

Spring 2020

## Time's Up: How Opera Is Facing Its Own Me Too Reckoning

Craig Price

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TIME'S UP: HOW OPERA IS FACING ITS OWN ME TOO RECKONING

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Music Arts in

Music Performance

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

Opera as an artform has a very misogynistic history. Many of the most beloved works in the standard repertory involve female characters as victims of violence, or an abuse of power by male characters. These works have recently been cast in a different light, in part due to a greater cultural awareness inspired by the "Me Too" movement. This study was executed to explore productions of standard repertory operas around the world, and how they have been handled in light of current culture. The study examines popularly performed operas *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Rigoletto*. The study also explores contemporary works as well as what can be done to create a more conscious future for the artform. The study collects what is being done to address these issues and provides a first of its kind digest that can give insight to the producers about how their colleagues are grappling with these difficult choices. The study also serves to start a conversation about how opera may strive for a more diverse and inclusive future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of music history, the performance of particular operas has often been subject to the fashions of the day. It was not until the advent of recording technology that operas truly began to take on a history of performance that led to the canonization of certain works into a core repertoire. Over time certain works have come to dominate the seasons of opera companies around the world. A look at the most performed operas around the world over the last ten seasons reveal a steady devotion to the operas of composers such as Verdi, Mozart, Puccini, and Bizet.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, however, some of these standard works have been cast in a different light due to emerging social movements. The "Me Too" movement was founded in 2006 by social activist Tarana Burke as a grassroots movement on MySpace to support survivors of sexual violence and assault. Burke began the movement "to help survivors of

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<sup>1</sup> *Operabase.Com.*

sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing.” It was designed to drive resources “for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities.”<sup>2</sup> It later rose to prominence on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter after a social media hashtag was started by actress Alyssa Milano in 2017. Her October 15<sup>th</sup> tweet which said, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet,” started a larger set of movements that grew out of the original grassroots movement and began to pervade contemporary culture.<sup>3</sup> It began a dialogue that “has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to destigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of a sexual violence worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> Sharing the hashtag along with personal stories became a way for women across the cultural landscape to express how they have been

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<sup>2</sup> “About- Me Too Movement.”

<sup>3</sup> Milano, “Alyssa Milano on Twitter.”

<sup>4</sup> “About- Me Too Movement.”

impacted, particularly in the workplace, by abuses of power, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

High profile cases such as the abuse scandal over acts committed by prominent Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein brought this movement to the fore of the entertainment industry. This led to the formation of the related "Time's Up" movement. The movement "insists upon a world where everyone is safe and respected at work. A world where women have an equal shot at success and security. A world where no one lives in fear of sexual harassment or assault."<sup>5</sup> "Time's Up" and the "Me Too" movement were highlighted prominently at the 2018 Golden Globe Awards, most evidently in a speech given by actress and media icon Oprah Winfrey in her acceptance speech as the winner of the Cecil B. DeMille award for lifetime achievement. As a woman of color, a victim of sexual abuse, and one of the most prominent voices in entertainment, Oprah was able to powerfully lend her voice to these movements. In her speech, Oprah said, "speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. And I'm especially proud and inspired by all the women who have felt strong enough and

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<sup>5</sup> "About- TIME'S UP Foundation."



empowered enough to speak up and share their personal stories." She goes on to point out that though the entertainment industry had become a big part of this story, "It's one that transcends any culture, geography, race, religion, politics, or workplace." Oprah ended her speech with a powerful invocation saying:

I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women, many of whom are right here in this room tonight, and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say 'Me too' again.<sup>6</sup>

By using this platform in such a powerful way, Oprah insured these movements could no longer be ignored.

The Royal Opera House in London announced at the end of 2018 that it would begin to examine its repertory opera productions in light of the "Me Too" movement.<sup>7</sup> A January 2019 article on the popular website Slate asked, "Can Mozart Survive #MeToo?" Productions designed for current contexts are no longer merely considerations being made by

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<sup>6</sup> Friedman, "Here's the Full Transcript of Oprah's Inspirational Golden Globes Speech."

<sup>7</sup> Riley, "Royal Opera Vows to Re-Think 'sexist Classics' Where Women Are Mutilated, Raped or Married off after Facing Criticism about Onstage Misogyny in Wake of MeToo Movement."

edgy upstart opera companies trying to have a unique voice, but by some of most prominent opera producing organizations in the world. Producers, directors, performers, and opera lovers are beginning to examine some of their most cherished works in light of the "Me Too" movement and grapple head on with issues of power, sexuality, and violence in these works. Can operatic works that now have a long legacy of performance and are staples in the repertoire continue to be loved in spite of their problematic story lines and characters?

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the "Me Too" movement on productions and performances of several standard works. Works to be included are Mozart's *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Verdi's *Rigoletto*. These operas all provide illustrations of what the "Me Too" movement is all about, whether it be the imbalance of power between Count Almaviva and his servant's betrothed Susanna whom the Count seeks to exploit in *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, or the sexual assault committed by Don Giovanni in Mozart's opera by the same name. Bizet's *Carmen* is a case study for "Me Too" where Carmen ultimately is tragically killed by her lover Don

José due to his inability to accept that she no longer loves him. In *Rigoletto*, the Duke uses his position of power over his hunch-backed court jester Rigoletto as a means to seduce Rigoletto's beautiful daughter Gilda. The study will also look to the future, and consider what efforts are being made to foster new works and new productions that are more inclusive and socially aware. The writer is interested to determine if the "Me Too" movement is a factor that is considered by producers when planning a season's repertoire, how characters and works are being staged differently to reflect a greater consciousness of the movement by artists and the audience, and the types of programming offered outside of the performance such as pre-performance lectures, panels, or talk-backs that may address these issues.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how the "Me Too" movement's impact is felt across the operatic world. Are producers feeling pressured by the social impact when doing their artistic planning? The study will collect what is being done to address these issues and will provide a first of its kind digest that can give insight to the producers about how their colleagues

are grappling with these difficult choices. It is hoped that the study will serve a greater conversation on how to best present these works to be sensitive to audiences and to ensure a continued legacy of performance of these celebrated works.

### **Review of Related Literature:**

#### **Overview**

This review of related literature examines various examples of research and thought surrounding opera, feminist criticism in music, and the "Me Too" movement. While the questions being asked by this study in terms of what opera companies are doing in the face of the "Me Too" movement are new, scholarship in recent decades has been dedicated to the unwrapping of feminist thought in relation to music and opera. First, this review examines literature written about the "Me Too" movement specifically. Second, the review considers groundbreaking works in feminist criticism and musicology. Third, the review will consider additional analysis on the operas of interest themselves within the confines of this study.

## Me Too

Though the purpose of this work is to highlight some canonical operatic works that have been called into question, the opera world itself has been affected over the last year with its own "Me Too" off-stage scandals, including allegations of harassment and assault by operatic stars Placido Domingo and Vittorio Grigolo.<sup>8</sup> These high-profile cases have only served to raise the importance of these questions in this sector of the entertainment landscape. Most of the writing on these movements can be found in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. However, Laurie Collier Hillstrom's 2019 book *The #MeToo Movement (21<sup>st</sup> Century Turning Points)*<sup>9</sup> provides a comprehensive background on events that led to the movement, as well as critical moments since the movement began in earnest. Hillstrom's book provides key insights to this study in terms of a greater understanding of the movement and the cultural impact of "Me Too." Hillstrom delves into issues in misogyny and power imbalances and the effects and impacts that these issues have on the world in

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<sup>8</sup> Cooper, "Vittorio Grigolo, Star Tenor, Fired for 'Inappropriate' Behavior."

<sup>9</sup> Hillstrom, *The #MeToo Movement*.

which we live. She explores the history of "a patriarchal system of male dominance and female subordination in politics, business, and popular culture."<sup>10</sup> She also raises the debate over fine art works from the past. Hillstrom points out that some critics have argued "that museums should remove questionable works from their collections," while pointing out that other critics have "asserted that museums should continue to display the works but provide context in the form of wall text or discussion programs."<sup>11</sup> Hillstrom's book provides significant context for the movement that will aid in the understanding of its manifestation in opera performance and programming.

As previously mentioned, due to the current nature, broad cultural impact, and awareness of the "Me Too" movement, many unique resources such as podcasts, blogs, magazines, and current periodicals will be of significant relevance. Of particular interest is Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad's 2018 article from the journal *Sexualities* entitled "The Shifting terrain of sex and power: From the

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<sup>10</sup> Hillstrom, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Hillstrom, 74.

'sexualization of culture' to #MeToo."<sup>12</sup> The authors write to reframe the periodical which has renewed its purpose in light of the movement. This article in particular seeks to examine what sexuality means in contemporary contexts and highlights a number of studies that have been done to support an expanding understanding of modern-day sexuality. The article also works to advance the narrative that the #MeToo movement should be considered more from the understanding of power as opposed to merely making it about sex. This consideration of power in terms of sexual interaction is a vital one when examining the plots of the operas in this study.

### **Feminist Criticism**

This study would not be possible without the groundbreaking writing and thoughts of Susan McClary. McClary is widely considered an early pioneer of feminist musicology. Her groundbreaking work *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*<sup>13</sup> is cited as the basis for a great deal of the research that has been considered in this review. Written in 1991, it was one of the first works of

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<sup>12</sup> Gill and Orgad, "The Shifting Terrain of Sex and Power."

<sup>13</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

its kind, as music had never been thought of through the constructs of gender theory, despite years of emerging scholarship of female criticism in many other fields. McClary's work examines the role of gender in music across the historical spectrum, from the dramatic music of Monteverdi, to the music of 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Laurie Anderson, and the music of popular provocateur Madonna. Through her book she lays the groundwork upon which further scholarship (including her own) will result. One of these texts is her in-depth look at the opera *Carmen* entitled *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, which she wrote a year later in 1992, and provided crucial thought that informed this document. She has also been cited as the inspiration for other works including Sam Abel's *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* which also was of great importance to this document.

Another work that provides a great deal of compelling thought that aids this study is Catherine Clément's 1988 book *OPERA, or the Undoing of Women*.<sup>14</sup> The credibility of this book is quickly established with a foreword written by Susan McClary. Whereas McClary examined music and gender

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<sup>14</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*.



across time and genre in her aforementioned work, Clément has focused specifically on gender and sexuality in opera. McClary lauds Clément in the foreword for a scrutiny that “includes even herself” by “admitting the influence opera has had on her life” and her own “desire to transmit to her son some sense of opera that does not passively accept the stories it articulates.” What is so powerful about Clément’s writing is the deeply personal way in which she describes both attending the opera and the various works themselves. Whether it is the feeling of her “heart beating” as the curtain rises or the sense of “mourning” she describes at evenings end, it is clear that Clément has a passion for these stories.<sup>15</sup> McClary also points out that Clément’s work not only examines that material itself but the “constructions that reveal a great deal about the values of the people who produce, preserve, and transmit them.”<sup>16</sup> Though Clément wrote this work in 1988, it presents a compelling view when considering “Me Too” and the future of opera. Pointing out the lack of female producers and conductors, Clément writes, “Not many women have access to the great masculine scheme surrounding this

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<sup>15</sup> Clément, 173.

<sup>16</sup> Clément, xi.

spectacle thought up to adore, and also to kill, the feminine character.”<sup>17</sup>

Clément raises a point that is still a major consideration today. One of the issues cited by The Royal Opera House included the lack of women on the creative teams. If women are not given a voice in this process, producers are likely to continue to produce the same problematic operas in the same problematic ways because the people producing them are not likely to have significantly different experiences from the people who wrote the operas.

#### **Additional Writings on Opera**

Numerous other works more broadly provide thought and criticism of interest relating to the role of gender in opera. These works paint the picture that many of the issues facing female characters in popular opera plots due to their gender are also inextricably linked to issues such as race, class, and the politics of the period. In their 1996 book entitled *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, Linda and Michael Hutcheon point out that “race and gender appear not to be easily separated from sexuality in the European

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<sup>17</sup> Clément, 5-6.

imagination"<sup>18</sup> Where the writings in the previous section deal more directly with feminist criticism of the works, Hutcheon and Hutcheon are concerned with presenting a more historical narrative of how the plots of these operas reflect the societies in which the operas were written to portray. A great example of this is how they link the association of Carmen with smoking and tobacco to the history of representing such a woman "as desirable yet possibly dangerous." A tradition the authors note, "was as strong in France as anywhere else."<sup>19</sup>

Another work that appeared in 1996 and is written in much the same manner as the Hutcheons' book is Sam Abel's work *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance*.<sup>20</sup> Abel makes the case for his book in pointing out "what I miss in opera criticism...is theater" saying that "few works offered a serious analysis of opera's theatricality."<sup>21</sup> In the course of his book Abel dives into a variety of works across the operatic canon exploring their varying expressions of desire, politics, sex, and

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<sup>18</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera*, 191.

<sup>19</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 179.

<sup>20</sup> Abel, *Opera in the Flesh*.

<sup>21</sup> Abel, 4.

power. Through his charming stories and pointed analysis he offers an entertaining and enlightening narrative of the relationship of sexuality and opera. Abel finds pleasure in the over-the-top sexual nature found in many operas. He relishes operas "illicit sexuality" because it gives him a "taste of a sexual experience that I would never dream of enacting."<sup>22</sup> While he finds excitement in the overt sexuality of many works, he also sympathizes with the plight of female characters. Abel points out that despite the fact that there are more male characters than female characters in leading roles, male characters "are allowed an individual personality; women become types." This is a reductive practice that he points out only seems to affect the female characters.<sup>23</sup>

While many works focus on the politics and identities associated with gender, more recent writings delve into issues of race in opera. Despite the fact that race is not explicitly the subject of this study, many of the authors mentioned in this review have pointed out that the treatment of these women and issues surrounding their race are inseparable. This is a concept that legal scholar and

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<sup>22</sup> Abel, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Abel, 38.

theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw named "intersectionality" in 1989. Intersectionality is a term used "to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics 'intersect' with one another and overlap."<sup>24</sup> This overlap, especially as it pertains to the character Carmen make the consideration of race-related scholarship relevant to this work.

One of the preeminent authors of recent scholarship on race-related matters is Naomi André. André has been involved in two books that are pertinent to this work. The first being a 2012 collection of essays for which she served as an editor entitled *Blackness In Opera*.<sup>25</sup> André and her fellow editors write that the election of the first black president served as an inspiration, while at the same time an emerging anti-immigrant sentiment compelled them to take on the task of putting this collection together, realizing that as Americans "we belong to a society inextricably bound to and shaped by racial politics and culture" and that we bear responsibility to "approach the

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<sup>24</sup> Coaston, "The Intersectionality Wars."

<sup>25</sup> André, *Blackness in Opera*.

topic in a thoughtful and considered manner."<sup>26</sup> Of particular interest in relation to this study is an included essay "The Politics of Color in Oscar Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones*" by Melinda Boyd. Boyd examines the origins of Hammerstein's work, and how the character representations from both the Mérimée novella and Bizet's opera are manifested in Hammerstein's adaptation. Boyd also compares and contrasts the stage production of *Carmen Jones* with its film version. This is important to this work as consideration of previous updates and adaptations can inform future readings of canon works, while also providing key insight and analysis into some of the problematic aspects of the original work and source material.

André has also written a 2018 book entitled *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, which addresses many of the same issues in the previously mentioned volume. The difference in this source is that these issues are framed more broadly with the use of performance and reception history. André writes that she presents "a way of thinking, interpreting, and writing about music in

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<sup>26</sup> André, xi.

performance that incorporates how race, gender, sexuality, and nation help shape the analysis of opera today." She writes that regardless of when the works themselves were written, she is most interested in how they "resonate with the issues and experiences of people today."<sup>27</sup> While a number of the works presented in this book fall outside of the realm of this study, a desire to understand how the issues in opera resonate with current culture is a shared mission. André's book provides an analysis of difficult gender conventions and illustrates how those are realized in the course of Bizet's opera. She also provides an in-depth performance history of several adaptations of Bizet's opera *Carmen* that have pervaded popular culture. Examining these adaptations alongside other current productions of the original work will make for a broader comparison when studying what modifications are being made to better suit contemporary audiences.

### **Nature of the Study**

This information was gathered through examining reviews and press about productions of these operas from around the world to create a catalog of relevant

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<sup>27</sup> André, *Black Opera*, 1.

performances and how their presentations have reflected the “Me Too” movement. The author spent approximately one year, from January to December 2019, collecting the reviews and press through utilization of targeted Google Alerts as a means for maximizing exposure to relevant work. While limited to reviews written in English, reviews covered a wide range of countries from the US, much of Europe, the Middle East, and Australia. Additional information was gathered through interviewing a successful female producer and female director about their experience producing these works. These interviews, conducted in April 2020, were done on condition of anonymity in order to provide protection to women who still hold a minority status in a very male-dominated field.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE CARMEN CONUNDRUM

When one begins to examine the repertoire for operas from the standard repertory that pose a problem in light of “Me Too,” one’s attention is immediately placed squarely on Bizet’s *Carmen*. This opera is ripe for analysis and while it is one of the most popular operas of all time, receiving hundreds of performances each year, it has also been one of the most controversial operas since its premiere. While the “Me Too” movement has grabbed the attention of the world over and become a cultural phenomenon since going viral in 2017, *Carmen* has also enjoyed a pervasive presence across the cultural landscape. Outside of being one of the most performed operatic works, *Carmen* is known the world over as its music and message find a home across artistic mediums including fashion, dance, figure skating, and film. One recent film adaptation by MTV entitled *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*, stars the internationally acclaimed pop star Beyoncé Knowles. Knowles also starred in a spinoff *Carmen* themed television commercial directed by famed director

Spike Lee that aired during the 2002 Super Bowl. In the commercial, she sang a version of Carmen's famous aria the "Habanera" to lyrics designed to sell Pepsi.<sup>28</sup> While high profile, this is one example of many that have used music from Bizet's score in popular television commercials. With such a presence across artforms and across mediums, there is no wonder why Bizet's *Carmen* has become so beloved to opera audiences. Due to the position it holds in the hearts of opera fans, and the number of tickets it sells for opera companies across the world, it would be difficult for producers to no longer present this work to their audiences.

### **Origins and Reception**

Carmen (the title character) was damned from the very beginning. Though the opera by the same name faced a rocky beginning before becoming the operatic juggernaut known across the globe today, the protagonist of this story never stood a chance. Operatic conventions of the time often saw leading female characters meet a tragic fate. Sometimes she dies through self-sacrifice such as Puccini's *Butterfly*, and other times she dies at the hand of a man.

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<sup>28</sup> "A History of Beyonce's Relationship With Pepsi."

Though Carmen is one of the strongest female characters in all of opera, she is unable to overcome this fate.

Bizet's *Carmen* is based on an 1845 novella by Prosper Mérimée. As Susan McClary points out in her book *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, "The battle that really interests this text is the battle between the sexes. From the very beginning, Woman is marked as the enemy. The battlefield itself, the territory that obsesses the text, is none other than her body, as the text constantly raised the question of who shall own it while describing those who are fighting over it."<sup>29</sup> This is something that certainly is translated into the opera. Mérimée paints Carmen as the devil. Don José is portrayed as the victim. Carmen, has through her mere existence, committed the biggest sin of all, especially in this time, which is that she "combines all the male virtues: she is clever, intelligent, brave, resolute, sexual, independent." Her use of her body, often as a means for survival, is seen as a threat. The novella "text is obsessed with images of male inadequacy faced with such allurements."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> McClary, 10-11.

Bizet's choice to base his opera on the Mérimée novella was controversial from the start. The novella was an unusual choice in that it was much different than the stories to which Opéra-Comique audiences were accustomed. The typical fare usually consisted of family friendly comedy or social satire. An opera with such a gruesome ending in this setting would seem out of the question. In fact, there were revolts among the cast members and even a resignation of an Opéra-Comique administrator. Ultimately, it was Bizet's own will along with the support of his leading singers that offered this work to stage.<sup>31</sup>

Over the course of his career, he was consistently drawn to certain themes. It should come as no surprise that Bizet would choose this subject matter. He consistently sought out exotic subject matter, and as McClary points out, "'Orientalism' was in vogue in France at this time, and few creative artists avoided it." This gave him the opportunity to "indulge in music marked as 'other'." Another common theme he enjoyed was "narratives involving the femme fatale and her innocent male victim"

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<sup>31</sup> McClary, 23.

which was also a "common obsession in late nineteenth-century culture" according to McClary.<sup>32</sup>

It would seem that conscious choices were made along the way to turn Bizet's Carmen into a much more detested figure than the Carmen of Mérimée. First was the addition of Micaëla, the young woman from Don José's hometown who was intended to be his bride. Micaëla was "designed to contrast with Carmen, as the normative good girl who stands as the ideal against which Carmen herself appears all the more monstrous." Another change is that Don José is presented to the audience as an "innocent soldier" in the opera, whereas in the novella he is presented as having had a past as a "bandit and murderer." By omitting this information, he is likely received by the audience as a much more sympathetic character. Perhaps the biggest change from the Mérimée text that influences the way we perceive Bizet's Carmen is that he eliminates her identity as a healer, who in the novella "risked her own well-being to save others." Instead, Bizet provides us with a woman

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<sup>32</sup> McClary, 18.

who "operates almost exclusively as a *femme fatale*" being defined only by her sexuality.<sup>33</sup>

Carmen's music also informs the audience how she should be perceived as much as the aspects of character that we are given via the story. McClary points out that Carmen's music is that of the "dissonant other," that her music is grounded in "physical impulses of exotic, pseudogypsy dance," making both Don José and the audience "aware both of her body and also (worse yet) of their own bodies." This is one of the cardinal sins that musically turns us against Carmen. European classical music is supposed to "transcend the body" and concern itself with the "nobler domains of imagination and even metaphysics."<sup>34</sup> Carmen, through her sensual music, disrupts the expected musical order.

McClary also posits that Carmen's music is purposefully designed to drive the audience to desire her death. Tonal music up until this point in time fairly reliably resolved in a triad, which leads the audience to expect and even to desire such an ending. However, "most

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<sup>33</sup> McClary, 22.

<sup>34</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 57.

listeners do not know how to account for the overwhelming push for closure they experience in this music means that it often seems like a force of nature rather than a human ideological construct." Bizet imbues the final scene with a need for this tonal closure, turning the once "harmonic bassline...into a maddeningly slippery chromatic floor." The audience desires for this "flood of chromaticism to be stopped" even if it "means the violent murder of Carmen."<sup>35</sup>

### **Racism and Sexism**

McClary writes that viewing Bizet's *Carmen* strictly as an "ill-fated love between two equal parties" ignores "the fault lines of social power that organize it." While the story seems unique to current day audiences, *Carmen* was "only one of a large number of fantasies involving race, class and gender that circulated in nineteenth-century French culture."<sup>36</sup> In subtle and not so subtle ways, Bizet fleshes out a character in *Carmen* that is meant to be held in low regard from the very beginning. This is done through various devices of racism, sexism, and classism. All of these things contribute to an othering that makes

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<sup>35</sup> McClary, 62.

<sup>36</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 29.

this work extremely problematic in light of the "Me Too" movements. Hutcheon and Hutcheon write in their book *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, "The issue of race, like that of gender, is brought to the fore from the start of both the opera libretto and the novella. Race and gender appear not to be easily separated from sexuality in the European imagination."<sup>37</sup> The novella in fact begins with an epigraph in Greek, therefore lost in translation to many, that reads, "Women are bitter. But they have two good times: in bed and in death."<sup>38</sup> In the opera we meet Carmen working in a cigarette factory, which Clément tells us "is the lowest level of proletariat in Seville."<sup>39</sup> It should then come as no surprise that Bizet introduces us to Carmen outside the factory smoking a cigarette. Hutcheon and Hutcheon trace the history of smoking in Europe and indicate that "linking women to smoking- as desirable yet possibly dangerous- was as strong in France as anywhere else" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This would be understood by the audiences. In fact, much of the scandal and outrage faced in the wake of the premiere "involved the presence of a

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<sup>37</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera*, 191.

<sup>38</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 189.

<sup>39</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, 50.



less than docile chorus of women who both smoked and fought on stage."<sup>40</sup>

McClary writes that "issues of class and sexuality were inextricably bound up with popular perceptions of the 'Orientals' at home." She also explains that ethnic cultures provided stimulation for "exhausted European imagination." It was a device that was used to create a "tension between desire for the exotic and fear of its seductive potency."<sup>41</sup> This is a tension that is played out in her fraught relationship with Don José. José "fits the psychological pattern of men who physically abuse their women." He is "constantly self-justifying" and "is possessive, sexually jealous, and controlling of his partner." He is "tied up with stereotypical models of masculine behavior in a macho culture," and accepted "gender roles and social conditioning prevent him from conceiving of her as an independent woman."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, José believes that he is not to blame for Carmen's ultimate demise, but rather Carmen suffers the fate of her own choosing. As McClary informs us, "the assumed dominance

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<sup>40</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera*, 179.

<sup>41</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 32-34.

<sup>42</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera*, 186-87.

of the white, middle-class male guaranteed that all these relationships- whether of race, class, or gender- appeared to reflect the natural order of things."<sup>43</sup> In the end, these social structures prevail and Carmen's refusal to submit to this order results in her being stabbed to death.

Though there have been many changes in the values of Western cultures since the premiere of *Carmen*, the "Me Too" movements were borne out of a frustration over how much discrimination and abuse still remains for women. An awareness of this adds a level of discomfort for many when producing or viewing *Carmen*. "At a time when violence toward women is as much a social issue as it is today, how we read *Carmen* may say a lot about how we feel about the social construction of women...and of men."<sup>44</sup> How can this work continue to be presented when society struggles to offer more equal treatment to women even now?

### **Can Carmen Evolve?**

When looking at how *Carmen* can be made more palatable for modern day audiences, there is a long line of adaptations and renditions of the famous work that one can

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<sup>43</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Opera*, 192.

study for inspiration and potential pitfalls. The popularity of the work has inspired many different settings. The most famous of which is Oscar Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones*, which ran on Broadway and was later made into an Academy Award nominated film. Hammerstein felt that "as a popular opera subject, *Carmen* stands alone" due to its "universally interesting story, fine characterizations and as melodic a score as was ever written."<sup>45</sup> Despite critics' praise, it went largely unnoticed at the time that Hammerstein's placing his setting in an African-American context simply "equated Bizet's sexually liberated gypsy with a lower-class African American woman."<sup>46</sup> McClary argues that the decision to have an all-black cast has "complex ramifications." Primarily, the decision to eliminate "racial difference" in *Carmen Jones* "eliminates that as one of the reasons for *Carmen's* death." Racial othering had been a primary conflict in the piece, and by eliminating race, "gender and sexual propriety" are left as the "sole tensions organizing the plot."<sup>47</sup> Over 50 years later MTV made a film inspired by Hammerstein's *Carmen*

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<sup>45</sup> André, *Blackness in Opera*, 217.

<sup>46</sup> André, 212.

<sup>47</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 132.

*Jones*, only the second adaptation of its kind with an all-Black cast. The film largely omitted Bizet's music and replaced it with Hip Hop music while keeping the bones of the famous plot line. The made-for-TV movie starring Beyoncé Knowles and Mekhi Phifer, entitled *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* largely avoids the "overwhelming sexual obsession" and instead "gets a bit sidetracked with its focus on bad cops."<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps the most relevant adaptation towards the purpose of this document is Peter Brook's reworked version of the opera which he titled *La Tragédie de Carmen*. This version premiered at the Théâtre Bouffe du Nord in 1981 and had the intent "to strip away the layers that had stultified what he takes to have been Bizet's original vision."<sup>49</sup> While Bizet's music remains, much is changed in Brook's version, including the orchestration. The libretto is also whittled down to focus on the four major characters of the narrative. What is left is a version where "fate is at the center" of the plot, and instead of Carmen being "a liberated woman in charge of her own fate," Brook's Carmen

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<sup>48</sup> Oxman, "Carmen: A Hip Hopera."

<sup>49</sup> McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen*, 137.

"is an evil presence" lacking the community to support her and making her fatalistic spin towards her death seem even more logical. While Brook's take on *Carmen* does make for compelling theater, McClary sees the work as "a reaction against the advances won by women in the last two decades."<sup>50</sup>

Brook's take on *Carmen* has enjoyed a reemergence in recent years with performances across the United States. No doubt, a large factor in these performances is that it is a smaller production than Bizet's *Carmen*, and can therefore be put together more quickly and at a lower cost. City Lyric Opera in New York City, however produced the work in May 2019 to critical acclaim with a great emphasis on the "Me Too" movement. The production team was helmed completely by persons who identify as female, and they were able to completely upend Brook's paradigm, presenting a story "in which the traditional male-dominated power structure gets flipped on its head," and the story becomes a "deadly power struggle between a confident, beautiful, and intelligent woman, and an insecure, volatile, and

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<sup>50</sup> McClary, 138-41.

unstable man.”<sup>51</sup> As with many productions in this “Me Too” era, sometimes producers determine the best way to deal with these issues is head-on, which can result in a viscerally graphic portrayal. City Lyric Opera made this choice, by staging a graphic, violent rape scene on stage in plain view of the entire audience. It was a daring choice, but perhaps necessary for the audience to truly understand all that is at play between Carmen and Don José. When considering the “Me Too” movement, the behavior is almost always about control. While sex may be used as the means to assert control, it is less about the sex and more about establishing dominance. Here it is not Don José’s lust that leads to this moment, it is his need to claim power in this relationship. The reviewer writes, “the notion that rape is related to lust and the punishment a woman deserves for daring to express her sexuality needs to be shattered now more than ever.”<sup>52</sup> José’s obsession to establish control over the free-spirited Carmen leads to her grizzly death, chillingly captured by City Lyric Opera’s creative team. Describing the tragic conclusion of

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<sup>51</sup> Ruel, “City Lyric Opera 2018-19 Review La Tragédie de Carmen.”

<sup>52</sup> Ruel.

the rape scene in the on-stage reflecting pool, the reviewer Ruel writes, "When all the violence to Carmen's body is done, she is left face up in the water, strangled, and dead with her hair floating in a grotesque fantail beneath her head. Beside her corpse, her red scarf rests at the bottom of the pool like a big splotch of blood."<sup>53</sup>

One of the first productions of Bizet's *Carmen* to make a splash in the international headlines was an Italian production in January 2018. The production from Florence's Teatro del Maggio Musicale had a surprise ending. Instead of Carmen being stabbed as is the tradition, she turns the tables on her aggressor Don José by pulling a gun on him and shooting him. The head of the opera, Cristiano Chiarot, asked how they could possibly represent a murder of a woman on stage when there is such a problem with violence against women in current society. A report from the Italian National Institute of Statistics indicates "one in three Italian women aged 16-70 experienced physical or sexual violence in 2014."<sup>54</sup> The opera company simply did not feel comfortable having the violence represented on-

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<sup>53</sup> Ruel.

<sup>54</sup> Saraogi, "Opera 'Carmen' Gets New Ending to Stop Violence against Women."

stage and having an audience applaud violence. The company believes it is the first time the opera has been changed in this way, but felt it was an important thing to do. Paulo Klun of the opera was quoted as saying, "We think it is important that the theater should not be a place of conservative culture, it should not be a museum." He goes on to point out that *Carmen* was "written 150 years ago in a very different cultural context."<sup>55</sup> Some will not agree with such a bold choice, but the creative team seems to come to these decisions from a strong sense of moral conviction. Reviews of many productions reveal that the productions that really commit to bold choices, rather than those that simply skirt the issues, are the ones that resonate with audiences and critics alike and have the best reception. A number of productions try to make a statement about how the opera fits within our current contexts, but in an effort not to offend traditionalists, end up saying nothing at all.

Not one to shy away from a controversial staging, Calixto Bieto took on Bizet's *Carmen* at Opéra National de Paris in April 2019. Bieto directed a production of

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<sup>55</sup> Squires, "Italy Gives World-Famous Opera *Carmen* a Defiant New Ending in Stand against Violence to Women."



*William Tell* at The Royal Opera Covent Garden in 2015 that was panned by critics and booed and heckled by audiences because of a graphic gang rape that took place on stage.<sup>56</sup> The production caused such an uproar that Royal Opera cited it as one of the factors in its decision to review productions through the lens of the "Me Too" movement. That choice by Covent Garden in turn was the genesis of this document. Bieto's production of *Carmen* was not an exception to the style that we have become accustomed to from this controversial director. Updating the setting to Seville in the 1960s, the production seeks to escape "from romantic and exotic ideas, instead placing the opera in a sexist society ruled by men."<sup>57</sup> While much of this is certainly used for shock value and to make audiences feel a sense of unease about the character interactions, the reviewer also finds the choices to be justified, as it "focused on the crude reality rather than the romantic view of *Carmen's* myth."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, after all this work is done to set up a crude society that is unfair to *Carmen*, it

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<sup>56</sup> "William Tell: Nudity and Rape Scene Greeted with Boos at Royal Opera House."

<sup>57</sup> Villa, "Opéra National de Paris 2018-19 Review: *Carmen*."

<sup>58</sup> Villa.

would seem that Don José is let off the hook in the end, instead of made to be a participant in this culture. The OperaWire reviewer suggests that “we don’t see an abusive murderer but a suffering and pleading lover who doesn’t want to kill Carmen.” He writes that the actor “made you feel pity” for José.<sup>59</sup> One can accept a violent interpretation of the opera, especially if a vital point is made in the process, but will opera audiences continue to accept Don José as a victim? Should performers and directors even ask their audiences to continue to indulge in narrative which furthers patriarchal oppression?

In considering where one might find a progressive performance of *Carmen*, the city of Muscat in Oman is not one of the first places that comes to mind. In fact, Human Rights Watch indicates that “Oman has no laws prohibiting domestic violence and marital rape.”<sup>60</sup> Though the challenges presented by Islamic and state law to produce a *Carmen* appropriate for the “Me Too” era are great, a 2019 Muscat production may be one of the most compelling readings in recent times. By the account of noted reviewer

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<sup>59</sup> Villa.

<sup>60</sup> “World Report 2017: Oman.”

David Salazar, the production was visually appealing and largely traditional. Salazar calls into question the aspect of the production that makes this staging seem particularly appealing through the lens of "Me Too." The choice was to play up Don José's violent tendency quite literally from the very start. At the end of the overture, Salazar reports that we see a man running across the stage at the beginning as if he were "running away from some oncoming attacker." We soon see that it is in fact Don José who he is trying to escape from, when José "runs across the stage, behind the columns and stabs the man."<sup>61</sup> While this may be shocking to those who are only familiar with the opera, it may be recalled that the Don José of *Merimée's* novella was a far more violent person. This is something that was softened in converting it for the opera stage, but not something that would be completely without merit to include when considering the original source material. In the Muscat staging by Gianni Quaranta, José "impulsively kills Zuñiga," and "abuses Carmen right from the start of their reunion in Act two."<sup>62</sup> The star tenor of

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<sup>61</sup> Salazar, "Royal Opera House Muscat 2019-20 Review Carmen."

<sup>62</sup> Salazar.

this production, José Cura, suggests that his character's "possession arises not from a sense of love, but machismo insecurity." The director, Quaranta, justifies his choice to channel the Don José of the novella within the context of the opera by "noting that the characters murderous tendencies needed to come from somewhere" and Bizet's reduction of the novella leaves an audience finding it "hard to believe that a man of virtue could stoop so low with antecedents of such behavior."<sup>63</sup>

While Salazar seems to understand the precedent for this incarnation of Don José, he also feels that it creates a void between the two leading characters, which leads the audience to wonder why Carmen would ever be attracted to Don José to begin with. The awkward nature of this relationship is exacerbated by regulations of Oman that "forbid that he have the characters engage in any suggestive behavior," which even forbids kissing.<sup>64</sup> Salazar also sees the ending as still being quite a shock. Carmen has been subjected to Don José's violent tendencies on multiple occasions, but each time it was either merely a

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<sup>63</sup> Salazar.

<sup>64</sup> Salazar.

threat, or he apologized for his behavior. In the end, when he pulls a knife, "she laughs in his face" finding it impossible to believe he would actually go through with it. He does, however, surprising Carmen and making her just as much of a victim of "the system of control and violence" that she falls victim to in most other productions.<sup>65</sup> While this production is exciting in many ways, it is understandable how Salazar would have been disappointed. Some of his issues seem to stem from the limits placed on the artists by the restrictions of Oman. One cannot help but think that this concept might really work well in a less restrictive environment.

Mindful adapted productions of *Carmen* show how a reframing of the story or character arc can impact how the audience perceives acts of violence. Some do this by altering the violence, as in the production in Florence, Italy. Others lean into the violence as is seen in the productions in France, Oman, and New York. Kentucky Opera has offered a multi-pronged approach to presenting *Carmen* to their audiences: one that is true to the opera and true to events with which audience members may have had personal

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<sup>65</sup> Salazar.

experience. Kentucky Opera has also chosen to engage with the piece in a real way to start conversations in their community. Kentucky Opera's stage director, Dan Wallace Miller, has chosen to lean into the story of a woman who "is torn by her circumstances of being in a relationship that is not healthy." In fact, Miller suggests that their production may feel more like a modern-day film "than a 100-plus-year-old opera."<sup>66</sup> Miller references productions in Europe similar to the one discussed in Italy where the ending was changed. He feels that such an interpretation ignores "the fact that the story of *Carmen* viewed from today's perspective is essentially the story of assault and murder within a relationship." Miller argues that this is something that still happens in our present day and that making a change to somehow avoid depicting this reality "is to miss an opportunity to make a strong comment" on an issue that should not be avoided.<sup>67</sup> Miller does not shy away from the violence in his telling either. He sees Don José as having "similar characteristics to a lot of the people committing mass shootings in America" and someone

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<sup>66</sup> Wiegandt, "Kentucky Opera Puts Modern Gritty Spin on Classic *Carmen*."

<sup>67</sup> Wiegandt.

who "fetishizes his gun" and uses it to carry out his "toxic masculine ideas" when he shoots and kills Carmen. Carmen seems destined for her fateful end at the hands of Don José's abuse. She is also a victim of her circumstances "being insanely poor, working at a sweatshop rolling cigarettes and having no money." Miller points out that her sexuality is all that she has to get a "a little bit of a leg up" in a society "that is built to oppress her class and race."<sup>68</sup>

When put in those stark terms it becomes even more clear how this story is as relevant as ever. Capitalizing on this relevance, Kentucky Opera did something that more and more opera producers are choosing to do when staging a complicated work like *Carmen*. They hosted a panel discussion entitled "Unblaming Carmen" preceding their performances. This panel, part of Kentucky Opera's AWAKENINGS series, sought to "help us understand intimate partner violence, intimidation, and domestic abuse today."<sup>69</sup> The panel included artists from the community, representatives from several violence against women

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<sup>68</sup> Wiegandt.

<sup>69</sup> "Awakenings."

organizations, local sex crimes law enforcement representatives, and the director from the Office of Victims Advocacy for the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Kentucky Opera General Director Barbara Lynne Jamison says that their production of *Carmen* and these partnerships allow the company to “amplify their voices and serve our community in a very particular way.”<sup>70</sup>

Art matters and these issues matter. The discomfort of the artists and the discomfort of the audience cannot be discounted. Leaning into the discomfort is sometimes the most effective way to shed light on an issue. As has been shown above, there are many ways to address the issues presented in telling the story of *Carmen*. Choosing to ignore these issues altogether runs the risk of alienating an audience that may grow increasingly unwilling to accept the status quo. Examining this beloved work in new and creative ways is necessary. Otherwise, producers of opera will find continued difficulty engaging with their audiences in meaningful ways and illuminating how a 150-year-old opera has relevance to contemporary society.

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<sup>70</sup> Kentucky Opera, “Kentucky Opera’s *Carmen* - Community Partnerships - YouTube.”



## CHAPTER 2

### MOZART'S TOXIC MASCULINITY

Considered to be one of the most prolific and influential composers of all time, one cannot consider the operatic repertoire without including Mozart. His operas *Die Zauberflöte*, *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan Tutte* are among the most performed operas in the world each year. His genius brought new life and innovation to the genre that forged a path for all those who followed. While his collaborations with Lorenzo Da Ponte are seen as jewels of the repertoire, these operas are also problematic in light of the "Me Too" movement, especially in regard to an imbalance of power. Considering the many productions that are given innovative takes, stage directors are traditionally less likely to make surprising changes in the way they stage the operas of Mozart. While more conservative in approach than the non-traditional stagings of later operas, directors are more and more willing to make interesting new choices empowered by the "Me Too" movement and its impact on our current culture to present new perspectives on these hallowed works.

### Don Giovanni: Seducer or Rapist?

Catherine Clément refers to *Don Giovanni* in a tongue-in-cheek manner as “the most-beautiful-opera on the masculine scale.”<sup>71</sup> The titular character is often presented as someone worthy of the audience’s admiration, one who oozes with charm and masculinity. When taking stock of this character, he is more often seen as a charming seducer rather than a violent rapist. In his essay on the work, Lawrence Lipking writes, “Don Giovanni stands revealed in his true colours, an embodiment of the masculine principle that cares for nothing but the exercise of dominating sexual power - ‘barbaro’, as Donna Elvira likes to call him. He is all man, all appetite.”<sup>72</sup> This kind of toxic masculinity is one of the chief targets of the “Me Too” movement. In fact, it hearkens recent memory in our own culture of a figure such as Harvey Weinstein. Can Don Giovanni still be represented on-stage as a character that is admired when current culture has deemed similar figures in current society to be unacceptable?

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<sup>71</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Don Giovanni*, 38.

Leporello proudly lists all of his master's conquests across Europe in his famous 'Catalog Aria.' Numbering all of the women who have fallen prey to Giovanni throughout Europe, he reports a grand total of one-thousand and sixty-two conquests. Of these one-thousand and sixty-two women, Mozart and Da Ponte introduce us to three: Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, and Zerlina. Catherine Clément writes that these three women "represent the biography of seduction: the one already seduced, the past, the abandoned Elvira; the violating seduction, the present, Donna Anna; and the seduction to come, Zerlina, Don Giovanni's future. But each seduction has an element of rape."<sup>73</sup> The audience is not traditionally given visual representation of any of these sexual acts on stage, though typically the audience hears Zerlina's shriek as the act against her is committed. These women are all dismissed as hysterics. This is a classic representation of women throughout the history of opera, that can be seen by the popularity of the many "Mad Scenes" that are used throughout the repertoire such as Elektra in Mozart's *Idomeneo* or most famously Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. This was a device used to

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<sup>73</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, 34.

paint women as out of control, even as they were simply acting in the face of a horrible injustice at the hands of a man. McClary writes that "attitudes toward madness in modern Europe have been informed by attitudes toward sexual difference" and that even "normal" women were considered to be "highly susceptible to mental breakdown, precisely because of their sexuality."<sup>74</sup> Is this so far removed from society of the current day? Feminist movements have fought and continue to fight against the stereotype of being a weaker sex. This battle against perceived hysteria of the woman is a battle that women throughout current day society face every day. Women are always fighting to find the balance between being strong and arguing for what they believe in without crossing the line to a point where they may be called "hysterical". The women that Don Giovanni has tormented are not hysterical. They are acting completely rationally considering all of the emotional and physical abuse they have suffered at the hands of this libertine.

These women are not allowed the right to be hysterical, because it is out of character with what is

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<sup>74</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 84.

deemed acceptable behavior for a respectable woman in a male-dominated society. Ralph P. Locke writes in *En Travesti: Women, Gender, Subversion, Opera* that "To watch men working out their various private and public agendas across the body and mind of an unempowered woman may not be pleasant, nor, to be sure, can it serve as a model of equitable gender relations. But is it so unfamiliar as to seem quaint?"<sup>75</sup> This question holds especially true in current times due to the collective conscience that has been raised due to the "Me Too" movement. Locke points out that "One of the things we notice, when we look at the rather complex text of the standard repertoire operas, is that some of the heroines are not as spineless as we have been led to believe."<sup>76</sup> Certainly that is true of the three women in *Don Giovanni*.

The reason Don Giovanni gets away with this behavior time and again and leaves the women looking like fools while moving on to the next of his numerous conquests is because the women are seen as being property of Don Giovanni. The audience is expected to be complicit in this

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<sup>75</sup> Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Blackmer and Smith, 66.

belief. Locke asks, "Is an unsolicited attack and a woman who fights back considered not interesting enough, not believable enough?" He goes on to consider: "why critics find it so hard to see that rape is the issue when Leporello, risking his master's displeasure, can frankly berate him for having now twice stooped to violence:

'Bravo, two brave deeds! Assault the daughter [sforzar la figlia] and murder the father!'"<sup>77</sup> Without question, rape occurs, but this leads us back to the label of these women as hysterics. "In the stories of hysterics, the rape never takes place. All that is clear is that there is fear, threat, and the great shadowy silhouette waiting in the dark."<sup>78</sup>

Though rape is clearly committed, the audience is not allowed to see it as such, but rather as another masterful seduction by Giovanni. "Seduction contains and measures out women's incapacity to speak for themselves or to claim as unadulterated a sexuality independent of men's dreams of them."<sup>79</sup> This imbalance of power held between the sexes and the way sexuality is viewed illustrates much of what is

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<sup>77</sup> Blackmer and Smith, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> Miller, *Don Giovanni*, 48.

problematic and what the "Me Too" movement fights against. While a character like Giovanni has historically been seen as a "hero, free spirit and individualist," these traditional views of human sexuality are "focused on women only in so far as they were the generalized object of male desire; thus narrowly determining women's scope for choice and resistance within narratives of seduction and ignoring the account of events they might have given themselves, if asked."<sup>80</sup> This same dynamic has played out in many of the headlines borne out of the "Me Too" movement. Stage directors must present *Don Giovanni* in a way that makes him less of a hero. They must empower the leading ladies to be seen and heard by audiences in a manner that gives them agency, not one that disregards them as hysterical or willing participants in his ploys.

### **Giovanni's Day of Reckoning**

Kasper Holten's production of *Don Giovanni* premiered at The Royal Opera Covent Garden in 2014 long before the opera world had to begin facing "Me Too." However, this production continues to receive enthusiastic reviews and additional performances in London, and more recently the

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<sup>80</sup> Miller, 49.

production has been seen at Houston Grand Opera in the United States. Holten utilizes amazing technology and stagecraft to turn Mozart and Da Ponte's "Dramma Giocoso" into more of a psychological thriller.

Holten and his creative team have delivered a production which is built for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. They have constructed a set which is made of several levels and many staircases, and which also serves as a backdrop for huge digital projections. This rotating set is designed to give us the illusion of seeing inside Giovanni's mind. One such projection is a rolling list of names that represent Giovanni's many conquests during Leporello's 'Catalog Aria.' In a YouTube video produced by OperaVision, Holten said that he believes this production, "Creates a very special world, a labyrinth turning around, a labyrinth Don Giovanni can constantly change, create illusions, change the world for a moment as he enters into a new seduction, but which also in the end turns into a nightmare for himself where he's trapped inside his own ultimately destructive overuse of imagination and seduction."<sup>81</sup> The set provides many opportunities to create intrigue by

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<sup>81</sup> OperaVision, *INTERVIEW | Kasper Holten. DON GIOVANNI - Royal Opera House.*



allowing the audience to see inside Giovanni's mind and all that drives him to his ultimate downfall. "The audience's perspective constantly changes, and sometimes the set rotates even in the middle of arias, giving the audience a glimpse of what Don Giovanni is up to in another room. It's like his presence is still felt when he is not there."<sup>82</sup> The Commendatore also appears around the set at various times after Giovanni murders him, as if he is haunting Giovanni's thoughts. The *New York Times* writes: "This notion is so striking and so clever it entirely justifies the overwhelming set."<sup>83</sup>

*Houstonia* magazine calls the most recent revival of this production "dark and disturbingly relevant." They go on to write of Holten's concept that, "The Don is portrayed as what he is: not an amoral, badass cultural hero with an insatiable zest for life and ladies, but the powerful, violent, self-entitled narcissist in Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto, who serially preys on women and thinks he is doing them a service."<sup>84</sup> In painting Giovanni in this light, Holten has given us a character that steps out of

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<sup>82</sup> Che, "Can You Make 'Don Giovanni' Feel Relevant?"

<sup>83</sup> White, "'Don Giovanni' as Psychodrama."

<sup>84</sup> Che, "Can You Make 'Don Giovanni' Feel Relevant?"

the traditional stereotypes and does not ask the audience to buy into the same sexist tropes that have often been represented on the stage throughout this opera's history.

Holten chooses to end his staging just as the Vienna premiere in 1788 ended, which eliminates the "moralizing sextet." Holten instead ends with Giovanni lying on an empty stage all by himself where he pleads to the audience, "Hell is oneself, Hell is alone."<sup>85</sup> As Giovanni "descends into insanity" in the end, Holten finally gives the many women who have been victimized by Giovanni their moment of power they deserve. The women:

stand unobtrusive and silent in open doorways and dark corners, their presence keenly felt. They reappear at the end, flanking the Commendatore as he arrives and offers the Don one last chance to repent. Don Giovanni adamantly refuses, and he's left alone, in darkness—his worst kind of hell. At least in this retelling, the voices that speak loudest are the voices of the women.<sup>86</sup>

Though several years ahead of the cultural movements that began to spawn a new creativity when staging this work, it is no surprise that Holten's production has been given

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<sup>85</sup> Rye, "Hell Is Oneself."

<sup>86</sup> Che, "Can You Make 'Don Giovanni' Feel Relevant?"

repeat performances and stagings around the world. It is truly a Don Giovanni made for the "Me Too" era.

In taking on a staging of *Don Giovanni* during the "Me Too" era, two things are important to keep in mind. The first is a respect for the piece and for the source material. The second is to reject the history of presenting the title character as simply a charming seducer. Ivo van Hove's 2019 production for Opéra National de Paris accomplishes both. Pierre Liscia is critical of the starkness of the staging in his review, complaining that it is "as sterile as possible and stripped of any eroticism."<sup>87</sup> Striking a different tone with the work was done with great intention by the director. In giving the costumes and sets a dark treatment, and minimizing the comedy in the work, van Hove sets his conception so that "the darkness of the work comes to the fore." Giovanni is dressed in a black suit which gives him the vibe of "a mobster, politician, Wall Street business executive, or even one of those Hollywood moguls, that are all being

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<sup>87</sup> Liscia, "Don Giovanni According to Ivo van Hove."

taken to task in the current climate of the #MeToo movement."<sup>88</sup>

His interpretation of the work in this way allows van Hove to present a greater contrast between Giovanni and the other characters. Giovanni is presented as a violent character from the beginning of the opera and "had none of the charisma that some productions give to him, taking out all of the ambiguity about how Van Hove wanted audiences to feel about it."<sup>89</sup> The other characters are intentionally made non-violent to help exacerbate this contrast, while Giovanni becomes more menacing throughout the course of the performance, "his beast-like qualities became more and more unleashed" as he races towards the climactic ending of the work.<sup>90</sup>

The production seems to have impressed critics with its relevance to our time. Liscia writes that, "While offering a welcome return to the source material, it takes a relevant look at our times, covering the taboos with a moralistic veil."<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile OperaWire also praises the

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<sup>88</sup> Salazar, "Opéra National de Paris 2018-19 Review."

<sup>89</sup> Salazar.

<sup>90</sup> Salazar.

<sup>91</sup> Liscia, "Don Giovanni According to Ivo van Hove."

commitment to the source material and lauds Van Hove's ability to find "ways to further develop its themes and ideas in simple but effective ways."<sup>92</sup>

Of all the productions considered here, the March 2019 production of *Don Giovanni* by the Boston Opera Collaborative is perhaps the boldest and most fascinating. Taking on the current contexts of the "Me Too" movement in a ripped-from-the-headlines way has created a profound piece of theater. Co-directors Patricia-Maria Weinmann and Greg Smucker have updated the work in a way that "ensures that you do not forget this is about the Me Too movement." The popular opera blog *Schmopera* writes that "the show begins with a slideshow of people like Harvey Weinstein and others that is prefaced with Trump's now-infamous 'grab them by the pussy' comments. From here, the symbolism only deepens in how the men behave towards the women of the show, and nobody is safe."<sup>93</sup> Weinmann and Smucker's update has turned Giovanni into a celebrity photographer that uses his influence to manipulate the women. In doing so, they are able to create a character that "is nothing short of a

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<sup>92</sup> Salazar, "Opéra National de Paris 2018-19 Review."

<sup>93</sup> Fernandez, "BOC's Don Giovanni Smart and Relevant."

complete snake"<sup>94</sup> and "channels the character's fundamental emptiness as a Superfluous Man who reflects and refracts the vanities of others as he manipulates them."<sup>95</sup>

One of the issues with updating an opera to a different time and setting is the inability to carry the concept through; however, Weinmann and Smucker have had success in developing their concept. The famous duet "La ci darem," between Giovanni and Zerlina really puts his manipulation on display. Giovanni uses his "cool, collected mannerisms" to "turn Masetto's behavior into a tool with which he paints himself as a better option, and it is in this way that Giovanni works his way into Zerlina's dress despite her protests." The author of this particular review recounted how this was done to chilling effect, providing an eerie reminder of a personal friend's story of rape.<sup>96</sup>

One interesting decision that Weinmann and Smucker have made is to have the role of the Commendatore, typically played by a bass, be played instead by a female singer. Rather than being Donna Anna's father, the

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<sup>94</sup> Fernandez.

<sup>95</sup> Ru, "Don of a New Era."

<sup>96</sup> Fernandez, "BOC's Don Giovanni Smart and Relevant."

character becomes the Commendatrice, Donna Anna's mother. Though a bit shocking, the reviewer writes that "it has the effect of amplifying the misogyny."<sup>97</sup>

This production has chosen to cut the epilogue, just as was done by Kasper Holten. In a moment of female empowerment, the directors also have a "chorus of women that taunts Don Giovanni with the promise of eternal suffering and not men as printed in Mozart's score."<sup>98</sup> Weinmann and Smucker have accomplished two important tasks in creating a staging of *Don Giovanni* for the "Me Too" era: They present the title character without simply making him a man of incredible charm, and they empower the women of the story and give them the vindication that they deserve.

### **Mozart's Feminist Figaro?**

While *Le Nozze di Figaro* also enjoys a prime position in the current operatic repertory, that was not always true. The opera was largely ignored after its initial performances. This was mostly due to the controversy of being based on a banned Beaumarchais play. It was not until "the twilight of Romanticism did *Figaro* gain

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<sup>97</sup> Fernandez.

<sup>98</sup> Fernandez.

ground.”<sup>99</sup> While the opera has since come out of the shadow of Mozart’s other operatic masterpiece *Don Giovanni*, *Figaro* may be the greater indicator of how one should view Mozart’s works in relation to “Me Too.”

The opera features Count Almaviva, who, “spends three and a half acts plotting to exercise his ‘droit du seigneur’ (or “right of the lord”) over the maid Susanna on her wedding night—only to repent halfway through the finale.” This immediately sounds the alarm in regard to “Me Too.” The Count is a man of high position using his power and authority to take advantage of a woman who has her well-being at the prerogative of this man. She is placed in the uncomfortable position of being asked to betray both the Countess, to whom she is a chambermaid, and her soon-to-be husband, Figaro, on the eve of their nuptials. In the Count, it would appear that Mozart has given us another character as detestable and unbearable as Don Giovanni. However, the comedic nature of this work has given Mozart an opportunity to express this character in a way that he did not in the case of Don Giovanni.

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<sup>99</sup> Carter, *W.A. Mozart, Le Nozze Di Figaro*, 137.



Perhaps a reason that the opera itself did not immediately become a jewel of the repertoire has partly to do with its controversial nature. The risk of censor was always present due the story's challenge of the power structure of the day. While the characters of most opera buffa "tended to split into 'serious' and 'comic' groups along class lines," *Figaro* was particularly threatening to the established order by the fact that it embarrassed and exposed the nobleman, Count Almaviva.<sup>100</sup> Beyond the Count receiving his comeuppance in the end at the hands of the Countess and the servants, even Mozart's musical cues give indication as to how he felt about the master of the house. Arianna Warsaw-Fan Rauch writes that in the opera buffa form, "ridicule is the most castigating treatment a character can receive—and Mozart goes to great lengths to ridicule the Count" through many musical devices. While frequently giving the Count dotted rhythms, which Mozart typically "employs to depict strength and nobility," he often "undercuts this with a series of grace notes in the orchestra, which sound like short comedic "blips," thus

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<sup>100</sup> Carter, 14.

mocking the Count's self-regard and bravado."<sup>101</sup> This is just one example of many throughout the work where Mozart musically mocks the Count.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Mozart would mock the Count and paint the female characters as having a superior sense of cunning. While the single most profound influence in Mozart's life was his father Leopold, theirs was also a relationship that was quite fraught and complex. However, Mozart relied on a strong network of female figures that were highly influential in his life as well. Jane Glover attributes these relationships to Mozart's creation of "some of the most vividly drawn and brilliantly understood women on the operatic stage."<sup>102</sup> One of the highlights of Mozart's operatic repertoire that best displays his esteem for women is the stunning duet for Susanna and the Countess, "Sull'aria." Warsaw-Fan Rauch writes that though "Da Ponte's words are rather superficial," musically Mozart turns a "lilting" opening theme "into a soaring combination of rich harmonies and sweeping melodies." This serves to illustrate that while

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<sup>101</sup> Rauch, "Can Mozart Survive #MeToo?"

<sup>102</sup> Glover, *Mozart's Women*, 5.

these two women could have easily been "made into enemies" in this situation, Mozart has musically shown us how the two ladies have "instead found comfort and strength in their alliance."<sup>103</sup>

*Figaro* appears to offer much to say for directors in the era of "Me Too." While the two male leads, "Figaro and the Count are reduced to the same level of jealous posturing at the supposed infidelities of their women," the women are able to team up and "take the other's part." While the women are successful in gaining the upper-hand and finding vindication in the end, the two male leads "are imprisoned by an institutionalized sense of male dominance."<sup>104</sup> Since its reemergence in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Figaro* has frequently been viewed through the lens of its political and sexual tensions. This is much in the spirit of which the piece was likely created and gives directors the opportunity to make clear statements. A great deal of this was done through a deeper examination of the original Beaumarchais play, and as in the case of John Copley's production at Covent Garden in

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<sup>103</sup> Rauch, "Can Mozart Survive #MeToo?"

<sup>104</sup> Carter, *W.A. Mozart, Le Nozze Di Figaro*, 147.

the 1970s, exploiting "the social and sexual tensions of the opera to the full, being 'fertile, busy, and keenly observant of the text and its implications.'"<sup>105</sup> This should provide a great history and legacy that directors can build upon in making this work even more pertinent to present day audiences.

Cincinnati Opera's June 2019 production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* was credited for the "intensely human nature of these characters of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century court" that made the performances relatable to current day audiences.<sup>106</sup> The performances, sung in the original Italian benefited from updated titles and dialogue that spoke to the sexual politics of our time and empowered the female characters. Artswave even reported that "the contemporary audience, perhaps reacting to our current era of increased awareness and discussion surrounding harassment, reacted with laughter and cheers to some of the lines spoken by female characters as they fought back."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Carter, 140-42.

<sup>106</sup> Gelfand, "'Marriage of Figaro' Dazzles in Cincinnati Opera Season Opener."

<sup>107</sup> Tracey-Miller, "'The Marriage of Figaro' Is a Delightful, Arresting Experience."

Director Stephen Lawless was credited with giving a “between-the-lines glimpse of the #MeToo movement in lace and brocade.” Emphasizing Mozart’s strong female characters, Lawless illustrated the “tears behind the laughter, and validated the seething anger of women who dared to fight sexism more than 200 years ago.” In terms of the men, Count Almaviva was portrayed as “brutish and abusive and horny” while Figaro is seen violently grabbing his betrothed Susanna.<sup>108</sup> In spite of all the drama, the comedic nature of the piece still shines through. Janelle Gelfand writes that “Characters popped in and out of doors, windows and – most of all – beds. In fact, much of the action was centered in, around, on top of and underneath of a bed.” In addition to the sexual politics of this production being broadly on display, the politics of class were brought out as well, with the “the revolutionary idea of the servants mocking their aristocratic masters.”<sup>109</sup>

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL) also gave performances of *Figaro* during the summer of 2019 in an

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<sup>108</sup> de Acha, “Cincinnati Opera Opens 99th Season with Charming Figaro.”

<sup>109</sup> Gelfand, “‘Marriage of Figaro’ Dazzles in Cincinnati Opera Season Opener.”

English translation, which was highly dedicated to considerations of the "Me Too" movement. Director Mark Lamos revealed that as he began to make his preparations for this production, "Harvey Weinstein and #MeToo became very much a presence in the gestalt." This inspired Lamos to see Count Almaviva as "almost a serial rapist" and he used that perspective to inform the actions of all the women on stage, having them react to the Count "in ways reflecting their histories with him."<sup>110</sup>

This production is sexually charged, and that is not left only to the Count, but also to the young page Cherubino. Due to the overtly sexual nature of the production as well as an awareness of how cast members and audience members alike may experience this, especially in a time of great awareness, the cast all went through training where an "intimacy coach help the cast work through the staging requirements."<sup>111</sup> In a time when scandals have surfaced in the opera world with harassment claims against several prominent opera stars, OTSL should be commended for providing a safe environment for their artists to discover

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<sup>110</sup> Wilson, "OTSL Approached 'Figaro' with #MeToo in Mind."

<sup>111</sup> Wilson.

these characters. In enabling the artists to explore their characters in a supportive environment, the company mounted a production which likely gave the audience a more honest portrayal of a timely subject.

David McVicar's production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* at The Royal Opera Covent Garden has been called "very much a reading for the #MeToo era."<sup>112</sup> Richard Fairman points out that even in the time of the Enlightenment women were beginning to fight for their rights, and that Mozart has given voice to this in his opera. McVicar's production presents a "seething society, in which oppressed groups are agitating for equality."<sup>113</sup>

This particular production has been updated to the 1820s. A choice that was met with disapproval from critics, with Hewett writing that "The social tensions of the opera are blurred by the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century setting." Instead, McVicar has given us a world where servants are "always scheming just outside a door, or bowing with ironic obsequiousness" and "aristocrats run distractedly about for

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<sup>112</sup> Kettle, "The Marriage of Figaro Review - Zippy Mozart for the #metoo Era with Gender Swap."

<sup>113</sup> Fairman, "A First-Rate Marriage of Figaro at the Royal Opera House, London."

their amusement, pursuing their erotic games.”<sup>114</sup> While the sexual politics seem appropriate for a reading that would reflect the expectations of a modern audience, diminishing the social tensions would diminish the spirit of the work and its appeal in the time of “Me Too.”

The setting is not the only interesting choice in this particular production. There is a long history of eroticism brought about by the character Cherubino, traditionally sung by a mezzo-soprano. It is the case of a woman dressed as and playing a man, who in the course of the opera dresses as a woman. This is a role that was “explicitly about sex” and that “unsettles every social order.”<sup>115</sup> This character creates great comic intrigue as well as much discomfort for the Count along the way. This particular production has the Korean-American Countertenor Kangmin Justin Kim in the role. While being the “first ever countertenor to sing Cherubino” at Covent Garden, the choice was an obvious success. Fairman suggests that “Kim has a striking vocal purity and a hotline to an adolescent boy’s raging hormones that inevitably escapes the average

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<sup>114</sup> Hewett, “A Marriage Almost Made in Heaven - Opera The Marriage of Figaro Royal Opera House.”

<sup>115</sup> Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti*, 140-41.



mezzo."<sup>116</sup> While it is a unique choice that breaks with tradition, the gender-fluid nature of this role still provides a great deal of interest for a modern audience.

Though Mozart composed over 200 years ago, and his operas present highly problematic characters with embarrassingly insatiable libidos in both Giovanni and Count Almaviva, he is possibly the most appropriate composer for the "Me Too" movement among those in the standard repertory. Though his opera *Don Giovanni* has traditionally been presented in ways that glorify the titular character and rapist, his opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* uses comic devices and the wit of the strong female characters to embarrass the Count in a manner that would serve as a cautionary tale for the likes of a Harvey Weinstein or Matt Lauer. A work that if handled appropriately, as in the Cincinnati Opera production, can engage and excite an awakened 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience.

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<sup>116</sup> Fairman, "A First-Rate Marriage of Figaro at the Royal Opera House, London."

## CHAPTER 3

### REIMAGINING RIGOLETTO

Verdi's *Rigoletto* shares many things in common with other works that this document has considered. Based on the play *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo, the opera takes a source material that had been banned by censors after its first performance with the authorities claiming that "the piece was immoral."<sup>117</sup> This is reminiscent of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which was based on a play by Beaumarchais that had originally faced backlash and a complicated journey to the stage due to the opposition of censors. Verdi's work also shares a resemblance with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, in that it features a character (the Duke of Mantua) who is seen as a charming seducer, similar to the title character in Mozart's work. Lastly, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, similar to Bizet's *Carmen*, has made its way into the popular cultural landscape through a number of film versions and adaptations as well as the presence of its

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<sup>117</sup> Balthazar, *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, 201.

best-known tune, "La donna è mobile" being used in numerous occasions in television, film, and commercial advertisements.

The opera itself has enjoyed great success since it premiered over 150 years ago. Verdi's works consistently appear as some of the most performed works in the standard repertory, and *Rigoletto* stands out to many as being worthy of "the title of his best-loved work."<sup>118</sup> Despite the position it holds today in the repertoire, the opera, similar to its source material by Hugo "only reached the stage via difficult negotiations and several rewrites." Through a great deal of work with the authorities, Verdi and his librettist Francesco Maria Piave were able to arrive "at a compromise whereby the most scandalous parts were removed but the essential ideas remained."<sup>119</sup>

Joseph Kerman points out that while "Verdi is no Puccini" in terms of his treatment of women over the course of his output, he indeed had a "bad patch" in his career when "a whole clump of women come to grief because of sexual transgression." The operas that Kerman refers to

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<sup>118</sup> Balthazar, 198.

<sup>119</sup> Balthazar, 202.

were all written in a four-year period between 1849-1853, and include some of Verdi's most celebrated works including *Rigoletto*, *Luisa Miller*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*. All of these works remain in the repertory and enjoy frequent performances around the world each season.<sup>120</sup>

The drama centers around three main characters. The first is the titular character, a hunch-backed court jester named Rigoletto, who is "complex, obsessive, and almost completely unsympathetic." While his outward appearance makes him an "ideal buffoon" for the court, it has also manifested itself in making him "jealous, resentful, and cruel." Rigoletto serves the Duke of Mantua. The Duke is similar to Mozart's Giovanni, as he uses his position of power and his seductive skill to exploit a number of unsuspecting women. Whereas Giovanni eventually faces the consequences of his action, "Verdi's Duke escapes altogether, leaving almost everyone else to punishment." While Mozart saves his "audience from disquieting amorality," Verdi allows "ambiguities to persist until the final curtain."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Kerman, "Verdi and the Undoing of Women," 22.

<sup>121</sup> Kerman, 204-5.

Then there is Gilda, our leading lady, who Kerman says "receives an icy portrayal from her composer."<sup>122</sup> While her father Rigoletto is "ugly and paranoid," Gilda is "beautiful and trusting."<sup>123</sup> Too trusting and too kind, in fact. Both men compete over her taking advantage of these characteristics, and even Verdi as the composer himself. Elizabeth Hudson argues that this is in part due to the threat of censorship. Verdi's opera leaves out the seduction of Gilda at the hands of the Duke from the original play. Hudson indicates that this is "the only major discrepancy between the libretto and its source." Instead, we are given "three tales of abduction" in the form of "a full-scale double aria, cabaletta and all, for the Duke." This is at the crux of what makes the work highly problematic. In eliminating this seduction, Gilda is forced to take responsibility for her "forbidden romantic notions" while the Duke is able to walk away from the situation spot-free.<sup>124</sup>

Just as with Mozart's *Giovanni*, using the description of a seduction, when it appears to be a "straight-forward

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<sup>122</sup> Kerman, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Balthazar, *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, 198.

<sup>124</sup> Hudson, "Gilda Seduced," 233-34.

case of rape" is a difficult one. This is something that Hudson acknowledges, however she suggests that Gilda's "disheveled, distraught appearance" may stem more from her "shame and agitation" over the "loss of her chastity" than from "any coercion."<sup>125</sup> Hudson goes on to explain that the chastity of a woman in that day would be seen as belonging to the male authority in her life and that "its loss was commonly viewed as a transgression not against a woman, but against her male authority figure," which in this case would have been her father Rigoletto. Due to the elimination of any clear-cut seduction scene and the ambiguity of what Verdi used in its place, we cannot be certain if a rape occurred. Hudson argues that this "does not condone sexual violence," but rather allows for the possibility "that she made a choice- a choice that went against society's mores, and, perhaps more important, against her father's wishes." Similar to the fate that befell Carmen, a woman demonstrating the audacity to have freedom for her own choices in that time often faced a violent punishment. Gilda would ultimately be no different.

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<sup>125</sup> Hudson, 246.

Gilda not only faces the reduction of her personal right through historical and dramatic means, but also through musical means. Kerman points out that she "sings very often in simple repetitive two-bar fragments." He points out that even when her music is more fully realized in Act II, it is music that she shares with Rigoletto. She also is faced with other characters "constantly interrupting her or completing her phrases." This is evident in Act III as well. As Gilda dies, "she is interrupted repeatedly, as Rigoletto breaks in to register his anguish." Kerman points out that Rigoletto "steals the scene" with music that is "so heartbreakingly prolific that Verdi can turn our sympathy to him even as we sicken at the death of his near-inarticulate victim."<sup>126</sup> Despite all this injustice toward Gilda, and the irredeemable quality of the two male leads, the work continues to be chosen by opera fans as a favorite time and time, again. Is there a way to give strength to a character when the odds are against her?

### **Relatable Rigoletto**

*Rigoletto* is a work that seems to lend itself to being updated. An examination of the performance history of the

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<sup>126</sup> Kerman, "Verdi and the Undoing of Women," 26.

work will uncover famous updates including Jonathan Miller's 1982 production for English National Opera where he set the work "in the bloody world of organized crime in New York's Little Italy during the 1950s." More recently there was a colorful production by The Metropolitan Opera that placed the action in "Las Vegas circa 1960, recasting the licentious Duke as a lecherous lounge singer and Rigoletto as an insult tossing comedian from his entourage." A Munich production placed the action "on the Planet of the Apes."<sup>127</sup> While stage director Michael Cavanagh updated the work to modern day in his 2012 production with Hamilton Opera, his recent production with Calgary Opera was staged more traditionally. However, Cavanagh points out that this is a work that is "pliable" and "lends itself to updating really easily," saying that "All of these themes are incredibly universal. If leadership is unchecked, absolute power always corrupts absolutely."<sup>128</sup>

Cavanagh's Calgary production, while set in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, makes clear the universality of the theme

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<sup>127</sup> Volmers, "Calgary Opera."

<sup>128</sup> Volmers.



and its connection to our present day through its exploration of the major theme. He does not see the work being merely about "revenge or love," but that its "biggest theme is consequence for actions." Great care is taken to emphasize the Duke's "abuse of power," and Rigoletto's "irreverent cruelty" that lead to "horrifying results" for his innocent daughter Gilda. Singer Gregory Dahl, who played the role of Rigoletto, expressed his desire for the audience to recognize these "basic themes of life" stating that he hopes they walk away thinking "Wow, that was a little bit over-the-top, or a little bit violent, but it proves a point."<sup>129</sup>

While Calgary Opera's production sought to convey the relevance to current times through a more traditional approach, many others have taken advantage of the pliability of the work that Cavanagh mentioned to update their productions and make a clear connection between the problematic plot and more recent headlines. Houston Grand Opera's (HGO) October 2019 production seems to have been successful in doing just that. They set their production in Italy in the 1920s and ensure that the "more despicable

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<sup>129</sup> Volmers.

elements are handled without kid gloves." They employ the men of the HGO chorus as a "mob of courtiers" who are "groping women left and right" displaying "unrestrained male lust and aggression." This along with the "extreme brutality in the beating and murder of Count Monterone" clearly had the intended effect on a stunned audience who sat in "uncomfortable stillness in the traditional moment for applause" showing their "discomfort at the moral outrage just witnessed."<sup>130</sup>

Seattle Opera also recently offered an updated production looking to make a statement about the "Me Too" movement through their presentation of this classic work. Stage director Lindy Hume points out that the story is very male dominated, even using an exclusively male chorus, and the few female characters do not "have much in the way of what we now call 'agency.'" This inspires Hume's decision to portray the action with "men in suits in executive offices, calling greater attention to the violence against women and the power imbalance." Hume says further inspiration for the concept grew out of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's "'bunga bunga' sex

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<sup>130</sup> Clark, "Review."

parties.” While women are excluded from the chorus, Hume used a number of women in supernumerary roles, mostly as part of the Duke’s cabinet. They portrayed “PR directors and executive assistants – dressed in power suits and fully complicit in the abuse going on around them.” OpereWire also writes that “Casual, dangerous sex lurked throughout the production, from blatant on-stage molestation to a semi-nude morning-after walk of shame. The whole environment felt on point and current, if appropriately heightened for theatrical/operatic effect.”<sup>131</sup> One thing that is not common in a modern political cabinet is a court jester. Hume made Rigoletto into “something of the Duke’s Maitre D’, albeit one with a biting sense of humor.” The production seems to have been well received, and the “fast-paced world of austere luxury and seedy sexuality, media saturation, mobile phones, power suits, sunglasses, cigarettes, and tattoos” that Hume and her cast created appears to have achieved its goal in relating the work to present times.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Carroll, “Seattle Opera 2019-20 Review.”

<sup>132</sup> Carroll.

Of the standard works that this study has examined, *Rigoletto* seems to be the most easily relatable to modern times. It has often been updated, and even when it is not, *Rigoletto* contains themes that are so clear that the audience requires little imagination to relate the piece to current times. As Cormac Newark wrote, "If Verdi's audiences over the past 150 years have chosen as their favorite work one that keeps shifting under the gaze, that is amenable to reduction but easily exhausts it, maybe that is a good thing too."<sup>133</sup> As a beloved work, it provides the necessary ingredients to attract a great audience and make a great statement. Continuing to produce this work in new and more meaningful ways seems to be a credible way to treasure the past while honoring the future.

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<sup>133</sup> Balthazar, *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, 208.

## CHAPTER 4

### A MORE FEMALE FUTURE

Many agree that the path toward a more fair, just, and equitable artform is to engage more female artists in positions of leadership. There must be a concerted effort to promote more female administrators to positions of power such as General Director or Artistic Director within companies that produce operatic works. Several of the companies who have had productions mentioned in this document have women at the helm of their organizations. Creating a more equitable artform, however, begins at the top. More work must be done to foster, promote, and hire female directors and female composers. One thing cited by The Royal Opera House in the article that inspired this research was a desire to engage more female creative teams.<sup>134</sup> In fact, Royal Opera has gone a step further since that initial article, joining a coalition of companies in the UK who have committed to "achieving gender parity, as

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<sup>134</sup> Riley, "Royal Opera Vows to Re-Think 'sexist Classics' Where Women Are Mutilated, Raped or Married off after Facing Criticism about Onstage Misogyny in Wake of MeToo Movement."

part of a new push to drive change in the industry.” Royal Opera specifically has committed to having an artistic staff that is 50% female by the year 2022, meaning that “half of all composers, directors, designers, librettists and movement directors employed for new productions will be women.” When speaking about this, director of the Royal Opera Oliver Mears said: “Opera must represent the widest possible range of people and perspectives both on and off the stage. This commitment supports our long-term ambition to change the landscape for women across the sector.”<sup>135</sup>

This is not a movement that is limited to the United Kingdom. In light of the women’s marches and the “Me Too” movement around the world, women everywhere are demanding that their voices be heard in the most hallowed of artistic institutions. For too long women have had to be part of a storytelling that by-and-large perpetuates “the perception of women in opera as subservient victims” and one that is at odds with contemporary culture. Over 190 artists have signed a petition in Australia demanding “a national commitment to opera work that resonates with the lives of women and men of all gender identities, and a reframing of

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<sup>135</sup> Snow, “Royal Opera House and English National Opera among 60 Organisations Promising Gender Parity by 2022.”

women's voices and stories away from victimhood."<sup>136</sup> Vienna State Opera also recently premiered Olga Neuwirth's opera *Orlando*. It was the first performance of a work by a female composer in the company's 150-year history.<sup>137</sup>

Here in the United States the conversation has been elevated as well. The Metropolitan Opera has commissioned two works by female composers. This comes after the company performed a work by a female composer in 2016 for only the second time in the company's 137-year history. That work was *L'amour de Loin* by Kaija Saariaho. New works will be Jeanine Tesori's *Grounded*, and a work by Missy Mazzoli based on the novel "Lincoln in the Bardo" by George Saunders.<sup>138</sup> Tesori is a celebrated composer of American Musical Theater who has had recent success in the world of opera, with the premiere of her opera about police brutality entitled *Blue*, which premiered at the Glimmerglass Festival in the summer of 2019.<sup>139</sup> Mazzoli is

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<sup>136</sup> Morris, "Opera under Fire for Stage Violence against Women."

<sup>137</sup> Maddocks, "Orlando World Premiere Review - a Feast for Ears and Eyes."

<sup>138</sup> Cooper, "The Met Is Creating New Operas (Including Its First by Women)."

<sup>139</sup> Tommasini, "Review."

also an opera composer of rising acclaim. Her work *Breaking the Waves* premiered at Opera Philadelphia in 2016. Opera News wrote that it “stands among the best twenty-first-century American operas yet produced.”<sup>140</sup> The work has been performed in New York and throughout the world. Future productions are planned by other companies including Houston Grand Opera.<sup>141</sup> Opera Philadelphia has made a great commitment to commissioning and premiering new works, mounting multiple world premieres each season. In addition to Mazzoli’s breakout premiere, they have produced the premiere of critically acclaimed composer Jennifer Higdon’s opera *Cold Mountain*, and will also premiere Higdon’s latest work *Woman with Eyes Closed* this fall as part of the “O20” Opera Festival.<sup>142</sup> These efforts are great first steps toward ensuring that opera continues to support and promote the works of female composers, who are obviously experiencing great success. Only by increasing the number of female-composed works that are performed on major stages, can opera reflect a world that is more representative of what current society is seeking.

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<sup>140</sup> Shengold, “OPERA NEWS - Breaking the Waves.”

<sup>141</sup> “MISSY MAZZOLI.”

<sup>142</sup> Opera Philadelphia, “Home.”



Opera America, one of the largest professional organizations of opera in the United States has also adopted the mission on behalf of their member companies of raising the profile of women in opera. They have created what they refer to as their "Women's Opera Network" or WON. Their website states that while women make up over half of the population, "the percentage of women in leadership roles within the field of opera is comparatively small." Similar to the consortium in the United Kingdom, Opera America's WON initiative seeks to "to explore and work actively to advance gender parity field-wide."<sup>143</sup>

In April 2020 interviews, a female stage director and a female administrator interviewed for this document expressed similar realities within the field.<sup>144</sup> The stage director expressed pride in the fact that there are many wonderful female directors doing great work in smaller and regional opera companies throughout the United States, but these women often end up assisting or remounting a production at a larger company. When a new production at one of the larger companies comes along, it is often staged

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<sup>143</sup> Opera America, "Women's Opera Network."

<sup>144</sup> These interviews were done anonymously due to the nature of the subject and need to protect these women who hold a minority status in the field of opera.

by a European man or one of a select, few, well-known American male directors. She believes that this is the next "glass ceiling" for female directors in opera. It is not a question of whether these women can be successful on these stages. It is a question of how we consider where "creative genius" lies.<sup>145</sup> The administrator agrees that it is a real problem, and something of which she is keenly aware. As a female administrator with influence, she often finds herself as the only woman in the room. This inspires her commitment in her job to stay intentional in finding voices outside her own circle who are doing interesting work. She finds this especially important, because women are not often given the same platform as men. This is something that can be overcome though if administrators are committed to solving the problem. She states that you can go see someone's work at a smaller company and can "definitely garner what the artistic value is and what they have to say, and then decide for yourself if this is something you would like to create a platform for."<sup>146</sup>

Artistic intention and aligning the values of the company are a crucial piece to solving the problem. The

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Stage Director.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Opera Administrator.

director bemoans that no matter what work is done in the rehearsal room, all the work is for naught if that vision is different from how the company has marketed the production. She expresses that it is "so difficult for people to see something other than what they want to see or have been told to see."<sup>147</sup> The administrator agrees that this alignment of vision between the artistic staff and people working on the administrative side is crucial. She believes this speaks to the need to have someone within the company that is "able to speak to it and understand it and make sure it's aligned." This is why representation matters, and having opera companies committed to that representation is so important for the artform so that we are having more balanced conversations.<sup>148</sup>

Both women spoke to an optimism for the future. While the director cautioned that there is a fine line with a "Me Too" production because audiences do not come to the opera to "be preached at," she also sees herself as having always been a "Me Too" director because of her viewpoint as a woman and "seeing women in a certain way and trying to give them as much agency" as possible. She still wants *Carmen*

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<sup>147</sup> Interview with Stage Director.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Opera Administrator.

to be staged "because it's a masterpiece."<sup>149</sup> The administrator agrees saying, "I don't think for a minute we ever have to sacrifice the standard repertoire. The story is what it is. It was written at the time that it was, and opera is one of the oldest artforms and it's going to be problematic, but how are we choosing to address it, and how are we as a company balancing that conversation?" She finds frustration in the fact that opera has often "stereotyped ourselves to such an extent that it harms us."<sup>150</sup> These stereotypes are something that artistic administrators and directors must fight against in the telling of canon operas, as well as the creation of new works. It is not good enough to simply produce a new work by a female composer if it is telling the same stories that operas from the past have told time and time again where female characters lack agency. Artistic leaders have a responsibility to educate audiences and lead them beyond a comfortability that is beholden to the past. The administrator points out that "you are creating a viewership and a viewpoint of women characters as well and not only seeing women characters that are only written by

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Stage Director.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Opera Administrator.

men." This is only possible by bringing more female directors to the table, but also female librettists and dramaturgs as well. Great strides are being made to get there. The administrator concludes, "I would love to see at the end of the day more women in positions of power and agency from inside the company, to the people that are performing and directing and producing these new works. That's where the magic change happens. We are getting more and more balance in that way. There's a lot of great people fighting for it."<sup>151</sup>

### **A Handmaid's Tale**

While not a work by a female composer, Poul Rouders opera *The Handmaid's Tale* based on the acclaimed novel by Margaret Atwood has taken on a new life in recent years. In the wake of the 2016 American presidential election, the Women's Marches that galvanized the globe, and continued outcry in light of the "Me Too" movement, Atwood's novel has taken on a cult following. It was adapted as a television series by the streaming platform Hulu. That influence and a sense of "power in symbols, and a great deal of power in the red dresses and white bonnets" has inspired women to wear the costumes in protests around the

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Opera Administrator.

world.<sup>152</sup> Rouders' opera, which was premiered in 2000 by Danish National Opera, benefitted from a revision by the composer and was presented by Boston Lyric Opera in May 2019. Taking advantage of the current popularity of the novel and television adaptation, surely other companies will follow in staging this work. Performances are planned by San Francisco Opera for the fall of 2020. The work has been well received across the world and the Boston production is no exception with the Boston Globe remarking that the world created in the opera "feels alarmingly close."<sup>153</sup> The New York Times review calls the work "a brilliant, brutal opera, one that should be taken up widely." The reviewer goes on to characterize Rouders' score as "oppressive – too much so for comfortable listening, though that's probably the point." The production was staged in Boston's Lavietes Pavilion gymnasium, reminiscent of the gym that Atwood describes at the beginning of her novel. It is not hard to be drawn in to that world in a deep way since "this production tells her story where she lived it." One might think a story

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<sup>152</sup> Madonna, "Boston Lyric Opera's Powerful 'Handmaid's Tale' Lands Close to Home - The Boston Globe."

<sup>153</sup> Madonna.

depicting such oppression of women would not be the story one would choose to tell in these times, but clearly society has found something to identify within this story. Audiences largely identify with the narrative of the main character, Offred. Her strength in spite of the brutality she and the other characters face allows the audience to “find joy” in her “towering account.”<sup>154</sup>

### **Angel’s Bone**

The promotion of female composers has seen at least one encouraging sign in recent years: recognition by the Pulitzer Prize. Two of the last three winners in the music division have been female composers of opera. The 2017 winner of the Pulitzer Prize was Du Yun’s opera *Angel’s Bone*, which was premiered in 2016 at the Prototype Festival in New York.<sup>155</sup> Yun’s opera, which “is an allegory of human trafficking in modern times” was scheduled to have its West Coast Premiere by the Los Angeles Opera in May, but unfortunately those performances have been canceled due to concerns over the novel Coronavirus Pandemic.<sup>156</sup> The New

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<sup>154</sup> Allen, “Review: ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ Is a Brutal Triumph as Opera - The New York Times.”

<sup>155</sup> “Pulitzer Prize Music.”

<sup>156</sup> “Angel’s Bone | LA Opera.”

York Times declares it "unmistakably of the moment."<sup>157</sup> The opera "follows the plight of two angels whose nostalgia for earthly delights has, mysteriously, brought them back to our world," where they encounter a married couple who end up exploiting them "for wealth and personal gains." In doing so, the work explores "the dark effects and motivations behind modern-day slavery and the trafficking industry," an ever-present problem facing women across society.<sup>158</sup>

### **P R I S M**

The most recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize in music is Ellen Reid's opera *P R I S M*.<sup>159</sup> The work about a victim suffering from PTSD as a result of sexual assault came to life before the "Me Too" movement took off, but "as they were putting the finishing touches on the piece for the world premiere," the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination hearings began, making the work "an amplification of the headlines," thereby helping make the case to audiences for Los Angeles Opera and Beth Morrison

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<sup>157</sup> Fonseca-Wollheim, "Review."

<sup>158</sup> "Angel's Bone - PROTOTYPE."

<sup>159</sup> "Pulitzer Prize Music."



Projects which premiered the work.<sup>160</sup> Of the Los Angeles premiere, Richard S. Ginell writes that, "a viewer could get a sense of the agony, disruption of normal life, and sickening feeling that a sexual assault survivor experiences."<sup>161</sup> In an interview with NPR, Reid remarks that even though she began this work before the "Me Too" movement commanded our attention, it caused "a kind of shift in thinking about what it meant to be a survivor. And it felt really important." Reid goes on to reveal that both she and librettist Roxie Perkins had experienced sexual assault firsthand, which gives even greater insight into the experience. Reid remarks that there is "something about the piece that makes people who haven't experienced sexual assault understand just a little bit more what it might be like." When asked what she hopes the audience will take away from the work, Reid says: "I hope this piece allows anyone to be one step closer to living a life that isn't their own. I feel like music has a way of allowing you to understand an experience that isn't yours."<sup>162</sup> This

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<sup>160</sup> Ginell, "Sexual Assault, Refracted Through An Operatic Prism | Classical Voice North America."

<sup>161</sup> Ginell.

<sup>162</sup> Huizenga, "Readjusting Your Reality."

should be the goal. This is the reason for pursuing inclusiveness, putting works on stage that are created by diverse voices whether they be standard works or works that are being crafted for the future. Opera should be entertainment. It should transport us to a different world than the one to which we are accustomed. If art is able to achieve that, then and only then, can it communicate to the audience on a deeper level that makes everyone understand the work in light of the greater human experience. In the time of "Me Too" more than ever, works like Reid's are necessary.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

*Vanity Fair* magazine interviewed Supreme Court Justice, feminist icon, and opera fanatic Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the summer of 2018. In the interview, she recounted attending a lecture given at the Glimmerglass Opera Festival by *The Handmaid's Tale* author Margaret Atwood. Atwood expressed her belief that similar to previous feminist movements, the "Me Too" movement would face a backlash that would set back the progress of women yet again. Ginsburg fervently disagrees with this assessment, arguing that even when there is a backlash, it "never takes us all the way back." Ginsburg continues by arguing that she believes this moment in our history will be different because "the more women there are in positions of authority, the less likely that setbacks will occur." Ginsburg goes on to express that this was the moment in time for "Me Too." She points out that Ashley Judd gave her story to the *New York Times* two years before it was published, but that when it was ultimately published "it

had a ripple effect."<sup>163</sup> It has had a ripple effect; one that has sent shockwaves around the planet and one that has found its way into every corner of cultural life, including opera. It seems unbelievable that there could be a backlash this time as Atwood suggests, as this moment feels inevitable, and is a moment that opera as an artform cannot ignore.

Near the end of her book *Opera: The Undoing of Women*, Catherine Clément expresses that what she loves most about the women of opera is their resilience in the face of oppression. She speaks of how in these standard repertory operas we are "killing dead women who have already come back to life." You can return to the opera the next night and "matches blaze again and the sky lights up once more." Clément dreams of a world where "women will continue to sing in a voice that will never again submit to threat," a world in which "they will say something entirely different than the words breathed in delirium and pain."<sup>164</sup> McClary

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<sup>163</sup> Rosen, "'They Will Not Allow Progress to Be Reversed': Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Margaret Atwood Debate #MeToo | Vanity Fair."

<sup>164</sup> Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, 180.

calls this Clément's "invocation for all the women victims of the operatic stage."<sup>165</sup>

These are hopes that Clément wrote in 1988. They are hopes that cannot and should not be ignored any longer in 2020. Opera can no longer continue to perform its most hallowed works without acknowledging the sacrifice women have played in these works. The artform cannot afford to betray audiences by unashamedly bearing its misogyny on stage night after night. As renowned opera scholar Fred Plotkin said, opera "is not a dead artform" but "an evolving artform."<sup>166</sup> This evolution requires that both audience and producers be willing participants in its future. Creative ingenuity and inclusion of female voices in the creative process gives new life to the great works of the operatic tradition. This practice of inclusion can be a source to engage audiences and even draw in new audiences. There has been a "positive reception to recent new works—in particular those that feel relevant to our 21st century lives."<sup>167</sup> These new works can coexist alongside operatic classics in a way that engages audiences

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<sup>165</sup> Clément, xvii.

<sup>166</sup> Weir, "The Opera Is Having a Woke Renaissance."

<sup>167</sup> Weir.

in fresh and appealing ways. At a time when audiences have declined, and so many options for entertainment are at everyone's fingertips, opera must choose to be a bold forward-thinking artform. HD transmissions and high-profile names from Broadway and film are nice, but unless these voices and platforms embrace the chance to say something new, opera will continue to be a museum for older works and in a perpetual struggle to stay relevant in a modern world. "Time's Up." The moment to act is now. Many are already beginning to lead as this document shows. It is time the rest of the operatic world follow.

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## **APPENDIX A RECITAL PROGRAMS**

### PROSPECTUS FOR A DOCTORAL RECITAL

Submitted by

**Craig P. Price**

Prospective Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree  
in Performance (Voice)

Sharon Rattray, Piano

Friday, November 9, 2018  
4:30pm  
Recital Hall

#### **Salmo Quarantesimo-Secondo**

Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739)

Dal Tribunal' augusto  
Se mia Fortezza sei  
Sopra di me  
Allor fia che à sacri altari  
Dunque alma mia

#### **Michelangelo Lieder**

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Wohl denk ich oft  
Alles endet, was entsteht  
Fühlt meine Seele

#### **Chansons de Don Quichotte**

Jacques Ibert (1890-1962)

Chanson du départ  
Chanson à Dulcinée  
Chanson du Duc  
Chanson de la Mort de Don Quichotte

#### **Three Salt-Walter Ballads**

Frederick Keel (1871-1954)

Port of Many Ships  
Trade Winds  
Mother Carey

Che mai vegg'io!...Infelice! e tuo credevi...from *Ernani*

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Mr. Price is a student of Professor Jacob Will. This recital is presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance



PROSPECTUS FOR A DOCTORAL RECITAL (Opera Role MUSC 893)

Submitted by

**Craig P. Price**

Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree  
in Performance (Voice)

February 22-24, 2018

7:30/3:00PM

Drayton Hall Theater

**The Cunning Little Vixen**

Roles: Parson, Harašta

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Mr. Price is a student of Professor Jacob Will. This recital is presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance.

PROSPECTUS FOR A DOCTORAL RECITAL

Submitted by

**Craig P. Price**

Prospective Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree  
in Performance (Voice)

Sharon Rattray, Piano

Thursday September 26, 2019

6:00pm

Recital Hall

**Selections**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Moy geniy, moy angel, moy drug  
O, esli b ti mogla (Op. 38 No. 6)  
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt (Op. 6 No. 6)

**Fünf Rückert Lieder**

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Ich atmet' einen linden Duft  
Liebst du um Schönheit  
Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder  
Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen  
Um Mitternacht

**Songs of a Theme of War**

The Lads In Their Hundreds

George Butterworth (1885-1916)

Look Down Fair Moon

Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

Tom Sails Away  
In Flanders Fields

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

**Selections**

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Come dal ciel precipita from *Macbeth*

Il lacerato spirito from *Simon Boccanegra*

L'alto retaggio non ho bramato from *Luisa Miller*

Ramelle Brooks, Walter Craig Price, Wurm

Mr. Price is a student of Professor Jacob Will. This recital is presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance.

PROSPECTUS FOR A DOCTORAL RECITAL

Submitted by

**Craig P. Price, Bass-Baritone**

Prospective Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree  
in Performance (Voice)

Sharon Rattray, Piano

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

4:30pm  
Recital Hall

O Ruddier Than The Cherry from *Acis and Galatea* G.F. Handel (1685-1759)

It is Enough from *Elijah* Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

**Vier Ernste Gesänge** Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)  
Denn es gehet dem Menschen  
Ich wandte mich und sahe  
O Tod, wie bitter bist du  
Wenn ich mit Menschen

**Poème d'un jour** Gabriel Fauré (1890-1962)  
Rencontre  
Toujours!  
Adieu

**Flight for Heaven** Ned Rorem (b. 1923)  
To Music, to becalm his Fever  
Cherry-Ripe  
Upon Julia's Clothes  
To Daisies, not to shut so Soon  
Epitaph (upon a child that died)  
Another Epitaph  
To the Willow-tree  
Comfort to a Youth that had lost his Love  
To Anthea, who may command him Anything

Mr. Price is a student of Professor Jacob Will. This recital is presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Voice Performance.