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Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* at The Academy of Vocal Arts February 25, 26, 28, March 1, and 3, 2012

Philadelphia: The Academy of Vocal Arts will present Debussy's only opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande* with piano accompaniment **February 25, 26, 28, March 1, and 3 in the Helen Corning Warden Theater at AVA**. Faculty member **Luke Housner** is music director and pianist. For the past seven seasons, The Academy of Vocal Arts has offered as part of its season, a fully staged opera with piano accompaniment in order to showcase AVA's talented artists in roles they might not otherwise have an opportunity to perform. Often, these are operas that require large orchestras that would not fit into AVA's small theater. In recent years, Mr. Housner has served as music director and pianist for most of them, including among others, three by Richard Strauss (*Arabella*, *Capriccio*, and *Elektra*).

The libretto of Debussy's opera was adapted by the composer virtually verbatim from the play by Maurice Maeterlinck. The work is considered to be anti-naturalistic in content and style, and makes great use of symbolism to express the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Recognizing an opportunity for the AVA artists to explore this unique work, AVA's president and artistic director, **K. James McDowell**, plans a collaborative effort in staging the opera, giving the cast members significant input and bringing their skills and instincts to bear as they create their characters.

SYNOPSIS:

Prince Golaud finds a mysterious young woman, Mélisande, lost in a forest. He marries her and brings her back to the castle of his grandfather, King Arkel of Allemonde. Here Mélisande becomes increasingly attached to Golaud's younger half-brother Pelléas, arousing Golaud's jealousy. Golaud goes to excessive lengths to find out the truth about Pelléas and Mélisande's relationship, even forcing his own child, Yniold, to spy on the couple. Pelléas decides to leave the castle but arranges to meet Mélisande one last time and the two finally confess their love for one another. Golaud, who has been eavesdropping, rushes out and kills Pelléas. Mélisande dies shortly after, having given birth to a daughter, with Golaud still begging her to tell him "the truth".

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

LUKE HOUSNER, music director and pianist, maintains a balanced schedule with a combination of opera assembling, music direction, vocal coaching, extensive performing, and choral preparation.

In February 2012, Mr. Housner will serve as music director, principal coach and performance pianist for a conductor-less, fully staged production of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* as part of the Academy of Vocal Arts 2011-2012 season. This is Mr. Housner's seventh production in this capacity at AVA, having done the same with Janacek's *Kát'a Kabánova*, Barber's *Vanessa*, Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and Strauss', *Arabella*, *Capriccio* and *Elektra*.

From 2007-2010, Mr Housner was principal coach and performance pianist for Astoria Music Festival in Oregon and then went on to coach and musically direct a production of *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro* for the Lyric Opera Studio of Weimar in Germany. Mr. Housner has served as assistant conductor, vocal coach and accompanist at the Central City Opera Festival, Portland Opera, Utah Opera Festival, Brevard Music Festival and at the Hong Kong's Academy of Performing Arts. In July 2012, Mr. Housner will be returning for a fourth year of private opera weeklong workshops in Vancouver, B.C. and will be doing the same in both Victoria B.C. and Portland, OR .

Over the past fifteen years with the Philadelphia Singers, Mr. Housner has performed on various subscription series concerts as pianist, organist and harpsichordist, served as rehearsal pianist and vocal coach for soloists and has played under the batons of Yannick Nezet-Seguin, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Andrew Davis and Kurt Masur.

Native of Western Massachusetts, Mr. Housner earned a Master's Degree of Music in Vocal Accompanying and Coaching from University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana with instruction from internationally acclaimed vocal coach John Wustman. Previously, he received a Bachelor's Degree of Music, with a double major in Piano Performance and Vocal Accompanying from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music.

K. JAMES MC DOWELL, stage director

Texas native K. James McDowell attended Furman University as a chemistry major before beginning his musical career as an apprentice with Santa Fe Opera. He graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music, and attended The Academy of Vocal Arts, where he performed numerous leading baritone roles. Mr. McDowell then began work on a master of business administration in management and finance at Temple University, and returned to AVA as concert manager and director of public relations. One year later, AVA's board of directors appointed him to the position of executive director upon Dino Yannopoulos' retirement.

Under Mr. McDowell's guidance and direction, AVA has expanded its reputation as a training and performing arts institution, noted for both its artistic excellence and financial stability. He has overseen the expansion of the facilities to include two adjacent buildings, adding many new teaching and practice studios, as well as a newly expanded library. Mr. McDowell established AVA's fellowship program, which provides every resident artist with a living stipend. He also greatly increased the number of performances in the greater Philadelphia area, allowing for more performance opportunities for students. Future plans include providing housing for resident artists.

While at the helm of AVA, Mr. McDowell has maintained a busy schedule of lieder and oratorio appearances throughout the Delaware Valley, including recitals with his wife, mezzo-soprano Suzanne DuPlantis.

JOHN VISCARDI, tenor

John Viscardi, from Manhasset, N.Y., is a third-year AVA resident artist. Mr. Viscardi received The Bertha Koempel Award in the 2012 Leiderkranz Competition. Awards and achievements in 2011 include second place in the WRTI radio broadcast online poll of the Giargiari Bel Canto Competition, the Lys Symonette Award for Outstanding Performance of an Individual Number in the Lotte Lenya Competition, and first place in the Mario Lanza Scholarship Competition. At AVA he has sung Nathanaël, Spalanzani and Schlémil in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Ruiz in excerpts from *Il trovatore*, the Magistrate in *The Scarlet Letter* and Fenton in *Falstaff*. Other roles include Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Camille in *The Merry Widow*, Frederick in *The Pirates of Penzance*, all with New York University; Giuseppe in *La traviata* with Opera New Jersey; and Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* with the Rockland Opera. Mr. Viscardi holds his M.A. in Music Performance – Opera Concentration and his B.M. in Vocal Performance from New York University

CHLOÉ MOORE, soprano

Chloé Moore, from Toronto, is a second-year AVA resident artist. She is a third-prize winner of the 2012 Liederkrantz Competition. In 2011 Ms. Moore was the recipient of the Prix Leoš Janáček Prize and Prix Donald James Goldberg Prize, both with the Czech & Slovak International Voice Competition at Théâtre Lyricorégra 20, the Rosalind Jackson Memorial Award from the Crested Butte Music Festival, first place in the Sacred Vocal Competition with Concerts@First, and encouragement awards from the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition and the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Vocal Competition. At AVA she has sung the roles of Antonia and Stella in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Zdenka in *Arabella*, Mistress Brown in *The Scarlet Letter*, and Sister Osmina, Sister Dolcina and the Infirmary Sister in a concert version of *Suor Angelica*. Other performances include Giulietta in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, and Antonia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with the Crested Butte Music Festival. She holds a M.M. in Vocal Performance from the University of Arizona and a B.M. from the University of Toronto.

ZACHARY NELSON, baritone

Zachary Nelson, from Annapolis, Maryland, is a third-year AVA resident artist. Mr. Nelson is the first prize winner of the 2012 Liederkrantz Competition. In 2011, he won second prize in Loren L. Zachary Vocal Competition, Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition, and the Gerda Lissner Foundation International Vocal Competition, along with an encouragement award from the New England region of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. At AVA he has sung Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, Mandryka in *Arabella*, Sailor in *The Scarlet Letter*, Michele in a concert version of *Il tabarro*, Benoit and Alcindoro in *La bohème*, Haushofmeister in *Capriccio*, and the title role in *Falstaff*. As a young artist with Glimmerglass Opera, he sang Sciarrone in *Tosca* and was a soloist in The New York Festival of Song's *Killer B's*. Additional roles include Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*, and Marcello in *La bohème*, all with The Catholic University of America, Morales in *Carmen* with Summer Opera Theater Company, Germont in *La traviata* with Lyric Opera of Virginia, and Quinault in *Adriana Lecouvreur* with The Opera Orchestra of New York. Upcoming engagements include Angelotti in *Tosca* and covering Mandryka in *Arabella*, both with Santa Fe Opera. Mr. Nelson holds a B.M. in Vocal Performance from The Catholic University of America.

THE CAST

Arkel, King of Allemonde - Patrick Guetti, *bass*

Geneviève, mother of Golaud and Pelléas - Margaret Mezzacappa, *mezzo-soprano*

Golaud, grandson of Arkel - Zachary Nelson, *baritone* (Feb 25, Feb 28, Mar 1) and Musa Ngquangwana, *bass-baritone* (Feb 26, Mar 3)

Pelléas, grandson of Arkel - John Viscardi, *tenor* (Feb 25, Mar 1); Zach Borichevsky, *tenor* (Feb 26, Mar 3); Wes Mason, *baritone* (Feb 28)

Mélisande - Chloé Moore, *soprano* (Feb 25, Mar 1); Sydney Mancasola, *soprano* (Feb 26, Mar 3);
 Bettina Schweiger, *mezzo-soprano* (Feb 28)
Yniold, the young son of Golaud - Maria Aleida, *soprano*
Doctor - Christopher Rimmel, *baritone*
Shepherd - Christian Bowers, *baritone*

FACT SHEET

Pelléas et Mélisande

Premiere: Opéra-Comique, Paris on April 30, 1902

Composer: Claude Debussy

Libretto: adapted by the composer from the play by Maurice Maeterlinck

February 25, 28, March 1, and 3, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 26, 2012 at 2:30 p.m.

All performances in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Luke Housner, music director and pianist

K. James McDowell, stage director

Sung in French with English supertitles

\$60 adults / \$50 seniors / \$25 30 and Under / Students \$10

www.avaopera.org or 215 735-1685

The Academy of Vocal Arts' 2011 / 2012 Season

Les Contes d'Hoffmann / Offenbach

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, November 12, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 17, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Central Bucks South High School

1100 Folly Road, Warrington, PA

Saturday, November 19, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

450 Lancaster Ave. Haverford, PA

Monday, November 21, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 22, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

An Evening of Russian Romances

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

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Tuesday, December 13, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 15, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Oberto / Verdi

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

Thursday, January 26, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Friday, January 27, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

Tuesday, January 31, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Pelléas et Mélisande / Debussy

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, February 25, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 26, 2012 @ 2:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 28, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 1, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 3, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Jubilate! A Concert of Sacred Music

Haddonfield United Methodist Church

29 Warwick Road, Haddonfield, NJ

Sunday, March 11, 2012 @ 7:00 p.m.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

104 Louella Avenue, Wayne, PA

Saturday, March 17, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

The Church of the Holy Trinity

Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

Sunday, March 18, 2012 @ 7:00 p.m.

L'elisir d'amore / Donizetti

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, April 28, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 1, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 3, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Central Bucks South High School

1100 Folly Road, Warrington, PA

Saturday, May 5, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

Tuesday, May 8, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 10, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Walter K. Gordon Theater at Rutgers/Camden

3rd and Pearl Sts. Camden, NJ

May 13, 2012 @ 2:30 p.m. matinée

Farewell Recital*The Church of the Holy Trinity*

Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

Friday, May 11, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

**Operas: \$60 adults / \$50 seniors / \$25 30 & Under / \$10 students
Add \$35 per person for PREMIUM SEATING / group rates available**

For more information, contact 215-735-1685 or visit www.avaopera.org

THE ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

The mission of The Academy of Vocal Arts, founded in 1934 by Helen Corning Warden, is to provide tuition-free vocal and opera training of the highest quality, and financial support during training, to exceptionally talented and committed young singers who have the potential for international stature, and to present them in professional performances that are accessible to a wide community.

Gifted singers come from throughout the world to seek the exceptional guidance and training that The Academy of Vocal Arts offers. AVA's four-year program is unique, not only because it is a fully tuition-free institution that focuses solely on operatic training, but also because it has established a niche as an organization that produces opera. Admission is determined by competitive annual auditions, with an average of 8 to 10 singers admitted each year. The total roster of resident artists is purposely kept low and averages 25-30 in total. Those who are accepted receive training equivalent to more than \$70,000 per year. A faculty of individuals who are among the finest in their fields provides intensive training in voice, acting, stage combat, repertoire, languages, and other related subjects necessary for an operatic career.

Over the past seven decades, outstanding singers of international stature have attended AVA, including David Adams, Lando Bartolini, Gwendolyn Bradley, Thomas Carson, Elizabeth Carter, Richard Clark, Dominic Cossa, John Darrenkamp, Joyce DiDonato, Harry Dworchak, Ryan Edwards, Wilhelminia Fernandez, Allan Glassman, Vernon Hartman, Nancy Fabiola Herrera, Luis Ledesma, James Morris, Stuart Neill, John Packard, James Pease, David Poleri, Julien Robbins, Jane Shaulis, Hugh Smith, Ruth Ann Swenson, Indra Thomas, Richard Troxell, Victoria Vergara, Stephen West, Beverly Wolff, and currently making their mark in the opera world, recent graduates Burak Bilgili, Jan Cornelius, Stephen Costello, Ellie Dehn, Manon Strauss Evrard, Michael Fabiano, Jesus Garcia, Othalie Graham, Eglise Gutiérrez, Bryan Hymel, Takesha Meshé Kizart, Angela Meade, Keith Miller, Latonia Moore, Ailyn Pérez, Dongwon Shin, Taylor Stayton, and James Valenti.

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