OPERA INSIDER
A Look at the 2017 Festival
SEASON TWO
Episodes available starting June 23, and dropped weekly through August 8, 2017

Featureing interviews with artists and others involved in Central City Opera’s 2017 Festival.

Hosted and Produced by Emily Murdock

Listen at your leisure after easily downloading the podcasts directly to your computer, tablet or phone from CentralCityOpera.org/podcast or from the iPhone Podcasts app or the Android Stitcher app.
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**Compiled and Written by:** Deborah Morrow, Emily Murdock, Michael Dixon, Valerie Smith  
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CentralCityOpera.org  
Central City Opera Box Office 303.292.6700
Nina Odescalchi Kelly
Family Matinee of
CARMEN

Tuesday, August 1, 2017  |  2:30 pm

CENTRAL CITY OPERA PRESENTS the family friendly matinee in the Central City Opera House, performed by members of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artists Training Program. Pre-show activities and a post-show autograph signing session with the stars.

Tickets now on sale. Order today!

CentralCityOpera.org  |  303.292.6700
WELCOME TO THE 2017 OPERA INSIDER.

We have a special season lined up for Central City Opera’s 85th anniversary with something for everyone. If you like learning more about the great operas that can be seen on our stages, as well as composers, artists and history, this guide is for you!

In addition to our renowned summer opera festival in Central City where great artists present innovative full opera productions, Central City Opera’s dynamic history of community engagement continues to grow. In 2016 we served 46,000 students, families and seniors with 207 live performances, workshops and residencies throughout Colorado and Wyoming, as well as 26 podcast episodes that were heard around the world. We present touring performances in schools, theaters, and community and retirement centers in communities large and small. For many, especially in rural areas, these performances are the first exposure not only to opera, but to live performance of any kind.

Our programs are designed to enhance existing curriculum for young students and lifelong learning for everyone. Many of the artists who perform in these programs are also teaching artists and, in addition to presenting master classes and interactive performances, they mentor students in the creative process of producing and performing their own original music theatre works.

For a complete list of Education and Community Engagement programs offered throughout the year by Central City Opera beyond the summer festival, see pages 4-5 to learn how you can bring a program to your community.

It is our experience that the arts enrich lives and learning at every age.

Enjoy,

Deborah Morrow, Director of Education and Community Engagement
EUREKA STREET (GRADES K-6) brings students into the fascinating world of opera characters, great stories, history, music and rhythm.

MOZART & COMPANY (GRADES K-6) introduces the basics of opera – song, story, costumes and props – in arias and short vignettes.

HOW THE WEST WAS SUNG (GRADES 3-8) Frontier history comes alive as real and imaginary characters from the past react to today’s new-fangled notions.

EN MIS PALABRAS—IN MY OWN WORDS (GRADES 6-12) is a bilingual (Spanish-English) opera that follows 15-year-old Ana Maria as she tries to balance the conflicting influences of her family cultural traditions vs. the expectations of her peers. Bilingual study guide provided.

SMOOTH OPERATOR, SAINTS AND SINNERS, THERE’S A SONG FOR THAT, and LOVE NOTES are cabaret shows that bring popular songs and scenes from opera and musical theatre to family audiences. Available for booking by schools, private parties, concert venues, arts councils and recreation districts.

MUSIC! WORDS! OPERA! (GRADES 3-12) provides extended artist residencies to engage students in creating and performing musical stories.

MUSIC! WORDS! OPERA! EDUCATOR WORKSHOP, a 5-day summer workshop for K-12 teachers, prepares educators to incorporate opera music and stories into curriculum and lead their students in creating and performing musical stories. Graduate credits available.
ALL-ACCESS PASS DAY CAMP for students who are budding performers or potential production personnel. Students in grades 9-12 are eligible to spend three days seeing performances, taking master classes and going behind the scenes with internationally-acclaimed artists and production people—conductors, singers, instrumentalists, wig and makeup artists, costumers, lighting designers, backstage technicians and more.

FAMILY MATINEES for children ages 6 to 18 and their companion adults are special performances of Festival operas (performed by participants in the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artists Training Program) with tickets at significantly discounted prices.

Central City Opera engages in Performance Partnerships with such organizations as Inside the Orchestra, the Denver Art Museum, the Boulder Philharmonic, the Colorado Springs Conservatory and the Colorado Children’s Chorale.

Visit CentralCityOpera.org/education for more information or call 303.331.7026 to schedule a program at your school. Scholarships available.
From the beginning of time, humans have been telling stories, and opera happens to be one of the grandest forms of storytelling.
AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

CENTRAL CITY OPERA: A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE IN THE MOUNTAINS

What is opera? Opera is a story that is sung. It combines all the great art forms: music, theatre, visual arts, literature, and sometimes even dance. From the beginning of time, humans have been telling stories, and opera happens to be one of the grandest forms of storytelling.

DRESS
Opera is a great opportunity to get dressed up and lots of people still do, although Colorado is known for being comfortable and relaxed. You are going to be up pretty high in the mountains, so make sure you bring your jacket. Central City is also known for the occasional short-lived downpour, so it’s wise to bring an umbrella or rain jacket.

PUNCTUALITY
It’s important to be on time for the opera. Arrive early to get in your seat and read your program. It would be a shame to miss any of the opera if you are late.

DURING THE PERFORMANCE
Enjoy the opera! Turn off anything that rings or beeps, put your program and other belongings under your seat, and please, no chatting (or singing along!).

APPLAUSE
This is your time to make a little noise - finally! The audience will usually applaud after the overture, at the end of each act, and sometimes if one of the singers sings a really spectacular aria. Show your appreciation by clapping with gusto, and shouting Bravo! (for a man), and Brava! (for a woman.) Singers really like the positive attention.

THE HISTORY OF “BRAVO!”
When exactly did people start shouting this particular word at operas? Well, it first appeared as a cheer meaning “well done!” or “brave!” in 18th century Italian literature, and was adopted by English speaking opera audiences sometime in the 19th century when Italian opera was very popular in England. As a matter of fact, some singers would hire a claque (French for “applause”) to applaud their performance wildly, hopefully convincing the rest of the audience of their greatness!

THE HISTORY OF “BOO!!!”
Oh yes, there have definitely been times when opera singers have been booed, though we at the Opera Insider certainly think you will be shouting “Bravo” while sitting in the Central City Opera House! Showing operatic disapproval in the form of a loud “Boo!” first appeared in the 19th century and was supposed to sound like oxen lowing. Booing at an opera is much more likely to be found in Europe, where opera-going is treated more like a sporting event. Some opera attendees, like the loggionisti at La Scala in Milan, are so fanatical about exactly how an opera should be sung, they’ve managed to boo several famous singers off stage right in the middle of an opera! In America, the singers are rarely booed, although at some of the larger opera houses, like the Metropolitan in New York, opera-goers will boo the director, set and costume designers if they don’t like the way a new production looks.
EXPERIENCE ALL CENTRAL CITY OPERA HAS TO OFFER THIS SEASON

Carmen | Cosi fan tutte
The Burning Fiery Furnace | Gallantry | Cabildo

2017 FESTIVAL
July 8 - August 6

303.292.6700 | CentralCityOpera.org
WORDS TO KNOW
BEFORE YOU GO SEE THE SHOWS

IN THE OPERA SCORE...

The **libretto** contains all of the words of an opera. Italian for “little book,” a libretto is usually shorter than the script for a play because it takes longer to sing lines than to say them, and because music is also a very important part of telling the story of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is often a playwright or poet and is called a **librettist**.

The **composer** writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the **score** with separate lines for each instrument and each singer’s vocal part. The score, as a piece of music, reflects the mood, events and emotions of the characters in the story.

**Characters** are the people in the story. Singers perform the parts of the characters, also called **roles**.

A **synopsis** is a short written summary of the story.

The **overture** is a piece of music played by the orchestra to begin the opera. It usually, but not always, contains some of the musical themes from the opera and sets the mood for what the audience is about to see.

**Recitative**, pronounced re-chi-ta-TEEV, is sung dialogue that propels the action of the story. The singing is generally faster with a rhythm more like regular speech.

An **aria** is an extended musical passage sung as a solo (by one person). It is often very lyrical and accompanied by the orchestra, conveying the emotions of the character at a particular point in the story. The action usually stops while an aria is sung.

A **duet** is an extended musical passage for two singers, a **trio** is sung by three singers, a **quartet** is a piece for four singers, and so on.

An **ensemble** is an extended musical passage for four or more singers. Very often each performer in an ensemble is singing different words and different musical lines.

**Choral** scenes usually feature the principal and secondary cast members with the chorus. The sheer number of voices on stage is usually reserved for moments of high drama and spectacle. Dancers might also be featured in a big choral scene.

The **finale** is the last number in an act. It usually involves many singers and is very dramatic.

**Supertitles** or **surtitles** are the translation of the words of an opera projected above the stage at the same time the character(s) on stage is singing them. When an opera is in a different language, this helps people understand what is going on. Even if an opera is performed in English, supertitles are often used to help the audience follow the story.

ONSTAGE AND IN THE PIT...

The **Music Director** is responsible for the interpretation of the score. The Music Director is also usually the **conductor**, who is responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor stands at the front of the orchestra pit and uses a **baton** (a short white stick) and his/her arms and body to interpret the music, cue singers and instrumentalists and keep the beat so everybody stays together. **Maestro** *(maestra* for a woman) is the Italian word for conductor (literally “master”) and is a term of great respect.

**Soprano** is the highest female voice. She is often the heroine of the opera and frequently, she is in love with
the tenor. A star soprano is often referred to as the “Prima Donna.”

**Mezzo-soprano**, or just mezzo, is the second highest, or middle, female voice. The mezzo sound is typically darker and warmer than the soprano. The mezzo usually plays the older female character (like the mother), a villainess (like a witch), a seductress, or a young man or boy. When the mezzo plays a male character, she will be dressed in men’s clothes, thus it is called a pants or trouser role. This convention became popular in the 17th Century as a woman’s voice is stronger than a boy’s voice.

**Alto**, also called contralto, is the lowest female voice. The alto often plays an old woman, who can either be wise and good or an old witch.

The **tenor** is the highest male voice and is usually the hero of the opera and generally in love with the soprano.

**Baritone** is the next lowest, or middle, male voice. The baritone is often a villain but can sometimes be a hero who sacrifices himself for the tenor and/or soprano. In a comedy, the baritone is usually the one pulling all kinds of pranks. The baritone is often in love with the soprano but usually loses her to the tenor.

The **bass** has the lowest male voice. He very often plays a wise old man or sometimes a comic character (basso buffa). Basso profundo describes the lowest bass voice.

**Supernumeraries** or “supers,” appear on stage in costume in non-singing and non-speaking roles.

The **orchestra** is the group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. They play under the stage in the orchestra pit where they will be less likely to overpower the singers and detract from the physical action on stage. Even though the orchestra is not on stage, the instrumentalists are equal partners with the singers in performing an opera.

The **chorus** is a group of singers who function as a unit on stage. Choruses can be for mixed voices, men only, women only, or children. They are usually featured in crowd scenes where they can represent townspeople, soldiers, pilgrims, etc.

**Dancers** are often included in an opera. They are usually part of large crowd scenes but can be featured in solo roles as well. Many operas include a short ballet.

**BACKSTAGE AND BEHIND THE SCENES...**

Where do you start if you want to put on a production of an opera? Usually the General Director, Artistic Director or Music Director will pick the **repertoire**, or what operas will be performed. The performance is conceived by the **Production Team**, which consists of the Music Director/Conductor, Stage Director, Choreographer, Scene Designer, Costume Designer, Props Master, Lighting Designer and Technical Director. These people meet frequently to trade ideas and work together to ensure a cohesive interpretation of the piece from a visual, dramatic and musical standpoint.

The **Stage Director** (sometimes simply called the director) is responsible for the overall look or concept of the production. The director determines how the opera will be interpreted and tells everyone on stage when and where to move, creating “stage pictures” that enhance the story.

The **Choreographer** designs movement for the dancers and sometimes for chorus and other characters.

The **Costume Designer** designs and creates the clothes singers wear to reflect aspects of the character played by the singer and their significance in the story.

The **Scene Designer** creates the visual background and set pieces for the opera. He or she creates a small scale model of the set and detailed blueprints which serve as the “instructions” for building the set. He or she also
works closely with the props master on hand props, furniture and set decoration.

The **Lighting Designer** creates a lighting plan that emphasizes the drama of the moment. Lighting design is an important visual element that contributes to the ambience of the stage setting and adds depth to the appearance of people, costumes and props on stage.

The **Technical Director** supervises everyone who is implementing the concepts of the designers. He or she works with carpenters, painters, electricians, sound designers and stagehands and oversees the building of sets and props and hanging of lights.

The **Stage Manager** coordinates the elements of a show during the performance. He or she is responsible for calling all the **cues** in the performance for the cast and crew. This means the stage manager warns the cast and crew when acts are about to begin and end, tells the conductor when to start, cues cast members for entrances, and follows hundreds of detailed notes in the score to tell the crew when to change lighting, scenery, sound effects, and raise or lower the curtain.

The **Crew** (stagehands and props master) works behind the scenes and is responsible for setting up and running all of the equipment for a performance, including changing sets, placing and maintaining props, operating the lights, opening and closing the curtains, operating trap doors, sound effects, and assisting performers with costumes and makeup.

**OTHER OPERA TERMS...**

**Bel canto**, literally “beautiful singing,” describes the musical style of an opera that is lyrical and often very flowery.

**Bravo**, literally “brave” or “courageous,” is a form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, bravo is for a single man, **brava** for a single woman and **bravi** for more than one performer.

**Cadenza** is a brilliant passage in an aria often improvised by the singer, usually in such a way as to best display his or her vocal talents. Cadenzas are virtuosic and rhythmically free.

**Coloratura** describes a voice that possesses unusual flexibility, able to sing many notes quickly over a wide range. This term is most often used to describe female voices, i.e. coloratura soprano or mezzo, but occasionally men will have this same ability.

The **concertmaster** or **concertmistress** is the first violinist who leads the orchestra in tuning at the beginning of each act and coordinates the strings section, deciding on the bowing so that all the bows move in unison.

**Diva**, literally “goddess,” refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is **divo**.

**Leitmotiv**, “light-mo-teef,” is a short musical phrase associated with a particular character or event. These repeated musical themes can signal the entrance of a character, foreshadow an event, or help reveal what a character is feeling or thinking.

The **prima donna** is the leading female singer, or “first lady,” in an opera. Because of the way opera stars have behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding way. **Diva** can have the same connotation.

**Tempo** refers to how fast or slow the music is performed. The conductor reads the composer’s markings and sets the speed of the music.

An **understudy** is someone who learns a main role in an opera in case the lead singer can’t perform for some reason. This is also called a **cover**, i.e. Miss Trill is covering the role of Buttercup.
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<td>CARMEN, TALKBACK</td>
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**Performance Locations**
- The Burning Fiery Furnace: Gilman Rehearsal Room at The Martin Foundry
- Gallantry: Williams Stables Theater Cabildo: Williams Stables Theater

Opera Notes occur 45 minutes before every main stage show, except the Family Matinee.

Artists Mix & Mingle follows matinees, weather permitting.

*Take a Child to the Opera*
EXPAND THE FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE BY ADDING ON ONE OR MORE EVENTS.

LUNCH & A SONG
30 minute solo performances to whet your vocal appetite, preceded by lunch at the historic Teller House.

SHORT WORKS
Engaging short scenes for opera veterans or virgins. Williams Stables Theater.

OPERA NOTES
Free pre-performance talks 45 minutes before main stage shows. Williams Stables Theater.

TALKBACK
Free post-performance talks in the Teller House directly after select main stage shows.

POST-OP
Impromptu performances by Central City Opera stars and a cash bar after select weekend evening shows at the Teller House.

ARTISTS MIX & MINGLE
Join us after select matinee performances to mix and mingle with the artists on the Teller House deck. Enjoy a cash bar and the chance to meet the stars. Weather permitting.

AFTERNOON AT THE OPERA
Enjoy a seated lunch and dessert, followed by a Historic Hardhat Tour of the Belvidere Theater.

NINA ODESCALCHI KELLY
FAMILY MATINEE
A kid-friendly matinee of Carmen with a narrator’s preview and an autograph session with singers. Bring a picnic and add on fun preshow activities with Take a Child to the Opera.

BOOMER BUS
Add the Boomer Bus package for an insider’s look at Central City Opera and its historic mining town. Enjoy a live history presentation during the ride to Central City, a boxed lunch and an exclusive behind-the-scenes experience.

OPERA BUS
Leave the driving to us. Add the Opera Bus for a scenic drive to Central City.

Boomer and Opera Buses leave from Sports Authority, 370 S. Colorado Blvd, Glendale at 10 am.
Boomer and Opera Buses leave from Simms Steakhouse, 11911 W. 6th Ave., Lakewood at 10:45 am.

THE BOOMER BUS IS SPONSORED BY
“Love is a rebellious bird whose heart cannot be tamed”
- Carmen

CARMEN

COMPOSER Georges Bizet
LIBRETTISTS Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
BASED ON A NOVEL BY Prosper Mérimée
CONDUCTOR Adam Turner
DIRECTOR Jose Maria Con demi

Premiered 1875 in Paris, France

The music of Carmen may be the most familiar in all of opera (who doesn’t know the Toreador song?) but the character of Carmen herself is the reason we remain fascinated with the opera. She is a woman unafraid to pursue her heart’s desires, whatever the consequences. A handsome soldier wins her affection while a macho bullfighter turns her head, but neither can tame her defiant spirit.

Georges Bizet didn’t live to see his opera become a worldwide hit. Paris audiences were scandalized at its 1875 premiere. Women smoking cigarettes on stage and fighting like street urchins while Carmen brazenly carried on with two men at once just didn’t mesh with middle class morals. Bizet died at the age of 36, only three months after the premiere, unaware that critics and public were already taking a second look at what would come to be known as his masterpiece.

Setting: Seville, Spain and the mountains above it

CHARACTERS

Emily Pulley
CARMEN - a Roma (gypsy) woman who values freedom more than life; a spitfire who is a smuggler, occasionally works in a cigarette factory, and sings and dances in a local tavern

Adriano Graziani
DON JOSÉ - a young Basque army corporal with a dark past, stationed in Seville

Angela Mortellaro
MICAËLA – a country girl from José’s home town. José’s mother wants him to marry Micaëla.

Michael Mayes
ESCAMILLO – a famous bullfighter

Tyler Putnam
ZUNIGA – José’s commanding officer

Kira Dills-DeSurra, Heidi Middendorf, Nathan Ward, Armando Contreras
MERCEDES, FRASQUITA, REMENDADO, DANCÄIRE – Carmen’s smuggler comrades

Chorus
Today Gypsies, or as they call themselves, Roma, represent Europe’s largest ethnic minority. Spread across Europe, the Middle East and North and South America, Gypsies are a unique population with shared values and customs, but they neither claim a homeland nor seek to establish an independent state.

Linguistic evidence suggests their origins lie in northwestern India because the Romany language shares traits with languages of the Punjab region. Around the 11th and 12th centuries, Gypsies migrated toward Europe, perhaps driven out by invading armies from Afghanistan. Making their way through the Ottoman Empire as refugees, soldiers and slaves, Gypsies were initially welcomed in Eastern and Central Europe, where they were granted writs of protection from the Pope and Kings. Early 15th century documents granting safe conduct to the “Princes and Counts of Little Egypt” suggest that the term “Gypsy” was derived from “Egyptian”. Folklore has it that the migrating Gypsies claimed to be descendants of Egyptians who had enslaved the Israelites, and for that reason God condemned them to perpetual wandering.

Their welcome in Europe was short-lived, and they soon encountered resentment, discrimination and persecution. The causes of prejudice were rooted in a number of factors. First, they have dark skin, and phrases like “black as a Gypsy” became common insults in Italy and the Netherlands. Also, their language was mysterious, their social structures were...
foreign, they resisted assimilation, and because they'd crossed Turkish-occupied lands, they were considered infidels or spies for the Ottoman Empire.

The record of persecution is staggering in Europe, where Gypsies were enslaved, expelled, and subjected to ethnic cleansing. The first recorded transaction for a Gypsy slave took place in 1385 in Wallachia (part of present-day Romania), and in 1548 the Holy Roman Empire declared that “whoever kills a Gypsy will be guilty of no murder.” The Egyptians Act of 1554 in England directed Gypsies to abandon their “naughty, idle and ungodly life and company,” and in 1885 the United States prohibited Gypsy immigration.

Discrimination continues to the present day, based on stereotypes of crime and anti-social behavior that have been perpetuated by fictional representations in literature and art. In romanticized portraits, Gypsies possess mystical powers of fortune-telling, passionate tempers paired with indomitable love of freedom, and habits of criminality. Gypsy female characters have been portrayed as provocative, sexually available, exotic and seductive.

Carmen is no exception. Her character is the creation of Prosper Mérimée, a French author who took inspiration from Alexander Pushkin’s poem The Gypsies, which Mérimée translated from Russian into French. Another source of inspiration was George Borrow’s book The Zincali, or, An Account of the Gypsies of Spain. Part travelogue, part ethnography, The Zincali traces the origins, migration, customs and treatment of Gypsies, or Gitanos and Hungaros as they are known in Spain. In his anecdotal accounts, Borrow attempts to dispel stereotypes of the time, but his observations also reinforce Romantic impressions, such as the practice of palm-reading. While Carmen herself is not a fortune teller, she believes in the practice and its prophecies.

“Dabbling in sorcery is to some degree the province of the female Gypsy,” Borrow writes. “She affects to tell the future, and to prepare philtres (love potions) by means of which love can be awakened in any individual towards any particular object; and such is the credulity of the human race, even in the most enlightened countries, that the profits arising from these practices is great.”

Records show that Gypsies arrived in Spain in 1425 and settled primarily in Barcelona and the southern region of Andalusia, where Roma musicians influenced the evolution of flamenco. For 300 years, Spanish laws were enacted with the goal of either integrating or driving out the Gitanos, but, like Roma everywhere, the Gitano resisted assimilation. One way they did this was by pursuing professions that allowed them to maintain control and ownership of their work, such as metal-craftsmen, horse traders and musicians.

“The Roma is the most basic, most profound, the most aristocratic of my country, as representative of their way and whoever keeps the flame, blood and the alphabet of the universal Andalusian truth.”

Most Gitanos in Andalusia are now settled, some in the caves of Sacromonte Hill facing the majestic 14th c. royal Moorish complex known as Alhambra, but the Hungaro population, who are poorer than the Gitanos, still tend to live nomadic lives. Today the Spanish government is devising programs to allow Gypsies to participate in Spain’s economic and political life without erasing their distinctive culture and linguistic heritage.

“The Roma is the most basic, most profound, the most aristocratic of my country, as representative of their way and whoever keeps the flame, blood and the alphabet of the universal Andalusian truth.”

Federico Garcia Lorca, Romancero Gitano
Gypsy Ballads
The life of French composer Georges Bizet offers a disconcerting tale of early promise finally realized through hard work, but appreciated only after the artist has passed on. Born on October 25, 1838, Bizet grew up in a musical household in Paris. His father was a wigmaker-turned-voice teacher, his mother was a pianist, and it’s said that they hid books from their child so that he would spend more time learning music than reading.

Based on his musical precocity, which critics have compared favorably with the talents of young Mozart and Mendelssohn, Bizet was accepted into the Paris Conservatoire de Musique at age nine. There he studied with the opera composers Fromental Halévy and Charles Gounod, both of whom influenced his work. Bizet proved to be a model pupil and won numerous awards, including a first-year prize for solfège (sight-singing). His formal training culminated in 1857 when he received the Prix de Rome, a five-year state pension that began with two years in residence at the Académie de France in Rome.

While in Italy, Bizet conceived several ambitious projects only to abandon them. That pattern, along with compositions that failed to garner popular appeal or critical acclaim, characterizes much of his career. His first opera of significance, *Les pêcheurs de perles (The Pearl Fishers)*, was performed in Paris in 1863. Set in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the opera was panned by critics, though it displayed Bizet’s talent for creating exotic atmosphere. His later operas followed suit: *Ivan IV* (1862, but not performed until 1946) is set in Russia; the one-act *Djamileh* (1872) takes place in Cairo, Egypt; and the tragedy of *Carmen* (1875) unfolds in Andalusian Spain.

Bizet’s choice of *Carmen*, based on Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novella of the same title, exemplifies how French artists and authors sought inspiration in Spain during the 19th century. In 1830 French novelist Victor Hugo set his most famous play, *Hernani*, in a fictitious Spanish court, and a decade later Giuseppe Verdi transformed that drama of romance and intrigue into his opera masterpiece, *Ernani*. The rule of Joseph I, Napoleon’s brother who was crowned King of Spain in 1808, resulted in hundreds of Spanish paintings being shipped to the Louvre, where artists such as Manet, Renoir, and Degas studied them. And master works inspired by composers’ travels to Spain include Claude Debussy’s *Iberia* (1908) and Emmanuel Chabrier’s *España* (1883).

Bizet’s personal life was no less problematic than his professional endeavors. After returning to Paris in 1860, he earned his living by arranging others’ compositions,
teaching, and accompanying rehearsals. In 1862 he fathered a child whom he never acknowledged with the family housekeeper, Marie Reiter. In 1869 he married Geneviève Halévy, the mentally unstable daughter of his former teacher. Later, when rumors spread that Georges was romantically involved with the lead actress/singer of Carmen, Galli-Marié, it seems that Geneviève was enjoying her own tryst with Emil-Miriam Delaborde, a virtuoso pianist. A year after Georges’s death, Geneviève and Delaborde entered into a marriage contract (though they never officially wed). Through all that, Bizet, who was given to depression and smoked heavily, wrote that he “suffered like a dog” from abscesses in his throat.

The last chapter of Bizet’s life is defined by his all-consuming work on Carmen and the subsequent discernment of critics and the public. The project was initiated by the management of the Opéra Comique, and Bizet spent two years composing and rehearsing. Along the way, he encountered resistance in every direction. First, an Opéra Comique director resigned because he deemed the subject matter too risqué and vulgar. Musicians complained that the music was too difficult to play. Chorus members threatened to go on strike because they had to act as individual characters—and fight and smoke on stage! And the lead actress, Galli-Marié, insisted that Bizet revise Carmen’s famous habanera 14 times to accommodate her voice.

Opening night must have been nerve-racking. Enthusiastic response during the first act dwindled as the performance proceeded. Indignant exclamations of “immoral” and “scandalous” were overhead during intermissions. And the response of critics ranged from vicious contempt to faint praise; one described Galli-Marié’s interpretation as “the very incarnation of vice” while another accused Bizet of pandering to public taste.

After the curtain rang down, Bizet retired to his country home and never saw another performance. “I foresee a definite and hopeless flop,” he wrote. Three months later, he died of a heart attack at age 36. His funeral was attended by 4,000 people, and that evening the Opera Comique presented a special performance of Carmen. Finally Bizet’s genius was acknowledged, and not long afterwards Tchaikovsky wrote: “Carmen is a masterpiece in every sense of the word...one of those rare creations which expresses the efforts of a whole musical epoch.”

If only he had lived to hear that praise. “What a beautiful art,” Bizet once wrote, “but what a wretched profession.”
Born and raised in San Andres de Giles, a small town in rural Argentina, Jose Maria Condemi moved to Buenos Aires as a teenager to continue his education. Then, after nearly four years of medical school, he dropped out, he says, “To begin this crazy idea to become an opera director, which I didn’t even know existed. Since I was young, I played the piano and was very much into the arts, but opera didn’t come into my life until later.”

The defining moment when he chose opera, or opera chose him, came when he heard the final duet of Carmen for the first time. Soon thereafter he enrolled in the Institute at Teatro Colón, a grand opera house that has been compared favorably in terms of acoustics and architecture to Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Vienna State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

After receiving his undergraduate degree in opera stage direction, Condemi pursued a professional career, but it soon became evident there weren’t enough opera companies in Buenos Aires to make a living. And as a young director, he would be waiting a long time for his chance to direct at Teatro Colón. While researching other opportunities, he came across an advertisement for the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He applied, was accepted, received a full scholarship and began his graduate studies in theater directing.

“One of the reasons I like opera is that the storytelling is through music,” Condemi explains. “I’m very musically inclined, but I love theatre too, and that’s what I trained in at CCM. I took courses like lighting design and scenic design to learn how to tell a story through the visual components. On top of that, I studied what performers do on stage to tell the story through movement and how they interact. The idea is to make good theatre out of opera.”

To accomplish that, Condemi begins by asking questions. “In the act of asking questions, we are creating the ground for good theatre,” he says. “Who is Carmen and how is she going to be in this production in 2017? Why approach this particular moment this way? At the heart of it all is questions – something that will break the material open.”

Of course, having directed Carmen before, Condemi has an opinion about the title character: “She craves adventure and thrives in danger. Risk is her fetish and freedom is her drug of choice. She is not only fearless in the face of death but curiously attracted to it. When
she meets Don José, I imagine she sees through the cracks of his repressed façade and gazes straight into the darkest corners of his soul.”

Condemi’s productions have been staged at the San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Canadian Opera Company, among many more. Critics have praised his work for its theatrical flair, psychological subtlety and detailed crowd scenes. “I always take with a grain of salt what reviewers say, but in terms of theatrical flair,” he notes, “it’s not that I sit down and think to myself, OK, I’m going to put some theatrical flair in my shows. It’s whatever the story may need to become theatrically interesting.”

“I’ve always worked with young singers, but this is the first time I’ve had a full-time job training young singers, and I love it. Being able to train the next generation of opera singers in a way that reflects what will be expected of them is so exciting because I can only imagine just how wonderful and how exponentially better it’s going to get.”

To inspire his students, Condemi shares a quote borrowed from Albert Einstein: “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.” It’s a statement that describes his approach to directing opera, as well.

“Regarding character psychology,” he continues, “I actually work very hard to make sure that nothing is taken for granted, so that the audience can go, wow, I never thought about this moment that way. And as far as crowds are concerned, my goal is to treat the chorus as a group of individual characters. I’m always thinking about involving the chorus more than is required in a scene in ways that enhance the storytelling.”

Condemi is a teacher, as well, and was recently appointed Chair of the Opera and Musical Theatre Program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.
Emily Pulley launched her professional career as a Studio Artist at Central City Opera in 1992 and has performed, as she puts it, “most of the roles on my soprano bucket list” with some of the world’s great opera companies, including Mimi in La bohème at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden and Nedda in Pagliacci at the Metropolitan Opera.

The setting of Central City Opera couldn’t be more different than the Metropolitan Opera or the Royal Opera House. How do you compare experiences in such different spaces?

**EP:** I think that everyone is hungry for shared experience, and it’s always a shared experience in the theater, even if it’s a 4,000-seat house. But when you’re in Central City, it’s an intimate experience as well. You can really feel it when the audience is with you, and you know they can feel all the energy coming from the stage. Having everyone in such close proximity definitely helps keep you honest and engaged, so for someone who strives to give detailed performances and connect with the audience, Central City is an ideal venue.

What does it mean to be performing the role of Carmen at this point in your career?

**EP:** I’m thrilled to be taking on this role and am glad that I have so much experience to draw upon. I’ve performed in numerous productions of the show as Micaëla and Frasquita (and even “Crazy Manuelita” at Central back in 1993), but I honestly never thought I would get to sing the title role. It’s arguably the most iconic character in all of opera, and that is both exciting and daunting. I realize I’m not your typical Carmen, but that gives me the chance to delve into different facets of her personality—and my own

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY PULLEY**

**BY MICHAEL DIXON**

“I realize I’m not your typical Carmen, but that gives me the chance to delve into different facets of her personality...”
personality as well. And I’ll finally get to put all those flamenco lessons I took to good use!

**What’s the biggest challenge in playing the role?**

**EP:** Carmen is exotic, fiery, seductive, and self-empowered, and all of these things are very attractive, even thrilling. But she uses these attributes to manipulate people to suit her own ends and creates chaos all around her. So for me, the challenge is to make sure that the audience doesn’t lose sympathy for her. I think one of the ways to do that is to emphasize her sense of humor, which comes from her zest for life and her savvy self-awareness. It’s also important to show that she never pities herself or regrets her choices. She lives—and dies—on her own terms.

**With Carmen, how much is coy flirtation and how much is authentically felt?**

**EP:** While it undoubtedly starts out as flirtation—even provocation, I believe that Carmen’s love for José becomes genuine, and that creates a huge inner conflict. For someone who prizes personal liberty above all things, love is about the worst thing that can happen, because you can’t be in love and be completely free.

**You’ve described a very modern dilemma.**

**EP:** This is part of what I find so exciting about Carmen. It may have been written with a Victorian sensibility (the immoral shall perish, and dalliance with a wanton woman will inevitably lead to your destruction), but we have just as much of this same conflict now. We still long for love while craving complete freedom and then wonder why we feel so unsettled. Carmen embodies that paradox, and I think that’s why people are both drawn to and repelled by her. Likewise, it’s why everyone adores Micaëla: she demonstrates unselfish love, the courage of her convictions, and order amidst the chaos. Deep down, we know that we need that in our lives, even if the opposite seems more desirable.

**What does it mean to you to perform this role at Central City Opera?**

**EP:** Central City has been a tremendously important part of my life for over 25 years, and this will be my 10th season with them. I truly consider it to be a second home. I received vital training and encouragement there when I was first starting out, and I have felt overwhelming support in the years since. Many of my closest friendships were formed at Central, and my family is always thrilled to come visit. Speaking both professionally and personally, this offer could not have come at a better time, because we can all get a bit down on ourselves in this crazy business. To have them say, “We think you’d be a great Carmen” made me see myself differently and even consider taking my career in a new direction. I’m incredibly grateful for that. And when you’re venturing out into unfamiliar territory, it’s always important to know where home is.
“No woman yet has ever died for love. Die for a man? There are more where he came from.” – Despina

**COSÌ FAN TUTTE**

*ossia La scuola degli amanti:*

*Thus Do All Women, or The School for Lovers*

**COMPOSER**
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**LIBRETTIST**
Lorenzo Da Ponte

**CONDUCTOR**
John Baril

**DIRECTOR**
Stephen Barlow

Premiered 1790 in Vienna, Austria

The fidelity of two sets of lovers is put to the test in Mozart’s comedy of errors. Lines are hilariously blurred as deceit and desire play out in a world caught between make-believe and reality.

Setting: A university around 1900

**CHARACTERS**

Matthew Plenk  
FERRANDO - a student dating Dorabella, convinced that his girlfriend is faithful to him

David Adam Moore  
GUGLIELMO - a student dating Fiordiligi, and who is also convinced that his girlfriend is faithful to him

Patrick Carfizzi  
DON ALFONSO - an older professor who doesn’t believe women can be faithful

Hailey Clark  
FIORDILIGI - Dorabella’s sister; a student dating Guglielmo

Tamara Gura  
DORABELLA - Fiordiligi’s sister; a student dating Ferrando

Megan Marino  
DESPINA - a junior house mistress working in Fiordiligi and Dorabella’s dormitory; has a more realistic view of love

Chorus
From masked Greek heroes to the mustached "Albanians" in Così fan tutte to the bespectacled Clark Kent in the world of Superman, thinly constructed disguises have been an effective and beloved storytelling tool for as long as there have been stories. An exhaustive litany of operatic characters summon the ability to fool their closest friends, their siblings, even their lovers with nothing more than an unsuspecting set of clothes, and maybe some applied facial hair. These tricks would never work in "real life" yet opera librettists rely heavily upon the disguise trope as a means to move their stories along. Why? The answer is all a matter of genre and viewer expectations.

Dictionary.com defines “opera” as an extended dramatic composition, in which all parts are sung to instrumental accompaniment, that usually includes arias, choruses, and recitatives, and that sometimes includes ballet. Conspicuously, the words “plot” and “story” aren’t part of that definition. Despite the critical role that the latter elements play in most every opera from the time of Monteverdi to Gershwin, the classical opera has never been a plot-first art-form. Because an opera’s story has historically played second-fiddle to its musical elements, easily-understandable tropes such as gender-bending and disguises became popular tools for librettists to help advance their narratives. Because that is what the “disguise” trope does for a story – it moves things along quickly and ironically, if not expertly. Here’s an example: Ferrando and Guglielmo, the two officers in Così fan tutte, want to know if their fiancées will remain faithful to them, no matter the
COSÌ FAN TUTTE

circumstance. After a false farewell to the front, the officers return to their ladies disguised as Albanians—with mustaches—with the intent of wooing their women and testing their romantic fortitude. A more logical, complicated, way to try and get the same information would be for Ferrando and Guglielmo to try to recruit different men to try and test their fiancées on their behalf—men whom the ladies had not met and would not suspect of colluding with their betrothed. But here’s what the first choice does for the librettist:

SAVE TIME: Having the main characters in disguise, characters that the audience already knows and understands, will save the story meaningful pages. Adding new characters would mean adding scenes in which they are searched out and explained—both from the perspective of the other characters in the story as well as the audience.

REDUCE COMPLICATION: In this context, the audience already knows exactly who “The Albanians” are so there isn’t a need to add any new backstory or secret agendas to the proceedings. If the officers brought in outside surrogates, new plot complications would arise because of those characters’ own desires and feelings on the matter, if not other matters as well.

ENHANCE THE IRONY: Having the heroes in the thick of their own plot allows for more humor from an “audience irony” perspective—because the viewer knows exactly who the “Albanians” actually are, they will see every exchange, every duet, and every conversation with an additional depth of knowledge. That knowledge allows for more layered humor of the you-know-that-I-know-that-she-doesn’t-know variety as well as deeper investment in the story. Audiences are smart and can see through leaky plots with ease. But when a story is built knowing what an audience wants—great music, great humor, and a plot to just keep us afloat—that’s when a piece of art can truly fly. It’s the same reason generations of Superman fans will go along with a superhero movie with a secret identity being shielded by little more than a pair of glasses. If readers and viewers didn’t accept that Clark Kent was suitably hidden by those specs, he wouldn’t be able to have a public persona with the Daily Planet, he wouldn’t know the cast of characters in his world with ironic duality, and the stories wouldn’t be as strong.

2017 Opera Insider
In a letter to his father, Mozart wrote, “...the best thing is when a good composer, who understands the stage enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet, the true phoenix.” Mozart’s “true phoenix” was Lorenzo Da Ponte, the court-appointed poet and librettist to the Italian Theatre in Vienna. The collaboration of the young and struggling composer with the older and more politically astute poet would produce three operas that have stood the test of time as masterpieces—*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Cosi fan tutte*.

On the face of it, Mozart and Da Ponte seemed an odd pairing. A child prodigy, Mozart had spent his young life giving concerts before European royalty, while Da Ponte, the eldest son of a Jewish tanner, was essentially illiterate until he converted and entered a Catholic seminary at the age of fourteen. Mozart’s adolescence and young adulthood were spent under the controlling influence of his father Leopold, and then under the equally possessive hand of his patron, the Archbishop Collerado. The penniless and solitary Da Ponte would become a priest even though it was “wholly contrary to my temperament, my character, my principles, and my studies.” As soon as he was ordained, twenty-four-year-old Da Ponte escaped to “the permanent fancy-dress ball that is Venice,” to survive by his pen and his wits alone.

Both men arrived in Vienna in 1781. After quarreling with the Archbishop and with his father who urged him to persevere with Collerado, Mozart was allowed to resign his post in Salzburg. He was escorted from the Archbishop’s property with a “kick in the arse.” Mozart resolved to settle in Vienna and pursue a freelance career as a performer and composer.

Da Ponte experienced an equally inglorious departure from Venice where for seven years he had devoted himself to “cards and love.” In 1779, he was brought
up on charges of mal vida or immoral living, but more probably it was for writing seditious verse about local dignitaries. Da Ponte was banished from Venice for fifteen years.

Prior to his arrival in Vienna, Da Ponte did some apprentice work in writing for theatre and opera and thought he would try his hand at writing opera buffa, a new, realistic, comic form that was fast surpassing the less fashionable, and often turgid opera seria. A lover of music, Emperor Joseph II decided to install an Italian opera company in Vienna’s Burgtheater in 1783. The company needed a librettist. Owing to Da Ponte’s unique talent for persuading the powerful, and despite never having written a libretto, he landed the job. “Good, good!” he quotes the Emperor as saying, “We shall have a virgin muse!”

But the job would not prove easy. Da Ponte’s position required him to locate, translate, and adapt opera libretti, as well as prepare the performances. Scores had to be retailed for the company singers. There was a lot to learn and Da Ponte would have to learn it quickly. As he had done for most of his life, he improvised.

His first commission was for an adaptation for the court composer Salieri. Looking at the work he was to adapt, Da Ponte knew that he was headed for disaster:

...I found as I advanced, that the dialogue was tame, the songs forced, the sentiments trivial, the action languid, and the characters uninteresting; in short, I seemed to have lost the entirety of the art of writing, and I felt like a child endeavoring to wield the club of Hercules.

Not surprisingly, the opera flopped. Salieri threatened to “cut off his fingers” before he would accept another Da Ponte libretto. Da Ponte persevered. He closely analyzed the successful operas of the day to understand
what made them work and mastered the craft, all the while fending off vicious intrigues by court rivals who coveted his job.

Mozart and Da Ponte first met at a salon in 1783. Mozart had done well in his freelance career, prospering as a music teacher and performing in self-produced concerts with his own compositions. He had great success with his 1782 opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, which was performed throughout German-speaking Europe and established his talent for composing opera.

But Mozart longed to write Italian *opera buffas*. If he were to stand a chance at popular success, he had to write one, and that required a gifted Italian librettist. Mozart elicited a promise from Da Ponte for a libretto but only, said Da Ponte, after his other obligations were met. In a letter to his father, Mozart expressed concern that the court composers, now in fierce competition for Da Ponte’s talents, would commandeer the librettist’s time. As a freelancer, even a very well-known one, Mozart might never see his libretto.

True to his word, however, Da Ponte fulfilled his obligations and discussions began. Mozart was keen on adapting Beaumarchais’ stage play *The Marriage of Figaro*. Inconveniently, Joseph II had just banned the play for its subversive politics. Da Ponte suggested that they work on the opera in secret until an opportune moment presented itself and Da Ponte could bring his persuasive charm to bear on the Emperor. Da Ponte finished a draft of the libretto in November 1785. Mozart completed the music in six weeks.

When Da Ponte approached the Emperor, he was reminded sternly that the work was banned. The poet assured his Emperor that in converting the play into an opera, he had shortened the piece, being mindful to cut out all the offensive political content. Also, he told the Emperor, the music was “remarkably beautiful.” And it was. Once Joseph heard the music, he approved *Figaro* for performance.

*The Marriage of Figaro* premiered in 1786 and was an outright triumph. In the space of four years Mozart and...
Da Ponte would go on to write two more milestones, *Don Giovanni* in 1787, and *Così fan tutte* in 1790. Both men knew they had created something thoroughly unique, a revolution in the world of opera.

To understand how groundbreaking their operas were, it’s important to know that opera buffas of the time most often were disjointed hodgepodges. Confusing and absurd plots, stock characters, badly translated verse, and low, knockabout comic antics were cobbled together solely as a showcase for the singers, the best paid and most powerful people in the profession. Like Da Ponte, Mozart understood the problem:

*Why do the Italian comic operas please everywhere—in spite of their miserable libretti? Just because the music reigns supreme and when one listens, all is forgotten.*

Composer and librettist set out to create a completely unified and coherent work and their strengths complemented one another. Da Ponte simplified plots, and cut or combined characters to heighten the dramatic action. He wrote elegant, concise, and witty verse that served Mozart’s genius for musical nuance, allowing the composer to use the full spectrum of vocal and orchestral tools at his command. What emerged was virtuosic music expressing the complicated emotions of dimensional characters and thematic sophistication in accessible stories. The effect on audiences was powerful. *Opera buffa* had been raised to high art.

*Così fan tutte* was Mozart and Da Ponte’s final collaboration. Though it used time-honored conventions such as the testing of love through disguise, love wagers, and partner swapping, the story was a wholly original work by Da Ponte, not a translation or adaptation. And unlike their preceding operas, the action of *Così* was set in the present with its location in Italy, not that far from Austria. It was designed to be more “real” to audiences of the day, and as such, audiences found the opera much darker and more challenging than either of the two previous works.

Some critics were delighted by it as a comic idyll, others condemned it as immoral, and still others were at odds to explain the story’s endless paradoxes; misogyny and deep love, despair and humor, joy and cynicism woven seamlessly together and accompanied by some of the most beautiful and poignant music ever written. The opera remains something of a mystery.

In understanding *Così fan tutte*, it is instructive to realize that even as the opera was being written, the glittering aristocratic world that Mozart and Da Ponte inhabited was in crisis and collapsing around them, consumed by the spirit of Revolution sweeping across the continent.

Due to the financial toll of his war with the Turks, Joseph II would be forced to withdraw support from his beloved opera house. Da Ponte would keep it operating through subscriptions now open to all classes. After just four performances of *Così fan tutte*, the Emperor would die in 1790, leaving Da Ponte bereft of a protector, out of a job, and again banished from a city he loved. Mired in debt and harried by creditors, Mozart would die in 1791.

Da Ponte would outlive his favorite composer by forty-seven years. He would flee Europe for America. He would run a grocery, a distillery, a bookstore, and an opera house and all of them would fail. He would be the first professor of Italian at Columbia University—and in the United States. He would become an American citizen.

And he would never write another libretto.
“Storyteller in Chief—that is how I describe my job to people who ask me what an opera director actually does.”

“There’s a phrase that goes something like ‘Life is what happens to you when you’re planning other things.’ And that’s certainly true when it comes to me being a director,” Stephen Barlow, the director of Central City Opera’s production of Così fan tutte, has said regarding his career as one of England’s more ground-breaking opera directors. Born in Melbourne, Australia, Barlow always harbored a deep love of music and drama. As a high school student he worked as a theatre usher, which enabled him to see touring productions of classical opera for free. Later, he studied music and drama at Melbourne University and moved to London with the intention of becoming an actor. His ultimate vocation presented itself when a director of a show he’d acted in invited him to direct a revival, telling him, “You’ve got a director’s eye and a director’s brain.” Barlow says that although he was apprehensive, he took on the assignment and realized he enjoyed the larger responsibilities that a director shoulders. “I love the fact that as a director I’m helping so many people—it’s very altruistic.”

Barlow has acquired an impressive array of directorial credits at home and abroad. Apart from England and Wales, where he has established a career as one of England’s more groundbreaking opera directors, he has worked in Russia, Romania, Hong Kong, Singapore, Monte Carlo, and Denmark. In the United States, he has directed for the Met in New York, and for opera companies in San Francisco, Santa Fe, Chicago, St. Louis, and now Colorado. The range of works that Barlow has directed includes revivals, new works, and works for children, as well as musical theatre. But his career has mostly been built on his inventive and imaginative interpretations of classical operas.

Barlow admittedly likes to follow his instincts about time and place. For the Bucharest production of Rigoletto, for instance, he updated the setting to 1920’s Chicago as a recognizably modern and parallel backdrop for the corruption and scandal of the opera’s plot. But Barlow’s re-envisioning of an opera’s time...
and place is invariably married to a strong idea already inherent in the work. That idea forms the basis for the opera's design, as well as a directorial conception that strives for connection to contemporary audiences. For Barlow, then, the re-setting of a classical work is never frivolous. Barlow says, “I never feel that I have to make any opera relevant to a modern audience, but nonetheless we all enjoy finding parallels to our own life and times in any given story. Certainly updating an opera can allow the audience to have more familiar points of reference in the story and our shared quest to connect with its truths.” For some operas, especially those that are not often seen, he tends to stay with the original context. His staging for Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, for example, kept Poulenc's setting of a convent coping with the turbulence of the French Revolution.

“I love looking at famous pieces through different prisms or filters,” says Barlow, “and not for the sake of being novel, which is virtually impossible anyway, or for simply decorative reasons. Rather, because a different time and/or location from the original can open up a new connection with the story and its characters. And I never forget that ultimately my responsibility is to tell the story in an imaginative and coherent way. Storyteller in Chief – that is how I describe my job to people who ask me what an opera director actually does.” In terms of finding an appropriate “frame” for an opera, Barlow points out that “…what one always has is the music… I always hear something new, something different each day in rehearsal—a note, or a phrase, or a harmonic structure that catches me by surprise and gives me an idea.”
“Merodak! Make our enemies fear us, yes, fear and respect us. Destroy them! Protect us! ...Gold is our God, fall down and worship it!”

- Nebuchadnezzar

THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE

Second Parable for Church Performance

COMPOSER    Benjamin Britten
LIBRETTIST   William Plomer
CONDUCTOR    Christopher Zemliauskas
DIRECTOR     Ken Cazan

Premiered 1966 in Suffolk, England

Based on the Old Testament story of King Nebuchadnezzar and the three Israelites, The Burning Fiery Furnace is the second of three Parables for Church Performance. Thrown into a furnace for their refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image of gold, the three are saved from their untimely death by an angel sent from God.

Setting: A feast in Babylon, hosted by King Nebuchadnezzar, given in honor of the three Israelites

CHARACTERS

Bille Bruley
NEBUCHADNEZZAR - King of Babylon, obsessed with gold, power, and indulgence

Zhinguang Hong
ASTROLOGER/ABBOT - The Abbott introduces the premise of the story to the audience, then changes into the Astrologer, the King’s main advisor, suspicious of and prejudiced towards outsiders

Tim Murray, Humberto Borboa, Stephen Clark
THE THREE ISRAELITES - Ananias, Misael, and Azarias - brought to Babylon to be governors of Babylonian provinces, they refuse to participate in the festivities, choosing to honor the one god of Israel over the gods of Babylon.

Dean Murphy
THE HERALD - announces the King’s order that all must bow down to the golden statue or face a fiery death

Chorus of Courtiers/Monks Acolytes
The great themes of Benjamin Britten's operas—the marginalized individual persecuted by a hostile society, endangered innocence, the abhorrence of violence and war, the yearning for social connection and inclusion—clearly flow from Britten's own life. He was a shy middle-class prodigy who grew up in an isolated village. He lived openly as a homosexual under threat of persecution. He was a pacifist in a time of war. While composers of the era had discordant revolution on their mind, Britten would not totally abandon tonality and melody. Musical rivals courted greatness in large-scale productions, while Britten favored the intimacy of chamber operas. His avant garde contemporaries might attack the ideals of the middle-class; Britten unabashedly championed the artist's role as servant to his community.

Born in 1913, Britten spent his early years in the fishing village of Lowestoft on the east coast of England. In a 1968 interview, Britten said he had little musical education and at the prep school he attended from age nine to fourteen there was no music at all. Yet from age five, Britten wrote “reams and reams” of music. By the time he was fourteen, Britten had composed well over a hundred works.

In 1937, Britten met the tenor Peter Pears. A life-long partnership began, one that personally motivated Britten to compose for voice. But homosexuality was still illegal in England, heavily censured and punished. Europe also was turning toward war and Britten’s pacifism was not popular. He’d received hostile reviews criticizing his work as being technically brilliant but lacking in substance, which stung him. So in 1939, he and Pears followed their friend W. H. Auden and an exodus of other artists to America.

A volume of Suffolk poet George Crabbe’s poems that conjured the bleak landscape of Britten’s former seaside home convinced the homesick composer to return to England in 1942. The effect of his time in America, Britten said, helped to broaden and encourage him. It also stoked a desire to do what American composers were attempting—widening the audience for opera by creating successful homegrown works that could stand beside the European classics.

Britten’s opera Peter Grimes would fulfill that desire. It debuted June 7, 1945, marking the jubilant reopening of the Sadler’s Wells Opera House, closed during the war to accommodate the displaced whose homes had been destroyed. Based on a poem by Crabbe, Grimes was transformed by Britten into a tale of a fisherman persecuted and eventually destroyed by his community. The opera was a sensation. As one commentator observed, its opening was “a moment in national life.” Grimes anointed Britten thereafter as England’s national composer and secured his reputation on the international stage.

In Peter Grimes, Britten proved that a successful opera could be written in English, that the language’s inflections and rhythms could be powerfully transformed and wedded to instrumental music. It opened the door for Britten and others to write in their own language on British subjects and themes.
Though Britten enjoyed success with large-scale symphonic works and large-cast operas, working locally on a more intimate scale allowed him to experiment. Britten’s Church Parables, Curlew River (1964), The Burning Fiery Furnace (1966) and The Prodigal Son (1968) are good examples of Britten’s imaginative innovations in operatic form, content, and setting.

During a 1956 tour to the Far East, Britten attended a Japanese Noh play and became fascinated by what he felt offered “a totally new ‘operatic’ experience.” For the first production of Curlew River, Britten wrote: “...Was there not something—many things to be learned from [Noh drama]? Surely the Medieval Religious Drama in England would have had a comparable setting—an all-male cast of ecclesiastics—a simple austere staging in a church—a very limited instrumental accompaniment—a moral story?”

Britten and his librettist William Plomer would find that many of the essential elements of Noh theatre—flexible time and rhythm, stylized entrances and gestures, all-male casting, lack of a conductor, and the Noh tradition of a single magical episode had similar counterparts in Christian service and the medieval mystery play.

In The Burning Fiery Furnace, the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the three Israelites, Britten sought “something much less sombre” than Curlew River. Furnace utilizes a similar ritualistic presentation, and the same vocal and instrumental accentuation as its predecessor. But Furnace adds a greater range of colors via the alto trombone and the specially devised instruments that evoke the pagan atmosphere of the Babylonian court and its festivities. What Britten achieved in Furnace was a blurring of the boundaries between secular entertainment and religious ritual.

The Britten-Pears Foundation regards Britten’s fifteen operas as “the most substantial and important part of his compositional legacy.” Many of his operas premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival that he co-founded in 1948 and named for the small fishing village where he and Pears would make their home until Britten’s death in 1976. Today, his operas remain steadfastly in the canon.
Benjamin Britten grew up in a mixed household in terms of religion; his father was an adamant agnostic, but his mother went to the local Anglican church every Sunday, often taking young Ben. As a young adult, however, Britten became disillusioned with the church for a variety of reasons. He did, however, remain spiritual throughout his life, and his beliefs and the Church of England’s influence permeated his musical tendencies. His spirituality was deeply rooted in his childhood, his belief that music had a place in God’s plan, and his admiration for Jesus Christ’s teachings. As his friend Bishop Leslie Brown said at Britten’s funeral in 1976, “He believed deeply in a Reality which works in us and through us and is the source of goodness and beauty, joy and love. He was sometimes troubled because he was not sure if he could give the name of God to that Reality.”

In 1956, while Britten was touring in Japan, he attended a play called *Sumidagawa* at the Suidōbashi Noh Theatre. He was deeply moved by the performance and saw it several times before he left. He remarked, “I shall never forget the impact made on me by Japanese theatre...above all the Noh plays....The deep solemnity and selflessness of the acting, the perfect shaping of the drama...coupled with the strength and universality of the stories are something which every artist can learn from.” He was determined to turn the play into an opera, eventually deciding that “Christianizing” the plot in the tradition of a medieval mystery play would best suit himself as a composer and his audience. Mystery plays had recently been revived at the York Festival of Arts after a banishment of almost 400 years, and they enjoyed a huge following. Britten’s own *Noye’s Fludde*, premiered to great success in 1958, was modeled after the mystery play tradition. But Britten was determined to write an opera inspired by his experience in Japan, and in 1964, that opera was *Curlew River*, the first of the Parables for Church Performance.

The story of *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, the second of the Church Parable operas which premiered in 1966, comes from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament of the Bible, dating from the 3rd-century B.C. The three Israelites Ananias, Asarias, and Misael sing the Benedicite—a canticle or an extended prayer of blessing—while trapped in the furnace. Also called “The Song of Three Young Men,” the Benedicite was added to the Book of Daniel as part of the Apocrypha in the 2nd century B.C. and is used in the prayer books of the Anglican and Lutheran churches.

(Excerpt)

*O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise him and magnify him for ever.*

*O ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise him and magnify him for ever.*
Chant also influenced the way Britten set text to music. When chant is sung well, the listener cannot tell if the cantor is singing or speaking because the text and music are so beautifully intertwined.

The canticle appears in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer under the name of “The Song of Creation,” and it traditionally follows the first scripture lesson in the Order of Morning Prayer. Britten used the Benedicite as the “liturgical parable within the parable” at the climax of the opera. A very familiar text to British audiences, hearing it in such an atmosphere must have deeply resonated with them.

Each of the three Parables for Church Performance begins and ends with a plainsong chant. In addition to matching the solemnity and ritual of Noh theatre, the chant and processional mimic an Anglican service, which helps connect the operas with their audience by creating a familiar atmosphere and providing the musical inspiration for the rest of the piece. Chant also influenced the way Britten set text to music. When chant is sung well, the listener cannot tell if the cantor is singing or speaking because the text and music are so beautifully intertwined. Chant—and therefore Britten’s vocal writing—is linear, horizontal, with the inflection of the words perfectly matched to the musical pitch and stress. Britten mastered the synthesis of word and music so well that the effect is mesmerizing. He used this masterful synthesis in all his vocal writing, not just in the Church Parable operas.

Benjamin Britten’s heritage and exposure to the Anglican Church heavily influenced his composition style. The Burning Fiery Furnace and its plainsong introduction and conclusion, the way the melodies develop seamlessly from that plainsong, and the insertion of a familiar Anglican canticle into the climax of the story connected not only Britten with his own spiritual traditions, but also the audience with theirs. After World War II, traditional church attendance in England was declining, but the British people still overwhelmingly identified as Christian. A resurgence of religious music, art, and theater served to remind the country of the possibility of renewal after destruction. Benjamin Britten drew on his spirituality to join this national renewal, and we are the better for it.
“Does Lola realize the importance of this particular operation.”
– Announcer

**GALLANTRY**

<table>
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Premiered March 15, 1958 at Columbia University

Douglas Moore was on the music faculty at Columbia University in the 1950s and 60s. He created *Gallantry* to be performed by voice students there. He later adapted the opera for television where it aired on CBS in 1962.

The phenomenon of TV soap opera was at its peak in the late 50s, having moved from radio, where it originated. These daytime serial stories are called “soap operas” because the plots are melodramatic and the sponsors were often laundry soaps or other products used by housewives, who were the primary listeners/viewers. Commercials were live testimonials back then, made by the announcer and sometimes backed up by singers performing a catchy jingle.

Setting: The TV set of a soap opera, *Gallantry*, which takes place in a hospital

CHARACTERS

Ann Fogler
**ANNOUNCER** – She touts the sponsors for the show – Lochinvar Soap and Billy Boy Wax – and announces the scenes to come

Zane Hill
**DOCTOR GREGG** – A surgeon who is enamored of his nurse anesthetist, Lola

Kaileigh Riess
**LOLA MARKHAM** – A nurse anesthetist who is engaged to Donald, who works in the hospital’s cashier office

Eric J. Taylor
**DONALD HOPEWELL** – Lola’s fiancé, and now a patient with an appendix in need of attention

Ensemble – members of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artists Training Program
It was a year after the 1956 premiere at Central City Opera of Douglas Moore’s popular *The Ballad of Baby Doe* and plans were afoot for the opera’s Broadway production. The composer was busy, cutting *Baby Doe* down to an hour for the upcoming live studio version of ABC-TV’s Omnibus series and was deeply involved in that production. Possibly the heady experience of working in television helped inspire Moore’s creation of the chamber work *Gallantry*, a parody of a medical soap opera, soon afterwards. But in a 1961 article that he wrote for *Opera News*, the composer described how he came to write the piece this way:

“...a wonderful idea came to me from a friend. Why not write a real soap opera? The television soap opera is so much a part of American civilization that a real one, complete with commercials and corn, might hold great appeal for audiences. I asked Arnold Sundgaard again to collaborate with me, and the whole venture was a delight to us both.”

By 1957 it seems, the American entertainment phenomenon known as the soap opera had entered the mainstream so completely, it had achieved iconic status—it was “a part of American civilization.”

The rise of the soap opera started innocuously enough. In 1930, a Chicago radio station manager proposed a new kind of program designed to appeal to women listeners, a 15-minute radio serial. He pitched it first to
In 1930, a Chicago radio station manager proposed a new kind of program designed to appeal to women listeners, a 15-minute radio serial. He pitched it first to a detergent company (the “soap” in “soap opera”)...and they agreed to try it.

a detergent company (the “soap” in “soap opera”) and then a manufacturer of margarine and they agreed to try it. *Painted Dreams* focused on the conversations “Mother” Moynihan had with her unmarried daughter and their female boarder in which “Mother” dispensed humorous homilies and advice. The show appeared to be a success although it took time to figure out how to measure audience interest scientifically. When they finally did, broadcasters and advertisers nation-wide realized what a goldmine “soap operas” were. By 1937, soap operas dominated the radio airwaves, attracting large corporate sponsors such as Proctor and Gamble, Pillsbury, and General Foods.

By WWII, listeners could choose from 64 different daytime radio soap operas. Sponsors continued to advertise even when their products were unavailable due to wartime rationing. By 1948, the ten highest-rated daytime radio programs were soaps. The popular non-serial *Arthur Godfrey* took a dismal twelfth place.

The advent of television further fueled soap opera popularity. Proctor and Gamble premiered the first television soap in 1950, *The First One Hundred Years*, but they ran into trouble when the costs of a live daily televised show proved triple that of radio production. And no one was sure whether women who listened to the radio shows while cleaning house would devote more attention to actually watching a show on TV.

But by 1960, with CBS’s successful TV serial *Guiding Light*, soaps were positioned for a virtual Renaissance. The last radio soap opera went off the air in November of 1960. Television soap operas now occupied half-hour slots and the race was on to break CBS’s monopoly over the medium. Finally in 1963, ABC and CBS broke through with *The Doctors* and *General Hospital* respectively. Such shows, which originated on radio, continued the hugely popular sub-genre of the “medical soap,” with conflict among traditional family characters in home settings replaced by the trials of doctors, nurses, and patients in the more crisis-driven environment of a hospital.

The late 1960s and early 1970s represent the apex of popularity for the classic television soap opera. Confident of viewer loyalty and wanting to reflect the vast changes happening in the real world, writers felt emboldened to experiment with content, exploring tensions of class, ethnicity, and race. Story lines became more daring in their handling of sexual liaisons.

By the early 1970s, all three networks were airing ten hours of soaps every weekday. But by then the most popular soaps had been on the air for more than two decades. Women were entering the workplace in unprecedented numbers. Viewership decreased. The most loyal viewers were “aging out” of the prime demographic group that sponsors demanded. New viewership lagged. By the 1980s, with the advent of videotape recording and distribution of content by satellite and cable, the audience for network-sponsored soap operas declined even more radically. In the 1990’s, sponsors gravitated to the more popular “talk-show” formats. Such shows were cheaper to produce and captured more of the essential audience demographics. In the 2000’s, the Internet, content streaming, and reality television signaled the final demise of most of the soaps. Today only four survive—*Days of Our Lives, The Bold and the Beautiful, The Young and The Restless,* and *General Hospital.* The once beloved classic soaps, *All My Children* and *One Life to Live,* were briefly revived on-line in 2013. Both were cancelled that same year.
The American composer Douglas Moore was born in Cutchogue, Long Island, New York in 1893. His family had deep roots in American soil, the Moores being one of the earliest families to arrive on Long Island in the 1600’s. His mother’s side of the family descended from Mayflower settlers. It was Moore’s mother who encouraged his early interest in music, insisting that he take piano lessons where he soon mastered the “light” classics and many of the old parlor standards.

Moore’s other early interest was theatre. At age seven Moore acted and directed a melodrama in the family home’s attic. In his high school years, he dabbled in music and drama, writing school songs, writing and performing amateur theatricals in the family home, and setting some of his friend Archibald McLeish’s poems to music. Both he and McLeish entered Yale together in 1911 and Moore went on to pursue a Masters degree in Musical Composition while continuing his interest in dramatics and writing incidental music for several of the Yale Dramatic Club’s productions.

After graduation from Yale in 1917, he enlisted in the Navy as a first lieutenant. Even military life offered opportunities for Moore to compose and pursue his interest in popular music. He wrote humorous songs meant to entertain the sailors, satirizing naval life or romantic liaisons abroad. Many of these songs would eventually be published in Songs My Mother Never Taught Me, an anthology Moore co-wrote with John Jacob Niles.

After the Navy, Moore spent two years in Paris where he studied composition with Vincent D’Indy and Nadia Boulanger. After his return, and with the help of MacLeish, Moore landed a position as Director of Music at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921. He continued his musical studies with Ernest Bloch at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921. He continued his musical studies with Ernest Bloch at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921. He continued his musical studies with Ernest Bloch at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921. He continued his musical studies with Ernest Bloch at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921. He continued his musical studies with Ernest Bloch at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1921.
Institute of Music. He also indulged his ongoing love of theatre by acting with the Cleveland Playhouse and enjoyed such success that he seriously considered exchanging a career in music for that of an actor.

In the early 1920’s, Moore concentrated on creating serious orchestral compositions. With *The Pageant of P. T. Barnum*, written in 1924, Moore began a lifelong passion for American subjects and the traditional American musical forms he loved. In 1926, Moore was hired to teach at Columbia University where he was to stay for the next thirty-six years until his retirement, becoming Chairman of its prestigious Music Department in 1940.

In that position, and later as the President of American Arts and Letters, Moore would play a huge role in the great American Opera Movement, begun in the 1930s, and blossoming in the 1950s and 60s. Born of national pride, the movement strove to create an American repertoire that would compete seriously with the European works dominating American opera stages. Between the end of WWII and the premiere of Moore’s own influential opera, *The Ballad of Baby Doe* in 1956, the Columbia Opera Workshop founded by Moore turned out eighteen operas by many leading American composers, playwrights, and poets of the day. They included Britten’s *Paul Bunyan*, Menotti’s *The Medium* and Virgil Thompson’s *Mother of Us All*.

Moore’s belief in the necessity for America to have its own opera canon fueled his interest in the adaptation of American stories to opera. In 1961, he wrote:

“We now have operas, or operas in the making...based upon plays by Arthur Miller, Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, Archibald MacLeish, William Saroyan...and new librettos by such men as Thornton Wilder, Stephen Vincent Benet and Paul Horgan...No one can say today that our composers are out of touch with the contemporary theater.”

His legacy lives on, particularly at Central City Opera with regular productions of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, and across the nation with every new American opera written.

This, stated Moore, “is an indication of the increasing prestige of American opera.”

Moore’s own works reveal his conviction that the way to build an American audience for opera was to tap into the dramatic realism of American storytelling, the rhythms of American speech, and into American popular musical traditions. Collaboration with his old Yale friend, Stephen Vincent Benet, resulted in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* that stands as one of Moore’s most successful operas. Moore’s collaboration with Arnold Sundgaard, a fellow Columbia professor, led to an adaptation of the great American novel *Giants in the Earth* for which Moore received a Pulitzer in 1951. During the process of adapting *The Ballad of Baby Doe* into a one-hour version for live studio television, Moore was inspired to create *Gallantry*, a one-act chamber opera modeled after popular televised medical soap operas. Another partnership with librettist Sundgaard, *Gallantry* premiered in 1958 and remains in the canon. Altogether, Moore completed eight operas, and all but one dealt exclusively with American subjects.

Moore himself achieved national recognition for *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, a work that remains popular with audiences today. Premiered in 1956 by its original commissioner, Central City Opera, the opera got a second and more visible production at New York City Opera in 1958 with soprano Beverly Sills in the title role. Eleven years later, Moore died at his home in Greenport, NY. His legacy lives on, particularly at Central City Opera with regular productions of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, and across the nation with every new American opera written.
“This was a notable pirate, a very Prince of a pirate. No wonder the Lady Valerie loved Lafitte the Pirate!” – Barker

Amy Beach (1867-1944) was the first American female composer to publish a symphony. She wrote for piano, orchestra and voice. Her songs for piano and voice were her most popular publications – sheet music was a huge business then. After Beach’s death, her music was neglected until the 1990s when it came back into notice. Cabildo is Beach’s only opera.

Background: Pierre Lafitte (older brother of the more famous Jean Lafitte), was a pirate from New Orleans’ early days, and was once imprisoned in the Cabildo. He escaped from prison (the facts are murky as to how or why), and defended New Orleans in the last battle of the war of 1812 under General Andrew Jackson. He and his brother later returned to piracy.

Setting: A modern-day tour of the Cabildo, a Spanish Colonial government building that still stands today in New Orleans.

CHARACTERS

John Kun Park
BARKER – a tour guide at the Cabildo

Louise Rogan
MARY – a young woman taking the tour, fascinated by the story of Pierre Lafitte’s imprisonment and escape

Nathan Ward
TOM – Mary’s newlywed husband; the couple is very much in love and find Lafitte’s story romantic

Dean Murphy
PIERRE LAFITTE – a famous pirate in early 1800s New Orleans, imprisoned in the Cabildo and awaiting execution for the murder of Lady Valerie, but still hoping to clear his name

Shannon Jennings
LADY VALERIE – a French aristocrat in love with Lafitte; now missing and presumed dead in a shipwreck

Tyler Putnam
JAILER (or Gaoler) – a guard at the Cabildo

Lucas van Lierop
DOMINIQUE – Lafitte’s former comrade who visits him in prison to bring news of the Lady Valerie

Ensemble – members of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Artists Training Program
THE FACTS OF THE FANTASY IN AMY BEACH’S CABILDO
BY VALERIE SMITH

It might be said that writers prosper in the murky overlap of history and legend. That is certainly true of Nan Bagby Stephen’s tragic love story of pirate Pierre Lafitte and his aristocratic lady, Valerie. Although the libretto is tied to historical fact, Stephen took considerable artistic liberty, blending fact, legend, and personal invention for her operatic story.

The Cabildo is an actual place, and still stands today, one of two twin buildings flanking the St. Louis Cathedral in the historic French Quarter of New Orleans. The meaning of its name, however, has nothing to do with a prison. It derives from an early form of colonial Spanish government instituted in 1767, when the French relinquished their colony to the Spanish. Over time the cabildo, the name of the civic governing body, attached itself to the building. The actual prison lay behind the Cabildo across a courtyard, the infamous lice-infested calabozo or calaboose.

Also, Pierre Lafitte’s imprisonment had nothing to do with sinking boats or tragically drowned ladies. It had everything to do with his brother Jean who, with his genius for organization, graduated from being a broker of pirated goods to administering a highly effective smuggling operation. Within a year of taking over a lawless gang of ruffians, Jean Lafitte was the “bos” of a quasi-legal privateering venture described as “one of the largest privately owned corsair fleets operating on the coast.” Pierre stayed in New Orleans as the public
Although the libretto is tied to historical fact, Stephen took considerable artistic liberty, blending fact, legend, and personal invention for her operatic story.

face of the operation, handling the commercial aspects of the enterprise.

For a time, the operation worked well. Merchants and citizens in New Orleans who had been cut off from much needed merchandise by the 1807 Embargo Act, enjoyed a steady stream of smuggled supplies. But by 1812, the situation had changed. The Lafittes were trafficking in the now outlawed but lucrative slave trade. Local merchants were incensed by Jean Lafitte’s “auctions” that allowed their customers to buy goods at lower prices than they could match. And although the Lafitte brothers benefitted handsomely from America’s war with England, they never shared their earnings with the government as required of privateers. Their smuggling reduced badly needed revenues. With only a small navy, U.S. authorities couldn’t hope to stem the Lafitte brother’s operation at sea. So the government turned to the courts, which indicted both brothers.

With a price on his head, Jean went into hiding. Pierre Lafitte was captured, charged with being an accessory to piracy (a hanging offense) and jailed without bail to await trial. He was placed in the calaboose, chained to the wall of his cell, and guarded day and night.

Jean was desperate to free his older brother who, after several months of incarceration, was ill. He hired two prestigious defense lawyers and brought in doctors to attest to Pierre’s poor health. Pierre, they claimed, had suffered a prior apoplectic seizure that had resulted in palsy and paralysis of the left side of his face. Pierre was still supposedly “subject to paroxysms resembling hysteria.” But upon their examination, the doctors found nothing wrong with Pierre, save “lowness of spirit from agitation of mind.” He would remain in prison and irons.

Writing to a friend and member of the Louisiana state legislature, Jean delivered valuable intelligence of a planned British attack on the city. In it, he vowed his loyalty to America, and pledged his men, his ships, and his considerable cache of ammunition in the coming fight. He also asked for clemency for his brother. Two days later, Pierre miraculously escaped from jail. His chains had been cut. His strangely bewildered jailer noticed nothing, only that Pierre Lafitte had mysteriously vanished.

As for Pierre Lafitte’s love affair with the beautiful Valerie, it is unlikely (for all of the Lafitte brother’s wealth and their importance to the municipal economy) that such a pair would meet at the Governor’s Ball or anywhere else. The class prejudices of the time would not have tolerated such a union.

Lady Valerie’s fate in Bagby’s libretto also echoes popular legend. On New Year’s Eve in 1812, Theodosia Burr Alton, Aaron Burr’s beautiful twenty-nine year old married daughter, boarded a schooner in South Carolina. She was bound for New York to see her famous father recently returned from exile after his acquittal for treason. The ship never arrived. Its crew, and all its passengers were never seen again. One of the many fanciful stories to spring up in the wake of the lady’s disappearance was that of an old pirate’s deathbed confession. As the story goes, the man claimed that it was Dominique You, Jean Lafitte’s famous lieutenant, who captured the ship and murdered everyone on board. The beautiful Theodosia, the dying pirate asserted, bravely walked the plank to her watery death. ■
A prodigy, Amy Beach drew acclaim for her piano concerts as a solo pianist in the United States and in Europe. Her composing was versatile, virtuosic, and encompassed a wide range of genres—solo piano, vernacular songs, choral works, chamber music, concertos, and church music, all the more astonishing because she was primarily self-taught. She experimented with tonal scales, exotic harmonies and techniques. She was the first American woman to compose and publish a symphony, one that was acclaimed by critics and audiences alike. She was one of the few women composers, and even fewer American women composers, to tackle an opera. She was the first president of the Society of Women Composers. As a writer and an educator, she encouraged young composers, especially women, and because of her status, she proved a strong advocate for musical education at all levels. At the time of her death in 1944, she was a respected and legendary artist, influential in her field, one of the few women to achieve critical acclaim in a field dominated by men. And then, in a few short decades, Amy Beach and her entire body of work were forgotten.

But by the late 1990s, more women had entered the field of classical music and had studied its history. Interest in Beach’s works and in the woman herself blossomed. Modern critics, such as Andrew Achenbach of Gramophone, lauded Beach’s Gaelic Symphony for its “big heart, irresistible charm and confident progress.” When her Quintet was reintroduced by pianist Mary Louise Boehm, Paul Hume, music critic of the Washington Post, wrote:

*Where has this music been all its life? Why has it never been heard while performances of quintets that are no better are played annually? If the answer is not that the composer was a woman, I would be fascinated to hear it.*

Other critics joined in, praising Beach’s Gaelic Symphony and her Piano Concerto as overlooked masterpieces. Accolades followed. In 1994, a bronze plaque was placed at her old Boston address by the Boston Women’s Heritage Trail. In 1995, her gravesite at Forest Hills Cemetery received special dedication from the Cemetery’s Educational Trust. In 1999, Beach was inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame. In 2000, her name joined eighty-six other famous composers—among them Bach, Handel, Chopin, Debussy and Beethoven—on the granite wall of Boston’s famous Hatch Shell. Beach is the only woman on that wall.
Beach’s sole foray into the operatic form, *Cabildo*, experienced even more severe neglect. Unlike Beach’s other works, almost all of which could claim impressive performance histories and critical acclaim, *Cabildo* was written when she was sixty-five, near the end of the composer’s full life of musical expression. With one exception, an amateur production in 1945, *Cabildo* went unpublished and unperformed for over a half century.

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It had been composed in a surge of creativity in the summer of 1932, between June 1st and the 18th during Beach’s stay at her much beloved MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. She’d been talking about creating an opera for a long time, but as her biographer Adrienne Fried Block notes, “she put it off because of the pressures of concert life and the lack of a suitable libretto.” She was looking for a truly colorful story, she said, one that embodied “picturesque moments in our history,” something along the lines of the old New York legends of Rip Van Winkle or Ichabod Crane.

When her friend, the novelist and playwright Nan Bagby Stephens suggested her own play of the same name, Beach felt she had finally found an intriguing subject, one that was “really American.” With its cross-class and cross-cultural love affair between a French aristocrat and an outlaw pirate, its lush setting of New Orleans at the start of the 19th century, *Cabildo* also would allow Beach to explore the rich musicality of traditional Creole folksongs, and experiment with blending them with her own romantic compositional style.

Since it was to be a chamber opera with few characters, a chorus, and a single setting, both Beach and Stephens felt that the possibilities of a full staging of *Cabildo* would be good. But despite enthusiastic responses to Beach’s demonstrations, supportive backers proved hard to find in the depths of the Depression. In 1940, the University of Georgia scheduled a workshop production but the advent of war put a hold on those plans. When at last the University premiered its amateur production in February of 1945, Amy Beach was not in the audience. She had died nine weeks earlier.

At last, in 1995 *Cabildo* realized its first full professional staging at New York’s Lincoln Center, where it also was telecast for PBS’s *Great Performances* and recorded for Delos on CD. Its debut at Central City Opera will be the work’s third professional production by a major company.