



For Immediate Release

**WEST COAST PREMIERE OF ACCLAIMED OPERA**

***SOPHIA'S FOREST***

**LEMBIT BEECHER, COMPOSER AND HANNAH MOSCOVITCH, LIBRETTIST**

**FEBRUARY 24, 25 & 26, 2022, GRACE CATHEDRAL**

[www.operaparallele.org](http://www.operaparallele.org)

SAN FRANCISCO (February 1, 2022) — The highly anticipated West Coast premiere of composer **Lembit Beecher** and librettist **Hannah Moscovitch's** critically acclaimed opera, *Sophia's Forest*, will be given four performances Thursday, February 24 through Saturday, February 26 at Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Street. Ticket prices are \$35, \$85 and \$145, and may be purchased via online at [www.operaparallele.org](http://www.operaparallele.org).

All audience members, staff, and artists ages 5 and up must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Prior to entering Grace Cathedral, ticket-holders will be asked to provide proof of vaccination through a QR code generated by the Digital COVID-19 Vaccine Record website, or an original vaccination card or photograph of it, along with a valid government-issued photo ID (a Student ID for minors under the age of 18 is also acceptable). Opera Parallèle strongly encourages all audience members who are eligible, to get the vaccine booster shot at least 10 days prior to their ticketed event. Ticket-holders are required to wear a non-vented N95, KN95, or KF94 mask at all times for maximum protection while inside Grace Cathedral.

An opera in one act, *Sophia's Forest* relates the story of a young girl, Sophia, who has recently immigrated to the United States, having survived a traumatic journey through the chaos of a civil war in her homeland. During the course of the lyric drama, we see Sophia as an adult remembering her childhood, as a nine-year old recent immigrant to the U.S., and in flashback to a couple of years earlier, as a child escaping her homeland with her mother, Anna, and sister, Emma.

*Sophia's Forest* is an exploration of both the lasting effects on families of the immigrant experience, and the ways in which children use their imaginations to deal with trauma. These themes are part of family lore for both librettist and composer: Moscovitch's great-grandparents escaped a wave of Eastern European massacres to find their way to Canada while Beecher's grandmother and then-two-year-old mother, escaped Estonia during WWII, having survived both Nazi and Soviet occupations of their country.

During the month of February 2022, Opera Parallèle will be the Artist-in-Residence at San Francisco's **Saint Joseph's Arts Society**, 1401 Howard Street, and will rehearse *Sophia's Forest* at this venue. The company will host an open rehearsal at Saint Joseph's on Tuesday, February 15 from 6.00 – 7.30 p.m. The public is invited to attend and register in advance at [operaparallele.org/sophia](http://operaparallele.org/sophia).

On Wednesday, February 16 at 6 p.m., there will be a **Grace Forum Online**, co-presented by Opera Parallèle and Grace Cathedral via Zoom. Grace Cathedral's **Dean Malcolm Clemens Young** will lead a conversation with composer **Lembit Beecher** and neuroscientist and opera stage director, **Indre Viskontas** about the lasting effects on families of the refugee/immigrant experience, the ways in which children use their imaginations to cope with trauma, and how art can help us connect with ourselves and with others. <https://gracecathedral.org/calendar-events/grace-forum-online-sophias-forest/>

One hour prior to all four performances at Grace Cathedral, ticket holders are invited to attend a conversation with the opera's creators in the Chapel of Grace with Opera Parallèle's artistic leadership, **Nicole Paiement** and **Brian Staufenbiel**, and composer **Lembit Beecher**. To enhance the *Sophia's Forest* performance experience, Opera Parallèle has created an extensive resource page with suggested music, poetry, books and more; [operaparallele.org/sophiaenhance/](http://operaparallele.org/sophiaenhance/)

*Sophia's Forest* was presented in an initial, exploratory production at Philadelphia's Drexel University Black Box Theatre in 2017, conducted and directed by Opera Parallèle's **Nicole Paiement** and **Brian Staufenbiel**, supported by the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. The opera received critical acclaim from David Patrick Stearns writing in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: "A searingly introspective study on immigrant children, the opera was full of vocal lines reflecting psychological depths but also electronic music effects that added greatly to the dreamlike atmosphere."

A central part of the production is nine electronically-controlled sound sculptures placed across the stage. These were built in collaboration with the ExCITE Center at Drexel University, an interdisciplinary center for research and innovation that combines the arts and engineering. The sound sculptures featured in *Sophia's Forest* form part of the opera's set as well as functioning as an instrumental chorus, blending with the string quartet and percussion to create the fantastical and dream-like musical landscape of the piece.

Opera Parallèle's fully realized production of *Sophia's Forest* includes soprano **Maggie Finnegan** as Sophia; mezzo-soprano **Kindra Scharich** as Anna; baritone **Bradley Kynard** as Wes; young sopranos **Victoria Ko** and **Samantha Fung-Lee** as Emma; and actor **Charlotte Fanvu** as Young Sophia. The creative team is led by company General and Artistic Director **Nicole Paiement**, conductor; company Creative Director **Brian Staufenbiel**, concept and director; **Jessica Bejarano**, assistant conductor; **Mariseley Cortés Fonseca**, costume designer; **Jon Altemus**, scenic designer; and **Aaron Curry**, lighting designer. The opera will be presented with projected English language supertitles.

The musical score will be performed by the **Del Sol Quartet**, percussion by **Divesh Karamchandani**, and Sound Sculpture electronics by **Lembit Beecher**.

Opera Parallèle's presentation of *Sophia's Forest* is made possible, in part, by **The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Bob Ellis, Stephen and Diane Heiman, and Paul L. King**, with support from Producer's Circle members **Donna Dubinsky and Len Shustek**.

On Thursday, April 14, Opera Parallèle will present ***Over the Rainbow, a Benefit Celebration*** for the company with special guest artist **John Holiday**, acclaimed countertenor, crossover singer, recording artist and finalist from NBC TV's *The Voice*. The season will conclude with iconic composer **Philip Glass' *La Belle et la Bête***, a surreal new take on a timeless tale, fusing opera and film live on stage; presented in collaboration with SFJAZZ at Miner Auditorium, July 15 – 17.

For more information about Opera Parallèle's 2021-22 season, visit [www.operaparallele.org](http://www.operaparallele.org).

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Please connect for production images, interviews with the creative team and artists, and press credentials.

**For Artist and Creative Team Bios**, visit <https://operaparallele.org/sophiabios/>

#### ***Sophia's Forest* Performance Schedule**

Thursday, February 24, 2022 at 8 p.m.

Friday, February 25 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, February 26 at 5 p.m.

Saturday, February 26 at 8 p.m.

Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Street, San Francisco  
Two public parking garages are adjacent to Grace Cathedral