

# Upcoming events at OTG

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March 7, 7pm

Hangar on the Wharf Ballroom

## Opera Spotlight

stay tuned for details

June 1



[www.OperaToGo.net](http://www.OperaToGo.net)



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Motyka, Roman  
Prentice, Carol and Walz, Robin  
Price, Catherine and Michael  
Query, Jay and Delong, Julie

# A message from the Artistic Director

Opera to Go is very proud to present the premiere production of Rory Stitt's new opera for children (and adults!), *Bennu*. This piece is OTG's first commission of a work not based on previously extant material. Audiences might remember new pieces we presented such as *Mozart Reimagined* and *Arctic Magic Flute*. Both of those shows were based on the music of Mozart, yet created new story lines.

The idea for a new children's opera from Rory hit me while working with him on the 2008 performance of his *Requiem*. The broad appeal of his music, combined with his artistic sensibilities, made this project a must. The journey from initial idea to first production of *Bennu* has taken over five years! The work that you are about to hear and see is not only the product of lots of artists pulling together to make a special production of a brand new work, but is the product of a musical and theatrical mind searching for his personal approach to an art form that has seen hundreds of years of re-invention. Rory's background with so many various musical forms puts him in a unique position to bring audiences a new experience in opera and continue to show the world that opera is still a vibrant and living art form capable of touching the hearts of people who might not otherwise give it a chance.

I personally want to thank all the folks involved in this production, which from all the names you can see in the program is quite a few very dedicated individuals who helped bring this dream into a reality. Aside from those onstage and in the pit, there are wonderful designers and directors who put in unbelievable amounts of time to create the production you are to witness. I am in awe of their dedication to the project.

Enjoy the show!  
William Todd Hunt  
Artistic Director, Opera to Go

# Bennu

by RORY MERRITT STITT

An Opera for Children and Adults  
Music and Libretto by Rory Merritt Stitt  
Commissioned by Opera to Go  
William Todd Hunt, Artistic Director

Conductor William Todd Hunt  
Stage Director Brandon Demery  
Scenic and Costume Designer Paul Spadone  
Lighting Designer William Conrow  
Props Designer Robina Moyer

## Cast

Bennu	Aaron Abella
Princess	Gin Anderson
King	Jay Query
Queen	Lisa Ray
Sir Malais	Brett Crawford
Mother	Therese Thibodeau
Father	Wade Rogers
Sister	Anne Weske
Brother	Gillian Smith
Matriarch	Catherine Pashigian
Bird	Rebekah Smith



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# Notes from the Composer

The first draft of my libretto for *Bennu* would have been an opera over two and a half hours long. It was full to the brim with disparate kingdoms, unrequited loves, fusing polarities, disembodied voices and all manners of subplots that any great work of fantasy might have. The child in me had free reign. There would be an orchestra of one hundred and thirty pieces, a cast of thousands and a costume budget of one bajillion dollars!

It was *Lord of the Rings* in scope.

As reality made its inevitable approach I heard the voices of reason. It must be shorter. Simpler. Less is more. More is less. One bajillion isn't even a real number.

So I edited. Ideas that my brain insisted on, I let go of. Moments my heart insisted on, I invested in. What's left is a story that sings like a picture book. Each scene is a page in the picture book, each page a chapter in the story. The characters are large and the brush strokes are wide. The colors are bold and the music is both crunchy and chewy. Just how I like it.

What remains is a simple story of self. Bennu is a blank slate. He is a mirror for us, the audience, to find ourselves in. In the end, his journey leaves us with two questions:

What is the unique and beautiful song within *you*?

What will *you* do with it?

--Rory Merritt Stitt

# Villagers, Guards, and Retainers

Katie Moritz

Janet Schempf

Anne Weske

Therese Thibodeau

Lisa Ray

Catherine Pashigian

Lorie Daniels

Jessica Snyder

Gillian Smith

Brett Crawford

Jay Query

Jonathan Pollard

Wade Rogers

Trevor Daniels

Leina Tillotson

# The Amalga Chamber Orchestra

Flute/Alto Flute Sally Schlichting

Oboe Jetta Whittaker

Clarinet Sarah Grove

Contrabass Clarinet Becca Antonoplos

Bassoon Artemio Sandoval

Horn Heather Beggs

Kristin Mabry

Bill Paulick

Trumpet Ken Guiher

Tuba Tim Ayer

Piano Sue Kazama

Violin Lisa Ibias

Kathy Maas

David Miller

Robert Newmann

Val Snyder

Viola Sandy Burd

'Cello David Russell-Jensen

Maia Wolf

Bass Ceann Murphy

Percussion Mary Borthwick

David Grove

Debbie Maas

Shoshana Seligman

# Synopsis

**Scene 1 - The Village.** The villagers gather for the annual festival of the Moon Bird, a supernatural creature who brings the end of winter. We learn that every person has a part to play in this ritual, including three chosen ones who must sing the Moon Bird's song to welcome it and thereby bring the spring. This year the chosen three are Bennu and his siblings. When we meet Bennu, the villagers comment on how he never speaks, but only sings a strange song that no one understands. His family tries to help him practice the Moon Bird song, but he playfully sings his own. All express their concern over the coming ritual, but return to their festivities.

**Scene 2 - The Matriarch.** The ancient Matriarch of the village enters in a slow processional. She explains that people come and go as time passes, but when they sing for the Moon Bird they have the power to change things. When the bird approaches, the brother and sister sing their parts to perfection. When it's Bennu's turn he sings an inspired song, but not the Moon Bird song. The spell is broken and the approaching bird turns and flies back into the distance. The Matriarch tells the villagers they will have to wait until the next year to try and welcome the spring again. Bennu is shamed by the villagers and his family, who leave him standing alone. He decides to leave, and wanders through the forest. He eventually comes across a large, overgrown garden.

**Scene 3 - The Garden.** A Princess enters and sings to the old looming statues in the garden. She is unhappy with her life at home and compares her parents to the cold unfeeling statues. Bennu enters, hearing her song, but stays hidden. The Princess sings of her dream to find inspiration. Bennu, still hidden, sings to her. She is entranced by the mysterious voice and believes it is her dream and inspiration answering her call. She vows to return the next evening. She exits and Bennu follows close behind.

**Scene 4 - Meeting Malais.** Bennu follows the Princess to a decrepit castle. Outside he encounters the bumbling steward of the court, Sir Malais, who tries fruitlessly to figure out who he is. When he finally opens his mouth to sing, Malais is stunned and excited. He tells Bennu he must meet the King and Queen of the Castle at once, for they are in need of someone special.

**Scene 5 - Meeting their Majesties.** After grilling Sir Malais about the boy, they introduce themselves grandly to Bennu, saying that they need new music to bring life back to their kingdom. They offer to make him a Prince and give him a home if he will help them. He sings and, recognizing the potential in his song, the King and Queen send him to the Music Machine. He exits and they reveal that if he does not cooperate, they will sew his mouth shut. The Princess enters, overhearing that her parents have found yet another victim for their machine.

**Scene 6 - The Machine.** Four retainers of the castle escort our young protagonist to the music machine and strap him in. As Bennu sings, a potion is created that restores the youth of the devious monarchs, but at the cost of Bennu's freedom. They intend to keep him strapped to the machine forever and make him sing every day. They exit, pointing out that at least now he'll never be alone.

**Scene 7 - The Rescue.** The Princess enters, hoping to give some comfort to her parents' new victim. When Bennu sings to her, she recognizes his voice as the magical one she heard in the garden. Unwilling to see him become a slave to the King and Queen and their awful machine, she is determined to do whatever it takes to set him free. Malais discovers them trying to escape.



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**Gillian Smith - The Brother.** This is Gillian's first front of stage role with OTG. For *Rusalka* she spent nearly the entire opera flat on her back wearing sunglasses, behind the scrim, operating a stick puppet naiad. An eighth grader in the Montessori Borealis program, she has appeared in 7 musical productions with Northern Light Junior Theater and Theater at Latitude 58. Her most recent role was as the General in *Seussical! The Musical*. She was also in Perseverance Theatre's *Hansel and Gretel*, and studies piano with Rosie Humphery.



**Therese Thibodeau - The Mother.** Therese has sung many roles including Suzuki in *Mme Butterfly*, Despina in *Cosi fan Tutti*, La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi* and many chorus roles with Opera to Go and Juneau Lyric Opera. She is thrilled to be a part of this new work by Rory Stitt. She is also thankful to be able to continue her vocal studies with Mark Calvert. She hopes you enjoy this musical trip into a fantasy world.



**Anne Weske - The Sister.** Ms Weske was literally born into the music community. Much of her childhood memories involve tagging along with her mother, Sue Kazama, from rehearsal to rehearsal, often being recruited to turn pages for Juneau Lyric Opera productions. She has been singing since she was a young child, however began taking voice lessons from Dr. John d'Armand at the age of 14, and has continued off and on for the past 16 years. Anne has been involved in many of the operas and musicals in Juneau, including Bizet's *Carmen*, and Roger and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* and most recently Puccini's *La Boheme*. She has also been seen performing in various local groups including the Bach Society, MidSummer Vocal Workshops, as well as singing a few times in the December concert of *The Messiah*. She is forever grateful for the encouragement shown by her friends and family as they support her in one of her many loves...singing!



**Congrats to the Cast**

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**Scene 8 - Conflict in the Castle!** Sir Malais awakens everyone to come and save their future, for the good fortune of the King and Queen will no doubt trickle down to everyone. A fight ensues, where the Princess displays her prowess in combat. The court and guards overwhelm them, but the Princess makes a last stand and tells Bennu to use his voice for what he knows it is truly for.

**Scene 9 - The Escape.** Bennu sings and his song enchants everyone. They all fall into a trance, dancing happily and echo the song back to him. The Princess tells him to hurry and go, but to share his gift and inspiration with everyone he meets.

**Scene 10 - The Return** – Bennu and the Bird. After escaping the Castle, Bennu wanders alone in the night again. He comes to the ocean and sings his song sadly. A small voice responds and he discovers a lovely bird caught in a trap. As he frees her, they sing their nonsense songs to each other, gradually realizing that they speak the same language. Bennu is released from his trap of trying to conform to other's preconceptions and discovers that he, himself, is transforming into a magnificent bird. He returns to his village as the Sun Bird, greeted with great enthusiasm by the villagers. He and the bird he rescued fly off into the sunrise.



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**Catherine Pashigian - The Matriarch.** Mezzo-soprano Catherine Pashigian has sung principal and minor rolls for Juneau Lyric Opera and Opera to Go. Her most recent role was as Marcellina in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, a collaboration of JLO and OTG. She has been a soloist with the Juneau Symphony and the Bach Society. She is a student of Dr. John B. d'Armand of the University of Alaska Southeast, a winner of the National Association of Teacher's of singing Competition in Anchorage, and a former opera theater student at Hartt college of Music in Hartford, Ct. She is excited to play the role of the Matriarch in Rory Stitt's new Opera *Bennu*.

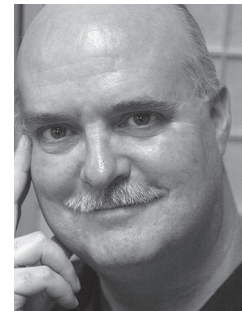


**Jay Query - The King.** Tenor Jay Query has been active in the music scene since stepping off the boat in Juneau. He has performed with OTG as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* and as Tinca and Rinuccio in *Il Trittico* and with JLO as Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*, Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, a talking clock in *Beauty and the Beast*, Nanki Poo in *The Mikado* and Basilio in *Marriage of Figaro*. Mr. Query performed as a soloist with Opera Fairbanks in their 50th Statehood Gala Celebration, the Juneau Bach Society, Juneau Symphony Showcase, and as Remendado in *Carmen* with the Juneau Symphony.

He studies voice with Dr. John d'Armand and pianist/coach Sue Kazama.



**Lisa Ray - The Queen.** Ms. Ray is a lifelong Southeast Alaskan who enjoys the lively music community in Juneau. She has performed in several local opera productions including starring as "Belle" in Juneau Lyric Opera's 2007 performance of *Beauty and the Beast*. Lisa is also an avid flutist and is a co-founder of the local group Flutatus.



**Wade Rogers - The Father.** Wade has performed the role of the philosopher Colline in Giacomo Puccini's *La Boheme*, was Guglielmo in Mozart's opera buffa, *Così fan Tutte*, and performed in the Opera to Go production of *Madama Butterfly*. In 2007, Wade performed as a choral member in the Opera to Go production of Puccini's *Tosca*, sang bass with the Juneau Victorian Carolers, a strolling group of holiday carolers and most recently performed as Aeneas in OTG's *Dido and Aeneas*, Marco in *Gianni Schicchi*, and as Pish Tush in *The Mikado*. Wade's vocal work has included a 32 year stint as a Radio Personality at radio stations KPGE in Arizona, KYFM and KWON in Bartlesville Oklahoma, KBRD/KTAC in Seattle Washington, and KSUP/KINY in Juneau Alaska.

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# Cast Biographies



**Aaron Abella - Bennu.** Aaron Abella was born and raised here in Juneau and loves performing. Recent shows include *Treasure Island* with Perseverance Theatre and *Pippin* with Juneau-Douglas High School from which he recently graduated from. He is a proud member of Ricci Adan's Dance Machine International. Along with singing and acting Aaron enjoys playing the oboe, reading, and climbing trees. He is very grateful for all the performing opportunities he's had in Alaska.



**Gin Anderson - The Princess.** Gin Anderson has been surrounded by music her entire life, whether it was playing in her Dad's bluegrass band as a child, performing solo vocal repertoire, or teaching voice students of all ages. As a student of Dr. Jaunelle Cellaire at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Gin's musical studies ranged from the 19th-century German Lieder of Schubert and Brahms to the modern chamber works of composers such as Steve Reich and Tan Dun. After receiving her Master's of Vocal Performance degree from UAF, Gin moved to Juneau to experience a new part of Alaska and spend more time enjoying the outdoors. She and her husband are now the owners of Alaska Zipline Adventures in Juneau and are proud to be part of this unique and vibrant community. This is Gin's debut performance with Opera To Go, and she hopes it will be the first of many.



**Brett Crawford - Sir Malais.** Brett arrived in Juneau some 28 years ago for three months and is still here! When not keeping busy with his businesses, Alaska Custodial Service and Aurora Window Cleaning, he fills his life with singing. He has performed with many of the groups in town including Juneau Lyric Opera, Opera to Go, Perseverance Theatre, and the Juneau Bach Society. Some of his favorite roles over the years have included Little Bat in *Susannah*, Kaspar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Shaunard in *La Boheme*, Ferrando in *Così fan Tutte*, one of Juneau's Three Tenors, and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*.



**Rebekah Grimes - The Bird.** Rebekah Grimes has lived in Juneau for 17 years. She has taken voice lessons with local instructors including Joyce Parry Moore and Kathleen Wayne. She has been singing with Opera to Go since high school when she played Miss Jessel in *Turn of the Screw*. Other Opera to Go roles included Le Feu in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. She has also performed with Juneau Lyric Opera, Juneau Bach Society, Juneau Symphony, and other local theater and vocal groups. She is grateful for the opportunities in Juneau to sing, sing, sing!

# Production staff

Rehearsal Pianist	Sue Kazama
	Rosie Humphery
	Doug Smith
Stage Manager	Jason Ginter
Production Manager	Betsy Sims
Vocal Coaches	Sue Kazama
	Doug Smith
Technical Director	Earnest Eckerman
Scenic Painter	Paul Spadone
Auditorium Manager	Robert "Bo" Anderson
Master Electrician	Jason Ginter
Stage Crew	Jessalynn Rintala
	Shawn Stendevad
Costume Shop Manager	Valerie Snyder
Stitchers	Susan Oshida
	Shelly Wright
	Inga Gregovich
Projections Master	Erik Chadwell
Backstage Assistant	Jeanine Smith
Set Construction	Jeremy Kotler
Poster Design	Paul Spadone

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# Artistic Staff Biographies



**Rory Stitt, Composer** has been composing, performing, and arranging music professionally since the age of 17. He and his work have been seen at Joe's Pub (the Public Theatre), the Cutting Room, the Bitter End, and the Living Room – all in New York City; the Kennedy Center in Washington DC; and the Knitting Factory in Los Angeles. As a singer/songwriter, Rory has produced, arranged, and released three original albums and toured nationally for five years. He has been represented at the international music conference, MIDEM, in Cannes (2001) and performed at numerous sanctioned music showcases throughout the United States and Canada. Most recently Rory has been focusing on larger scale compositions, including a full length *Requiem* for voices, piano, and percussion, as well as a series of interdisciplinary secular oratorios. He continues to write, arrange, and perform for theatres and soloists around the country.

Rory studied Piano Performance at the Johannessen International School of Music with Hungarian pianist Bela Siki; The University of the Pacific in Stockton, California with Rex Cooper; and the University of Alaska with Neal O'Doan (University of Washington).



**William Todd Hunt, Conductor** Artistic Director of Alaska's Opera to Go, as well as Resident Conductor of the Juneau Symphony, Mr. Hunt has also appeared with the Northern Hungarian Symphony Orchestra, the Kling Chamber Orchestra (Louisville, KY), Indiana University Chamber Opera, and the Juneau Symphony. He served as Assistant Conductor at Indiana University Opera Theatre, University of Louisville Opera Theatre, Music Theatre Louisville and the Evansville Philharmonic where he has worked with conductors Arpad Joo, Alfred Savia, Imre Palló and David Harman, among others. Mr. Hunt served as co-founder and Music Director for Ardo Opera (Bloomington, IN), where he produced and conducted several productions, notably at the Bloomington Early Music Festival. Mr. Hunt has most recently made his Anchorage Opera debut conducting *Suor Angelica* and *Pagliacci*, as well as appearances with Opera to Go in *Il Trittico*, Dvorak's *Rusalka*, and *L'elisir d'amore*, Juneau Lyric Opera's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the Juneau Concert Band and the Juneau Symphony in concert. Upcoming engagements include a concert with the Juneau Concert band in May.



**William Conrow, Lighting Designer.** William Conrow moved to Juneau in 2005 and has been quietly working behind the scenes supporting local arts groups with his lighting and directing expertise, while continuing his love affair with writing for the stage. Believe it or not, Bill's career in theatre started as a professional dancer before segueing into a twenty-five year run as a choreographer, stage director, and lighting designer. Along the way he kept writing, and twelve stage plays later, he's still at it, writing with more passion for the art form than he ever thought possible. Bill is devoted to serving the arts and the people in Juneau who create, produce, and support the fine arts. And, yes, hilarious as it sounds, Bill actually was a leotard and tank top wearing modern dancer once upon a time—think John Travolta in the 80s flick "Staying Alive." He even wore the head band and leg warmers in rehearsals! Oh, baby!



**Brandon Demery, Director.** Brandon is a director, actor, and teacher of the theatre. He has been a company member of Perseverance Theatre since moving to Juneau in October of 2006. Notable productions include 'Noises Off', 'The Who's Tommy', Equus, 'Much Ado About Nothing', 'Wittenberg', 'Boom!' and in this season's 'God of Carnage'. In late March he will begin rehearsals for 'Boeing Boeing', the final show at PT for the 2013-2014 season. He has worked at The Long Wharf Theater, The Kennedy Center, The Philadelphia Theater Company, Hartford Stage, The Shakespeare Theater, and in NYC at Red Bull Theater, Manhattan Ensemble Theater, and The Variety Arts Theater in Elaine May's 'Adult Entertainment' with Danny Aiello and Jeannie Berlin, directed by Stanley Donen. At Perseverance Theatre he has directed 'Leading Ladies', 'Circle Mirror Transformation', 'A Question of Mercy', and the Young Company's 'The General Dilemma', which he also wrote. He is pleased to add opera to his list of experience with 'Bennu' and would like to thank a hard working cast and production team for their time and creativity. An extra special 'thank you' goes out to William Todd Hunt and Rory Merritt Stitt.



**Paul Spadone, Scenic and Costume Designer.** Paul's motion picture credits include Assistant Designer on *Spider-man 2* and *Spider-man 3* (Columbia Pictures), *Elektra* (New Regency Productions), and *The Soloist* (Dreamworks/Universal Pictures) for which he oversaw all period and background design. Additional work with Academy Award-winning designer James Acheson includes development and fabrication of superhero and villain costumes for the original *Spider-man*. Theater credits include *Villains Tonight!*, and *Wishes* for Disney Cruise Lines, *Yeast Nation: The Triumph of Life*, Perseverance Theatre, Juneau and American Theater Company, Chicago, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (American Theater Company, Chicago. Perseverance Theatre, Juneau. Actor's Express Theater, Atlanta.), *The Who's Tommy*, *Hair* (Perseverance Theatre), *Love Loves a Pornographer*, *Laura Comstock's Bag-Punching Dog* (Circle X Theatre Co., Los Angeles, Director: Jillian Armenante), *Duel*, *Remodeling Plans* (Oasis Theater Co., Los Angeles, and *Galileo* (Yale Repertory Theater. Assistant Design for theater includes the Broadway revival of *Little Shop of Horrors* (with William Ivey Long), the Metropolitan Opera's world premier production of *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (with Jane Greenwood). Awards include the LA Drama Critics Circle Award (Nominee: *Love Loves a Pornographer*), Backstage Garland Award (Winner: *Love Loves a Pornographer*), Los Angeles Ovation Award (Nominee: *Laura Comstock's Bag-Punching Dog*), and the Leo Lerman Graduate Fellowship in Design. Paul is a graduate (MFA) of the Yale School of Drama.



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