



An Evening of Romantic Opera with Orchestra

**October 9, 2023
7:30 p.m.**

Daniel Hall

David Berry: Overture: *Henry's Night Out*

(inspired by the painting by **Quent Cordair**
and introduced by **Linda Cordair**)

Thomas Shoebottom, conductor

I painted *Henry's Night Out* in 1994 and I like to think of it as a “tiddlywink” painting, for those familiar with Ayn Rand's term for one of her favorite genres of music. The imagery intends to be benevolent, innocent, playful, hopeful, optimistic—light of spirit, without a trace of cynicism, worry, or self-doubt. *Henry* evokes a time of silent movies, ragtime and Tin Pan Alley tunes, a time of top hats and tails, when one would still dress to the nines to go out on the town, a time when a young bear might embark on an evening's adventure with every expectation of finding and meeting, someday, somewhere, that marvelous and unrepeatable other bear with whom he will surely fall in love. But if he doesn't find her on this particular evening, a grand adventure will be had regardless.

Dressed up and posed just so, his dinner borrowed from the fruit bowl in the kitchen, his copper cup from the dining room cupboard, the composition of *Henry's Night Out* is a child's reflection of how he sees his own relationship with the world, anticipating an evening in the future when he, too, will be able to venture out to explore and experience the world's wonders.

David Berry’s musical composition extends the narrative of the piece, accompanying Henry as he sallies forth and ventures down the walk, to discover what he will. I’m honored to have created the visual art that inspired Berry’s delightful aural complement.

—*Quent Cordair*

(Both the original oil painting and limited-edition prints of *Henry's Night Out* are available through www.cordair.com)

Erich Wolfgang Korngold: Marietta’s Lied from *Die tote Stadt*

Gia Sweitzer, soprano
Thomas Shoebottom, conductor

For many years, Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) was dismissed by many as little more than a Golden Age film composer, but in recent years his work has been reevaluated, and he is now recognized as one of the great geniuses of twentieth-century music. Born near Vienna, he was so prodigious that at the age of nine, his cantata *Gold* moved Gustav Mahler to declare him a musical *Wunderkind*. When he was only eleven, his ballet *Der Schneemann* (The Snowman) was performed at the Vienna Court Opera for the Emperor Franz Josef, where it was also heard by the composer Richard Strauss, who remarked that it was “eerie” to see such musical gifts in one so young.

By the mid-1930s he had arrived in Hollywood to escape Nazi oppression, and Warner Brothers soon assigned him to create symphonic masterpieces for their “swashbuckling” epics starring Erroll Flynn and Olivia de Havilland—box-office bonanzas such as *Captain Blood* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. In 1942 he also created one of his most highly acclaimed scores for the period drama *Kings Row*.

For years, his three-act opera *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City), which he composed when he was only 23, was largely forgotten, but today it is frequently performed, and many consider it his greatest masterpiece. The setting is late nineteenth-century Belgium, where the town of Bruges was often known as “the Dead City” because so many of its residents seemed to effect a sense of pious gloom. Paul had been living happily with his young wife, Marie, but she has now died, and he is unable to deal with her death. One day he sees a beautiful young woman, Marietta, on the street, and because she resembles Marie, he convinces himself that his wife has been

resurrected. Marietta is a dancer appearing with an opera company, and he invites her to his home where—in an attempt to recreate a photograph of his wife—he gives her a scarf and a lute that once belonged to Marie. He then asks her to sing a song that Marie used to sing, and the song’s final lines suggest the possibility of resurrection.

—*Stephen Siek*

Glück, das mir verblieb,
rück zu mir, mein treues Lieb.
Abend sinkt im Ha(a)g—
bist mir Licht und Tag.
Bange pochet Herz an Herz—
Hoffnung schwingt sich himmelwärts.

[You my] happiness that remained,
move closer, my faithful love.
Evening is setting in the grove—
you are my light and day.
Anxiously heart beats against heart—
hope soars heavenward.

Wie wahr, ein traurig Lied.
Das Lied vom treuen Lieb,
das sterben muss.

How true, a sad song.
The song of the faithful lover
who must die.

Ich kenne das Lied.
Ich hört es oft in jungen,
in schöneren Tagen...
Es hat noch eine Strophe—
weiß ich sie noch?

I know the song.
I heard it often in younger,
in better days...
It has another verse—
do I still know it?

Naht auch Sorge trüb,
rück zu mir, mein treues Lieb.
Neig dein blass Gesicht—
Sterben trennt uns nicht.
Mußt du einmal von mir gehn,
glaub, es gibt ein Auferstehn.

Though grim sorrow may approach,
move closer, my true love.
Incline your pale face—
death will not separate us.
If you must leave me one day.

Peter Tchaikovsky: Lensky’s Aria from *Eugene Onegin*

Alan August, tenor
Thomas Shoebottom, conductor

Today, the Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) is most often remembered for his ballets and symphonies, but *Eugene Onegin* is considered among the greatest of Russian operas. Loosely based on a poetic novel by Pushkin, it opened in Moscow on March 29, 1879.

The story occurs largely in the mansion of Madame Larina, and much of the plot centers around her two daughters, Tatyana, and her younger sister, Olga. Tatyana is introverted and spends much of her time reading romantic novels, while Olga is far more spirited and carefree. Olga has a fiancé, Lensky, a young poet, and one day Lensky brings his friend Eugene Onegin, a soldier from St. Petersburg, to their home. Tatyana is immediately taken with Onegin and later writes him a long, emotional letter declaring her love. She is devastated when he rejects her.

Act II opens with a grand ball that Madame Larina is giving in honor of Tatyana's name day, and Onegin first projects boredom at the whole occasion. He agrees to dance with Tatyana, but when he notices people gossiping about the two of them, he decides to flirt with Olga. She is happy to receive the attention, and even leads him on, despite Lensky's strenuous objections. In front of the guests, Lensky renounces his friendship with Onegin and challenges him to a duel. Reluctantly, Onegin feels forced to accept.

Act II, Scene 2 opens in a snowy field, where Lensky is alone with his thoughts, awaiting Onegin's arrival. As Onegin is a military man, famous for his exploits and marksmanship, and Lensky is a poet, he has no illusions that he will win this duel, yet honor and hurt prevent him from backing down. In this aria, he is pleading with Olga to remember him, to visit his grave, and realize how much he loved her.

—*Alan August*

Where, oh where have you gone,
golden days of my youth?
What does the coming day hold for me?
My gaze searches in vain;
all is shrouded in darkness!
No matter: Fate's law is just.
Should I fall, pierced by the arrow,
or should it fly wide,
'tis all one; both sleeping and waking
have their appointed hour.
Blessed is the day of care,
blessed, too, the coming of darkness!
Early in the morning the dawn-light gleams
and the day begins to brighten,
while I, perhaps, will enter
the mysterious shadow of the grave!
And the memory of a young poet

will be engulfed by Lethe's sluggish stream.
The world will forget me; but you,
You! ... Olga ...

Say, will you come, maid of beauty,
to shed a tear on the untimely urn
and think: he loved me!
To me alone he devoted
the sad dawn of his storm-tossed life!
Oh, Olga, I loved you,
to you alone I devoted
the sad dawn of my storm-tossed life!

Oh, Olga, I loved you!
My heart's beloved, my desired one,
come, oh come! My desired one,
come, I am your betrothed, come, come!

I wait for you, my desired one,
come, come; I am your betrothed!

Where, where, where have you gone,
golden days, golden days of my youth?

Leonard Bernstein: Balcony Scene from *West Side Story*

Gia Sweitzer as “Maria”
Alan August as “Tony”

Stephen Siek, piano

Harvard-educated and classically trained as a serious composer and conductor, Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) scarcely projected the image of a Broadway mover and shaker. But when he was approached by playwright Arthur Laurents and choreographer Jerome Robbins to create a modern adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, he had already written the musical *On the Town*, which was so successful that in 1949, MGM even adapted it into a major feature starring Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly. And by the time *West Side Story* opened on September 26, 1957, Bernstein was also credited with the scores for *Wonderful Town* and *Candide*.

Nonetheless, Laurents’s modern Shakespeare adaptation was plagued with problems. Many Broadway moguls like George Abbott refused to get involved because they felt the material was simply too dark for a Broadway show. But fortunately, the prodigiously gifted Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021) agreed to come aboard as lyricist and was so well-connected in Broadway circles that he convinced his friend Hal Prince to step in as producer. *West Side Story* was projected to have more dance sequences than any musical in Broadway history, and to Robbins’s delight, Prince expanded the rehearsal schedule from four weeks to eight—enabling Robbins to win a Tony® for his striking choreography.

Today, Sondheim’s genius as a lyricist is also recognized as an integral part of the show’s success. He converted long passages of Laurents’s dialogue into simple, metrical rhymes, and even managed to turn an ominous phrase like “A boy like that would kill your brother” into a memorable lyric. He also countered Laurents’s insistence that the lyrics for “America” and “I Feel

Pretty” were too sophisticated for the characters singing them, and Sondheim’s choices quickly made those songs into audience favorites.

But the iconic song “Tonight” was almost never written. Bernstein originally wanted to use Tony and Maria’s duet “One Hand, One Heart” for the balcony scene, but Sondheim’s longtime friend and mentor Oscar Hammerstein felt that it lacked sufficient drama, and he convinced them to move the duet to the flower shop, which demanded that a new, more powerful song be written for the balcony. Today, the song that the duo almost didn’t write has become one of the most memorable and frequently performed duets in the history of American theatre.

—*Stephen Siek*

David Berry: *To Him Who Waits*, a one-act opera after O. Henry

Jacob Bullock as “The Hermit”
Gia Sweitzer as “Beatrix”
Wendi Arms as “Edith”
Alan August as “Bob”
Mark Shelton as “Inn employee”

David Berry, conductor

*This evening’s performance is dedicated to the memory of
Ralph Rivera (1948-2019)*



Background

O. Henry's "To Him Who Waits" appeared in print on January 23, 1909, in *Collier's*, founded in 1888 as a magazine of "fiction, fact, sensation, wit, humour, news," and soon one of the country's best-selling magazines. One of only eight stories he published that year, it shared the issue with reports and photographs of an earthquake in Messina. It was illustrated by George Brehm, an Indiana-born artist who had studied at the Arts Students League in New York, as did Ayn Rand's husband Frank O'Connor decades later. It begins: "The Hermit of the Hudson was bustling about his cave with unusual animation." It has never before been adapted to the musical stage.

—*Shoshana Milgram*

The Music

I have been a big fan of O. Henry since a now-forgotten elementary school teacher read aloud "The Ransom of Red Chief." The forward by Harry Hansen of *The Complete Works of O. Henry* (published by Doubleday) states that the story "To Him Who Waits" was adapted by O. Henry himself for an unsuccessful musical. It turns out that is untrue. I was planning (and have completed) a trilogy of one-act operas titled *3 American Yarns*. The stories I chose all feel autobiographical. This work is the first of the three. Excerpts from all three have been performed at various times over several decades, and *To Him Who Waits* was premiered in 2002 by the Spartanburg Repertory Company with singers accompanied by two pianos. In 2021 I orchestrated the operas for 13 instruments, and tonight is the first performance of the finished version.

Opera composers virtually never set the entire text of an adapted story or play, but I wished to capture the spirit of O. Henry, so every word of his dialogue has music. I wanted some additional lyrics for each of the characters. They were provided by my life-long friend and music collaborator, Ralph Rivera, who passed away in 2019. He was an enormously gifted lyricist and songwriter. Many of my most cherished compositions, including this one, display his brilliance, and his words here comfortably complement O. Henry's work. Tonight's performance is dedicated to Ralph's memory.

—*David Berry*

Opera Personnel



Jacob Bullock, baritone (The Hermit) is originally from Rocky Top, Tennessee, and is a conductor, teacher, and baritone soloist in South Carolina. A graduate in Music Education at East Tennessee State University, he is currently an elementary school teacher in Spartanburg District Two. Jacob is frequently featured as a church soloist in works such as Dubois’ *The Seven Last Words of Christ* and Saint-Saens’ *Christmas Oratorio*. Jacob has appeared as King Melchior in Gian-Carlo Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with Music on Site Inc., and as Buff in Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor* (The Impresario) with Converse University. Recently, Jacob debuted his first “Masetto” and “Il Commandatore” roles in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* with the Aquilon Music Festival in Oregon.



Gia Sweitzer, soprano (Beatrix), proudly hails from Richmond, Virginia. Her voice has been celebrated for its winsome and emotive qualities, often drawing parallels to renowned soprano Teresa Stratas. Her operatic repertoire is a testament to her versatility, encompassing iconic roles such as Susanna in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the titular role in Holst’s *Savitri*, and Anne Trulove in Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, among others. Gia holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Louisiana State University and is continuing her artistic journey under the guidance of Patricia O’Neill.



Wendi Arms, soprano (Edith), holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in Vocal Performance from Converse College. She grew up in Anderson, South Carolina, performing in community theatre and singing in churches. While in college, she participated in operas at Converse as well as at The Brevard Music Center. Recently, Wendi has performed a number of roles in community theatre productions with the Tryon Little Theatre in Tryon, North Carolina, and the Greer Children’s Theatre in Greer, South Carolina. Wendi is the Music Librarian at Converse University, she teaches voice for the Lawson Academy of the

Arts at Converse, and she is the Minister of Music at First Baptist Church of Tryon, North Carolina.

Orchestra Members

Courtney LeBauer, violin
Ivana Carlson, violin
Libby Miller, violin
Anna Zimmerman, violin
Hannah Dara, viola
Kathleen Foster, cello
Aaron Yackley, double bass
Karen Hill, clarinet

Christopher Vaneman, flute
Kelly Vaneman, oboe
Frank Watson, bassoon
Craig King, trumpet
Beth Richard, horn
Steven Graff, piano
Adena McDaniel, percussion