

BRENT MICHAEL DAVIDS  
**PURCHASE OF MANHATTAN**  
CONCERT OPERA





The new concert opera **PURCHASE OF MANHATTAN** sings-to-life the drama of New York's hidden beginning. Was the island's price tag really \$24 worth of beads? The concert opera captivates Indian and non-Indian audiences alike with an intelligent and inspired look into the life of Manhattan's first inhabitants, the Lenape. **PURCHASE OF MANHATTAN** mingles together a perfect blend of operatic and American Indian singing styles about the famous beginnings of "New Netherland," later becoming "New Amsterdam" and finally "New York." By keenly re-staging New York's founding from a Lenape perspective, the opera blazes uncharted territory.

**PURCHASE OF MANHATTAN** is scored for three solo voices, chorus, American Indian singers, orchestra and Native American flute, by preeminent Mohican composer, Brent Michael Davids, in collaboration with celebrated Abenaki author, Joseph Bruchac, for the libretto. The music interlaces American Indian and Western European styles in a hybrid mix. As a Mohican from a tribe once residing in lower Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, the composer's lyrical conjuring of early Lenape life is unique and bold, with an artistic earthiness amid the sparkling orchestration.

**PURCHASE OF MANHATTAN** was commissioned by the Lenape Center in Manhattan with support from the Collegiate Church of New York and funded in part by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's Expressive Arts program, the Indian Arts Research Center of the School for Advanced Research with support from the Ronald and Susan Dubin Artist Fellowship, the Native Arts & Culture Foundation's Artist Fellowship, USA Projects, several private patrons, and support from Sharon Doty Davids.





**SOLOISTS**

SPIRIT OF THE LAND — Dramatic Soprano  
DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT — Lyric Tenor  
LENAPE — Lyric Baritone

**SATB CHORUS**

LENAPE CHORUS — Soprano, Alto, Tenor  
DUTCH CHORUS — Bass

**TRADITIONAL SINGERS**

AMERICAN INDIAN SINGERS

- A) **MANHATTAN**  
Spirit of the Land introduces Manhattan island before first contact.
- B) **THE INDIANS**  
Lenapes sing of life in Manhattan and the importance of Wampum.
- C) **THE DUTCH**  
Director General Minuit and the Dutch sing of exploration.
- D) **THE PURCHASE**  
The Lenape and Dutch meet on Manhattan island.
- E) **THE AFTERWARD**  
A century-long reflection on the founding of New York is recounted.
- F) **WIPING OF TEARS**  
A present-day Lenape "Wiping of Tears" condolence ceremony is musically brought to life for our modern times.



## PART A — MANHATTAN

### INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

*A Group of Lenape women and children in  
Manhattan village preparing corn for storage*

### LENAPE CHORUS

*nees-NOHL SEE-boh-awl<sup>1</sup>*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

*nees-NOHL*

I feel the feet of all creatures,  
Running, walking and crawling,  
Women dancing, shuffling their feet,  
Men stomping, voices calling.

*ah-KEE<sup>2</sup>*

Deer dance, hooves beat,  
back and forth across my body,  
Bears' paws, Rabbit's feet;  
They are dancing on me.

*ah-KEE*

There is nothing so sweet,  
As this dance of life could be,  
On my head, across my face,  
On every part of me.

### LENAPE CHORUS

*nees-NOHL SEE-boh-awl.*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

*ah-KEE*

Hear our voices, drums of thunder.  
We throw a ball across the sky,  
In one throw a day goes by.  
We shout great winds, tearing branches from trees.

### LENAPE CHORUS

*ah-KEE*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

We chase a bear through clouds.  
No one plays *PAP-wun-gahn<sup>3</sup>* like us!  
Loud, my brothers hunt with me;  
Seasons come with our success.

### LENAPE CHORUS

*ah-KEE*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

We laugh flashes of lightning,  
As we stomp across the skies.  
Still, there is gentle breathing,  
Barely stirring wings of butterflies.

### LENAPE

*noh-WAHT<sup>4</sup>* long ago this came to be,  
from the Sky Land there fell down,  
A root from the Great Tree.  
We are Great Turtle's grandchildren.

It was he, the Great Turtle who saw that root fall.  
He was glad. He knew his hard shell could support a tree.  
He knew his grandchildren would need a place to stand.  
We are Great Turtle's grandchildren.

All the water animals dove in,  
Buoyantly glad to bring up land,  
Spreading mud over Turtle's back,  
Giving us more room to stand.

We are Great Turtle's grandchildren.

<sup>1</sup>*nisnol siboal* Two rivers.

<sup>2</sup>*ahki* The earth. Also used as a greeting.

<sup>3</sup>*papwungan* Lacrosse game. Also linked with constellations and seasons;  
thunder is a lacrosse game in the sky and hunting of the celestial bear.

<sup>4</sup>*nowat* Long ago.

## PART B — THE INDIANS

### LENAPE CHORUS

*wah-nih-SHEE*,<sup>1</sup> thank you. But what of the *AH-wah-NOHTS*,<sup>2</sup> the strangers?

### LENAPE

All of us who are *Lenape*,<sup>3</sup> and all of us who are human beings.

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

*ah-KEE*.

### LENAPE CHORUS

Who are they?

### LENAPE

They're coming soon. The women clans have decided this exchange is a good thing. Not only *Lenape*, but also *meh-SIG-neeoo*<sup>4</sup> and *ah-KEE mah-WAY*<sup>5</sup> will be listening. The people, animals and the earth share in this exchange. Our minds are one, by this string of *wampum*<sup>6</sup> showing the agreement we share.

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

*ah-KEE*.

### LENAPE

Birds catch the spirit on wings.  
Snakes sense the earth so tenderly.  
Animals show us many things;  
*Wampum* records all in memory.

White of hope, the rising dawn,  
Purple of chance and danger,  
A gift of the *quahog* clam,  
Inspires us to remember.

Of promises woven into beads,  
Strings whispered with honor  
Between *AH-wah-NOHTS* and *Lenapes*,  
Standing on this land we will share.

We're all related, *Wampum* establishes!  
All woven together, the beads say,  
*Wampum* is *ah-KEE mah-WAY*, our wishes  
Bursting across the Milky Way!

### INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

*Four Native men enter, walking with  
dignity, without weapons.*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND

Brothers, we've seen other men like these.  
We offered them friendship before.  
They answered with ingratitude,  
Violence and acts of war.

Sisters, a floating house first came  
Like a dream out of the sunrise.  
A giant canoe with wings on fire.  
The sight astonished our eyes.

### NATIVE CHORUSES

Crawling with human beings,  
Unlike any seen before.  
Their faces pale, covered with hair,  
Were they part wolf or bear?

<sup>1</sup>*wanishi* Thank you.

<sup>2</sup>*awanots* Fair-skinned strangers.

<sup>3</sup>*lenape* The people.

<sup>4</sup>*mesignw* Animals.

<sup>5</sup>*mawe* All.

<sup>6</sup>*wampum* White and purple shell beads, considered good, imbedded with stories and memories, cherished as powerful. Also linked to the constellations. Not used as "Indian money" as misinterpreted by the colonists.

### **SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

Fearlessly, a *Lenape* ambassador  
Went to meet them in the ancient way.  
In one hand, a *wampum* belt of war;  
The other, a smoking pipe of peace displayed.

They were almost to shore but did not chase;  
The Indian was careful to not get caught,  
Waiting for them to make their choice.  
But they saw his burning stick and fired a shot.

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

We hear your words, but these new men have  
promised to live as friends.

### **LENAPE**

We would do well to trade with them. They bring us  
things we can use.

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

Let us listen to them. Let us see what they bring us.

### **SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

*ah-KEE.* Be careful now.

### **LENAPE**

Our minds are one. We all agree.

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

We see them now. Who are they?

### **LENAPE** (*Pre-contact duet with Minuit*)

I hear your music in the leaves!

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

So much lumber in the trees!

### **LENAPE**

My mother's bones rest in this mound.

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

I see handsome profits from this ground!

### **LENAPE**

I touch the dirt, find your heartbeat!

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

I see abundant riches below my feet!

### **LENAPE**

In your whispers my dreams are told!

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

So dark and rich, the soil is gold!

### **LENAPE**

You give us water and wampum strings!

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

I can get it with rum and otter skins!

### **LENAPE**

Your strong body is where I stand!

### **GENERAL DIRECTOR MINUIT**

Oh bless me Lord, I want this land!

## PART C — THE DUTCH

### INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

*Four Dutch men enter, pause and stand, pointing at the Lenapes.*

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

What did we bring to purchase this island?

### TRADITIONAL SINGERS

*Lenape Welcoming Song*

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND/CHORUS

*ah-KEE.*

### DUTCH CHORUS

Many strings of beads, which they greatly prize. They sweat to make the beads, but we make them so easily.

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

Sixty guilders worth of trinkets.

### DUTCH CHORUS

A good price, our Director General!

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

I salute the men who discovered this land,  
The visionaries here before me,  
Christopher Columbus and Hendrick Hudson,  
We revere their names, who saw our destiny!

I am following their legacy!  
Walking in their giant shoes!  
Bringing wealth to our Company  
This hero's path is what I choose.

### DUTCH CHORUS

To be fruitful on this island is the proper course,  
Dominion over earth like those who came before.  
Ownership has been our divine right to enforce,  
From the blessed day we stepped ashore.

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

With these trinkets, we shall take title,  
This fine island will be Dutch property!  
The purchase of Manhattan is vital,  
To bring civility to barbary.

### DUTCH CHORUS

It would be cheaper to altogether take it.  
We have the guns.

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

We are taking it, but not by force. We need them to  
bring us beaver pelts. Remember, West India Company  
wants to avoid conflict. And they outnumber us.

### DUTCH CHORUS

Will they attack us?

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

Be brave, my men, be brave. They want our goods as  
much as we want their land.

## PART D — THE PURCHASE

### LENAPE CHORUS

Show them our friendship. Offer them a welcoming song.

### SPIRIT OF THE LAND/CHORUS

*ah-KEE.* Welcome is good.

### TRADITIONAL SINGERS

*Lenape Welcoming Song*

### DUTCH CHORUS

What is that chanting? It hurts our ears!

### LENAPE CHORUS

*ah-KEE.* Why don't they understand?

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

Answer these pagan cries with a strong hymn!

### DUTCH CHORUS

Hear our words, Oh God of Hosts,  
Who shepards over faithful sheep,  
Lead us to a new Jerusalem,  
And protect us in our sleep.

### LENAPE CHORUS

*OO-lih-GEHN,*<sup>1</sup> Good. We have proved we are friends and mean no harm.

### LENAPE CHORUS

They have answered with one of their own welcoming songs. It sounded so strange. Who are they?

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

*yah-GUHT!* We have shown them, we do not fear them.

### INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

### LENAPE

We give you friendship, as our tribes meet here.  
This Good Road wampum opens good relations.  
May we sweep the briars and make the path clear,  
Brothers, sisters on the Good Road, side-by-side as nations.

We give you friendship, as our relatives meet here,  
Under the ancient Elm, the tree of respect and peace.  
We'll welcome you to Turtle Island, every year,  
Standing together so hearts and diplomacy increase.

### DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT

We enjoy this simple hospitality.  
May we share many such times of interchange.  
We offer sixty guilders for Manhattan and this tree.  
By right of purchase which we arrange.

### LENAPE CHORUS

So we join together, take each other's hands.  
In this sign of friendship, here we all stand.  
So we dance together, boots and moccasins,  
This is how we will behave, to act as friends.



### **DUTCH CHORUS**

So we join together, shake each other's hands  
In this time of purchase of a fruitful land.  
So we dance together, boots and moccasins,  
Talking sign language with Indians we befriend.

### **DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT**

Bring forth the chest of goods. Let us pay for the land.

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

What fine gifts they offer! A friendship is at hand.

### **DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT**

*Waving paper*

My friends, come! Sign this deed!

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

What does their chief want us to do?

### **LENAPE**

That wavy sign language I do not read!

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

How can we translate their point of view?!

### **DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT**

Just take hold of this pen.

### **DUTCH CHORUS**

Aaaah! Look out! Over there! A poison snake!  
Kill it! Kill it!

### **LENAPE CHORUS**

Oh no, do not harm *SKOHKS!*<sup>1</sup> They warn before they strike.

### **LENAPE**

Friends, our people long ago made peace with the snakes.

### **DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT**

Let us hasten from this place. Where there is one snake there are more.

### **DUTCH CHORUS**

But what of the deed?

## **PART E — THE AFTERWARD**

*A century passes*

### **INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC**

### **SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

It may seem odd for Spirits of this Land,  
To share this story of European conquerors,  
Who now seem to have gained command,  
Those who pictured our people as wanderers,  
Who had no rights, whose own side of this story,  
Was not worth remembering in civil history.

But thanks to the knowledge we possess,  
Knowing history and earth,  
Through turns of seasons from that time to this,  
We can tell a truer tale of this nation's birth;  
Our Native home, now shared by many,  
Was not sold from Manahattan to Allegany.

<sup>1</sup>*skoks* Snakes.

My friends, your written accounts  
of Manhattan are familiar to you.  
Your children read them every day  
in their school studies;  
But they do not read, not conceive,  
no pen record, no book review,  
The terrible story of recompense  
for kindness paid my Aborigines.  
First, to be "of and with us" was sought  
as a warm privilege, like gold;  
But later, demanding assistance from  
your kings you assert your hold.

#### **LENAPE CHORUS**

Transmitting beyond the waters  
Intelligence of your possession,  
By "right of discovery" but never  
begging the question.

#### **GHOST OF DIRECTOR GENERAL MINUIT**

I highly approve of the recent grant  
by Governor Stuyvesant  
To Cornelius Jans Vanderveer  
for a patent of flatbush land,  
Twenty-six hundred guilders for this new city;  
Amazing the entire Island was purchased for only sixty!

#### **SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

It is curious, the history of my Indians,  
these past centuries.  
Nothing that deserved the  
name of Purchase was ever made.  
Deeds were given, indifferently,  
to individuals or treasuries,  
Even to governments, for which  
consideration was never paid.

Should an Indian, at times,  
desert his home to go hunt game,  
Abandonment laws were passed  
to extinguish his claim.

#### **LENAPE**

Let it not surprise you, my friends, when I explain,  
This very spot on which we stand, where we sit down,  
Has never been purchased or rightly obtained;  
And by justice, it should belong now,  
To the children of those who from  
the Sky Tree descended.  
Though made to leave by force and hunger,  
their title never ended.

#### **LENAPE CHORUS**

The children of those people, the *Lenape* nation,  
From whom their great ancestors descended,  
Driven from here by force and starvation,  
Their title was not extinguished, it never ended!

### **PART E — WIPING OF TEARS**

*Present Day*

#### **LENAPE CHORUS**

My friends.

#### **LENAPE**

My friends,  
May we wipe the tears from all our eyes,  
both *AH-wah-NOHTS* and Indian,  
so we can clearly see again?

My friends,  
Can we clear the sorrow and obstruction from our  
throats, whatever language we may speak, so we can  
talk clearly?

My friends,  
Can we clear the obstructions from our ears, so we  
can hear the good words from friends and relatives.

**LENAPE CHORUS**

My friends.

**SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

Why not clear the sickening feeling we have in our  
stomachs, so we can eat again and be strong?

**LENAPE**

Blood stains are everywhere; can we wipe off the  
marks, so whoever joins us can have a clear mind?

**LENAPE CHORUS**

My friends.

**LENAPE / SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

Can we set the bones of our loved ones to rest  
peacefully, leaving our grief at the graveyard?

**LENAPE CHORUS**

My friends.

**SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

If death has left us empty and scattered, can we sing  
words of restoration and goodness to restore our minds?

**LENAPE / SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

If we travel far on a difficult path with thorns in our  
feet, feeling pain from the journey, perhaps, could  
we remove the thorns and be comfortable again?

**LENAPE**

My friends.

**SPIRIT OF THE LAND/CHORUS**

Welcome to Turtle Island.

**LENAPE CHORUS**

Welcome, my friends.

**EVERYONE**

*Lenape Welcoming Song*

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