



american composers orchestra

news release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONTACT: Christina Jensen, Jensen Artists
646.536.7864 x1; christina@jensenartists.com

American Composers Orchestra
Derek Bermel, Artistic Director & George Manahan, Music Director

Performs in the New York premiere of *Fellow Travelers*
by composer Gregory Spears & librettist Greg Pierce
co-presented with PROTOTYPE Festival and John Jay College of Criminal Justice



Fri., Jan. 12, 2018 at 8pm | Sat., Jan. 13, 2018 at 2pm & 8pm | Sun., Jan. 14, 2018 at 2pm
Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College of Criminal Justice | 524 W. 59th Street | NYC
Tickets: \$30-\$75 at 212.352.3101 or www.prototypefestival.org

For more information: www.americancomposers.org

New York, NY – **American Composers Orchestra (ACO)** continues its 2017-2018 season, *Dreamscapes*, under the leadership of Artistic Director **Derek Bermel**, Music Director **George Manahan**, and President **Edward Yim**, with New York premiere performances of *Fellow Travelers* as part of the **PROTOTYPE Festival** from Friday, January 12, 2018 through Sunday, January 14, 2018 at John Jay College of Criminal Justice’s Gerald W. Lynch Theater. Based on Thomas Mallon’s 2007 novel and directed by **Kevin Newbury**, composer **Gregory Spears** and librettist **Greg Pierce**’s *Fellow Travelers* is an extraordinary personal journey through the intriguing, gut-wrenching world of the McCarthy era 1950s American witch-hunts, and the often overlooked “Lavender Scare.”

“We’re so excited to work again with Greg Spears. Several years ago, ACO read, performed, and recorded his hypnotizing orchestral work *Finishing*, which among other devices employs dog-whistles and microcassette tapes,” said ACO Artistic Director Derek Bermel. “We all became instant Spears fans, and the enthusiasm has not waned with time. I’m personally thrilled that ACO will perform the New York premiere of *Fellow Travelers*; Greg’s lush and dramatic score is a powerful vessel for communicating this moving story. To be collaborating with

PROTOTYPE and John Jay College of Criminal Justice supports our belief in collaborating with like-minded partners to produce important work.”

About *Fellow Travelers*

At the height of the McCarthy era in 1950s Washington, D.C., recent college grad Timothy Laughlin is eager to join the crusade against Communism. A chance encounter with handsome State Department official Hawkins Fuller leads to Tim’s first job, an illicit love affair with a man, and an entanglement that will end in a stunning act of betrayal. This acclaimed Cincinnati Opera production pairs American Minimalism with Medieval troubadour melodies, reflecting the tension between two men’s professional, public lives and their private, forbidden longings.

“Opera thrives on stories with rich subtext, where characters cannot fully express themselves in words,” states Spears. “Both politicians and gay men and women in Washington, D.C. in the 1950s lived in a world full of coded sensibility – a culture operating under the surface and in counterpoint with the rigid formality of 1950s mores. In both the fraught political world of the McCarthy Era and the private world of Hawk and Tim, dialogue could only tell part of the story. My goal was to craft a musical language for *Fellow Travelers* that would foreground the undercurrent of clandestine machinations and forbidden longing churning under the surface of Greg Pierce’s elegant adaptation. My hope is that the nuanced machinery of opera might play some small part reminding us of this history, while also preserving in music the sensibility of doubleness that so often defined gay experience in this era.”

Gregory Spears (Composer) music work has been called “astonishingly beautiful” (*The New York Times*), “coolly entrancing” (*The New Yorker*), and “some of the most beautifully unsettling music to appear in recent memory” (*The Boston Globe*). In recent seasons, he has been commissioned by The Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Cincinnati Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Seraphic Fire, The Crossing, and the JACK Quartet among others. Spears’ *Fellow Travelers* was written with playwright Greg Pierce and premiered in 2016 at Cincinnati Opera in a ten-performance run. It was hailed as “one of the most accomplished new operas I have seen in recent years” (*Chicago Tribune*) and an opera that “seems assured of lasting appeal” (*The New York Times*). The premiere of *Fellow Travelers* was also included in *The New York Times*’ Best in Classical Music for 2016. Spears’ children’s opera *Jason and the Argonauts*, written with Kathryn Walat, also premiered in the summer of 2016 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and was subsequently performed on tour the following fall. His opera about space exploration, *O Columbia*, was written in collaboration with Royce Vavrek and premiered in 2015 at Houston Grand Opera. Spears and Walat’s first opera, *Paul’s Case*, was described as a “masterpiece” (*New York Observer*) and was developed by American Opera Projects. It was premiered by Urban Arias in 2013, restaged at the PROTOTYPE Festival in 2014, and presented in a new production by Pittsburgh Opera. Spears has won prizes from BMI and ASCAP as well as awards and fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Vagn Holmboe Competition. His music is published by Schott Music and Schott PSNY.

Greg Pierce (Librettist) grew up in Shelburne, Vermont. His play *Slowgirl* was the inaugural play of Lincoln Center’s Claire Tow Theater (LCT3). It was subsequently produced by Steppenwolf Theatre and the Geffen Playhouse, among others. His play *Her Requiem*, a Lincoln Center Theater commission, was also produced by LCT3. *The Landing*, a musical written with composer John Kander, premiered at the Vineyard Theatre in NYC. His second musical with Kander, *Kid Victory*, was co-produced by Signature Theatre in Virginia and the Vineyard Theatre. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, co-written with director Stephen Earnhart, based on the novel by Haruki Murakami, premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival, and went on to play the Singapore Arts Festival. *The Quarry*, with music by Pierce’s brother Randal Pierce was commissioned and produced by Vermont Stage Company. Pierce has received fellowships from the Edward F. Albee Foundation, Yaddo, The Djerassi Institute, the New York Public Library, and the Baryshnikov Arts Center. He currently holds commissions from Second Stage Theatre and Manhattan Theatre Club/Sloan Foundation. His work has been developed with Naked Angels, The New Group, Atlantic Theatre Company, Asia Society, the Rattlestick Theater, and the Public Theater’s Under the Radar festival. He recently wrote a film for Lionsgate. He has a B.A. from Oberlin College and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Warren Wilson College. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild and the WGA.

Kevin Newbury (Director) is a theatre, opera, and film director based in New York City. Newbury has directed over sixty original productions and his work has been presented by many opera companies, festivals, and

symphonies including the Park Avenue Armory, Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, The Santa Fe Opera, Barcelona Liceu, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Minnesota Opera, The San Francisco Symphony, L'Opera de Montreal, The Prototype Festival, Urban Arias (DC), Bard Summerscape, Portland Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Philadelphia Orchestra, Seattle Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Cincinnati Opera, The Virginia Arts Festival, and The Wexford Festival in Ireland, among many others. Kevin is especially committed to developing and directing new work. He has directed over two dozen world premiere operas and plays, many of which were subsequently published or recorded. Recent world premiere highlights include Bates/Campbell's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (Santa Fe Opera), Spears/Pierce's *Fellow Travelers* (Cincinnati Opera, *New York Times* Best of 2016), Todd Almond's *Kansas City Choir Boy* (starring Courtney Love, PROTOTYPE/NYC and Boston, LA and Miami), Puts/Campbell's *The Manchurian Candidate* and Cuomo/Shanley's *Doubt* (Minnesota Opera), and Lopez/Cruz's *Bel Canto* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, broadcast on PBS' Great Performances and recently nominated for the 2016 International Opera Awards: Best World Premiere). Newbury's first two short films, *Monsura Is Waiting* and *Stag*, have screened at a total of forty film festivals and have each won festival awards. Both of his films are now available online. His third short, *Epiphany V*, a classical music video, will be released in mid 2017. Other upcoming projects include Fairouz/Hanif's *Bhutto* (Pittsburgh Opera and Beth Morrison Projects) and *Fellow Travelers* (Lyric Opera of Chicago).

G. Sterling Zinsmeyer (Executive Producer and Co-Commissioner) conceived the idea, commissioned, and developed *Fellow Travelers* into a chamber opera. He spent most of his career in New York City, early on working in classical arts management with Sol Hurok and theater production with producer Saint Subber. This career was interrupted by the AIDS epidemic, in which Zinsmeyer spent twenty years as a leader in developing special needs residences for persons living with HIV/AIDS. Ten years ago, Zinsmeyer resumed his arts career by developing independent films, serving as Executive Producer on the award-winning film *Latter Days*; other films include *Adam & Steve*, *The Deception* and *Young Blue Eyes*. Zinsmeyer and his husband, Louis Bixenman, reside in Santa Fe, New Mexico along with their three adorable critters: Oliver, Marcus and Tyler.

Thomas Mallon (Author) is an American novelist, essayist, and critic. His novels are renowned for their attention to historical detail and context and for the author's crisp wit and interest in the "bystanders" to larger historical events. He is the author of nine books of fiction, including *Henry and Clara*, *Two Moons*, *Dewey Defeats Truman*, *Aurora 7*, *Bandbox*, *Fellow Travelers*, *Watergate*, and most recently, *Finale*. He has also published nonfiction on plagiarism (*Stolen Words*), diaries (*A Book of One's Own*), letters (*Yours Ever*) and the Kennedy assassination (*Mrs. Paine's Garage*), as well as two volumes of essays (*Rockets and Rodeos*, and *In Fact*). He is a former literary editor of *Gentleman's Quarterly*, where he wrote the "Doubting Thomas" column in the 1990s, and has contributed frequently to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The American Scholar*, and other periodicals. He was appointed a member of the National Council on the Humanities in 2002 and served as Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 2005-2006. His honors include Guggenheim and Rockefeller fellowships, the National Book Critics Circle citation for reviewing, and the Vursell prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters for distinguished prose style. He was elected as a new member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2012.

George Manahan (Music Director) The wide-ranging and versatile George Manahan has had an esteemed career embracing everything from opera to the concert stage, the traditional to the contemporary. He is the Music Director of American Composers Orchestra and the Portland Opera (OR), previously served as Music Director of New York City Opera for fourteen seasons, and has appeared as guest conductor with the Opera Companies of Seattle, Santa Fe, San Francisco, Chicago, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Opera National du Paris and Teatro de Comunale de Bologna, the National, New Jersey, Atlanta, San Francisco, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis Symphonies, and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. A recipient of Columbia University's Ditson Conducting Award, he was honored four times by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his commitment to 20th-century music during his tenure as Music Director of the Richmond Symphony (VA). Dedicated to the music of our time, he has led premiers of Tobias Picker's *Dolores Claiborne*, Charles Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, David Lang's *Modern Painters*, Hans Werner Henze's *The English Cat*, Terence Blanchard's *Champion*, the New York premiere of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner* and Emmy Award-winning composer Laura Karpman's Grammy Award winning *Ask Your Mama*, a collaboration with soprano Jessye Norman, The Roots, and the orchestra of St. Luke's. Recent Seasons have included appearances at the Santa Fe Opera, Rose Theater at Lincoln

Center in a concert performance of Gluck's *Alceste* featuring Deborah Voigt, the Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival. The Live from Lincoln Center broadcast of his New York City Opera production of *Madame Butterfly* won an Emmy Award. Manahan's discography includes the Grammy Award nominated recording of Edward Thomas' *Desire Under the Elms*, with the London Symphony, and Steve Reich's *Tehillim* on the EMI-Warner Brothers label. He is Director of Orchestral Activities at the Manhattan School of Music as well as frequent guest conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

Gregory Spears, composer
Greg Pierce, librettist
Kevin Newbury, director
George Manahan, conductor
Braden Toan, assistant conductor
G. Sterling Zinsmeyer, executive producer
with American Composers Orchestra

Cast:

Timothy Laughlin: Aaron Blake
Hawkins Fuller: Joseph Lattanzi
Mary Johnson: Devon Guthrie
Senator Potter & Bartender: Vernon Hartman
Estonian Frank, Interrogator, & Sen. McCarthy: Marcus DeLoach
Potter's Assistant, Bookseller, & Priest: Christian Pursell
Tommy McIntyre: Paul Scholten
Miss Lightfoot: Alexandra Schoeny
Lucy: Cecilia Violetta Lopez

Fellow Travelers is a Cincinnati Opera Production, developed and co-commissioned by G. Sterling Zinsmeyer and Cincinnati Opera, and co-presented by PROTOTYPE Festival with John Jay College of Criminal Justice and American Composers Orchestra.

About PROTOTYPE

PROTOTYPE: Opera/Theatre/Now launched in January 2013, unleashing a powerful wave of opera- and music-theatre from a new generation of composers and librettists. Across its first five seasons, PROTOTYPE produced and presented a total of 160 performances of 32 presentations, and shared the work of more than 500 local, national, and international artists. Now in its sixth season, PROTOTYPE, as *Opera News* proclaimed, "has become a major leader in opera theatre for the twenty-first century."

Founded by Kristin Marting (of HERE), Beth Morrison (of Beth Morrison Projects), and Kim Whitener (of HERE), and now produced and directed by them along with new co-director Jecca Barry, PROTOTYPE supports and spotlights a diverse range of culturally and socially engaged work from intrepid creators across ethnicity and gender. Half of PROTOTYPE's lead artists to date have been women, and the Festival has presented work from Belgian, Chinese, Dutch, Egyptian-American, Indian-American, Irish, Kazakh, Korean-American, Lithuanian, Mexican, Russian, and Slovenian lead artists.

ACO's 40th Anniversary Season

ACO's 2017-2018 season, *Dreamscapes*, features ten world, U.S., and New York premieres by a diverse set of composers. ACO continues its concerts at **Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall** (December 8, 2017 and April 6, 2018) while expanding its presence in New York to include the 40th Birthday Concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center (November 7, 2017) and as part of the **2018 PROTOTYPE Festival** (January 12-14, 2018) in Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce's *Fellow Travelers*. ACO continues to take its commitment to fostering new work beyond the stage in its annual **Underwood New Music Readings** (June 21 and 22, 2018) for emerging composers, now in its 27th year,

and through **EarShot**, the National Orchestra Composition Discovery Network, which brings the Readings experience to orchestras across the country. In addition, this season ACO launches its **Commission Club**, through which members invest in the lifespan of a commission: from the composer's first kernel of artistic inspiration to the realization of the music as a printed score, the early rehearsals, and through the premiere performance. In its inaugural season, ACO's Commission Club will support The Bad Plus founding member, composer, and pianist **Ethan Iverson** as he creates his first orchestral work, *Concerto to Scale*, which he will perform with ACO on Friday, April 6, 2018 at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall.

In 2017-2018, ACO celebrates 40 years as the only orchestra in the world wholly dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promotion of music by American composers. To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. This season explores the overarching theme of dreams as an inspiration for both music itself and community created through music – celebrating ACO co-founder Francis Thorne's dream of an orchestra to champion the American composer; iconic composer Philip Glass' dream for the next generation; and the American dream of inclusiveness reflected in the infinite ways American orchestral music illustrates geographic, stylistic, gender, and racial diversity.

About ACO

Founded in 1977, American Composers Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promotion of music by American composers. ACO makes the creation of new opportunities for American composers and new American orchestral music its central purpose. Through concerts at Carnegie Hall and other venues, recordings, internet and radio broadcasts, educational programs, New Music Readings, and commissions, ACO identifies today's brightest emerging composers, champions prominent established composers as well as those lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting gender, ethnic and stylistic diversity. ACO also serves as an incubator of ideas, research, and talent, as a catalyst for growth and change among orchestras, and as an advocate for American composers and their music. ACO programs seek to innovate and experiment, educate students and the public, and open the orchestra to diverse new influences and audiences.

To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. Among the orchestra's innovative programs have been SONiC, a nine-day citywide festival in New York of music by more than 100 composers age 40 and under; Sonidos de las Américas, six annual festivals devoted to Latin American composers and their music; and Coming to America, a program immersing audiences in the ongoing evolution of American music through the work of immigrant composers;

Composer development has been at the core of ACO's mission since its founding. In addition to its annual Underwood New Music Readings and Commission, ACO also provides a range of educational and professional development activities, including composer residencies and fellowships. In 2008, ACO launched EarShot, a multi-institutional network that assists orchestras around the country in mounting new music readings. EarShot programs have included the Detroit, Berkeley, La Jolla, Nashville, Memphis, Columbus, Colorado, San Diego Symphonies, the New York Philharmonic, New York Youth Symphony, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Recently, EarShot introduced an initiative to provide career development and commissions for emerging female composers, and launched an online archive featuring audio excerpts, program notes, and score samples by more than 140 composers whose works have been performed through the EarShot Network. The Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute, launched in 2010, supports jazz artists who desire to write for symphony orchestra. For more information visit www.EarShotnetwork.org.

Among the honors ACO has received are special awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and from BMI recognizing the orchestra's outstanding contribution to American music. ACO was the 2015 recipient of the Champion of New Music Award given by American Composers Forum. ASCAP has awarded its annual prize for adventurous programming to ACO over 35 times, singling out ACO as, "the orchestra that has done the most for American music in the United States." ACO received the inaugural MetLife Award for Excellence in Community Engagement, and a proclamation from the New York City Council. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes. ACO's digital albums include *Playing It UNSafe* (March

2011), *Emerging Composers Series: Vol. 1* (February 2012), *Orchestra Underground: XI0D* (June 2012), *Orchestra Underground: Tech & Techno* (July 2014), and *SONiC Double Live* (July 2016), a collection of premiere performances from its groundbreaking SONiC festival. ACO has also released *Orchestra Underground: A-V*, a groundbreaking album of multimedia works available for free streaming at www.vimeo.com/channels/orchestraunderground.

More information about American Composers Orchestra is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

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Special support for American Composers Orchestra’s participation in this co-production of Fellow Travelers has been provided by Linda and Stuart Nelson and Misook Doolittle.

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Derek Bermel, Artistic Director | George Manahan, Music Director | Edward Yim, President
Dennis Russell Davies, Conductor Laureate | Robert Beaser, Artistic Director Laureate
244 West 54th Street, Suite 805 | New York, NY 10019-5515
Phone: 212.977.8495 | Fax: 212.977.8995 | Web: www.americancomposers.org