



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contacts: South Dakota Symphony Orchestra: Brandy Hartman

[brandy.hartman@sdsymphony.org](mailto:brandy.hartman@sdsymphony.org) 605-335-7933 ext. 5

National: Nikki Scandalios | [nikki@scandaliospr.com](mailto:nikki@scandaliospr.com), 704-340-4094

**SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND  
MUSIC DIRECTOR DELTA DAVID GIER REVIVE  
DOUGLAS MOORE'S OPERA *GIANTS IN THE EARTH*,  
APRIL 26 & 27, 2025**

Inspired by Ole Edvart Rølvaag's epic novel of 1870s immigration to South Dakota, Moore's opera was premiered in 1951, winning a Pulitzer Prize; *Giants in the Earth* received one performance in 1974 following Moore's 1963 score revisions; the SDSO engraved the latter version for these 2025 performances

*"In no opera by an American is there music of such freshness, beauty and distinctive character."*  
Pulitzer Prize Committee, 1951

**(February 6, 2025, Sioux Falls, SD)** – The South Dakota Symphony Orchestra (SDSO) and Music Director Delta David Gier offer performances of Douglas Moore's Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Giants in the Earth*, April 26 and April 27, 2025. These mark the first performances of the work in over 50 years and take place in Sioux Falls, SD at the Mary W. Sommervold Concert Hall at the Washington Pavilion. The SDSO's semi-staged performances of Douglas Moore's opera *Giants in the Earth* will be brought to life with imagery, costumes, and will be sung in English.

"*Giants in the Earth* is rooted in this very place. There's clearly a real connection between *Giants* and many of those who call South Dakota home," commented Music Director Delta David Gier. "When I learned of Moore's opera, it seemed destined that our orchestra bring this work back to life. We committed to excavating and researching the original scores, as well as having Moore's 1963 version engraved. To each partner who has invested in related projects,

events and publications and to every donor who has enabled us to realize an effort of this magnitude, we are deeply and genuinely grateful. We are honored to offer these SDSO performances, alongside a wonderful cast and production team. It is our hope that the Moore's *Giants in the Earth* can now be seriously considered by others for future productions."

The SDSO's revival of Moore's *Giants in the Earth* aligns with the 100th anniversary of the publication of Ole Edvart Rølvaag's novel of the same name, on which the opera was based. Rølvaag's three-part novel chronicles the struggles of early Norwegian immigrants as they attempt to settle on the Dakota prairie. The SDSO's April 2025 performances of Moore's opera also align with the bicentennial of the start of Norwegian immigration to the North America.

Events and discussions related to the SDSO's revival of Moore's *Giants in the Earth* are taking place in South Dakota, New York and via broadcast thanks to robust partnerships with several organizations, including: Augustana University, Columbia University, Douglas Moore Fund for American Opera, Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA), Norway House, Norwegian Embassy, Norwegian Emigrant Museum, Scandinavia House, Sons of Norway, South Dakota State Historical Society, South Dakota Historical Society Press, South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota Public Broadcasting, and St. Olaf College. For more information, please visit <https://www.sdsymphony.org/education-community/giants-in-the-earth-community-events/>

### **Douglas Moore and *Giants in the Earth*, background by Jerry L. McBride**

Arnold Sundgaard (1909–2006), Broadway lyricist and author, recommended *Giants in the Earth*, by Ole Edvart Rølvaag (1876–1931) to Douglas Moore as the basis for an opera libretto in 1948. Moore received the Rome Prize for composition at the American Academy in 1949, necessitating a collaboration by correspondence—a challenging working arrangement. Moore finished in 1950. He wanted a professional performance in New York at the City Center Opera or on Broadway, but the Columbia University Opera Workshop gave the premiere with professional singers in the principal roles in 1951. Shortly thereafter, the opera was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music.

Copyright issues delayed the opera's publication for three years. By then, interest in the opera had waned, but it was revised for publication in 1963, which is the version used in this production. The only fully staged production since the premiere was by the University of North Dakota in 1974. Although many consider the *Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956) to be his finest opera, Moore felt that *Giants in the Earth* contained some of his best music.

Douglas Moore (1893-1969) is best known as the composer of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, one of the few American operas to enter the operatic repertory. He also composed songs, chamber and orchestral music, and six other operas, including *The Devil and Daniel Webster*. Early in his career he turned to American subjects for inspiration. At a time when many composers were writing ever more adventurous music, he steadfastly continued writing tonal music in traditional forms. His influence was felt far beyond his work as a composer through his work as

an educator and administrator. He was a significant advocate for American composers and musicians, especially during the 1930s and 1940s, when American composers were not held in high regard, and he initiated the recording company, Composer's Recordings, Inc. to make music of important American composers widely available regardless of the music's commercial viability. He was professor of composition and head of the music department at Columbia University for over thirty-five years and President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His leadership in founding the Columbia Opera Workshop established a model for college and university workshops throughout the country when there were few professional opera companies in the United States and almost no opera training opportunities for musicians and composers in America.

The SDSO's April performances of *Giants in the Earth* is made possible thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor and concert sponsors Dacotah Bank, Reliabank, and Woods Fuller.

### **South Dakota Symphony Orchestra**

#### **Delta David Gier, Music Director**

As the state's preeminent arts organization, the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra (SDSO) is nationally recognized as a driver for how an orchestra engages with its community. Founded in 1922 at Augustana University, the SDSO is now a fully professional 75-member orchestra with a history of performing in towns throughout South Dakota. The SDSO's concert seasons feature a diverse mix of classical and pops programming, performed at the Mary W. Sommervold Concert Hall at the Washington Pavilion. The orchestra's nine full-time musicians make up the Dakota String Quartet and the Dakota Wind Quintet, which offer over 100 performances annually in schools, health and care facilities, and community centers throughout the region.

Delta David Gier has been Music Director of the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra since 2004. Under his direction, the orchestra has been lauded for its programming (including seven ASCAP awards). His series based on the Pulitzer Prize was called "an unprecedented programming innovation" by *the Wall Street Journal* and has included residencies with composers Jennifer Higdon, John Corigliano, Steven Stucky, Zhou Long, John Luther Adams, Paul Moravec, and Theodore Wiprud. During Gier's tenure the SDSO has expanded its offerings with a complete cycle of Mahler symphonies, numerous world premieres, and semi-staged operas. The recent release of the SDSO's recording of John Luther Adams' *An Atlas of Deep Time* on Cantaloupe has received international recognition.

Gier is nationally recognized for championing living composers and his ability to deepen an orchestra's impact in its community. Gier is the 2022 recipient of Columbia University's Ditson Conductor's Award, which called him "the model of an engaged conductor," a sentiment echoed by writer Alex Ross wrote in *The New Yorker*, "...his group is the model of an engaged orchestra," adding that "the South Dakota Symphony is bolder and savvier in its programming than all but a handful of American ensembles."

[The Lakota Music Project](#) (LMP) was developed under Gier's direction to address racial tensions between Native Americans and non-Natives in the region the SDSO serves. Now in its thirteenth year, the LMP is a side-by-side program with the SDSO and Lakota/Dakota musicians which explores the role

music plays in their respective cultures, seeking to engender understanding, trust, and healing between estranged peoples. This program traveled to Washington, D.C. in October 2019 for performances at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian and the National Cathedral. A recording of the music commissioned for the LMP was released on the Innova label.

Over the last decade the Lakota Music Project has expanded into Bridging Cultures, a broader program which has included projects with several communities in South Dakota including South Asian (tabla player Zakir Hussain; composer Reena Esmail), Arab (with oud artist Simon Shaheen and composer Malek Jandali), Persian (with composers Behzad Ranjbaran and Nilofar Iravani), Chinese (with composers Chen Yi and Zhou Long), and Sudanese/Somali refugees (with the Bernard Woma Ensemble).

Live SDSO performances are heard by over 15,000 people including 11,000 children annually. Additionally, SDSO concerts are livestreamed and available free of charge through a partnership with South Dakota Public Broadcasting. A robust digital library includes virtual recitals, music education videos, and podcasts.

Education is a fundamental priority for the SDSO, which offers programs including the long-standing annual Young People's Concerts for over 3,000 third and fourth graders, the South Dakota Symphony Youth Orchestra, Young Musician Concerto Competition, Music Composition Academies, and regular engagements throughout the academic year by the Dakota String Quartet and Dakota Wind Quintet in Sioux Falls Public Schools.

### **Calendar Listing**

#### **Giants in the Earth**

Opera in three acts in English

Music by Douglas Moore

Libretto by Arnold Sundgaard, based on the novel by Ole Edvart Rølvaag

First performed on March 28, 1951 by the Columbia Opera Workshop

**April 26, 2025 at 7:30pm and April 27, 2025 at 2:30pm**

Mary W. Sommervold Concert Hall at the Washington Pavilion

Delta David Gier, *conductor*

Dr. Timothy J. Campbell, *chorus director*

Bob Neu, *stage director*

Meredith Lustig, *soprano* - (Beret Hansa)

Michael Hawk, *baritone* - (Per Hansa)

Sarah Nordin, *mezzo-soprano* - (Sorrine Olsa)

Andrew Gilstrap, *bass* - (Hans Olsa)

Emma Grimsley, *soprano* - (Kjersti Tonsenten)

Dylan Morrongiello, *tenor* - (Syvert Tonsenten)

Benjamin Dutcher, *tenor* - (Henry Solum)

Abby Brodnick, *soprano* - (Dagmar)

Joshua Jeremiah, *bass* - (Preacher)

Steve Pence, *bass* - (O'Hara)

South Dakota Symphony Orchestra Chorus

Please visit [sdsymphony.org](http://sdsymphony.org) for more information and to secure tickets.