

MEDIA RELEASE:

Stopera presents the Australian premiere of

Nigredo Hotel by Nic Gotham and Ann-Marie MacDonald

14-23 September, The Street Theatre, Canberra

Described in The Australian Financial Review as 'one of the most adventurous and stylish independent opera companies in the country', Stopera has presented more than twenty opera seasons and concert series in the ACT and interstate since 1995.

With a vibrant and exciting range of theatre productions, festival events and concerts, Stopera's impressive repertoire features eight Australian premieres, and extends from the Baroque delights of Handel to the cabaret idiom of Kurt Weill.

Stopera has created sold-out concert performances for the National Gallery of Australia, the National Multicultural Festival and the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival, and has won nine Canberra Critics Circle Awards, including the 2005 Canberra Times Artist of the Year Award for the company's Artistic Director, Vivienne Winther.

Stopera's most recent critical and box office success was the 2005 Australian premiere production of *Jane Eyre*, by British composer Michael Berkeley and Australian writer David Malouf. This production received rave reviews nationally and internationally for its daring design, outstanding direction and moving performances.

In 2006, Stopera presents *Nigredo Hotel* - another Australian premiere, this time an exciting new Canadian chamber opera by jazz saxophonist Nic Gotham and award-winning writer Ann-Marie MacDonald. A Hitchcock style thriller set to a cool jazz score, *Nigredo Hotel* is a daring and imaginative journey into the subconscious.

Strange things happen in Room 7 of *Nigredo Hotel*. A stressed out neuro-surgeon runs off the highway in his car and checks into a seedy hotel, deserted except for a mystery woman who seems to know more about him than he does himself. Trapped in Room 7, they enter the dark recesses of the mind, in a series of dramatic confrontations with the past.

MacDonald's brilliant libretto accompanies Gotham's jazz-inspired score on a transformative journey into the self. Hailed by the critics as 'highly evocative music theatre', 'powerful and engaging', *Nigredo Hotel* promises to be 'one of the best nights of bad sleep you're likely to experience' (Toronto Star).

From the same award-winning Stopera team that produced the stunning *Jane Eyre* production, *Nigredo Hotel* features soprano Rebecca Collins and baritone David Pearson, with clarinettist Nicole Canham, percussionist Gary France and double-bass/electric bass player Gareth Hill led by Musical Director Adam Laslett at the piano. The production is directed by The Street Theatre's Caroline Stacey, with stage design by Kaoru Alfonso and lighting by Nick Merrylees.

Nigredo Hotel is at The Street Theatre in Canberra from 14 September to 23 September, and the entertainment doesn't stop at the opera's last scene: The Street Theatre's foyer will be transformed into the very retro *Nigredo Hotel Jazz Lounge*, with Canberra's hottest jazz musicians 'Live in the Lounge' after every show. *Nigredo Hotel* promises to be yet another original hit for Stopera, and exclusive to Canberra!

Event summary follows next page plus short artist bios

For more information, photos of the artists & to arrange interviews please contact Vivienne Winther or Greg Marginson at Stopera:

Email: info@stopera.com.au Tel: 02 6232 4082 Mobile:0411 458 516

Nigredo Hotel **(chamber opera/music theatre)**

Stopera presents the **Australian premiere** of an exciting new Canadian chamber opera by jazz saxophonist Nic Gotham to text by award-winning Canadian writer Ann-Marie MacDonald. A Hitchcock style thriller set to a cool jazz score, **Nigredo Hotel** is a daring and imaginative journey into the subconscious.

Strange things happen in Room 7 of Nigredo Hotel. A stressed out neuro-surgeon runs off the highway in his car and checks into a seedy hotel, deserted except for a mystery woman who seems to know more about him than he does himself. Trapped in Room 7, they enter the dark recesses of the mind, in a series of dramatic confrontations with the past.

Hailed by the critics as *'highly evocative music theatre'*, *'powerful and engaging'*, **Nigredo Hotel** promises to be *'one of the best nights of bad sleep you're likely to experience'* (Toronto Star). And the entertainment doesn't stop at the opera's last scene: The Street Theatre's foyer will be transformed into the very retro **Nigredo Hotel Jazz Lounge**, with Canberra's hottest jazz musicians 'Live in the Lounge' after every show.

From the award-winning Stopera team that produced the stunning 2005 production of **Jane Eyre**, **Nigredo Hotel** features singers **Rebecca Collins** and **David Pearson**, with musicians **Nicole Canham**, **Gary France** and **Gareth Hill** led by Musical Director **Adam Laslett**. The production is directed by The Street Theatre's **Caroline Stacey**, with stage design by **Kaoru Alfonso** and lighting design by **Nick Merrylees**.

Stopera, the ACT's chamber opera company, was recently described in the national press as *'one of the most adventurous and stylish independent opera companies in the country'*. Since 1995, Stopera has presented more than twenty chamber opera seasons and concert series, both locally and interstate, winning eight Canberra Critics Circle Awards.

Venue: **The Street Theatre, Childers St, Canberra ACT**

Dates: **Thursday 14 September-Saturday 23 September**

Thu 14/Fri 15/Sat 16 Sept: show at 8pm, jazz lounge from 9pm

Sun 17 Sept: matinee show at 3.30pm, jazz lounge from 4.30pm

Wed 20/Thu 21/Fri 22/Sat 23 Sept: show at 8pm, jazz lounge from 9pm

Tickets: **\$36, Concession/group \$30 (includes jazz lounge)**
 Jazz lounge only \$6

Bookings: **02 6247 1223 The Street Theatre**

**For more information visit www.stopera.org.au or contact Stopera:
02 6232 4082 info@stopera.org.au**

The Artists

Rebecca Collins **soprano**

A winner of the National Aria Competition, Rebecca Collins has appeared in principal roles for Opera Queensland, Opera Australia and OzOpera, including Gilda in *Rigoletto* and Marzelline in *Fidelio*. She has also performed at international festivals, such as the Colorado Music Festival and the AIMS Festival in Graz, Austria, in repertoire ranging from Monteverdi to John Adams' controversial opera *Nixon in China*. In 2005, her performance as the heroine, Jane, in Stopera's Australian premiere production of *Jane Eyre* was acclaimed as stunning in reviews nationally and internationally. Concerts in 2005 and 2006 for Rebecca included sold out events for the National Multicultural Festival and the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival, as well as gala concert appearances for Opera Queensland. In May 2006, she gave the Australian premiere performance of Hans Werner Henze's cantata *Being Beauteous* at the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival.

David Pearson **baritone**

Recently returning to Canberra after several years of study and performance in London, David's last appearance for Stopera was in the 2000 production *September Songs*, a Kurt Weill tribute that included the complete *Mahagonny Songspiel* and excerpts from Weill's German and American theatre works. David's post-graduate studies in music theatre at the Royal Academy of Music, with Mary King of *Operatunity*, led to performances with the English National Opera, the London Symphony Orchestra as soloist in Bernstein's Mass, and a West End music theatre debut. David has appeared in the Australian premiere of *Jekyll and Hyde*, as well as principal roles in *Carousel*, *Godspell*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*, *42nd Street*, *South Pacific* and *Peter Pan*. Most recently David performed the role of Cooley in *Don's Party* for Canberra Repertory and after *Nigredo Hotel* he joins the cast of the Sydney premiere of *Titanic the Musical*.

Caroline Stacey **director**

Caroline Stacey was recently appointed the Artistic Director of The Street Theatre in the ACT and is the current Artistic Director of the Castlemaine State Festival. She has directed a diverse portfolio of theatre, opera and music and has lectured in drama and stagecraft at the Victorian College of the Arts Opera School. Her productions of Copland's *The Tender Land* for Operalive and Mozart's *The Magic Flute* for Melbourne Opera were both nominated for Victoria's Green Room Awards in 2004. Other opera directing credits include: *Pimpinone* (West Australian Opera); *The English Eccentrics*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (Melbourne International Festival of the Arts); *Lakme* (Canterbury Opera); *Madame Butterfly* (Melbourne Opera); *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, *Albert Herring* (Operalive); *Love of Three Oranges*, *Rusalka* (Victorian College of the Arts); and *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (Geminiani Orchestra). For Stopera Caroline directed *Il filosofo di campagna* (The Country Philosopher) in 2003 and *Jane Eyre* in 2005, both productions receiving Canberra Critics Circle Award for excellence in direction.

Adam Laslett **musical director**

Adam Laslett completed his Master of Philosophy (piano performance) in 2005 at the ANU School of Music, investigating interpretation and creativity, and received awards including the 2003 Erika Haas award for Performance and a 2002 ANU Honours Scholarship. He is Musical Director of the newly formed Canberra Handel Choir, and of the ACT Singers. He is an accompanist for the Canberra School of Music, the National Eisteddfod, the Woden Valley Youth Choir, Blue Sky Singers. and has been involved with numerous ACT music theatre productions. As a piano soloist he has performed works such as Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 and Liszt's Sonata in B minor. He also teaches piano, works as a vocal coach, and performs as an organist,

harpichordist, and tenor soloist. Adam was chief repetiteur for Stopera's 2005 production of *Jane Eyre*.

Kaoru Alfonso **set designer**

Kaoru Alfonso has produced work in lighting design, multi-media installations, soundscapes and site-specific design for a number of theatre, opera and dance companies, as well as working as a sculpture and installation artist. The companies, theatres, festivals and organisations he has worked with include: Ausdance, Culturally Innovative Arts (CIA), Festivals ACT, Festival of Sydney, Pacific Wave Festival, The Performance Space (Sydney) The Street Theatre (ACT), Jigsaw Theatre (ACT), Padma Menon Dance Theatre, Stopera and Splinters. For Stopera he has designed three award-winning productions: *Viva Verdi!*, *The Country Philosopher*, and *Jane Eyre*, for which he created a unique onstage art installation with the burnt rubble from the 2003 Canberra bush fires. Other opera design credits include Copland's *The Tender Land* for Operalive, and *The Magic Flute* (Mozart) and *The Pearlfishers* (Bizet) for Melbourne Opera. Most recently he worked with director Caroline Stacey on the design and visual projections for the play *QED* at The Street Theatre in July 2006.

Nick Merrylees **lighting designer**

Nick graduated from The University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Science in 1996 and from VCA with a Bachelor of Dramatic Art in 1999. Some of Nick's recent lighting designs have been *Inheritance* (Full Dress Productions), *Squizzy* (LaMama), *Ginger Mick* (Petty Traffickers), *Mrs Petrov's Shoe* (Theatre@risk), *Carrying Shoes - Into The Unknown* (LaMama), *Into The Woods* (Ballarat Arts Academy), *The Nero Conspiracy* (Trade's Hall), *Billy Malone* (Commonplace Productions), *La Clemenza di Tito* (VCA Opera Studio), *The Woman Before* (Theatre@risk) and *Women Beware Women* (VCA Drama). Career highlights include the lighting designs for *Madama Butterfly* (Melbourne Opera), *Polygraph* (Theatre@risk), *Uncle Bob* (Red Stitch), *The Ishmael Club* (Playbox), *Turandot* (The Puccini Festival), *Blue* (CIA), *Tosca* (Melbourne City Opera), *Caresses* (Vicious Fish), *The Tell Tale Heart* (Melbourne Opera/Castlemaine Festival), *The Idiot* (VCA) and *Corpus Christi* (Polemic Productions). Nick was lighting designer for *The Terms & Grammar of Creation* (Commonplace Productions) which won a Green Room Award for most outstanding fringe show in 1999.

Nicole Canham **clarinet**

Nicole Canham is the Artistic Director of the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival and a founding member of the clarinet quartet, Clarity. Her solo CD, *A Year in Paris*, is regularly heard on ABC Classic FM, and was a feature CD of the Week for the Drive program. Nicole last played with Stopera in 2005 as the clarinetist for *Jane Eyre*.

Gary France **percussion**

Gary France is the Head of Percussion at the ANU School of Music and director of the ANU percussion ensemble DRUMatiX. He has performed with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the Nova Ensemble, the West Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestras, the Dallas Brass, the Doddworth Saxhorn Ensemble, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Canberra Symphony Orchestra. Gary recently created and performed the electronic/percussion soundscape for The Street Theatre's Australian premiere production of the play *QED*.

Gareth Hill **double bass/electric bass**

Gareth Hill studied both classical and jazz music at the ANU School of Music. He has toured with the Australian Youth Orchestra and played with the Canberra and

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras. He is a regular performer with a number of jazz groups in the ACT region.

Vivienne Winther artistic director & executive producer

Vivienne Winther is Artistic Director of Stopera, the ACT's chamber opera company, and has played a leading role in the production and performance of more than twenty notable opera and concert events for the company since 1997. She is also Artistic Director of Music For Everyone, the ACT's community music organisation and a part-time lecturer in piano at the ANU School of Music. She began her professional career as an opera repetiteur with Canberra Opera until moving to Hong Kong where she was Chief Repetiteur for the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts Graduate Opera School, assisting conductor Carlo Felice Cillario. Vivienne has accompanied and coached singers from Opera Australia, Victorian State Opera, ChamberMade Opera, Beijing Central Opera, and Cologne Opera. In November 2005, Vivienne was named ***The Canberra Times Artist of the Year***, for her uncompromising vision and achievement in gaining national and international recognition for opera in the ACT.