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 ${\it Cover: Eric\ Owens\ as\ Hercules\ in\ the\ Canadian\ Opera\ Company/Lyric\ Opera\ of\ Chicago\ (LOC)\ co-production\ of\ Hercules,\ 2011,\ LOC.\ Photo:\ Dan\ Rest}$

Welcome

Sophocles was a writer in ancient Greece. But he was also a war general who had experience commanding troops in battle, and he understood the devastating psychological, as well as physical, traumas that can affect returning soldiers. With Hercules – Handel's take on Sophocles' play Women of Trachis (c. 450 BC) – American director Peter Sellars creates a healing work in which the untold horrors of war and the unspoken complications of reunion find their voice. Sellars propels the incendiary myth of Hercules into the modern day, creating a moving individual story that cuts across history and politics to touch the open nerve of our innermost humanity.

The subjects explored in *Hercules* include: ancient Greece, modern warfare, war and peace, military culture, and postwar issues for veterans and their families. In addition to drama, music, and visual arts, the production of *Hercules* is a thrilling piece to study through the Canadian and World Studies curriculum.



STUDENT DRESS REHEARSALS 2013/2014

\$15 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RUSH TICKETS*

La Bohème Puccini Tuesday, October 1, 2013

Peter Grimes Britten Wednesday, October 2, 2013

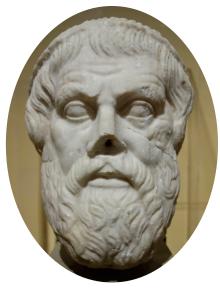
Così fan tutte Mozart Thursday, January 16, 2014

A Masked Ball Verdi Thursday, January 30, 2014 **Hercules** Handel Thursday, April 3, 2014

Roberto Devereux Donizetti Monday, April 21, 2014

Don Quichotte Massenet Wednesday, May 7, 2014

*In-person, day-of sales only. Age and purchasing restrictions apply. All dress rehearsals take place at 7:30 p.m. and are approximately three hours with one or two intermissions. Visit coc.ca/Explore for details.



Head of Sophocles, a Roman copy of Greek original, marble. Exhibition at the Fitchburg Art Museum in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, USA

TEACHER DISCOUNTS: 50% OFF ADULT TICKETS!

Teachers can purchase a limit of two (2) adult tickets per opera season in select seating sections for half price. An OCT membership card must be shown when purchasing/picking up the tickets.

Visit **coc.ca/Explore** for details and purchasing restrictions.

Opera 101

WHAT IS OPERA?

The term "opera" comes from the Italian word for "work" or "piece," and is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de' Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini (composer) and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on, the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of a serious nature (called opera seria) and some light-hearted (called opera buffa). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (Madama Butterfly), comedic farce (The Barber of Seville), politicians on foreign visits (Nixon in China), the celebration of Canadian heroes (Louis Riel), and children's stories (The Little Prince), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don't use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

What does opera feel like?

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing everything. Make an agreement with the students that it's not about judging people's voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don't worry about singing "correctly." Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions?

If so, how?

Attending the Opera: Make the most of your experience

WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. People wear all sorts of things to the opera – jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie. But skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons and performers are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act on a television screen in the lobby rather than from your seat. If you don't have your ticket yet, arrive as early as possible – the line-up for the box office can often be quite long prior to a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about

tonight's performance, drop by the Welcome Desk (just inside the main doors) to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about tonight's opera, but also about COC programs in general. A preperformance chat takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats, given by members of our COC Volunteer Speakers Bureau, offer valuable insight into the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. Stop by concessions and **pre-order a beverage for intermission or purchase a snack**. Browse the Opera Shop and pick up a memento of your experience at the opera. (Note: the Opera Shop is not open at dress rehearsals.) Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture as you go, and note the floating glass staircase – the longest free-span glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

Chimes will ring throughout the lobby ten minutes before the performance, reminding everyone to find their seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a program from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone - the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official COC photographer and/or members of the media can take pictures and even then, only under special circumstances that require prior arrangements.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, listen carefully. Remember all of that traffic you heard in the lobby? And now... not a peep! The auditorium is physically separated from the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera! SURTITLES**[™] will be projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. SURTITLES™ originate from the idea of "subtitles", which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: above the stage. SURTITLES™ were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages everywhere.

Feel free to show your appreciation to the performers by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting "bravo!" for a man, "brava!" for a woman, or "bravi!" for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

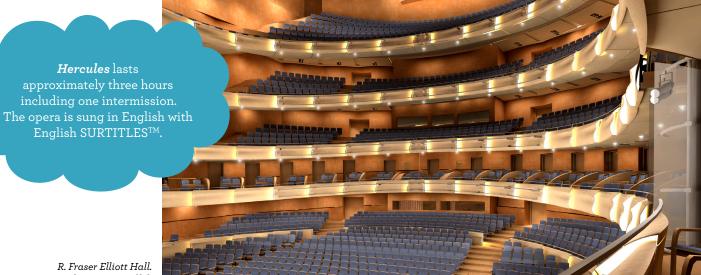


Photo: Tim Griffith

Characters and Synopsis

MAIN CHARACTERS (in order of vocal appearance)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Lichas	herald, faithful servant to Dejanira	Countertenor	LIE-kuss
Dejanira	Hercules' wife	Mezzo-Soprano	deh-jun-EYE-ruh
Hyllus	Hercules' son	Tenor	HILL-us
Iole	Princess of Oechalia	Soprano	EYE-oh-leh
Hercules	world's strongest man	Bass	HER-cue-lees



Alice Coote as Dejanira and Eric Owens as Hercules in Hercules, 2011 (LOC). Photo: Dan Rest

Canadian Opera Company 2013/2014

This production

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Dejanira waits for news of her husband Hercules, the world's strongest man, who has been away at war for 18 months. His bloody labours have included 12 impossibly punishing tasks and a conflagration in the state of Oechalia (ee-KALE-yuh). In the absence of news, her fears for him, her resentments, her helplessness to help, and the anxiety of separation itself, she finds herself unexpectedly weeping at strange times of day and not knowing how to stop.

Lichas, Hercules' herald and a close family friend, visits to console this inconsolable woman ("...disconsolate his absence she laments..."). He prays with her for Hercules' safety and safe return ("Preserve, great Jove, the hero's life").

She has been sitting for days alone in a room with the blinds drawn, lamenting the light that is missing from her life ("The world when day's career is run").

Her son Hyllus has asked priests to perform a divination ceremony at the temple. He returns with a shocking prophetic image – a vision of his father's corpse surrounded by flames ("I feel, I feel the god").

Dejanira reaches for tranquilizers to find some calm and serenity. She imagines her own death and a meeting with her husband in the world beyond ("There in myrtle shades").

Hyllus is determined to go to the ends of the earth to find his father – from the polar caps to the Middle East ("Where congealed the northern streams"). He is frightened and does not know where to start. A divinely inspired chorus of neighbours and friends gives him courage and hope ("O filial piety! O gen'rous love!").

Lichas brings official confirmation that Hercules is alive: he has sacked and leveled Oechalia to the ground and is on his way home. Dejanira begins the process of telling herself that she can let go of her fears and anxieties ("Begone my fears").

The first planeload of returning troops arrives with disturbing cargo – among the prisoners of war, the princess Iole, who saw her father killed before her eyes and her countrymen massacred at the hands of Hercules. Her appearance in chains shocks the spectators and moves Hyllus, who instinctively wants to help her. Stunned and

disoriented in a new and hostile land, she prays with all her strength and every fibre of her being to the goddess of liberty ("Daughter of gods, bright liberty!"), affirming a world order based on hope and pleasure, plenitude and grace.

A somewhat perfunctory triumphal march heralds Hercules' return. He is exhausted, but retirement is also a challenging prospect; at least on the battlefield abroad he knew his job and his place. Facing his family and himself will be the most difficult battle of his life. He has brought Iole home as a war trophy, but also as a love interest on the side. He is marked as a man who has difficulty giving, receiving, and accepting love.

Iole experiences recurring traumatic flashbacks of her father's grisly death ("My father").

Hercules doesn't want to talk about the war, or the bloody things he has seen and done, but it is also hard for him to imagine what is next ("The god of battle quits the bloody field").

At a party with neighbours and friends, Hercules feels strangely out of place in his own home, and his wife still can't figure out how to respond to him ("Crown with festal pomp the day").

Iole's memories of a quiet peaceful life in the mountains of her ravaged country stir, haunt, mystify, and touch her new neighbors ("How blessed the maid"). She rejects Hercules' fumbling advances, but Dejanira has seen enough. The arrival of a new young woman in their household is an affront. Of course, everyone's heart goes out to the war victim, particularly if she's pretty, Dejanira snaps ("When beauty sorrow's livery wears").

Iole, beginning to grasp the unhappiness of the world she has entered, pleads with Dejanira not to give in to jealousy which will exchange all her peace and love for endless pain ("Ah, think what ills the jealous prove").

Lichas, on very shaky diplomatic ground, still trying to protect his boss but somehow acknowledge that there are real problems, tries to reconcile husband and wife, but neither of them is ready. They will need time to heal and find each other again ("As stars that rise and disappear").

The chorus calls out jealousy for what it is: the tyrant that burns in every human breast, kindled with every trivial glance and gesture, dividing us, gradually turning us into monsters that we no longer recognize ("Jealousy").

ACT II

The gods themselves descend to earth to taste the deeper joys of love among humans ("From celestial seats descending"). Hyllus offers Iole the safety and refuge of his enfolding love, reaching beyond his own childhood of blame, growing up in his father's shadow with an abiding sense of unworthiness for love or greatness. He finds his own homeland in the exiled mind and heart of a courageous refugee.

Wishes, sighs, and soft desires ripple through the night (Chorus: "Wanton god of am'rous fires").

During a late night of alcohol and wild emotion, Dejanira congratulates her husband on his new honours and promotions. She observes that he has become an abject slave to his passions and unfulfilled emotional hunger. He shouts back at her that he deserves some applause and headlines ("Alcides' name in latest story shall with brightest lustre shine"), referring to himself by his birth name, Alcides. But all the parades and hero's welcomes leave him with a bitter aftertaste, an emptiness, and overwhelming, unresolved anger. The idea of a new generation emulating his career and exploits first fills him with pride and then sickens him.

Dejanira, her feelings also ricocheting around the room, mocks him, humiliates him and emasculates him. She calls him a whining boy. Dangerous, brittle violence hangs in the air. She tells him to put away his weapons and learn to help around the house ("Resign thy club"). She only succeeds in driving the man she loves further away from her bruised and hurt body and heart.

After lying to her face point blank about his marital infidelities, Hercules shuts down and retreats behind a wall of silence. He lets his wife know that she has a problem and that she needs to fix it. He leaves for another award ceremony.

Dejanira, at her lowest moment, pleads for the sun to no longer rise in the sky, leaving herself and her husband silent and dead in an endless night ("Cease ruler of the day to rise").

She prays to a kinder power to inspire her. She wants to recover. She wants to regain Hercules' alienated love. A radical idea comes to mind. Years before, a centaur (a mythological creature that is half-man and half-horse) named Nessus, had tried to rape her. Hercules rescued her, shooting Nessus with a poisoned arrow. As he died, his



Alice Coote as Dejanira and Eric Owens as Hercules in *Hercules*, 2011 (LOC). Photo: Dan Rest

grip on her skin loosening, Nessus whispered to her that his blood would transform into a magic potion capable of reviving "the expiring flame of love." She kept and hid this liquid in an urn and now she will use it to draw Hercules back to her. She buys Hercules a beautiful jacket, and rubs the love ointment into the lining. She gives the treated coat to Lichas, and asks him to take it to her husband as a reconciliation gift. She wants Hercules to wear it with honour during his ceremony. No sooner does Lichas disappear with the magic garment than Dejanira turns to see the wool rag on the floor, the rag that she used to rub in the potion, begin to smoke, sputter, dissolve and burn.

Lichas recounts the horrifying experience of offering the coat to a pleased and proud Hercules and watching him put it on, then writhe and scream in agony as poison seeped into his joints and the hero's burning, mangled flesh fused with the coat's malignant fibres. Lichas tries to pull himself together for his funeral oration at the memorial service, to say farewell to a brave but very unhappy man ("Oh, scene of unexampled woe").

The chorus acknowledges the end of an era: "Tyrants now no more shall dread on necks of vanquished slaves to tread. All fear of punishment is gone." We are helpless in front of ever new forms and new faces of tyranny. "The world's avenger is no more."

We watch Hercules, twisted in unbearable pain, burn in the relentless flame of his own rage. He calls for help and no one answers. He rages on, furious and alone.

His body and mind pushed beyond the last limits of pain and endurance, Hercules curses his wife and orders his son to bear his body to a mountaintop to be received by the gods.

Now it is Hyllus' turn to watch his father die before his eyes, and with no space for grief, he has a panic attack. He turns on Iole, who is Oechalian, as a possible spy – news of Hercules' death must be hushed up and hidden from a hostile world. Hyllus can trust no one now, overwhelmed with his father's legacy and beginning to run in Hercules' shoes.

Dejanira is drowning in guilt and unassuagable grief – Hercules was killed by her hand. Her last gesture of love was Nessus' final act of revenge. She will be haunted for the rest of her life by relentless demons, steeped in remorse and self-blame ("Where shall I fly"). She watches as the phantoms of her own mind lead her to a place of horrible isolation, entrapment, and finally, suicide. Iole intervenes. With her aria ("My breast with tender pity swells"), Handel offers a compassion that reaches beyond Greek tragedy and moves us into an Enlightenment world of understanding and recovery, the recognition of suffering as a path towards healing and gradual transformation.

Iole transcends her own grief and offers her hand to Hyllus who responds, at first, tentatively, in what becomes a duet ("Oh, Prince, whose virtues").

The community emerges from shock with the resolve to honour, praise, and offer gratitude to the men and women who have sacrificed lives, hearts, and limbs, and the families who have supported them, with their own wounds and resilience ("To them your grateful notes of praise belong"). The song of liberty welcomes all strangers: the wedding of Iole and Hyllus suggests the birth of a new America and a new Middle East.



(centre) Lucy Crowe as Iole and Richard Croft as Hyllus in Hercules, (LOC, 2011). Photo: Dan Rest

Genesis of the Opera

ITALIAN OPERA IN LONDON

George Frideric Handel was born in Halle, Germany, in 1685 but by his mid-20s had moved to London, England. For a number of years, he enjoyed tremendous success there as a composer of Italianstyle opera seria*, with works like Rinaldo (1711), Giulio Cesare (1725) and Orlando (1733) garnering particular attention and acclaim.

Handel was really the first composer to present genuine Italian opera written for the London



Portrait of Handel by Balthasar Denner, oil on canvas, circa 1720

stage and performed by capable Italian singers. (*Castrati*, male singers whose high vocal registers were preserved by castration before the onset of puberty, were especially popular.)

*Opera seria:

An Italian musical term which refers to the noble and "serious" style of Italian opera that predominated in Europe from the 1710s to around 1770. Stories were based on mythology and followed a very rigid musical structure of repeated themes.

By the 1730s, however, Italian-language opera was becoming a financially precarious undertaking in London. Not only was there increased competition in the marketplace from rival opera theatres, audiences were also being drawn away to the spectacle of English-language proto-musicals; entertainments like *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay were more accessible to middle-class audiences than *opera seria* and attracted more and more of the ticket-buying public.

Moreover Italian opera, even at the height of its popularity, was considered by many as a somewhat suspect art form, being an imported and foreign cultural practice that seemed to threaten English literary traditions. This nationalist critique of opera is apparent in the Hogarth engraving below, where the treasures of English literature (Shakespeare, Dryden, Congreve, etc.) are carted off as wastepaper, while the public lines up for admission to the opera house.



Masquerades and Operas by William Hogarth, engraving, 1724

Whether Handel was responding to the above factors or not, it is clear that by the 1740s he had decidedly moved away from Italian-language opera and devoted himself to composing English oratorio.

THE ENGLISH ORATORIO

In Handel's time and place, *oratorio* meant a musical entertainment based on a Biblical subject; it was sung in English and performed as a concert, i.e. without scenery, costumes or stage action, and featured the chorus more prominently than Italian opera did.

Despite never being presented as fully staged works during his lifetime, many of Handel's oratorios have an unmistakable narrative structure and a dramatic sensibility, wherein characters converse with each other, information is withheld and revealed to create maximum dramatic effect, there is an inciting incident, rising action, climax, etc. This makes oratorio ideal for the stage.

HERCULES, A MUSICAL DRAMA

The story of *Hercules*, however, is drawn from ancient mythology, rather than the Bible, so it's formally outside the oratorio genre. Handel himself labelled it a "musical drama" and commentators have wrestled with the work's genre classification ever since, calling it "secular oratorio," "choral opera," and "mythological oratorio." The libretto

was written by a clergyman, Reverend Thomas Broughton. He adapted Sophocles' Women of Trachis, splicing in additional materials from Ovid's Metamorphoses. In this Canadian Opera Company production, director Peter Sellars has reshaped the libretto to bring the opera's structure closer to the Greek tragedy that inspired it. (For more on the production see page 17.)

At its premiere in January 1745 at the King's Theatre in London, *Hercules* was a failure. The reasons for its cool reception are not entirely clear. Some historians posit a rivalry among London theatres – Handel might have upset some aristocratic impresarios a year earlier by refusing to write a pair of new operas for them – which rippled out to affect sales for *Hercules*. Others have suggested that *Hercules* suffered because it was presented in a form (oratorio) unsuitable to its true, or more natural, genre (opera).

It was not until the 20th century – in conjunction with a broader rediscovery of Handel's work – that *Hercules* was recognized as one of the composer's greatest achievements.

A Fiery History

The King's Theatre in London (top right) is where many of Handel's works were first performed.

It was established as the Queen's Theatre in 1705, by architect and playwright John Vanbrugh. For many years it served as a venue for opera.

After the building was destroyed by fire in 1789 another theatre was erected in its place. Yet it too burned down in 1867 (middle right).

A third theatre was built, but demolished less than 25 years later to make way for a more modern building (bottom right), which opened in 1897.

Because the theatre's name changes with the sex of the ruling monarch, it has been known as Her Majesty's Theatre since Queen Elizabeth II took the throne in 1952.

It is currently playing *The Phantom of the Opera*.







Top right: Italian Opera House (King's Theatre) by William Capon, pencil and watercolours, 1783; centre: Depiction of the great fire that claimed Her Majesty's Theatre in 1867; bottom: Her Majesty's Theatre in 2010, photo: Seth Anderson

Listening Guide

INTRODUCTION

As with 1744's Semele, produced by the COC in 2012, Handel's Hercules (1745) was a response to the waning popularity of the Italian operas which had been hugely successful and had dominated his output in the 1730s. At first glance, Hercules, like Semele, might seem to belong more in the world of oratorio than opera.

However, from the start *Hercules* was recognized as a "musical drama," as was printed in the original libretto. Both Handel and his librettist Thomas Broughton consistently referred to the major divisions in *Hercules* as "acts" (as they are called in opera) rather than "parts" (as in oratorio). Borrowing from Italian opera, Handel uses the full *da capo* aria structure (in which the opening section is repeated after a contrasting middle section) more frequently than he did in his biblical oratorios like *Messiah*. He even uses the *da capo* form in the chorus, "Love and Hymen, hand in hand" which concludes Act II. Handel's incorporation of these conventions in *Hercules* therefore places it, at least in part, within the realm of opera.

However, by not limiting himself entirely to the strictures of opera and still embracing oratorio, Handel was able to free himself up to use a wider variety of forms with greater leeway to follow the sense of the words as he thought fit. A prime example of this is found in Excerpt #4, Dejanira's remarkable quasi-mad scene which is constructed from a series of intensely dramatic accompanied recitatives with hardly a nod to conventional aria forms.

More than anything, Hercules shows Handel still determined to "write for himself," forging ahead with a new kind of opera/oratorio hybrid even when his first foray into this genre (Semele) was decidedly unpopular with London audiences. Handel was obviously looking for new ways to treat secular subjects in a dramatic way. However, for a good portion of his audience, oratorio was deemed suitable for religious subjects only and therefore not ranked highly as a theatrical entertainment.

The tracks listed are excerpted from: *Hercules*, Archiv 469 532-2. Les Musiciens du Louvre; Choeur des Musiciens du Louvre, Marc Minkowski, conductor. Gidon Saks, Anne Sofie von Otter, Richard Croft. You can also experience the Listening Guide online at **coc.ca/COCRadio**.



MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act II, scene iii: Recitativo/Chorus: "In vain you strive his falsehood to disquise!... Jealousy! Infernal pest"

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

The Chorus warns Dejanira to beware of jealousy since she believes Hercules to have designs on Iole.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Handel uses the choruses in *Hercules* to provide necessary formal closure at the end of acts, but elsewhere (as in this excerpt), they serve to comment on the action. Listen at 1:03 for the hushed, expressive way the chorus sings the words "jealousy, infernal pest" which are meant as a warning to Dejanira who suspects her husband of being unfaithful to her with the captive princess. The extensive involvement of the chorus in *Hercules* skews the piece slightly more in the direction of traditional oratorio. However, Handel ensures the work's hybrid nature by also including more "operatic" forms such as the *da capo* aria which helps place it somewhere between the oratorio and operatic worlds.

FURTHER REFLECTION

The chorus plays a significant role in *Hercules*, and in the operatic genre in general. What do composers gain from having a large group of singers perform together (as opposed to relying solely on solo vocal pieces)?



MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act II, scene vi: Recitativo/Aria: "Dissembling, false, perfidious Hercules... Cease, ruler of the day, to rise"

CONNECTION TO STORY

Dejanira does not trust Hercules' protestations of innocence regarding the affair she suspects him of having with Iole.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

This excerpt opens with a traditional recitativo secco (dry recitative), that is, sung passages which are heavily tied to the rhythms of speech and are usually accompanied by bass and harpsichord. In the case of this excerpt, an organ provides the accompaniment, again situating Hercules more in the church-based oratorio tradition. After the recitative, the instrumental introduction to the aria begins at 0:41 and then, the sung text at 0:58. In keeping with Handel's desire to push musical boundaries, this aria is not written in the usual da capo format in which the opening "A" section is repeated after an intermediary, often contrasting "B" section. Instead, we get a continuous, one-movement aria consisting of several variations on the main "cease ruler of the day" theme (which can be heard from 0:57-1:16). This understated, sinuous, almost reticent melody communicates the necessary air of disillusionment which Dejanira is experiencing, no matter how misguided her anguish might be. The "modernity" of this aria is also reflected in its chromaticism, that is, Handel's reliance on the smallest intervals between notes in the Western musical scale. This produces unease in the vocal line which is in keeping with the character's disappointment and disillusionment.

FURTHER REFLECTION

If you have a piano or keyboard in your classroom, experiment by playing a series of notes, first only using the white keys and then, alternating between white and black keys. Describe and discuss the different types of sounds and moods you hear.



Alice Coote as Dejanira in Hercules (LOC, 2011). Photo: Dan Rest



MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act III, Scene ii: Recitativo/Recitativo accompagnato/Aria: "Great Jove! Relieve his pains... Was it for this unnumbered toils I bore?... Let not fame the tidings spread."

CONNECTION TO STORY

Hercules, in his last agonies, blames Dejanira and asks Hyllus to carry his body to the top of Mount Oeta to be burned on a funeral pyre. Hyllus hopes that news of Hercules' death will not reach the Oechalians quickly.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The recitative which opens this excerpt includes sections of *recitativo accompagnato* (accompanied by the rest of the orchestra) unlike the previous aria which was introduced solely by *recitativo secco*. Listen at 1:32 where Handel purposefully begins the fully orchestrated section of the recitative at Hercules' words, "My pains redouble – Oh! be quick, my son, and bear me to the scene of glorious death," thereby reinforcing the dying man's urgency.

The aria itself begins at 2:09 and is of typical $da\ capo$ form. Its agitated, coloratura-filled vocal line is well-suited to Hyllus' concern that the news of Hercules' death not reach Oechalia (the land the hero had most recently conquered), for fear the "baffled foe... [would] triumph in the victor's fall." The repeat of the aria's opening "A" section begins at 4:42 and it is here that the singer demonstrates his virtuosity by taking an already complicated line, making it even more spectacular by playing with rhythms, adding trills (quick oscillations between two notes) and filling in larger intervals with quick, running notes.

*Coloratura:
derived from the
Italian colorare, meaning
"to colour" or "to enliven,"
the term refers to an ornamental type of vocal music
where several notes are
sung for each syllable
of the text.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Pick a melody from a song and sing it "as written." Now, think about its basic mood and decide on how you could change the melody to make its message even more emphatic. Try singing it in different ways: adding notes, changing rhythms, playing with dynamics (soft and loud) to enhance the mood.



MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act III, Scene iii: Recitativo accompagnato: "Where shall I fly"

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Dejanira, horrified that she has become the agent of Hercules' death, has a vision of the furies rising to torment her guilty soul.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Probably the most astonishing solo passage in *Hercules* is this extended scena for Dejanira composed as a free-form accompanied recitative owing very little to any formal aria structure. Throughout, her torment is telegraphed by quick mood changes signified by very different styles of vocal writing. Listen for example to the transition between the highly ornate, *coloratura* (quick, scale-like passages) and *staccati* (quick, short notes) of the "See the dreadful sisters rise" section at 1:34 in contrast with "Hide me from their hated sight, friendly shades of blackest night!" at 2:03. At this point, Handel drains all colour from the vocal line thus indicating the character's fear and desperation. The music continues on in this vein, alternating between the frenzied and the pathetic – no wonder it is often referred to as Dejanira's mad scene!

FURTHER REFLECTION

Mad scenes have a long history in the operatic tradition. Last season, the COC performed Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* which has one of the most famous mad scenes in all opera. Why do you think composers liked to write them? Why are audiences drawn to them? Why is it mostly female characters who sing them?

What to Look for

CREATIVE TEAM BACKGROUND

American stage director **Peter Sellars** is one of the most important and innovative figures in the performing arts today. His interpretations of classic works often engage with contemporary political and social issues. For example, he set the action of W. A. Mozart's most famous operas squarely in the modern world: *Don Giovanni* (1787) in New York's Spanish Harlem, *Così fan tutte* (1790) in a seaside diner on Cape Cod, and *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786) in the luxurious Trump Tower.

Though many of his early efforts were met with disapproval by audiences and critics, Sellars has since become universally celebrated for his unorthodox stagings, many of which are distinguished by the truly meaningful connections they draw between our present cultural moment and the political/social conditions of the past. He has been lauded for making visible on stage that which is dramatically inherent in the score itself.

In April 2012, the American classical music magazine Opera News gave a glowing assessment of Sellars's career, saying that, "In making himself an artist whose preoccupations and concerns grapple with nothing less than the fate of humanity, Peter Sellars has created a body of work that will transcend epoch and place, style and fad."

CONCEPT

In this production, Sellars propels the ancient myth of Hercules into the 21st century, creating a parallel between Sophocles' version of the tragedy and America's recent armed conflicts abroad. In this interpretation, Hercules is a U.S. Army General returning from the war in Iraq or Afghanistan.

COSTUME, SET, AND LIGHTING DESIGN

You'll notice that the **costumes, designed by Dunya**Ramicova, place us in the contemporary world – army fatigues, Kevlar vests and combat boots. But the ancient origins of this narrative are also given a nod, in the somewhat Grecian draping and patterning of the gowns worn by the chorus members. Note that the headscarves could suggest Muslim faith just as easily as they might signify Christian piety, contributing to a network of signs that resist fixed meaning.

The sets by George Tsypin are minimalist. As with the costumes, the set clearly situates us in the modern era – there is a backyard barbecue, cans of beer – but with a degree of abstraction, as partially destroyed columns placed along the edges of the set evoke ancient Greek architecture and the physical cost of battle. Combined with lighting designer James F. Ingalls' use of dramatic reds, yellows, and oranges, the impression is of a hellish place, scorched and devastated by war.



(l-r) David Daniels as Lichas, Richard Croft as Hyllus, Marckarthur Johnson as a soldier and Lucy Crowe as Iole in Hercules, (LOC, 2011). Photo: Dan Rest

COC Spotlight: Kathy Frost

Not everyone at the COC is an opera singer... take a peek behind the scenes and learn about the many diverse careers available in the arts! In this edition, we interview Kathy Frost, Properties Co-ordinator/Buyer. Kathy makes sure that every production has the necessary props – the objects used by the singers while on stage – and that they reflect the overall concept developed by the opera's

director, as well as the set, lighting and sound designers. That means she deals with everything from swords and guns, to stationery and glassware, and does a lot of historical research and sleuthing when an authentic item needs to be tracked down or a replica built from scratch. We asked Kathy a few questions to see what led her down this career path.



Position: Properties Co-ordinator

Name: Kathy Frost

Role in the Company: It's almost always cheaper to buy something readymade than to build something from scratch here in the props shop, so my job is to try to find all the furniture, weapons, almost anything that is handled by a performer on stage. If it doesn't exist or if I can't find it, then our talented team of builders will construct it. They can build things out of wood, metal, plastic; from tiny model bits to giant sofas and special effects. I also find and buy all the materials the builders need to build those props. I also have to know how to handle and transport some of the more dangerous things we might use, including blank-fire ammunition, guns, and weapons. We work together in the shop to help each other figure out solutions to problems, including what real and fake foods we can give to performers (it's often difficult to sing while eating real food or drinking real beverages). I also look after the accounts and track the money we've spent, so that we can stay on budget.

Hometown: The small town of Acton, just an hour outside of Toronto.

Education: Carpentry/Cabinet-making certificate, Sheridan College School of Crafts and Design

First became interested in opera: There wasn't any opera or much theatre in Acton when I was a kid, so I was in my early 20s when I discovered opera. On a trip to New York City in the 1984, one of my friends suggested we go to the Metropolitan Opera to see the Philip Glass opera Akhnaten. We were up in the cheapest, highest seats in back of the opera house, watching Egyptian history unfold to a hypnotic soundscape. I was amazed!

What made you decide to pursue this sort of career path?

I slid into this career sideways. By my mid- to late-20s, I had tried and enjoyed many different areas of study and work: pipe organ-building, wood-working, furniture-building, finishing, weaving, textile surface design, ceramics, retail decorating at IKEA, and film production. Having a lot of varied skills is exactly what is handy for working in props, so this seemed natural to me. I didn't have to settle for any one of my areas of interest. Instead, I could use a little bit of all my diverse skills in this job.

What is a typical day/shift like for you? What things are you responsible for? My typical day is never boring and almost always interesting. There may be a meeting with our head of props or with one of the builders or co-ordinators to discuss what they might need for a building project or a show. I might do some research, or go shopping out of town for antiques or textiles, or to Chinatown or the hardware store for bits and bobs, or I might purchase things from eBay, Kijiji, or Craigslist. Once a week or so I have to do the prop department's accounting to keep track of how much of money I've spent: we have very tight budgets! I also have to create reports of money spent and keep track of all my suppliers and sources. Safety is important in our work, so we also track and keep our Safety Data sheets up to date, on the over 500 different "toxic" materials we use in the building of props, like paints, solvents, and mould-making materials.

If someone was interested in becoming a properties co-ordinator, what would you recommend they have in terms of skills or experience? I believe there are two ways to do this: you could slide in sideways with a bunch of related skills and lots of enthusiasm, and start working at any small theatre or you could study at one of the great theatre schools at college or university level.

What do you love most about your career? I love shopping with designers, who are some of the most interesting people. I get to see their thought-processes: how they make some of their design decisions, and I get to know them personally too. I love the collaborative nature of this work, and I especially enjoy the day-to-day relationships I have with my work colleagues. They're smart and talented and fun. And finally, I love how crazy some of my days are: one day I looked at my list of things to do, and it included ammunition (for blank-firing gun) and bubble gum (needed for children's chorus on stage). It's never dull!

What do you enjoy the least about your career? I don't much enjoy working on numbers, and doing accounting. That's the work part of my work. It's not my strength, so I always have to force myself to do that part of my job.

What surprises you most about your career? I'm surprised that I could have been pulled into this world that I never really knew existed. When I was growing up I imagined that everyone should know exactly what they should do when they graduated from school, but sometimes a very satisfying job finds us. This work seems to have found me, and I'm very glad it did!

What's your favourite part about this production?

It's exciting that we'll have directorial giant Peter Sellars again at the Canadian Opera Company. This should be an exciting production, with a story as old as the ages pulled into the present and made relevant to modern audiences.

What's a crazy prop situation you've had to deal with in your career?

The director of one our Ensemble Studio productions wanted a character to disembowel a large, real pumpkin every performance. As I discovered, however, after calling every fruit stand and farm within an hour's drive of Toronto, finding big pumpkins after Halloween is nearly impossible: farmers and shop-keepers destroy them after the holiday because no one usually wants them at that point. In early November, while driving around the city in total despair, I found a fruit stand with about twenty slightly-rotted pumpkins, ready to be thrown out. To the great surprise of the shop-keeper, I took them all. We stored them in our weapons lock-up, the coolest small room in the shop, amidst the swords and rifles. Every day, we carefully turned them to prevent further decay. They lasted until the end of November, and the director was happy.

Active Learning

One of the best parts of taking your students to the opera is the discussion and further exploration the opera can inspire. Take a deeper look into the themes and story of *Hercules* with these discussion questions and ideas for further exploration.

DISCUSSION

- Director Peter Sellars has used the recent American military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan as the backdrop to this Greek drama. Discuss how (or if) this story is still relevant and how this new production highlights that.
- How do attitudes towards the military differ between the U.S. and Canada? How would this production differ if Hercules was a Canadian soldier?
- How does director Peter Sellars reconcile the supernatural elements of the story (Nessus the centaur, the coat he's given Hercules in revenge) with the realistic modern setting he's chosen?

EXTENSION THEMES

Use this opera as a jumping off point to discuss the longterm effects of war on veterans historically and in its modern form.

- Explore issues in the news today surrounding the successes/problems Canadian veterans experience in receiving proper care and services from the government.
- If your class has already started to explore the social and cultural aspects of modern warfare, examine how this production is an accurate or inaccurate portrayal of those elements.
- Examine historical significance of post-traumatic stress disorder by studying conflicts like the Vietnam war
- Study Greek mythology to further expand upon Hercules' life and create a timeline leading up to the events of the opera.

Resources about the Canadian military and Canadian veterans:

Veteran Affairs: www.veterans.gc.ca The Memory Project: www.thememoryproject.com

Did viewing the opera spark some scintillating debates or discussions? Would your students like to share examples of their work with the COC? E-mail us at education@coc.ca.

We'd love to hear from you!

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Above: Summer Opera Camp. Photo: COC