



**Odyssey Opera, in Partnership with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), Presents the East Coast Premiere of Tobias Picker's Fully-Staged Opera, *Awakenings***

**First opera performance in Boston's reopened Huntington Theatre**

*"Awakenings is a touching, resonant, important new piece of lyric theatre. May it have many more productions."* – *Opera Today*

*"Mr. Picker's elegiac, autumnal score, with its eloquent writing for solo string players, treads delicately in these stories of unrealized possibility..."* – *The Wall Street Journal*

**When:** Saturday, February 25, 2023, at 7:30 p.m.

**Where:** Huntington Theatre, 264 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA, T: Green to Symphony

**Tickets:** General: \$35 and Up/Students: \$15. For more information, please visit

[OdysseyOpera.org](http://OdysseyOpera.org) or call 617.826.1626.

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**Boston, MA (For Release 01.05.23)** – Hailed by *The New York Times* as "One of the nation's most intriguing opera companies," **Odyssey Opera**, in partnership with the **Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP)**, presents the East Coast premiere of Tobias Picker and Aryeh Lev Stollman's *Awakenings* (2022) Saturday, February 25, at 7:30 p.m. In a one-night only, fully-staged production, *Awakenings* marks the first operatic performance in the reopened Huntington Theatre. Baritone **Jarrett Porter** plays the lead role of Dr. Oliver Sacks, alongside a cast including sopranos **Joyce El-Khoury** and **Adrienne Danrich**. They are joined by the Odyssey Opera chorus, and the BMOP orchestra as part of its extended 25th anniversary celebration season. The creative team includes Grammy Award winning conductor **Gil Rose** and celebrated director **James Robinson** (Artistic Director Opera Theatre of Saint Louis). A world premiere studio recording will follow on BMOP/sound (TBR Summer 2023).

Based on the 1973 bestseller by Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* is an operatic journey drawing from source material and personal experience. Set primarily in a Bronx hospital from 1966 to the end of 1969, it tells the true story of the eminent neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks, who received worldwide acclaim for awakening survivors of the "sleeping-sickness" epidemic of the 1920s from their

decades-long, frozen-like state to a new chance at an active life with the drug L-DOPA. Sacks' work inspired several adaptations for the stage and screen, including the 1990 Oscar-nominated film *Awakenings*.

About 25 years ago, Picker acquired the stage rights to the book. The project is of personal importance for Picker — he has said his friend Dr. Sacks “freed” him from the shame he once felt over his Tourette’s Syndrome. *Awakenings* first took musical form as a ballet score, commissioned by England’s Rambert Dance Company, which toured throughout the UK during the 2010-11 season with some eighty performances. There is no musical overlap between the ballet and the opera. After a two-year delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, *Awakenings*, commissioned by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, premiered June 2022. Months before Sacks’ death in 2015 at the age of 82, he revealed publicly and with pride that he was gay. This sensitive operatic adaptation by two of Sacks’ longtime friends—Picker and Stollman—is the first to portray him, accurately, as a gay man.

“I am sure this opera will resonate with audience members in many different ways. Its themes range from the role science and medicine plays in our lives to living your truth,” says **Gil Rose**, artistic director and conductor of both Odyssey Opera and BMOP. “The current pandemic that we are all still living through adds another layer of meaning onto this opera. Ultimately, this is a story about reflection, hope, re-awakenings, and love.”

A renowned composer of all genres, performed by major orchestras and concert soloists throughout the world, **Tobias Picker** was initially trained by a trio of American Modernists—Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt, and Charles Wuorinen. Picker, called “the finest composer for the lyric stage” by *The Wall Street Journal*, says as a composer he is a “prima la musica guy.” “I am inspired by words, their rhythm and emotions they describe. In the end, it is music that brings a story to life.” Picker’s opera career began with *Emmeline* (1996) commissioned by Santa Fe Opera, followed by *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, premiered by LA Opera and later performed then recorded by BMOP, which won a Grammy. His next three operas—*Thérèse Raquin*, *An American Tragedy*, and *Dolores Claiborne*, which premiered at The Dallas Opera, the Metropolitan Opera, and San Francisco Opera respectively—have received widespread recognition and multiple new productions.

**Aryeh Lev Stollman** is the Lambda Literary Award-winning author of the novel *The Far Euphrates* (Riverhead), a neuroradiologist at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, and Picker’s partner of 43 years. He had the challenging task of turning Sacks’ nonfiction book, a collection of case histories and essays, into a libretto.

Odyssey Opera and BMOP have performed Picker’s music for almost a decade. Its 2014 co-production of the family opera *Fantastic Mr. Fox* was hailed by WBUR Radio as “utterly delightful” and one of the “High Notes of Classical Music in 2014.” In 2019, BMOP/sound released the opera’s debut recording *Tobias Picker: Fantastic Mr. Fox* (#1065), which subsequently won the label’s first Grammy Award for “Best Opera Recording” in 2020.

## About Odyssey Opera

Founded in 2013 by artistic director/conductor Gil Rose, Odyssey Opera presents adventurous and eclectic works that affirm opera as a powerful expression of the human experience. Its world-class artists perform the operatic repertoire from its historic beginnings through lesser-known masterpieces to contemporary new works and commissions in varied formats and venues. Odyssey Opera takes its audience on a journey to places they've never been before. [odysseyopera.org](http://odysseyopera.org)

## About BMOP

The Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP) is the premier orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to commissioning, performing, and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A unique institution of crucial artistic importance to today's musical world, BMOP exists to disseminate exceptional orchestral music of the present and recent past via performances and recordings of the highest caliber. Founded by Artistic Director Gil Rose in 1996, BMOP has championed composers whose careers span nine decades.

Each season, Rose brings BMOP's award-winning orchestra, renowned soloists, and influential composers to the stage of New England Conservatory's historic Jordan Hall in a series that offers orchestral programming of unrivaled eclecticism. *Musical America's* 2016 Ensemble of the Year, BMOP was awarded the 2021 Special Achievement Award from *Gramophone Magazine* as "an organization that has championed American music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century with passion and panache." The musicians of BMOP are consistently lauded for the energy, imagination, and passion with which they infuse the music of the present era. [BMOP.org](http://BMOP.org).

### **Tobias Picker: *Awakenings* (2022)**

**Composer:** Tobias Picker (b.1954)

**Librettist:** Aryeh Lev Stollman (b.1954)

**Dr. Oliver Sacks:** Jarrett Porter (baritone)

**Miriam H.:** Adrienne Danrich (dramatic soprano)

**Rose:** Joyce El-Khoury (soprano)

**Leonard Lev:** Andrew Morstein (tenor)

**Iris:** Katharine Goelder (mezzo-soprano)

**Mr. Rodriguez:** César Delgado (tenor)

**Dr. Podsnap:** Keith Klein (bass)

**Director:** James Robinson

**Conductor:** Gil Rose

**Musicians:** Boston Modern Orchestra Project and Odyssey Opera chorus

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For more information, visit [BMOP.org](http://BMOP.org) or [OdysseyOpera.org](http://OdysseyOpera.org).

To download cast bios, photos, and more, visit [Dropbox](#).

For artist interviews, ticket requests and all other media queries, contact April Thibeault,  
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