music at the Concert Hall in Beijing's Forbidden City, and served as a voice professor in the Beijing Festival and School of Music.

WENDY BAKER SOPRANO

Wendy Baker has performed predominantly in the operatic and oratorio repertories, recently having had success singing works as wide-ranging as Bach, Mozart, and Poulenc. She has a Master in Music Performance and Literature from the Eastman School of Music and she obtained a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance (cum laude) from Clayton State College.

Baker has been sought out for the soprano solos in the *Poulenc Gloria, Vivaldi Gloria, Faure Requiem, Rutter Requiem, Haydn's Stabat Mater*, and Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*. In 2006, she sang the World Premiere of Laura Karpman's *Heebie Jeebies*, commissioned by the Julliard Choral Union, at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center.

Baker has sung the roles of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Suor Angelica in *Suor Angelica, Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi*, Giuletta in *Capuletti e I Montecchi*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Madame Heartthrob in *The Impresario*, and Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. She has performed with the Atlanta Opera, Atlanta Savoyards, Regina Opera, and Caramoor and Anchorage Opera Studio Theatre Young Artists Programs.

The recipient of numerous awards, Baker was a semi-finalist in the International Concert Alliance Mozart Competition (2007). She was also a multiple Jensen Foundation National Finalist (2007, 2006, 2003) and Oratorio Society Semi-Finalist (2008, 2007, 2006, 2005). In 2005, Baker was named a Gerda Lissner National Finalist and Grant Winner. Before that, she was a prize-winner in the Met District and Regional competitions (2002, 2000), as well as an Orpheus National Vocal Competition Prize Winner in 2002, and a Mobile Opera Guild Competition Prize Winner in the same year.

NATHAN BAHNY NARRATOR

Bass-baritone Nathan Bahny has performed oratorio and opera extensively in the United States. Among his performing venues are Opera Theater of Pittsburg, the New York Liederkrantz Society, Long Beach Opera, the Wagner Society of Washington DC, Washington Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. Favorite operatic roles include the Flying Dutchman, Alberich in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, Amonasro in *Aido* and the four villains in *Tales of Hoffman*. Bahny also has an extensive oratorio resume including the Verdi *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and various Handel oratorios such as *Saul*, *Alexander's Feast* and (of course) *The Messiah*. He has appeared on Late Night with David Letterman and on Broadway in Baz Luhrmann's production of Puccini's *La Boheme*. Bahny took part in the American premiere of Anthony Hedges' and James Weldon Johnson's *I'll Make Me a World* based on the Book of Genesis and performed in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* in Massachusetts in the spring of 2011.

THE ARTEMIS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

The Artemis Chamber Ensemble was founded in 2003, and since then has quickly established a reputation in New York's performing arts community for its unique flexible structure, creative programming, and dedication to outreach.

The ensemble performs as a chamber orchestra, string quartet, woodwind quintet, brass quintet, and mixed ensemble. Artemis is committed to performing music by and collaborating with living composers. The musicians of the Artemis Chamber Ensemble are talented young artists who are active performers; as soloist and chamber musicians, they have performed at some of the world's premiere stages including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Heinz Hall, Kennedy Center, La Monnai (Brussels), Sydney Opera House (Australia), and the Konzerthaus (Vienna).

DAVID KRANES LIBRETTIST



David Kranes is a nationally recognized writer whose works include seven novels and two volumes of short stories – most recently *Making the Ghost Dance*. His novel, *The National Tree*, was recently made into a film by Hallmark, which aired in November 2009. His short fiction (appearing in such magazines as *Esquire*, *Ploughshares*, and *Transatlantic Review*) has won literary prizes and has been anthologized. Over 40 of his plays have been performed in New York and across the United States. His radio plays have been performed in the United States, Canada, and abroad. He has written for film and dance companies and the libretto for the opera *Orpheus Lex*.

"...I think it is a masterpiece...The libretto is so involving and captivating, and your music captures every intimacy and dramatic moment of it...Most of all, your music is gripping, sensuous, and sub-lime...You should consider submitting it as a Pulitzer Prize entry." *Harold Rosenbaum, conductor of The New York Virtuoso Singers*

"...it is a magnificent piece, full of heart-rending music, generously melodic and extraordinarily well written..." *Barry O'Neal, New Music Connoisseur Magazine*

The Artemis Chamber Ensemble
The New York Virtuoso Singers | Harold Rosenbaum conductor
David Arnold baritone
Wendy Baker soprano
Nathan Bahny narrator

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ACT I

1	Entrance/Narrator	2:08
2	1. Red River Opening	
3	Narrator	
4	2. Sounds of the River	
5	3. Sounds Interlude	
6	Narrator	
7	4. Hello	
8	Narrator	
9	5. Slow	
10	6. Slow Interlude	
11	Narrator	
12	7. A Person Imagines	
13	8. A Person Interlude	
14	Narrator	
15	9. Don't Look Look at My Hair	
16	10. Hair Interlude	
17	Narrator	0:10
18	11. Lists	2:36
19	12. Lists Interlude	0:57
20	Narrator	0:11
21	13. A Boy	1:15
22	Narrator	0:08
23	14. That Young	1:50
24	Narrator	0:48
25	15. That Young Interlude	1:14
26	Applause (End Act I)	0:32

ACT II

27	Orpheus & Eurydice 0:42
28	1. Shenandoah 1:38
29	Narrator 0:11
30	2. It's Hard to See 2:32
31	3. It's Hard to See Interlude 0:20
32	Narrator 0:12
33	4. Wandered 2:14
34	5. Wandered Interlude 0:35
35	Narrator 0:20
36	6. The Cloth 1:16
37	7. The Cloth Chorus 1:41
38	Narrator 0:31
39	8. You're Being Very Good 5:24
40	9. Never 2:16
41	Narrator 0:18
42	10. I Want to Get Ready 3:44
43	11. I Want to Get Ready Interlude 0:59
44	Narrator 0:08
45	12. River Ending 0:53
46	Narrator 0:11
47	13. Hello Ending 3:20
	TOTAL 52 40

TOTAL 53:43

The Artemis Chamber Ensemble
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David Arnold baritone

Wendy Baker soprano Nathan Bahny narrator

