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Press Release



The Seattle EXperimental Opera (SEXO) presents a world premiere

HUNGER: THE JOURNEY OF TAMSEN DONNER

A new chamber opera by Seattle composer Tom Baker

Seattle WA, February 25, 2008: The Seattle EXperimental Opera is proud to present the world premiere of a new chamber opera by composer Tom Baker. HUNGER is Baker's second opera in a trilogy dealing with distinctly American stories, bold heroines, and truly tragic circumstances.

WHAT: Premiere of a new opera – HUNGER - by composer Tom Baker

WHEN: Friday March 14th and Saturday March 15th, 2008, 8:00 PM

WHERE: The Chapel at Good Shepherd Center
4649 Sunnyside Ave N (4th Floor), Seattle
www.gs chapel.blogspot.com

HOW MUCH: \$15 General, \$5 Student and Senior. General Admission.
Advance tickets available at Brown Paper Tickets: **1-800-838-3006**
<http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/28188>
Tickets also available at the door.

The SEXO Ensemble:

Maria Mannisto, soprano
Jesse Canterbury, clarinet
Greg Campbell, percussion and horn
Brian Cobb, contrabass
Tom Baker, guitar

Production Design by Alissa Rupp
Choreography by Beth Graczyk
Lighting Design by Reed Nakayama



The Story

HUNGER tells the tragic tale of the Donner Party through the eyes of Tamsen Donner, the matriarch of that ill-fated group of pioneers. The Donner family and their fellow travelers were determined to make it to the promised land - the California territory. After struggling across the prairie and the desert, losing most of their oxen and cattle, and nearly dying of thirst, they were convinced to modify their route by a hired guide. They reached the Sierra mountains, just miles from their destination, only to be trapped for months by blinding snow and bitter storms. Many perished. Some survived by resorting to cannibalism. They all experienced unimaginable suffering.

The music of Tom Baker and the poetry of Ruth Whitman combine to give a moving account of this journey, told through Tamsen Donner's re-imagined words, thoughts and songs.

From the composer:

"The story of the Donner Party has been in the back of my mind for a very long time. My father grew up in San Francisco, and our family lived in southern Idaho. Every summer we would take a car trip over the Sierra-Nevada mountains to California, and we would always pause at the summit of what is now called Donner Pass. My father would read the monument, and then proceed to tell his own version of the grisly tale with all its gory details. The desired affect was accomplished: we were scared to death. To this day, the idea of a road trip makes me uneasy. I need to know the destination and then set about a plan to get there as quickly and as safely as possible. The motto of the Donner children, written long after they survived the ordeal, still rings in my ears:

'Never tarry, take no cut-offs.'

When I found this amazing poem by Ruth Whitman, relating the story of the Donner Party through the eyes of Tamsen Donner, I knew I had found the heroine of my next opera in a trilogy of operas. The first was *Mary Webster*, who was tried and hung for being a witch in Puritan New England, only to survive her ordeal of being left on the tree all night. Mary's transformation, and her strength of will, seem reflected in the strong and loyal Tamsen. They both find themselves in a horrible situation, one which was not really of their own making, and their human reactions to these unbelievable circumstances each create a story worth looking at (or hearing) from different perspectives."

For more information: www.tombakercomposer.com/hunger.htm

Attached photo: SEXO Ensemble Members from L to R: Maria Mannisto, Jesse Canterbury, Greg Campbell, Brian Cobb, Tom Baker.

Photo credit: Alissa Rupp