



Opera Huntsville presents

OLD MAID

and the

APRIL **Thief** 7PM
16-17

AAMU Johnson Little Theatre

A RETRO BROADCAST EXPERIENCE

From the Artistic Director

Welcome to *The Old Maid and the Thief*—or as we like to call it, OMAT!

It is a joy to welcome you to this production with Opera Huntsville, especially as it marks my first full season serving as Artistic Director. This year has been one of growth, collaboration, and renewed vision, and I am incredibly proud to share this work with you.

Composed by Gian Carlo Menotti, *The Old Maid and the Thief* was originally written for radio in 1939, making it the perfect piece to reimagine through a radio-style performance. Tonight, you'll experience storytelling not just through voice, but through imagination—complete with foley sounds, narration, and the charm of a bygone era. We invite you to lean in, listen closely, and let your mind paint the scene.

At its core, this opera is a witty and surprisingly sharp look at morality, perception, and the stories we tell ourselves about right and wrong. Menotti reminds us that sometimes the “respectable” are not always innocent—and that a good story can be just as powerful as the truth.

This production has been a true ensemble effort. From our dedicated cast and musicians to the creative team shaping every detail behind the scenes, this performance reflects the heart of what Opera Huntsville strives to do: bring high-quality, accessible opera to our community in fresh and engaging ways.

Thank you for being here, for supporting the arts, and for sharing in this moment with us.

Enjoy the show!

Sierra Hammond

Artistic Director
Opera Huntsville

Synopsis

The narrative revolves around **Miss Todd**, a domineering, middle-aged spinster and pillar of her small-town society. Her life is defined by social standing and her interactions with her nosy, gossiping neighbor, **Miss Pinkerton**. Miss Todd's household is kept in order by her young, restless maid, **Laetitia**, who shares her mistress's boredom and longing for male company.

Their stagnant lives are disrupted when **Bob**, a handsome and penniless drifter, knocks on their door asking for a meal. Captivated by his looks, Laetitia convinces Miss Todd to let him stay in the guest room. Soon after, Miss Pinkerton arrives with news of an escaped convict in the area. Miss Todd and Laetitia immediately jump to the conclusion that Bob is the fugitive. However, instead of being afraid, they are thrilled; they decide to harbor him, believing that by "keeping" a criminal, they can keep a man.

To provide for Bob—who is actually a gentle soul with no interest in crime—Miss Todd begins to steal. She first embezzles from the local sewing circle and eventually robs a liquor store to satisfy Bob's request for a drink. The irony is thick: to keep a "thief" happy, the "honest" woman becomes a thief herself.

In the final scene, when Bob rejects Miss Todd's romantic advances, she threatens to turn him in for the crimes *she* committed. Realizing he is trapped in a house of madness, Bob decides that if he is to be treated like a criminal, he might as well act like one. He elopes with Laetitia, stealing Miss Todd's car and all her silver, leaving the old maid destitute and broken by the very monster she manufactured.

Program

Pre-show lecture

Dr. Shonda Devine, AAMU Voice Faculty

The Old Maid and the Thief

Cast and Creative Team

Miss Todd • Josey Poppin

Letitia • Amanda Nelson Colón

Bob • Brendan Herr

Miss Pinkerton • Stella Broussard

Narrator • Kenisha Hill Phillips

Director • Sierra Hammond

Music Director • Thomas Ballew

Technical Director • Darwin Washington

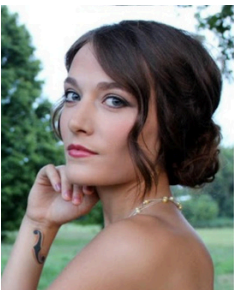
Foley Artist • Marcus Johnson

Cast



Josey Poppin • Miss Todd

Josey Poppin, mezzo-soprano, is a recent graduate from the University of Cincinnati – College-Conservatory of Music, where she received her M.M. in Vocal Performance. During her time at CCM, she performed the roles of Meg in Verdi's Falstaff, ensemble member in Smetana's The Bartered Bride, as well as the mezzo-soprano soloist in the American premier of Andrew Staniland's operatic Dark Star Requiem. She has also sung as a chorus member with Cincinnati Opera. Before deciding to further pursue a career in opera, Josey earned her B.M.E. in Music Education at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul in Minnesota, where she performed in countless recitals and received 1st-place rewards in competitions including NATS and Thursday Musical. Josey was primarily a music teacher while in Minnesota, and still loves to teach voice and piano to her private students.



Amanda Nelson Colón • Letitia

Amanda Nelson is an American Soprano hailed for her “nimble coloratura,” “astute sense of style,” and “alluring stage presence.” She recently performed with Raylmore Opera in their cinematic production of Der Schauspieldirektor as Madame Herz, as well as Bastienne from Bastien und Bastienne. She also performed with Opera Huntsville as Rosalinde in Die Fledermaus. Ms. Nelson was also the featured Soprano Soloist in Handel's Messiah with the Spring Hill Orchestra. This season, Amanda has performed in a variety of concert recitals.



Brendan Herr • Bob

Brendan Herr, baritone, is a Chicagoland native currently based in Nashville, Tennessee. He returns to Opera Huntsville after previously appearing in the chorus of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. His recent engagements include performances with Franklin Light Opera, the Nashville Symphony, Memorial Opera House, Tennessee Performing Arts Center, and The Center for the Arts.

Brendan is also a music educator a member of the choral ensemble *Voix d'Été*, which was featured at the Indiana Music Education Association (IMEA) 2025 Professional Development Conference. He also sang in the premiere of *Requiem for Colour*, which received three Emmy Awards at the MidSouth's 2025 ceremony. His interest in contemporary music has led to appearances including the CMA Christmas special, broadcast on ABC, Hulu, and Disney+ and as a studio musician at Columbia Recording Studios.

Other notable credits include *Action in West Side Story*, *Frankie Epps in Parade*, and *Conte Robinson in Il Matrimonio Segreto* with Belmont Opera, where he studied Music and Psychology. Brendan is grateful and happy to return to the stage at Opera Huntsville with the role of Bob.



Stella Broussard • Miss Pinkerton

Soprano Stella Broussard, based in the Southeastern United States, is a versatile performer and dedicated educator committed to sharing the power of music and storytelling with diverse audiences. She recently made her professional debut with Druid City Opera, covering the role of Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Her favorite stage credits include Gertrude in *Hansel and Gretel*, La Fée in Viardot's *Cendrillon*, Adina in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, and Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.

In Fall 2025, Stella appeared with Opera Huntsville in their Opera Bytes concert series and will perform in the company's upcoming production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. A recent finalist in Mobile Opera's Madame Rose Palmai-Tenser Scholarship Competition, she holds a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Alabama, where she studied with Dr. Paul Houghtaling.

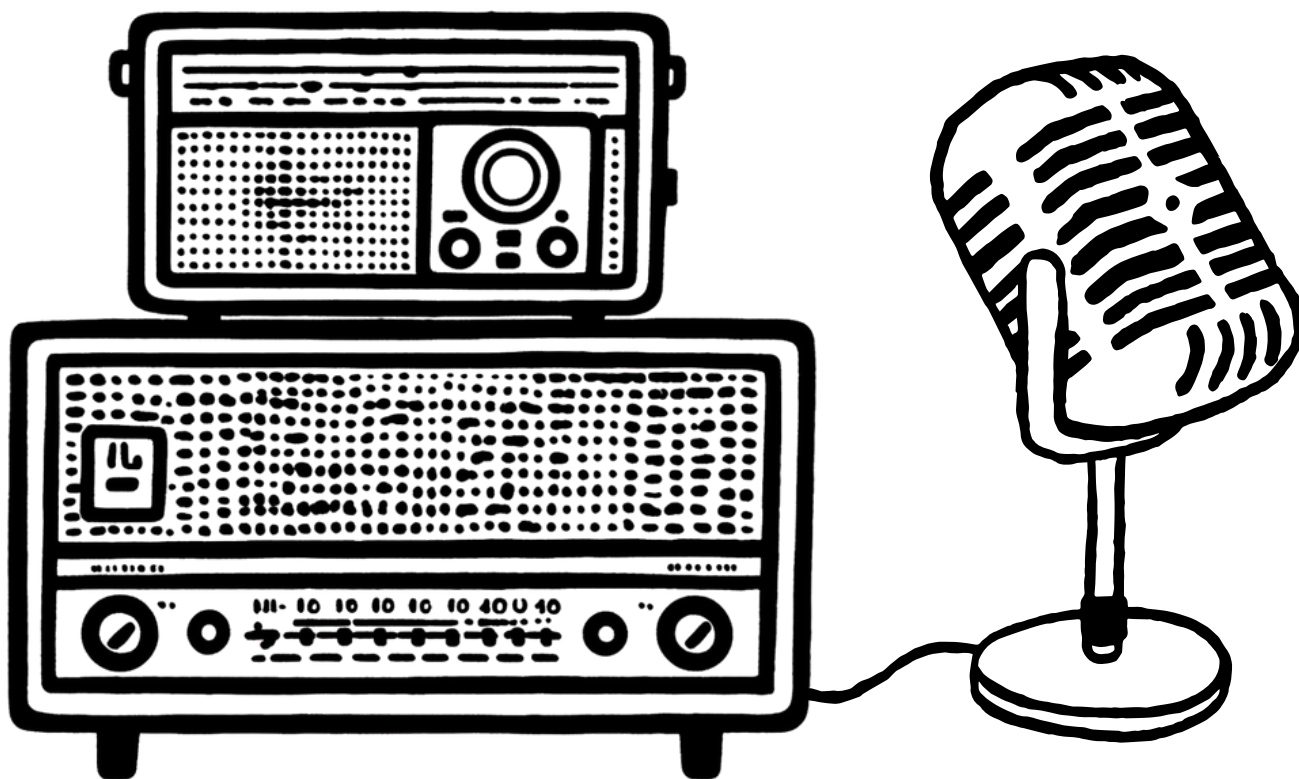
In addition to her performance career, Stella serves as a teaching artist with Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theater and Academy in Huntsville, Alabama, where she has taught since 2017. She recently held the position of Music Director for *SpongeBob the Musical Jr.* and continues her work as a lead teaching artist, inspiring and mentoring young performers.

Stella's artistry and teaching reflect her deep belief in opera's ability to inspire, educate, and connect communities both on and off the stage.



Kenisha Hill Phillips • Narrator

Kenisha Hill Phillips, soprano, has a BA in Music Business from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Operatic roles include the Sorceress in *Dido and Aeneas* and Giannetta (cover) in *L'Elisir d'amore*. Kenisha is also a featured soloist in Opera Huntsville's Opera Byte series. Ever the choir nerd, Kenisha sings with the chamber ensemble Valley Consort. She sang with Huntsville Community Chorus Association from 2013 to 2024 in the Symphonic Chorus and Chamber Chorale and is the 2020-2021 Albert Lane Scholarship recipient.



Creative Team



Sierra Hammond | Stage Director

Sierra Hammond is a soprano from Dallas, Texas. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from Oakwood University in 2014 and her Master of Music from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While in Knoxville, she performed with the University of Tennessee Opera Theatre and Knoxville Opera, appearing in productions including *La Bohème*, *The Crucible*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Consul*, *Mefistofele*, and *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*.

Sierra has been actively involved with Opera Huntsville since 2018, currently serving as Production Manager and previously as Board President. She made her stage directing debut in 2019 with Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*. As a performer with Opera Huntsville, she has appeared in productions such as *The True Story of Cinderella*, *Gilbert and Sullivan in Rocket City*, and *Bremen Town Musicians*.

In addition to her work in Huntsville, Sierra continues to build an active directing career. She recently served as assistant director for the world premiere of Leslie Burrs's *I Can't Breathe* with Marble City Opera and was subsequently invited to co-direct its West Coast premiere with Pacific Opera Project in Los Angeles.

Sierra is currently on faculty at Alabama A&M University in the Vocal Studies Area and resides in Huntsville, Alabama.



Thomas Ballew • Music Director

An Alabama native, Thomas Ballew graduated cum laude from Samford University in 2014 and received a B.M. in Piano Performance. Since then, he has worked as an accompanist and répétiteur in Birmingham, Chicago, Philadelphia and Atlanta. He served on the faculty at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta from 2021 until 2025, at which point he moved to the Huntsville area.

In addition to being a musician, Thomas is also a filmmaker. In 2019, he released a collection of short films through Vimeo On Demand entitled My Trilogy which features his wife, producer/actress Laura Ballew. Thomas is in post-production for a short film entitled "Quiet Nights," a coming-of-age story about a young composer who finds inspiration at a summer music camp. He and Laura are also developing a feature-length film called Thus Saith the Lord, a biblical epic set in modern-day Las Vegas. They live in Madison, AL and have three children.



Marcus Johnson • Foley Artist

Marcus Johnson is a senior music major at Alabama A&M University from Ann Arbor, Michigan, serving as the foley sound director for this opera production. With a focus on creating immersive audio experiences, he specializes in designing and performing live sound effects that enhance storytelling on stage. His work blends traditional techniques with creative innovation to bring depth, realism, and atmosphere to the performance.



Darwin Washington • Technical Director

DARWIN O. WASHINGTON is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with 20 years of service. He received a BA degree from Hampton Institute (university) in Hampton, VA. During his years as a member of the Hampton Players, Darwin developed a love for live theatre and the skills of a theatre technician – lighting, sound and set construction. Through-out his years of military service, Darwin has been active in community theatre and live music in the American Theatre in Wiesbaden, West Germany; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Richardson, Alaska; Fort Monmouth, New Jersey; and Hampton, Virginia. He has been lighting designer, sound technician, or technical director for such productions as; “Godspell”, “Two Gentleman of Verona”, “J.C. Superstar”, “Fiddler on the Roof”, “Barefoot in the Park”, “Hobbit”, “Wizard of OZ”, “Rain Maker”, “Man of LaMancha”, and “The Parable of the Biscuit and the Gravies”.

Darwin is volunteering as Technical Director for the Johnson Theatre, Alabama A&M University. He has provided technical support for university productions of; “The Wiz”, “The Tempest”, “Twelfth Night”, and “Much Ado About Nothing”. He also did the set design for the Fantasy Playhouse production “Freedom Riders”. He did the lighting for the Theatre Huntsville production “Mountaintop”.

Darwin also serves as the Director of the Media Ministry, Saint John AME Church, Huntsville, Alabama. He supervises a team of volunteers to provide audio, video, lighting, and streaming services.

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Special Thanks

Alabama A&M University

Opera Huntsville Team

Sierra Hammond • Artistic Director
Kenisha Hill Phillips • Executive Director
Shannon Rose McCauliffe • Grants Specialist



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