

**Regina**  
**Scented with magnolia, and a whiff of arsenic**

March 20, 2008

Pacific Opera Victoria presents the Canadian premiere of an American opera. Based on Lillian Hellman's 1939 play *The Little Foxes*, with a sweeping cinematic score that blends jazz, ragtime, spirituals and blues with hints of Copland and Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* is presented April 17, 19, 22, 24 and 26, 2008 at the Royal Theatre, 805 Broughton Street in Victoria.

*Regina* is performed in English with a running time of approximately 2 ½ hours plus two intermissions.

*Regina* tells the gloriously toxic tale of a nouveau riche southern family who have fuelled their greed through cynical marriages, the exploitation of workers, and now theft and murder. Regina Giddens and her two brothers, Ben and Oscar Hubbard, scheme for money and power. When her ailing husband Horace opposes her plans, Regina denies him his heart medication and he dies of a heart attack. Their daughter Alexandra, realizing the true cause of Horace's death, finds the strength to leave her mother. Having double-crossed her brothers as well, Regina is left wealthy but alone.

*Regina* premiered on Broadway in 1949 to critical acclaim, but most agree that this work really belongs in the opera house. With its sweeping cinematic score that blends jazz, ragtime, spirituals and blues with hints of Copland and Bernstein, *Regina* is drenched in the language and music of America circa 1900. Blitzstein himself explained, "I wanted to write something as real musically to Americans as Italian opera is to the Italians".

Timothy Vernon conducts this Canadian premiere, which will be recorded by CBC Radio for future broadcast on "Saturday Afternoon at the Opera". Maestro Vernon has received national honours for his leadership in Canadian opera. His great musical acumen and passion have guided Pacific Opera Victoria since the company's inception, and his unique ability to interpret new and existing works has engaged the community and made POV a nationally recognized symbol of artistic excellence. Glynis Leyshon, Artistic Director of the Vancouver Playhouse and former Artistic Director of the Belfry Theatre, returns to Victoria to direct the production with lighting designer Alan Brodie, costume designer Erin Macklem and choreographer Anne Wootten. Pam Johnson (POV's 1999 *Don Giovanni*) is creating a set that evokes the languid nostalgia of the American South. This made-by-POV production of *Regina* will be presented by Utah Opera in January 2009.

Tallulah Bankhead described the role of Regina Giddens, which she created on Broadway, as "etched in acid". Her sensational performance in the stage play *The Little Foxes* was followed by Bette Davis's Oscar-nominated portrayal in the 1941 film. "Regina is a tour-de-force for an actor and requires no less intensity from a singer", declares Timothy Vernon, Artistic Director of Pacific Opera Victoria. "We have contracted the finest opera actors for this Canadian premiere, many of whom have never performed with Pacific Opera Victoria, and we are especially delighted to announce that Kimberly Barber will make both her role and POV debut as Regina."

Kimberly Barber has performed throughout the world and is acclaimed for the power and beauty of her voice and the intelligence and intensity of her acting. She performs opposite another newcomer to POV, Dean Elzinga, as Horace Giddens. Mr. Elzinga has impressed the New York Times with the "mesmerizing dramatic intensity" of his performances. They are joined by Robyn Driedger-Klassen as their daughter, Alexandra, and by Kathleen Brett (POV's *Roméo et Juliette*) as Birdie, Tracie Luck as Addie, Doug MacNaughton (POV's *The Tempest*) and Gregory Dahl (POV's *Don Giovanni*) as Ben and Oscar, Lawrence Wiliford as Leo and DeAndre Simmons as Cal. Victoria's jazz diva, Louise Rose, makes her POV debut as the appropriately named Jazz.

Note: Pacific Opera Victoria's April 2008 Canadian premiere of Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* was broadcast on *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* on Saturday, September 13, 2008, at 1:00 pm on CBC Radio Two.

