



**MALLARMÉ MUSIC PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, June 12, 2024**

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**Mallarmé Music and Paradox Opera co-present a concert reading and audio recording of the opera *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* based on the 1940 book by Carson McCullers.**

DURHAM, N.C. - The Durham-based Mallarmé Music, a 40-year-old chamber music ensemble will work with the 3-year-old Paradox Opera based in Morrisville to present the newly composed opera *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The opera score is by composer Robert Chumbley with the libretto written by Carey Scott Wilkerson.

Several years ago, the estate of the great writer Carson McCullers and the McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians awarded composer Robert Chumbley the operatic rights to her masterpiece novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Mr. Chumbley was attracted to the work because it requires two main characters to be mute, amid the setting of the most sonically large art form, opera. The themes of the novel (the deaf community, the Jim Crow era, the angst of teenage years and LGBTQIA+ community) are still so relevant, if not more so, some 65 years after McCullers wrote it. The librettist is the gifted Carey Scott Wilkerson, a renowned poet and a nationally known McCullers scholar.

Eight scenes of the opera were workshopped at the Millikin University Opera Theater three years ago. Since then, composer Robert Chumbley has completed the piece and orchestrated much of it. Several opera companies, especially in the South, have shown interest in producing the opera and Mr. Chumbley felt that a high-quality recording of the work would assist in marketing the work nationally. Mr. Chumbley currently resides in Winston-Salem, NC and upon the recommendation of a colleague, contacted Mallarmé artistic director Suzanne Rouso to see if she would organize a reading of the work with piano accompaniment to be professionally recorded and possibly performed.

With the assistance of Alissa Roca, director of Paradox Opera, Mallarmé has hired eight diverse young vocalists and a collaborative pianist to gather in Chapel Hill to record the opera, August 1-2, 2024. Composer Robert Chumbley will conduct the ensemble and audio engineer and UNC-CH assistant professor Pablo Vega will record the project. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> @ 3:00 pm Mallarmé Music will give a concert performance of the 90-minute opera at the Durham Arts Council's PSI Theatre. This performance will be open to the public.

“Paradox Opera is thrilled to be collaborating with Mallarmé Music on this production of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*! With themes of isolation, longing, and the desperate search for connection in a world filled with loneliness, this story couldn't be more relevant to today's world. This story also reflects issues of the deaf community, POC and LGBTQIA+ folks in a way we are deeply excited to bring to the stage.”

Funding for the project will come from private donations and gifts to the composer.

***The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* opera by Robert Chumbley, libretto by Carey Scott Wilkerson**

**PERFORMANCE:** Saturday, August 3, 2024 3:00 pm, PSI Theatre at the Durham Arts Council  
120 Morris Street, Durham, NC 27701

Suggestion donation of \$20 at the door (cash or credit) but no one will be turned away

**Cast:**

[Alissa Roca](#): Mick - 16-year-old girl/ soprano

Gwen Hyland: John Singer - deaf and mute jewelry engraver/ baritone

[Miguel Pedroza](#): Spiros Antonopolous - deaf and mute cousin of John Singer/ bass

[Leo Balkovets](#): Biff - transgender owner of the New York Café/ tenor

[Chris Fotis](#): Jake - local ne'er-do-well/ baritone

Langelihle Mngxati: Dr. Copeland - African American doctor/ bass-baritone

Jemeesa Yarborough: Portia - Copeland's daughter/ mezzo-soprano

[Dylan Elza](#): Harry - Mick's love interest/ tenor

[Anja Arko](#): collaborative pianist

Hailed by critics from the Chicago Tribune, New York Times to Paris Match, [Robert Chumbley](#) is one of the most versatile musicians of our day. Equally at home conducting and composing for the musical theater, opera, ballet and symphony, Mr. Chumbley served as Music Director for Atlanta Ballet for five seasons, and for Cleveland Opera. He has appeared as guest conductor with the Breckenridge Music Festival (Colorado), American Repertory Ballet, Norwegian National Opera, the Royal Ballet Orchestra (London), the Carolina Chamber Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony and the Prague Chamber Orchestra among other groups. He has served as Principal Guest Conductor of the renowned Piedmont Wind Symphony, and as Artistic Advisor and conductor to the Chicago Chamber Musicians.

His compositions have been commissioned throughout Europe and the United States and been performed by organizations all over the world including the NC Symphony, Atlanta Ballet and the Broyhill Chamber Players. He has written incidental theatrical music and three large ballet scores. His works are recorded on MMC Records and published by Carl Fisher, Inc.

In 1989, Mr. Chumbley won the Composer Fellow Prize, presented by the North Carolina Arts Council and followed that award with the Composer Fellow Prize from the Nebraska Arts Council in 1993. In 1989 he was honored with a major grant from Opera America for the initial commission and development of his opera, *Ordinary People*, with the Piedmont Opera Theater and the Des Moines Metro Opera. In 1992, Opera America awarded him another grant for a second workshop production. The opera received a full semi-staged reading from the Maryland Opera Studio in 2008. Mr. Chumbley has also been the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation grant (1980), the Irwin Freundlich Prize at the William Kapell International Piano Competition (1979) and First Prize in the International Musical Showcase Competition (1978).

In early 2019, the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians awarded Mr. Chumbley the operatic rights to McCullers' masterpiece novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. In collaboration with librettist and McCullers scholar, Carey Scott Wilkerson, the opera was workshopped at Millikin University in May 2021.

**Carey Scott Wilkerson** is the author of numerous plays and opera libretti, including *Seven Dreams of Falling* (*Black Box Theatre Publishing Company*), *Divanalysis* (with Stephen Foster, also from *Black Box Theatre Publishing Company*) and *Ariadne in Exile*. He is the author of *Lessons in Levitation*, a collection of his opera libretti, also from *Black Box*. He has written the libretti for *The Ariadne Songs* (with composer Angela Schwickert); *The Rescue* (a retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, also with Angela Schwickert); *Eddie's Stone Song: Odyssey of the First Pasaquoyan* (with composer James Ogburn), and most recently an operatic adaptation of Carson McCullers's novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (with award-winning composer Robert Chumbley). His most recent poetry collection of poems is *Cruel Fever of the Sky*, (*Negative Capability Press*). He holds a PhD from Georgia State University. He is a Core Faculty member in Reinhardt University's Low-

residency MFA Creative Writing program and is Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Columbus State University.

**Mallarmé Music** is a flexible collective of professional musicians based in Durham, North Carolina, whose mission is to enrich the lives of the community through outstanding chamber music performance. This is Mallarmé's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. The organization distinguishes itself in the community by its innovative educational programs, its commitment to creative collaboration with other organizations, its creation of significant new work, and its dedication to serve a diverse population. Mallarmé annually presents a series of concerts that features varied and multidisciplinary chamber music. Mallarmé performs everything from Bach on period instruments to commissioning and performing brand new works. Mallarmé is unique in that they use the wonderful musical talent North Carolina has to offer to perform with the ensemble depending on the needs of the repertoire. Most of Mallarmé's musicians are members of professional organizations like the NC Symphony, freelance players, or faculty members of numerous institutions of higher learning. Mallarmé is the lead organization for the biennial NC HIP Music Festival (historically informed performance) and over its 40 years has commissioned over 40 new works by American composers for chamber ensemble.

**Paradox Opera** was established in June 2021 when its founder, soprano Alissa Roca, was motivated by her frustration with the opera industry's status quo and her desire to create a platform for change. She aims to put the artists' experience at the forefront of Paradox Opera's vision, producing high-quality, socially relevant works while keeping artists at the center of the creative process and ensuring that they are treated fairly and humanely, including being paid a living wage. Paradox Opera holds the core belief that opera is a powerful, emotionally thrilling, and timeless art form and believes that opera is not just an art form; it's a cultural treasure that should be accessible to everyone. In October 2021, Paradox Opera began planning its inaugural season, starting with "Covid Chronicles." Roca called upon a trio of trusted colleagues and the four worked closely together for six months to create a show that was personal to them and universally relatable to everyone who lived through the pandemic. The show premiered virtually worldwide and to live audiences in Raleigh, Durham, and Hillsborough, NC in the summer of 2022 to great acclaim. ##



Mallarmé Music, [www.mallarmemusic.org](http://www.mallarmemusic.org)  
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