



Proving Up  
Missy Mazzoli & Royce Vavrek

OPERA OMAHA · INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE  
CHRISTOPHER ROUNTREE



## Proving Up (2018)

composed by **Missy Mazzoli**  
to a libretto by **Royce Vavrek**  
after the short story by **Karen Russell**

co-commissioned by the **Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, and Miller Theatre at Columbia University** and first produced at the **Kennedy Center** during the 2017-18 Season

### Track listing

1	Prologue (Uncle Sam's Farm)	4. 41
2	Part I: The Settler's Scar	9. 39
3	Part II: Miles Will Prove Up	7. 16
4	Part III: How Pa Obtained the Glass	10. 05
5	Part IV: Strange Dreams	7. 01
6	Part V: Nore at a Soft Canter	12. 38
7	Part VI: Sodbuster	20. 16
8	Epilogue (All That's Required)	8. 07
	Total playing time:	79. 48

**Miles Zegner**  
**Mr. Johannes "Pa" Zegner**  
**Mrs. Johannes "Ma" Zegner**  
**Taller Zegner Daughter**  
**Little Zegner Daughter**  
**The Sodbuster**

Michael Slattery (tenor)  
John Moore (baritone)  
Talise Trevigne (soprano)  
Abigail Nims (mezzo-soprano)  
Cree Carrico (soprano)  
Andrew Harris (bass)

*(Original cast recording from Opera Omaha production, April 2018)*

### International Contemporary Ensemble

**Flute & Piccolo** Isabel Lepanto Gleicher  
**Clarinet & Bass Clarinet** Curt Miller  
**Bassoon & Contrabassoon** Rebekah Heller  
**Trumpet** Sam Jones  
**French Horn** Rachel Drehmann  
**Harp** Nuiko Wadden  
**Piano & Harpsichord** Karl Larson  
**Percussion** Clara Warnaar  
**Violin I** Leah Asher  
**Violin II** Marina Kifferstein  
**Viola** Wendy Richman  
**Cello** Katinka Kleijn  
**Double Bass** Brian Ellingsen

Conducted by **Christopher Rountree**

When Washington National Opera first asked me to create a new chamber opera, my librettist Royce Vavrek and I set out to find a story that was timely, unusual, and uniquely American. We found the perfect inspiration in the writing of Karen Russell, who in 2013 published the short story on which the opera is based. Russell's story is a surreal and haunting commentary on the American dream as experienced by the Zegners, a fictional family of 1860s homesteaders.

This narrative feels newly relevant at this fraught moment in my nation's history, when people are examining and reevaluating the achievability of the American Dream. The Zegners are a family that does everything "right" and are still undermined by forces beyond their control. These characters have parallels in our contemporary world: a mother who tries to maintain control through domestic order, a father who turns to the bottle under the pressures of supporting a family, children forced to take on responsibilities beyond their years, a lone, deranged man who resorts to violence and destruction. These are ordinary people in an impossible situation, a brutal world where dead children sing, pigs and horses become the audience for one's deepest



Missy Mazzoli  
© Caroline Tompkins

secrets, and zombie-like sodbusters wander the desolate prairie. Pushed to the edge by poverty and ultimately undermined by fate, the Zegers' fixation on "proving up" never wanes. The story's surrealism suggested to me a music unmoored from time; the score includes imagined fiddle tunes, Baroque gestures, scrap metal percussion, seven acoustic guitars, eight harmonicas and harpsichord in addition to the chamber ensemble.

I am honored to have been commissioned by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and New York's Miller Theatre, all of whom presented this opera in 2018. I am thrilled to present this original cast recording from the Opera Omaha production, featuring the International Contemporary Ensemble conducted by Christopher Rountree.

**-Missy Mazzoli**





OPERAOMAHA



## Opera Omaha's ONE Festival

This recording of *Proving Up* was made in Omaha, Nebraska during the 2018 ONE Festival, produced by one of the work's co-commissioners, Opera Omaha. Opera Omaha's **ONE** Festival assembles groups of world-class artists, providing them with the time, space and resources to create new work and collaborations on location with local partners. Each of the festival's creatives is an Artist-in-Residence, stretching across their respective mediums to craft multiple interdisciplinary live performances and creative social events. With an emphasis on experimentation and new work, **ONE** encourages and celebrates bold risks and transformative storytelling. Artists-in-Residence are in direct dialogue with the audience, continuing the festival's mission to activate music and sound within the culturally vibrant city of **Omaha, NE**.



Christopher Rountree  
© Maria Jose Govea

## Libretto

1

### Prologue: Uncle Sam's Farm

*( Pa enters, at first sober, but as the years go by he becomes more and more drunk... )*

#### Pa

Come along, come along!  
Make no delay,  
come from every nation,  
come from every way.  
Our lands, they are broad enough,  
don't be alarmed.  
Uncle Sam is rich enough  
to give us all a farm.

Of all the mighty nations  
in the east or in the west,  
this glorious Yankee nation  
is the greatest and the best.  
We have room for all creation,  
our banner is unfurled!  
Here's a general invitation

to the people of the world.

Come along, come along!  
Make no delay,  
come from every nation,  
come from every way.  
Our lands, they are broad enough,  
don't be alarmed.  
Uncle Sam is rich enough  
to give us all a farm.

The brave in every nation  
they are joining heart in hand,  
and flocking to America  
the real promised land.  
And Uncle Sam stands ready  
with a child on each arm,  
to give them all a welcome  
to a lot upon his farm.

Come along, come along!  
Make no delay,  
come from every nation,  
come from every way.  
Our lands, they are broad enough,

don't be alarmed.  
Uncle Sam is rich enough  
to give us all a farm.

We're bound to lead the nations,  
as our motto's "Go ahead!"  
And tell the foreign paupers  
that our people are well fed.  
For the nations must remember  
Uncle Sam is not a fool,  
for the people do the voting  
and the children go to school.

Come along, come along!  
make no delay,  
come from every nation,  
come from every way.  
Our lands, they are broad enough,  
don't be alarmed.  
Uncle Sam is rich enough  
to give us all a farm.

---

2

### Part I: The Settler's Scar

*( Two young girls, the Zegner Daughters,  
run about on a five year-old Nebraskan  
homestead, with a small sod house and a  
small wooden barn, barely big enough for a  
single horse and a large hog. Laundry flaps  
gently on the line, and a plow sits unused by  
a washtub. Frozen in time as the girls sing  
are four members of the Zegner family: Pa,  
sitting drunk on a stump against the barn,  
Ma, washing Peter, their eldest son, who  
sits bloody in an outdoor steel washtub,  
and Miles, in mid-conversation with his only  
friends, Nore, the mare, and Pig, the hog. )*

### Ma, Pa, Miles and the Zegner Daughters

The Homestead Act of 1862:

A house of sod,  
with dimensions quite particular.  
Acres of grain,  
five years of harvests,  
a window of glass.  
The Homestead Act,  
all that's required  
to prove up,  
at the Inspector's visit.

### Zegner Daughters

Pa's been branded,  
a star scored into his palm,  
by the handle of the moldboard plow.  
A permanent symbol:  
The settler's scar.

### Zegner Daughter, Taller

Pa works hard,

### Zegner Daughter, Littler

Drinks harder.

### Zegner Daughter, Taller

He's a hair's width away...

### Zegner Daughters

...from proving up  
and obtaining his section's title.  
after five long years,  
and two dead daughters...

### Ma, Pa, Miles and the Zegner Daughters

A house of sod,  
acres of grain,

five years of harvest.  
A miracle, since Ma always asks:  
"Where is God's rain?"

A house of sod.  
Acres of grain.  
A window of glass.  
Five years of harvests.  
All that's required  
to prove up,  
at the Inspector's visit.

### Zegner Daughters

Pa even has the final strangeness,  
the wink in the bureaucrats' wall:

### Ma, Pa and the Zegner Daughters

A window of glass.

### Zegner Daughters

Windows, a premium in Nebraska.  
Only one in this blue-gray ocean of  
tallgrass...  
Only one...  
And it's Pa's.

Farmers need to look out for farmers:  
The window will be shared.  
Pa's got the scar,  
the settler's scar.

*( The girls sink into a grave dug in a hill on  
the property. Their figures glow from the  
mound of dirt. )*

3

## Part II: Miles will Prove Up

*( Ma cleans Peter, bloodied in a washtub. )*

**Ma**  
You're a bloody mess, Peter.  
*( beat )*

Who will deliver the window now?  
Surely a chore for the eldest son!

**Pa**  
*(drunkenly)*  
Farmers need to look out for farmers.

*( Peter says nothing. Miles spies on the*

*washing from an uneven slat in the barn. )*

**Miles**  
*(to Pig)*  
He's not reliable.  
Peter, I mean.  
Crazy from hunger, probably.  
Ma says we need meat,  
that's why I tell you things, Pig.  
My secrets will be butchered with you.

*( Miles snorts, imitating the pig. Pa  
drunkenly stumbles over to the bathtub, trips  
over himself and tumbles to the ground. Ma  
doesn't so much as flinch, let alone look at  
him. )*

**Ma**  
Who will deliver the window now?

**Pa**  
*(under his breath)*  
Send Miles.

**Ma**  
We can't spare Miles!

**Pa**  
Send Peter, then.

**Ma**  
Quit kissing the dirt when you talk.

**Pa**  
*(moving his mouth away from the ground.)*  
Send Peter.

**Ma**  
Look at him.

**Pa**  
*(staring at Peter)*  
Bloody fool!

**Ma**  
We can't spare Miles.

**Pa**  
Got to entice the Inspector!

**Ma**  
You're drunk, you're soused up and down.  
Johannes!

**Pa**  
Got to entice the Inspector to our land.  
I'm not about to forfeit our struggles:  
The drought, the hail, the locusts,  
the dust, the snow.  
Struggle after struggle.

**Ma**  
We can't spare Miles...

**Pa**  
Got to entice the Inspector to our land.  
Bud Sticksel told me himself -  
he's westward bound on the train,  
the Inspector's well on his way.

**Ma**  
We can't spare Miles...

*( Pa bursts into the barn. He sings to Miles. )*

Farmers need to look out for farmers.  
We must share the window,  
Wrap it safe in burlap,  
deliver it in one piece to the Sticksels,  
then lope it back home to us!  
Got to entice the Inspector to our land.

**Miles**

*(to Pig)*

Dad's in one of his states again.

**Pa**

Angling to be a man, aren't you, Miles?

**Miles**

It's just peach fuzz yet, but –

**Pa**

*(cutting him off)*

Boy, it's you!

It's you I'm sending to our neighbors in need.

**Miles**

Yes, Pa!

**Pa**

The Sticksels don't have one shard of glass.

**Miles**

Yes, Pa!

**Pa**

But once they prove up...

**Miles**

Yes, Pa!

**Pa**

Once they have the deed in hand,  
you know just what to do...  
you take the window back!  
Farmers need to look out for farmers,  
and farmers need to look out for themselves!

Got to entice the Inspector to our land.  
But don't be seen reclaiming the window.  
Use your wits, son,  
some slight of hand.



Mr. Johannes "Pa" Zegner



Mrs. Johannes "Ma" Zegner



Peter



The Sodbuster

**Miles**

I've caught many an unassuming bullfrog!

*( Pa stumbles to the door but stops before he exits. )*

**Pa**

We're talking glass, son.

And don't you go muttering anything about where the window came from.

That's between you, me, and the livestock...

---

4

**Part III: How Pa Obtained the Glass**

*( The Zegner Daughters roll in their grave. )*

**Zegner Daughters**

Where did the window come from?

How did Pa obtain the glass?

**Miles**

*(to Pig)*

You remember how Pa obtained the glass, don't ya Pig?

**Zegner Daughters**

Where did the window come from?

**Miles**

One night he overdrank, confessed it all...

**Zegner Daughters**

How did Pa obtain the glass?

**Miles**

And capped it off with a heave in the trough.

*( The scene shifts to the Yothers' bustling homestead. Children run around, the sun shines, Ma and Pa and Peter arrive with a handful of carrots to offer as a neighborly gift. The scene is acted out by the Zegner daughters who pull clothes off the Yothers' laundry line and become the characters, exaggerating their speech. )*

**Miles and Zegner Daughters**

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Yothers and family first landowners we met in Nebraska.

**Miles**

First of our neighbors to prove up!

We arrived at their July picnic...

**Little Zegner Daughter**

*(imitating Mrs. Yothers with a squeaky voice)*

"one hour shy of serendipity..."

**Miles**

...or so said Mrs. Yothers.

**Little Zegner Daughter**

*(continuing the imitation, boastful)*

"You just missed the Inspector!"

**Miles**

She waved the title like a flag.

**Little Zegner Daughter**

"We just proved up!"

**Miles and Zegner Daughters**

The sun shined down like gold on the whaleback hump of their sodhouse.

**Miles**

Mr. Yothers bragged and bragged:

**Taller Zegner Daughter**

*(imitating Mr. Yothers)*

"The Inspector shook every one of my children's hands..."

Congratulated each on becoming landed gentry."

**Miles**

Ma was like I'd never seen her.

**Ma**

*(to Pa)*

Oh, Johannes!

They proved it to them!

To everyone back east.

Everybody who said they'd never last a year.

Everybody in Washington.

The Inspector will forward the papers to the president himself.

**Miles**

I could have stared for hours at the window,

the magical glass fusing their inner room  
with the outside.

*( The Yothers' farmstead turns desolate.  
The land that was once alive with growth  
and laughing children has become brown  
and abandoned. Ma, Peter, and the Zegner  
daughters disappear. )*

A few years later,  
rumor of the Inspector floated back around.

**Pa**  
Yoo-hoo, Yotherses!

**Miles**  
Pa rode out to the Yothers' land.

**Pa**  
It's your neighbor, Johannes Zegner!  
Mrs. Yothers,  
I hope you don't mind me pointin' out  
but your Sauceman hogs  
are masticating your dress to bits!  
And little Henry Jr.'s bowtie all caked in

manure...

*(He peers into the window, befuddled)*

And a family of jackrabbits under the table.  
Mr. and Mrs. Yothers?

*( Pa notices the title to the land in a broken  
frame leaning against the house. A beam  
of light hits the window, Pa knows what  
he must do. He finds a hammer and uses  
its claw to pry the window from the rotten  
frame of the sodhouse. He wraps it in the  
remnants of Mrs. Yothers' red dress and  
carries it home. )*

**Zegner Daughters**  
This is how Pa obtained the glass.  
Stole it from the Yothers.

**Pa**  
*(To Ma, presenting her the window.)*  
The most remarkable thing:  
Bartered for it with a man moving back to  
Texas!

**Miles**  
What a whopper!

**Ma**  
Thank you, God.  
You've blessed us with glass.  
May you bless us now with rain!

*( Pa grabs a bottle of booze guzzles it down  
in the barn as Ma washes the mud off of the  
window behind the sodhouse. )*

**Miles**  
But I recognized the glass.

**Pa**  
Funny thing about glass,  
it all looks the same.

**Miles**  
It was the Yothers' window.  
I recognized.

**Pa**  
What's the difference, Miles?

Dead is gone.  
*(as if possessed)*  
What puzzles me.  
Is he planted a new crop, Mr. Yothers did.  
Queer little trees,  
behind the wheat.  
Queer little trees.  
One grew a foot and a half,  
the rest smaller.  
Queer things they were,  
shaped like crosses.  
Thin trunks a shade of milky white,  
not a leaf in that bleached grove.  
A single branch right through the middle.  
Roped to its base by a hitching knot.  
Who plants trees in the dead of winter?  
A proven man, that's who!  
He's met every stipulation:  
A house of sod,  
the acres of grain,  
five years of harvest,  
window of glass.  
But these queer little trees,  
with queer little branches,  
queer little knobby ends.

Ivory...  
Like animal...  
Or even human...  
Bone.

( *Pa drops the bottle of moonshine, asleep.* )

---

5

#### Part IV: Strange Dreams

( *The Zegners sleep in their sodhouse. Pa snores, Peter moans in his sleep. Ma wakes up and walks out of the house, she could be sleepwalking... she slips out of the flap that shields the inside of the dwelling from the elements.* )

#### Ma

(*picking the weeds above her dead daughters' grave*)  
Somehow the weeds  
find means to grow  
long after they've soaked up the blood  
of those we've buried.  
I'll never hate the weeds

that grow like wildfire,  
choke the wheat of our windblown acres.

( *The Zegner Daughters crawl up for out of their grave and sway behind their mother.* )

I'll never hate the thistle's flowers  
that bear the faces of my daughters.

#### Ma and Zegner Daughters

(*quoting Psalm 68:9*)

Oh God, you sent a heavy rain.  
You brought life back  
to the promised land  
when it was dry.

#### Miles

(*trying to get his mother's attention*)

Ma!  
They're singing your psalm.  
Turn around, ma!  
Right behind you...

#### Ma

I'll never curse the prickle

that pierces my thumb,  
a never-ending kiss  
from the earth.

#### Ma and the Zegner Daughters

A house,  
acres of grain,  
A window of glass...  
But where is God's rain?

#### Zegner Daughters

(*continuing to quote Psalm 68:9*)

Oh God, you sent a heavy rain.  
You brought life back to  
your promised land when it was dry.

#### Miles

Ma!  
They're looking right at me.  
Waving...  
Ma!  
Remind them I'm their brother.

#### Ma

The Inspector is a rumor.

The Inspector is smoke.  
A deed as worthless as the acres without  
rain...  
I'll never move from the grave of my  
daughters.  
Oh God!

#### Zegner Daughters

A house of sod  
acres of grain.

#### Ma and Zegner Daughters

All that's required.

---

6

#### Part V: Nore at a Soft Canter

( *Nore has been saddled up. Ma, Pa and Peter stand by the mare's side, ready to see Miles off on his journey.* )

#### Pa

She's saddled up,  
and I used the better bit on the bridle!  
Don't go putting any weight near the

window.

**Miles**

I'm eager for the crystal risk of riding at a gallop.

**Pa**

No, Miles.

No risk.

*(He whispers into Miles' ear, slipping an envelope into the back pocket of his trousers.)*

Here's a little bribe.

Tell the Inspector there's more waiting at the Zegner place.

**Miles**

Okay.

Is there?

**Pa**

Remember,  
we are but the window's custodians.

*(Pa gently slaps Nore's rump.)*

Hiya!

*( Miles and Nore take off. Miles turns around and Ma and Pa look like they are dancing in the distance. Ma crumbles in tears. )*

**Miles**

*(calling back to his family)*

Don't worry, Pa!

You can trust me to be efficient!

*(then back to the task at hand)*

Nore, you've found the rhythm of a square trot,

But now it's time to gallop!

Oh, what a beautiful day for a window delivery!

Miles and Nore, proving up!

My toes are tickling,  
that's where it starts, I bet!

A tickle in your toes,

then it shoots into your legs,  
sprouts of manhood on your chest,  
then to your voicebox and beard!

Miles and Nore, proving up!

Give me a task for a proven fellow.

Give me a window three times bigger.

Soon I'll have my own sodhouse,

my own acres!

Miles and Nore, Proving Up!

*( the environment slowly becomes more hostile )*

The yellow stitching of the sky goes dark,  
the timber belt of cottonwoods  
has never seemed so tall!

O, what a beautiful day for a window delivery...

*( Nore's ears fold back. A droplet of rain falls, Miles puts out his hand and catches a drop in his hand. )*

Rain!

*( Miles opens his mouth and tries to catch the water in his mouth as sheets of water start pummeling down. )*

I've dreamt for two full years  
of water flowing down glass.

Oh, God, I want to see that, Nore!

*( dismounting Nore, Miles unwraps the window )*

Oh God, you sent a heavy rain!

*( drops of water splash against the glass )*

When I clench my eyes shut,  
I can see Ma and Pa dancing for joy!

Nore, this is a green joy I feel...

A surging green joy!

*( A shape shifts in the distance. Miles wonders if his eyes are playing tricks, but he is certain he has seen a human figure, obscured by rainwater on the glass. The figure walks, nearly floats, in a clockwise*

*fashion, circling Miles. Miles takes a beat then walks against the rotation of the figure, then wraps the window back up. He gets back into the saddle atop Nore, and feels a chill, a snowflake falls. )*

Hello? Hello?

*( The Zegner Daughters reveal themselves, following Miles. )*

### **Zegner Daughters**

The Inspector is a rumor.

### **Miles**

Well I'll be.

Can a blizzard strike this early?

In late October?

### **Zegner Daughters**

The Inspector is smoke.

*( Miles and Nore ride hard and fast through the blizzard. The wind and snow attack. Miles drops the reins and wraps his hands*

*around Nore's neck. Nore whinnies and bucks Miles off of her back. The Zegner Daughters flank Miles. )*

His eyelids cut by a choke-cherry branch.

His sockets filled with blood.

Miles got the scar!

### **Miles**

Nore, I love you the most,

and you've thrown me off...

Now I've got the makings of a scar!

### **Zegner Daughters**

Snow has eaten his tracks.

### **Miles**

Now I understand!

This is a dream,

a nightmare!

### **Zegner Daughters**

Like he no longer exists.

*( Nore runs off. )*



**Miles**

Nore!

**Zegner Daughters**

The Inspector is a rumor.  
The Inspector is a smoke.  
Worthless as the acres...

**Miles**

Quick, think of a hymn, a bible verse.  
"Oh God, you sent a heavy rain..."

The clock of my body breaks down.  
The world is pitch black.

*( A blackout. )*

\_\_\_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_\_\_

**Part VI: Sodbuster**

*( Miles comes to. The blizzard has given way to a mist that pervades the landscape. A black-lipped Sodbuster, of willowy frame and gaunt, blackened face, sits in the distance wearing a hat that covers his eyes.*

*Miles and the Sodbuster stand at the same time and call out to each other... )*

**Miles and Sodbuster**

Inspector?

*( They both hesitantly move towards each other. )*

**Miles**

I guess we are both mistaken, sir.  
You did not see a horse come through here, sir?

**Sodbuster**

No horses.  
No inspectors on horseback.  
No bats hanging from inspectors' noses.

**Miles**

Are you all right, sir?  
Are you lost, too?

**Sodbuster**

Green me that wheel!

**Miles**

Pardon?

**Sodbuster**

Grease me that doe.

**Miles**

I am not understanding you.

**Sodbuster**

Ground me that windmill.

**Miles**

Sir!

**Sodbuster**

The Inspector will be coming very soon.  
The Inspector will be coming soon.

**Zegner daughters**

The Inspector is a rumor.

**Miles**

You're waiting on the Inspector, too.

You got a homestead?  
A family?  
Here for five years, then?

**Sodbuster**

Longer.  
Long enough to lose track of the days.  
Suns,  
moons,  
droughts,  
famines,  
no sense to go counting tragedies.  
The west is a land of infinite beginnings.

**Miles**

Sir?

**Sodbuster**

The west is a land of infinite beginnings.  
Don't you agree, Miles Zegner?  
A family...  
I may have.  
I did have.  
Parents buried back east.  
A wife, but she wasn't worth much.

So impatient.  
She lost faith.  
Lost her will to prosper.  
Had to make a break.  
Make a fresh start.  
Drove her off...  
Or plowed her under.  
Kids,  
had them.  
Sicklings.  
Weak ones.  
Sons, daughters.  
None lasted.  
They couldn't take it.  
Wasted away.  
They were weak.

### **Sodbuster and Zegner Daughters**

The west is a land of infinite beginnings.  
Isn't that right, Miles Zegner?  
Pick up.  
Start again.  
File a preempt.  
Stake a new claim.  
I've made a stake to my claim.

Fulfilled each of the Act's stipulations.  
Each one.  
Miles Zegner.  
Each one but glass.

I'm in real need, Miles.  
I've got all other proof,  
all but the final stipulation:  
Glass.

### **Miles**

Listen, sir!  
I have a Window!  
Happy to loan it to you.  
So you can prove up.

### **Sodbuster**

You'd do that for me, Miles?

### **Miles**

I am but the window's custodian.  
Wait - how do you know my name?

*( The Sodbuster's eyes brighten fervidly. They walk together to his sod dugout. )*

### **Sodbuster**

Would you like to see the acres I've cultivated, Miles?

### **Miles**

What crops might those be, sir?  
Corn? Wheat? Milo? Hay? Soy? Lucerne?  
Sorghum? Sugar beets? Potatoes?

### **Sodbuster**

*(revealing bones, pulled from his bag)*

Come take a look.  
Quite a harvest!  
My little trees,  
grown without a drop of water.  
The Inspector will come  
and I'll own every acre.  
Now, if you'll kindly help me put the window  
in.

*( The Sodbuster just smiles. They place the window into the empty space perfectly fitted for the glass. )*

### **Miles**

Does a window make a home?  
Does a deed make the land yours?  
Once when I was nearly sleeping,  
a fleecy tarantula crawled across my mouth.  
Peter laughed so hard,  
got me laughing too.

Pa spent three months  
with repurposed nails  
building a table he painted lake blue.  
Ma pieced a quilt for both her daughters,  
did so in the pitch-dark.

Does a window make a home?  
Does a deed make the land yours?  
Who owns the land?  
What makes a home?

Our sod house, even windowless, is a home.  
This is a tomb.

Who owns the land?  
What makes a home?

( *The Sodbuster seals up the window.* )

**Sodbuster**

When the Inspector comes and sees my window...

( *Miles' heart sinks.* )

**Miles**

Give it back!

**Sodbuster**

It's too late for that, Miles.

**Miles**

I have a bribe!  
Money!  
Give me the glass,  
take the money.  
I'll be on my way!

**Sodbuster**

The window isn't yours.  
You stole it.

**Miles**

You're acquainted with the Yotherses?

**Sodbuster**

Only at the end.

**Miles**

I didn't steal the window.

**Sodbuster**

But your father did.

**Miles**

How do you know that?

**Sodbuster**

When the Inspector comes and sees my window...!

( *Miles lunges at the Sodbuster, grabbing his knife. Miles stabs between the Sodbuster's shoulder blades, but he won't die. The Sodbuster turns, holding the pane of glass between them. The Zegner Daughters laugh.* )

I thought you said you weren't a thief, Miles.  
That's the thing about windows, Miles...  
Sometimes we see things we don't want to see.  
This is the final strangeness...  
Have you proven up, Miles?  
Have you proven up?

8

**Epilogue**

( *Ma watches from the empty window frame.* )

**Ma**

Every stipulation has been met:  
The house of sod,  
acres of grain,  
Five years...  
The window,  
and soon the deed,  
signed by the Inspector's hand.

( *Ma spots Miles in the distance. Peter gets out of the tub and walks to the door, while Ma calls for Pa who is passed out in the pigpen.* )  
Oh God,  
you heard my prayer!

The promise has been kept.  
Uncle Sam has given us a farm!  
Johannes, we've proved it to them,  
everyone back east.  
Everyone will know we found the westward dream.  
Oh, God,  
you brought life back to the promised land.  
Miles is home.  
Miles has come home.

( *The shadow of the Sodbuster quickly overtakes their young son. The Sodbuster holds up window, a projection of the happy Yothers family is seen on the glass. Ma and Pa watch as Miles descends into the grave with the Zegner Daughters, curling up in the middle.* )

Oh, God!  
You are a rumor.  
God, you are smoke.  
As worthless as the acres without rain.

## Ma, Pa, Zegner Daughters and Sodbuster

A house of sod.  
Acres of grain.  
Five years.  
A window of glass.

## Pa and Sodbuster

All that's required...

## Pa

All that's required.

( Pa exits, carrying the glass. )

The libretto of *Proving Up* contains an excerpt of lyrics from *Uncle Sam's Farm*, a 19th-century song by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr.

## Also available on PENTATONE



PTC 5186 697

## Acknowledgments

### PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producer **Missy Mazzoli** | Producer **Jesse Lewis** | Recording engineer **Shauna Barravecchio**  
Assistant engineer **Tom Ware** | Editing **Shauna Barravecchio & Brett Leonard** | Mixing **Jesse Lewis**  
Mastering **Kyle Pyke & Jesse Lewis**

Cover design **James Darrah with Yuki Izumihara** | Performance photography **James Daniel**  
Design **Marjolein Coenrady** | Product management **Kasper van Kooten**

*This album was recorded at Ware House Productions, Omaha, Nebraska, April 17, 18, 20, 2018.*

### CREATIVE TEAM STAGE PERFORMANCES

Director **James Darrah** | Scenic designer **Adam Rigg** | Costume designer **Chrisi Karvonides-Dushenko** | Lighting designer **Pablo Santiago** | Wig and Makeup designer **Ronell Oliveri**

Publisher credit: © 2018 G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)

The recording of *Proving Up* was made possible with support from Opera Omaha through a grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation.



### PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Simon M. Eder**  
A&R Manager **Kate Rockett** | Product Manager **Kasper van Kooten**  
Head of Marketing, PR & Sales **Silvia Pietrosanti**



Sit back and enjoy