



# Barnum's Bird

Music by Libby Larsen

Libretto by Bridget Carpenter and Libby Larsen

November 16 and 18, 2007  
Odeon Theatre, Greensboro Coliseum



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Opera Theater presents:

# Barnum's Bird

Music by Libby Larsen  
Libretto by Bridget Carpenter and Libby Larsen

First Performed February 1, 2002  
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## Cast

(in order of vocal appearance)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>P.T. Barnum</b> , the world's greatest showman  | <b>Andrew Owens</b>   |
| <b>Octet of Singers</b>                            | <b>Cory Alexander</b><br><b>Conor Angell</b><br><b>Lindell O. Carter</b><br><b>Sidney Glasgow Dixon</b><br><b>Kate Farrar</b><br><b>Melissa Larkin</b><br><b>Whitney Myers</b><br><b>Michael Laverne Thomas</b> |
| <b>Giovanni Belletti</b> , colleague of Jenny Lind | <b>Neal Stratford Sharpe</b>  |
| <b>Jenny Lind</b> , The "Swedish Nightingale"      | <b>Natalie Fagnan</b>   |
| <b>General Tom Thumb</b> , Barnum's sidekick       | <b>Christina Friedmann</b>  |

## Pit Chorus

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Jonathan Albright  | Gina Hurley         |
| Liane Elias        | Chris Juengel       |
| Margaret Carpenter | Farin Loeb          |
| David Clark        | Michael Martinez    |
| Carlos Fuentes     | Diána Thompson      |
| Bryn Hagman        | Marian Towe         |
| Alice Henderson    | Melinda Whittington |

## Director's Note

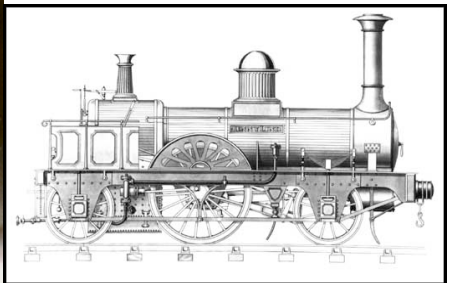
Libby Larsen's *Barnum's Bird* is the story P.T. Barnum, the "Greatest Showman on Earth" and Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale" (and thus the "bird" in the title). Barnum would sell a ticket to anyone to see anything, including General Tom Thumb, a "little person" whom Barnum discovered as a child. Tom Thumb never grew to be more than a little over 3 feet tall but became Barnum's advisor and trusted confidant. As I researched this opera this past year, I admittedly struggled over how to portray Tom - his physicality obviously presents some challenges. During one of my August conversations with Libby about *Picnic* (the opera we have commissioned her to write for us), I told her of my questions about Tom, whereupon she told me that she had always envisioned that he be played by a puppet. In response, I contacted Rachel Briley of UNCG's North Carolina Theatre for Young People, who is teaching a class in puppetry this semester. She put me in contact with MFA student Ericka Grayson, and it resulted in our execution of Libby's original concept - the Tom Thumb you will see in tonight's performance will be puppet manipulated by Christina Friedmann, the soprano singing the role. I asked Erika to write a note about the process she went through in creating Tom Thumb, which you can find later in this program.

In *Barnum's Bird*, Libby invites us into and introduces us to the world of American popular entertainment of the 1850's, including the widely popular Minstrel Shows and other acts to which he sold tickets, including his famous "Moustache Man." He even created and promoted a machine which was powered by steam that played music - an Automaton (which opens the second act).

No one had ever promoted an opera singer to the American public, so when he hit upon the idea of an American tour of one of Europe's most popular classical singers, it was revolutionary. However, since no one in America had ever heard of Jenny Lind, Barnum faced a challenge. This was not a problem, however, for Barnum's creative marketing machine - before he brought Jenny over from Sweden, he put her name on as many items as he could - ranging from the Jenny Lind crib to the Jenny Lind steam engine!



The Jenny Lind rocker and deacon's bench



The Jenny Lind

In her composer's note in the vocal score, Ms. Larsen challenges us to see *Barnum's Bird* as a vehicle to gain insight into ourselves as lovers of art and consumers of entertainment. We hope that you enjoy our presentation of this unique and fascinating musical drama!

David Holley

## **Barnum's Bird plot summary**

### **ACT I**

In 1850, P.T. Barnum (the "Greatest Showman on Earth"), is looking for the next big venture which will make him a profit, while Jenny Lind (the "Swedish Nightingale") is making a name for herself singing all over Europe. Barnum's confidant and one of his oddities, "General Tom Thumb" suggests that he bring Jenny Lind to America for a tour of the country. Barnum sends Tom to Europe where he offers her \$1000 per concert for the "Grand American Tour" of 150 concerts - an amount over \$1 million dollars in today's money. Jenny accepts.

### **ACT II**

Barnum begins to publicize Jenny's tour, only to find out that no one in America knows her. In a stroke of genius, he decides to attach her name to as many items in American culture as he can - thus we have the "Jenny Lind crib" and so many other items to this day. He calls a press conference announcing his plans, after which Jenny crosses the Atlantic to arrive in New York, where she is greeted by an enthusiastic press. Always scheming, Barnum decides to auction the first ticket to her premier concert to the highest bidder, creating a frenzy of interest. Her opening concert at Castle Garden is a huge success and launches the tour, which makes Barnum a great deal of money. It is a grueling tour to many cities in a short time, and Jenny, weary and exhausted, exercises the escape clause in her contract and cuts the tour short. Barnum tries to convince her otherwise, but she stands firm. Tom Thumb sings her a farewell, and Jenny thanks Barnum for the opportunity to sing in America. All celebrate the success of the venture.

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## **Synopsis of Scenes**

### **ACT I**

#### **Prologue**

P.T Barnum, the most influential American Showman of the nineteenth century introduces the audience to his "wondrous and popular entertainment" that is *Barnum's Bird*.

#### **Scene i, The Salon (Germany, early summer 1850)**

We are introduced to Giovanni Belletti, beloved friend and colleague of Jenny Lind, who sings "Largo al factotum" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. We are also introduced to Jenny Lind, better known as the "Swedish Nightingale," singing "Hear Ye Israel" from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

#### **Scene ii, The Broadway Office (New York, late summer)**

Barnum speaks to the audience, telling them he can smell the opportunity of something big and new, but can't decide what. Tom Thumb, Barnum's sidekick, enters and tells his boss that he has heard a famous opera singer named Jenny Lind. Barnum jumps on the opportunity to bring this "Swedish Nightingale" to New York for an American tour.

#### **Scene iii, The Salon (Europe, early autumn)**

Jenny Lind and Belletti are seated at a piano, where Jenny sings a song. She contemplates leaving the Opera stage, to sing for unfortunate children. Tom Thumb enters to tell Jenny about Barnum's proposal. After some thought, Jenny accepts the offer... with the condition that he not disclose the fact she will donate much of her fee to charity.

## **Synopsis of Scenes (cont.)**

### **ACT II**

#### **Prologue**

Music of an automaton - one of the gimmicks that Barnum used to make money.

#### **Scene i, The Train Ride (NY train from Bridgeport, late summer)**

Barnum, excited about his new venture, converses with the Train Conductor to see if he's heard the news about Jenny Lind. The Conductor, indifferent to the news, has never heard of a Miss Jenny Lind.

#### **Scene ii, Barnum's Office (New York, still late summer)**

Barnum and Tom come up with ideas of how to advertise and publicize Jenny Lind's arrival into America, and share it with the press - attach her name to many everyday products!

#### **Scene iii, Jenny's Crossing (Aboard the Atlantic, September 1850)**

Jenny faces and withstands a storm at sea. Belletti, who is seasick, is comforted by Jenny.

#### **Scene iv, The Press Conference (The Lobby of the Irving Hotel, NY, September 10)**

Jenny Lind and Barnum meet for the first time. Jenny is also introduced to the press who ask her inappropriate questions.

#### **Scene v, The Auction (Outside Castle Garden, on the eve of Jenny's first concert)**

Barnum and Tom auction off the first ticket to the highest bidder.

#### **Scene vi, The Premiere (Castle Garden, New York, September 11, 1850)**

Jenny Lind's first concert of her American Tour. After singing "Casta Diva" from Bellini's *Norma*, Barnum announces to the audience that Jenny Lind's entire fee will be donated to charity. Jenny Lind, furious with Barnum for having broken their agreement, threatens to end her American tour.

#### **Scene vii, The American tour (Various cities on the East Coast, Fall 1850-winter 1851)**

Jenny Lind performs every night while Barnum collects tickets and money.

#### **Scene viii, The Dressing Room (Backstage at the concert hall, early summer 1851)**

Jenny Lind, exhausted from the tour, ends her contract with Barnum after 93 concerts. Barnum tries to convince her otherwise, but to no avail. Tom sings a farewell song to Jenny, who is moved by the performance. She thanks Barnum for the opportunity to sing in America and help her charities.

#### **Scene ix,**

The Farewell (Jenny's dressing room, on the eve of her last concert with Barnum)

Barnum, Jenny, Tom, and Belletti celebrate the success of the American Tour.

## Artists

**Cory Alexander** (Octet) was director of Choral Activities at Central Florida Community College from 2001-2005 and is currently a DMA student in Choral Conducting at UNCG. He holds a MM degree in Choral Conducting from the University of Florida in Gainesville and a BA in Vocal Music Education from Central College in Pella, Iowa. As a performer, Mr. Alexander has sung under several notable conductors, including Robert Shaw and has appeared many times as a baritone soloist, including a performance of Schubert's *Mass in G* recorded in Carmarthen, Wales for Welsh television.

**Conor Angell** (Octet), born and reared in Ireland, studies with Dr. Robert Bracey while he pursues his Masters degree in Vocal Performance at UNCG. Last year, he sang the role of Melchior in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, was one of the Cronies in *The Ballad of Baby Doe* and created the role of Timothy in the world premiere of UNCG composer Seth Colaner's *He Cried Uncle*. Mr. Angell has performed as bass soloist with the Marion Philharmonic Orchestra and in Handel's *Messiah* in Peru, IN. He spent the summer of 2007 performing with the Janiec Opera Company at the Brevard Music Center, where he sang Elder McLean in *Susannah*, and this fall over 10,000 school children have seen him in the UNCG Opera Theatre's "Tour to the Schools" production of *Carmenella*.

**Lindell O. Carter** (Octet) is a junior at UNCG majoring in Vocal Performance and Choral Music Education. Originally from the Bronx, Mr. Carter lends his talents to several areas, including the University Chorale, Men's Glee, and he serves as Director of Music for the UNCG Spartones and Asbury United Methodist Church. Past performing credits include Ahab in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, the tenor solo in the Mozart *Requiem*, and a member of the ensemble in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and *The Tender Land*. Mr. Carter is a recent inductee into the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP).

**Sidney Glasgow Dixon** (Octet) is a senior at UNCG pursuing a major in Vocal Performance and a minor in Technical Theatre. Originally from Pittsboro, NC, Ms. Dixon has several performances to her credit, including *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *The Mighty Casey*, *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, *Anything Goes*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. She is a member of the UNCG Chamber Singers, as well as a section leader at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. A massive fan of Tarheel basketball, Ms. Dixon also serves as a DJ for WUAG 103.1 FM.

**Natalie Fagnan** (Jenny Lind) hails from Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance in May of 2006 from the Oberlin Conservatory, where she performed the role of Maria in *West Side Story*. She is currently at UNCG as a first year MM student in Vocal Performance, under the instruction of Dr. Robert Bracey. In March of 2007, Natalie was chosen as the Rose Bowl winner of the Calgary Kiwanis Music Festival, won in Provincials and went on to compete as a finalist in Nationals in New Brunswick. In April of 2008, Natalie will be making her hometown debut, performing as a featured soloist with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

**Kate Farrar** (Octet) from Hillsborough, NC, is a junior currently majoring in Vocal Performance and French. A past first-place winner in the Mid-Atlantic region of NATS, Ms. Farrar performed as an ensemble member in UNCG's recent productions of *The Ballad of Baby Doe* and *The Tender Land*. In addition to her performances with the UNCG Opera Theatre, she has also participated in numerous productions with the Opera Company of North Carolina and the Long Leaf Opera Company.

## **Artists (cont.)**

**Christina Friedmann** (General Tom Thumb) is currently in her second year pursuing her MM in Vocal Performance at UNCG with Dr. Robert Bracey. Most recently, Ms. Friedmann made her Capitol Opera Raleigh debut as Annina in *La Traviata*. Other credits include Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, Adele in Act II of *Die Fledermaus*, The Countess in *Figaro's Wedding*, and the First Hand Maiden in the world premiere of Luigi Zaninelli's *Snow White* at the Teatre del Maggio Musicale in Florence, Italy. She earned her Bachelor's in Music Education from Syracuse University. A native of Sturbridge, Massachusetts, Ms. Friedmann enjoys sewing, traveling, and playing with her cat, Mozart II.

**Melissa Larkin** (Octet), originally from the Pacific Northwest, received Bachelor's degrees from Prairie Bible College and the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. She is completing her MM in Vocal Performance at UNCG, where she has appeared with the UNCG Opera Theatre as an ensemble member of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and as Kate in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Previous operatic roles include the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Monica in *The Medium*, and First Lady in *The Magic Flute*, all with the University of Lethbridge's Opera Theatre. Her solo appearances include Handel's *Messiah* and Haydn's *Creation* for the Prairie Bible College masterworks series. Ms. Larkin studies voice with Levone Tobin Scott.

**Whitney Myers** (Octet), originally from Johnson City, Tennessee, is a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance, as well as a minor in Art History. While at UK, she appeared as The Novice in *Suor Angelica*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Spirit in *Die Zauberflöte*, and as an ensemble member in *Madame Butterfly* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. She was also a featured soloist in the University's Women's Choir during their European tour. Ms. Myers is currently a first year MM student in Vocal Performance in the studio of Dr. Nancy Walker.

**Andrew Owens** (P.T. Barnum), a native of the Philadelphia area, is currently a first-year MM – Vocal Performance student at UNCG in the studio of Dr. Robert Bracey. A recent graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, he has performed such roles as Laurie in *Little Women*, Spärlich in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Camille in *The Merry Widow*. He has also performed as a tenor soloist in Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethe's Faust* with the Cleveland Orchestra. This past summer, Andrew was the grand-prize winner at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Mario Lanza Vocal Competition for Tenors in New York City.

**Neal Stratford Sharpe** (Giovanni Belletti), a senior Vocal Performance major, was a first-place winner in the North Carolina NATS auditions in 2005 and 2006 and has twice been a semi-finalist in the Charles A. Lynam Vocal Competition. Past performances with the UNCG Opera Theatre include Horace Tabor in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Top in *The Tender Land*, Dick Deadeye in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, Balthazar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and the Concessionaire in *The Mighty Casey*. Mr. Sharpe is the Director of Music Ministries at Memorial Presbyterian Church and serves on the UNCG School of Music Advisory Board.

**Michael Lavern Thomas** (Octet), from Columbia, South Carolina, is a freshman Vocal Performance and Music Education major at UNCG. He is a recent graduate of the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts & Humanities residential high school, where he performed the roles of the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro* and the Pirate King in *Pirates of Penzance*. He is involved in several ensembles at UNCG, including Men's Glee and the University Chorale.

## **Artistic Staff**

**David Holley** (Producer/Stage Director) is the Director of Opera at UNCG, where his productions have consistently won awards in the National Opera Association's Opera Production Competition, including first place for *Susannah* (2004), *Little Women* (2003), *Orpheus in the Underworld* (2001), *The Consul* (2000), *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1997), *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1996), and *Don Giovanni* (1994). An active performer as well, he has sung leading tenor roles such as Tamino, Romeo, and Pinkerton throughout the United States and Canada. Mr. Holley is the librettist for Libby Larsen's operatic adaptation of William Inge's *Picnic*, commissioned by the UNCG School of Music which will be premiered at UNCG in April of 2009.

**James Bumgardner** (Musical Director/Conductor) presently teaches studio voice at Guilford College and Appalachian State University. He holds the DMA in Vocal Performance from UNCG, where he served on the voice faculty and acted as vocal coach. Dr. Bumgardner's interests range from opera to oratorio to musical theatre, and his conducting credits include such diverse music as the *Requiem* of Maurice Duruflé, the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, and Barry Manilow's *Copa Cabana*. He is resident conductor for the chamber series "SummerMusic" in Blowing Rock, NC, where he also acts as choirmaster/organist and director of music at St. Mary of the Hills Episcopal Church.

**Candice Burrows** (Assistant to the Director), in her second year as a DMA student in Vocal Performance at UNCG, makes her debut as an Assistant to the Director in *Barnum's Bird*. Candice has been involved in opera as a mezzo-soprano for 23 years and has a background in straight theater as well. Ms. Burrows, whose appearances with the UNCG Opera Theatre include the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and Mama McCourt in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, has future engagements in Mexico, Oregon and here in the Piedmont. She resides in Jamestown, is raising three teenagers, and teaches at the Music Academy of North Carolina.

**Pamela McDermott** (Chorus Master) is a first-year doctoral student at UNCG. She comes to us from Farmville, VA where she was teaching at Longwood University, working with the Commonwealth Chorale, and leading church music. Ms. McDermott has degrees from James Madison University and East Carolina University. She has conducted *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and has accompanied opera scenes, but most of her stage experience comes from the circus-like atmosphere of high school, community, and resort productions as a singer, actress, dancer, choreographer, accompanist and/or director. She is grateful for the opportunity to be a part of P.T.'s show.

**Erika Grayson** (Puppet Designer and Engineer) is a first year MFA Theatre Design student. She hails from Virginia, and received her BA from Gettysburg College. She has also studied abroad a number of times, including three months in Japan learning and performing *bunraku* (Japanese traditional puppetry) and a semester at the Victorian College of Art School of Production in Melbourne, Australia. Previous credits include *The Secret Garden* (costume design) and *Jubilee* (scene and lighting design) for Gettysburg College, *Deathtrap* (scene, lighting, costume and props design) for The Playhouse and *Sweeney Todd* (assistant scene design) for UNCG Theatre.

**Susan Young** (Repetiteur) is the staff accompanist at Greensboro College but is no stranger to UNCG, where she earned her MM in Accompanying and has served as the pianist for numerous UNCG Opera Theatre productions. Originally from Valdese, NC, Ms. Young's professional credits include playing for a touring production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with Opera Carolina and recording two soundtracks for New York tours of shows. Presently serving as the Music Director and Organist at College Place UMC, she has accompanied 38 choirs, 46 full productions and numerous scenes programs and served as supertitle operator for three Greensboro Opera productions.



**Konstantza Chernov** (Chorus Repetiteur) was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, where she attended the Vladigerov Conservatory of Music and was a first prize winner of the Svetoslav Obretenov Bulgarian and the Dimitar Nenov Bulgarian National Piano Competitions. Prior to arriving at UNCG to pursue her DMA in collaborative piano, she studied at the Mannes College of Music and Queens College (City University of New York), where she received both her BM (magna cum laude) and MA degrees. An active teacher, she has served on the faculties of Queens College, the University of Alabama, the United Nations International School, the Westchester Conservatory of Music and the Piano School of New York City.

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### **Note from our Puppeteer**

The infamous General Tom Thumb, a little person originally named Charles Sherwood Stratton, never achieved the height of the puppet portraying him in this opera. When Sherwood stood two feet, one inch, P.T. Barnum discovered and trained him in performance before having his first American tour in 1843. At the point when Barnum contracted Jenny Lind, Stratton had grown two more inches, yet the puppet measures in at three feet, ten inches, six inches taller than Stratton at his highest.

The reason for this difference has to do with the construction of the puppet. The height of the puppet was determined from the proportions of Christina Friedmann, the singer of the role. In order for the puppet to move believably, certain distances are required for joints to bend correctly. The ability to use stable points on the actress, such as the bust, to anchor the puppet helps to make his posture correct. To create a lightweight and easy to maneuver puppet, I used influences from marionette styles and modern foam structures. The rods in his arms, unlike those you might have noticed on *Sesame Street* or *Avenue Q*, are manipulated from above in a similar manner as the strings on a marionette. The result creates better access and easy manipulation for the performer. Most of the structure has a base of foam core covered in fabric and then foam. For added strength I used layers of Sculpt or Coat® and more fabric.

Of course, this puppet could not have been built without the assistance of the UNCG scene and costume shops, and the support of Rachel Briley. Please enjoy the opera and thank you for coming!

-- Erika Grayson, creator of Tom Thumb

**ORCHESTRA**  
**James Bumgardner, Conductor**

**Violin**

Jane York, Concertmistress

**Flute/ Piccolo**

Allison Fletcher

**Viola**

Christen Blanton

**Percussion**

Christina Palermo

**Cello**

Diane Bonds

**Piano**

Konstantza Chernov

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Dianna Carter  
Noah Davis  
Rachel Briley

Blondie Johnson  
Amy Moore  
Neal Thacker  
Jane York  
Eve Hubbard  
Julian Cheek  
Imagine Design and Production

Special thanks to the Music Academy of North Carolina for the use of the melodian and to the Music Loft for the loan of the banjo.

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**PRODUCTION STAFF**

Producer/Stage Director  
Assistant to the Director  
Musical Director/Conductor  
Chorus Master  
General Tom Thumb Puppet Designer and Engineer  
Repetiteurs

Lighting Designer  
Scene Designer  
Costumes

Wigs/Facial Hair  
Opera Theatre Graduate Assistants

Program Typesetting and Printing  
Program Copy

David Holley  
Candice Burrows  
James Bumgardner  
Pamela McDermott  
Erika Grayson  
Susan Young  
Konstantza Chernov  
Erin Stevie  
David Holley  
Eastern Costume Company  
Julian Cheek  
Trent Pcenicni  
Natalie Fagnan  
Andrew Owens  
Noah Hock  
Natalie Fagnan, David Holley

The UNCG School of Music is proud to announce  
the World Premiere of:

# *Picnic*

Music by Libby Larsen  
Libretto by David Holley

Based on William Inge's play

*April 2-3 & 5, 2009*

Aycock Auditorium

Visit our website at: <http://opera.uncg.edu>