

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

IN A GROVE

Friday, October 31, 2025 | 7:30 PM
Sunday, November 2, 2025 | 2:30 PM
Kilbourn Hall



University
of Rochester
Eastman School of Music

CREDITS

IN A GROVE

AN OPERA IN SEVEN TESTIMONIES

MUSIC BY **CHRISTOPHER CERRONE**

LIBRETTO BY **STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN**

*BASED ON **RYŪNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA'S** SHORT STORY*

In A Grove was commissioned by the Los Angeles Opera with production support from Pittsburgh Opera, with additional creative and development support provided by Metropolis Ensemble, Raulee Marcus, Stephen Block, and Judy and Allen Freedman.

In A Grove had its World Premiere Performance at Pittsburgh Opera (Christopher Hahn, General Director) in Pittsburgh, PA on February 19, 2022. Directed by Mary Burnbaum / Conducted by Antony Walker

In A Grove is presented by arrangement with European American Music Distributors Company, U.S. and Canadian agent for Schott Music, publisher and copyright owner.

ARTISTIC TEAM

Artistic Director & Music Director

Timothy Long

Stage Director

Joelle Lachance

Scenic Designer

Kim Zhou

Costume Designer

Nicole LaClair

Lighting Designer

Andrew DG Hunt

Projection Designer

John Horzen

Sound Designer

Gregory Thompson

Props Designer

Mary Reiser

Associate Projection Designer

Ein Kim

Intimacy Director

Lindsay Warren Baker

Fight Director

Adriano Gatto

Assistant Projection Designer

Jada Pinsley

Assistant Conductor

Nathaniel Peets

CAST

Friday, October 31, 7:30 PM

Sunday, November 2, 2:30 PM

The Woodcutter

Gu Hong Wu

The Priest

Christine Sheng

The Policeman

Owen Connolly

The Old Woman

Anna Bjerken

The Outlaw, Luther Harlow

Darrin Nicholson II

Leona Raines

Emma Wilansky

Ambrose Raines

Andrew Puschel

The Medium

Yiran Alicia Guan

COVERS

Mitchell Parmelee for **The Woodcutter**

Norah Bailey for **The Priest**

Benjamin Coudriet for **The Policeman**

Karynna Moore-Sobel for **The Old Woman**

Max Foreman for **The Outlaw, Luther Harlow**

Naomi Chad for **Leona Raines**

Zachary Thompson for **Ambrose Raines**

Kai Harrington for **The Medium**

GRADUATE OPERA ASSISTANTS/PIANISTS

Haniel Anugerah

Xi Huang

Bolai Cao

Chaeun Lee

Andrew Chen

ORCHESTRA

Timothy Long, conductor

<i>Violin</i> Kaylynn Li	<i>Flute and Alto Flute</i> Kaja Hammerschmidt	<i>Electronics</i> Amy Krutsch
<i>Cello</i> Clara Schultz	<i>Clarinet and Bass Clarinet</i> Jay Kline	<i>Piano and MIDI Keyboard</i> Haniel Anugerah
<i>Harp</i> Viviana Alfaro	<i>Horn</i> Amelia Caruk	<i>Percussion</i> Hudson Toler Grace Qian

PRODUCTION STAFF

<i>Technical Director</i> Mark Houser	<i>Costume Shop Supervisor</i> Megan Lancy	<i>A2</i> James Callahan-Stiles
<i>Production Stage Manager</i> Josh Lau	<i>Costume Construction</i> Leah Camilleri Naomi Chad*	<i>Light Board Operators</i> Katherine Duprey Brodie McPherson
<i>Assistant Stage Managers</i> Mariana Iguavita* Amy Krutsch	Claudette Hercules Andrea McGaugh Jessamyn Slon Elizabeth Wager Emma Wilansky*	<i>Wardrobe Run Crew</i> Shelbie Colombo Claudette Hercules Megan Lancy Andrea McGaugh Jessamyn Slon Elizabeth Wager
<i>Properties Supervisor</i> Mary Reiser	<i>Hair & Makeup</i> Leah Camilleri Megan Lancy Renee Proulx Jessamyn Slon	<i>Video & Production</i> Dylan Skwirba
<i>Union Steward</i> Steven Woznick	<i>Audio Mixer</i> Brandon Schmitt	<i>Kilbourn Hall Operations Manager</i> Deirdre Graves
<i>Carpenters</i> Robert DiCandia Jose Maisonet Dylan Skwirba Steven Woznick	<i>Head Electrician</i> Matthew Oliner	<i>EcoPrint Artist</i> Debra Eck
<i>Scenic Artist/Painter</i> Shelbie Colombo	<i>Electricians</i> Brodie McPherson Logan Simpson	<i>Director of Production</i> Pat Diamond
<i>Assistant Scenic Painter</i> Katherine Duprey	<i>Light Board Programmer</i> Katherine Duprey Justin Gommel	*denotes student production assistants

SETTING & SYNOPSIS

WARNING: *In A Grove* includes the use of prop weapons consisting of a non-firing, non-loading replica of a period rifle as well as a prop knife with rounded edges. The music includes a pre-recorded, stylized sound referring to “gunshots.”

This production also contains depictions of sexual violence, theatrical haze (fake smoke/fog), and harsh lighting effects.

SETTING: 1890s Klondike region of Yukon Territory, Canada

Duration: 55’

A ghost forest — the aftermath of a wildfire. We, the audience, are the silent, unseen interlocutor, gathering testimony from seven witnesses / potential perpetrators of a crime.

A woodcutter states that he found a body in the grove, on the mountain where he goes to cut wood. A priest testifies that he passed a man leading a woman on a horse along the Foundry Post Road. A policeman recounts his arrest of Luther Harlow, a local vigilante, who some say is responsible for the spate of women gone missing from the mountain.

A woman describes her daughter, Leona, an aspiring botanist, whose new husband, Ambrose, a schoolteacher, appears to have been murdered. The mother pleads with the interlocutor to find the girl, who is missing.

Luther Harlow confesses. Taken by the beauty of a young woman he encountered along the mountain road, he had tried to lure the girl and her husband into a nearby grove, promising treasure.

As Luther tells his story, he relives the events: The girl resists Luther’s ruse, but her husband, eager to regale his new bride with pretty trinkets, follows Luther into the grove. Luther quickly disposes of the young man, and when Leona discovers her husband bound and gagged, she pulls a knife on Luther, who knocks the knife from her hand and attempts to contain and subdue her. She slips from his grasp, pelting Luther with a rock, and knocking him out just long enough for her to free her husband, arming him with her knife. Ambrose is hesitant at first, but Leona urges him to fight.

SETTING & SYNOPSIS

Although the schoolteacher is no match for the vigilante, he somehow holds his own. Soon enough, however, Ambrose's strength wanes. Leona intervenes by shooting Ambrose's rifle into the air, and in the confusion, Luther stabs him, grabs the gun and flees, leaving him for dead.

Leona reluctantly delivers her testimony: of having encountered a dubious man on the mountain road; of her husband Ambrose's misguided desire to follow the stranger into the grove; of being left to wait alone in the gloam, calling on the relics of the ghost forest for protection.

When the man returns without Ambrose, she follows, terrified of what has befallen her husband. In the grove, Luther attempts to assault her, but she eludes him, hurling a stone at him, freeing Ambrose so that he can defend them both. Ambrose hesitates, and she lashes out at him. Ambrose has no choice but to fight a losing battle.

Leona again steps in, pointing Ambrose's rifle to the sky and firing. In the tumult, the marauder disappears, and Leona discovers that her husband is bleeding. She gathers medicinal plants to staunch the wound. But as she tends to Ambrose, he jealously rebukes her, accusing her of having consorted with Luther. Thrown by his anger, she balks, and in that moment he expires. Believing she killed him, she tries, over and over again to take her own life, but fails. Leona confesses that she murdered her husband.

A medium channels the dead man, who articulates the secret Ambrose was never able to tell his new bride—that his heart has always been weak, ever since suffering from rheumatic fever as a small child.

The medium and Ambrose relive the incidents leading up to Ambrose's death from his perspective, tormented by the fact that in his final moments, he allowed his wife to believe it was she who killed him, rather than his failing heart.

If you need help or know someone who is a survivor of sexual assault, help is available.

*Call 585-546-2777 (*24-hour confidential hotline)*

Local resources and help are available at RestoreSAS.org

ARTISTIC STATEMENTS

In A Grove opens with a wash of white noise—a sonic representation of wildfire and smoke. As the opera progresses, rhythms, harmonies, motives, and eventually melodies emerge out of this aural fog, mirroring the way facts emerge, piece by piece, in this musical detective story.

As our characters relate their tales, motives and melodies recur, but they also evolve, paralleling each narrator's shifting perspective. A throwaway melody in Luther's scene becomes the basis for Leona's aria in hers; finally, this melody becomes the core of the final confession, a duet between a Medium and Ambrose.

Throughout the work, the voices are transformed electronically. I tried to exemplify remembrance's flawed roughness by distorting the voices using reverb, pitch-shifting, and, granulation—effects that suggest that our characters' memories are flawed, foggy, or plain wrong.

In setting out to compose *In A Grove*, I tried to take something unconventional—a story told over and over again from different perspectives—and marry it to something familiar: music, where themes, repetition, and variation help us navigate and understand this mysterious tale.

— *Christopher Cerrone, composer*

What we discovered in the process of making *In A Grove* is that Leona is the heart of the story. And that truth is not just prismatic, elusive, and fallible, it is personal, emotional, razor-edged. The truths and untruths that we perceive, gloss over, embrace, refute or deny drive the trajectories of our lives. The uncanny weave of opacity and transparencies so aptly conjured in Akutagawa's remarkable tale makes up the fabric of lived experience. The story's form, that of seven testimonies, asks us to listen differently—to approach narrative, language, image and sound in new ways, and in so doing, perhaps, to see and hear anew. Obfuscation is pervasive, and yet the crystalline architecture of Chris's music serves as a revelatory container for the ineffable.

— *Stephanie Fleischmann, librettist*

ARTISTIC STATEMENTS

In A Grove is, at its core, simple. It is the story of a murder and a missing woman as told from seven different perspectives. But nothing is ever straightforward in real life, so why should it be on the stage? Perspective is vitally important. While examining the source material, Akutagawa's short story of the same name and the film *Rashōmon*, as well as the libretto, I was struck by the passage of time, how the time of day was relayed by the sun, and how it was never the same. How would the story be affected if the position of the sun was unreliable? Would that character's intentions and perspective change, too?

This idea caused me to shift the setting of this production in order to allow me to play with light and shadow, and the perspectives of not just the characters but the audience as well. Instead of 1920s Oregon, this production takes place in the 1890s outside of Dawson City in the Klondike of the Yukon Territory of Canada during the gold rush. The use of technology in the pit, over the voices, and through the projections also work to distort the information presented to the audience. It muddies the perspective. Does this change who you believe is telling the truth? Is anyone? Or is everyone hiding or lying about something? Which telling is what actually happened in the grove? I will leave that for you to decide.

— *Joelle Lachance, director*

MEET THE ARTISTS

Christopher Cerrone (b. 1984) is internationally acclaimed for compositions characterized by a subtle handling of timbre and resonance, a deep literary fluency, and a flair for multimedia collaborations. His three-time GRAMMY-nominated work balances lushness and austerity, immersive textures and telling details.

Cerrone's recent opera, *In A Grove* (libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann), jointly produced by LA Opera and Pittsburgh Opera, received its sold-out premiere run in March 2022. The opera made its New York debut at the PROTOTYPE Festival in January 2025, where *The New York Times* named it the highlight of the festival, praising: "Cerrone's coolly caressing music, with its eerie haze of electronic and acoustic textures, deepens the mystery and leaves listeners suspended between ambiguity and wonder." *Beaufort Scales*, an oratorio commissioned by Lorelei Ensemble and premiered at

MEET THE ARTISTS

Mass MoCA, earned him his third GRAMMY nomination. Other recent projects include *The Year of Silence*, based on Kevin Brockmeier's story, for the Louisville Symphony and Dashon Burton; *A Body, Moving*, a brass concerto for the Cincinnati Symphony; *Breaks and Breaks*, a violin concerto for Jennifer Koh and the Detroit Symphony; *The Insects Became Magnetic*, an orchestral work with electronics for the Los Angeles Philharmonic; and *The Air Suspended*, a piano concerto for Shai Wosner.

Cerrone's first opera, *Invisible Cities*, was a 2014 Pulitzer Prize finalist, receiving its fully-staged world premiere in a popular production by The Industry in Los Angeles' Union Station. In July 2019, New Amsterdam Records released his GRAMMY-nominated sophomore effort, *The Pieces that Fall to Earth*, collaborating with Wild Up. *The Arching Path*, released on In a Circle Records in 2021, earned his second GRAMMY nomination. His latest album, *Don't Look Down* (2025, PENTATONE Records), features collaborations with Sandbox Percussion, pianist Conor Hanick, and mezzo-soprano Elspeth Davis; the title work was described as 'exhilarating' by *The New York Times*. Cerrone won the 2015-2016 Samuel Barber Rome Prize in Music Composition and was a resident at the Laurenz Haus Foundation in Basel, Switzerland from 2022–2023.

Christopher Cerrone holds degrees from the Yale School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music. He is published by Schott NY and Project Schott New York and in 2021 joined the composition faculty at Mannes School of Music at The New School. He lives in Jersey City with his wife and their young son.

<https://christophercerrone.com/>

Stephanie Fleischmann is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Her "lyrical monologues" (*NY Times*), "finely tuned" opera libretti (*Opera News*), plays, and music-theater works have been performed internationally and across the U.S. Libretti include: *IN A GROVE* (Christopher Cerrone; LA Opera, Pittsburgh Opera; In a Circle Records; NY Times Best Classical Music Albums 2023); *MEDEA* (Michael Hersch; Ensemble MusikFabrik, Cologne) & *POPPAEA* (Hersch; Wien Modern, Zeiträume Basel; New Focus Recordings); *PARADISO* (Yevgeniy Sharlat; Hub New

MEET THE ARTISTS

Music/Austin Opera); *DIDO* (Melinda Wagner; Brentano Quartet; 92nd Street Y, Rockport Music Festival and more); *ANOTHER CITY* (Jeremy Howard Beck; Houston Grand Opera) & *THE LONG WALK* (Beck; Opera Saratoga, Utah Opera, Pittsburgh Opera); *AFTER THE STORM* (David Hanlon; HGO) & *THE PIGEON KEEPER* (Hanlon; Santa Fe Opera); *REMEDIOS VARIOS* (Carrillo; Chicago Opera Theater). Selected plays/music-theater: *RED FLY/BLUE BOTTLE* (HERE, EMPAC, Noorderzon), *THE SECRET LIVES OF COATS* (Red Eye), *SOUND HOUSE* (New Georges) music by Christina Campanella; *THE SWEETEST LIFE* (Saskia Lane; New Victory). Selected grants/fellowships: Campbell Librettist Prize, Café Royal Cultural Foundation, Venturous Fund, Howard Foundation, NEA, NYFA, NYSCA, MapFund, Macdowell, New Dramatists, HARP, American Lyric Theater. www.stephaniefleischmann.com

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UPCOMING EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE EVENTS

Tickets for all opera performances can be purchased at EastmanTheatre.org

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

Impressions de Pelléas

January 29 – February 1, 2026

Annex 804

Music by Claude Debussy and Marius Constant

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

Twenty-Four or, The Cure for Love

February 5 – 8, 2026

Annex 804

Conceived and Arranged by Tony Boutté

Original Scenario and English dialogue by Tony Boutté & Chas Rader-Shieber

Sparks & Wiry Cries presents: songSLAM Eastman

Saturday, February 7, 2026 at 4:00 PM

Sproull Atrium at Miller Center

Friends of Eastman Opera Voice Competition

Friday, February 20, 2026 at 7:30 PM

Kilbourn Hall

*This event does not require tickets

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

Die Fledermaus

April 9 – 12, 2026

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

Music by Johann Strauss II

Libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the “Great Hill People” and “Keepers of the Western Door” of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.

TALK-BACK ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31

There will be a talk-back immediately following the performance to discuss the production. This conversation will include composer Christopher Cerrone, librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, stage director Joelle Lachance, and music director Tim Long.



For the most up to date information on Eastman concerts and events, scan this code to visit our online calendar.



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