

ARIAS, etc.

Haley Whitney, soprano · Kameron Lopreore, tenor
Michael Rorex, piano

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Opera has a long, storied history, one which began on the Italian peninsula around 1600 but soon saw itself expanding outward across Europe and around the world. Its major innovators have included the composers Claudio Monteverdi, Christoph Willibald Gluck, Richard Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, and Alban Berg. Repeatedly, its stories tell of doomed lovers cursed by inescapable fates. So much of the repertoire is tragic, but there are also lighter moments, whole comedies too. Opera captures a range of human emotions, and, at its best, the tunefulness of its melodies can inspire these same emotions in us, the audience. Regardless of the language—Italian, German, French, English, or something else entirely—the music itself creates the emotional space and assists the stage drama in telling the powerful narratives. Opera is a genre we rarely get the chance to enjoy at chamber music festivals such as this one. Often opera is restricted to the large stages of theatres and concert halls where the accompaniment of a full orchestra can reiterate the grandness of this medium. Nevertheless, we are glad to be joined this afternoon by soprano Haley Whitney and tenor Kameron Lopreore who, together with pianist Michael Rorex, will present a program of opera arias alongside songs from musical theatre. We are indebted to our friends at the Shreveport Opera for arranging their performance.

Our first three numbers are in Italian, beginning with the aria “Da tempeste il legno infranto” from the opera *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* by **George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)**. Handel, German by birth, studied in Italy, bringing with him Italian opera when he settled in Great Britain. In total, Handel wrote thirty-six operas in Italian for the English stage, before his audience lost interest and he switched to oratorio, this time in their own language. *Giulio Cesare* was one of his most successful, premiered on February 20, 1724 and revived by Handel another three times. The opera tells of Julius Caesar’s Egyptian campaign where he struggled against King Ptolemy whose sister, Cleopatra, had fallen in love with Caesar. The aria we hear comes at the moment when Cleopatra rejoices upon seeing Caesar again, who she believed had drowned. She sings of the fierce storm she believed had taken his life in this showpiece, full of quick runs and passionate emotions. Next, we hear the aria “Sì ritrovarla io guiro” from *La Cenerentola*, a retelling of the Cinderella fairytale by **Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)**. This opera premiered on January 25, 1817 in Rome during one of Rossini’s most productive periods. In this aria, Ramiro, the Prince Charming of the opera, declares he will find Angelina, our Cinderella, who has left him with a matching bracelet with which to identify her. The familiar Neapolitan song “O sole mio” closes our Italian set. Published in 1898 by Eduardo di Capua, this song is best-known in the version by Luciano Pavarotti for which he won a Grammy Award in 1980. Its lyrics compare the sight of a beloved’s face with the joy of a sunny day.



Gioachino Rossini

The remainder of the program is in English with the first two selections drawn from opera and the others from Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. “What Good Would the Moon Be” is from *Street Scene*, a work by **Kurt Weill (1900-1950)** subtitled “An American Opera.” Few composers had written English-language operas before the twentieth century, at least not with much success. That changed, however, with the various folk-inspired operas by Scott Joplin (*Treemonisha*), George Gershwin (*Porgy and Bess*), Aaron Copland (*The Tender Land*), and Weill’s own *Street Scene*; perhaps, it was after the triumph of the Broadway musical that “serious” composers saw new potential in English-language opera, especially if it drew inspiration



Kurt Weill

from everyday American life. *Street Scene* is based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Elmer Rice. With Rice and the addition of Langston Hughes, Weill crafted his opera which premiered on Broadway on January 9, 1947. Its run lasted 148 performances which by musical theatre standards was low, but by American operatic standards, quite high. In “What Good Would the Moon Be,” the opera’s heroine, Rose Maurrant, rejects an offer to “make it big on Broadway” in favor of a simpler lifestyle with her lover, Sam Kaplan. *A View from the Bridge*, from which we hear the song “New York Lights,” is an opera by American composer **William Bolcom (born 1938)**. It is based on the play by Arthur Miller and premiered at Chicago’s Lyric Opera on October 9, 1999. The aria “New York Lights” is sung by Rodolpho, an Italian immigrant, who has fallen in love with Catherine much to the chagrin of her overprotective uncle, Eddie Carbone.

The collaboration between composer **Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)** and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960) has been called the most fruitful partnership in the history of American musical theatre. Their first show, *Oklahoma!*, which opened on Broadway on March 31, 1943, ran for an unprecedented two thousand performances and has remained popular worldwide ever since. This afternoon, we hear the playful duet “People Will Say We’re in Love” in which the show’s protagonists, Laurey Williams and Curly McLain, tease each other that, if they keep spending so much time together, the neighbors will suspect they are in love. Curly seems much more comfortable with this

notion than Laurey who sweetly provides him with a list of “don’ts”—little things he does that expose his love for her. Our last two selections are from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s next musical, *Carousel*, which opened on Broadway on April 19, 1945. It was also well-received, although not nearly as phenomenal a success as *Oklahoma!* had been two years earlier. Its plot centers on a carousel barker, Billy Bigelow, whose love for Julie Jordan and his strong desire to provide financially for their unborn child misguidedly causes him to commit a robbery. “When I Marry Mr. Snow” is sung by Julie’s friend Carrie Pipperidge as she recounts to Julie the story of her own courtship with an ambitious fisherman (some context for the peculiar line about her Mr. Snow smelling of fish). The familiar song, “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” closes *Carousel* as it likewise closes our program today. This anthem encourages everyone who sings and hears it to remain steadfast and true to their beliefs even in the most of difficult times.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a graduate student pursuing his master’s degree in musicology at the University of Louisville where, in April 2017, he was awarded the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars’ College in Natchitoches, Louisiana following the completion of his undergraduate thesis, “Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers.” From 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria, and since that time has remained concert annotator for presenters of classical music across Louisiana. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He recently shared this research in March 2018 at the American Musicological

Society South-Central Chapter’s annual meeting in Asheville, North Carolina. Also a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into compositions which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His compositions have been performed at the Sugarmill Music Festival and New Music on the Bayou.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.