

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 4/13/2015

Press Contact:

Peter Weathers
High Concept Labs
(503) 562-0200
peter@highconceptlabs.org

High resolution images available upon request

ARCHITECT AND COMPOSER TO PREVIEW WORLD PREMIERE WITH CHICAGO OPERA COMPANY

*Opera Cabal to present “HKGraft” preview and discussion on April 25,
in partnership with High Concept Labs and hosted by Mana Contemporary Chicago*

CHICAGO, IL — Chicago-based avant-garde opera company Opera Cabal partners with innovative Chicago arts service organization and cultural platform High Concept Labs this April to present a work in progress and public discussion of [Hong Kong Graft](#) (*HKGraft*) on April 25 at 6 PM. *HKGraft* is the next chapter in an ongoing collaboration between renowned composer/performer Ken Ueno and Hong Kong-based architect Thomas Tsang (DEHOWPROJECTS), with vocalist and performer Majel Connery.

HKGraft is both an installation and an opera—expanding Ueno and Tsang’s joint work rethinking the relationship between space and sound, and embracing architecture as a fundamentally sonic and theatrical experience.

The 20-minute preview on Saturday, April 25 premieres two scenes from the forthcoming opera, and represents the first phase in the project’s development. Following the preview, Seth Brodsky (Associate Professor of Music at the University of Chicago), will lead a discussion and audience talkback with Ueno, Tsang and Connery.

DEHOWPROJECTS and Opera Cabal are thrilled to partner with sponsor High Concept Labs and host Mana Contemporary Chicago to present this world premiere.

HKGraft reflects on the current plight of Hong Kong, a uniquely unsettled city. Physically, Hong Kong is many places: an international safe harbor, an island and a contested geopolitical oddity. Aurally, it is also many sounds, with mainland Chinese Putonghua mingling with colonial British English and native Cantonese. Last fall, images of umbrella-wielding Occupy protesters went viral, forcing Hong Kong back into the international spotlight. But the Hong Kong question—what to do?—remains far from clear.

Audibly and visually, *HKGraft* is a meditation on the jarring discord present in Hong Kong today amidst cacophony and chaos.

Part landscape, part architecture, Tsang’s massive and restless stage set is informed by the shifting dynamics of clouds. Reams of umbrella fabric suspended from the ceiling ripple and buck, propelled by both man- and wind-power. A vast system of pulleys together with a series of electrical fans evoke a landscape that is never still. Both the enormity of the installation and its pattern of continuous change echo Hong Kong’s uncertain geography.

The soundscape of *HKGraft* is similarly divided. Interpreting Hong Kong as a modern-day Babel, Ueno's score adheres to the principle of juxtaposition rather than resolution. Ueno's trademark vocal style blends 21st-century extended techniques with throat singing. Connery's singing, by contrast, presents a smoother, pop-synth style reminiscent of Portishead or Sigur Ros. A series of dueling arias between two very different singers mirror the semantic deadlock of Hong Kong's own fraught air space.

Past projects developed by Opera Cabal in partnership with High Concept Labs have included *Pierrot Lunaire* (Schönberg), *Vesalii Icones* (Maxwell Davies), and the commission and world premiere of *USW* (Nielson), an explosive meditation on the life of Rosa Luxemburg, which received additional productions at Oberlin University and Galapagos Art Space (NYC). *Ritornello*, produced through Opera Cabal's ongoing "Opera Shop" residency with hcl, was composed by Caroline Shaw, who went on to become the youngest composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2013. In 2014, Opera Cabal's world premiere staging of Georg Friedrich Haas' *Atthis* at the Kitchen in NYC was hailed by the New York Times for its "no-holds-barred ... blazing intensity."

HKGraft

Saturday, April 25 at 6 PM / FREE

High Concept Labs

2233 S Throop St, Chicago, IL 60608

(located in Mana Contemporary Chicago, enter on Cermak Rd)

Project website: bit.ly/1cf4e1c

Participant Biographies

Majel Connery is Executive and Artistic Director of Opera Cabal, and Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Ongoing projects include stage direction for Kurt Rohde's *Death With Interruptions*; composition and vocals for *Hecuba* and *Passionate Pilgrim*, song cycles co-produced by Opera Cabal with Oracle Hysterical, and New Vintage Baroque; and vocals and stage direction for *HKGraft* with Thomas Tsang and Ken Ueno. Past collaborators include Caroline Shaw, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble, Nadia Sirota, Hai-Ting Chinn, Phyllis Chen, Tony Arnold, dal niente, Lewis Nielson, Elliot Cole, Rick Burkhardt and the Nonsense Company, and Habib Azar. Connery holds an A.B. from Princeton University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

Rome Prize and Berlin Prize winner **Ken Ueno** is a composer/vocalist/sound artist. As a vocalist, he specializes in extended techniques, such as multiphonics, circular breathing, and throat singing. Musicians who have collaborated with Ken include Kim Kashkashian, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Joey Baron, Ikue Mori, Joan Jeanrenaud, eighth blackbird, Alarm Will Sound, BMOP, SFCMP, and Frances-Marie Uitti. The Hilliard Ensemble featured Ken's *Shiroi Ishi* in their repertoire for over a decade. Ken's sound installations have been commissioned by galleries museums in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Taiwan, Mexico, and China. Currently an Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, he holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University kenueno.com

Thomas Tsang is an architect, artist and curator based in Hong Kong. He studied at the Southern California Institute of Architecture and stage production at the Juilliard School, and received a professional degree in Architecture at The Cooper Union. He is founder of DEHOWPROJECTS, an art and architecture practice based in Hong Kong dedicated to developing cultural projects. His curatorial projects includes the

'Grand Opening Projects' at the Miniature Museum and co-curated with Roan Ching-yueh 'Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets,' in 2014, first time themed exhibition on the subject of urban spatiality for the Taipei Fine Art Museum. His solo exhibition includes 'MonoMiniDome: Cornice' (2014) at the Garden City Art Space in Taipei and 'Lost and Found: Rome in 50 Pieces' (2007) at the American Academy in Rome. In 2015, Tsang will be in residency at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation as Visual Artist fellow. Taught at Cooper Union and China Academy of Arts, currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong. dehow.com

About Opera Cabal: Opera Cabal Performing Arts Association NFP is reshaping how opera is imagined, produced and performed in the United States. Composed of a versatile collective of accomplished young artists, Opera Cabal propels the opera of today by presenting unpredictable new work and modeling new forms of audience involvement. In an era of rapidly changing audiences and shifting musical genres, the company embraces interdisciplinary collaboration, new commissions, and intimate and unusual venues. Since its founding in 2006, Opera Cabal has reached into to neighboring visual, theatrical and technological communities to broaden the audience for and the definition of opera in a new century, reviving the integrity of a revered art form with an infusion of new energy and eclectic design. operacabal.com

About High Concept Labs: High Concept Labs is a Chicago-born not-for-profit arts service organization and cultural platform dedicated to supporting working artists and engaging the Chicago community with arts and culture. Partnering with artists at every step of the creative process, hcl offers high-quality custom support services through its Sponsored Artist and Institutional Incubation Programs. hcl also curates and hosts Cultural Conversations, artist showcases, presents special community events, and facilitates educational arts partnerships. With a vibrant cycle of programs, and process-support, High Concept Labs grows community alongside culture and fosters new audiences for the arts.

hcl is supported in part by the generosity of MANA Contemporary Chicago, the Chicago Community Trust, the Illinois Arts Council Agency, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, the Chicago Dancemakers Forum, and individual donors.

website: highconceptlabs.org

calendar of events: highconceptlabs.org/calendar/

facebook: facebook.com/highconceptlabs

hcl is based at Mana Contemporary Chicago in the Pilsen neighborhood, at 2233 S. Throop St. Chicago, Illinois 60608.

###