

TORONTO STAR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2012 SECTION E



**TIGER OF A TALE**  
Ang Lee meets challenge of bringing *Life of Pi* to screen, E3

**DESIGNER SHOE WAREHOUSE SALE**  
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**ENTERTAINMENT**



MATTHEW SHERWOOD FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Christopher Alden, director of *Die Fledermaus*, on the set at the Four Seasons Centre. The costumes by Constance Hoffman, seen in sketches below, are meant to be sexy.

**Bats in the opera house**



**Director Christopher Alden delivers a provocative *Die Fledermaus* for the Canadian Opera Company**

**TRISH CRAWFORD**  
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

Unconventional director Christopher Alden says he doesn't care if changes he makes to opera's old favourites ruffle a few feathers.

"I couldn't do something straight if my life depended on it," laughs Alden as he prepares *Die Fledermaus* for its Oct. 4 opening at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

*Die Fledermaus* is one of the world's most popular operettas (words are spoken as well as sung and there's a lighter tone), but Canadian Opera Company audiences should be prepared

for a different Vienna than that of "waltz king" Johann Strauss, who wrote the operetta in 1874. Men in garters and nylons, women wearing men's clothes, animal costumes and masks, bats and bare skin are just some of the visual treats in the COC production.

"The kind of art that interests me is personal, with a strong point of view, and goes out on a limb and maybe is provocative and upsets some people

who are more traditional," says Alden, when asked if he's afraid of turning off an audience with an "out there" interpretation.

"That's when I start to connect to art. That's the energy and attitude I try to bring to everything I do."

The COC's *Die Fledermaus* has been moved to the Vienna of the early 20th century, when Sigmund Freud and his dream analysis became popular. There are references to dreams, hypnotism (the stage is dominated by a giant swinging clock) and sex.

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**CHRISTOPHER ALDEN**  
DIRECTOR OF  
*DIE FLEDERMAUS*

FLEDERMAUS continued on E6

# Opera references sex, dreams and hypnosis

FLEDERMAUS from E1

The New York-based creative team, including set designer Allen Moyer and costume designer Constance Hoffman, immersed themselves in the black-and-white world of Ernst Lubitsch's silent movies and the surreal collages of Max Ernst.

They worked together to create a sophisticated, sexy tale that unfolds as if in a dream.

The first act centres on a troubled marriage, with the action taking place on a giant bed. Gabriel von Eisenstein is a philanderer and Rosalinde his unhappy spouse in this bourgeois arrangement.

Moyer says the black, white and grey colour scheme for the Eisenstein household shows it to be a place "of repression."

The action then moves to an eye-popping costume ball. Rosalinde is taken there by coachmen with giant birds' heads covering their skulls.

(The COC obtained a 1906 Brewster Brougham from an Amish carriage restorer in Ohio.)

Dressed all in black, the disguised Rosalinde brings a sense of foreboding to the party, says Moyer. "It's almost like a funeral carriage."

The costumes are sexy, frightening and otherworldly. Hoffman has men dressed as women and women dressed as men and bats, all scantily

clad. There are garters, whips, masks and even handcuffs.

She assures that there is no nudity in the piece in spite of what appears to be an exposed breast on a bat girl.

"The girl is covered from throat to toes in sequins. It's just a costume," says Hoffman.

But she concedes the costumes "are meant to be sexy."

"We really felt we wanted to look at Rosalinde, her subconscious, her fantasies," says Hoffman. "It is about repressed desires that are allowed to surface at the Orlofsky party. The tone we tried to get for the party is that it is not dangerous. The sexiness is done in good fun and a warm spirit."

Alden says he doesn't mind "throwing cold water" on spectators to make them sit up and take notice. Exposure to TV and pop culture means audiences expect more visual entertainment, says Alden.

His twin brother, David Alden, also a top director from a theatrical New York family, is also part of the COC's 2012/2013 season.

Christopher returns to direct Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* in February while David will direct Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in April and May.

The Canadian Opera Company's Die Fledermaus is at the Four Seasons Centre Oct. 4 to Nov. 3. See [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca) for details.