

FROM THE FIRST THOUGHT OF WRITING

an opera to the highly anticipated world premiere, the journey of *Cold Mountain* by American composer and Pulitzer Prize winner Jennifer Higdon lasted approximately a decade. Although she is one of the most well-known living composers, undertaking her first opera was not a task to be entered into lightly. Finding a suitable story, researching the genre, and actually composing the work became an odyssey in its own right that ended in critical acclaim, a recording, and an International Opera Award within a year of its world premiere.

The earliest step for Higdon, even before choosing a story, was finding a librettist, the eventual choice being Gene Scheer, known for his previous operatic work in Tobias Picker's *An American Tragedy* (2005) and Jake Heggie's *Moby-Dick* (2010). Choosing a topic was a collaborative effort since the story had to connect with both Higdon

and Scheer while being suitable for the operatic stage. Countless suggestions were considered but eventually Scheer proposed Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, the recipient of the 1997 National Book Award.¹ Higdon recalled, "The minute I started reading, I thought, 'This is it. I can tell that this is the story we're supposed to set' . . . it was recognizing the personalities of the characters because I grew up so close to there . . . I recognized those individuals despite the fact that it's a Civil War story" (Cotter).

The last member to join the core creative team was Leonard Foglia, known for his work in both operatic world premieres and on Broadway. Scheer had collaborated with him previously as a dramaturge and highly recommended him to Higdon. After she met him, she approved the Santa Fe Opera to hire him in that role and as director. Foglia explained in detail his role in the process:

BY CHRISTINA L. REITZ

COLD MOUNTAIN: **A JOURNEY FROM CHARLES FRAZIER'S MAGNUM OPUS TO JENNIFER HIGDON'S MAGNUM OPERA**

PHOTOGRAPH BY KATE RUSSELL; COURTESY OF SANTA FE OPERA



¹ Jim Cotter, "Jennifer Higdon on *Cold Mountain*," WRTI, Philadelphia, 12 Nov. 2012; web; Paul Ingles, "*Cold Mountain* Takes Civil War Odyssey to the Opera Stage," *Morning Edition* (NPR, 5 Aug. 2015); web; both subsequently cited parenthetically.