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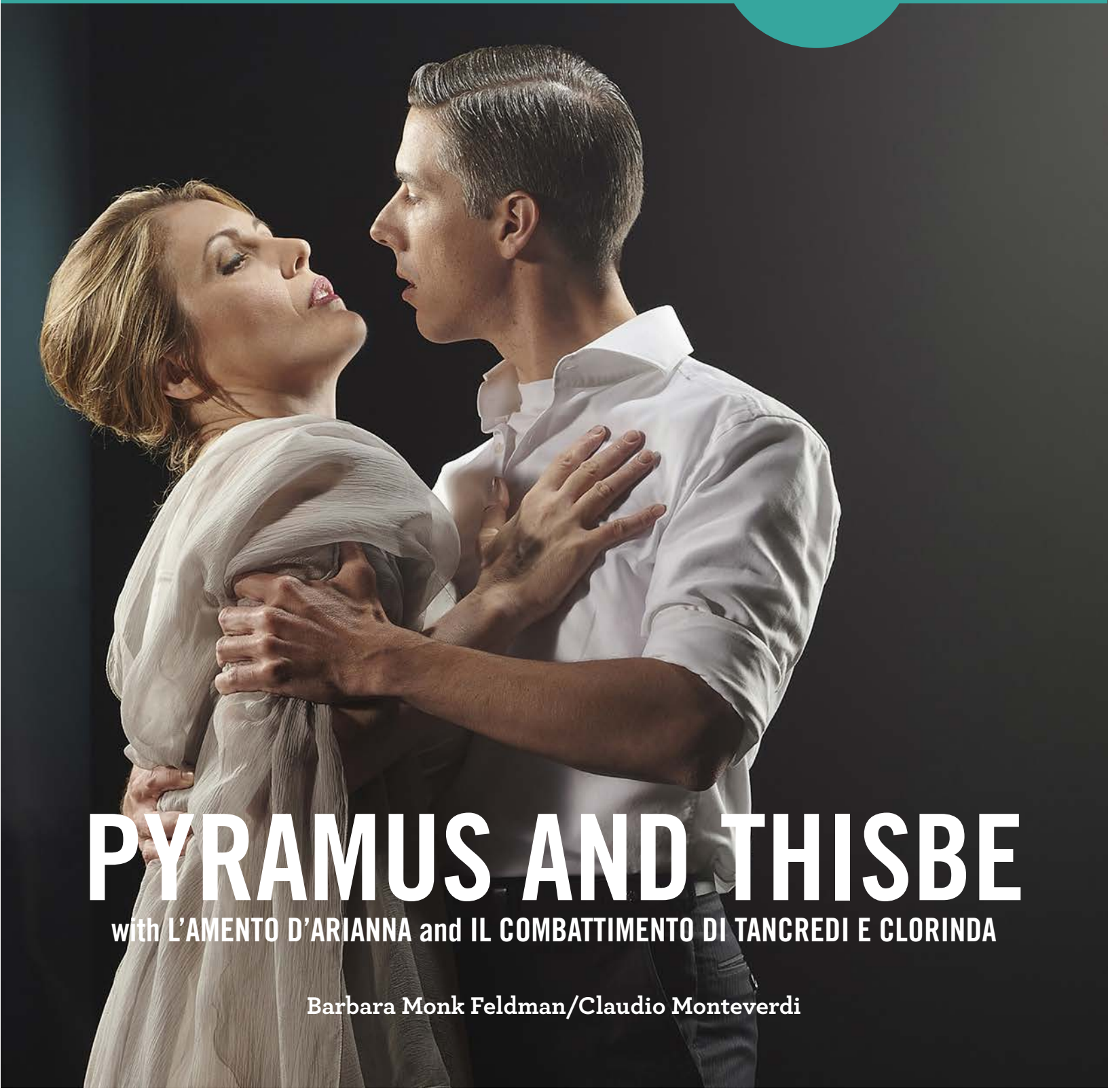
CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Study Guides
2015·2016



PYRAMUS AND THISBE

with L'AMENTO D'ARIANNA and IL COMBATTIMENTO DI TANCREDI E CLORINDA

Barbara Monk Feldman/Claudio Monteverdi

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Cover: Krisztina Szabó and Phillip Addis
Above: Krisztina Szabó
Photos: Michael Cooper, 2015

Welcome!

It is an extraordinary honour for the Canadian Opera Company to premiere Barbara Monk Feldman's new Canadian work and present two short pieces by Monteverdi written in the beginnings of the development of the art form. While the works showcase the opposite spectrums of operatic history, they are linked through their themes, musical aesthetic, and artistic innovations.

We hope that you use this guide as a jumping-off point to further explore the development of the artform and the rich repertoire of new operatic works by Canadian composers, who continue to experiment and explore the fascinating relationship between music, text, and storytelling.

Lamento d'Arianna and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* are sung in Italian. *Pyramus and Thisbe* is sung in English with sections in German and Latin. All three pieces feature English SURTITLES™.

PLAN YOUR NEXT VISIT IN 2015/2016!

STUDENT DRESS REHEARSALS 2015/2016

La Traviata Verdi
Monday, October 5, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

Pyramus and Thisbe Monk Feldman/Monteverdi
Sunday, October 18, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

Siegfried Wagner
Wednesday, January 20, 2016 at 5:30 p.m.*

The Marriage of Figaro Mozart
Monday, February 1, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Carmen Bizet
Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Maometto II Rossini
Monday, April 25, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

*Please note the earlier start time to accommodate the length of the opera, approximately five hours including two intermissions.

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 1598. 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

Photo: Sam Javanrouh

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 **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats 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**. 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 **10 minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to find their seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a program

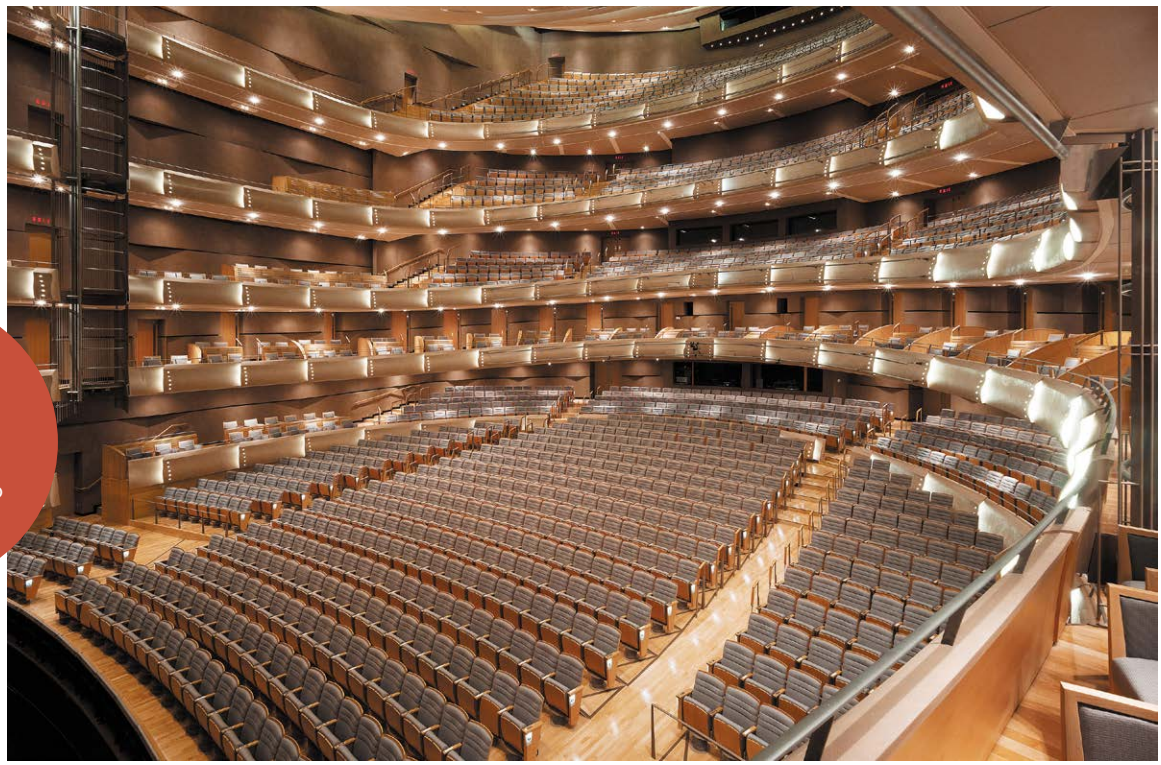
from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone—the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The 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!

The performance lasts approximately one hour and 10 minutes, with no intermission.



R. Fraser Elliott Hall.
Photo: Tim Griffith

Characters and Synopsis

LAMENTO D'ARIANNA (1608)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Arianna	Cretan princess	Mezzo-soprano	ah-ree-AHN-nah

Synopsis
The lament derives from the Greek myth of the hero Theseus who, with the help of the Cretan princess Ariadne ("Arianna" in Italian), defeats a monster, the Minotaur, and wins her love. However, when he is recalled to Athens, Theseus disdainfully abandons his love on the island of Naxos. The four-part lament depicts Arianna's various emotional reactions to her abandonment: despair, longing, incredulity, anger, sorrow, anger, fear, self-pity and her sense of futility. The opening repeated words "Lasciatemi morire" ("Let me die") are followed by "O Teseo, O Teseo mio" ("O Theseus, my Theseus"); the two phrases representing Arianna's contrasting emotions of despair and longing. Throughout the lament, indignation and anger are punctuated by tenderness until she resignedly returns to her opening, despairing words, "Let me die."

IL COMBATTIMENTO DI TANCREDI E CLORINDA (1624)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Tancredi*	Christian knight	Baritone	tan-CRAY-dee
Clorinda*	Saracen warrior maiden	Soprano	cloh-REEN-dah
Testo	Narrator	Tenor	TEH-stoh

Synopsis
Tancredi, a Christian knight, has fallen in love with Clorinda, a Saracen warrior maiden who has joined the Muslim defense of besieged Jerusalem. They meet, but as she is in armour he does not recognize her and proceeds to challenge her to a fight that lasts all night. As dawn breaks, Tancredi notices his enemy is more seriously wounded than he and asks her name. Clorinda refuses to give it and the fight resumes with more savagery than before. During the ensuing combat, Clorinda is mortally wounded and only then, upon opening her visor, does Tancredi recognize his adversary. Clorinda asks him to baptize her, and dies.

**Il combattimento* has a varied performance tradition: the role of the Narrator as well as those of Tancredi and Clorinda are often sung by the same person who varies their delivery/tone depending on who is singing. Sometimes, different performers take on each role with a tenor singing the Narrator and a bass and soprano as Tancredi and Clorinda who have very few lines of their own. This distribution of voices can be seen here and onstage in the COC production

PYRAMUS AND THISBE (2010)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Pyramus	A young man in love with Thisbe	Baritone	PEER-a-muss
Thisbe	A young woman in love with Pyramus	Mezzo-soprano	THIHZ-bee

Synopsis

The following description of the story is taken from **"Music and the Picture Plane: Poussin's 'Pyramus and Thisbe' and Morton Feldman's 'For Philip Guston'"** by Barbara Monk Feldman:

"The legend as it is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is as follows: Pyramus and Thisbe fall in love but their families refuse to allow them to marry. They communicate secretly with each other through a crack in the wall that separates their homes. Soon they decide to arrange a meeting at night outside the city, at the site of Ninus's tomb, which lies in the shadow of a tall mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives first and encounters a lioness fresh from a kill, prowling in the darkness. She escapes into a cave in fear and loses her cloak, which the lioness tramples and stains with blood. Pyramus arrives moments later and discovers the beast's footprints in the dust, and recognizes the torn and bloodied garment. Believing that Thisbe has been devoured by the creature, he thrusts his sword into his side. Thisbe returns to the mulberry tree whose fruit has now turned a deep rose color from Pyramus' blood. She notices the new colors on the tree and begins to feel disoriented, wondering if she has returned to the same place. She sees something stirring on the blood-soaked ground and steps back, her face turning pale. It is Pyramus. She runs to him and calls out. He opens his eyes and sees her face one last time, as though she were a vision, before his eyes close forever. Thisbe recognizes the cloak nearby, understands immediately what has happened, and takes her life with Pyramus' sword. The families reconcile their differences and agree to bury the ashes of the two lovers in the same urn."

Note:
The opera is not a direct representation of the narrative but a response to the themes of love and woman's courage and conviction in Ovid's story, as well as the interplay between light and dark in French Baroque painter's Nicholas Poussin's painting (see below). While the story of Pyramus and Thisbe will help to contextualize the piece, Monk Feldman and Alden have elected to focus more on its abstract themes and emotions.

Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape during a Thunderstorm with Pyramus and Thisbe*, 1651. Photo: U. Edelmann–Stadel Museum–ARTOTHEK

Genesis of the Operas

The three musical pieces in the triple bill showcase the entire span of opera history from its earliest beginnings in Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* (1608) to an example of a current and modern day work in *Pyramus and Thisbe* (2010). As a means of tying together the works, director Christopher Alden explores their common themes: "all drawn from classical/mythological sources, address the spikily ambivalent nature of male/female relationships, the societal forces which conspire to throw roadblocks in the way of the deep human need to find spiritual and physical connection with another human being, and the eternal quest of us mortal beings to move beyond our ego fixations and find a richer and more organic relationship with existence."

How did these operas come to be? Take a quick yet thoughtful journey 400 years back, towards the end of the Renaissance period when artists first began experimenting with the combination of text, music, and drama, as a single unified form of art.

In Florence, in 1573, music, writer, and scientist, Count Giovanni de Bardi, assembles a group of artists, humanists, poets, philosophers, and scholars to discuss trends and innovations in the arts. His collective, which includes theorists Vincenzo Galilei (father of astronomer, Galileo Galilei) and Girolamo Mei, and composers Giulio Caccini and Pietro Strozzi, seek to revive Greek monody (poetry sung by a single performer) and drama. Their experiments lead to the development of a new art form which combines text and music and that is presented in a theatrical setting, or what we know now as opera.

Composer Jacopo Peri writes what was probably the first opera, *Dafne*, in 1598 followed by *L'Euridice* in 1600, for which complete music still exists. Both pieces are based on ancient Greek myths and Peri's sung-spoken music is credited to have launched a new genre of musical storytelling. Around the same time that Peri was writing *Dafne*, Monteverdi secured a position as a viol player at the court of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua. The Mantuan court was a major supporter of the arts and the Duke quickly recognized the potential power of this new musical form to bestow prestige on his family name. Accordingly, as Gonzaga's musical master, Monteverdi arranged and composed music for the Mantuan court, including his first fully-fledged opera, *L'Orfeo*, which premiered in 1607. For the marriage of his son in 1608, the Duke commissioned another opera from Monteverdi and chose the myth of Ariadne as its subject. Gonzaga (a very

Left: Claudio Monteverdi, composer of *Lamento d'Arianna* and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*.
Right: Barbara Monk Feldman, composer of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

involved patron!) assigned its text to Ottavio Rinuccini, the leading librettist of his time who had the most experience adapting the conventions of contemporary lyric poetry to the needs of this new musico-dramatic form. The text was written in eight scenes and Rinuccini used Ovid's *Heroides* (*The Heroines*) and other classical sources to recount the tale of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus on the island of Naxos and her subsequent elevation to constellation form by the god Bacchus.

It is generally remarked that the composition period of *L'Arianna* was stressful for Monteverdi. He probably began writing it in late October or early November 1607 since Rinuccini's arrival in Mantua can be dated to October 23 of that year. Rehearsals were due to begin in early 1608 and so, Monteverdi was under considerable pressure; in fact, in a letter written nearly 20 years later he was still complaining of the stresses he endured: "It was the shortness of time that brought me almost to death's door in writing *L'Arianna*."

L'Arianna premiered on May 28, 1608, the first of several spectacular entertainments to celebrate the Duke's son's wedding. A large temporary theatre was built for the occasion and a lavish production was mounted with 300 men employed to manipulate the stage machinery alone. Star soprano Virginia Ramponi-Andreini sang Arianna and is reported to have "made many weep" with her lament. Apart from the lament, all of *L'Arianna*'s music was lost, although its libretto survives intact.

WHY THE "LAMENTO" WAS THE ONLY SECTION OF *L'ARIANNA* TO SURVIVE?

The only known revival of *L'Arianna* was at Venice's Teatro San Moisè where it inaugurated the re-opening of that theatre as an opera house for the 1639–1640 Carnival season. It was received with great enthusiasm by the Venetian public who were already familiar with the lament due to its publication in 1623. Its appearance in print form was fortuitous since the score for the rest of the opera disappeared sometime after 1640. In this way, *L'Arianna* was no different than most of Monteverdi's operatic output—six of his other nine operas shared the same fate. Ideas about posterity were quite different in 17th-century Italy than today. Many works were produced for very specific circumstances (weddings, coronations, holidays etc.) and there was little expectation for them to live beyond their initial performances. The lament was saved from oblivion by Monteverdi's decision to publish it independently from the opera: first in 1614 as a five-voice madrigal (a song for several voices arranged in elabourate counterpoint without instrumental accompaniment), then in 1623 as a monody (the form for solo voice which the COC will be using) and finally, in 1641 as a sacred hymn, "Lamento della Madonna."

Rinuccini's libretto, which was published several times during Monteverdi's life, has survived intact to this day. **Watch a video clip** of Italian soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci in a staged performance of the "Lamento" from her one-woman show, *Era la notte*.

IL COMBATTIMENTO DI TANCREDI E CLORINDA

After settling in Venice in 1613 as music director of St. Mark's Basilica, Monteverdi wrote mostly church music. Still, he continued to develop his dramatic gifts in many secular madrigals and dramatic cantatas such as *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. Composed for the most prominent of his Venetian partons, the senator Girolamo Mocenigo, it was performed for the first time at his palace during the Carnival of 1624 as an entertainment for an aristocratic wedding.

Although premiered in 1624, it was not published until 1638, appearing together with several other pieces in Monteverdi's eighth book of madrigals. Its text was adapted from Torquato Tasso's (1544–1595) epic poem, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Liberated*, 1580), a mythologized account of tales of the First Crusade from the end of the 11th century which proved to be a frequently-mined source for opera plots over the next 100 years.

In his introductory text to the 1638 book of madrigals, Monteverdi outlined in detail his specifications for both the theatrical action and their musical performance. For *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, the main dramatic weight falls upon the Narrator who must remain detached from the action, sing clearly and articulate correctly. The composer also makes it clear that he set Tasso's text in a *genere rappresentativo* (*representative manner*) as opposed to *senza gesto* (*without gesture*) indicating he envisioned the piece staged and not just presented in concert form. Watch Anna Caterina Antonacci again, in **a concert version** of *Il combattimento* and **a staged version**.

The next 400 years are dense with creation, innovation and exploration in opera. After Monteverdi, composers like Lully, Purcell, Gluck, Handel, Mozart, Donizetti, Bellini, Rossini, Puccini, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Wagner,

Strauss, Bartók, Britten, Stravinsky, to contemporaries like Philip Glass and John Adams to name only a few, continued the tradition of exploring the relationship between music and text. Their individual innovations and subsequent contributions to opera are too many to list, but their musical explorations are all part of a continuum of storytelling, learning, experimentation, and form of expression, which composers of opera still uphold today.

PYRAMUS AND THISBE

Barbara Monk Feldman is adding her voice and musical exploration to the operatic repertoire with her first opera, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Her opera is based on the themes and emotions in the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The story of the ill-fated lovers is one of the great, archetypal myths used by many of the most renowned playwrights, poets and authors throughout the history of Western literature. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare famously utilized the story by having his group of comic "mechanicals" put on a crude parody of the tale—an episode unforgettably and hilariously set to music by Benjamin Britten in his operatic version of the play. The most famous appropriation of Pyramus and Thisbe is found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, also the story of two lovers torn apart by their feuding families, who tragically die in a double suicide when each mistakenly thinks the other is dead.

Barbara Monk Feldman was inspired to compose the piece after seeing a painting of the same title by French Baroque painter Nicolas Poussin while in Frankfurt in 1983. Poussin captures the pivotal moment in the tragic story, the moment when Thisbe discovers the dying Pyramus and realizes that he has been misled into choosing his own death. It is through Thisbe's eyes and her painful discovery that the individual views the painting. In thinking how to make the ancient myth into a modern one, Monk Feldman turned her attention to the emotions and themes in Ovid's story, and colours, movement, and contrast in lighting in the painting, as a source of direction and motivation when she began working on the piece in 2008. The painting clearly resonated with her as she saw it nearly two decades before embarking on the project; she has thought of the story for a long time. The result is a deeply contemplative and meditative composition of two abstract characters going through subtle adjustments in their unconscious rather than a retelling of the narrative. Composing the piece over two years, the work was completed in 2010. The opera has its world premiere at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on Tuesday, October 20, 2015.

The myth in media

The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe can be found throughout literature and popular culture. A chapter entitled "Pyramus and Thisbe" in Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, alludes to the secret romance between Maximillian Morrel and Valentine de Villefort; during his "nose monologue" in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the title character mocks his "traitorous nose" in "parody of weeping Pyramus;" The Beatles made a parody of the story for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, transmitted in a one-hour TV special in 1964 and, in a 2012 episode of *The Simpsons* entitled "The Daughter Also Rises," Grandpa Simpson talks to Lisa about Pyramus and Thisbe.

MORE ON BARBARA MONK FELDMAN

Barbara Monk Feldman was born in Canada and studied composition with Bengt Hambraeus at McGill University in Montreal and with Morton Feldman (whom she later married) at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where she received a Ph.D. in 1987. Her music has been performed in Canada, the United States, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and Italy by the Arditti String Quartet, the Montreal Chamber Orchestra, Roger Heaton, Yvar Mikhashoff, Frederic Rzewski, Aki Takahashi, Robyn Schulkowsky, and Marianne Schroeder. She has participated on the faculty of the International Ferienkurse fur Neue Musik at Darmstadt since 1988, and she has been commissioned to write new works from the Sonorities Festival at the Queen's University of Belfast, Toronto New Music Concerts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council, and Concerts in New York City. Her music has been recorded for radio by the BBC in Ireland, BRT in Belgium, the CBC in Canada, and WDR and HR in Germany.

Her research into music and visual art has led to collaborations with numerous artists, including Stan Brakhage, whose hand-painted film "Three Homerics" was created for use with her work "Infinite Other." She founded the Time Shards Music Series at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2001 and served as its artistic director.

Listening Guide: Opera from Monteverdi to Monk Feldman

It's important that we keep in mind that the three musical pieces show both ends of the spectrum of opera history. Seeing and hearing some of the earliest form of the art form and an opera that is being performed for the first time begs the question—how do the pieces relate? How are they connected?

He may not have the same notoriety as Mozart or Beethoven, but Claudio Monteverdi is one of the most important composers in the history of Western classical music. He lived and worked in the transition period between the Renaissance and Baroque eras and he was the first composer to develop opera to its full dramatic and musical potential. While Monteverdi is also well known for his composition of **madrigals** (a secular part-song without instrumental accompaniment, usually for four to six voices with elaborate melodies), his particular experiments and compositions in opera foreshadowed the modern idea of the song.

Monteverdi tempered the polyphonic writing of the madrigal that was popular during the Renaissance period and put the text and emotion at the forefront. He stripped down the melody to a single vocal line with accompaniment, and incorporated music composed to convey human emotions. His new musical language dazzled audiences but left his colleagues and critics a little baffled. If only they could see then how Monteverdi's trail-blazing works and innovations would influence centuries of composers like Mozart, Puccini, Verdi, Wagner, Stravinsky, and Barbara Monk Feldman who would continue exploring the relationship between text and music.

In *Lamento d'Arianna* Monteverdi captures Arianna's heightened emotions in an elegant vocal line. The lament is in the style of an extended recitative (song-spoken style). Remember the idea of the aria or elaborate solo which we've come to expect in operas hadn't quite yet been developed. But the seed of what will become the main characteristic of the aria, a solo song in which a character expresses their emotions, has been planted. In the lament, Arianna sings through several emotions including sorrow, anger, fear, self-pity, desolation and a sense of futility. "The lament enjoyed a special status, an emotional climax followed by resolution of the action, it was a soliloquy, a moment of intense expression within the movement of a narrative structure." (Rosand, Ellen. The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament. *The Musical Quarterly*. Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 1979), pp. 346-359) With *Lamento d' Arianna*, the form of the lament became a recognized genre of vocal chamber music and became a standard scene in opera (particularly crucial in 17th-century Italian opera).

Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda was written in 1624, a few years after *L'Arianna*. In this work, Monteverdi experimented with new musical sounds and special effects in the orchestra to convey the text and story. The opera contains one of earliest known uses of ***pizzicato***, a technique in which string players are instructed to pluck the strings with their fingers, as well as the use of ***tremolo***, a trembling effect which generates excitement, agitation or anger, created by a rapid, short back and forth movement of the bow on the same note. Since these musical inventions were so unique, the technique of how to play these types of musical embellishments had not been established yet, and Monteverdi had difficulty getting the players to perform it exactly the way he wanted it.

Monteverdi was truly ahead of his time and his innovations laid the foundation for modern day composers, like Barbara Monk Feldman, to further expand the musical expressiveness of text in opera.

Like Monteverdi, Barbara Monk Feldman wrote *Pyramus and Thisbe* through her own creative process and artistic instincts. Using the original tale in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as her jumping-off point, she turned to multiple literary sources for the libretto (text) for her opera, including the works of American novelist William Faulkner, 16th-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross, and early 20th-century author and poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Instead of a through-line narrative, Barbara Monk Feldman was more interested in finding a text that could capture the delicate emotions and essence of the original myth and Poussin's painting. Musically, Barbara Monk Feldman almost composes and works like a painter. She tries to capture the shifting movement between the foreground and background of Poussin's work, including the elements of light and dark in her sound. The score focuses on the slight adjustments in Pyramus's and Thisbe's emotions instead of the usual swooping highly emotional melodies, and as a result the music is very meditative and atmospheric. For further exploration of her music, read Wendalyn Bartley's **article** in *Wholenote* magazine.

Similarly to Monteverdi, Barbara Monk Feldman also demands a different type of singing to which most opera singers aren't accustomed, in order for the full effect of her opera and musical intentions to be achieved. Leslie Barcza, of **Barcza blog** spoke to Canadian baritone Philip Addis who performs the role of Tancredi in *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, and Pyramus in *Pyramus and Thisbe* at the COC. Addis discusses his experience and thoughts on the production:

How it feels to sing Barbara Monk Feldman's music:
"Singing *Pyramus and Thisbe* is challenging not in its virtuosity but in its minimalism. In rehearsal we are striving for such a spare aesthetic that we have to let go of habit, ego and expectation in order to participate in any given moment. There is very little dynamic variation and the range of my part is just an octave, meaning that any move towards the extremes of these narrow parameters is more deeply felt, like one wave on otherwise still waters."

On the mix of repertoire in this production:
"In fact these two composers are a good pairing and not so far removed from one another. If anything, the writing of Monk Feldman almost seems like a renaissance antecedent to Monteverdi's baroque sentiments. Singing these works is no great challenge in terms of vocal stamina, but is a major endeavour mentally and physically. We've decided that the characters have an arc through the whole production, so we've made efforts to harmonize the pieces and hide the seams. Our movement through the piece is as important as anything we're doing vocally, and that has required a strong discipline and an exploration of our physical limits."

How he prepares for the role of Pyramus:
"I begin with the text under the assumption that this is also what the composer had as inspiration, and I read it dryly, then in the rhythm that has been established in the score. These I alternate to explore possible meanings, or double meanings, of specific words. Then I consider the pitch and melody as contours which drive the inflection. It's sometimes frustrating when you want to stress a word a certain way, but the composer has had other ideas. Sometimes you can keep a kernel of your original idea, but usually you have to submit to the composer's will in this case. As for any psychology, it would be false to say that I embody the character. I'm constantly aware of what words I need to deliver next and how and when. If I look like I'm in an emotional state, it's because I'm imagining how it ought to look, and then creating the appropriate mask. One can't get too worked up on the inside in opera, not really, or the very instrument upon which you rely will not function. The only time I can really remember losing it was in a final chorus of *Hänsel and Gretel*, as the father, at a time when my wife was expecting our son. I was blubbering away and it was all rather overwhelming."

Phillip Addis stars in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Photo: Michael Cooper, 2015

Since *Pyramus and Thisbe* is receiving its world premiere, no recording is available of the opera, but if you're interested in hearing Barbara Monk Feldman's works listen to a recording of her trio ***The Northern Shore*** or hear one of her lectures on her creative process **here**.

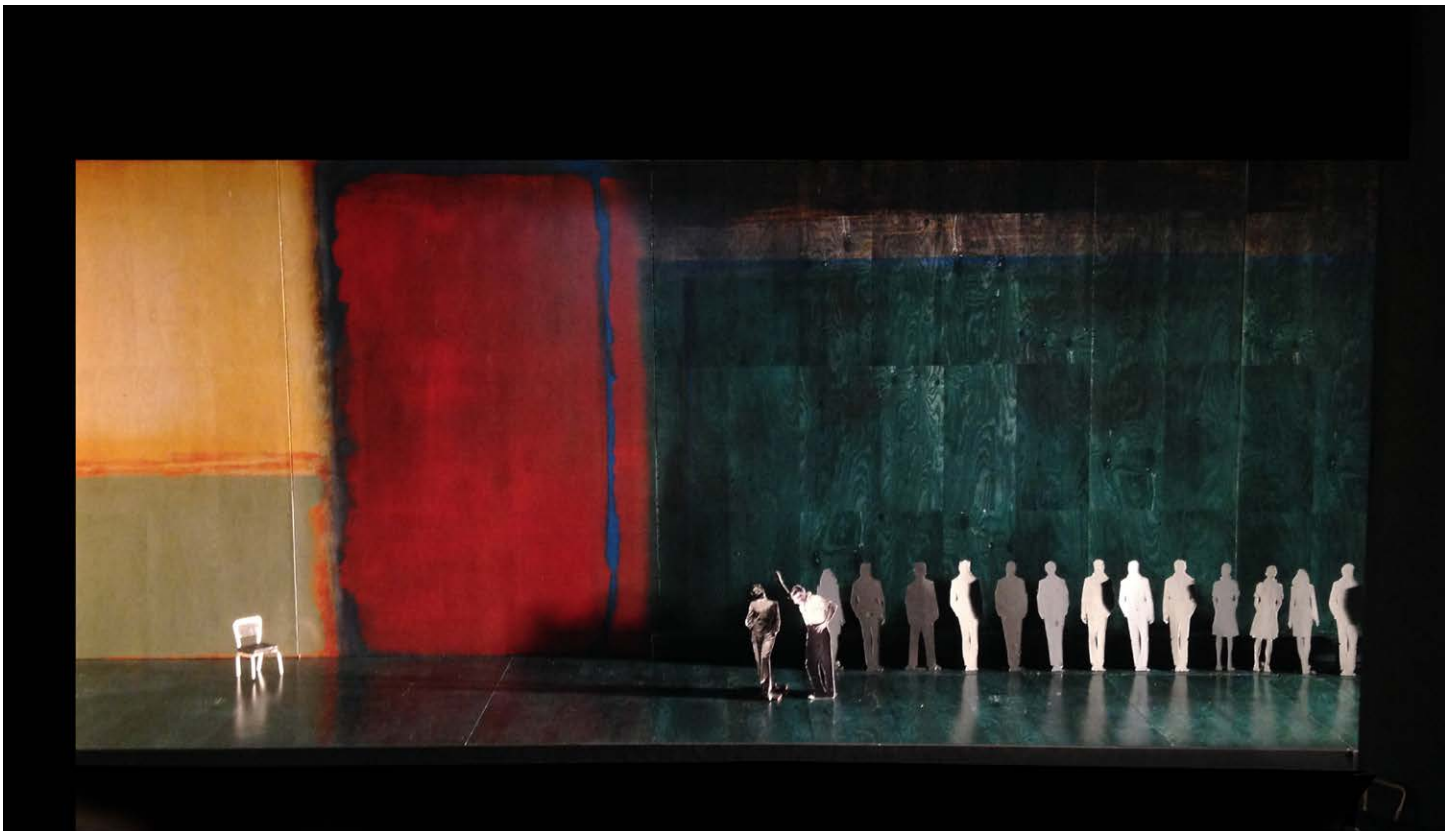
What to Look for

Director Christopher Alden, along with Dora Award-winning set designer Paul Steinberg and acclaimed costume designer Terese Wadden, has created an aesthetic for the set design that is heavily inspired by the massive colour blocking and abstractness of the works by renowned American painter Mark Rothko (1903 – 1970). The goal was to create a seamless production to show the span of the history of the opera and link the common themes.

The set is broken up into three large panels–one yellow, one red, and one with green and darker hues–painted in the style of Mark Rothko. Connected together, they move slowly across the stage, with each of the panels forming a background to one of the operas. The order of the operas is: *Lamento d'Arianna*, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* and, finally, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. The performance ends with the ill-fated lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, standing alone on stage looking into the abyss.

There are many commonalities between the aesthetic and artistic philosophies between Barbara Monk Feldman and Mark Rothko, and it makes perfect sense that his artistic works served as the inspiration for this production. They are not concerned with a direct narrative, but are more interested in making art that generates an emotional and spiritual experience, that is a unique and personal to every individual who comes across their work.

Preliminary set design by Paul Steinberg. Photo: COC



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Above: Workshop at Howard Park Jr. P.S. Photo: COC