

NEW TRILLS

Lost and found at the OPERA.



I know almost nothing about opera. I'm not sure I even want to learn much more. I go into every performance the way I went into the first opera I ever attended (it was on a date)—with no expectations—and I surrender myself entirely to the experience of not having a clue. I don't even read the synopsis—or, at least, not until afterwards, and then the whole thing usually makes sense to me.

“Oh,” I say to myself, “that was her dad! That is why she didn't marry him instead of the guy in the big hat.” Or, if she did marry him: “Ah, then that almost certainly explains why the gods were so angry with the pair of them.”

When opera singers sing and they're sad, I cry. And you don't have to be a genius to know when opera singers are sad, so that part is pretty straightforward. Mostly I have only the vaguest notion of what it is that's actually making them sad, but anyone who can sing the way many of them can sing—so beautifully that sometimes I can barely believe they are human—can winge about any old thing they want, especially if they're doing it in another language. I get 100 percent behind the sad, singing foreigners.

Trust me, if the people in your life only ever told you their problems in a language you don't speak, you would believe their lives to be far more interesting. You would hear a stream of unintelligible emotion from which, I imagine, only a few words like “Facebook,” “Jack Astor's,” “tagged,” “D&G platforms...ugh!” and “Corporate Amex!” would jump out at you and hint that this was just another boring drama. And if that long, dull, predictable story were an aria sung to you, you'd say “Please tell me again.”

Most operas have Surtitles—which are like subtitles, only they're high up above the stage—and some operas are in English, but, as you can probably tell, I don't really care for those ones very much. *Death in Venice* is in English, and in it some old guy spends a lot of time making arrangements with the front desk at his hotel concerning transportation and luggage. I might as well have been at an all-inclusive resort in Cancun.

I don't want comprehension or reality, just beauty and forgetting. And now that the long days spent on the local beach, where the hot sun, the wine and the odd cast of regulars at the clothing-optional setting have measured out their healthy dose of the surreal, I again cast about for a new source of daze.

These summer afternoons, like the almost-impossible-coloured flowers in my garden, have kept reality at a distance, but now I must consider what avenues of escape I will go down this winter, and again I'm looking forward to being lost at the opera when the new season begins. □

a while ago, a friend and I decided that rather than fly somewhere for a week, it might be better if we spent that vacation money on a subscription to the opera. I'd been to the opera just enough times to know that no one searches your bag as you go into the building, and, without actively being told this, I'd sensed that patrons of the opera are encouraged to wear

“I don't want comprehension... just beauty.”

their shoes—good ones—throughout the entire opera-attending process. Also, at no point during an evening at the opera am I expected to hoist a plastic bin onto a conveyor belt and then raise my arms and submit to a pat-down. It's difficult not to be charmed by this prospect.

The idea of many short explorations into something mostly unknown to me—of little pools of luxurious hours enjoyed throughout the year instead of one anxiously booked week away (hours of which are spent wondering which continent my favourite sundresses might be travelling toward)—won the day, and I've been attending the opera regularly for a year now.

Just as I'd hoped, I still experience each opera as if it were a foreign country.