

# EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

## ELIZABETH CREE

*A chamber opera in one act*

*Based on the novel 'The Trial of Elizabeth Cree  
by Peter Ackroyd*

*Commissioned by Opera Philadelphia*

*Music by Kevin Puts '94E, '99E (DMA)  
Libretto by Mark Campbell*

Timothy Long, conductor  
Stephen Carr, director

VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE:

July 9 – August 7, 2021

Filmed at Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre from April 17–25, 2021\*

*This work is performed in conjunction with the Eastman  
1921 – 2021 Centennial*



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SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

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## CAST

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Elizabeth Cree	Kyrsten Chambers Jones
John Cree	Michael Aiello
Dan Leno	Travon Walker
Aveline Mortimer	Susannah Stewart
Uncle	Peter Schoellkopf
Inspector Kildare	Nathaniel Malkow
Doris	Andrea McGaugh
Little Victor Farrell	Trevor Scott
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## ORCHESTRA ENSEMBLE

Timothy Long, conductor

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# SYNOPSIS

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SETTING: London, 1880's.

## PROLOGUE

April 9, 1881; Camberwell Prison

Elizabeth Cree is hanged for the murder of her husband, John. As the noose tightens around her neck, Elizabeth utters an enigmatic phrase: "Here we are again."

## SCENE 1

January, 1881; The Courtroom

Elizabeth stands on trial for murdering her husband. The prosecuting attorney inquires about her former life before she met and later married John Cree.

## SCENE 2

September, 1878; A Street in London

Elizabeth returns in memory to her youth when she was known as Lambeth Marsh Lizzie and lived in poverty with her abusive mother, mending sails for the fishermen on the Thames. After her mother dies, Elizabeth uses the collection the fishermen have raised to fulfill her dream of visiting the music hall. She runs across town to a theatre, buys a ticket, and goes inside.

## SCENE 3

September, 1878; The Music Hall, Onstage

Elizabeth watches a variety show, enthralled as the famous comedian Dan Leno performs a skit playing Bluebeard's housekeeper.

## SCENE 4

September, 1878; The Music Hall, Backstage

Elizabeth slips backstage after the performance and meets Dan Leno, as well as others in his company: "Uncle" the Ventriloquist; Doris, the Goddess of Wire-Walking; Little Victor Farrell the Magician; and Aveline Mortimer the Wide-Eyed Warbler (who leaves soon after Elizabeth arrives). The performers, hearing of Elizabeth's plight, quickly adopt her into their stage family.

## SCENE 5

September 10, 1880; The Diary of John Cree

An entry in the diary of John Cree recounts the murder of a young prostitute named Jane Quig.

## SCENE 6

September 12, 1880; An Office in Scotland Yard

Panic grips London after the murder of Quig, and Inspector Kildare of Scotland Yard is assigned to the case. Searching for clues, he learns that

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Quig occasionally swept the floors of the Reading Room in the British Museum, so he interrogates the noted novelist George Gissing who does his writing there.

### SCENE 7

February, 1881; The Courtroom

At her trial, Elizabeth is questioned by the defense attorney. Elizabeth suggests that John took his own life, due to a “morbid disposition.” The prosecution attorney implies that Elizabeth murdered John for his money and calls Aveline Mortimer to the stand.

### SCENE 8

April, 1878; The Music Hall, Backstage and On

After working for several months backstage with the troupe of actors, Elizabeth makes her stage debut, replacing an increasingly truant Aveline Mortimer. It is a great success. When she leaves the theatre after her performance, John Cree, playwright and critic, approaches her and introduces himself.

### SCENE 9

September 12, 1880; The Diary of John Cree

Another entry in the diary of John Cree records the murder of Solomon Weil, a Hebrew scholar.

### SCENE 10

September 14, 1880; An Office in Scotland Yard

Kildare interrogates Karl Marx, who was a colleague of Weil’s and also frequents the Reading Room. Meanwhile, public panic grows and the murderer is dubbed “The Limehouse Golem,” because of the geographic location of the crimes and because a Jewish man is the latest victim.

### SCENE 11

February, 1881; The Courtroom

At the trial, the prosecution attorney interrogates Aveline Mortimer and raises the suspicion that Elizabeth killed John by poisoning him with a “physic” she concocted herself.

### SCENE 12

November, 1878; The Music Hall, Backstage and On

Elizabeth has risen to star status in the world of the music hall, but grows bored with ingénue roles. She performs a song in male attire with Dan called, “Here We Are Again.”

### SCENE 13

September 15, 1880; The Diary of John Cree

An entry chronicles another brutal murder: that of the entire Gerrard

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family, slaughtered to commemorate the Marr family murders immortalized in Thomas De Quincey's "On Murder As One of the Finer Arts."

### SCENE 14

September 26, 1880; An Office in Scotland Yard

Kildare seeks clues in the Gerrard family murders and questions Dan, as Mr. Gerrard once served as his dresser. After Dan leaves Scotland Yard, he quietly bemoans a world in which such evil exists. Meanwhile, the panic in London builds and Kildare feels more pressure to find the murderer.

### SCENE 15

February, 1881; The Courtroom

At the trial, Aveline raises stronger suspicions that Elizabeth murdered her husband.

### SCENE 16

November, 1879; The Music Hall, Backstage

After a performance, Uncle learns that Elizabeth is about to go on another date with John Cree. He accuses her of opportunism, mentioning that John is both a theatre critic and wealthy.

### SCENE 17

November, 1879; A Street in London, Under a Full Moon

John confesses his love for Elizabeth and proposes marriage. Elizabeth accepts.

### SCENE 18

June, 1880; The Music Hall, Backstage

At a marriage celebration, Dan toasts "Lambeth Marsh Lizzie's" new life...as Mrs. John Cree.

### SCENE 19

September, 1880; The Home of John and Elizabeth Cree

John is frustrated that Elizabeth refuses to consummate their marriage. He leaves for the Reading Room at the British Museum. Elizabeth decides to engage Aveline as a maid to satiate John's desires.

### SCENE 20

September, 1880; The Reading Room, the British Museum

In the Reading Room, John expresses despair about his marriage. While working on his new play, entitled Misery Junction. Karl Marx appears and requests a book from the librarian.

### SCENE 21

September, 1880; The Home of John and Elizabeth Cree

Aveline is engaged to work in the Cree household as a housekeeper.

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John meets and is instantly attracted to Aveline. He leaves, but returns and flirts with Aveline while Elizabeth looks on approvingly

### SCENE 22

September, 1880; The Reading Room, the British Museum

John continues to voice his sorrow at his unhappy marriage while working on *Misery Junction*. He is joined in the Reading Room by Karl Marx, George Gissing and Dan Leno.

### SCENE 23

September, 1880; The Home of John and Elizabeth Cree

Elizabeth tells Aveline that John suffers from mad dreams and orders her to give him a “physic” that she prepares herself every night.

### SCENE 24

March, 1881; The Courtroom

The two attorneys conclude their arguments in the trial of Elizabeth Cree.

### SCENE 25

October, 1880; The Reading Room, the British Museum

John is absent from the chair in which he usually sits. Marx, Gissing, and Leno continue to read their books. Elizabeth returns three books to the librarian.

### SCENE 26

November, 1880; An Office in Scotland Yard

Kildare is dumbfounded that the Limehouse Golem’s murders have suddenly stopped and that the public now turns its fickle attention to the trial of Elizabeth Cree.

### SCENE 27

March, 1881; The Courtroom

Elizabeth is convicted of murdering John and sentenced to death.

### SCENE 28

April 9, 1881. A Cell in Camberwell Prison/The Diary of John Cree

The Priest visits Elizabeth and hears her confession.

### SCENE 29

September, 1881; A Theatre

A year later, it’s opening night of John Cree’s play, now entitled *The Crees of Misery Junction*, which has been rewritten to capitalize on his murder and stars Aveline Mortimer (“The Woman Who Was There”) as Elizabeth Cree. Unfortunately, there is a calamitous scenic malfunction, prompting Dan to remark, “Here we are again.”

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<https://www.operaphila.org/whats-on/on-stage-2017-2018/elizabeth-cree/full-synopsis/>

## MEET THE ARTISTS

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Winner of numerous prestigious awards, including the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for his debut opera *Silent Night*, **Kevin Puts**'s works have been commissioned, performed, and recorded by leading ensembles, and soloists throughout the world, including Yo-Yo Ma, Renée Fleming, Jeffrey Kahane, Dame Evelyn Glennie, the New York Philharmonic, the Tonhalle Orchester (Zurich), the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Miro Quartet, and the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Cincinnati, Detroit, Atlanta, Colorado, Houston, Fort Worth, St. Louis, and Minnesota. His latest operatic work, an adaptation of Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, has been co-commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera and is slated for premiere in 2022. The opera will star Renée Fleming, Joyce DiDonato and Kelli O'Hara. His newest orchestral work, *The City*, was co-commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in honor of its 100th anniversary and by Carnegie Hall in honor of its 125th anniversary. His new vocal work *Letters From Georgia*, written for soprano Renée Fleming and orchestra and based on the personal letters of Georgia O'Keeffe, had its world premiere in New York in Fall 2016, and his first chamber opera, an adaptation of Peter Ackroyd's gothic novel *The Trial of Elizabeth Cree* commissioned by Opera Philadelphia, had its world premiere in September 2017, followed by performances with Chicago Opera Theater in February 2018.

*Silent Night*, commissioned and premiered in November 2011 by Minnesota Opera and co-produced by Opera Philadelphia, has been produced at Fort Worth Opera, Cincinnati Opera, the Wexford Opera Festival, Calgary Opera, Montreal Opera, the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Atlanta Opera, Opera San Jose, and Michigan Opera Theatre. In 2013, his choral works *To Touch The Sky* and *If I Were A Swan* were performed and recorded by Conspirare. His second opera, also commissioned by Minnesota Opera, *The Manchurian Candidate*, based on the novel, had its world premiere in 2015.

A former Composer-in-Residence of Young Concerts Artists, he is currently a member of the composition department at the Peabody Institute and the Director of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer's Institute.

**Mark Campbell**'s work as a librettist is at the forefront of the contemporary opera scene in this country. A prolific writer, Mark has created 38 opera librettos, lyrics for 7 musicals, and the text for 6 song



## MEET THE ARTISTS

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cycles and 2 oratorios. His works for the stage have been performed at more than 90 musical venues around the world and the names of his collaborators comprise a roster of the most eminent composers in classical music and include three Pulitzer Prize winners.

Mark's best-known work is *Silent Night*, which received a Pulitzer Prize in Music and is one of the most frequently produced operas in recent history. *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, an audience favorite, received a 2018 GRAMMY Award for Best Opera Recording. Mark's other successful operas include *The Shining*, *Stonewall*, *Later the Same Evening*, *The Nefarious, Immoral but Highly Profitable Enterprise of Mr. Burke & Mr. Hare*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *As One*, *The Other Room*, *Memory Boy*, *Empty the House*, *The Inspector*, *Approaching Ali*, *A Letter to East 11th Street*, *Dinner at Eight*, *Volpone*, and *Bastianello/Lucrezia*. His musicals include *Songs from an Unmade Bed*, *The Audience* and *Splendor*. He also created a successful new adaptation of Stravinsky/Ramuz's *The Soldier's Tale*.

Mark has received many other prestigious prizes for his work, including the first Kleban Foundation Award for Lyricist, a Grammy nomination for Best Classical Recording, two Richard Rodgers Awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, three Drama Desk nominations, a Jonathan Larson Foundation Award, a New York Foundation for the Arts Playwriting Fellowship, the first Dominic J. Pellicciotti Award, and a grant from the New York State Council of the Arts.

Recordings of his works include: *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (Pentatone), *Sanctuary Road* (Naxos), *As One* (Bright Shiny Things), *Volpone* (Wolf Trap Records), *Bastianello/Lucrezia* (Bridge), *Rappahannock County* (Naxos), *Later the Same Evening* (Albany) and *Songs from an Unmade Bed* (Ghostlight).

Mark is also an advocate for contemporary American opera and serves as a mentor for future generations of writers through such organizations as American Opera Projects, American Lyric Theatre, and Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative. In 2020, he created and is funding the Campbell Opera Librettist Prize, the first and only award for opera librettists. The award will be given annually and is administered by OPERA America.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mark's 2020 premieres were postponed. They included *Edward Tulane* for Minnesota Opera (Paola Prestini, composer), *A Nation of Others* for the Oratorio Society of New York (Paul Moravec, composer), *A Sweet Silence in Cremona* for the

## MEET THE ARTISTS

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Florence at Villa la Pietra–Continuum Theater, Florence (Roberto Scarcella Perino, composer) and *Stone Soup* for Ft. Worth Opera (Joe Illick, composer). Future premieres include *The Secret River* for Opera Orlando (Stella Sung, composer); *Supermax* for Saratoga Opera (Stewart Wallace, composer; Michael Korie, co-librettists); *Bernadette's Cozy Book Nook* for Ft. Worth Opera (Joe Illick, composer) and the book for the musical *Les Girls* (Cole Porter, composer).

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Alexandra R. Hotz `20E (MM)  
Liesa Hotz and Paul Hotz  
Valerie Lashley  
Anna C. Lenti `11E  
Joseph D. Lerangis `19E (MM)  
Ava L. Linvog  
Timothy G. Long `92E (MM)  
Ayla H. Martinelli  
Talya Matz  
Peter Maurer  
Russell Miller  
John S. Muentner  
Trevor Nelson  
Lisa M. Newton `91E  
Dallas Oestara  
Jan Opalach and Katharine L. Edmonds  
Jean Pedersen  
Gregory H. Partridge `80 and Dr. Douglas  
Potter  
Paul Quiram, Jr.  
Varun Rangaswamy `20E  
Schwartz, Marc Allen  
Veronica M. Siebert  
Candace Speed P`21E and Jason Speed  
P`21E  
Suzanne M. Spencer  
Kevin J. Spooner  
Kristine K. Thompson  
Sophie P. Thompson `20E (MM)  
Sonja A. Thoms `03E  
Sarah M. Tipton and Steven Tipton  
Dana F. Wendel  
Patricia White  
Kendra M. Wieneke `11E, `14E (MM) and  
Dr. Robert J. Carroll `14 (MA), `15 (PhD)  
Dr. Diana R. Williams `94M (Res) and Dr.  
Kevin W. Williams  
Dr. Kristen E. Willmott `13W (PhD) and  
Benjamin Willmott  
Ashleigh D. Wolf  
Dr. Lee S. Wright `03E, `18E (DMA)

# UPCOMING VIRTUAL OPERA EVENTS AT EASTMAN

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**Kilbourn Hall fire exits** are located along the right and left sides, and at the back of the hall. In the event of an emergency, you will be notified by the stage manager. If notified, please move in a calm and orderly fashion to the nearest exit.

**Please note:** The use of unauthorized photographic and recording equipment is not allowed in this building. We reserve the right to ask anyone disrupting a performance to leave the hall.

**Restrooms** are located on the main floor of Kilbourn Hall. Fully-accessible restrooms are available on the first floor of the Eastman School. Our ushers will be happy to direct you to them.

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