

ANIMATING OPERA

A Five-Year Plan of Themes and Series



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Preface



TERRENCE MCCARTY

The position of General Director of San Francisco Opera marks a homecoming for me from Europe to America – a return to memories and first experiences in the realm of opera. Today, that path of development seems like a bridge between times, places, styles and experiences. I would like to invite everyone who comes to San Francisco Opera on a new voyage of discovery into the world of opera. Season repertoire and casting will be determined in close collaboration with San Francisco Opera Music Director Donald Runnicles. Our foremost goal is to show audiences that opera is a total work of art— one in which music and theater are indivisible. So, we thought it would be useful to describe some of our intentions and ideas for the next five years.

Programmatic Ideas



SALVADOR DALÍ

The programming choices—which operas will be presented when—will be crucial for our planning. It is important to provide guidelines for a journey of discovery by the public through opera history. No opera exists in a vacuum; each incorporates existing developments while at the same time opening up new perspectives and pointing to new potential. We hope that it will be possible to illuminate these developments and potential by means of a carefully designed program over several years that looks at each opera presented not only on its own terms, but also as it fits into a wider context.

A network of related works will be created by incorporating themes into multi-year series. The themes will be based on different sources. They may emphasize opera from a certain period, such as the second half of the 20th century, or the works of a specific composer or subject matter: for example opera with the theme of Utopia in the Age of Enlightenment can intersect with the themes in *Metamorphosis: From Fairy Tales to Nightmares*. Another subject could be towering figures living on their own terms outside the confines of society. These are just a few of many possible series.

These themes would offer points of orientation to the public without, being overly didactic or pedagogical. That which is familiar and proven may appear in a new light. That which is new and unfamiliar receives a deliberate link to tradition. The aim is to let the public explore for themselves, through a network of suggestions and various combinations, a mixture of historical, emotional and cultural ideas. This is not an intellectual exercise, but a way of engaging the audience's curiosity and imagination in order to encourage them in developing their own ideas and associations on their voyage of discovery. Auxiliary programming in conjunction with other institutions in the Bay Area, will add additional input for this journey. Film series, readings, lecture series, art exhibitions and workshops with young composers will augment the public's opportunity to delve into the various themes. Our hope is that audiences understand the offerings of San Francisco Opera as an opportunity to address questions about their own existence and perceive opera as a part of their own personal reality.

Seminal Works of Modern Times

- 2002/03 *Saint Francis of Assisi*, Olivier Messiaen
- 2003/04 *The Mother of Us All*, Virgil Thomson
- 2004/05 A work by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, György Ligeti,
Luigi Nono, or Wolfgang Rihm

Today's operas, loosely defined, are the ideal bridge between yesterday and tomorrow. I deliberately call these operas Seminal Works of Modern Times. This series will provide a guideline in some way to operatic development in the late 20th century. The engagement with modernism begins during the 2002/03 Season with the American stage premiere of Olivier Messiaen's *Saint Francis of Assisi*, in a production by **Nicolas Brieger** with scenic design by **Hans-Dieter Schaal**. The dimensions of Messiaen's work offer not only a great theatrical challenge, but an ecstatic declaration of faith. It is opera in the original sense: the birth of a new humanity from the spirit of music. I am certain that this piece belongs among the chief legacies of the 20th century. Therefore, despite the great obstacles involved in producing this mammoth work, we want to create a musically and visually exemplary presentation of it at San Francisco Opera.

The 2003/04 Season will include Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*, an opera with a charming yet trenchant libretto by Gertrude Stein about women's emancipation. This piece numbers among the most significant American works. San Francisco Opera will present **Christopher Alden**'s outstanding production of this opera.

An opera by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, György Ligeti, Luigi Nono or Wolfgang Rihm will follow during the 2004/05 Season. These composers greatly influenced opera during the second half of the 20th century through their aesthetic and dramaturgical styles, by pushing beyond the existing frontiers of the art form. Their creations contribute decisively to an understanding of opera as art of our time. It is important for audiences to have the opportunity to become acquainted with the messages and styles of those composers.

The Faust Project

2002/03 *La Damnation de Faust*, Hector Berlioz

2003/04 *Doktor Faust*, Ferruccio Busoni

FOLLOWING SEASONS

Faust, Charles Gounod; *Mefistofele*, Arrigo Boito

A new commission subtitled *An American Faust*

The second series, extended over several seasons, will be devoted to a reflection on the Faust legend. An important role is played in all cultures by the figure who strives for the divine but is consumed by human desire. No other character embodies this passion for crossing borders and searching for meaning as unconditionally as Faust. Composers such as Hector Berlioz, Ferruccio Busoni and Arrigo Boito, among others, have written pieces on this topic that set the standard. Works from the turning point between two periods, the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, determined the development of opera between traditional and modern. From this perspective, the series Seminal Works of Modern Times and The Faust Project are closely intertwined. Connecting threads like these constitute for me one of the added attractions of presenting thematic series. The series will open in the Summer of 2003 with *La Damnation de Faust* by Hector Berlioz, in a production by **Thomas Langhoff** and designs by **Jürgen Rose**. I am looking forward over the next few years to introducing San Francisco audiences to groundbreaking theatrical works from Europe and America underscoring how contemporary and topical opera can be.

The Faust Project will continue in 2003/04 with a new production of Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*. **Jossi Wieler** will direct with designs by **Anna Viebrock**. They collaborated on Georg Friedrich Händel's *Alcina*, a production which will be presented in San Francisco in the Fall of 2002. This engagement is an example of my intention to offer certain creative teams an artistic home in San Francisco for extended periods. Following seasons will see performances of *Faust* by Charles Gounod and *Mefistofele* by Arrigo Boito. Like the series Seminal Works of Modern Times, The Faust Project is also marked by a shift in time and style. Both projects will converge in a utopian plan: a commission for a new opera with the subtitle *An American Faust* with the objective of answering the question, "What does the myth of the questing Faust have to do with present day American culture?"

Composer Portrait: Janàček/Berlioz

2002/03 *Katya Kabanova*, Leoš Janàček; *La Damnation de Faust*, Hector Berlioz

2003/04 *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Leoš Janàček

2004/05 *The Trojans*, Hector Berlioz (complete version)

FOLLOWING SEASONS *The Makropulos Case*, Janàček; *From the House of the Dead*, Janàček; *Benvenuto Cellini*, Berlioz; *Béatrice et Bénédict*, Berlioz

Two composers whose works stylistically shaped the development of opera in our lifetime will play a central role in the programming over the course of several seasons. Leoš Janàček and Hector Berlioz are each, in their own way, proponents of the fascinating idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”). We will offer audiences the opportunity to follow the creations of these composers over an extended period of time. In his day, Hector Berlioz was considered an outsider as a dramatist. But he may have been one of the first who worked relentlessly on the idea of “total theater.” In addition, his discontinuity and intellectual leaps, unorthodox juxtaposition of orchestral colors, revolutionary changes in time and space, and scenic movement all make him a prophet of the musically disjunctive and dramatically powerful operatic writing of the 20th century.

Janàček was remarkable for his rich, symphonic scoring and the extraordinary focus he brought to the interrelationship of language and music. He translated grand human drama, reminiscent of ancient tragedies, into intimate settings. I believe this is the reason that his works, which became successful only late in his lifetime, remain so vibrant and topical. The 2002/03 Season will open the Composer Portrait: Janàček/Berlioz series with a new production of Janàček’s *Katya Kabanova*, a drama about an unconditionally loving woman driven to death by her fellow men. **Johannes Schaaf** will direct, with set design by **Erich Wonder**.

In the Fall of 2003, **Schaaf** will also direct Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, another opera about a strong female figure, another exemplary work by an Eastern European composer. In subsequent seasons, Janàček’s last great operas will become permanent fixtures of San Francisco Opera’s repertory: *The Cunning Little Vixen* (2003/04), *The Makropulos Case* and *From the House of the Dead*. In addition to *Benvenuto Cellini* and *Béatrice et Bénédict*, planned for later seasons, Berlioz’s greatest music drama will appear in the Spring of 2005 in its entirety—*The Trojans*, already heralded as “The French Ring” during the composer’s lifetime. The production will be directed by **Richard Jones**, whose modernized interpretation of *Hänsel und Gretel* will appear in 2002/03.

Women Outside of Society: Laws Unto Themselves

- 2002/03 *Turandot*, Giacomo Puccini; *Katya Kabanova*,
Leoš Janáček; *Alcina*, Georg Friedrich Händel;
Madama Butterfly, Puccini
- 2003/04 *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Dmitri Shostakovich
- 2004/05 *Rodelinda*, Händel; *Salome*, Richard Strauss

This series will focus on unique female characters and their extraordinary fates. It highlights the rebellion, resistance and passions of heroines who defy societal norms, break taboos and are, in some cases, driven out of the community in which they live or withdraw themselves from all contact with society: *Turandot*, *Katya Kabanova*, *Alcina* and *Madama Butterfly*. It is not coincidental that the titles of these operas reflect the names of their heroines. The works span from Baroque to Modern, offering personality studies in circumstances ranging from grim realism to exotic kingdoms. In spite of the diversity of these settings and characters, these are portraits which have defined our view of modern women in opera. All four struggle to shape their own destiny and the degree and way in which they fail to determine their own life turn these four fates into tales of either total destruction or redemption. Although the four individuals portrayed are utterly different, there are searing moments of recognition and identification with their states of being for modern viewers (both women and men).

In the following seasons, this Series will continue with *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* by Dmitri Shostakovich (2003/04) and *Salome* by Richard Strauss (2004/05). Additionally, in 2004/05 San Francisco Opera will present Georg Friedrich Händel's *Rodelinda*, an opera in which Händel anticipates the dramatic conflict in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. *Rodelinda* is a piece that marks the transition from Baroque Opera to the operas of the Era of the Enlightenment.

Metamorphosis: From Fairy Tales to Nightmares

- 2002/03** *Hänsel und Gretel*, Engelbert Humperdinck;
La Cenerentola, Gioachino Rossini
- 2003/04** *The Golden Cockerel*, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov;
The Cunning Little Vixen, Leoš Janáček;
Der Freischütz, Carl Maria von Weber

Ever since opera was invented, a central role has been played by romantic magic and fairy tales, which often transform themselves into nightmares. These ideas are expressions of age-old myths and collective desires. At San Francisco Opera, a series will be devoted to these magical pieces and the phenomenon of the nightmare, beginning in 2002/03 with Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* and Gioachino Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. The first work, as described by the composer, is a "piece from children's life" that enables adults also to work through their anxieties and dreams. *La Cenerentola* provides the connection between magic opera and ideas of the Enlightenment. Is it possible that in a person's life "goodness triumphs," as the subtitle of this musical comedy states?

The 2003/04 Season will open with a magical Russian fairy-tale opera, *The Golden Cockerel*, by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, followed by Janáček's erotic fairy-tale opera, *The Cunning Little Vixen*. The same season includes Achim Freyer's production of Carl Maria von Weber's Romantic opera *Der Freischütz*. This piece, unfortunately rarely performed in America, creates an ideal nexus in the network of programs. *Der Freischütz* is an opera of spirits and demons, and at the same time, a piece in which the ideas of Enlightenment turn into a nightmare.

Utopia in the Age of Enlightenment

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| 2002/03 | <i>The Abduction from the Seraglio</i> , Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart |
| 2003/04 | <i>Fidelio</i> , Ludwig van Beethoven; <i>Der Freischütz</i> , Carl Maria von Weber |
| 2004/05 | <i>Così fan tutte</i> , Mozart |

At the center of the four-hundred-year history of opera stands Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his works, which form an incomparable cosmos, not only musically but socially and dramatically as well. Mozart provided the culmination of a theater that arose from the spirit of Enlightenment during the era of great revolutions at the end of the 18th century. A special cycle at San Francisco Opera will focus on significant works from the Enlightenment, a period that dealt with great ideals, disappointed hopes and emotional experiments. These works, ideas and figures have lost nothing of their topicality. The test of fidelity in Mozart's early breakthrough work, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Beethoven's revolutionary and liberating opera *Fidelio*, and Weber's Romantic opera *Der Freischütz* will appear in the 2002/03 and 2003/04 Seasons. The next highpoint of the series will be a new production in the Fall of 2004 of Mozart's erotic experiment *Così fan tutte*, directed by **Nicolas Brieger**. Mozart points out the ambiguity of the Enlightenment in this supposed comedy of life. How can a mistaken belief in the constancy of their emotions help people if, in the end, they can stand broken before the shards of their illusions?

Outsiders or Pioneers?: The Nature of the Human Condition

2004/05

Billy Budd, Benjamin Britten; *Macbeth*, Giuseppe Verdi;
The Flying Dutchman, Richard Wagner

As complement to, but also mirror of, the series *Women Outside of Society: Laws Unto Themselves*, this series will illuminate the archetypal male hero in the history of opera: *Macbeth* by Giuseppe Verdi, *Billy Budd* by Benjamin Britten, and *The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner in a production by **Nikolaus Lehnhoff**. Each character is cursed in a different manner and cast out from society. The Dutchman is condemned to eternal wandering because unconditional, pure love cannot be experienced in the real world. Macbeth's obsession with obtaining power at any cost does not result in his achieving supreme control over a society, but in his own destruction. Billy Budd, an "idiot savant," is too guileless to see through society's base nature. As a result of his innocence, he falls prey to man's cruelest behavior. All three individuals are prototypes of dramatic models to be found throughout literature.

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