

GABRIEL'S DAUGHTER

The Story of a Freed Slave

Authors' Note

Gabriel's Daughter was commissioned by the Central City Opera Association, Pelham Pierce, General Director. The Association Board, with Artistic Director John Moriarty, began discussing the commission of a new opera with its focus on Colorado. Moriarty had read an unpublished play by local historian Roger Baker, featuring pioneer Clara Brown, a freed slave, as its central character. This captured Moriarty's interest. He devised an outline based on Baker's play. Their mutual vision became the basis for the new opera. Moriarty enlisted composer Henry Mollicone to create the music and playwright William Luce to write the libretto.

Cast of Characters

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Clara Brown Mezzo-Soprano
Col. John Chivington Tenor

BLACK SUPPORTING ROLES

Becky/Eliza Jane Soprano
Barney Ford Baritone
Eliza Brooks Soprano

CAST FROM CHORUS

Auctioneer/Miner 3/Tommy Tenor
Wives 1, 2, 3/Quilters 1, 2, 3 2 Sopranos, 1 Mezzo soprano
Bidder 3 Baritone
Lucinda Soprano
Evaline Contralto
Col. Wadsworth Baritone
Jenny Soprano
William Byers Baritone
John Evans/Physician Bass
Jane Gordon/Wife 3/Quilter 3 Mezzo-soprano
Miners 1, 4 1 Tenor, 1 Baritone
Mayor/Miner 2 Baritone

NON-SINGING ROLES

Young Clara (black)
Child Eliza Jane (black)
Child Paulina Ann (black)
Bidders 1, 2, 4
Overseer
O'Hoolihan
President U.S. Grant

Roles indicated as doubled or tripled may be cast individually, if preferred.

Instrumentation

2 Flutes (2nd doubles on Piccolo)
1 Oboe (doubles on E.H.)
2 Clarinets in B-flat (2nd doubles on Bass Clarinet)
1 Bassoon
2 Horns
2 Trumpets in B-flat
2 Trombones
2 Percussion (including Timpani)
Harp
Piano
Strings

(Materials available on rental from the publisher.)

Duration

c. 2 hours

Synopsis

(short version)

Gabriel's Daughter tells the story of Colorado pioneer Clara Brown, the first black woman to cross the Great Plains. She was born a slave in the South at the start of the nineteenth century. The opera opens in 1835 when Clara, her husband and children are sold at a Kentucky slave auction, each to a different plantation owner. Clara grieves most of all for her youngest daughter, nine-year-old Eliza Jane and vows to find her one day. It is years later, when the plantation owner dies, that Clara is given her freedom papers. She makes her way west to the 1859 Colorado Gold Rush. In the mining boom town of Central City, Clara works as a laundress, investing her earnings in real estate and mining shares. All the while, she continues to send letters across the country, offering money for news of her daughter. Following the Civil War, Clara travels back to the South, continuing her search, while helping ex-slaves come west. Finally, in ill health, cheated by swindlers and suffering losses from fire, she receives generous aid from fellow townsmen. Three years before her death in 1885, and in true operatic *denouement*, the faith which has sustained Clara Brown throughout her life is gloriously rewarded in a dramatic reunion with her daughter.

Synopsis

(full version)

Gabriel's Daughter tells the story of a Colorado pioneer named Clara Brown. She was born a slave in the South circa 1800. The opera opens in 1835 when Clara, her husband and children are sold at a Kentucky slave auction, each to different buyers. Clara most deeply grieves for her nine-year-old daughter Eliza Jane and vows to find her even if it takes a lifetime.

After years of service at the George Brown plantation, Clara is given her freedom papers on Brown's death. She makes her way to Kansas, where she joins up with Colonel Wadsworth's wagon train heading for the gold rush in Colorado. Settled at first in "Denver Town," she finally ends up in Central City, where a great mining bonanza is underway. Here, Clara becomes known for her Christian character and good works. She is active in the church and helps many in need. She is a powerful force for good during the dark days of Colonel John Chivington's Sand Creek Massacre. Her investments and laundry business flourish. All the while, she keeps her goal in mind: finding Eliza.

By 1865 the Civil War has run its course. A letter from the Brown daughters in Kentucky tells Clara that they may have found Eliza. So their "Aunty Clara" makes the journey back to the ruined plantation, where she is joyfully reunited with the two sisters. But the candidate for Eliza proves not to be her daughter. Saddened and defeated, she returns to Central City, only to face the aftermath of a devastating fire which all but wipes out the mining town.

With the help of citizens, Clara, now infirm and old, resettles in Denver. There, a letter arrives one day from the Brown daughters, telling her that they have found her real daughter living in Council Bluffs. The letter states that Eliza will travel to Colorado to meet her mother, arriving on Easter Sunday.

The final scene of the opera is the reunion of mother and daughter. We hear church bells, the knock on the door. The finale is the dream fulfilled, with Clara singing, "A curve of hope whose arc I could not see—has brought you back again to me."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACT I

- Scene 1**1
It is 1857 on a Kentucky Plantation. A black woman named Clara Brown dreams of a slave auction thirty years ago, when she and her child Eliza were separated and sold to different owners.
- Scene 2**39
Clara awakens from her dream. Her owner has died and his daughters Evaline and Lucinda have come to tell her so. They give Clara her freedom papers. The three women rejoice.
- Scene 3**61
Clara Brown has now made her way to Kansas Territory. She joins a crowd of departing emigrants going west by wagon train to the gold fields of Colorado.
- Scene 4**90
It is 1862 and Clara lives in the settlement of Denver Town. In a church meeting cabin, she sings a prayer to Angel Gabriel as she sets up for a prayer meeting. She overhears Colonel Chivington speak disparagingly of the Cheyenne. Clara courageously defends them with her credo of love.
- Scene 5**119
We are in the office of the Rocky Mountain News, where the subject of Colorado statehood is being discussed by the Editor, the Governor and Chivington. Chivington has a plan to deal with his one hated obstacle, the Indians.
- Scene 6** 129
It is 1865 and the Civil War ends. Clara now runs a laundry in Central City. Jennie, a Cheyenne, is helping her sort washing, when an unruly mob bursts into her cabin, praising Chivington's massacre of the peaceful Cheyenne at Sand Creek. Suddenly a piercing mill whistle rends the air. President Lincoln has been assassinated.

ACT II

Scene 1 151

It is Saturday night at Jane Gordon's brothel. A rowdy party is underway. A grimy miner enters, his hand badly injured. Clara is sent for to tend to it. While there, she happily tells Jane that her long-lost daughter Eliza has been found in Kentucky.

Scene 2 179

Clara arrives at the old plantation in Kentucky, and is greeted by Lucinda, Evaline and son Tommy. It is a joyful reunion. Tommy fetches the woman they hope is Clara's daughter. Her name is Eliza Brooks. Under questioning, it is sadly clear that she is another Eliza.

Scene 3 193

Back in Central City, snow falls. A fire kindles in a shack and spreads rapidly. Fire bells clang. A bucket brigade forms. People shout and run in confusion. Carpetbag in hand, Clara returns during the inferno, her cabin in flames. "Gabriel," she cries, "how much more?"

Scene 4 209

Statehood is in the air. A brass band plays, as citizens excitedly greet the arrival of President Ulysses S. Grant. Chivington sees Clara and asks, "What of the search for your daughter?" Clara replies, "Must be Angel Gabriel's plan for me to learn the lesson of resignation."

Scene 5 231

It is Easter Sunday, 1882, and Clara has a cottage in Denver, provided by generous friends. She has received startling news: the real Eliza has been found and is about to arrive. There is a knock on the door. The lost Eliza steps in. She goes to her mother and they tearfully embrace. The Angel Gabriel has answered Clara's prayer.

Catalog No. 6165
dedicated to John Moriarty

Gabriel's Daughter

The Story of a Freed Slave
Opera in Two Acts

Libretto by William Luce

Music by Henry Mollicone

Act I Scene 1

Glorioso ♩ = 60

5

9

We see a black slave woman sleeping in a rocking chair beside a baby's cradle. It is 1857 in Russellville, Kentucky, and the woman is CLARA BROWN.

Libretto: © Copyright 2003 by William Luce. Used by permission.

Music: © Copyright 2009 by Ione Press.
A division of ECS Publishing, Boston, Massachusetts.
All rights reserved. Made in U.S.A.