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**Wyoming opera to premiere in Jackson:**

**The ghostly tale of a vanished species**

Photos: Woodcut of the Rocky Mountain locust from the 1800s and Cristin Colvin, soprano who will sing the role of the locust’s ghost

*Laramie, Wyoming – August 23, 2018*

“Locust”, a one hour chamber opera, will premiere at the National Wildlife Art Museum outside of Jackson, Wyoming on Friday, September 28, at 7:00 PM, with a reception following. A matinee performance will be given on Saturday, September 29 at 1:00 PM. People are encouraged to sign up for free tickets at http://bit.ly/LocustsOpera (a $20 freewill donation is suggested). To make the events even more enticing, the University of Wyoming’s, ever popular Saturday University program will feature the team of UW faculty who created the opera, speaking from 9:00-Noon at the Teton Public Library.

Wyoming doesn’t often—or maybe ever—host the world premiere of an opera. But then, not many operas have been written by Wyoming artists for Wyoming audiences. Add to that the fact that the libretto (lyrics), music, costumes and scenery all come from Wyoming artists and attendees will be treated to a rare, perhaps unprecedented, theatrical performance.

What can the audience expect from this novel event? “The opera is an environmental murder mystery,” says Lockwood, a professor of natural sciences and humanities, who wrote the lyrics. “It is the story of the Rocky Mountain locust, an iconic species that blackened the skies in the 1800s with huge swarms but suddenly disappeared forever at the turn of the twentieth century.” As an entomologist-turned-writer and philosopher, Lockwood maintains that telling stories through music is one of the best ways to promote scientific literacy and reveal the history of the West.

He might be right, given the resurgence of musical theater in America. “Hamilton” won eleven Tony Awards and continues to play to packed houses across the country with audiences surpassing half a million. And the film musical “La La Land” grossed $340 million and scored six Academy Awards. According to Dr. Anne Guzzo, the composer and a professor of music,

“Jeff’s lyrics are potent, but music provides the emotional lens for me—and perhaps the audience—to truly understand the story and to be moved by its message of caring for the natural world.”

Not to give away the plot, but in the opera the ghost of the Rocky Mountain locust compels a scientist to figure out how a creature that once numbered in the trillions survives only in stories such as Laura Ingalls Wilder’s “Little House on the Prairie.” The opera is based on Lockwood’s book, “Locust: The Devastating Rise and Mysterious Disappearance of the Insect that Shaped the American Frontier”, which the Pulitzer Prize winning author Annie Proulx described as, “Gripping…fascinating…an entomological thriller.”

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But will there really be an acclaimed soprano playing the role of a locust? Absolutely, and one of the highlights of the staging is her costume, which is being designed by Ashley Hope Carlisle, a professor in the Art Department. “My ideal for the costume,” she says, “is to morph the images of locust, woman, and ghost in an ethereal presence so that when she moves you see an insect but when she sings you experience humanity.” What does a professional opera singer think about the role of an insect? According to Cristin Colvin, “I am thrilled to perform a role in which I am not purely human but a dream figure that allows me to explore other aspects of the ‘self’ in philosophical, psychological, even spiritual terms.”

Colvin will be joined by Todd Teske, a tenor singing the role of the scientist, and Thomas Erik Angerhofer, a baritone singing the role of the rancher. The Colorado Chamber Orchestra will provide the instrumental music—along with yet another innovation. The audience will perform the role of a locust swarm, using sheets of cellophane coordinated with a brief and fun-filled rehearsal with the conductor, Thomas Blomster, just before the performance begins. Blomster values the opportunity to work with new music, “In a long career, you find yourself doing the same pieces repeatedly. I’m excited to find new works and doubly so with Anne’s creativity, talent, and reputation as a composer.” As for what his role, “I want to be honest to the musical score. Too often classical musicians seek to interpret a work, and I want to realize the composer’s intentions for the audience.”

The opera was developed with support from the University of Wyoming’s College of Arts & Sciences, Biodiversity Institute; Haub School of Environment & Natural Resources, and the UW-National Park Service Research Center. Funding was also provided by the Wyoming Humanities Council, the Ucross Foundation and the Laramie Audubon Society.

So what comes next for this opera? Thanks to support from the UW Global Engagement Office and private donors, “Locust: The Opera” will be featured at the 13th International Congress of Orthopterology (the study of katydids, crickets, grasshoppers and, of course, locusts) in Agadir, Morocco, next March. And after that? Perhaps the opera will take the world by storm, just like the locusts whose story it tells.

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