

September 27, 2018 | By Anthony King

Chamber Opera Addressing Gun Violence to Receive World Premiere at UC San Diego

Produced by Grammy Award-winning soprano Susan Narucki, “Inheritance” uses legendary story of Sarah Winchester to spark discussion about guns in today’s culture

Grammy Award-winning soprano and Department of Music faculty member Susan Narucki presents the world-premiere chamber opera “Inheritance” at UC San Diego, using the legendary story of Sarah Winchester to address gun violence in the United States.

Narucki will portray Winchester, the eccentric widow and rifle-company heir who was self-imprisoned in her California mansion, haunted by the spirits of those killed by the firearms that made her family’s fortune.

“Inheritance” interweaves Winchester’s story with events from contemporary life, asking complex questions about complicity, atonement and gun control in our society.

“The story of Sarah Winchester, regardless of the way in which our culture has altered it over time, is the perfect way for us as musicians and artists to explore the deeper discussion of gun violence and the prevalence of guns in our culture today,” Narucki said. “Yes, the issue is immediate — and one that prompted us to develop this piece in the first place — but we owe it to each other to think broadly on the topic, which is as complex and nuanced as Sarah herself.”

Lei Liang of the Department of Music composed the original score, with libretto by poet Matt Donovan of Smith College. The chamber opera’s production design, including costumes, set and extensive video footage, were created by artist Ligia Bouton of Mount Holyoke College.



From left, Lei Liang and Susan Narucki in the UC San Diego studio Sept. 4, 2018. (Photo by Erik Jepsen/ UC San Diego Publications)

UC San Diego Distinguished Professor of Music and Reed Family Presidential Chair Steven Schick serves as music director, and Cara Consilvio serves as stage director, with lighting design by Mary Ellen Stebbins.



A costume sketch from “Inheritance,” designed by Ligia Bouton. (Courtesy *Inheritance: A Chamber Opera*)

Co-presented by the Department of Music and ArtPower at UC San Diego, “Inheritance” runs for three performances only: Oct. 24, 26 and 27 in the Experimental Theater at the UC San Diego Conrad Prebys Music Center.

“We are thrilled to be working with our colleagues in the Department of Music, each of whom is a highly respected innovator in their field,” said Jordan Peimer, ArtPower executive director. “Moreover, when they first discussed the project with us we immediately saw the opportunity to employ the arts in order to have discussions with our students about gun violence.

ArtPower felt that this was just an incredible opportunity for great art to make a difference.”

Narucki and Liang have a long history of addressing society’s most urgent social issues through music. The pair worked together on the chamber opera “Cuatro Corridos,” the story of four women trapped in the cycle of human trafficking. Based on true events in the San Diego-Tijuana region, the critically acclaimed opera opened at UC San Diego in 2013, and has since been staged across the U.S. and Mexico, received multiple broadcasts on Mexico’s art and culture station, CANAL 22, and nominated for a 2017 Latin Grammy Award.

“The role of artists to address these contemporary issues for society is a unique one, and one that we take very seriously,” said Liang, the current Research Artist in Residence at the UC San Diego Qualcomm Institute. “We not only listen to each other in developing the piece, but we listen to history, we listen to our own communities and, as performers, we listen to each other on the stage. ‘Inheritance’ is a deeply personal experience we are looking forward to sharing with our audience.”

In addition to Narucki, performers for “Inheritance” include sopranos Hillary Jean Young and Kirsten Ashley Wiest — graduate students in the UC San Diego Department of Music — and acclaimed baritone Josué Ceron of Mexico. Schick will lead the eight-musician ensemble, in which faculty members and graduate students will perform side by side.

“I’m incredibly humbled and grateful for the outstanding team that has come together for this production, some of the most innovative professionals in their fields,” Narucki said. “What’s more, as educators and performers, we are overwhelmed with the talent and passion of our students. I know we are learning from them just as they are learning from us.”

Commissioned and produced by Narucki, “Inheritance” is supported in part by Creative Capital, New Music USA and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional underwriting comes from Phyllis and Dan Epstein, Julia Falk and Catherine and Robert Palmer.

“Inheritance” show times are Oct. 24, 26 and 27 at 7 p.m. Individual, general admission seats are \$25; \$14 for youth age 5-17. [Tickets and parking information](#) are available via ArtPower.

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