

**BMOP**  
*sound*

**ERIC SAWYER: OUR AMERICAN COUSIN**

LIBRETTO BY JOHN SHOPTAW

**ERIC SAWYER** b. 1962

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

LIBRETTO BY JOHN SHOPTAW

**BOSTON MODERN ORCHESTRA PROJECT**

GIL ROSE, CONDUCTOR

**JANNA BATY** mezzo-soprano

**ALAN SCHNEIDER** tenor

**AARON ENGBRETH** baritone

**DREW POLING** baritone

**DONALD WILKINSON** baritone

**ANGELA HINES GOOCH** soprano

**TOM O'TOOLE** bass-baritone

**HILLARIE O'TOOLE** soprano

**JANICE EDWARDS** mezzo-soprano

**DANIEL KAMALIC** baritone

**THE AMHERST COLLEGE CONCERT CHOIR**

Mallorie Chernin, music director

**DISC 1**

<b>ACT I</b>		PAGE	
[1]	PRELUDE	6:36	20
[2]	SCENE 1 A Sneeze	1:58	20
[3]	Arts of Theater	4:16	20
[4]	SCENE 2 Harry Hawk's Substitute	1:52	21
[5]	Walking a Corduroy Road	4:26	21
[6]	SCENE 3 Mathews and Booth	1:59	22
[7]	What Happens Here?	2:48	23
[8]	SCENE 4 Chorus of Women	1:57	24
[9]	Chorus of Amputees	1:27	24
[10]	Chorus of Freedmen	1:14	24
[11]	Chorus of Nurses	1:23	25
[12]	Chorus of Businessmen	0:45	25
[13]	SCENE 5 Drinking Song	4:02	25
[14]	SCENE 6 Laura Keene	3:59	27
[15]	Emancipate your Sorrows	3:28	27

<b>ACT II</b>			
[16]	SCENE 1 Father and Daughter	3:58	28
[17]	I Feel a Draft	2:06	30
[18]	Asa's Letter	4:20	30
[19]	SCENE 2 A Moneyed Man	5:21	32
[20]	SCENE 3 Introductions	1:44	33
[21]	Possum Herding	3:02	34
[22]	Lincoln	4:17	35

**TOTAL** 67:00

**DISC 2**

<b>ACT II (cont'd)</b>		PAGE	
[1]	SCENE 4 In the Library	3:42	37
[2]	Two Letters	2:38	38
[3]	SCENE 5 Musical Chairs	6:29	39
<b>ACT III</b>			
[4]	SCENE 1 In the Dairy	2:31	41
[5]	Ancient Business	5:35	41
[6]	Mary and Abraham	2:40	43
[7]	Sic Semper Booth	2:52	43
[8]	SCENE 2 Assassination	7:34	44
[9]	SCENE 3 The Presidential Box	9:18	47
[10]	SCENE 4 Hawk's Second Chance	2:47	50
[11]	Burning Letter	5:32	50
[12]	SCENE 5 Blood Stains	5:10	52
[13]	Apparition	3:44	53
[14]	Final Chorus	4:47	54

**TOTAL** 65:20



ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, CURRIER &amp; IVES, c. 1865 (DETAIL), LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

## By Eric Sawyer

### MUSICAL REALITIES

In an opera containing colliding realities, I sought music that could give distinct identities to the comic play and historical drama while at the same time connecting them. The orchestral prelude, a musical background to the drama, springs from Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address given only a few weeks before, in particular from the words "With malice toward none, with charity for all... let us strive... to bind up the nation's wounds." The opening musical phrase, with its rising steps followed by a descending cascade into silence, is emblematic of Lincoln's call for forgiving and forgetting. This opening emblem constitutes the musical bridge between two realities: as peace can come only from forgiveness, the spirits of the theater audience can be lifted only through forgetting the strife of war and giving their cares over to a harmless comedy.

The musical and dramatic shape moves from the backstage darkness of the actors' entanglements to the bright spirits of the stage once the curtain is lifted. The opening scenes of the play consist of songs and light musical repartee giving a nod to the popular operetta of the time. As the onstage plot thickens and the audience feels increasing involvement with the characters and plot, the music evolves toward a less stylized and more dramatic trajectory. The music taking place inside the play and that outside of it grow closest in the scene preceding the assassination, as a gesture of generosity and love onstage touches and informs a moment of intimacy between the Lincolns.

Folded into the lyrical, extended tonal fabric are bits either quoted from or inspired by period music, including "Dixie," "Hail to the Chief" (prefigured by the orchestral prelude),

songs from the Civil War, spirituals, music from the American frontier, and “machine music” heralding the Industrial Revolution. The libretto is replete with essential operatic moments: the drinking song, the mad scene, and letters received, stolen, and burned. The small orchestra is an approximation of the pit band that played that night at Ford’s Theater and was scheduled to cap the evening with a patriotic sing-along: “Honor To Our Soldiers.” The opera’s final chorus stands in for the songfest that never took place.

## By John Shoptaw

### THE TRUE STORIES BEHIND *OUR AMERICAN COUSIN*

When a work of art is deemed historical, it is commonly either praised for “following history closely,” or faulted for “straying” or “departing from the facts” at certain points, or condemned as a sideshow for “misrepresenting history” altogether. Such characterizations are, in my view, themselves misrepresentations of the task not only of the artist but of the historian, whose own relations to the past are neither simple nor transparent.

I will try to say something about what is involved in transforming the historical past into art by recalling some of my own methods in making the events surrounding the Lincoln assassination into the libretto for *Our American Cousin*, which is, among other things, a meditation on the role of art in history. I’ll start with a basic question of interest both to historians and to artificers of history: Why did Booth assassinate Lincoln? And why while Lincoln was watching a play? While acknowledging the complexity of Booth’s motives, the historian will, I think, gravitate toward those that are political, public, and explicit. That Booth shot Lincoln, leapt onstage, waved a dagger and, before exiting, declaimed the line “*Sic semper tyrannis*,” to upstage his family’s Shakespeareans (chiefly his father, Junius, and his brother, Edwin) has been generally discounted as idle, unsubstantiated psychologism. This position accords well with John Wilkes’s own vehement disavowal of

any private motive. In the swamps of Maryland, in his diary, having received the devastating reviews of his final performance, Booth asked incredulously why he was panned for “doing what Brutus was honored for, what made Tell a Hero,” especially since his motive “was purer than either of theirs”: “I acted for my country [the South] and that alone.” Methinks the actor doth protest too much. Why did he do it, in my libretto? Booth was an actor whose chief role was his life. He constructed a drama in which he would play the role of his nation’s liberator, a part which would fix his name in history. The very different part he actually played in history’s drama he never fathomed.

Though Booth made this diary entry weeks after the event, I bring his defense into his last night’s performance, which unfolds in real time. There is a historical basis for this. Before the play, Booth handed a sealed letter to Jack Mathews (the play’s villain), instructing him to deliver it the next day to a Washington newspaper. Booth was no stranger to Mathews. Less than two months earlier, Booth had offered him an incredible part: to help abduct President Lincoln (from a theater no less) and to demand as ransom the release of all the Confederate prisoners of war. On the night of our play, Mathews had ample reasons to be suspicious, yet he pocketed the letter. Had Mathews opened the letter and read it, there would probably have been no assassination. This non-event or counter-fact, which has fallen unremarked outside the purview of history, lies near the center of my libretto.

Mathews did read the letter, but only after the assassination, and he burned it. In my libretto, he is encouraged, even directed, to burn it by Harry Hawk. Hawk, the play’s hero (the “American cousin”), was of draft age. He probably remained on the stage by hiring a “substitute” to fight in his place. It was a common practice; Lincoln himself had a substitute. Some of these substitutes doubtless were casualties of the conflict. By having Hawk’s substitute die, and by having him learn of it the night of the assassination, I was supplying him with a composite actor’s history. I did it to amplify his guilt at not acting—or at merely “acting.” Hawk was the only actor on the scene when Booth dropped onstage. When Booth turned from the audience toward Hawk, who stood between him and the

exit, Hawk acted (as he told the papers) as “anyone would have done; I ran.” In a somewhat unreal scene, I bring Hawk and Mathews together over the incriminating letter. Did Mathews tell Hawk, or anybody, about it? I suspect he told somebody, but nobody knows. What I do know is that Mathews and Hawk were each guilty of inaction. So I let them play out their quintessentially theatrical scene.

It was partly in order to rob Booth of the limelight that I re-centered the libretto around the night’s performance—the play, the cast, and the audience, including the Lincolns. While I preserve much of the plot and many of the characters of *Our American Cousin*, I keep little of its language beyond an *ad lib* or two (“That reminds me of a story, as Mister Lincoln says”). Since we have the approximate text, why did I “stray” from it? Because Tom Taylor’s comedy of manners seemed to me to have become more mannered than comical. This is one opera in which the end is not in doubt. But I wanted the opera’s audience from time to time to forget what was going to happen, to lose themselves in the play’s silliness or melodrama: to act, in short, like the audience of Tom Taylor’s play. The five choral groups representing that diverse audience are given songs drawn from contemporary letters and journals. The audience included the Lincolns. Nobody knows what they said to each other during the play; drawing on their letters and on Mary Lincoln’s recollections, I put words and thoughts in their mouths and minds. (I don’t feel too bad about it; Milton put words into God’s mouth!)

But, the commonsensical reader will object, there are some things you simply can’t change. You can’t finish the play—Lincoln was assassinated mid-performance! Oh yes I can, by other means. Well, you can’t keep Lincoln from being shot! But I can briefly resurrect his spirit (Lincoln didn’t die until the following day), his old self, and give him, not Booth, the last word. My belief in art is not unlike my Laura Keene’s: it can help us forget awhile, and, if it’s doing its job, it can refresh our memories of the world.

*Our American Cousin* is a three-part opera depicting the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln from the perspective of the actors presenting playwright Tom Taylor’s 1851 comedy of the same name at Ford’s Theater. The work was premiered in concert version by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (Gil Rose, conductor) on March 31, 2007 and received its world premiere stage performance on June 20, 2008 at the Academy of Music Theater (Northampton, MA) with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (Carole Charnow, director; Gil Rose, conductor).

### By Klára Móricz

On Palm Sunday April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate Army surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant’s Union troops. The American Civil War, which had raged for four years and cost 700,000 lives, ended with Union victory. On April 11, President Lincoln gave an impromptu speech from a window in the White House in which he stated that he intended to grant suffrage to former slaves. Lincoln’s promise infuriated actor John Wilkes Booth (1838–1865), who was in the crowd in front of the White House. According to his former friend Louis Weichmann, Booth turned to him and said: “Now by God, I’ll put him through.” Booth was born in Maryland to a family of actors who shaped Shakespearean acting in nineteenth-century America. Although reasonably successful on the stage, Booth aspired higher. As the Civil War progressed, he gradually gave up acting and became a Confederate secret agent. After Lincoln’s reelection in November 1864, Booth devoted his energies to a plot of kidnapping the President. As this plan failed, Booth became desperate. “For six months we had worked to capture,” he wrote in his diary, “but our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done.” To his friends he announced that he was done with the stage. For his last performance, he

said, he planned to play in *Venice Preserv'd*, an English Restoration play by Thomas Otway about a conspiracy against the senate in Venice. Only those who knew the play's plot understood that Booth aspired to the role of assassin.

In fact, Booth remained an actor until the very end. He scripted his plot for the assassination of President Lincoln to the last line, casting himself in the main role. This final role, he knew, would make him more famous than his father or brothers. "Do you plan on seeing the show tonight?" he asked the owner of Star Saloon, whisky in hand, as he waited for the curtain to rise on the performance of *Our American Cousin* in Ford's Theater, in Washington, DC. "You ought to. You'll see some damn fine acting!"

Since Booth's family was friends with John T. Ford, the theater's owner, Booth had free access to all parts of the theater; he himself had played there on several occasions, once even before President Lincoln. On Good Friday, April 14, Laura Keene's traveling company was performing in the theater. Keene had been forced to give up her own theater on Broadway due to the war. She toured with her company to maintain her income, and, before arriving in Washington, DC, she invited President Lincoln to see *Our American Cousin*, a farcical comedy by Tom Taylor about the meeting of an awkward, rough-hewn American with his aristocratic English relatives. Keene knew Lincoln personally and was sure that the President, who loved low comedy as much as he loved Shakespeare's tragedies, would accept her invitation.

Booth was familiar with the play and could recognize the lines while waiting outside the presidential box. He knew that in Act III, scene 2 only one actor, Harry Hawk, would be onstage. He chose that moment to enter the box and fire a leaden ball into Lincoln's skull. He then planned to use his acrobatic skills to jump fifteen feet on the stage and deliver his line, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" ("Always to tyrants!"), the motto of the State of Virginia.

Lincoln's assassination is one of the best-documented events in American history. Booth, fatally shot in Bowling Green, Virginia, by Union soldiers twelve days after his escape from Ford's Theater, became the protagonist of historical studies (i.e. James Swanson's *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*, 2007; Alan Axelrod's *Lincoln's Last Night: Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, and the Last Thirty-Six Hours Before the Assassination*, 2005; and Thomas Goodrich's *The Darkest Dawn: Lincoln, Booth, and the Great American Tragedy*, 2006, to name only the most recent), of popular theater (i.e. the musical *Assassins* by Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman), and television movies (i.e. *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*).

Eric Sawyer and John Shoptaw's opera, *Our American Cousin* (2007) is the first operatic treatment of the subject. Because of the inherent complexity of the genre, history and fiction, action and reflection are subtly layered to create a deeply felt musical and poetic commentary on one of the greatest traumas of American history. The music itself has poetic power, exemplified by Sawyer's decision to start the opera with a chord progression that outlines both the beginning of the tune "Hail to the Chief," the official anthem of the President of the United States, and the first melodic phrase of the "*Dona nobis pacem*" ("Grant us peace") movement of J. S. Bach's B Minor Mass [DISC 1 | TRACK 1]. Already this initial gesture signifies the composer and librettist's intention to downplay Booth's role in the national tragedy. Violent, obsessive, over-ambitious, and, most crucially, unreflective, Booth remains a two-dimensional character in the opera, fixated on his intended "glorious act." By turning the stage into reality and the play into history, he aimed to become, as he says in the opera, "the last Shakespearian." But can one enter history by playing in real life the roles that Shakespeare created for the stage? Over-acted and badly executed, Booth's final act is consciously de-centered in *Our American Cousin*. His heroic jump is turned into a miserable leap because his leg is caught in the Union flag, his intended, pretentious line becomes a curse ("Damned flag spoiled my leap!"), and his

central act is interpreted by the audience as a “gag,” unexpected, yet still seen as part of the comedy [2|8].

Comedy and tragedy, art and reality, action and reflection thus mix almost seamlessly in the opera. The comedy played on stage spoils Booth’s intended heroic performance, just as the brutal interruption of the comic play violates the sanctuary Laura Keene offered to the audience as protection from the wounds of war. The highpoint of fun, the audience’s long-time favorite, would have been Lord Dundreary’s sneeze, an extravagant mannerism originally introduced into *Our American Cousin* by English actor E. A. Sothorn. In the opera, this is precisely the moment when a woman’s voice from the President’s box announces that Lincoln has been shot [2|8]. Bewildered, Ned Emerson, the actor who plays Lord Dundreary, stops mid-sneeze and leaves the stage, while his interrupted sneeze reverberates in the audience’s outcries “shot,” “ahhh, shoot.”

A different transition between comic stage action and serious off-stage reflection marks Lincoln’s earlier aria, the high point of the second act [1|22]. After Asa, the American cousin, finishes his tall tale about “possum herding,” Lincoln joins in the audience’s laughter, praising Harry Hawk, who played Asa for his “common” look. Accused by his enemies of being common, vulgar, and boorish himself, Lincoln could have easily identified with “the backwoods bumpkin, honest Asa,” who, as Laura Keene describes him in her introduction to the play, “travels east to reunite two severed branches of a family.” To make the similarity between Asa and Lincoln stronger, Asa’s birthplace is changed in the opera from Vermont to Illinois. But the relief provided by Asa’s antics (“Don’t know when I laughed so hard,” Lincoln says) is short lived. The word “constitution” serves as a pivot to switch Lincoln’s attention from his “hard-to-look-at” physical appearance to the shame of the United States, the institution of slavery, which is so “hard to look at, difficult to see.” If you don’t face it, if you don’t destroy it, Lincoln reflects, it spreads and, like an overgrown vine, “cracks your house in two.”

The images of the house cracked in two (a reference to Lincoln’s speech at the Republican Convention on June 16, 1858: “A house divided against itself cannot stand”), of the removed vine (in Lincoln’s aria), of the moon cut into two, of the missing limbs (in Hawk’s aria), Emerson’s cane broken by Booth in the opera’s first scene, the death of Hawk’s substitute in the war that irreversibly severs him from his shadowy double, the presence of the amputee war veterans and widows in the audience, the interrupted sneeze and the violently truncated comedy, are all related to the central topic of the opera: the sense of truncation and division that permeates the painful reality of the United States at the time of the Civil War. Even the partitioned space in which the actors move—onstage and offstage, fantasy and reality, comedy and tragedy—reflects this theme.

At climactic moments these divided worlds collide. In scene 5 of Act I, the backstage rehearsal culminates in Hawk’s, Emerson’s, and Mathews’s rough drinking song (a scene we never see in the play itself, since it comes after the assassination) [1|13]. As the rehearsal develops into a scuffle, Booth, always eager to incite violence, joins in from a distance, singing the refrain of Dan Emmett’s minstrel tune “Dixie,” which became the unofficial anthem of the Confederate States during the Civil War. In the opera the end of the line, “look away, Dixie Land” is changed to “look away, if you can,” signaling the contrast between Lincoln’s painful and difficult looking at the shame of slavery and the South’s deliberate “looking away” from the cruelty of America’s “peculiar institutions.” Booth’s line serves as a connecting link between the stage fight and the reality of war represented by the audience whose lines, heard earlier in the opera, seep in the ensemble, giving voice to widows mourning their loved ones, to businessmen cheering over their war profit, to nurses who tended the wounded, to amputee veterans who lost their limbs, and to freedmen who fought in the war.

Booth’s dark shadow is cast over the play on stage in another scene, too. As Lincoln has his comic double in the generous, boorish Asa of the play, so does Booth in the evil

solicitor Coyle. Coyle's lines about the document that assures his future ownership of the Dundrearys' property is echoed offstage by Booth's threatening reference to his letter to the editor of *The National Intelligencer*, which he had written to assure his future historical significance [2|2].

In contrast to Booth's two-dimensional figure, the other actors are represented in the opera as complex human beings haunted by guilt. Harry Hawk, who receives a letter in the first act about his substitute's death in the war, tells his surrealistic dream of finding the corpse on a moon-lit blue field [1|5]. The images of the aria again recall a truncated reality of missing limbs and missing lives. Hawk's final aria registers his second missed chance of taking real action by stopping the escaping Booth [2|10]. "Now I am condemned to play myself," the guilt-ridden Hawk sings. A similar guilt assails Jack Mathews (who plays Coyle) to whom Booth entrusted the letter intended to appear in *The National Intelligencer* after the assassination. He realizes too late that his irresponsible act of pocketing the letter without checking it cost the President's life. Although he despises Booth for pretending to be "a man of consequence," he also knows that he, Booth's "breathless messenger," will take his shared responsibility for the crime to his grave [2|11]. United by their inability to take real action, Mathews and Hawk burn the letter, escaping from the police as well as from their own guilt into their transient actor personalities: "we're guilty—we know it—of something, of everything we did not do."

By burning the letter, Hawk and Mathews attempt to erase private and public memory. The scene is marked in the music by the last, grotesquely distorted appearance of a motive, one that appears during moments of forgetting and remembering. This falling chromatic figure first occurs in the orchestral prelude; it returns during Hawk's aria when Hawk, after receiving the letter about the death of his substitute in the war, tries to block out reality with alcohol; it reappears when Asa chooses to forget his ownership of Dundreary Manor; and it surfaces, most crucially, when Laura Keene, manager of evocation and forgetting, invites the audience "to forget awhile." Although she shares this motive of forgetting and

remembering with others, she seems to be the only one who has the power to consciously thicken or dissipate the fog of oblivion. The distortion of the motive in the last act suggests that Hawk and Mathew's retreat from reality into the theater, "where everything, where nothing ever happens," is futile, a grotesque distortion of Laura Keene's attempt to maintain the theater as a temporary refuge from reality.

Laura Keene's refuge, however, cannot transform reality. The contrast between the world of theater and the world of reality creates guilt—a guilt that, like division, permeates the opera. It is only Booth, simplistic poseur that he is, who is untouched by guilt. Lincoln's melancholy figure is constantly shadowed by a sense of guilt—guilt for the shameful condition of slavery, for the truncated country, for the bloodshed caused by the "pestilent war." Although guilt frequently colors the lines of the actors, the character who takes on most of the guilt in the opera is Laura Keene. She is the one who invited Lincoln to watch the play, who encouraged her audience to "leave the world behind" and set sorrows free, who promised "the North and South will pass away, forgiven and forgotten" [1|15]. But her guilt is more global than that. Accused after the assassination by Mary Lincoln of having the immoral profession of acting, she poses questions about the role of art in general, about artists' right to practice their art during war, and about their self-deceptive belief that "art brings peace." At the end she is forced to acknowledge art's powerlessness: "I couldn't keep the bloodshed out; I couldn't keep the war from breaking in."

In contrast to Booth who remains trapped in his actor's pose, Laura Keene manages to assume roles that carry significance beyond the events surrounding Lincoln's death. After the assassination her guilt transforms her momentarily into Lady Macbeth, who, turned insane after her participation in regicide, tries to wash the blood off her clothes. "I'll never get it out of my sight," Keene sings frantically. But she is not only the theater manager, the famous actor, the fictitious Mary Dundreary in the play, and Lady Macbeth in her imagination, she is also Mary Magdalene, who, in this Passion scene of Good Friday, holds and washes the head of the sacrificial victim. Her words, "Jesus, pour down your pity," uttered

while she is cradling Lincoln's head in her lap, plea for mercy for all [2|9]. And mercy of a sort is granted, because Keene, like Mary Magdalene in the garden of Gethsemane, gains access to a transfigured reality. In a scene recalling that in which the resurrected Christ addresses Mary Magdalene in the garden, Lincoln's spirit briefly reappears, though without divine understanding.

During the light and almost comical last words of Lincoln's spirit ("I can't carry a tune two feet before I spill it.") the orchestra is reduced first to a few rattling, broken chords on a banjo, then falls totally silent during Lincoln's quotation from his favorite play, *Macbeth* ("Duncan is in his grave. After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.") [2|13]. The silencing of the orchestra at this moment is significant. Besides underlining Lincoln's unmusical personality, it also negates the long-lived illusion that art (especially music) has redeeming power. Music can provide local color (as by quoting "Dixie," "Hail to the Chief," and the Civil War song "When This Cruel War is Over" or by faintly echoing Negro spirituals, patriotic marches, seafaring songs or operetta); it can express feelings, differentiate characters and scenes, enhance the drama, relieve and refresh memory, but its redemptive, healing power is limited. The musical silence that surrounds Lincoln in this last moment in the opera signals the assassinated President's release from memory and guilt, and grants him a fleeting rebirth as an imperfect, but guilt-free human being, disrobed of the heavy presidential garb of responsibility. Obviously, this liberated Lincoln has no answer to Keene's last question: "Oh Mister President, don't you really know what happened?" It is not Lincoln who must make sense of the events, but the survivors.

Paradoxically, Sawyer's gesture of deflating art by silencing it during Lincoln's last words enhances the redeeming potential of the last scene. In the final chorus the audience of Ford's Theater is heard, chanting the long list of names of places where battles were fought, bodies were mangled, and the country was dismembered [2|14]. This final incantation sounds like a desperate effort to make sense of events, to re-member what was dismembered, to heal what cannot be healed, and to complete the truncated line

("pluribus, pluribus, pluribus"—from many parts) of the motto of the united country ("*E pluribus unum*"—from many, one). The repetition of the word *pluribus* also echoes the French *pleurs* (tears), giving this final chorus the mourning solemnity of Bach's Passions.

Ultimately, the opera is not so much about the violent act of Lincoln's assassination by John Wilkes Booth as it is about the condition of truncation, division and dismembering, and the possibility of healing, which, as the characters reflect, can come only through the purgatory of memory and the acceptance of guilt. "Funny, how hard it is to remember, to piece it all together, to pick up the threads and thrums of what happened," the audience sings in the final chorus. What glimmers through the mist of history, the mist of forgetting, mis- and re-membering in this opera is something we are still trying to piece together.

© 2007 Klára Mórićz

**ACT I**

As the cast of the comic play *Our American Cousin* assembles backstage, aging actor Ned Emerson spins out a comparison of theater to war, while leading man Harry Hawk broods over a letter informing him of the death of a friend he hired to be his substitute in battle. Character villain Jack Mathews banter with John Wilkes Booth, who appears backstage to present him with a sealed letter announcing news “that has not come to pass.” Knowing Booth has concocted violent and subversive schemes in the past, an alarmed Mathews hides the letter in his pocket. As they arrive, groups of theatergoers give voice to their thoughts, while backstage a last-minute rehearsal erupts into a scuffle just as the company manager/leading lady, Laura Keene, enters to deliver a stern admonishment to the actors. At the sound of “Hail to the Chief” Keene walks onstage to welcome Abraham and Mary Lincoln, exhorting the audience to put war behind them and forget their cares for the evening of entertainment.

**ACT II**

As the theater curtain rises on an English country estate, Mary Dundreary (Laura Keene) is helping her forgetful father, Lord Dundreary (Ned Emerson), to locate a misplaced letter, which turns out to be from a backwoods American cousin, Asa Dundreary (Harry Hawk), announcing his imminent visit to Dundreary Manor to settle some “ancient business.” Overhearing news of the visit of a presumably wealthy American, Lady Mountchessington schemes with her daughter Gussy to secure Asa’s hand in marriage. Arriving as if on cue, Asa confounds the pair with a coarse tall tale of “herding possum” on the frontier. Abraham Lincoln laughs heartily at the frontiersman’s mannerisms, so comically resonant

with his own public persona. The villainous Solicitor Coyle (Jack Mathews) informs Lord Dundreary that he now holds the deed to the family estate, and that only his daughter’s hand in marriage will forestall ruin. As the family assembles for dinner, Asa is smitten with Mary Dundreary and instantly detects Coyle’s plans. The rivals jockey for seats at a lavish dinner table as underfed soldiers from the theater audience look on with indignation.

**ACT III**

As Mary Dundreary leads an adoring Asa on a tour of her modern dairy, Asa spins a yarn of a deathbed bequest by his stepfather of sufficient money to save the Dundreary estate. Mary rushes off to tell her father of their salvation. Conversing quietly in their box, Abraham and Mary Lincoln look to their future after the presidency, while Booth, outside, rehearses for the assassination. Asa encounters the still eager Mountchessingtons, and having sacrificed his fortune to save the estate, declares himself penniless. As they escape from Asa’s comic scorns, a shot is heard. Booth leaps from the presidential box and wields a knife at the paralyzed Hawk before fleeing. While the actors attempt to continue the play, Laura Keene tries to calm the crowd, which instead erupts calling for mercy and justice. Within the presidential box, Mary Lincoln prepares for a life of mourning while a surgeon tends hopelessly to Lincoln. Laura Keene, seeing the President lying on the bare floor, takes his head on her lap and bathes it. Mathews remembers Booth’s letter in his pocket, and he and Hawk set fire to it just as police arrive to arrest them for questioning. While Laura Keene is left to wander the stage alone wondering the value of her life in theater, a shadowy figure approaches to ask her when the play will resume. Recognizing Lincoln in the figure Keene exclaims, “Don’t you really know what happened?” Upon Lincoln’s silence, the audience chorus gives a cryptic reply in the form of a recitation of the names of Civil War battlegrounds.

## LAURA KEENE &amp; HER COMPANY

**Laura Keene**

Director & Manager of the Company  
playing **Mary Dundreary** (daughter of Lord Dundreary)

**Harry Hawk**

playing **Asa Dundreary**  
(the Dundreary's long lost "American Cousin")

**Jack Mathews**

longtime acquaintance of John Wilkes Booth  
playing the villainous **John Coyle**, Lord Dundreary's lawyer

**Ned Emerson**

aging thespian, playing **Lord Dundreary** (Mary's father)

**Lady Mountchessington**

an avaricious dowager, mother of Gussy

**Gussy Mountchessington**

her romantic daughter

## IN THE AUDIENCE

**President Abraham Lincoln****Mary Lincoln****John Wilkes Booth****Doctor Leale**, attending President Lincoln**Audience chorus**

(women, veterans, freedmen and freedwomen, nurses, businessmen)

## SPEAKING PARTS

**Binny**, the Dundreary's butler**Two soldiers****Janna Baty**, mezzo-soprano**Alan Schneider**, tenor**Aaron Engebret**, baritone**Drew Poling**, baritone**Janice Edwards**, mezzo-soprano**Hillarie O'Toole**, soprano**Donald Wilkinson**, baritone**Angela Hines Gooch**, soprano**Tom O'Toole**, bass-baritone**Daniel Kamalic**, baritone**The Amherst College Concert Choir****Marshall Nannes****Mark Knapp, Ross Wolfarth**

**[DISC 1] ACT I****[1] Prelude****[2] Scene 1: A Sneeze**

*Backstage at Ford's Theater*

EMERSON (*studying his lines, rehearsing a sneeze*)

Ah ahhh ahhhhh...  
(*brightly*)

Aha!

And they call me Addlepate!

Who counts the lines missing in action  
when a legend reclaims the stage?

My gathering sneeze  
will take the audience by storm  
and save my name.

**[3] Arts of Theater**

— *Aria* —

(*pompously*)

Are not the arts of theater  
like the arts of war?

Each company musters its troops  
and parades them in sabers and plumes  
to the music of fifes and clarions.  
Their lines are drawn up and fired,  
and others as hotly returned.  
Drawn up and fired, and hotly returned!  
(*reflects, warming to his theme*)

Now, here's the mysterious part:

suppose a dramatic persona shoots,  
or stabs another persona dead,

do soldiers rush the stage  
and apprehend the villain?

Why no! It's just a play.

Well, so it is in war.

A brother runs his brother through,  
and yet commits no murder.

The part he plays is part  
of one tremendous drama

directed from the wings.

(*remembering that he's soon to go on*)

Good Lord, what time is it?

(*checks his pocket watch with some alarm,  
then summons up his courage*)

Now's the time,

Ned Emerson,

prepare to act!

(*resumes rehearsing his sneeze*)

Ah ahhh ahhhhh... aah

BOOTH (*approaching Emerson from behind,  
interrupts him*)

Hear what that scoundrel did?

EMERSON (*taken aback, offended, not yet  
recognizing Booth*)

Scoundrel? Pardon?

I never forget a face,  
but your name for the moment...

BOOTH (*taking Emerson's cane, bending it  
over his shoulders*)

That low scoundrel Lincoln!

He sauntered through our smoldering

Richmond,

and marched his muddy boots

into the President's mansion.

He sits himself down in the "cheer,"

as he says it, of Jefferson Davis,

and leaning back to tell a smutty joke,

he squirts his tobacco juice over an heirloom  
carpet—

(*incensed*)

A vulgar man, a buffoon, a baboon liberator king  
not fit to shine the boots

(*shouting, cracks Emerson's cane*)

of President Davis!

(*regaining his composure, coolly*)

Your cane, sir.

(*hands cane to Emerson and strolls away*)

EMERSON (*in belated recognition*)

Wilkes Booth!?

(*aggrieved, exits with broken cane*)

Say, what about my limp?

**[4] Scene 2: Harry Hawk's Substitute**

*Backstage*

HAWK (*drinking but not drunk, reading from  
a letter*)

"We regret to inform you..."

(*reflecting*)

"regret," that I am dead,

(*reading*)

"that your conscripted substitute, Mark Hazard,

holding the rank of corporal at the time..."

(*reflecting*)

"corporal," yes, still corporeal,

(*reading*)

"his remains were insufficient..."

(*reflecting*)

but I remain to gather you up

and carry you to my grave.

(*reading*)

"Having located no next of kin..."

(*pockets his empty bottle*)

I've been looking all week for you, Mark,

in this dream.

It's night out and chilly

where I come to,

and overcast with stars.

**[5] Walking a Corduroy Road**

— *Aria* —

I'm walking a corduroy road.

The moon is cut in two.

A whole blue field is falling,

thickly and quietly,

like melting snow.

I can hear hogs snorting,

fighting over something.

It smells of chloroform.

Here's where I find you, Mark,

so cold and chattering,

in a shallow rifle pit.

I dress you in boiled blue linen,

fasten your cross-belt and tourniquet.

I dust off your forage cap,

your overcoat, and your knapsack

full of traps. But when I kneel

to pull your knee boots on,  
I find you've sent out roots.  
Your uniform is hanging  
from a blasted possum oak.  
The trunk is gouged  
and powder burned  
and slick with sap.  
Some limbs are yanked away.  
Their sockets are bubbling.  
But I can feel along  
where the limbs were.  
The air is still warm  
and slender to the touch.  
Higher up  
a bobolink sits burbling,  
pouring out  
its little jug of song.  
My throat is sore.  
I take a drink.  
Now nothing else  
will ever quench my thirst.  
*(He inspects his bottle, which is still empty.)*

MATHEWS *(coming up without being noticed,  
noticing Hawk's condition)*

Hello, Harry. You're in good spirits.  
What's that you're spiriting away?

HAWK *(straightening his costume)*  
Some business of mine.

MATHEWS  
Another part?

HAWK  
I'm not playing, Jack. This is real.

MATHEWS  
Real? Well, it can't be as real as all that.

HAWK  
My substitute is dead,  
It says here he died for me  
short of Petersburg.

MATHEWS  
We're men of acting, Harry.  
We make the stage our world.  
We act for others;  
let them act for us.  
*(Hawk exits.)*  
*(Booth enters across the stage.)*

MATHEWS *(spots Booth)*  
But look, isn't that Wilkes Booth,  
disguised as a tragedian?  
*(Hawk waves dismissively, and exits.)*

[6] **Scene 3: Mathews and Booth**

*Backstage*  
*(Booth sees Mathews and approaches,  
smiling.)*

MATHEWS *(extending his hand)*  
Wilkes! Still roaring? How's your throat?

BOOTH *(shaking hands)*  
My voice is fine tonight.  
Besides, my lines are few.  
*(retrieves a letter from his pocket)*

I have a letter for you.  
Good Friday news that has not come to pass.  
Will you deliver it?  
I won't trust it to the Federal mail.

MATHEWS *(takes the letter and reads from  
the envelope)*  
From J. Booth to John Coyle, editor,  
*The National Intelligencer.*  
Marked Urgent.  
Coyle? Are you joking?  
*(Mathews holds the letter out for Booth to take  
back, which he doesn't.)*

BOOTH *(changing the subject)*  
I understand your bumpkin emperor  
will attend the play tonight  
without his tipsy centurion.  
I saw the Grants this afternoon  
evacuating Washington, in terror,  
I suspect, of Mary Lincoln's scenes.

MATHEWS *(smiling)*  
Yes, she is theatrical,  
but she lacks your legendary gymnastics.

BOOTH  
Only a swoon is required.

MATHEWS *(dropping his smile, shakes the  
letter at him)*  
Booth, what happens here?

BOOTH *(departing without taking it)*  
Deliver the letter!  
*(Booth exits.)*

MATHEWS *(looking after Booth, at the letter,  
then at the stage)*

[7] **What Happens Here?**

— Aria —  
What happens here?

Here where I live out my lives,  
a villain clad in irony,  
a snake that never leaves its lair  
or sheds its coat of mirrors.  
Each night I spend a life,  
forging my schemes  
among sultans and hasbeens,  
starlets and octoroons.  
Hundreds of women  
have eluded my clutches.  
I have cursed my last curse  
hundreds of times.  
I have hissed and been hissed  
in house after house.  
I have stolen and squandered  
fortune after fortune.  
*(looks at the letter)*  
Now enters Booth,  
who hands me a letter.  
Am I directed  
to conspire against our Caesar?  
Will I be held responsible?  
Is he mad enough to act?  
Were his last reviews that bad?  
What happens here,  
where everything,  
where nothing ever happens?  
*(He pockets the letter and exits.)*

**Scene 4**

*In the theater audience; some seated, some  
arriving engage in conversation.*

A MAN *(responding to a question)*  
No, just the President.

A SECOND MAN

Well, God bless U.S. Grant anyhow!

A WOMAN

The President? We see him everyday.  
But Laura Keene!

A SECOND WOMAN (*pointing*)

That's Eleanor!

Three years of table rapping,  
and she's let her Chester go.

A THIRD WOMAN (*to her woman friend*)

The children won't go near him,  
the way he eats. I won't neither.

(*turning to an amputee, whose crutches have fallen*)

Excuse me, are these your crutches?

THE VETERAN AMPUTEE

Wal, I'm agonter see Linkern  
and I'm agonter sleep,  
lessen they's music.

A SECOND VETERAN (*indignantly*)

They lettin' collurds in now?

A FREEDMAN

Father Abraham's gonna be right up there.  
We'll see him, and he'll see us.

A BUSINESSMAN (*putting his overcoat on seats*)

Pardon me, are these seats reserved?

A WOMAN (*handing him his overcoat*)

First come, mister, first serve!

A NURSE (*wiping herself*)

Filthy pestilential streets!

[8] **Chorus of Women**

We met at the depot at dawn,  
when they rang out name after name  
of the wounded, the missing, and dead—  
Chestnutt and Evans and Green.  
Sometimes at H, sometimes at M or Y  
a gasp or a groan would strike  
somebody in homespun or bombazine.  
She'd sink out of sight, leaving a hole behind.  
We'd drop down around where she lay,  
but we never could reach her in time:  
her mouth would be working that terrible  
name—  
sometimes at H, sometimes at M or Y.

[9] **Chorus of Amputees**

We laid down our arms, our kneecaps and rifle  
butts;  
we emptied our barrel chests when that  
weren't enough.  
The newspapers speak of a final disarmament.  
How come, when we already laid down our  
arms?  
We wagered our lives to crush the rebellion,  
but we never intended to set no one free.  
They tol' us to seize any runaway contraban',  
but how can you emancipate three-fifths of  
a man?  
They's somethin' like me, three-fifths of a man.

[10] **Chorus of Freedmen**

We walked on over, walked on over, we walked  
on over by ourself;  
confiscated contraband can't walk on over by  
itself.

We laid down they hoes and children, we done  
let their people go;  
we abandoned Mississippi, we invaded Ohio.  
You was fightin' with your black hand bound  
and tied behind your back,  
You was fightin' without knowin' what idea to  
attack.  
We picked up your Enfield rifle, we strapped on  
your haversack,  
Ever since we walked on over, three-fifths from  
one nothin' lacks.

[11] **Chorus of Nurses**

Rend your garments, ladies, but rend not your  
hearts.  
When the wounded are hauled in, shattered  
and glazed,  
strip them and wipe them and burn their  
clothes  
that the surgeons can rend their tattered  
members.  
Bind up their remnants with blood-vessel silk,  
then bandage their wounds but guard against  
feeling  
and prophylac daily your heart if you care  
to survive. Rend all that you see from your  
minds,  
dear ladies, rend everything saving your hearts.

[12] **Chorus of Businessmen**

The war was kind to us; we made a killing.  
You'll light your oil lamps with kerosene.  
Start eating from a can; you'll find it filling.  
We fortify our work with backs of green.  
You'll drink from Mrs. Borden's powdered cow.

Please take our catalogue—it's so appealing.  
But let's get back to work, the time is now.  
There's money to be made. We know, we made  
a killing.

[13] **Scene 5: Drinking Song**

*Backstage rehearsal*

(*Enter Emerson, Hawk, Mathews, and Booth,  
who observes from a distance.*)

HAWK

Hey men!

Let's run through the wine-cellar scene.  
Last night it went so badly  
even the audience noticed.  
Ned, know where we are?

EMERSON (*thinking, then brightly*)  
Ford's Theater!

MATHEWS (*laughs*)  
Tonight will be unforgettable!

HAWK (*impatiently to Emerson*)  
The scene, Lord Dundreary, the scene!

EMERSON (*frantically searching his script*)  
My mistake, fellow thespians.  
(*finding his place, composing himself*)  
Ahem! The wine-cellar scene,  
Lord Dundreary's ancestral cellar,  
Dundreary manor, somewheres deep  
in Southron Englan'.  
(*All quickly take their roles and places.*)

HAWK (*in role as Asa, addressing Emerson/  
Dundreary*)  
Wal, Lord Dundreary,

this fix we're in needs fixin'!  
I reckon by now Mary's got  
that legalistic rascal Coyle  
absolutely histered.  
We'll get him singin',  
then we'll poach his keys.

MATHEWS (*as Coyle*)  
And this will be my wine-cellar!  
A drink, boys, to my nameless forebears,  
may they wrestle in peace with yours.

ASA (*glass in hand*)  
Some sherry cobbler?

COYLE  
I'll try a shot of your flintlock whiskey.  
Guaranteed to kill at forty paces!

ASA (*servicing him whiskey*)  
I warrant it'll hit the spot.  
Let's have a song!

COYLE  
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,  
we'll drink to And The Other,  
and after that we'll drain a glass  
to the Vanquished and Evictor.

ASA AND LORD DUNDREARY (*furtively  
searching Coyle's pockets*)  
And after we purloin his keys,  
we'll find out who gets licked here.

— Chorus —

COYLE  
Well we'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,  
we'll drink to And The Other;

and after that we'll drain a glass  
to the Vanquished and Evictor.

ASA and LORD DUNDREARY  
Well we'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,  
we'll drink to Auntie Other;  
and after we purloin her keys,  
we'll find out who gets licked here.

BOOTH  
Look away, look away,  
if you can.

COYLE  
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That, ...

ASA and LORD DUNDREARY  
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That, ...

BOOTH  
Will old times ever be forgot? ...

MIXED AUDIENCE CHORUS (*drowning each  
other out*)

We met at the depot at dawn,  
The war was kind to us;  
we made a killing.  
You'll light your oil lamps with kerosene.  
Rend your garments,  
but rend not your hearts.  
But how can you emancipate  
three-fifths of a man?  
You was fightin' with your  
black hand bound and tied  
behind your back.  
(*The drinking group jostles and scuffles, a bit  
too roughly and loudly, talking and shouting  
over each other.*)

LAURA KEENE (*storming backstage*)  
Peace!  
(*The men scramble to their feet.*)

[14] **Laura Keene**

If you will work for Laura Keene again,  
I will have peace.  
What in tarnation has gotten into you?  
Don't you realize the war is over?  
Our President and our First Lady  
are coming tonight to watch us play,  
and we are here as actors  
to help them let their troubles go—  
and that means each of you  
who means to stay.  
(*Ominously she surveys her cast. From the  
orchestra pit come strains of "Hail to the  
Chief."*)  
Listen, the President's anthem.  
Make yourselves ready, men, to entertain.

**Scene 6**

*Onstage*

LAURA KEENE (*comes onstage applauding  
and turns to the Lincolns, who take their bows  
and their seats*)  
We're awfully pleased to welcome you,  
Mrs. Lincoln, and you, Mr. President,  
here at Ford's Theater,  
to our peacetime comedy,  
"Our American Cousin,"  
(*exuberantly*)  
performed by our traveling company  
upwards of one thousand nights.

I think you'll recognize our story:  
a certain backwoods bumpkin,  
honest Asa, travels east to reunite  
two severed branches of a family.  
Why, he even marries Mary,  
as played by me.  
(*curtseys to audience*)  
SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS  
Hurrah Miss Keene!  
(*While Keene and the audience blow kisses  
to each other, Mary and Abraham Lincoln  
exchange words.*)

MARY LINCOLN (*furiously*)  
Even marries Mary!  
The impudence of that coquette!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (*wearily, patiently*)  
Mary, Mary, keep your peace,  
for Willie's sake, Mother.  
Remember, tonight we mean  
to leave the world behind.

LAURA KEENE (*resuming*)  
Tonight will be my final performance  
upon this Capitol stage.  
I hope you enjoy it.  
Tonight we grant you general leeway.  
Please put yourselves at ease.

[15] **Emancipate your Sorrows**

— Aria —

Emancipate your sorrows, losses,  
apprehensions;  
for this balconied space of an hour  
set them free.

The North and South will pass away,  
forgiven and forgotten,  
and rise again from a single bed  
with all their living and their dead united.  
*(mysteriously)*  
How long since we've fallen asleep together?  
Maybe we'll never remember.  
There must have been years of tossing  
and turning against each other.  
We were trying to wake each other  
from the same nightmare;  
We were trying to bury ourselves  
under the same cover,  
till one day it dawned on us  
who had fought the night away:  
we could be happy tending a nation,  
we could be busy watching a play.  
And now, Mary and Abraham Lincoln,  
and you, dear members of our audience,  
we invite you to forget awhile,  
everything that's come and gone,  
till your memories come back to you refreshed.  
*(The audience applauds Miss Keene, who bows  
and exits; and they applaud the Lincolns, who  
acknowledge them, and then settle themselves  
down for the play.)*

## ACT II

### [16] Scene 1: Father and Daughter

*Drawing room, Dundreary Manor*

*(Mary enters, carrying her dairy account book.)*

MARY *(ordering)*  
Fourteen Jersey yearlings,  
fourteen cowbells,  
one evaporator drum...

LORD DUNDREARY  
Oh, there you are my dear.  
I have something for you.  
Something important, perhaps.

MARY  
How marvelous, Father!  
What is it?

LORD DUNDREARY *(distracted, gazing off)*  
What is what my pet?

MARY *(a bit exasperated)*  
This thing you have for me!

LORD DUNDREARY  
I really couldn't say!  
Perhaps you might give me a clue.

MARY  
Very well, Father.  
Isn't it something new?

LORD DUNDREARY  
Why yes, I believe it is!

MARY  
And small?

LORD DUNDREARY *(pondering the clues)*  
Something small,  
something small and new.

MARY  
Well then, what is it?

LORD DUNDREARY *(stalling for time)*  
What is it? Exactly! What is it?  
I think I may hazard a guess.  
Is it a...?  
*(his hesitation becomes the start of a violent  
sneeze)*

ah, ahhh, ahhhh...?

MARY  
Bless you, Father!

LORD DUNDREARY  
Botheration, Mary!  
You spoiled my beautiful sneeze.  
I caught the awful thing last night  
in that confounded draft.  
My doctor gave me something for it:  
a little medicinal draught.

MARY  
A draught for the cold  
that you caught in the draft.  
Why Father, you've almost enough  
for a game of draughts.  
But we're not making any headway.

LORD DUNDREARY  
That's because my head is in the way.  
But let me see. Let's try a riddle!  
What is it gives a cold in the head,  
and cures a cold,

and pays the doctor's bill,  
and makes a...?

MARY *(prompting him)*  
and makes a ho...?

LORD DUNDREARY  
and makes a who?

MARY  
and makes a ho...

LORD DUNDREARY  
and makes a garden hoe.

MARY  
and makes a home gar...

LORD DUNDREARY *(getting frustrated)*  
and makes a home gar...

MARY  
and makes a home gar...

LORD DUNDREARY *(brightening)*  
And takes home a garfish?

MARY *(a bit less patient)*  
A home guard, Father!  
And makes a home guard look for...  
substitutes!  
What gives a cold  
and cures a cold,  
and pays the doctor's bill,  
and makes a home guard look  
for substitutes?  
It couldn't be the "draft" now, could it?

[17] **I Feel a Draft**

Don't you know  
Mr. Lincoln suspended the draft?  
(*Everyone looks toward his box and applauds.*)

LINCOLN (*standing and clapping with the audience*)

Thank you, yes thank you, thank you all.  
And thank you boys! Here's to you!  
(*to himself*)

I feel a draft. It cuts right through.  
I can't get warm. Where's my coat?  
(*He fetches it from a coat rack.*)

MARY LINCOLN (*watching him*)  
He looks so frail! He can't eat.  
Not while his boys lie outside.

LORD DUNDREARY (*fishing around in his pockets*)  
Mary, I've got it,  
the draft of a letter!

MARY  
The draft of a letter?

LORD DUNDREARY (*still fishing*)  
A letter from Hillynois,  
that's in the Reunited States.

AUDIENCE (*laughter and cheers*)  
Hooray for the Reunited States!

LORD DUNDREARY (*still fishing*)  
It made a hilly noise when I opened it.  
That's where I got the draft in my head  
that made me misremember it.  
(*catching and pulling it out of one of his pockets*)

Here it is, my dear.  
(*handing her the letter*)

MARY (*taking and opening it*)  
Goodness, it looks like a henhouse floor!  
(*Lady Mountchessington, about to enter, ducks behind a screen and listens eagerly.*)

[18] **Asa's Letter**

— Aria —  
(*reads haltingly*)  
"To you,  
Lord Beauregard Dundreary,  
and, if I may be so bold to spell,  
to my dear Angly cousin, Mary,  
of whom I have heard tell."  
Why, the poor madman! He thinks we're  
related!

"I bet you never give a thought  
of readin' anythin' from me,  
the last of themerican Dundrearies!  
But. Every since I was knee-high  
to the cornstalks that grows  
most evrywheres in Hillynoise  
I have dreamed of visitin' with  
yur Angleland and meetin'  
my onliest Angly kinfolks,  
which, my dear Beauregard  
and Mary, is you."

(*spoken*)  
Angling for an invitation?  
(*reads*)  
"Wal, to pop the bobwhite quail  
that's flown the bush,  
it jussu happens, there's this

ainshyunt busyness  
atouchin' the Dundreary clan  
that somewhat nearly  
calls upon yurs truley  
to come acrossing,  
where I beg you to receive,  
fer no more, I magine,  
then a month er two,  
yur longlast American cuzzin  
and yur frend in deed,  
Asa Dundreary,  
railroad magnet."  
Asa Dundreary!  
Why, he must be the orphan  
Uncle Ebenezer took in!  
(*turning the paper over, and upside down*)  
Papa, what does he mean  
by this ancient business?  
(*Lady Mountchessington exits.*)

LORD DUNDREARY  
I'm afraid I've no idea!  
(*aside*)  
and I'm afraid I do!  
When my elder brother left for America,  
a quarter century ago,  
he never gave up his claim  
to Dundreary manor.  
And now I fear, after all these years,  
his adopted heir, this Asa,  
is coming to claim his inheritance.  
(*A knock, which startles Emerson into forgetting his lines. Another knock.*)

MARY (*as Keene, fiercely prompting Emerson*)  
Perhaps...

LORD DUNDREARY (*flustered*)  
Perhaps...

MARY (*as Keene, while the knocking continues*)  
Perhaps that's...

LORD DUNDREARY (*struggling to remember*)  
Perhaps that's him now, Mary.

MARY (*in character, but also as Keene, glaring at Emerson*)  
I'll go and see.  
(*goes to the door and opens it*)  
Oh it's you, Coyle.

COYLE (*enters, bows*)  
That's Mister Coyle, Miss Mary,  
Solicitor at Law.

MARY  
Now coiled low.  
I'll leave you, Father.  
(*She exits.*)

LORD DUNDREARY  
Very well, my dear.  
(*turning to Coyle, sternly*)  
Mister Coyle, I must insist  
you treat my daughter with the respect  
which to a Dundreary is due.

COYLE (*villainously*)  
I shall, your Lordship, oh I shall.  
May I have a word with you?  
(*secretively*)  
It's a delicate matter that  
intimately concerns us three.

LORD DUNDREARY (*looking around him, confused*)

Us three? Coyle,  
are you quite well?

COYLE

Shall we continue  
in the library?

LORD DUNDREARY

Oh very well, Coyle,  
follow me.

COYLE (*bowing*)

For the moment, milord,  
for the moment.

(*He follows Lord Dundreary out the door.*)

[19] **Scene 2: A Moneyed Man**

*Drawing room, Dundreary Manor*

(*A near-sighted, unbespectacled Gussy enters reading, holding her novel rather close to her face. An animated Lady Mountchessington enters, and flurries across to her.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Oh Gussy, I've just received  
the most auspicious piece of news!  
Our hosts expect a lengthy visit  
from their long lost American cousin—  
a boundlessly wealthy,  
eminently eligible  
railroad magnet.

GUSSY (*clutching her novel to her bosom*)

An American Dundreary? How utterly romantic!  
A solitary spirit in his corn-skin cap

tracking game and bifurcating rails!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Gussy, isn't that "splitting rails"?

GUSSY (*with a wave of her hand*)

Bifurcating, splitting . . . in any event,  
that unsullied heart makes certain  
there's enough to go around.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

I'm sure he has a heart of gold.

GUSSY (*sighing*)

Oh, ma, I'm so tired  
of admiring things I hate.  
Money's so... it's so... material!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Material? Why, Gussy,  
money's the least material  
thing in the world!

— *Aria* —

A moneyed man is trim.  
His pockets do not bulge.  
He is light-hearted.

The more he has  
the less of it is there.

A moneyed man's sublime,  
his holdings are immense.  
There are dizzying vaults  
and breathtaking prospects  
in his speculative stare.

A moneyed man's an artist;  
he inspires confidence.  
He wraps you up  
in his imagination

until your dreams are his.

Nothing, in sum,  
could be more romantic,  
nothing less material  
than an authentic,  
an ethereal,  
a really moneyed man.  
Gussy, attend our American.  
Study his interests, his habits,  
his disarming attempts at speech.  
Remind him, dearest, of home,  
and you'll accompany him there.

GUSSY

Yes, ma.

(*brightening*)

I'm already fluent in American.

(*waxing romantic*)

Money may be material,  
but for surely  
it isn't confining.  
It sets the spirit loose  
like an unbridled pig in a pasture.  
America is growing like a wind,  
already outgrowing tomorrow.  
Who better to see it,  
who better to seize the potato  
than that farsighted dreamer,  
that windfall prophet,  
surveying the future  
from his buffalo pony.

— *Duet* —

GUSSY and LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

A moneyed man is trim.  
His pockets do not bulge.

He is light-hearted.

The more he has  
the less of it is there.  
A moneyed man's an artist;  
he inspires confidence.  
He wraps you up  
in his imagination  
until your dreams are his.  
Nothing, in sum,  
could be more romantic,  
nothing less material  
than an authentic,  
an ethereal,  
a really moneyed man.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Then see you turn your reading to account!

[20] **Scene 3: Introductions**

*Drawing room, Dundreary Manor*

BINNY (*enters, closing the door quickly behind him*)

Pahrdon me, my Lady,  
but there's ah houtdoorsman  
waiting in the hall, who rhudely maintains  
he's Lord Dundreary's cousin!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*animated*)

Oh, show him in at once, Binny!  
(*Resigned, he bows and turns toward the door, which flies open before he reaches it. Asa enters smiling.*)

BINNY (*recovering his bearing*)

Ahem. Ahem!  
May I announce Mihsteh...

ASA  
That's Cousin!

BINNY  
Cousin Ahssa

ASA  
That's "A-sa"  
with an elongated A.  
Don't let yer tongue go slock.

BINNY (*thoroughly discombobulated*)  
A-sa Dundreary of Hillynoise.  
(*exits*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*proffering her hand*)

May I introduce myself?  
I am Lady Mountchessington,  
your family's most highly valued friend,  
and this is my only daughter,  
Augusta, heiress to the name  
Mountchessington, but you  
may call her Gussy.  
(*turning to Gussy*)  
Now Gussy,  
present Cousin Dundreary your hand.

GUSSY (*extending her hand, speaking in broken American*)  
Oh ma, I was a-fixin' to!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON  
My daughter is devoted  
to your fabulously rich  
American tongue.

ASA (*shaking instead of kissing her hand*)  
Pleased to meet you!

GUSSY (*curtseying*)  
Howdy do, I'm sure.  
How dreamy and romantic  
your life must be, Cousin Asa,  
what with herding possum  
by the moonlight and all, I reckon?

## [21] Possum Herding

ASA (*trying not to laugh*)  
Yes'm, possum herdin', yes'm.  
I guess there's nothin'  
quite like possum herdin'.  
Which puts me in mind  
of a story, as Mr. Lincoln says.  
(*laughter from the audience and the President's box*)

— Aria —

One howlin' night,  
with the stars stamped asunder,  
and yonder moon a-danglin' by its tail,  
I was droopin' kinda low myself,  
a-shooin' this devious herd o' possum  
through the Cumbersome Gap.  
(*illustrates in pantomime, then continues*)  
Now if'n you know anythin' at all  
'bout the Cumbersome Gap, you know  
how powerful wearisome it can be.  
Wal, by and by, mesmerized  
by the ceaseless patterin' o' their paws  
and the listless swishin' o' their tails,  
I commenced to dreamin'...  
but no sooner had my chin  
touched my collar button  
than that entire herd  
o' double-dealin' marsupials

hit the ground with a thump,  
like wet snow off a dead branch.  
Which startles me awake.  
So I decides to interrogate  
the possum chief: "Wal now,  
jist whadaya think yer doin'?"  
I asks. Whereupon he whispers,  
confidential-like, "We're playin' possum."  
"Playin' possum? Wal," I says to him,  
"let's see you try your paws at playin' dead!"  
an' I plugged him in the head.  
After that command performance,  
you never saw a swifter possum herd!  
(*Asa puts his hands on his hips and roars with laughter. Gussy looks horrified and backs away, but Lady Mountchessington blocks her retreat. She pushes Gussy back toward Asa. The three continue in pantomime, with Asa showing the Mountchessingtons how to "shoo possum."*)

## [22] Lincoln

AUDIENCE (*in stitches*)  
Possum herdin'!  
Ah ha ha ha.  
Never hearda sucha thin'!  
Ah ha ha ha.

LINCOLN (*his laughter rising up out of the audience's*)  
Oh ho ho ho, oh mercy,  
oh ho ho ho, oh mercy me.  
Oh ho ho ho, oh mercy,  
oh ho ho ho, oh mercy me.  
Mercy, where's my hankerchief?  
Don't know when I laughed so hard.

That possum Hawk, he ain't half tall enough,  
but he's sure common enough for me.  
Fact is, I'm hard to look at, difficult to see.

— Aria —

Flatboat feet, mail-order legs,  
arms that dangle, like the Original Gorilla.  
Honest Ape, the Missing Link,  
oh yes, they like to blacken me,  
make me hard to look at, difficult to see.  
But I'm stuck with a pair of popcorn ears,  
holler cheeks, a burrowing mole  
Matt Brady couldn't chase away.  
I put on hairs to hide my face away,  
make it less hard to look at, difficult to see.  
To look at me, it must be hard to figure  
how I'll make it through another day,  
but all in all, I've got a hardy constitution,  
a hardy U. S. Constitution,  
hardy saving that peculiar institution,  
lodged securely there in the foundation,  
taking root and growing in native soil  
that all these years has clouded my gray eyes.  
Our founding fathers hushed those shameful  
words,  
"slavery" and "slave," making the thing  
that's so hard to look at, difficult to see.  
But like any affliction, a canker or a vine,  
if you don't destroy it, it spreads and overgrows,  
and cracks your house in two, and then  
you can see no other way. The vine  
must be removed. To save the life  
of the nation, the branch must be cut free,  
free to live and let live in one nation  
of common-looking men and women,  
hard to look at, difficult to see.



SURRAT.



BOOTH.



HAROLD.

War Department, Washington, April 20, 1865,

 **\$100,000 REWARD!**

**THE MURDERER**

Of our late beloved President, Abraham Lincoln,

**IS STILL AT LARGE.**

**\$50,000 REWARD**

[DISC 2]

[1] **Scene 4: In the Library**

*Dundreary Manor*

*(Lord Dundreary sits at his desk, buried in legal documents and bills. Coyle, dipping into his voluminous valise, inundates him with more and more bills.)*

COYLE

... and in arrears to Doctor Phlegm for fifty two pints of medicinal bitters...

LORD DUNDREARY *(exasperated, breaking in)*

Confound it, Coyle!

What do I pay you for if not to dispense with these infernal tradesmen?

Have you made out a total?

COYLE *(opening an account book and consulting it)*

Yes, milord.

It comes to four thousand eight hundred and sixty pounds, nine shillings and sixpence.

LORD DUNDREARY

Sixpence?

COYLE *(shutting the account book)*

Nine shillings and sixpence, four thousand eight hundred and sixty pounds.

LORD DUNDREARY

Zounds! Is there no mistake?

COYLE

I'm afraid there's no mistake.

LORD DUNDREARY

Very well, Coyle, very well. *(scribbling with a quill)*

We must make ends meet.

I hereby grant you power to mortgage the estate.

COYLE

Milord, I regret to say, Dundreary Manor is... entirely encumbered.

LORD DUNDREARY *(shocked)*

Encumbered!

COYLE

Mortgaged to my father.

LORD DUNDREARY *(uncomprehending)*

Your father? My father's agent?

COYLE *(reverently)*

Your father's industrious agent, my father, Litigius Coyle, who rescued the manor from ruin.

LORD DUNDREARY

But, is there no release?

COYLE

*(His hand involuntarily grasps his breast pocket.)*

No release, milord.

LORD DUNDREARY

Good Lord! What's to be done?

COYLE (*delicately*)  
I do see one solution.

LORD DUNDREARY (*impatient*)  
Well?

COYLE  
Marry your daughter to the mortgagee.

LORD DUNDREARY (*dumbfounded*)  
You mean... to you?

COYLE  
I am prepared to clear your debts  
and settle your estate, the day  
Miss Dundreary becomes Lady Coyle.

LORD DUNDREARY (*awestruck*)  
Lady Coyle?

COYLE (*proceeding quickly*)  
Naturally, as her father,  
you would retain all appearances,  
that is, appurtenances, proper to  
your supernumerary role  
of aging patriarch.

LORD DUNDREARY (*waving a fistful of  
papers*)  
You insolent scoundrel!

COYLE (*bowing*)  
Yes, your lordship.  
I'll wait just outside  
while you consider  
my humble proposition.  
(*Coyle leaves Lord Dundreary sitting, head in  
hands.*)

## [2] Two Letters

— *Duet* —

COYLE (*pausing at the door, patting his breast  
pocket*)

A letter lies in readiness,  
sequestered like a surprise witness,  
lurking in a pocket at my breast,  
a certified release,  
with power to undo deeds,  
reverse events,  
restore to rightful places.  
But never will it see  
the light of day,  
and never will it be  
called to testify.

BOOTH (*in the wings*)  
A letter lies in readiness,  
sequestered like a surprise witness,  
lurking in a pocket at your breast,  
a certified release,  
with power to undo deeds,  
reverse events,  
restore to rightful places,  
whenever it shall see  
the light of day,  
whenever it shall be  
called to testify.

COYLE and BOOTH  
The slave shall play the master!  
(*Coyle exits and Booth vanishes.*)

## [3] Scene 5: Musical Chairs

*Drawing room, Dundreary Manor*

(*Asa enters from outside through French  
doors with Lady Mountchessington and Gussy  
clutching either arm.*)

ASA (*looking around the empty room*)  
Wonder if we're early?

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*joyful*)  
On the contrary, they're too late!  
(*Through the library door, Coyle struts in,  
followed by a crestfallen Lord Dundreary.  
Spotting Asa, Coyle resumes his subservient  
posture and drops meekly behind Lord  
Dundreary. Asa strides over, with the  
Mountchessingtons in tow.*)

ASA  
Beaugard Dundreary!

LORD DUNDREARY (*scrutinizing his American  
garb*)  
Can you be Ebenezer's Asa?

ASA (*extending his hand*)  
I reckon I can!

LORD DUNDREARY (*in some confusion,  
clasping Asa's hand*)  
Welcome to Dundreary... That is to say,  
may I present Solicitor Coyle?

ASA (*aside*)  
What a contwistification!

COYLE  
Your servant, sir.  
(*bows deeply*)

May I inquire,  
what brings you to Dundreary Manor?

ASA (*instantly sniffing out his villainy*)  
You may.  
(*Asa turns, his back to Coyle, toward Mary,  
who enters in work clothes. When she sees the  
guest, she wipes her hands, removes her dairy  
apron, and crosses the room smiling.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*to Asa*)  
Poor child! Raised without a mother,  
all leathery and lathered from her dairy.  
I don't think she knows she's a woman.

ASA (*admiringly, without looking away from  
Mary*)  
A hard-working, self-reliant woman!

LORD DUNDREARY (*taking Mary's hands,  
introduces her, with undue emotion*)  
Mister Dundreary,  
this is my daughter, Mary,  
who knows how much I love her.

MARY (*aside*)  
What's the matter with father?

COYLE (*ravenously*)  
How delicious to behold my,  
(*remembering himself*)  
my client's daughter!

MARY (*sidesteps Coyle and extends her hand  
to Asa*)  
Cousin Asa? What a pleasure!  
What brings you to England?

ASA (*enchanted*)

To look at you, Miss Dundreary,  
I honestly can't remember.

LORD DUNDREARY (*repositioning Coyle before Mary*)

Now Mary, Solicitor Coyle  
merits your consideration.

MARY (*alarmed, aside to Lord Dundreary*)

Father, what's the matter?

ASA (*retaking his position*)

I wonder, might I visit your dairy?

MARY (*smiling indulgently*)

Have you any experience in animal husbandry?

ASA

No ma'am, I have not.  
I never husbanded anythin'.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*aside to Gussy*)

Gussy, don't lose him!

BINNY (*entering, grandly*)

Ladies and gentlemen,  
dinner awaits.

(*The guests in line behind him, Binny leads the way into the dining room to a large table, laden with covered dishes.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*to Binny*)

Binny, you nincompooop,  
the American sits between us!

BINNY (*to Lady Mountchessington*)

Yes, your Ladyship.  
(*to Asa*)

You're between these ladies.

ASA (*sternly, to Binny*)

I'm alongside Miss Mary.  
(*aside to Coyle*)

You're in the wrong seat.

COYLE (*to Asa*)

You're in the wrong estate!

MARY (*to Gussy*)

Gussy, will you trade places?

GUSSY (*politely, to Mary*)

I'm going to be sick!

ASA

I'm gonna marry Mary!

MARY

I've got to talk to father!

COYLE

I'm going to be a Lord!

LORD DUNDREARY

I'm going to lose my daughter!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

I'm going to be rich!

GUSSY

I'm going to be sick!

(*Binny returns with another chair and, with help, sets another place at the table.*)

(*Guests seat themselves; hovering staff, helped by Binny, uncovers the platters.*)

GUESTS and BINNY (*relieved*)

Ah!

AMPUTEE IN AUDIENCE (*apparently just waking up*)

Will you look at all that food!

AMPUTEE (*persisting*)

You reckon that there's play food?

NURSE (*next to him*)

I think we'd best sit quietly,  
and watch them eat.

AMPUTEE

Like we ain't even here?

Wal, I ain't agonna sit fer that!

I'm agoin'!

(*He staggers up on his crutches, forcing his row to stand.*)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Down in front!

Keep your seat!

(*Curtain on the onstage play, followed by curtain for opera intermission.*)

## ACT III

### [4] Scene 1: In the Dairy

(*Mary's modern dairy—engines and cowbells clanking. Twilight. Mary is showing Asa around, and overseeing her dairymaids. She's bustling; he's flagging.*)

MARY

Our milk cows are Channel Island Jerseys.

Jerseys yield milk rich in butterfat.

Why they even look creamy!

(*She looks around, then turns to a dairymaid.*)

Elsie, don't tell me the herd's still browsing clover!

The night's at hand. Round up our capital!  
(*continuing*)

... we heat and press our curd for cheese.

The whey we save for livestock.

Saturdays we churn butter.

ASA (*feebly*)

Mary, please! I'm evaporating!

MARY (*concerned*)

Would you like a cup of milk?

ASA (*taking her hand and sitting, exasperated*)

No no, Mary, not a drop.

Can't we just sit awhile?

MARY (*sitting down*)

Come now, Cousin Asa,

your mind's not on milk.

Suppose you tell me why you've come.

It wasn't simply for a visit,

and it surely wasn't to learn the dairy trade.

(*prompting*)

You wrote about some "ancient business"?

### [5] Ancient Business

ASA (*hedging*)

Wal now, Mary, as to why I've come...

I'd better backtrack a bit.

Before I could cipher

my ma took milk sick

from a snake-rooted cow.

Pa never got over it,

and he followed her down.

Wal now, your uncle Ebenezer,

he always doted on my ma,  
and he took me in.  
He had no son. I had no kin.  
Wal, one lowdown Febyuware  
dear Ebenezer  
meets up with a winter ague.  
He was shivery one minute  
and wringing wet the next.  
"Asa, my boy,"  
and painful slow he sez it,  
"Asa, my boy,"  
I kin hear him still!  
"This leetle sheet a paper," he sez,  
tugging this parchment foolscrap  
from under his bearskin bedding,  
"This leetle sheet..."  
Mary, do you mind  
if I light up a ceegar?  
This story's so all-fired gloomy  
I reckon I'd lose my way to the end  
without a light.  
*(She nods; he strikes a match and lights up.)*  
"When I pass," whistles Ebenezer,  
with a voice no loudern a dove's,  
"this leetle sheet a paper  
will make you the present  
of all my Hillynoise rail estate,  
and all my Angly holdings,  
specially Dundreary Manor and Dairy,  
which by rights belongs to me"

MARY *(standing, surprised and angry)*  
So, if I understand you aright,  
You've come to claim possession.

ASA *(anxious to calm her)*  
Hold on now, Mary,  
the old feller ain't done fer yet!  
*(coaxing Mary down beside him again, and  
resuming his comfortable gait)*  
Wal now,  
with a dreadful heave he props hisself,  
"My boy," he sez, "my boy—  
for you been my boy—forgive me,  
but I just kaint do it, I kaint.  
My onliest brother, Beauregard,  
and his leetle daughter, Mary,  
they be my rightful heirs.  
The railroad's yours, my boy,  
but Angly and Hillynoisy,  
let all the rest be theirs!"  
The dairy's yers, Mary,  
and Dundreary's Lord of the Manor,  
and a rich man besides!  
*(hand at his breast, working up his courage)*

Wal now, Mary,  
now that I've passed on  
that ancient bizness a mine,  
there's somethin' worryin' my breast,  
MARY *(thrilled with the ancient news,  
interrupting)*  
Still Lord of the Manor?  
With money to clear his debts?  
*(rushing off)*  
Oh Asa, I must find papa!

ASA *(lighting Ebenezer's will with his cigar and  
watching it burn, pleased with himself)*  
Wal now, I reckon that's about  
the richest ceegar I ever did smoke!

## [6] Mary and Abraham

LINCOLN *(absorbed, to himself)*  
Bluegray smoke and ashes...  
*(aloud)*  
Mary, I've been thinking.  
We've had a hard time of it  
since we came out to Washington.  
Now this pestilent war is over,  
I'm near done for.

MARY LINCOLN  
Abraham, don't say such things!

LINCOLN  
Well, Mary, if saying made it so...  
But anyhow I've been thinking.  
After my second term,  
I'd like to take up the Law again,  
back in Springfield maybe,  
or Chicago.  
Maybe I'll start shaving.  
Mary, what do you say?

MARY LINCOLN  
I say we need a holiday!

LINCOLN *(fired up)*  
A holiday? Say!  
You know, Mary,  
we've got some money put by.  
Before we settle down for good,  
let's jest run off to California!  
What would you think about that?  
*(Leaning toward her, he takes her hand.)*

MARY LINCOLN *(delighted, glancing over her  
shoulder at Miss Harris and Major Rathbone)*  
Now, Abraham,  
what will Miss Harris think  
with you hanging onto me so?

LINCOLN *(also exuberant)*  
Why, they're in love,  
they won't think anything!  
*(looking out over the audience)*  
Say Mary, isn't that General Burnside?  
Back there, with the brushfire whiskers?  
*(peering, they lean forward)*

## [7] Sic Semper Booth

BOOTH *(manic, rehearsing outside the  
Presidential box)*  
Sic semper... sic semper...  
sic semper... Booth!  
Fired with drink,  
bursting with flame,  
catching, leaping,  
spreading my name—  
John Wilkes Booth forever!  
I will strike boldly  
from the shadows  
without warning  
from close behind—  
one glorious act  
never to be forgotten.  
Sic semper Booth,  
beloved assassin!  
Thus William Tell  
waxing his bow,  
thus Brutus

polishing his blade,  
thus Booth forever  
hoisting his Derringer  
dethrones a Pretender  
and erects his name.  
Sic semper Booth,  
the last Shakespearean.  
My brother, Edwin,  
Prince Hamlet of Boston,  
and Junius, my father,  
poor Richard the Dead,  
will be peeling on posters  
forgotten and faded  
while I, John Wilkes,  
will still be resounding  
in lessons and legends  
louder forever and ever  
sic semper sic semper...  
Tonight I retire from the stage  
and enter History!

VETERAN 1 (*watching Asa smoking*)  
Don't that ceegar smell fine!  
Say friend, hows about a smoke?

VETERAN 2  
Hush! That ain't for real.  
He's jest pretending!

VETERAN 1  
Wal, it shore smells real to me!

VETERAN 2, with OTHERS  
Hush! Hush!

[8] **Scene 2: Assassination**  
*Dundreary Manor*

(*Lady Mountchessington and Gussy, hunting for Asa. Lady Mountchessington sets her sights on him, and alerts her daughter.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON  
Ah, Mister Dundreary,  
we were just speculating  
on your skills as a marksman.

ASA (*looking at the President's box*)  
Wal, I guess it's like most things:  
just keep that bullion sun outta your eyes,  
judge your distance and fire.

GUSSY  
Oh Mister Dundreary,  
you hit the cowseye!  
Farsighted souls  
don't set their sights on bullion.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*taking him cordially yet firmly by the arm, motions Gussy to his other side*)  
Truly, my dear Asa,  
we care only for your billions—  
I mean your brilliance.

ASA (*pausing, eyes them closely*)  
But... what if my sunbeams  
turned out to be pyrites?

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*somewhat confused, but enthusiastic*)  
Pyrites? Why,  
I suppose there's no harm  
in gathering a few pyrites

that drop into your lap  
from Heaven!

ASA  
Pyrites is fool's gold, ladies,  
I'm penniless!  
But I'm sure you both agree,  
that's no impediment  
to affectatious souls like us.  
To tell the truth, ladies,  
I'm bilin' over with affectations,  
and I'm ready to pour 'em all over you,  
like applesauce over roast pork!  
(*turning to Gussy, unsure how to react*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*horrified, retrieves her daughter*)  
Augusta, to your room!

GUSSY  
But ma, maybe I am affectatious  
like he says.  
(*runs off weeping*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*sternly*)  
Mister Dundreary,  
it is becoming increasingly clear  
that you are woefully illiterate  
in the manners of Christian society.  
(*parades off*)

ASA (*exultant*)  
Wal now, Lady Treasure-chest  
I guess I found your hymnal page,  
you sock-dologizing ole man-trap!  
(*Audience laughter and applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1  
Ho ho, sock-dologizing!  
I don't get it.  
(*A dull sound and smoke issue from the President's box.*)

BOOTH (*lowering himself carefully onstage, catches his foot on the U.S. flag; landing awkwardly, curses aside*)  
Damned flag spoiled my leap!  
(*limping to center stage, he strikes a heroic pose, swaying, dagger aloft*)  
Sic semper tyrannis!  
(*scattered laughter and applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2  
Seek who? Look sharp, Asa!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1  
What's so blamed funny?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3 to MEMBER 4  
Say, that's John Wilkes Booth!  
Who's he supposed to be?

ASA (*alone onstage behind Booth, ad libbing*)  
Wal now, I, uh, I, reckon that's...  
(*Hearing him, Booth whirls around, nearly collapsing.*)

ASA (*recognizing him, blurts in disbelief*)  
John!?  
(*Booth slashes at him menacingly. Hawk first stares, then turns tail and runs offstage right, followed by Booth. The stage is empty. The audience is silent. The theater orchestra strikes up a faltering patriotic tune. The opera audience lights come on.*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1 (*finally standing up*)  
Say, what's goin' on here?  
(*More scattered laughter, applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS 3 and 4 (*convulsing with laughter*)  
Hoho hoho!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3  
Down in front!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4  
It's just a gag!

LAURA KEENE (*striding onstage, arms aloft*)  
Ladies and gentlemen...  
(*Audience disquiet builds.*)

EMERSON (*rushing onstage, aside*)  
Miss Keene, you're losing me!  
(*in character of Dundreary*)  
Now look what you've done, my pet,  
you've spoiled my magnificent sneeze!

MISS HARRIS  
Miss Keene, bring water!

LAURA KEENE  
What's happening? What happened?

EMERSON (*as Dundreary, persisting, oblivious*)  
Ah ahhh ahhhhhh...

MISS HARRIS  
It's the President!  
He's been shot!  
(*Gasps and groans from the audience. Dundreary stops suddenly mid-sneeze, deflates, and exits bewildered.*)

LAURA KEENE (*turns back to the crowd, resolutely*)  
Ladies, gentlemen,  
please keep your seats!  
All will be well, I assure you,  
(*faltering*)  
All will be...  
(*She rushes offstage.*)

— *Audience Chorus* —  
(*standing, panicked, some taking the stage, along with confused and frightened cast members; A = all; J = justice; M = mercy*)

AUDIENCE A  
Shot? What? The President shot?

AUDIENCE J  
Ahhh! Shoot! Shoot! Ahhh shoot!

WOMAN  
Mercy oh mercy! Mercy!

AUDIENCE M  
Merciful Jesus, mercy!

MAN  
Stop that man! It's Booth!

AUDIENCE A  
Booth Booth Booth!

ANOTHER MAN  
They're lettin' 'im git away!  
He's one a them! Them actors!

AUDIENCE J  
Let's burn the theater! Burn it!

AUDIENCE M  
Mercy oh mercy!  
Deliver us from this place!

ANOTHER WOMAN  
Somebody's fainted! Bring water!

ANOTHER MAN  
Over here! Another's down here!

MISS HARRIS  
Is there a surgeon among you?

AUDIENCE A  
Surgeon! A surgeon!  
Save him, Jesus! Save him!

MAN  
Outta my way, cripple!

AMPUTEE  
Where in Hell's my leg!?

ANOTHER MAN  
Faster, you sons a bitches!

DOCTOR LEALE  
I'm a surgeon, you idiot!  
Let me through!

ANOTHER MAN  
Me first, cudjoe!

FREEDMAN (*striking a threatening pose*)  
Wal, come on then!

AUDIENCE M  
No oh no! We're not no enemies!

WOMAN  
Julia! Where's my Julia!?

ANOTHER MAN  
For God's sake, take care!  
There's children underfoot!

AUDIENCE M  
Mercy, oh mercy!  
Merciful Jesus!

AUDIENCE J  
Justice! Git justice fer em all!

AUDIENCES J and M  
Mercy, oh mercy!  
Justice for them all!

### [9] Scene 3: The Presidential Box

MARY LINCOLN (*kneels over Lincoln*)  
And am I to give him?  
And now, my God am I,  
to give my husband?  
What will become,  
oh what on earth will,  
Miss Harris, I say,  
What will Miss,  
Harris think of me—  
remember, darling?  
hanging on, to you so?  
What, will Miss Harris?  
—all the while we're  
holding on, to each other,  
by our hands—  
and you reply having,  
caught my high spirits,  
she won't, you say,  
she won't think anything,  
anything about it, and am I,

I ask, to give him up,  
to this, awful place,  
this awful, this awful place—?

AUDIENCE

Clear the way!

Make way for the doctor!

He's an Army surgeon.

Let him pass.

DOCTOR LEALE (*forcing his way, in civilian clothes, kneels beside Lincoln, addressing Mary Lincoln*)

Missus Lincoln,

I'm Doctor Leale.

MARY LINCOLN (*lapsing back into her chair, but without acknowledging him*)

If only, I hadn't brought him  
to this awful place, this awful—

I am in need,

of a mourning bonnet,

which must be exceedingly plain,

and genteel, an impeccable,

black straw,

trimmed with the finest

jet black English crepe,

white and black crepe flowers,

irreproachably plain, yet rich,

a black velvet headdress,

twisted as you did the crimson,

silk velvet strings, to fall behind,

trimmed with heartsease,

heartsease before and behind,

DOCTOR LEALE (*kneeling before the rocker, checking Lincoln's wrist for a pulse, and listening to his chest*)

No pulse, almost no pulse;

some breathing, labored breathing.

MARY LINCOLN (*continuing without pause or response*)

I implore you, exercise your taste,

to the utmost! A coronet wreath,

with simple black crepe myrtle,

a purple silk velvet headdress

of the exact shade, of the flowers,

a bow also on the purple, with a loop,

bows and loops, in front and back,

without they are of the best,

I cannot endure them!

I will require ruche flutings

of Mechlin lace,

the very finest and blackest and lightest,

long crepe veil,

a shimmering black silk mesh—

folded 'round for summer—

the weather, of a sudden,

is so beautiful, the wonder is,

we cannot feel well—

DOCTOR LEALE (*turning to those in the Statebox*)

Men, help me lay him out,

lay him flat out on the floor.

MARY LINCOLN

I await your reply, darling,

have I mentioned,

our Willie, lives, he,

comes to me every night he,

hovers at the foot of my bed,

he will know you, now,

and we will feast ourselves

on communion,

converged at a sensitive table,

draped in light black silk,

when the chill wind blowing

the thin veil back

flares our guttering candle.

AUDIENCE

It's Mary! Laura Keene!

Clear the way for Miss Keene!

DOCTOR LEALE (*to the crowd*)

I need more light, and water!

Who's got a pocket knife?

(*An audience member hands him a knife.*)

LAURA KEENE (*ushered in, carrying a pitcher of water*)

Doctor, here's some water.

May I hold his head?

DOCTOR LEALE (*to her, abstracted*)

What? Very well.

Wash his temples.

LAURA KEENE (*kneeling down, cradling his head in her lap*)

Jesus, pour down your pity!

(*begins to wash him*)

MARY LINCOLN (*crossing over, stands over her*)

It's Mary, isn't it?

And even marries Mary,

instead of me?

DOCTOR LEALE (*threading the fingers of both hands slowly back through Lincoln's hair*)

I've found a head wound!

LAURA KEENE (*shaken, looking up*)

I'm Laura Keene.

You have mistaken me.

MARY LINCOLN (*triumphant*)

Oh I don't believe so,

I know you,

I should have known, you

are an actress, you never

marry, you never settle down,

you joke, you are intemperate,

you pretend you live

in this awful place,

this awful, place!

DOCTOR LEALE (*regaining his presence of mind*)

The passageway's clear,

smooth and clear.

I can pass my little finger through.

He's breathing steadily.

I have his pulse.

The blood must not congeal.

LAURA KEENE

Will he live?

DOCTOR LEALE (*looking off, struggling for self-control*)

His wound is mortal.

There's nothing left for me to—

It's just impossible—

It is impossible for him to recover.

MARY LINCOLN  
Where's my veil!  
I will not leave this box  
without my veil.

DOCTOR LEALE  
He must be moved.  
He's not safe in this place.  
Break off that door for a cot.  
We'll take him to Petersen House.  
And keep these women away!

LAURA KEENE (*rising, aghast*)  
My God, I'm drenched in his blood!

[10] **Scene 4: Hawk's Second Chance**  
*The stage; the house*

*(Audience members quiet and comfort each other. Soldiers are seen questioning them, and looking for evidence. Hawk wanders backstage in a daze.)*

HAWK  
My chance has come and gone—  
I stood alone, in character.  
There was a burst of laughter,  
a puff of smoke.  
A villain entered off cue.  
"Stop him!" they shouted, like it was real.  
He held a knife, but he was reeling.  
I might've knocked him down,  
or blocked his way,  
or even just glared at him.  
I had a chance of thwarting him,  
the best chance in the house,  
my second chance to redeem myself.

What have I done, Mark?  
I meant to take your part.  
Now I am condemned to play myself,  
a prisoner of the stage, a made-up thing  
of greaspaint and spirit gum,  
a heroic buckskin  
who stares down the footlights,  
and winds up on a nail and soapy rag.

[11] **Burning Letter**

MATHEWS ( *pacing backstage, unseen by Hawk, agitated*)  
What's happening here? What happened?  
I'm supposed to be foiled by now.  
Wasn't that Booth, in the President's box?  
Tumbling onstage, waving that dagger of his?  
Who called for a shot, and a dagger?  
Was the President part of the gag?  
Was the President—?  
The house went mad—  
No, I won't believe it!  
But something really happened.  
Somebody put on a play.  
And did I... take a part?  
What was it Booth handed me?  
What did I take from his hands?  
*(pulls the letter out, tears it open, and scans it in disbelief)*

— Duet —

MATHEWS and BOOTH  
"To my Countrymen, who have outlived their  
Country—  
Our Nation was founded for the white man,  
not the black, and I for one...

But that tyrant Emancipator,  
who devours the young...  
Something decisive and great must be  
performed...  
I bless the entire world,  
but I am bound, too like MacBeth,  
to the crosssties of my Destiny.  
'Bearlike I must fight the course.'...  
Signed..."

MATHEWS (*crushing the letter in his hands*)  
Liar, reciter, pretender, imposter,  
hashish eater,... actor!  
Did you think yourself a man of consequence  
because you'd mouthed the lines of  
Shakespeare's kings?  
The crowds were awestruck, and you believed  
them!  
And who am I? Your breathless messenger?  
I should have known! I knew you!  
But I pocketed your letter, and now...  
*(looking around furtively, clutching the letter)*  
Take care, Jack!  
They're looking for actors out there.  
If they find you with this,  
they'll lynch you on the spot.  
Get rid of it, drop it, burn it!  
Whatever you do, you'll carry it to your grave.  
*(Unsure what to do, Mathews catches Hawk's attention. Mathews hastily tries to hide the letter, but Hawk restrains him.)*

HAWK  
Say Jack, what's that you're spiriting away?

MATHEWS  
A letter. It's... private.

HAWK  
Anybody dead inside it?

MATHEWS  
Inside, and at the borders.

HAWK  
The damning document?  
The villain's tragic oversight?  
Then it's a property of the stage.  
The curtain's down.  
You're still in costume.  
Let it burn away forever.  
Act like nothing ever happened,  
that nothing ever does.

MATHEWS  
Let it burn?

HAWK  
Away forever.

MATHEWS  
Like it never happened?

HAWK  
Nothing ever does.  
*(Mathews lights the paper. As it burns away, Hawk pulls out a whiskey flask, and hands it to Mathews.)*  
A drink to the lot of us!

MATHEWS (*hesitating, then drinking*)  
To the awful lot of us!  
*(Two soldiers appear. One pokes the ashes, the other confiscates the flask. The two pairs eye each other suspiciously.)*

SOLDIERS

You're actors, ain't you?  
(*They nod in unison.*)  
We'll have a word with you.  
We'd like to question you  
as to your whereabouts,  
and your associations.  
We've got our orders.  
We don't want no trouble.  
Come along now, boys.  
Come along.

— *Duet* —

MATHEWS and HAWK  
You've got the wrong man!  
We didn't do it!  
We didn't do a thing.  
If only we'd done something.  
We acted like always,  
like nothing ever happens.  
Remand us to our custody.  
You won't regret it.  
We'll keep an eye on us.  
We'll never get away.  
We may not be red-handed,  
but we're guilty—we know it—of something,  
of everything we did not do.

SOLDIERS (*long-suffering*)

OK boys, OK now.  
Thanks fer the little show,  
but it's time to come along.  
(*Hawk and Mathews are led away.*)

[12] **Scene 5: Blood Stains**

*On the stage, Laura Keene*

(*Distractedly, Laura Keene enters backstage*)

— *Aria* —

Quick, somebody, quick,  
before it soaks, before it spreads!  
It's oozed out on my moiré silk,  
and spattered up my underskirts.  
It's in my hair, and on my hands.  
I open Monday in Cincinnati.  
I've got to scrub it, flush it out.  
It's in my nose, and in my eyes.  
I'll never get it out of my sight.  
Somebody quick get me a cake  
of Windsor soap and cold salt water.  
Everything I touch is splotched.  
(*succeeding with effort in recollecting herself*)  
All through these fratricidal years  
I've kept our theater alive.  
I saw to everything—  
the playwrights, plays, and playbills,  
the patented effects;  
the litigations, the bookings;  
the piecemeal arrivals  
of tableaux, costumes, actors,  
my beloved Chickering upright.  
But I couldn't keep the bloodshed out;  
I couldn't keep the war from breaking in.  
Should I have lowered and hushed our curtains,  
and waited for the fury to play itself out?  
Tonight was a good and a festive Friday.  
The people paraded in  
to laugh away at a harmless comedy  
and to swell our patriotic chorus.

Was I wrong, all these years,  
to hold open our doors?  
Was I wrong to believe  
that art brings peace?  
(*As the aria subsides, a shadowy figure  
appears behind Laura Keene.*)

[13] **Apparition**

LINCOLN (*interrupting her*)  
Pardon me, Miss Keene.

LAURA KEENE (*startled, frightened*)  
Who is it? Who are you?

LINCOLN  
I hate to disturb you.  
I was wondering,  
when will the play  
pick up again?  
I wouldn't ask,  
but I'm kind of tired.  
I feel awful short-winded  
for a tall man.  
Isn't it near through?

LAURA KEENE (*suspecting who it is*)  
The play is over,  
for tonight at least.  
Something horrible happened.  
Somebody shot somebody.

LINCOLN  
That's terrible.  
It always is.  
I always hated violence.  
I never owned a gun.  
So there's no concert?

No "Honor to our Soldiers"?

LAURA KEENE  
I'm afraid, Mister,  
the orchestra's disbanded.

LINCOLN

I can't carry a tune two  
feet before I spill it,  
but I love to hear  
them that can.  
I love to laugh out loud.  
My jaw-bones ached today  
to bust out laughing.  
Old Dundreary,  
he tickles me.  
He acts just like  
he's fighting bees.  
(*He laughs.*)  
My favorite play  
of all's Macbeth.  
I think it's wonderful.  
"Duncan is in his grave.  
After life's fitful fever  
he sleeps well. Treason  
has done his worst.  
Nor steel, nor poison,  
malice domestic,  
foreign levy, nothing,  
can touch him further."  
That's about it, I think.

LAURA KEENE  
That's the way I remember it.  
(*pauses*)  
Oh Mister President,  
don't you really know what happened?

(Keene waits for an answer, which never comes. Finally, the audience is heard, as though in response.)

[14] **Final Chorus**

AUDIENCE

Funny, how hard it is to remember,  
to piece it all together,  
to pick up the threads and thrums  
of what happened,  
what shreds and ravelings  
might someday save us.  
There was a passing blur,  
a churning, a blotch.  
Already it runs together.  
Blood will have blood for blood  
until every drop drawn with a lash  
shall be paid with another drawn with a gun.  
For Hispaniola, Jamestown, Charleston,  
Harper's Ferry for Manassas,  
Shiloh, Malvern Hill, Antietam,  
Marye's Heights, Chancellorsville,  
for Gettysburg, for Little Round Top,  
Fort Wagner, for Chickamauga,

Chattanooga, Spotsylvania,  
Libbey Prison for Atlanta,  
Petersburg for Appomatox,  
Ford's Theater for blood for blood...  
E pluribus pluribus pluribus—  
already it runs together.  
It was good and dark, a bean-pod burst.  
It tasted funny, but it was food.

THE END

*This libretto is dedicated to the memory of Jim Oliensis (1922–2001).*

© 2007 John Shoptaw



TRACISILIS

**Eric Sawyer's** music is frequently performed on both coasts of the United States, including New York City's Weill Recital Hall and Merkin Concert Hall, and at the Tanglewood Music Center, as well as in England, France, Germany, and most recently in Romania and Bulgaria. Recent performances include works on programs by the Brentano String Quartet, San Jose Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Phoenix, Radius Ensemble, Laurel Trio, Now and Then Chamber Players, Aurelius Ensemble, Opera Longy, Ives Quartet, Arden Quartet, Lighthouse Chamber Players, Earplay, and Empyrean. He completed a residency at the Center for New Music and Acoustic Technologies at University of California, Berkeley, resulting in the premiere of *Itasca* for voices and live electronics, in collaboration with John Shoptaw and choreographer Wendy Woodson.

Sawyer has received the Joseph H. Bearns Prize in Music, a First Music commission from the New York Youth Symphony, awards from the Tanglewood Music Center and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has held fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and Harvard University. He appears frequently as a solo and chamber pianist, recently on programs by Empyrean, Lighthouse Chamber Players, and Composers in Red Sneakers, and is the founding director of the critically acclaimed contemporary ensemble Longitude. Following four years as Chair of Composition and Theory at the Longy School of Music, Sawyer joined the composition faculty of Amherst College in the fall of 2002. Previously, he has taught composition and theory at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Wellesley College, and MIT. Sawyer received his undergraduate musical training at Harvard College, and completed his graduate studies at Columbia University and the University of California, Davis. His teach-

ers have included Leon Kirchner, Ross Bauer, Tison Street, Andrew Imbrie, Thomas Benjamin, and George Edwards. His chamber music compilation *String Works* and his cantata *The Humble Heart* are available on compact disc from Albany Records.



ALASDAIR MCCONDOCHIE

**John Shoptaw** was raised in the Missouri Bootheel, the state's poverty belt, where his first jobs included picking cotton and stacking lumber in the local mill. He began college at Southeast Missouri State Teachers' College, and graduated from the University of Missouri at Columbia, with a degree in physics. He returned as a special student, and received undergraduate degrees in English and Comparative Literature. Upon graduating, he won the University award in Greek and Latin language. Mr. Shoptaw attended graduate school at Harvard University, winning there a Merit and a Whiting Fellowship. He received his PhD from Harvard in English and American Literature. His dissertation, on the poetry of John Ashbery, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry*, was rewritten and published by Harvard University Press.

After graduating from Harvard, he taught in the English Department at Princeton University, where he received the Andrew W. Mellon Preceptorship, and at Yale University, before he transferred with his wife (a professor in Classics at Yale) and daughter to the English Department of the University of California, Berkeley, where he now teaches American poetry and poetry writing. Since his study on Ashbery, he has published articles in the lyric theory (e.g., "Lyric Cryptography," *Poetics Today*) and on American poetry (e.g., "Listening to Dickinson," *Representations*). Since joining the UC Berkeley English Department, Mr. Shoptaw has shifted his primary focus to creative writing, the first result of which is his libretto for *Our American Cousin*. He is currently finishing his first book of poems, *Navigator*, a sequence dwelling on the Mississippi River basin. Some of these poems have been published

in journals such as *The Chicago Review* and *New American Writing*. He also recently collaborated with Sawyer on a setting of "Itasca," a poem from *Navigator*, recounting the discovery of the source of the Mississippi River, for four choreographed singers and electronics. It premiered at the Center for New Music and Audio Technology at UC Berkeley and was performed at Amherst College in October 2006.

**Mallorie Chernin** is Director of Choral Activities at Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts, where she coaches, teaches conducting, and conducts four choirs: the Concert Choir, Women's Chorus, Men's Glee Club, and Madrigal Singers. A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Ms. Chernin completed a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. She holds a Master of Music degree in Choral Conducting from Westminster Choir College located in Princeton, New Jersey. Prior to becoming Director of Choral Activities at Amherst College in 1986, Ms. Chernin served on faculties at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, Smith College, and Hampshire College. In addition to her position at Amherst College, Ms. Chernin is in frequent demand as an adjudicator, clinician, and guest conductor.

**Janna Baty** (*Laura Keene/Mary Dundreary*), soprano, has performed worldwide under the direction of prominent conductors including James Levine and Seiji Ozawa. Praised by *The Boston Globe* for her "rich, viola-like tone and a rapturous, luminous lyricism," Ms. Baty has won several international competitions, including the XXI Concurso Internacional de Ejecución Musical "Dr. Luis Sigall" (Chile). She has appeared with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Daejeon Philharmonic (South Korea), Hamburgische Staatsoper, L'Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Tanglewood Music Festival. Her opera roles have included the Duchess (*Powder Her Face*), Alice Ford (*Falstaff*), and Anna and Elvira (*Don Giovanni*). Ms. Baty can be heard with the Boston Modern Opera Project on the critically acclaimed Naxos release *Reza Vali: Flute Concerto/ Deylaman/ Folk Songs (Set No. 10)*.

**Alan Schneider** (*Harry Hawk/Asa*), tenor, is a principal artist with the Boston Lyric Opera and has performed with some of the best-known companies in the Northeast, including the Huntington Theatre Company, Opera Boston, Chautauqua Opera, and the Glimmerglass Opera Young American Artists Program. An advocate of new music, he has created roles in world premieres of works by Joseph Summer, Daniel Pinkham, and Paula Kimper. Mr. Schneider has appeared in a wide range of operas, including *Salome*, *Don Carlos*, *Carmen* and *Rigoletto*. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Boston University, he completed the Boston University Opera Institute with the title role in Mozart's *Idomeneo*—the topic of a feature story in *The Boston Globe* by music critic Richard Dyer. Mr. Schneider is also founder of The American Singers' Theater, which produces new American opera.

**Aaron Engebret** (*Jack Mathews/Coyle*), baritone, praised by *The Boston Globe* for his "beauty of voice and eloquence," has a wide-ranging career as a performer. He has appeared as a soloist with the Tanglewood Music Festival, Ravinia Music Festival, Opera Boston, Terezin Chamber Music Foundation, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Monadnock Music Festival. He is a frequent soloist with top early music organizations such as American Bach Soloists and the Handel and Haydn Society. A committed interpreter of contemporary music, Mr. Engebret has collaborated with composers Nicolas Maw, Daniel Pinkham, Lukas Foss, John Deak, and Ned Rorem—most recently in preparation of the Boston premiere of Rorem's evening-length song cycle, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* with the Florestan Recital Project. Mr. Engebret has performed a variety of opera roles, from Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* to Schaunard in *La Bohème*, and has appeared with Keith Lockhart, conductor of the Boston Pops, at WCRB's Concerts at Copley Square, performing works of Richard Rogers, with Lockhart at the piano.

**Drew Poling** (*Ned Emerson/Lord Dundreary*), baritone, is a performer of astonishing versatility and appears with equal ease on opera, concert, and recital stages as well as those of the musical theater. His opera roles, from Aeneas to Henry Kissinger, draw on repertoire from all musical periods and include Count Almaviva, Rossini's Figaro, Hérode, Gianni Schicchi,

*La Bohème's* Marcello, and *Albert Herring's* Vicar. An avid performer of new music, Mr. Poling has sung the American debuts of several major new works. In 1999, he debuted George Benjamin's *Sometime Voices* at Tanglewood, a piece *The New York Times* hailed as "a masterpiece" and a performance *The Boston Globe* described as "unspeakably beautiful." He made his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut in Oliver Knussen's *Where the Wild Things Are* and was featured to critical acclaim as the First Lion in Lucas Foss's *Griffelkin* with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. Mr. Poling reprised his role on the world premiere recording of the work released on the Chandos label. In 2004, he appeared as Henry Kissinger in *Nixon in China* under the baton of Gil Rose. In 2006, again under Maestro Rose, he was featured as Roy Cohn in the American premiere of Peter Eötvös's *Angels in America*, an opera based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tony Kushner. *Variety* wrote of his performance, "Roy Cohn (baritone Drew Poling) dazzles."

**Donald Wilkinson** (*Abraham Lincoln*), baritone, enjoys a distinguished career in concert, opera, oratorio, recital, and contemporary music, and has appeared throughout the United States and Canada. He made his European debut performing the role of Dionysos in the world premiere of Theodore Antoniou's opera, *The Bacchae*, at the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Since that debut he has appeared in Finland, Sweden, Germany, France, England, and Holland. Mr. Wilkinson has performed as a soloist with Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Hogwood and the Handel and Haydn Society (a U.S. tour of Bach's *Missa Brevis in G Minor*), and the symphony orchestras of Pittsburgh, Evansville, Jacksonville, Springfield (Massachusetts), Portland (Maine), and Vermont. Since 1984, he has been a soloist in Emmanuel Music's famed Bach Cantata Series, formerly under the direction of Craig Smith. Highly sought after for his interpretations of Bach, in 2003 he made his debut at the Northwest Bach Festival (Spokane) in Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and Mozart's *Requiem* under the direction of Gunther Schuller. He has also appeared at the Bach festivals of Carmel and Philadelphia, and is featured on Emmanuel Music's recordings of Bach's *Christmas Cantatas* (Koch International Classics). His discography also includes the title role on the

internationally acclaimed *Johnny Johnson* by Kurt Weill (Erato Disques), *Angels* with the Boston Camerata (Erato), John Harbison's *Recordare* (Koch International Classics), David Patterson's song cycle *Last Words* (Albany Records) and the recently released *The Jesuit Operas* with Ensemble Abendmusik (Dorian Recordings). In 1990, he was awarded a fellowship to the Tanglewood Music Festival. Mr. Wilkinson teaches voice at Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Phillips Academy Andover.

**Angela Hines Gooch** (*Mary Lincoln*), soprano, has performed with various ensembles including the Red Mountain Chamber Orchestra, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, the Florestan Recital Project, and with conductors David Itkin, Karen Keltner and in Orvieto, Italy with conductor Nyela Basney. She has performed various operatic roles including Nella in *Gianni Schicchi*, Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Lucy in *The Telephone*, and Norina in *Don Pasquale*. Her most recent performances include *The Little Prince* and *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* with Opera Theatre of Weston as well as *Candide*, *The Crucible*, and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* with Opera Boston. She has also performed with and is one of the hosts of Opera Boston Underground. Ms. Gooch is an accomplished pianist and has also worked as music director for the Birmingham Opera Theatre, Birmingham Summerfest, and Children's Theatres, as well as the Opera Theatre of Weston at Vermont's Historic Weston Playhouse. She has served on the faculty at Boston University, Tanglewood Young Artist Vocal Program, and is the head of the voice and opera department at the Walnut Hill School for the Arts. Ms. Gooch most recently has been honored by the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and named in the *Who's Who Among American Teachers*.

**Tom O'Toole** (*John Wilkes Booth*), bass-baritone, appeared most recently as Alaska Wolf Joe in Opera Boston's critically acclaimed production of Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Other recent New England appearances include Escamillo in *Carmen* (Granite State Opera), Gazella in *Lucrezia Borgia* (Opera Boston), Friedrich Bhaer in *Little Women* (Boston Opera Project), Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Commonwealth Opera), and Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* (Raylynmor Opera, New Hampshire). His additional credits include Germont

(*La Traviata*) and Father in *Hänsel und Gretel*. As a member of the 2006 Sarasota Opera Studio, Mr. O'Toole appeared in *La Bohème* and covered principal roles in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Verdi's *I Masnadieri*.

**Hillarie O'Toole** (*Gussy Mountchessington*), soprano, is equally at home in both opera and musical comedy. Ms. O'Toole's recent roles include Sarah Brown in Commonwealth Opera's production of *Guys and Dolls* and Amy in BASOTI's San Francisco premiere of *Little Women*. She is a past recipient of the Mikanna Clark Taurmann scholarship for voice from the international music fraternity Mu Phi Epsilon. Other roles she has performed include Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte*, Polly Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*, Madame Heart in *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Eileen in *Wonderful Town*, Fiona in *Brigadoon*, and My Fair Lady's Eliza Doolittle. In 2004, she premiered the role of Esther in *The Captivation of Eunice Williams* with Old Deerfield Productions, appeared with the production's Canadian premiere in 2005, and again with the 2006 Smithsonian Institute production in Washington, DC. She has been a featured soloist in concerts with the Keene Chorale, Clark University, Northampton Academy of Music, and Commonwealth Opera. She holds a Master's degree in Music Performance from Syracuse University. Her studies also brought her to the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. She currently resides in South Hadley, Massachusetts where she is the Music Instruction Coordinator of the Berkshire Hills Music Academy, a post-graduate school for gifted musicians with cognitive and learning disabilities, and additionally serves on the voice faculty of the Northampton Community Music Center.

**Janice Edwards** (*Lady Mountchessington*), mezzo-soprano, has appeared frequently with opera companies and orchestras throughout New England since moving to New Hampshire in 1999. Granite State Opera appearances have included Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, and the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Her repertoire includes the principal Wagner and Verdi heroines as well as the major concert works of Mahler, Bach, Beethoven, and Handel with organizations both in the U.S. and in Europe (Arizona Opera, Kentucky Opera, New Hampshire Music Festival, New Hampshire Symphony,

Pioneer Valley Symphony, Portland Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dvořák Summer Music Festival, Karlsbad Symphony Orchestra, Janáček Philharmonic, and the Danish Sinfonietta, among others). Recent engagements have included *Farewell, Vienna*, a play with music about the life and music of Erich Wolfgang Korngold in Portland, Oregon. Upcoming engagements include Mama Lucia with Granite State Opera's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Brahms's *Alto Rhapsodie* with the Portsmouth Men's Chorus. In addition to her performing engagements, Ms. Edwards has an active voice studio in Manchester, NH.

**Daniel Kamalic** (*Doctor Leale*), baritone, is an advocate of new and rarely-performed works, and has performed in such roles as Dupoirier in Granite State Opera's workshop premiere of Thomas Oboe Lee's *Oscar Wilde*, and Orpheus in the first-ever American performance of Matthew Locke's *The Empress of Morocco* as part of "Filthy/Rich," the Vox Consort's critically-acclaimed concert in partnership with the Spare Change Homeless Empowerment Project. This season, he will join the New England Light Opera to perform the roles of Cox and Lycidas in two rarely produced Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, *Cox and Box* and *Happy Arcadia*. Other engagements include, with Opera Boston: Joseph in *La Vie Parisienne*, the Chief of Police in *L'Etoile*, Ben in *The Telephone* (ongoing); with Granite State Opera: Speaker/First Priest/Armored Man in *The Magic Flute*, Marullo in *Rigoletto*; and with Connecticut Lyric Opera: Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, Mercutio in *Romeo et Juliette*.

**The Amherst College Concert Choir**, now thirty years old, is one of four ensembles at Amherst College, known collectively as the Amherst College Choral Society. The Concert Choir performs for various college functions, provides full concert programs both on and off campus, and has toured in the United States, Japan, Austria, Italy, the former Soviet Union, Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary. The repertoire of the Concert Choir contains a great variety of music written throughout the ages, from the Renaissance to the 20th Century. Selections are both sacred and secular, and are sung in a variety of languages and styles.

Mallorie Chernin, music director  
Katherine Vogele, assistant director

#### SOPRANO

Jessica Chung  
Isabel Duarte-Gray  
Cassidy Fitzpatrick  
Leigh Harris  
Elly Jessop  
Tara Kulkarni  
Katherine Vogele  
Katherine Willis

#### ALTO

Katherine Choi  
Zoe Fenson  
Elizabeth Minkel  
Leslie Moclock  
Samantha Ostrowski  
Katherine Wu  
Hannah Zhang

#### TENOR

Todd Fruth  
Mark Knapp  
Wesley Ringel  
Joseph Smeall

#### BASS

Sam Bass  
Jay Buchman  
David Grimes  
Marshall Nannes  
Alexander Smith  
Ben Vincent  
Ross Wolfarth



**Gil Rose** is recognized as one of a new generation of American conductors shaping the future of classical music. His orchestral and operatic performances and recordings have been recognized by critics and fans alike. In 1996, Gil Rose founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), the leading professional orchestra in the country dedicated exclusively to performing and recording music of the 20th and 21st centuries. Under his leadership, BMOP's unique programming and high performance standards have attracted critical acclaim and earned the orchestra nine ASCAP awards for adventurous programming and the John S. Edwards Award

for Strongest Commitment to New American Music. Since 2003 Mr. Rose has also served as Music Director of Opera Boston, an innovative opera company in residence at the historic Cutler Majestic Theatre.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Rose made his Tanglewood Festival debut in 2002 conducting Lukas Foss' opera *Griffelkin*, a work he recorded for Chandos and released in 2003 to rave reviews. In 2003 he made his guest debut with the Netherlands Radio Symphony conducting three world premieres as part of the Holland Festival. He has led the American Composers Orchestra, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra of the Ukraine, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and the National Orchestra of Porto, as well as several appearances with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

In June 2003, BMOP and Opera Boston together launched the much-celebrated Opera Unlimited, a ten-day contemporary opera festival featuring five operas and three world premieres. Mr. Rose led the world premiere of Elena Ruehr's *Toussaint Before the Spirits*, the New England premiere of Thomas Ades' *Powder Her Face*, as well as the revival of John Harbison's *Full Moon in March* with "skilled and committed direction" according to *The*

*Boston Globe*. In 2006 the Opera Unlimited Festival presented the North American premiere of Peter Eötvös' *Angels in America* to critical acclaim.

Also recognized for interpreting standard operatic repertoire from Mozart to Bernstein, Mr. Rose's production of Verdi's *Luisa Miller* was hailed as an important operatic event. *The Boston Globe* recognized the production as "the best Verdi production presented in Boston in the last 15 years." Mr. Rose's recording of Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* for Naxos has been hailed as an important achievement by the international press. He was chosen as the "Best Conductor of 2003" by *Opera Online*. He made his Chautauqua Opera debut in 2005 with a production of *Lucia de Lammermoor* and in the 2006–07 season conducted performances of Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*, a revival of Weill's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* as well as Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. In October 2007 he led the Boston premiere of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* with Dawn Upshaw and directed by Peter Sellars.

Gil Rose's discography includes recordings of music by Arthur Berger, Eric Chasalow, Shih-Hui Chen, Lukas Foss, Charles Fussell, Michael Gandolfi, John Harbison, Lee Hyla, Tod Machover, Steven Mackey, Stephen Paulus, Bernard Rands, George Rochberg, Elena Ruehr, Gunther Schuller, Reza Vali, and Evan Ziporyn. His world premiere recording of the complete orchestral music of Arthur Berger was chosen by *The New York Times* as one of the "Best CD's of 2003." In 2007 Mr. Rose received Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Award and an ASCAP Concert Music Award for his exemplary commitment to new American music.



CLIVE GRANGER

The **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** (BMOP) is widely recognized as the premiere orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to commissioning, performing, and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Founded in 1996 by Artistic Director Gil Rose, BMOP's mission is to illuminate the connections that exist naturally between contemporary music and contemporary society by reuniting composers and audiences in a shared concert experience. In its first ten seasons alone, BMOP programmed over 50 concerts of contemporary orchestral music; commissioned more than 20 works and presented over 40 world premieres; released 13 world premiere recordings; and collaborated with Opera Boston to produce staged performances of contemporary operas including the Opera Unlimited festival of contemporary chamber opera.

In addition to its regular season at Boston's Jordan Hall, the orchestra has performed in major venues on both the East and West Coasts and collaborated with internationally based artists and organizations. A nine-time winner of the ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming of Orchestral Music and recipient of the prestigious John S. Edwards Award for Strongest

Commitment to New American Music, BMOP has appeared at Tanglewood, the Festival of New American Music (Sacramento, CA), and Music on the Edge (Pittsburgh, PA).

In 2008 BMOP launched its signature record label, BMOP/sound. Additional BMOP recordings are available from Albany, New World, Naxos, Arsis, Oxingdale, and Chandos. BMOP CD's are regularly reviewed by national and international publications including *Gramophone*, *Fanfare*, *BBC Music*, *American Record Guide*, *The Chicago Tribune* (Best CD's of 2004), *Time Out New York* (Best CD's of 2004), *The Boston Globe* (Best CD's of 2003), and *The New York Times* (Best CD's of 2003).

Composers are at the core of BMOP's mission, and BMOP has hosted a Composer in Residence each season since 2000. In recognition of the importance of this position, Meet The Composer and the League of American Orchestras awarded BMOP one of six three-year Music Alive grants for a collaboration with composer Lisa Bielawa.

Dedicated to discovering and advocating for the next generation of composers and audiences, BMOP is committed to encouraging and extending the new music community. Beyond the concert hall, BMOP's trend-setting Club Concerts bring "the music formerly known as classical" to downtown venues, and its in-depth outreach programs provide mentors and workshops for teenage composers in underserved communities.

BMOP's greatest strength is the artistic distinction of its musicians and performances. Each season, Gil Rose gathers together an outstanding orchestra of dynamic and talented young performers, and presents some of the world's top vocal and instrumental soloists. *The New York Times* says: "Mr. Rose and his team filled the music with rich, decisive ensemble colors and magnificent solos. These musicians were rapturous — superb instrumentalists at work and play."

**Eric Sawyer**

Our American Cousin

Libretto by John Shoptaw

Producers Gil Rose, Eric Sawyer  
Recording and editing Joel Gordon

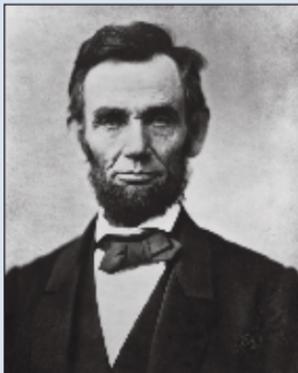
*Our American Cousin* was recorded on April 1 and 2, 2007 in Buckley Hall at Amherst College (Amherst, MA).

*Our American Cousin* is published by Lydian Press. All rights reserved.

This recording was made possible in part by Amherst College through the H. Axel Schupf '57 Fund For Intellectual Life and the John Tennant Adams Fund, and with the cooperation of the Boston Musicians' Association.

The composer offers special thanks to Klára Móricz, David Schneider, Jenny Kallick, Ted Keyes, Suzette Farnham, Gregory Call, Janet Tobin, Ellen Keel, Ellen Oliensis, Linda McInerney, Lyn Oliensis, Curry Sawyer, Rachel Zoll, and Cheryl Zoll for their invaluable efforts towards making this recording possible. He also thanks all of the performers for their artistry and dedication to this project.

© 2008 BMOP/sound 1006



Design: John Kramer and Robb Ogle

Cover: Photograph of Abraham Lincoln  
November 8, 1863, Alexander Gardner (1821-1882)  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

Booklet is 50% recycled (25% post consumer).  
Vegetable based inks throughout.

**TOM TAYLOR'S CELEBRATED ECCENTRIC COMEDY,**

As originally produced in America by Miss Keene, and performed by her upwards of

ONE THOUSAND NIGHTS

ENTITLED

OUR AMERICAN

**COUSIN**

FLORENCE TRENCHARD..... MISS LAURA KEENE

(Her original character.)

Abel Murcott, Clerk to Attorney..... John Dyott  
Asa Trenchard..... Harry Hawk  
Sir Edward Trenchard..... T. C. GOURLAY  
Lord Dundreary..... E. A. EMERSON

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RARE BOOK AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION

