

Daniel Thomas Davis

*Family Secrets: Kith and Kin*

1	Prologue	0:42
2	Scene 1: Top of the Stairs	4:27
3	Scene 2: Net (Dream Music)	4:22
4	Scene 3: Cemetery	2:43
5	Scene 4: Pantry	2:17
6	Scene 5: Chinaberry Tree	10:12
7	Interlude	2:51
8	Scene 6: Porch	4:33
9	Scene 7: Gossip	5:31
10	Epilogue	6:15
	Total Time	44:00

Andrea Edith Moore, Mother | Daughter  
Jane Holding, Friend | Neighbor

Elizabeth Phelps, violin  
Nicholas Photinos, cello  
Bo Newsome, oboe and English horn  
Lisa Kaplan, piano  
Hank Smith, banjo  
Timothy Myers, conductor



Andrea Edith Moore  
soprano

Daniel Thomas Davis

*Family Secrets: Kith and Kin*

Andrea Edith Moore, soprano

## Family Secrets: Kith & Kin

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### Close Relations

#### A Note from the Composer

When I first started work on this collaboration, I received a voluminous amount of poetry and prose – a loose bundle of new work by seven of the finest writers currently working in and around the Southern voices of American literature. As I slowly made my way through these stories and stanzas, I began to understand something I had already intuited – these writers all know one another. And one way or another, the people that inhabit their writings all seem to know one another, too. Their voices, characters, and almost-forgotten-but-now-remembered friends and family – they all seemed to live in proximity to one another. With this thought in mind, *Family Secrets: Kith and Kin* began to emerge as a series of loosely related portraits – from small faded snapshots to larger-scale paintings, with even a comical caricature or two.

As I began sketching out these portraits, two shapeshifting figures gradually came into focus: the first, a Mother/Daughter character, whose singing voice would serve as the piece's laughing, lamenting, testifying, and atoning protagonist; and the second, a Friend/Neighbor, whose speaking, yarn-telling voice would be the work's narrative engine. The resulting musical drama soon took on a fundamentally hybrid form – an opera on top of chamber music, or a song cycle inside a monodrama. Now, after several wonderfully different productions, I sometimes just call it a chamber opera, but I'm still not entirely sure what it is. And ultimately, I hope that ambiguity might be felt as part of the work's underlying message – we live, love, and die in close relation to one another, but the textures of those relationships shift over time and resist easy definition.

Like the characters onstage, the instrumental ensemble here speaks with an accent, most pronouncedly with the twangy banjo that lurks and lirts beneath the score's surface, but also in striding piano riffs and high-lonesome fiddle solos. And like the piece's dramatic structure, the ensemble also seems to be several things all at once – a motley, front-porch pick-up band but also a reimagined Baroque orchestra that took a wrong turn somewhere across three centuries and two continents. For reasons I still can't explain, when I was writing for this ensemble, the poignant intimacy of the Bach cantatas always seemed to be in my mind's ear, perhaps most obviously in Randall Kenan's bloodstained parable of the Great Migration in Scene 5: "Chinaberry Tree," but also in the breathlessly long melodic lines that meander through Allan Gurganus' full-throated epilogue and Frances Mayes' brooding Scene 2: "Net."

Uniting the many disparate elements that run through the work, there's one voice that has been the guiding spirit here – a many-hued voice I first heard and admired a few weeks after leaving North Carolina in the late nineteen-nineties and which belongs to someone who has since become a cherished collaborator and friend. To be sure, the ability to write for an artist like Andrea Moore is one of the greatest gifts I can be given as a composer, and working with her closely on this project has been a real joy. On behalf of all of us who have collaborated on this endeavor over the years, I thank her for inviting us to create a world together – and for rendering us all kith and kin.

– DTD

### LIBRETTO

Original texts by Allan Gurganus, Lee Smith, Frances Mayes, Michael Malone, Daniel Wallace, Randall Kenan, and Jeffery Beam

Concept by Andrea Edith Moore & Daniel Thomas Davis

Assembled and adapted by Daniel Thomas Davis



## Prologue – Allan Gurganus

Our village notices our village...

## Scene 1: Top of the Stairs – Lee Smith

The bridge club meets at one o'clock every other Thursday  
For chicken salad, clover rolls and gossip  
You know, all Mama's food is soft and white, except for the bourbon  
Linens and flowers glow pretty rose  
But even now she already knows  
The way these ladies are is a way she'll never be

There she sits at the top of the stair  
She's not really there  
She's lighter than air  
She's not really there

She sees through the dark like an owl or a person with special powers  
She knows when Billy, the cousin she loves,  
Comes in drunk with Jill, her older sister  
She sees where he puts his hand and how they kiss in the night  
Before they disappear onto the davenport, out of sight  
Jill is giggling doesn't she know that this is a sin  
They will both burn in Hell with their monster baby

There she sits at the top of the stair  
She's not really there  
She's lighter than air  
She's not really there



## Scene 2: Net (Dream Music) – Frances Mayes

I do not like you walking through the dark house when I am sleeping.  
You stand in the black kitchen filling a glass with tap water.  
I am dreaming upstairs.  
The skylight is like light at the top of a tomb where someone lies  
undisturbed for a thousand years.  
Gauze netting falls around my bed, another level of sleep.  
But you are slowly drinking cold water.  
Between us the quiet is the black inside closed books,  
It is the light inside of stems inside of flowers.  
I want this sleep to last.  
You put the key on the table.  
Go, sleep in your own empty house.  
But where?



## Scene 3: Cemetery – Michael Malone

Our daughter and I  
Lie on the green grass  
Under your tree.  
Above our heads  
Summer comes slowly.  
Clouds drift past us  
And the sky turns gray then blue.

Rain on the leaves slides  
Into the green grass.  
Rain drops down from your tree.  
Above our heads  
Showers fall fitful.



Then our child she asks me,  
"Is the rain sad, missing you?"

Our daughter and I  
Rake up the dead leaves  
Under your tree.  
Above our heads  
Winter moves quickly.  
Nothing can last long.  
Snow covers us both, as you used to do.

#### Scene 4: Pantry – Daniel Wallace

Three years after moving into the first house I bought I discovered what looked like a secret panel in the roof of the pantry. It was too small almost for a man to fit through; maybe a child or an ambitious raccoon. Even so, how would they get to it? Every time I went into the pantry I looked up at the panel and wondered what was up there, in its private attic. I always thought that in dark, cob-webbed, secret places I'd find a copy of the Declaration of Independence; I still think that. One day I couldn't stand it anymore. I took everything out of the pantry and set it on the kitchen floor and climbed the shelves until I was right there, and slowly I opened it, past the cobwebs, into the darkness, and saw what there was to see.

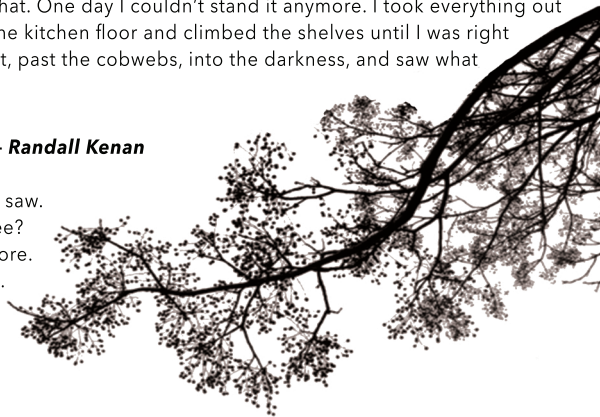
#### Scene 5: Chinaberry Tree – Randall Kenan

Chinaberry tree. Chinaberry saw.  
How old are you, you old tree?  
You've been there since before.  
Been there such a long time.  
Still there now.

This is what retirement was  
supposed to look like:  
back home from the Bronx...  
New house by the creek, upon her old cousin's new grounds.  
They called it a cabin, but it was a show place, out in the woods by the creek.  
Long like a Viking lodge, two storeys high. Ten years of planning. Two years to build.

Did it shock you, Chinaberry tree? Well of course it did.  
Chinaberries? What are they good for?

Like eyes. A hundred thousand thousand eyes.



She had a baby face. That's what he called her, "bay-face." Cheeks so big her eyes closed when she smiled. Her laugh was bubbling brown sugar. He liked big cigars, big Cadillac cars. He told large stories through large clouds of smoke, in his leisure suits. He fancied guns though, truth to tell, he never hunted. Truth to tell, he was a pitiful shot. He would keep them in the trunk of his Cadillac car. Open it up, show them off, to impress the country boys, while puffing on his big cigar.

Why, Chinaberry tree? Why did they slip down that chilly night? In the dark woods, in a house barely finished? What did she say? What did he say? Did she see him come into the room?

No shots fired. No. Just the butt of the gun. Against the head. Beat to death, they say. Cruel, cruel, cold awful death. They say he wandered the earth like Satan. On foot. Satan is proud, but he is not vain. Was this man proud? Was this man vain?

Turned himself in, he did. Cut a deal. All that retirement money, Cadillac, snatched up by a small town lawyer. He went "up the road," people say. That's what they say when you're locked up.

People say....somebody said...nobody saw but the chinaberry tree.

Nurse daughter, engineer son, the banker son, all vanished from their homeland. Never heard from again. The grande dame mother, pushing 100 years old, never left New Jersey.

Daughter! Mother! Niece, cousin, wife! Slain wife buried by and with her kith and kin, in the shadow of a tobacco barn, shaded by a long leaf pine.

Log cabin stood. Log cabin sold. Log cabin gone now.  
Who wants to live in a haunted house?



## Interlude – Solo Banjo

### Scene 6: Porch – Jeffery Beam

"You will return? Or will your absence become coolness?"

How peaceful the porch swing on summer evenings when the heat takes on a shimmering coolness.

How I sit and watch and listen.

Faint musics shimmy from the neighbors.

Cars whizz by like carousel horses.

How startling the sun sinks into the maple trees' fired leaves.

Oncoming silence sweet and deafening.

Perfect for remembering ... and forgetting.

You will return? Or will your absence become coolness?

You will return, you will, or will your absence become this sweet and deafening silence?



### Scene 7: Gossip – Allan Gurganus

Our village notices our village, mostly.

Few misdemeanors missed.

Their porch light? left ablaze four full hours of daylight!

And how many Merlot jugs can one girl that thin recycle? Divorce has forced their mansion back onto the market (doubled, by their split, to a whopping million nine. And in 1970 they'd have given us that whole ole barn for 50K. Makes you think, huh?)

It's just, we're moral people. So we care about our neighbors. Their morality. (And them, of course.)

"She did what? Oh, she did not. Oh no, she DID? Ooh!

How many times? That many times?

Well, I'm not the least little bit surprised."

A village monitors itself. It must. Remembers itself. When it can.

A village sometimes overlooks its most visible sinners.

Eventually.

– But, the latest?

Of course you've heard about Sheila's big night out? No? You been gone, been sick?

Yeah, still chasing that boy her son's age. The one with the cherry-red Jeep Cherokee up on those huge tires, who knows why? Despite his parents' taking out restraining orders, Sheila explainin', "I am not stalking Jamie, I am guarding Jamie."

Last night somebody told her he had a high-school-study-partner at home with him, a girl, and you know our Sheila barged right in through his Mother's trailer, carrying a brand-new Walmart shotgun, orange price-sticker still gummed across both barrels, loaded....

"She did not. Did so.

Unh-uh. Unh-hun! What next? Beats all.

But, yes, even knowing Sheila, I AM the least little bit surprised!"



## Epilogue – Allan Gurganus

Everything the world does wrong, everything the world does best, is found right here. But only by the Watchful. Those willing to see then report then, damage done, to try and start forgiving.

Forgive him, forgive her, forgive them who've become ours then become us. We're all still innocent underneath, right? Can't we each be saved from our worst selves? Innocent till proven innocent then far more innocent than even that.

Don't repeat this, but it's true: Innocent, I'm also innocent, at least as innocent as you.



## THE ARTISTS



Soprano **Andrea Edith Moore** brings to her performances an “opalescence that is particularly served by her impressive phrasing and inherent musicality” (*operagasm.com*), and “wows audiences with her powerful and flexible soprano voice, her acting ability, and her dedication and drive” (CVNC). Andrea has enjoyed a wide range of collaborations with artists and ensembles including Vladimir Ashkenazy, David Zinman, Eighth Blackbird, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance company, and the Hamburger Kammeroper.

Equally at home in the music of our time and of the distant past, she has starred in roles ranging from The Governess in Britten’s *Turn of the Screw*, Micaëla in *Carmen*, Countess Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Sara in Higdon’s *Cold Mountain*. An accomplished concert soloist, she has garnered particular acclaim for her interpretations of the Bach cantatas and German lieder, at venues including the Teatro Colon, Baltimore Lieder Weekend, and Richard Tucker Foundation.

Andrea’s commitment to voices from her native North Carolina has led her to commission, premiere, and perform composers including Kenneth Frazelle, Daniel Thomas Davis, Sue Klausmeyer, Robert Ward, and numerous others. She produced, premiered, and developed *Family Secrets: Kith and Kin* with North Carolina Opera, and is especially proud to feature this new work as her debut recording.

Andrea is a prizewinner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, was a fellow with four-time Grammy-winning ensemble Eighth Blackbird at the Blackbird Creative Lab, and has twice received the Yale School of Music Alumni Award. She holds degrees from Yale University, Peabody Conservatory of Music at The Johns Hopkins University and UNC School of the Arts.



**Daniel Thomas Davis** creates music singled out for its “soul-wrenching” connection to the human voice and its “rich harmonic and textural language” (*Classical Voice North America*). His recent works for the stage include *Six.Twenty.Outrageous*, a Symphony Space / American Opera Projects production directed by Doug Fitch, *Family Secrets: Kith & Kin* with North Carolina Opera, and *The Impossible She* with Rhymes with Opera at the New York Opera Fest, which *Parterre* hailed as a “towering musical achievement, a hugely complex work packing a whopping political and intellectual punch.”

At venues including the Royal Opera House, the Metropolitan Museum and Carnegie Hall, Dan’s music has been performed by Lynn Harrell, the Detroit Symphony, Momena Quartet, London Sinfonietta, ModernMedieval, Yarn|Wire, Lontano, Lexington Philharmonic, Charlotte Symphony, Ossian Ensemble, Ensemble X, 21st-Century Consort, Locrian Players, and members of Roomful of Teeth and Anonymous 4, among many others. A frequent collaborator with writers, filmmakers, and choreographers, he scored the feature films *An Encounter with Simone Weil* and *Pushed Up the Mountain*, as well as *Breath Catalogue*, an evening-length dance work with Megan Nicely/Dance+Kate Elswit. His work has earned him fellowships from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Bogliasco Foundation, Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the British Government (Marshall Scholar).

Raised in rural North Carolina, Dan has long created work informed by American popular and traditional musics – especially congregational singing and old-time country, an influence made clear in this album. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Royal Academy of Music, Peabody Conservatory, and Johns Hopkins University, he currently directs the composition program at Binghamton University (SUNY) and divides his time between upstate New York and Brooklyn.

**The Ensemble:** The characterful instrumentation of *Family Secrets* brought together an eclectic group of collaborators to highlight the operatic fervor, sultry accents, and unmistakable twang of this genre-bending score. The unique ensemble features pianist Lisa Kaplan and cellist Nick Photinos of the pioneering new-music ensemble Eighth Blackbird; NC banjo virtuoso Hank Smith of Hank, Pattie & The Current; Mallarmé Chamber Players’ standout oboist Bo Newsome and violinist Elizabeth Phelps; and North Carolina actress and tour-de-force storyteller Jane Holding. The intrepid and acclaimed conductor Timothy Myers unites this all-star group into a seamless and balanced whole.

On the other side of the studio, five-time Grammy-winning producer and Blackbird Creative Lab director Elaine Martone offered inspiration and guidance in every phase of the recording process – the remarkable result of a fortuitous meeting between Andrea and Elaine in 2018.



Pictured L-R (Ian Schreier, Timothy Myers, Elizabeth Phelps, Nicholas Photinos, Andrea Edith Moore, Hank Smith, Lisa Kaplan, Daniel Thomas Davis, Elaine Martone, Bo Newsome, Jane Holding)



## IN THE STUDIO

Recorded on September 13, 14 and 15, 2019  
Manifold Recording Studio; Pittsboro, NC

Executive Producer: Andrea Edith Moore  
Recording Producer: Elaine Martone, Sonarc Music  
Co-Producer: Daniel Thomas Davis  
Recording, Editing, and Mixing Engineer: Ian Schreier, Manifold Recording  
Mastering Engineer: Brent Lambert, Kitchen Mastering  
Managing Partner: Suzanne Rousso, Mallarmé Chamber Players  
Art and Cover Design: Xuan  
Photography: Elizabeth Matheson, and Crickett Photography

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## Special Thanks

Shannon Healy  
Alice and Joe Moore  
Laura and Kelly  
Allan, Daniel, Frances, Jeffery, Lee, Michael, and Randall  
Suzanne Rousso and Mallarmé Chamber Players  
Elizabeth Matheson  
Michael Tiemann

This recording of *Family Secrets: Kith & Kin* is supported by the  
Orange County Arts Commission and the Kenan Foundation.  
Additional funding provided by the generosity of a village of supporters without whom this  
project would not have come to fruition.

*For Michael Healy*  
&  
*In memory of Randall Kenan*