

## ABSTRACT

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THEATRE 1982-2002: FOUR  
CHILDREN'S OPERAS

Kalle Covert, Master of Arts, 2010

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Nearly every opera company in North America conducts some form of outreach to children with the intent to educate and develop young audiences. By examining the forty-year history of Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre, the biography of its most influential director, Evelyn Swensson, and four children's operas commissioned and produced by the company, I identify the educational and artistic goals that have made this company successful. These include allowing children opportunities to participate in the creation of professional opera, providing high quality preparatory materials, and performing operas based on quality children's books that are taught in the school curriculum. The critical analysis of four original children's operas compares the approaches of three different composers to this task and demonstrates key features of successful children's opera, which include brevity, relevant subject matter, repetition of themes or lyrics, and a balance between musical elements that are familiar and unfamiliar to children.

OPERA DELAWARE'S FAMILY OPERA THEATRE, 1982-2002: FOUR  
CHILDREN'S OPERAS

By

Kalle Covert

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By Libby Larsen

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consent of the composer, Evelyn Swensson.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Reasons for this Study

During the last half of the twentieth century, many opera composers, directors and performers identified the need to build and develop a young audience to ensure the survival of their art form. Newly established education departments in many professional and regional opera companies, particularly in the 1970s and 80s, sought to tackle this problem by developing a variety of programs to introduce schoolchildren to opera at an early age and to cultivate a suitable body of music with which to accomplish this task.

For directors of regional and professional operas, performing opera for children is, quite simply, the future of opera. Knowledge and appreciation of music and the arts has been a revered trait for thousands of years, and by educating the young, opera companies are also investing in their own future success as well as in the proliferation of opera. In a 1986 discussion of the future of opera, Claus Moser, former Chairman of the Royal Opera House, noted that “children are much more receptive and easier to educate than adults, so we need more links to the young.”<sup>1</sup> Although there are many different approaches to conducting opera outreach, opera companies all share a common goal of developing an appreciation of opera in young audiences, in part to insure the viability and sustainability of professional opera for years to come.

In recent years, many educators have been begun to recognize the potential of opera as a valuable educational tool. In a 1979 article in the *Music Educators Journal*, John Dukes discussed the possibility of children “learning *through* opera about additional

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<sup>1</sup> Moser; quoted in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *The Future of Opera* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 73.

aspects of the arts and humanities.”<sup>2</sup> Opera is interdisciplinary in nature, and most operas present themes that can be used as the basis for lessons about literature, history, culture, language and, of course, musical forms and styles. By using the inclusive nature of opera to relate it to other school subjects, music educators can help to justify the value of teaching opera in the school music curriculum.

Although some form of outreach to young people is conducted by the majority of opera companies in North America, comprehensive data on the subject is surprisingly scant.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to her dissertation, Tracelyn Gesteland states, “While nearly every major American opera company produces opera for young audiences, curiously, there are few current sources of data pertaining to these works.”<sup>4</sup> The dissolution of Central Opera Services in the 1990s and of Opera For Youth early in the last decade have left the field of children’s opera without a central governing body or any sort of national guidelines for educational programs.<sup>5</sup> Despite the lack of a dedicated, national service organization for children’s opera, it remains a vital and relevant aspect of the North American opera culture and is worthy of further study.

The lack of clear cut guidelines for the establishment of education programs at opera companies has fostered the development of very diverse programs, whose organization and educational goals vary drastically. In the introduction to her 1998 dissertation, Lynn Eleanor Eustis states, “As support for the arts dwindles and funding for the National Endowment for the Arts remains in jeopardy, opera companies must define

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<sup>2</sup> John Dukes, “Learning With Opera: Options and Resources,” *Music Educators Journal* 66/2 (1979): 31.

<sup>3</sup> Tracelyn K. Gesteland, “Opera For Young Audiences: A Study of the Operatic Writing of Mary Carol Warwick for Houston Grand Opera’s *Opera To Go!*” (DMA diss., University of Houston, 2007): 2. Gesteland reported that out of 117 opera companies surveyed, 91 conducted some form of youth outreach.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

their educational goals more clearly in order to justify the very existence of these programs.”<sup>6</sup> This thesis takes a broad look at current trends and practices in the field of children’s opera and applies this information to an analysis of the outreach program at Opera Delaware’s Family Opera Theatre in order to identify the factors that have contributed to its success.

Opera Delaware is a semi-professional opera company based in Wilmington that has been performing a minimum of one opera chosen specifically for a young audience each year since 1969. This program provides educational outreach to an average of 9,000 schoolchildren in the greater Wilmington area each year. The company rose to prominence as a leader in the field of children’s opera during the 1980s and has received national acclaim for their innovative outreach program, which organizes opera performances based on outstanding children’s literature that is taught in the Delaware school curriculum. Since the 1980s, Opera Delaware has been advised by an Education Advisory Council, made up of educators who help in the selection of suitable works for young audiences, or recommend the new works to be commissioned. Between 1982 and 2006, Opera Delaware oversaw the commissioning and composition of twelve original operas for children.

This study also offers a critical analysis of four original operas commissioned and premiered by Opera Delaware, in order to demonstrate key features of effective children’s opera. Although each composer had a different approach to this task, certain features, such as brevity, the use of themes relevant to young people, repetition of musical material or text and other elements accounting for a child’s lack of familiarity

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<sup>6</sup> Lynn Eleanor Eustis, “Educational Outreach Programs at Regional Opera Companies: Guidelines for Effectiveness” (DMA diss., Florida State University, 1998), 3.

with opera were identified in each case. Opera Delaware's archives and the personal archives of Evelyn Swensson, noted opera educator, composer and producer, offer a unique glimpse into the forty-year history of the Family Opera Theater and the impact it has had, both in the Wilmington community and in the field of children's opera.

### Organization of the Study

This study is in three parts. Part 1 includes a brief history of the field of children's opera including a summary of the most common methods of conducting outreach to children. Part 2 explores the outreach program that was developed by Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre, whose founding, organization, and educational and artistic goals over a forty-year period are examined. Biographical information about the composer and conductor, Evelyn Swensson, with particular attention to her tenure as Opera Delaware's Director of Education, from 1974-2006, demonstrates how she both exemplified and expanded the role of Director of Education of a regional opera company. During her tenure, Swensson conducted the world premiere performances of twelve original operas for children, including seven of her own compositions.

Part 3 of the study offers analyses of four children's operas commissioned by Opera Delaware between 1982 and 2002: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* by Gian Carlo Menotti; *A Wrinkle in Time* by Libby Larsen; and *The Legend of Redwall Abbey* and *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by Evelyn Swensson. For each of the works selected, there is a discussion of its genesis including its commissioning, composition, and performance history. There is also a detailed synopsis of the plot and description of the performance forces necessary to stage each work. When applicable, there is an analysis of the libretto. Selected scenes from each opera are analyzed in terms

of melody, harmony, text setting, and musical style to compare and contrast the compositional approaches undertaken by each composer, and to assess the value of each work as a musical composition and educational tool. Although each of the composers had a different approach to composing for children, similar elements such as brevity, the use of relevant subject matter, repetition of themes and a balance of familiar and unfamiliar musical elements were identified in each case.

Finally, the approaches of the composers are compared and evaluated, as are the respective merits of the selected operas in order to assess their value in the field of children's opera. In addition, the educational strategies of Opera Delaware that have been proven to be the most successful are reviewed. This study concludes that the following factors have been the most important in the continued success of the Family Opera Theatre: the creation and maintenance of the Education Advisory Council, maintenance of a semi-professional status, allowing children opportunities to participate in the creation of professional opera, using teacher-generated study guides that are integrated into classroom teaching and performing operas based on high quality literary models that are taught in Delaware schools.

This study contributes in the first place to the increasingly significant musicological scholarship regarding the role of music for children throughout history and its impact on the current state of opera in North America. It is also the hope of the author that information about the growth and structure of Opera Delaware's educational outreach program can serve as a model for other companies looking to strengthen their outreach programs by establishing a connection with an established educational curriculum. Should the demand for opera outreach programs continue to grow, so would

the need to compose a suitable body of music to accompany these programs. Since the key factors that make a musical work appropriate for children have been identified here, as have newly composed operas of high quality, music teachers, directors and producers intending to perform children's operas in their companies or schools now have the guidance they need to insure that children and opera continue to receive the attention they deserve in the future.

### Relevant Scholarship

Over the past two decades there has been much valuable scholarship published in the field of children's opera, but there are still many areas left to be explored. Martha Louise Malone and Lynn Eleanor Eustis have conducted exhaustive work identifying and analyzing the different types of opera outreach programs for young people. In her 1994 dissertation, Malone conducted a thorough investigation of the various approaches to outreach undertaken by opera companies in order to make opera appealing and accessible to young audiences and evaluates the respective merits of each type.<sup>7</sup> Malone's study also includes analysis of five of the most frequently performed children's operas in order to establish criteria upon which to judge works for children. In her conclusion, Malone states that the traits that determine the effectiveness of a children's opera fall into two main categories: those that accommodate a child's attention span, and those that help establish familiarity with opera.<sup>8</sup> Malone's criteria for analyzing this body of music has served as a basis for the musical analysis conducted in this study.

Similarly, Lynn Eleanor Eustis conducted an exhaustive survey of the educational outreach programs of five different regional opera companies in order to determine some

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<sup>7</sup> Martha Malone, "Opera For American Youth: A Practical and Analytical Study" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 272.

best practices shared by the most successful of these organizations.<sup>9</sup> Among the factors she considered were budget, repertoire, preparatory materials, training of performers, and location of performances. In her study, Eustis found that each of the five opera companies examined had a different educational philosophy and that “the definitive variance in approaches appears to lie in the balance of entertainment and educational value.”<sup>10</sup> She goes on to conclude that “repertoire selected for the program is the most critical in shaping its educational goals.”<sup>11</sup> Although she preferred the use of standard repertoire in outreach programs, Eustis found that original opera could be a useful tool for conducting outreach, so long as it was rooted in the operatic tradition and struck a balance between entertainment and education.<sup>12</sup>

Carrie deLapp Culver conducted a thorough investigation of the children’s operas composed by Mary Elizabeth Caldwell for schoolchildren in Pasadena, California.<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to this study Culver seeks to clarify the meaning of the term “children’s opera,” and identifies four distinct types of works that often fall under this heading:

1. Works written to be sung by adults for children or family audiences.
2. Works written to be sung by a combination of adult and child performers for children or family audiences.
3. Works written to be sung by children for children or family audiences or works which were developed or written by children to be sung by children for children or family audiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Lynn Eleanor Eustis, “Educational Outreach Programs at Regional Opera Companies”, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Carrie deLapp Culver, “A Study of Mary Elizabeth Caldwell’s Operas For Young Audiences” (DMA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1998) 1.



4. Works originally written for adult casts and audiences, but have been abridged or otherwise revised to suit the needs of children or family audiences.<sup>14</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the term “children’s opera” will be used to identify those works falling under category 2, as identified by Culver. Each of the operas investigated in this study was commissioned and composed for a cast of adult professional singers as well as children and intended for performance before a family audience.

Additionally, surveys conducted by Michael Patterson and Tracelyn Gesteland provided invaluable statistical data regarding types of opera outreach, and the opera companies using them.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Michael R. Patterson, “A Survey of Educational Outreach Programs for Children by Professional Opera Companies” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1991) and Gesteland, “Opera For Young Audiences.”

## Chapter 2: A History of Children's Opera

Throughout history there have been examples of music written for young people or employing the use of young voices. It was not until the last century, however, that presenting works specifically for young audiences became a regular activity of many professional opera companies in North America. In the *Grove Music Online* entry for “children’s opera,” Hugo Cole identifies the passage of the 1870 Education Act, which made class singing compulsory for students throughout England, as an important step in the development of modern children’s opera.<sup>16</sup> This law led to an increased demand for music that was appropriate for school performance, as well as young voices, which inspired many composers to begin writing “school operas.” This event is also significant in that it marks the first modern example of school music education throughout an entire country being linked to a relevant body of music composed specifically for young people.<sup>17</sup>

In the United States, performances of children’s operas were isolated events, at first. Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht’s school opera, *Der Jasager*, was performed in 1932 at the Henry Street Settlement Music School in New York City: the same theater that would host the premiere of Aaron Copland’s children’s opera, *The Second Hurricane*, in 1937.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Britten’s *The Little Sweep* premiered in 1949, billed as “An Entertainment for Young People.”<sup>19</sup> Britten’s composition is particularly noteworthy in

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<sup>16</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Children’s opera,” accessed February 20, 2010; <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Britten, “The Little Sweep: The Opera From Let’s Make an Opera! An Entertainment for Young People,” (London; New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1967).

the history of children's opera. Whereas earlier school operas by Gilbert and Sullivan, Percy Fletcher, Arthur Somervell, and the aforementioned Weill and Brecht composition were intended for performance in schools by children, Britten's opera was conceived for performance by a cast of adult professional singers and children performing side by side.

While it may not be possible to determine exactly when opera outreach to young audiences began in North America, most scholars agree that activity began around the middle of the twentieth century and became more prominent in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> One of the earliest examples of opera outreach took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the late 1940s. A.J. Fletcher, a businessman and philanthropist with a lifelong interest in the arts, founded the Grass Roots Opera Company in 1948.<sup>21</sup> Fletcher's objective was to bring opera to rural areas, introduce the art form to young people and provide a forum for young singers to practice their craft. Fletcher maintained a troupe of professional singers who collaborated with local public schools to provide an in-house performance of selected operas. The operas were always sung in English, and teachers were provided with study materials to prepare the students.

In 1955, the Grass Roots Opera Company embarked on a regional tour of the southeastern United States. This tour became an annual event, and Fletcher even changed the name of the troupe in the early 1960s to the National Opera Company to reflect the expansion of the touring company.<sup>22</sup> In 2001, the National Opera Company merged with the University of North Carolina School of the Arts School of Music to create the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute.<sup>23</sup> Students at the Institute received training in all

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<sup>20</sup> Emily Hammood, quoted in Culver, "A Study of Mary Elizabeth Caldwell's Operas", 3.

<sup>21</sup> A.J. Fletcher Foundation, "History," accessed February 20, 2010; <http://www.ajf.org/histop.html>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute, accessed March 24, 2010; <http://www.fletcheropera.com/>

aspects of operatic performance, conducted outreach, and continued to participate in touring performances.

While Fletcher's program sought to spread awareness and appreciation of opera throughout rural areas of the United States, other programs were attempting to bring opera education into the school classroom and include young people in the performances. Perhaps the earliest example of bringing opera into the schools was the Manhattan School of Music's pioneering program of 1968.<sup>24</sup> This project, which was launched by choir director Cynthia Auerbach, used students from the Manhattan School of Music's Preparatory Division and was begun with a budget of only \$200 and a group of parent volunteers willing to sew costumes. The goal of this new project was to present a fully staged opera that was sung, acted and produced by elementary schoolchildren. The inaugural season resulted in a well-received production of Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, and student interest and involvement increased rapidly over the next several years.<sup>25</sup>

A 1975 grant from the John Noble Foundation expanded the Manhattan School project to the students at Public School 75, an ethnically diverse school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. One hour each week was devoted to some aspect of theatre performance or production, giving the students the experience of learning the various components that go into producing an opera, from costumes and set design to singing and choreography. In 1976 the Manhattan School Preparatory Division expanded the project to a nearby middle school and then to a high school in 1977, each meeting with similar success as the elementary school project.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Josanne La Valley, "Opera: Not For Adults Only," *Music Educators Journal* 11/1 (1977): 36-41.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

The First National Conference of Opera Education in 1977 helped to foster the growth of education departments at regional opera companies across North America. The conference was held in Seattle, Washington, and was led by Seattle Opera's music director, Henry Holt. Representatives of a dozen opera companies met to establish criteria for building successful opera outreach programs. Holt had long been a proponent of the establishment of an education department by OPERA America, a service organization for professional opera companies in North America. Some of the attending companies already had education programs in place, while others did not. The participating companies were encouraged to either create a new education program, or improve and expand upon the existing programs. This conference had a measurable impact: OPERA America's education department and Opera For Youth were both founded later that same year, and by 1984, eighty-four out of the ninety member companies of OPERA America had established education programs.<sup>27</sup>

Opera For Youth was founded by Emily Hammood as a nonprofit service organization dedicated to the promotion of children's opera. According to the original charter, the objectives of Opera For Youth are as follows:

1. To encourage the production of new and lesser-known children's operas.
2. To encourage the creation of children's operas with children and/or adults in the casts.
3. To discover increased means of providing opportunities for recreational and pre-professional training in children's opera productions and to promote participation in professional opera productions by young people.

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<sup>27</sup> Malone, "Opera for American Youth", 21.

4. To encourage the development of materials and techniques applicable to children's operas in the aesthetic education of young people.<sup>28</sup>

In 1978, with funding from the American Theatre Association, the District of Columbia Federation of Music and the National Opera Association, the first Opera for Youth Workshop took place at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The Opera for Youth Workshop were held yearly in conjunction with the National Opera Association Convention and presented performances of scenes or entire operas for youth audiences as well as premieres of new children's operas. These workshops also featured guest speakers and classes on topics such as training young singers and fundraising.

Opera For Youth became defunct early in the twenty-first century with the passing of its founder, Emily Hammood.<sup>29</sup> The organization still exists in name through its partnerships with the National Opera Association and OPERA America. Opera For Youth is responsible for the compilation of an *Annotated Bibliography of Opera/Music Theatre Works for Young Audiences*.<sup>30</sup> This bibliography contains information about select children's operas, including publisher, intended audience, performance forces, and musical style.

The dissolution of both Central Opera Services and Opera For Youth in the last two decades has made it increasingly challenging to locate data about the field of children's opera, since there is no single governing body. OPERA America does, however, provide information on its website regarding productions of new works, and the

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<sup>28</sup> OPERA America, "Opera For Youth Directory," accessed 10 January, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/applications/ofyd/index.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> Gesteland, "Opera For Young Audiences", 2.

<sup>30</sup> Emily Hammood and Carlene W. Mills, *Annotated Bibliography of Opera/Musical Theatre Works for Young and Family Audiences, 1978-1998*, (Pleasant Grove, AL: Opera For Youth, Inc.), 1998.

*Opera For Youth Directory of Opera/Music Theatre Works of For Young Audiences* is updated regularly.<sup>31</sup>

### The Need for Youth Opera Outreach

Although the concept of children's operas is not new, the rapid growth of outreach and educational programs tailored for children in the last half of the twentieth century, and the push to compose suitable new works to be performed for children is unprecedented and holds broad implications for the future of opera. While the reasons for adopting educational outreach programs may vary from company to company, two prevailing concerns for most companies are audience development and financial support. The cost of staging professional operas is enormous. By promoting attendance across as broad a section of the population as possible, opera companies hope it will increase. Attending a children's opera is often much less expensive than attending an opera from the standard repertoire. Low ticket prices combined with the familiar subject matter of children's opera can be appealing to adults as well as young people. By providing affordable, high quality entertainment, opera companies can establish a vested interest in the communities they are serving. As Martha Malone points out, "once most Americans leave the education system, they are exposed to music, drama, and the visual arts primarily through the media of commercial television and radio, which most often do not promote the fine arts."<sup>32</sup> In order for the audience for opera to grow and expand, opera companies must seek out new and innovative ways to reach the general public in order to foster interest in opera and demand for new works.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 4.

Conducting operatic outreach to young people can also combat negative stereotypes about opera that arise because of a lack of early exposure. In the twentieth century, opera has the distinction of being among the least attended of all forms of public performances.<sup>33</sup> Especially in the last half of the twentieth century, the high cost of attending live opera also contributes to the perception that opera is elitist and exclusionary.<sup>34</sup> Two studies illustrate this prejudice against opera, specifically in the young adult population. In 1974, Karen Roberta Peeler wrote of her experiences performing Seymour Barab's opera, *Chanticleer*, to a sixth grade class in Tallahassee, Florida.<sup>35</sup> Based upon the reactions described in the letters she received from students, Peeler noted "an already burgeoning pre-disposition against opera."<sup>36</sup> Gladys Carol Van Asselt Fabbrini noticed a similar bias when conducting an in-school project that allowed forty-five high school students to learn about opera by performing scenes from *Tales of Hoffman*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *The Magic Flute*.<sup>37</sup> Fabbrini concluded that the main reasons why young people favored popular music over classical, specifically opera, stemmed from their lack of familiarity with it, as well as a lack of musical training or exposure at an early age.<sup>38</sup> One major aversion to opera that Peeler noticed was the

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<sup>33</sup> Sunil Iyengar, "2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," *National Endowment for the Arts* p. 83; accessed 21 December, 2009; <http://www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Moore, "How I am Dragging Opera Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *The Guardian* (April 24, 2004), accessed April 9, 2010; <http://www.guardian.uk.com>

Moore, an actor and director, recalls turning down an offer to direct an opera. When asked why not, Moore responded "Because it's boring, bourgeois, elitist, establishment, exclusive and has nothing to say to the man on the street."

<sup>35</sup> Karen Roberta Peeler, "Chanticleer: A Project in Presenting Opera to Children" (DMA treatise, Florida State University, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Gladys Carol Van Asselt Fabbrini, "The Introduction of Opera into the High School Through Performance" (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



students' disdain for the sound of the operatic voice.<sup>39</sup> In 1984, Samuel D. Miller explained it this way:

the younger children are, the more apt they are to accept the sound of the operatic voice. They become accustomed to it. More problems seem to arise with older children who have not been privileged to hear opera early in life. Because of this lack of long-term exposure, they may resist opera and express discomfort with it. This, of course, suggests it is best to introduce opera to children at the earliest possible age.<sup>40</sup>

The findings of Peeler, Fabbrini and Miller suggest that early exposure to opera is crucial in preventing the formation of negative opinions about opera and operatic singing. By conducting outreach to young people, the opera companies discussed here seek to develop favorable attitudes towards the art form early in life in the hope that these children will make up the next generation of opera attendees.

Indeed, other studies show a strong correlation between early exposure to the arts and opera attendance. According to the 1992 National Endowment for the Arts *Survey of Public Participation* people who attended live opera were more likely to have had formal musical instruction prior to the age of eighteen.<sup>41</sup> This study also found that eighty percent of opera attendees reported some form of amateur participation in the arts.

The rise of education and outreach programs has also created additional demand for suitable stage works. This impact can be seen in the number of original operas that have been composed for young audiences over the past decades. In 1984, Central Opera Services published a *Directory of Operas/Musicals for Young Audiences*.<sup>42</sup> Of the 1,597

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<sup>39</sup> Peeler, "Chanticleer: A Project in Presenting Opera to Children", 30.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel D. Miller, "Opera Made Elementary," *Music Educators Journal* 71/2 (Oct. 1984): 54.

<sup>41</sup> Joni Meyer Cherbo and Monnie Peters, *American Participation in Opera and Musical Theater 1992*, National Endowment for the Arts Research Division Report #32, (Carson, CA: Seven Locks Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Rich, ed., "Directory of Operas/Musicals for Young Audiences From Kindergarten to High School, Performed by Children and/or Adults," *Central Opera Services Bulletin* 24, no. 4 (1984).

titles, seventy-five percent had been composed between 1970 and 1983.<sup>43</sup> In 1989, Charles Fowler remarked, “when opera becomes a more populist activity, supply and demand will be balanced, and we will command media attention. Just as important, a growing audience will be a catalyst for a new American repertory.”<sup>44</sup> By continuing to promote opera education and attendance, opera companies are insuring that composers of new operas will have a forum in which to present their works.

### Background and Types of Outreach

According to the National Endowment for the Arts *2008 Survey of Participation in the Arts*, only two percent of adults in the United States attended a live operatic performance, placing opera among the most infrequently attended activities of all of those tracked in the study.<sup>45</sup> Opera also had among the least diverse audiences of those surveyed, with fifty-nine percent being women, approximately two thirds having either a college or graduate degree, and more than half earning more than \$75,000 annually.<sup>46</sup>

OPERA America, the service organization for opera companies in the U.S. and Canada, reports that there are currently 117 professional opera companies operating in the U.S., with more than half being established after 1970 and another twenty-five percent coming into existence after 1980.<sup>47</sup> Of these 117 opera companies, ninety-one currently offer some form of educational outreach to school children.<sup>48</sup> Although the most frequently performed operas in North America include such staples as *The Magic Flute*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Carmen*, there is a drive to produce new works, with

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<sup>43</sup> Culver, “A Study of Mary Elizabeth Caldwell’s Operas”, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Fowler, “Making the Grade,” *Opera News* 54/6 (February 1968): 57.

<sup>45</sup> Sunil Iyengar, “2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts,” *National Endowment for the Arts*, accessed December 21, 2009; <http://www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> OPERA America, “Quick Opera Facts 2008-2009,” accessed 10 January, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/content/research/quick0809.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> Gesteland, “Opera For Young Audiences”, 4.

more than 200 world premieres produced by professional companies in North America since 1990.<sup>49</sup>

There are currently many different approaches to opera outreach in North America, however, the two most common types practiced by professional opera companies are performing for children by touring to schools or offering in-house performances.<sup>50</sup> In either case, opera companies have the option of performing standard operatic works, either in full or abridged, or performing works written specifically for young audiences. Perhaps the newest form of opera outreach is programs which bring opera into the classroom as part of the school curriculum. Since the early 1990s, opera companies have developed several programs which make learning about opera a regular feature of the school day. These programs are tailored to meet the needs of students in grades K-12 and often culminate in the students collaborating with trained musicians to conceive, write, compose and produce an original musical work. Similarly, there are several opera companies offering in-school residencies in which Teaching Artists from the opera company maintain a regular presence in the classroom, usually with the ultimate goal of staging a production of an existing opera, or creating a new one as part of instruction.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> OPERA America, "Quick Opera Facts 2008-2009," accessed 10 January, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/content/research/quick0809.aspx>

<sup>50</sup> Patterson, "A Survey of Educational Outreach Programs", 35.

According to Patterson, 42 of the 62 companies that responded maintained a touring company. Eighteen companies reported offering educational programs that did not tour, and two reported having no educational programs.

<sup>51</sup> Gesteland, "Opera For Young Audiences", 5-10. According to Gesteland, of the ninety-three companies who responded to her survey, twenty-one offered in-school residencies and thirteen offered programs in which students created an original opera.

## Touring Performances

Maintaining a touring ensemble of professional singers is a common form of opera outreach, and it is often how young singers begin their operatic careers. At least two studies have cited this method of outreach as the most commonly practiced in North America, those by Tracelyn Gesteland<sup>52</sup> and Michael Patterson.<sup>53</sup> In 1991, Michael Patterson conducted a study of outreach programs at various opera companies. In this study, Patterson sent out questionnaires to 100 opera companies that were members of OPERA America. Sixty-two of these companies responded and Patterson was able to compile data on the various types of outreach being offered as well as survey educators whose students had attended outreach programs. Of the sixty-two companies, forty-two of them reported that they maintained a touring cast of singers and musicians. Twenty-nine of these companies reported that they had performed works composed specifically for youth audiences. The most frequently performed works were Seymour Barab's *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Toy Shop*, Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, John Davies' *The Night Harry Stopped Smoking*, and Malcolm Fox's *Sid the Serpent Who Wanted to Sing*. These same companies reported performing works that are also part of the standard repertory. These included Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Vittorio Giannini's *Beauty and the Beast*, Georges Bizet's *Dr. Miracle*, Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Twenty-nine companies also reported using excerpts from standard repertory and performing abridged versions of standard works. The most frequently performed excerpts cited in the study were *Carmen*, *The Barber of Seville*, *La bohème*, *Die fledermaus* and *Madame Butterfly*.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>53</sup> Patterson, "A Survey of Educational Outreach Programs", 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 55-58.

Touring performances are advantageous both for the opera companies that perform them, and for the students in the audience. Touring companies generally operate on a much smaller scale than non-touring companies. The sets, props, and instrumental accompaniment are limited by the constraints of the performance spaces and the fact that they must be portable. According to Patterson, fifty-seven percent of the responding companies performed during the school day, meaning that the schools did not have to worry about providing transportation to and from the performances.<sup>55</sup> Although performances in individual classrooms or small school auditoriums lack the spectacle and grandiosity associated with opera, Eustis suggests that this type of intimate setting could foster a “stronger personal connection to opera.”<sup>56</sup> This connection is nurtured even more when students are given the chance to interact in some way with the performers, such as a question and answer period following the performance.

### Mainstage Works For Young Audiences

Mainstage performance of operatic works targeted towards young audiences is a valuable type of educational outreach. By attending a performance in a large venue, children are given the opportunity to experience the grandiosity of live opera. Many opera companies offer student matinees or dress rehearsals, which allow the students to attend a fully staged opera complete with costumes and full orchestra. Tickets for these events are often sold at heavily discounted rates, so that students whose families could not typically afford opera’s high price tag have the opportunity to attend a professionally staged work. Some programs even allow students backstage to learn about other aspects of opera production, such as lighting, costumes and scenery. Students may have the

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<sup>55</sup> Patterson, “A Survey of Educational Outreach Programs”, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Eustis, “Educational Outreach Programs at Regional Opera Companies”, 115.

opportunity to meet and ask questions of the performers either before or after the show. The Washington National Opera has offered its “Opera Look-In” program since 1990.<sup>57</sup> In this program, students view an abridged version of an opera that is part of the company’s regular season. The performances take place during the school day at the Kennedy Center Opera House, and students and teachers begin preparing for the opera with in-class activities weeks in advance. Ambassadors from the Washington National Opera visit each school personally to introduce the students to the opera they will be viewing.

Although most companies that invite young audiences to attend an in-house production perform works from the standard operatic repertoire, there are companies, such as Opera Delaware, that offer mainstage performances of operas written specifically for children. According to Gesteland’s study, of the ninety-five opera companies who provided outreach in the form of touring or resident productions, forty-two presented original operas, whereas fifty-three presented works from the standard repertoire.<sup>58</sup> Of these forty-two companies, only ten reported presenting mainstage works for children as part of their outreach program. Another company performing original works for children is the Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia, a professional opera company that performs three operas each year, including one children’s opera.<sup>59</sup> Outreach for the Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia’s children’s opera begins months in advance, and local schools and youth organizations are contacted. Performances are scheduled both during the week and on weekends. School classes and, in some cases, entire schools, attend the weekday

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<sup>57</sup> Washington National Opera, “Education and Training,” accessed February 20, 2010; <http://www.dc-opera.org/educationtraining/educationcommunity.asp>

<sup>58</sup> Gesteland, “Opera For Young Audiences”, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia, accessed March 21, 2010; <http://www.operanova.org>

performances, while families and other community-based youth organizations attend the weekend performances. Over 25,000 students from Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. have attended these family operas. Using money from fundraising, grants, and other private donors, the Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia and its sister organization, the Opera Guild of Northern Virginia, are able to subsidize ticket prices and even provide free tickets to some schools.<sup>60</sup>

### Programs That Create Original Opera

In the last twenty years, a new type of outreach has been developed in which children create and produce an original opera in their own schools.<sup>61</sup> This approach is advantageous because it involves the students in every aspect of opera creation and production. Another benefit of create-and-produce programs is that they are built into the child's regular school day and use the interdisciplinary nature of opera to educate the children in areas of study besides music, including history and literature.

OPERA America has contributed greatly to the field of opera outreach with the advent of their *Music!Words!Opera!* curriculum.<sup>62</sup> This curriculum is a three-level program of study, tailored to suit the needs of children in kindergarten through twelfth grade which fully integrates the study of opera into the school day. *M!W!O!* offers two approaches to teaching opera in the classroom: "Listen and Discover" and "Create and Produce." Younger students are introduced to the craft of opera by studying its history and the composition of selected operas. Older students take these lessons one step further to participate in the creation of a new opera. Level I was first published in 1990 and is

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<sup>60</sup> Opera Guild of Northern Virginia, "About Us," accessed March 25, 2010; <http://www.operaguildnova.com>

<sup>61</sup> Volume 1 of *Music! Words! Opera!* was published by OPERA America in 1990.

<sup>62</sup> OPERA America, "Music!Words!Opera!," accessed January 10, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/content/education/mwo/>

tailored for students in grades K-2 and covers the operas *Hänsel und Gretel*, *The Magic Flute* and *The Child and the Enchantments*.<sup>63</sup> Level II is designed for grades 3-6 and covers *The Barber of Seville*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Aida*.<sup>64</sup> Included in the curriculum are lesson plans to help teachers lead the class, as well as “What To Listen For” CDs that accompany each lesson plan.<sup>65</sup> Students are also provided with study guides to enhance the learning experience. Level III is designed for students in grades 7-12 and is intended to culminate with students, under the guidance of a qualified teacher, creating an original musical work in the classroom. Students choose the story, lyrics, and participate in composing original songs. This level also includes in depth study of both Verdi’s *Otello* and Shakespeare’s *Othello* and a comparison of the two works.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to designing and supplying the *M!W!O!* curriculum, OPERA America offers week-long training sessions for teachers in which they can become familiar with the curriculum and learn how to tailor it to specific populations. These workshops assist teachers in lesson planning and explore strategies for applying the knowledge gained from studying an opera in depth to the creation of an original work for the stage. Teachers are also offered guidance on how to draw upon opera’s interdisciplinary nature in order to relate it to other school subjects.

The Metropolitan Opera Guild has introduced a similar program entitled *Creating Original Opera*.<sup>67</sup> This program is integrated into the students’ core curriculum and is available for grades K-12. Students and teachers are guided by a Metropolitan Opera

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> OPERA America, “*Music! Words! Opera! Materials*,” accessed January 10, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/Content/pubs/mwo.aspx>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The Metropolitan Opera Guild, “*Creating Original Opera*,” accessed February 20, 2010; [http://www.metoperafamily.org/education/schools/creating\\_original.aspx](http://www.metoperafamily.org/education/schools/creating_original.aspx)



Guild Teaching Artist, who helps to facilitate the formation of a production company to conceive, compose, produce and perform a musical work for the stage. When it is time for the performances, the Metropolitan Opera Guild supplies make-up and materials for scenery and public relations. This program is only available to schools whose teachers have completed the *Creating Original Opera Professional Development Program*, a week long program in which educators receive training in all aspects of opera composition, casting, staging, production and promotion.

The Washington National Opera has implemented the *Kids Creating Opera Partnership*, a program designed to assist schools who are using either the *Creating Original Opera* or *Music!Words!Opera!* curriculum in their classrooms.<sup>68</sup> In this partnership, a Teaching Artist from the Washington National Opera visits students in the classroom to assist with various stages of the creative process, such as composing the music, writing lyrics, or diction and vocal projection. Students may also have the opportunity to attend a Washington National Opera tech rehearsal or take a tour of the costume shop.

The benefit of this type of create-and-produce program can be demonstrated through the success of La Clevisque Opera Company. Farmland Elementary School in Rockville, Maryland has been using the *Kids Creating Opera Partnership* program with its third and fourth grade students for eight years.<sup>69</sup> The students work together to form an opera company they call “La Clevisque,” a combination of the words “clever” and “unique.” Students apply for jobs within the company based on their individual

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<sup>68</sup> Washington National Opera “Education and Training,” accessed February 20, 2010; <http://www.dc-opera.org/educationtraining/educationcommunity/schoolbasedprograms/kidscreate.asp>

<sup>69</sup> La Clevisque Kids Opera Company, accessed 20 February, 2010; <http://www.kidsopera.com/index.html>

strengths. These jobs include those of production manager, stage manager, composer, performer, costume designer and makeup artist. The children start the process by brainstorming possible themes that are based on ideas they find important in their own lives. The students create characters by listing basic personality traits and then expanding upon these traits to determine how each character looks, dresses, acts and relates to other characters. The students are then guided by their music teacher to bring these characters to life through music. La Cleve Kids Opera Company has been featured on the Today Show and NPR's "At The Opera." It has also been cited in the *Washington Post*, *OPERA America Magazine*, and students have even testified before Congress to help guarantee its NEA funding for the future.<sup>70</sup>

Based on the number of opera companies performing outreach to children and the variety of methods currently in use, it is evident that involving children in opera is a vital and relevant aspect of operatic culture in North America. The fundamental differences in approach lie in the choice of repertoire, choice of venue, and level of involvement of the children. No matter what type of outreach is performed, students' reactions were most favorable when the level of their involvement was increased.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3: Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre

### History

Wilmington, Delaware is a city of 519,000 people, located halfway between New York City and Washington, D.C.<sup>71</sup> Wilmington is home to three professional performing arts venues, The Grand Opera House, the DuPont Theatre and the Delaware Theatre Company. The Grand Opera House is an 1100-seat venue which was constructed in 1871. The Grand hosts 100 performances each year, including those by Opera Delaware and the Delaware Symphony Orchestra.<sup>72</sup> The DuPont Theatre was built in 1913 and is the oldest continually operating theatre in the United States.<sup>73</sup> Throughout its history, the DuPont Theatre has been known as Delaware's "Little Broadway."<sup>74</sup> During the first half of the twentieth-century, the DuPont Theatre hosted preview performances of many New York productions before they debuted on Broadway. The theatre currently hosts a six-show series of Broadway musicals each year. The 400-seat Delaware Theatre Company sits on the Christina Riverfront and is home to the Equity Theatre.

Children in the greater Wilmington area have ample opportunities to view professional arts performances that are tailored for young audiences. In addition to Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre, Wilmington is home to the Delaware Children's Theatre, and the DuPont Theatre has hosted an annual Children's Series each year since 1988. The Delaware Children's Theatre has been performing critically acclaimed

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<sup>71</sup> Greater Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau, accessed April 17, 2010; <http://www.visitwilmingtonde.com>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> The DuPont Theatre, accessed April 17, 2010; <http://www.duponttheatre.com>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

children's theatre since 1973, and also hosts acting classes for children and teens.<sup>75</sup> The DuPont Theatre's Children's Series presents musicals from the classic repertory, as well as new musicals based on children's stories, or biographies of famous Americans.

Although Broadway musicals were an important part of life in Wilmington in the early twentieth century, the city had no professional opera troupe in residence. This changed in 1945 when a group of community members with a shared interest in performing grand opera joined to form the Wilmington Opera Singers.<sup>76</sup> The first opera performed by this new company was Bizet's *Carmen*. In 1947 the company changed their name to the Wilmington Opera Society, and Elizabeth C. Bacon became its first president. The first eight performances of the Wilmington Opera Society were given in the Playhouse Theatre, now known as the DuPont Theatre. In 1952, performances were temporarily moved to the smaller Breck's Mill theatre. Following a reorganization in 1964, the company returned to the Playhouse until the restoration of the Grand Opera House was completed in 1976.

In 1969, the Opera Delaware Board of Directors formed a committee to investigate the possibility of performing children's theatre. Led by chairman Marie Swajeski, the Junior Division was formed later that same year with the goal of involving young people in all aspects of opera production.<sup>77</sup> The first production staged by the newly formed Family Opera Theatre was a successful tour of Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* to local schools. In 1970, the company launched a touring production

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<sup>75</sup> Delaware Children's Theatre, accessed April 17, 2010; <http://www.dechildrenstheatre.org>

<sup>76</sup> Wilmington, Delaware, Opera Delaware Archives (hereafter WD-ODA), Opera Delaware Vertical File (hereafter Vertical File): History Folder "Opera Delaware History, 1945-1990."

<sup>77</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware 1994/95 Silver Anniversary Commemorative Booklet," 2.

of Gian Carlo Menotti's *Help, Help, The Globolinks*.<sup>78</sup> 1970 also saw the formation of the Wilmington Opera Society Guild and Lois Stewart served as the first Guild president.

The establishment of the Guild was significant, because it gave the Wilmington Opera Society the necessary support to continue to grow and expand. The Guild first began hiring professional singers in 1972, and in 1976 the company moved to the Grand Opera House, where they staged the world premiere of Alva Henderson's *The Last of The Mohicans*, followed by the world premiere of Menotti's *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* in 1982. These world premiere performances garnered national attention and praise, and the Wilmington Opera Society was honored with the first ever "Governor's Award for the Arts."<sup>79</sup> Governor Pierre Samuel DuPont called the opera company "an organization which has literally worked itself up by its bootstraps from an amateur status in 1945 to its present position as a semi-professional opera company presenting three outstanding productions annually, attended by patrons from the entire tri-state area as well as New York and Washington."<sup>80</sup>

By 1982, the company had grown substantially in size and in scope and the Opera Society and its members felt that several changes were necessary. It was decided that the company be renamed Opera Delaware in order to reflect its status as a growing regional opera company. Until 1986, the entire administrative staff consisted of volunteers. Recognizing the new demands for funding, the company hired a full-time Development Director, Leland Kimball III. A retired DuPont employee, Eric Kjellmark, took the position of Managing Director, and Genevieve Yates took the positions of Assistant to

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<sup>78</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder, "Family Opera Theatre Works: 1969-2007."

<sup>79</sup> Philip F. Crosland, "Wilmington Opera Society Takes Honors," *Evening Journal* [DE], November 18, 1981.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

the Managing Director and Office Manager, both on a volunteer basis. These changes within the organization allowed Opera Delaware membership in OPERA America, the non-profit service organization for opera in North America.

Opera Delaware began to gain national recognition in the 1980s for its productions and educational programs, thanks to this reorganization. In 1985, Opera Delaware first applied for funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. This application brought peer review of the 1985-1986 season's production of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which led to the granting of first NEA funds. A new education program was launched the same season. Students were provided with study guides prior to attendance at the Family Opera Theatre Productions and 3,500 participated in a free lecture series.<sup>81</sup> Acting on the advice of OPERA America consultant, Marthalie Furber, Opera Delaware formed an Educational Advisory Council made up of leading educators from all around the state. The function of this Council was to advise Opera Delaware on the idea of matching Family Opera Theatre productions with school curricula and also on structuring the school lecture and demonstration program. Over the years, the Educational Advisory Council has worked with educators in the Wilmington area to identify well-known children's books that could serve as a basis for exposure to opera.

It was due to the establishment of the Educational Advisory Council and its recommendation to perform works included in the school curriculum that Opera Delaware began to seek the composition of new, high quality operas for children. Over the past forty years, Opera Delaware has presented world premieres of twelve original children's operas. Each season, more than 8,000 area students participate in Family

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<sup>81</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware History: 1945-1990."

Opera Theatre programs.<sup>82</sup> In addition to funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, Opera Delaware has received funding from the Delaware Humanities Forum to develop a series of lectures and demonstrations that use opera to illustrate scenes from American history. Opera Delaware was also one of the first opera companies in the nation to create a pilot program for OPERA America's textbook series, which uses opera as a basis for teaching other subjects.<sup>83</sup>

Today, Opera Delaware functions as a semi-professional opera company, performing three annual productions in the historic Grand Opera House in downtown Wilmington. As a semi-professional company, the principal artists, orchestra, music and stage directors, designers and technical consultants are all hired professionals. Production, chorus work, set construction, properties, stage handling, costume sewing and season ticket sales are all performed by volunteers. Opera Delaware's structure as a semi-professional opera company is advantageous: it allows the company to produce high-quality operas at a relatively low cost to the community. This structure also allows for maximum participation from community members in various capacities, both on and offstage.

### Approach to Outreach

When the Opera Delaware Board of Directors first discussed the idea of starting a family theatre in 1969, their goal was simple: to involve young people in all aspects of opera production.<sup>84</sup> Opera Delaware has maintained this simple vision over the last forty years and has created a successful model for conducting operatic outreach. The success

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<sup>82</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware 1994/95 Silver Anniversary Commemorative Booklet," 1.

<sup>83</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware History: 1945-1990."

<sup>84</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware 1994/95 Silver Anniversary Commemorative Booklet," 2.

of their outreach program is due to three important factors: allowing children ample opportunities to participate in the creation of opera, both on and offstage; preparing young people for the experience of seeing live opera by providing high quality study materials; and using literary models from the school curriculum as the basis for composing entertaining and educational children's operas.

By allowing students to participate fully in the creation of opera, both on and offstage, Opera Delaware's outreach program encourages young people to learn about opera by experiencing it firsthand. Operas are chosen or commissioned so that young singers have ample opportunities to sing in leading roles, supporting roles, or in the chorus. Young musicians are also recruited to play in the orchestra. Those who do not wish to perform have the opportunity to help out behind the scenes with costumes, props and scenery. Both onstage and behind the scenes, children and adults work side by side, giving the young people involved a unique perspective on all the work that goes into staging an opera.

Casting children alongside professionals presents a number of difficulties regarding rehearsal scheduling and limits the length of time an individual rehearsal can last. According to Martha Malone, "Because the process of involving children in opera as performers is far more complex and time consuming than is introducing them to this art form as audience members, relatively few opera companies go beyond the use of children's choruses where required in productions of standard operas."<sup>85</sup> Malone goes on to say, "the children who participate in such productions have the benefit of working with professional singers and actors and of gaining first-hand knowledge of a working

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<sup>85</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 10-11.



theatre.”<sup>86</sup> This hands-on approach is also championed by Lynn Kleinman, a junior high school music teacher whose students collaborated with singers from the Cleveland Opera Company’s touring ensemble to present a production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*.<sup>87</sup> According to Kleinman, “[t]he combined effort of the students and the professionals amazed the community...This experience has greatly affected the lives of my students and the attitude of the community toward the music program.”<sup>88</sup> Kleinman noticed not only a difference in the students’ attitude toward opera, but an improvement in their overall musicianship. This suggests that students who participate in these types of programs are enriched not only by the experience of participating in live theatre, but also by the exposure to professional level talent.

The sense of pride and accomplishment that a child gets from participating in the production of a professional opera production is also likely to foster positive feelings about opera, as well as a deep, personal connection to the art form that could potentially last for a lifetime. According to music educator, John Dukes, “students who learn about opera and music drama through such involvements are likely to develop somewhat different perspectives and skills than those who primarily are being groomed as future audiences.”<sup>89</sup> By investing the additional time and resources into allowing children to participate in opera productions, Opera Delaware gives the children involved a much more complete introduction to the craft than they would have by simply learning about opera in the classroom.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Lynn Kleinman, “Share the Stage! Teaming Students With Professionals” *Music Educators Journal* 76/6 (February 1990): 58-60.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>89</sup> Dukes, “Learning With Opera,” 31.

By providing appropriate and informative preparatory materials, the Family Opera Theatre insures that students will know what to expect when attending an opera, even if they do not have the benefit of participating in its production. Opera Delaware study guides are compiled by educators from all over the state who teach a variety of subjects.<sup>90</sup> The activities and exercises in the study guides are fully integrated into the classroom in the weeks prior to the opera. It is expected that the students will have read the book upon which the opera is based, or had it read aloud to them. The study guides introduce the children to the job of the composer and librettist to adapt the book into a musical work for the stage. In addition to providing basic information about voice types, instruments and basic theatre etiquette, the study guides use the interdisciplinary nature of opera by relating it to other areas of study.

In her dissertation, “Educational Outreach Companies at Regional Opera Companies: Guidelines for Effectiveness,” Lynn Eleanor Eustis compared the quality of the preparatory materials at five different opera companies. She concluded that “preparatory materials should strengthen the impact of the performance by preparing the children to see a particular opera and teaching content in other areas of study.”<sup>91</sup> For example, the study guide for the 1996 production of *The Jungle Book*, composed by Evelyn Swensson and based on Kipling’s book, includes study materials on a range of topics from jungle ecology to Victorian England.<sup>92</sup> Kay Weeks, a librarian at the Tatnall School who has been attending Family Opera Theatre productions with students since

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<sup>90</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, “Opera Delaware 1994/95 Silver Anniversary Commemorative Brochure,” 1.

<sup>91</sup> Eustis, “Educational Outreach Companies,” 115.

<sup>92</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Jungle Book* Folder, 1996, “*The Jungle Book* Study Guide.”

1992, reports that teachers in her school have used the themes presented in the selected works as the basis for lessons in art, physical education, science and social studies.<sup>93</sup>

Having a strong connection to an established academic curriculum also helps to increase the effectiveness of the study materials. According to Eustis, “When these materials are able to incorporate regular classroom content, the teachers involved are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the program. This is particularly the case when teachers are involved in the actual development of the materials.”<sup>94</sup> By tailoring their own educational objectives to fit within the preexisting framework of the Delaware school curriculum, the Family Opera Theatre is able to serve the community better by insuring that their performances will provide academic enrichment across a variety of disciplines.

By performing operas based on quality children’s literature, Opera Delaware’s Family Opera Theatre strives to encourage literacy and offer students a more complete artistic experience by introducing them to the often intimidating world of opera through stories with which they are already familiar. Basing operas on proven examples of children’s literature insures that the characters, themes and situations presented will offer greater relevance to the lives of the young audience members than works from the traditional operatic repertory. James Eversole, composer and former professor of music at University of Connecticut, voiced his objection to opera companies performing works that are simply not relevant or relatable to the lives of children.

It bothers me that so many groups put on *Così fan tutte* and *Don Pasquale*, for instance, because they are stylized pieces of whimsy concerning romantic love and not reflective of the kind of real-life situations that

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<sup>93</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Enormous Egg* Folder, Kay Weeks, “Letter to John Rollus III and others,” March 23, 2003.

<sup>94</sup> Eustis, “Educational Outreach Companies”, 116.

children can identify with...Even *Aida* has some elements of fundamental human conflict and passion that can make sense to a youngster. So do many contemporary works- most of Menotti's operas, Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*. But anything highly stylized as drama probably will not work.<sup>95</sup>

In 1995, Jana Fallin wrote about the vast potential of using children's literature as a regular part of music instruction in schools. Fallin stated, "we miss golden opportunities in elementary music classes by not utilizing children's books...used in the music classroom they can stimulate creative thinking by transferring words to sounds and by capturing feelings through sounds."<sup>96</sup> The benefits of adding music to the written word are further enhanced when students have the opportunity to see the characters from the story come to life before them on a stage. Kay Weeks described the experience of her students when they attend a Family Opera Theatre production by saying, "they listen and watch closely and find that you have given added meaning to the dialect and thoughts of the characters by expressing them in song and dance. They are thrilled that often they can pick out exact, word for word phrases from the book. The author's language... is not lost, but rather enhanced."<sup>97</sup> By basing their operas on literary works with which the audience is already familiar, the Family Opera Theatre encourages active listening and helps to insure that students will not find the experience of attending opera to be boring. The expressive nature of music allows the composers of children's operas to highlight the important themes from the story and bring them to life in a new, musical manner, thus

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<sup>95</sup> James Eversole, "Directory of Children's Operas," *Central Opera Services Bulletin* 15/2 (Winter 1972-73): 32-33.

<sup>96</sup> Jana R. Fallin, "Children's Literature as a Springboard for Music," *Music Educators Journal* 81/5 (March 1995): 27.

<sup>97</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Enormous Egg* Folder, Kay Weeks, "Letter to John Rollins III and others," March 23, 2003.

enhancing the original author's text and solidifying the students' understanding of the work.

### Evelyn Swensson Biography

By far the single greatest contributor to the success of Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre has been Evelyn Swensson, who served as Director of Education from 1974 until 2006. During this time, she conducted twelve world premiere children's operas, including seven of her own compositions.<sup>98</sup>

Evelyn Swensson, née Dickenson, was born in Woodstock, Virginia on September 18, 1928. Evelyn began to study piano at age nine, but with no piano in her home, young Evelyn practiced fingerings on a cardboard cutout that was enclosed in the back of a music book. She attended one year of junior college at Ward-Belmont and one year at Virginia Polytechnic Institute before being awarded a music scholarship to Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia. Two days after graduating from Hollins with dual degrees in piano and voice in 1949, Evelyn was married to Sigurd Swensson and quickly began a new career as wife and eventually as the mother of four children.

Even with four young children, Swensson continued to find opportunities to perform and participate in church musical activities wherever the family found themselves. "When the children were small, I sang recitals, soloed with orchestras, directed church choirs and had my own radio show. When they entered school, I began producing operas and musicals in small towns where the DuPont company sent my husband."<sup>99</sup> In 1969, the Swenssons relocated to Wilmington, Delaware, and Evelyn

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<sup>98</sup> Joy Vandever, "Evelyn Swensson: Singer, Composer, Conductor, Opera Educator," *Opera For Youth News* 19/1, 22-26.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 22.

enrolled in graduate school at West Chester University. She also began serving as conductor for Aldersgate Methodist Church, a post she would hold until 2002.

Evelyn Swensson's career has been filled with many notable accomplishments. At the time of her graduation from West Chester, Evelyn Swensson was the first woman to be awarded the Master of Music Degree from the University. This achievement is one of many musical "firsts" accomplished by Swensson during her career. She is the first woman from Delaware to earn a choirmaster degree from the American Guild of Organists, the first woman accredited as minister of music in the Peninsula Conference of the Methodist Church, and the first female guest conductor of the Delaware National Guard Band, Delaware Symphony Orchestra, and of the Brandywiners.<sup>100</sup> Swensson has also served as vice-president of Opera For Youth, and has been honored with the W.W. Laird Music Award, the International Reading Council Literacy Award, and seven National League of American Pen Women Composer Awards. She was named as a Distinguished Alumna by West Chester University, and she was inducted into the Delaware Hall of Fame in 2008.<sup>101</sup>

Evelyn Swensson has devoted her life to educating others through music, and throughout her career she has worked with many distinguished singers, composers, and producers. She names her two most influential teachers as Robert Shaw, with whom she studied conducting over two summers at Westminster Choir School, and Richard Torigi, vocal coach at the Metropolitan Opera with whom Swensson studied for five years.

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<sup>100</sup> Nancy Raley, "Music Master of Firsts," *Hollins Magazine* (Summer 1975): 12.

The Brandywiners is a musical troupe that has presented one annual musical in the Delaware Valley for the past 78 years. Their organization currently boasts 300 members and their annual budget is \$150,000. <http://www.brandywiners.org>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Shortly after graduating from West Chester, Evelyn Swensson met Marie Swajeski, the first director of the Family Opera Theatre and current director of the Delaware Children's Theatre. Ms. Swajeski asked Evelyn to serve as Music Director for the Family Opera Theatre's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. In 1974, Swensson was promoted to Director of Education for Opera Delaware, a post she held until 2007. In her thirty-three years with Opera Delaware, more than thirty different children's operas were performed under her baton, including world premieres of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, Charles Strouse's *Charlotte's Web*, Libby Larsen's *A Wrinkle in Time*, Arnold Black's *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and the U.S. premieres of Ottorino Respighi's *Sleeping Beauty* and John McCabe's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. According to Swensson, the 1991-1992 Family Opera Theater season drew 8,000 audience members, whereas the two standard operas performed that same year drew only 4,000 people.

Throughout her thirty-three year career with Opera Delaware, Evelyn Swensson both exemplified and expanded the role of Director of Education for a professional opera company. The job description for Director of Education for Opera Delaware outlines eight headings with fifteen subheadings. The first heading on this list is Family Opera Theatre, and it includes the following subheadings:

1. Find suitable works to perform (with a learning connection) or commission new works (plan several years in advance).
2. Insure that qualified singers (adults and students) audition.
3. Recruit and train orchestra (adult and student).

4. Plan study guide for school teachers; provide copy about composer and librettist; choose teacher to write lesson plans.
5. Take responsibility for production, beginning to end.<sup>102</sup>

According to this job description, a key focus of the Family Opera Theatre's educational objective is to perform operas based on literary works of the highest quality, that are also part of the school curriculum.<sup>103</sup> Realizing a need to introduce more works with a literary connection into the children's opera repertoire, Swensson encouraged Opera Delaware to commission new works of this nature. When it was not possible to come up with the funds to commission a new work from an established composer, Evelyn Swensson added the job of composer to her duties as Director of Education and Music Director for the Family Opera Theatre.

Swensson's first stint as an opera composer began with the 1993 production of *The Enormous Egg*. Following the 1989 production of Charles Strouse's *Charlotte's Web*, Opera Delaware developed a survey for teachers in order to identify superior children's books that would make excellent operas.<sup>104</sup> The criteria were as follows:

1. Excellence as children's literature.
2. Relationship to other curriculum subjects.
3. On the official school reading curriculum for grades 3-6.
4. Popularity with teachers.

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<sup>102</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder, "Job Description: Director of Education 1982-1992."

<sup>103</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: History Folder, "Opera Delaware 1994/95 Silver Anniversary Commemorative Booklet," 1.

<sup>104</sup> Vandever, "Evelyn Swensson," 23.



Among the books to appear on this list were Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, which would be developed into an opera in 1992 by Libby Larsen, and Oliver Butterworth's *The Enormous Egg*. Swensson initiated contact with Butterworth who was excited by the prospect of an opera based on his book and gave her contact information for a playwright who had recently adapted a version of the story. Attempts to contact the playwright were fruitless, and no script had been left behind. At this point, the project was temporarily abandoned.

In the fall of 1990, Swensson again reached out to Butterworth's family only to find that he had died. His wife did inform Swensson that before his death, he had expressed hope that she would go forward with the project of turning his story into an opera. Swensson learned at this point that the rights had been sold to Brad Waisbren, a Hollywood film producer who was trying to woo Ron Howard into adapting the story for a feature film. In the spring of 1991, negotiations began between Waisbren and Joseph Robinette, the playwright Swensson had suggested to write the libretto. These negotiations ultimately failed, and Robinette backed out of the project.

In fall 1991, Waisbren asked to see a script before any further negotiations could occur. With no librettist and no money in Opera Delaware funds to hire one, Swensson decided to tackle the job herself. In November 1991, Waisbren gave permission for Swensson to compose an opera based on his favorable reaction to her libretto. Opera Delaware received a contract from Waisbren in May 1992, and Swensson composed the music and lyrics throughout the fall and winter of that year. Rehearsals began in January of 1993 and culminated in the world premiere performance on March 5, 1993.

Since her first foray into opera composition in 1992, Evelyn Swensson has gone on to compose thirteen full-length operas for children's audiences. Her operas are tuneful and lively and always have a strong underlying moral message. She has been quoted as saying, "I want to use music as a tool for teaching other subjects and to make opportunities for children to deal with such important matters as manners and morals, friendship and respect for others, responsibility and freedom."<sup>105</sup>

Although Evelyn Swensson began composing rather late in her musical career, she has forged a distinct approach to the task of writing for young audiences. Swensson lists her strongest musical influence as composer Gian Carlo Menotti. After meeting Menotti for the first time at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1980, she was to maintain a friendship with the composer until his death in 2007, even visiting him at his home in Scotland. Throughout her career, Swensson conducted eight of Menotti's operas. During the 1985 Spoleto Festival, Swensson sang the role of Mrs. Skosvodmonit in *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* and also gave two recitals of Menotti arias, which the composer attended. Swensson's approach to writing opera for young people is based upon three rules imparted to her by Menotti:

1. Music should clarify the text, not confuse it,
2. Every opera should teach a lesson, and
3. Make them laugh!<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the rules stated by Menotti, Swensson's approach to writing children's operas can be further examined using an outline she authored as a guide to musical

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Evelyn Swensson, email message to the author, January 25, 2010.

composition. Swensson uses this outline as a tool both for herself, and when asked to give lectures about composition.<sup>107</sup> In this guide Swensson discusses five topics:

1. Define Your Audience
2. Choose Story
3. Obtain Performance Rights
4. Write the Show
5. What Next?

Item 4 has three subheadings; libretto, lyrics, and music. In writing a libretto, Swensson is quick to point out that one must remain true to the original intent of the author. She recommends choosing only the most important scenes and then deciding where solo singing, duets and ensembles fit naturally in the action. The first step in composing lyrics is to find a natural voice for each character, and to begin in prose, making the transition to poetry later. Swensson recommends making a chart of all of the musical numbers in a work, including key and time signatures, to insure variety. She also charts melodic patterns to determine musical climaxes and phrase endings. The final step in the compositional process is to compose a brief overture incorporating melodic and thematic material from songs in the work.

Evelyn Swensson is still working as a professional musician as conductor of the Brandywiners Pops Orchestra. She is also a lecturer for the Delaware Arts Forum, presenting one-woman shows retelling the lives of notable women throughout history.

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<sup>107</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder, Evelyn Swensson, "How to Write a Musical."

## Features of Successful Children's Operas

There is division in the operatic community over whether young audiences are better served by being exposed to traditional operatic works from an early age, or if they should be introduced to opera through works composed specifically for the young. The most frequent criticism of original works for children is the lesser quality of the music in many popular children's operas. For example, in her dissertation, Lynn Eleanor Eustis referenced the use of original children's operas and warned of children "form[ing] false perceptions about opera as a result, which will be shattered the first time they see a 'real' opera."<sup>108</sup> Another opinion, from Gian Carlo Menotti, is that "Just as there are books written for children, there must be operas too...During my operas the children do not tear the seats because they can understand the words and because the operas are written for them. You cannot expect a child to be especially interested in an opera where the heroine is slowly dying of tuberculosis."<sup>109</sup>

The prevailing argument in favor of composing original works for children is that the themes discussed in most traditional operas are simply too foreign and unfamiliar for most children, so that they cannot possibly establish any emotional connection to the drama. According to Malone, "The composers and librettists of the best-written children's operas...take into account the stages of emotional and intellectual development of their intended audiences, as well as their interests and concerns."<sup>110</sup> Also, the length of most operas and the static dramatic nature simply ask too much of the attention span of a young person.<sup>111</sup> It is the belief of many that this type of exposure will not promote an

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<sup>108</sup> Eustis, "Educational Outreach Programs", 7.

<sup>109</sup> Gian Carlo Menotti, quoted in Graubard, ed. "Future of Opera," 73-74.

<sup>110</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 274.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 272.

early appreciation of opera among most youths and may reinforce negative stereotypes about the craft.

In order to be successful, composers of children's opera must take into consideration the unique needs of their audience. Gian Carlo Menotti has composed six operas for children, and has been very outspoken about the challenges of writing for the young: "An audience of children is a demanding one. Just as they become quickly enchanted, so they become easily bored, and they will not forgive boredom."<sup>112</sup> In her dissertation, Martha Louise Malone identified several common characteristics of successful children's operas, which she divided into two main categories -- those that account for a child's limited attention span and those that help a child establish familiarity with opera.<sup>113</sup> First, because of the limited attention span of a young audience, many features traditionally associated with opera are not suitable for use in children's opera. Most children's operas are between thirty and forty-five minutes in length, and few run longer than one hour. Lengthy arias, interludes and overtures are typically sacrificed in favor of almost continuous action. Arias, duets and ensemble numbers cannot simply reflect, they must serve a greater dramatic purpose and propel the action of the story. Text setting is paramount in insuring that the story will be understood by the audience. If a child cannot understand what the characters are saying, he will quickly lose interest in the story. In setting the text, the composer must take care that too much of the singing does not take place at the extremes of the vocal range, as it is harder for a singer to use proper diction. Ideally the text should also be set in a syllabic manner, and sung in a tempo that it not so fast that it impairs delivery of the text.

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<sup>112</sup> Philip Crosland, "Opera Tryouts- The Kids Were Alive With the Sound of Music," *Sunday News Journal*, May 9, 1982, F2-F3.

<sup>113</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 272.

The second aspect that Malone identified was children's lack of familiarity with opera as an art form. Establishing familiarity can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Providing study materials and recordings prior to the show is one method used by opera outreach companies. These preparatory materials often include information about the history of opera, the composer, the story and about opera etiquette, such as when it is appropriate to clap. Establishing familiarity relies heavily on the merits of the opera itself. The use of repetition is an important feature in establishing familiarity. Repetition of text, music and plot situations help to keep the audience engaged in the story. Melodies that are simple and memorable will also aid in a child's enjoyment of an opera. Most children have never had the experience of hearing a trained, unamplified operatic voice, so a balanced mixture of classical and popular styles is often used to present familiar and unfamiliar musical features. Some composers take the approach of interspersing spoken dialogue in the music to help tell the story, while others use only singing. Both methods can be effective, but the dialogue should not be so lengthy that it overwhelms the music. The music for a successful children's opera should be able to tell a story on its own and not be overly reliant on dialogue. Opera's ability to communicate through the medium of song is what makes it distinct from other types of musical entertainment, and this should not be forgotten when composing for children.

A successful children's opera is one that is able to translate traditional operatic conventions to a medium that is both accessible and entertaining to young people. In order for a child to be receptive to a work of art, he or she must discover some familiar elements for it to be relatable. Many operas written for children feature young protagonists and deal with real life situations, such as family relationships, bullying or

peer pressure. Many composers and producers strive for an opera with a strong underlying moral message that is clear at the resolution. Whether or not an opera has a didactic purpose will not necessarily affect a child's enjoyment, nor does it speak to the quality of the story. Composers must be careful not to introduce characters or emotions that are largely unappealing to young people. Not surprisingly, the subject of romantic love is almost nonexistent in children's opera.

Musical quality is an extremely important and controversial issue in the field of children's opera. A frequent criticism of children's operas is that they are pandering and the musical quality has been sacrificed in favor of entertainment.<sup>114</sup> Although composers must make certain adjustments and allowances when composing for children, it is entirely possible to write high quality music that will be both entertaining and appealing to young people.

Throughout the analysis, the author will identify how each composer has approached the elements of traditional operatic form and style, and how they have adapted the medium to suit the young audience's limited attention span and level of familiarity with opera. Analysis of these children's operas will show how three different composers approach the task of writing for children and produce works of high musical quality, which are also highly appealing to a young audience. The selected operas represent a broad range of themes, subject matter and musical style. The selected composers range from the very well known, to the little known. Bearing in mind Malone's aforementioned criteria, the selected works have been analyzed based upon the following:

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<sup>114</sup> Eustis, "Educational Outreach Programs at Regional Opera Companies", 7.

1. Cast make-up
  - a. Number of voice types of soloists and chorus members
  - b. Ranges and tessitura of solo vocal roles
2. Libretto
  - a. Adaptation from literary source (where applicable)
  - b. Appropriateness of subject matter
3. Musical features
  - a. Melody
  - b. Harmony
  - c. Rhythm
  - d. Musical style
4. Orchestration
  - a. Accompaniment
5. Performance Considerations
  - a. Costume and props
  - b. Scenery and staging requirements
6. Conclusions and overall impression

A brief history of the commissioning and composition of each work performed by Opera Delaware, as well as a performance history, a cast list, the composition of the orchestra, and a full synopsis of its libretto are included, and world premiere cast lists and programs are found in the Appendices.



## Selected Works

Four of the twelve world-premiere children's operas commissioned by Opera Delaware have been selected for inclusion in this study to compare the approaches of the composers and to discover how each worked within the framework of traditional operatic form. These are *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* by Gian Carlo Menotti, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Libby Larsen, and two works by Evelyn Swensson, *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey* and *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.

Gian Carlo Menotti was one of the preeminent composers of modern opera in the twentieth century, and his operas tended to focus on contemporary subjects. Menotti's opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, is one of the most frequently performed children's operas in North America, and it was composed specifically for performance on American television.<sup>115</sup> Throughout his career, Menotti composed a total of five children's operas and several smaller children's works intended for performance in a church. In addition to premiering *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, Opera Delaware has performed Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *Help, Help*, *The Globolinks*, and *A Bride From Pluto*.

Libby Larsen is an American composer of both vocal and instrumental music in large and small forms. She is a former student of Dominick Argento and served as Composer in Residence for the Minneapolis Orchestra from 1983 to 1987.<sup>116</sup> Although *A Wrinkle in Time* is the only children's work in Larsen's output, she has been a strong proponent of music education throughout her career and has even lectured on the subject.<sup>117</sup> *A Wrinkle in Time* was included in this study because copious documentation

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<sup>115</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Gian Carlo Menotti," accessed April 20, 2010; <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

<sup>116</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Libby Larsen," accessed April 10, 2010; <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

survives about its composition, including the composer's stated reasons for selecting the literary model.

Although Evelyn Swensson was not a composer by profession, she approached the challenge of writing her first children's opera with more than fifteen years of experience producing and directing such works. Two of Swensson's twelve original children's operas have been chosen in order to analyze her approach to composition. Given this experience, Swensson's works for children may be more accurately labeled as musicals because of the use of spoken dialogue and overall musical form. The vocal writing for the adult leads is demanding, however, and requires the technique of a classically trained singer. Both of the selected works received favorable reviews in *Opera News*<sup>118</sup>, and *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey* is included in the *Opera For Youth Directory*, which can be found on OPERA America's website.<sup>119</sup> In 2003, Opera Delaware was invited to perform selected scenes out of Swensson's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art based on the opera's positive review.

The operas in this study show that children's operas have attracted distinguished composers, such as Menotti and Larsen, and are thus no playground for amateurs. Elements typically associated with the mature styles of these two composers are retained in the operas discussed here, such as Menotti's careful consideration of the voice and Larsen's fondness for colorful orchestration, but new elements which account for the

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Baxter, "Review of *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey*," *Opera News* 62/16 (1998), and David Shengold, "Review of *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*," *Opera News* 66/12 (2002), accessed April 22, 2010,

<http://www.operanews.com/operanews/templates/archives.aspx>

<sup>119</sup> "Opera For Youth Directory," accessed April 20, 2010;

<http://www.operaamerica.org>

needs of the audience are also present. Evelyn Swensson composed her children's works for Opera Delaware under very different circumstances than those of the two aforementioned composers, and brought with her a different perspective on the task. Thus, it is not surprising that of the four works studied, hers have the least in common with traditional operatic conventions. The following analyses explore how the three composers created operas that would appeal to children, sometimes following the framework of traditional opera, and sometimes departing from it.

## Chapter 4: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* by Gian Carlo Menotti

The first original opera for children to be commissioned and premiered by Opera Delaware was Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*. The idea for this new opera developed when Evelyn Swensson was introduced to Menotti after a performance of *Chip and His Dog* at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina in May of 1980.<sup>120</sup> Swensson recalls asking Menotti if he would be interested in composing an opera for a cast of both adults and children. Menotti responded that he had never been asked to write a work of that nature, but was willing to consider it. He felt strongly that such a work should not last any longer than one hour. Upon her return to Wilmington, Swensson contacted numerous local authorities to help raise the \$36,000 that Menotti requested to commission the opera. The opera was commissioned jointly by Opera Delaware and the DuPont Company under the condition that Swensson would find private donors to match their contributions.

Menotti arrived in Wilmington in May of 1982. At the time of his arrival, he had not composed any of the score, but he did have a title and a story which he kept secret. He did announce that he would be casting four adult roles- a baritone, tenor, soprano, and mezzo soprano, as well as a children's chorus of fourth, fifth and sixth graders for an unspecified number of roles. Auditions were held on May 1-2, 1982, and over 100 children and thirty-four adults arrived to audition before Menotti.<sup>121</sup> During the audition process, Menotti gave two reasons why he wanted the plot to remain secret, in order to

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<sup>120</sup> Evelyn Swensson, "Landscapes and Remembrances of Gian Carlo Menotti," *Opera For Youth News* 19/1 (1996): 22-26.

<sup>121</sup> Philip F. Crosland, "Opera Tryouts- The Kids Were Alive With The Sound of Music," *Sunday News Journal*, May 9, 1982, F2-F3.

keep the element of surprise in tact, and because he believed that some aspects of the story might need to be adjusted depending on the strengths and weaknesses of the cast.<sup>122</sup> Menotti selected twenty-four children and finally decided on a cast of six adults in June. Particularly difficult was finding a tenor six feet or more in height who could convincingly sing the role of a fourteen-year old boy.<sup>123</sup> Rehearsals for the new opera were scheduled to begin in August, 1982. The children spent several weeks learning Kodaly hand signals and how to accompany themselves by ringing handbells. When Menotti returned to Wilmington on August 26, he still had not composed any of the opera, but insisted it was all in his head. All he asked was that Swensson find him a quiet place to work, and he composed the entire opera over the span of just six days.

The world premier of *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* took place on September 24, 1982 in the Grand Opera House in Wilmington, Delaware. It was hailed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as “near-perfect theatre for children. Quick, efficient, and funny, the opera moves without pause and without false steps.”<sup>124</sup> According to the program for the premiere, Menotti specified that the plot not be released in advance and that no synopsis appear in the program. He states, “I prefer to have each audience have the enjoyment of surprise as the story unfolds.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> “Opera Delaware Names ‘Boy’ Cast,” *Evening Journal*, June 17, 1982. D4

<sup>124</sup> Daniel Webster, “Menotti’s Newest Opera is Nearly a Perfect One,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* Sept.25, 1982 7C.

<sup>125</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* Folder, “*The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* World Premiere Program,” September 24, 1982.

### Cast

Miss Hope, soprano  
Poponel, tenor  
Mrs. Skosvodmonit, mezzo-soprano  
Dr. Shrinck, tenor  
Mad Dog, bass-baritone  
Miss Procter, mezzo-soprano  
Little Poponel, child soprano  
Lizzie Spender, child soprano  
Policeman, not singing

### Orchestra

Flute  
Oboe  
Clarinet in B<sup>b</sup>  
Bassoon  
Horn in F  
Trumpet in B<sup>b</sup>  
Trombone  
Timpani  
Percussion (glockenspiel, cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, triangle, tambourine)

### Synopsis<sup>126</sup>

An immensely tall nine-year old boy, Poponel Skosvodmonit, moves to a new town where he is bullied by his classmates. His new teacher, Miss Hope, tells Poponel about Dr. Shrinck, who has invented a shrinking machine. Poponel's mother takes him to see Dr. Shrinck who will only agree to the procedure if Poponel promises to conform to the behavior of his schoolmates. A criminal named Mad Dog arrives at Poponel's school and demands one hostage. Poponel is the only student brave enough to volunteer. Because he has failed to conform, Poponel once again begins to grow to his immense size and is able to overpower Mad Dog.

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<sup>126</sup> Gian Carlo Menotti, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1982). For each of the operas discussed in this study, the plot summaries and related analyses are the author's own.

## ACT 1: Scene 1

It is the first day of school in a small town and the children are singing a song of welcome. Miss Hope enters the room and attempts to get the children to settle down so that she can begin her lesson. She is interrupted by a knock at the door. It is a very timid Mrs. Skosvodmonit who explains that she is accompanying her son, Poponel, to his first day of school. Miss Hope sees that there is no child in the hallway and asks where Poponel is. Mrs. Skosvodmonit explains that her son is waiting outside because he is very shy. She goes on to explain that Poponel is very tall for his age. He cautiously enters and, upon seeing his immense size, the children break into uproarious laughter. Miss Hope apologizes to Poponel and his mother for the outburst and assures them that it will never happen again.

The peace is short-lived, however, as the students once again fall into hysterics upon hearing the new boy speak his name aloud. Miss Hope once again admonishes the students for their rudeness, but Poponel is mercilessly teased, tripped, and squirted with a water pistol throughout his first day. At recess none of the children will allow Poponel to join them in their games. Only Lizzie Spender, another new student, reaches out to Poponel. Miss Hope tells Poponel about a doctor named Shrinck who has invented a machine that can shrink a giant whale down to a sardine. If Poponel truly wants to be like the other children, Shrinck is the man who can do it. Miss Hope manages to track down Dr. Shrinck and he reluctantly agrees to see the boy.

## Scene 2

The curtain opens to Dr. Shrinck's messy office. The impressive shrinking machine stands in one corner. Dr. Shrinck comes in to find his nurse, Miss Procter, asleep at her desk. He chastises her for her laziness and for the untidiness of the office until they are interrupted by the arrival of Miss Hope, Lizzie and Poponel. Dr. Shrinck demonstrates the effectiveness of his invention by shrinking his own nurse and promptly restoring her to her normal size. Miss Procter assures Poponel that the procedure is completely painless, but the Doctor warns him that there is one caveat. In order for the procedure to be effective, Poponel must conform to the behaviors of the other children. He must always agree with the crowd and act and dress just as they do. If he dares to differ, he will begin to grow back to his original size. Poponel agrees and Dr. Shrinck goes ahead with the procedure. He steps out of the machine in his new form and all three of them are overjoyed. Poponel, Lizzie and Miss Hope eagerly return to school.

### Scene 3

The students are finishing an assignment which they are handing in to Miss Hope at her desk one by one. After the last child has finished, Miss Hope announces that she has a surprise for the class. She introduces the newly shrunken Poponel, and he is greeted with amazement. The children immediately respond favorably and ask Poponel to join their sports teams and attend their birthday parties. The celebration is halted when an armed man runs into the classroom. He introduces himself as Mad Dog, a criminal who has just escaped from jail and is being chased by the police. Mad Dog tells the children that he intends to hold them hostage until the police agree to let him go free. Miss Hope pleads with Mad Dog not to harm the children. He agrees to let the other children go free if one child will volunteer to serve as a hostage. All the children say no to Mad Dog's request, but Poponel bravely says yes knowing that it will reverse his treatment. Miss Hope leads the children out of the class, leaving Poponel alone with the criminal. Poponel manages to slip away from Mad Dog's grasp and turns off the classroom lights. A chase in the dark ensues, with Poponel popping out of hiding places and appearing slightly taller each time. By the time the lights come back on Poponel has returned to his immense height and is able to disarm the startled Mad Dog. The police rush in and drag Mad Dog offstage in handcuffs to the cheers of the class. The children cheer for Poponel and Miss Hope tells the class to be glad for who they are and to accept others even if they are different from you.

Menotti's libretto deals with the themes of tolerance and conformity. Upon arriving at his new school, Poponel is immediately mocked by his new classmates because of his height and his funny name. The teacher attempts to control the students unruly behavior, but it is no use. The students are unwilling to accept Poponel simply because he is different. He is excluded from games and parties, and is made to feel like an outcast.

Only one student, Lizzie Spender, is accepting of Poponel the way he is. Lizzie is the only student to reach out to Poponel, and she tells him that she likes him. Lizzie is also a new student, so she feels compassion for Poponel seeing that they are in similar situations. The constant teasing from other students makes Poponel feel so badly about himself that he confesses to his teacher that he would do anything in order to be just like



everyone else. Dr. Shrinck is able to grant Poponel's wish to look like everyone else, but this transformation does not come without great sacrifice. In order to look like everyone else, Poponel has to give himself up entirely. Conforming to the crowd means that Poponel has lost his individual identity, and can no longer think or speak for himself. It is this overwhelming fear of being different that prevents all the other children from standing up to Mad Dog when he arrives at their school. It is at this moment that Poponel realizes that conformity is detrimental when it causes people to do the wrong thing, and stand idly by when they could be helping. Poponel is the only student brave enough to stand up to Mad Dog and he sacrifices what he so desperately thought he wanted in the name of doing the right thing.

This story has a strong moral message that is communicated clearly and effectively. Children who view this opera will be able to take away the message that teasing people because they are different is wrong and hurtful, and that it is okay to go against the crowd when it means standing up for what is right. This opera also encourages self esteem in young people by reinforcing that it is our differences that make us unique individuals, and that they should learn to love and embrace the qualities that make them different and not try to be like everyone else.

### Musical Features

*The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is the fifth children's opera composed by Menotti, following the premieres of *Amahl and The Night Visitors* in 1959, *Help, Help, The Globolinks* in 1968, *Chip and His Dog* in 1979, and *A Bride From Pluto* in 1982. While Menotti's earlier works for children still feature traditional operatic forms such as

recitative, arias, and ensemble numbers, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is written in a new operatic style, favoring constant action over traditional form. The majority of the singing is declamatory, with few examples of either true recitative or aria singing. The children sing a brief opening hymn, and Miss Hope digresses into a brief waltz when quizzing the children about the capital of Austria. These are among the only examples of Menotti's use of traditional musical forms in the entire opera. The opera runs just over forty minutes in length and showcases a true economy of means on Menotti's behalf. The vocal lines unfold in a quasi declamatory fashion, and there is little wasted action. Menotti peppers his score with humor, both for children and savvy adults.

The opera begins and ends with the children and Miss Hope singing choral numbers. In the opening, it is a stately hymn (Example 4.1) welcoming the children back to school after summer break. The hymn is sung in a call and response fashion between teacher and students with the tonal center shifting between C major and F major, the meter also alternates between 2/4 and 3/4 time. The accompaniment is sparse and doubles the vocal lines. This opening hymn is one of few examples of true ensemble singing in the opera. Menotti has written the score in a conversational manner, and there is rarely more than one speaker at a time, unless two characters are singing the same text.

Example 4.1, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, “Opening Hymn,” p. 1, mm. 1-12

The musical score for Example 4.1, "Opening Hymn," from *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, measures 1-12. The score is written for Miss Hope, Children, and Piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Andante molto moderato". The lyrics are: "Af - ter la - zy sum - mer days let us praise the air - y au - tumn that has set the woods a - blaze." The score includes a first ending bracket for Miss Hope's vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a waltz-like interlude in measures 10-12.

Miss Hope sings her lessons to the class in a declamatory fashion, with brief digressions into more melodic passages. For example, during a lesson in geography none of the students is able to come up with the capital of Austria. When she finally gives the answer to the class, Miss Hope loses herself temporarily, and the vocal line veers off into a brief waltz interlude (Example 4.2). The character of Miss Hope is somewhat whimsical; prone to brief moments of distraction, but also quick to reprimand the children when they act up. Miss Hope's vocal lines are very angular and most of the singing occurs within the range of a ninth, between  $e^i$  and  $g^{ii}$ . Much of Miss Hope's singing occurs within the range of  $c^{ii}$  and  $g^{ii}$ , which is typically the *zona di passaggio* for soprano singers, or the transition point from the middle to upper register. In order to maintain a consistent tone throughout the *passaggio*, sopranos often have to modify

vowels to a more open sound, which can affect diction and, consequently, comprehension by the audience.

**Example 4.2, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, “Vienna Waltz,” pp. 6-7, mm. 7-9, 1-3**

The musical score for "Vienna Waltz" from *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 7-9) is in 4/4 time, marked "Andante". The vocal line (Miss H.) is in a recitative style, with lyrics: "no, no, no, no! No, no, no, no, no. Vi - en - na, Vi - en - na, the cit - y of the". The piano accompaniment (Tpt., W.W., Strgs.) features staccato eighth-note passages and triplets. The second system (mm. 1-3) is in 12/8 time, marked "Allegro". The vocal line continues with lyrics: "waltz, Vi - en - na, Vi - en - na, the cit ... Darn it! Who is it?". The piano accompaniment features a waltz-like melody and staccato eighth-note passages.

Menotti's musical interludes serve to advance the drama. Since most of the singing is in a recitative style, the accompaniment is very sparse. Even in the more melodic passages, the accompaniment is static and often doubles the vocal line. This type of setting allows the voice to predominate in the texture, allowing for maximum expression from the singer, and better comprehension by the audience. Solo instrumental lines are much more expressive and also serve to comment on the action by introducing characters or ideas. There are a few musical motives that reappear throughout the opera. The children's hysterical laughter at the sight of Poponel and upon hearing his name is depicted in the orchestra by staccato eighth-note passages descending chromatically and descending triplets featuring sharp dissonance (Example 4.3).

**Example 4.3, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, “Laughter Interlude,” p. 11, mm. 1-13**

The musical score for "Laughter Interlude" (Example 4.3) consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the piano accompaniment (Pno. senza Sva bassa) with a forte (*ff*) and brilliant tempo. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system introduces Miss Hope's vocal line, which is marked as "(spoken)" and includes the lyrics "Children, children,". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The third system shows Miss Hope's vocal line with the lyrics "stop it! Behave! Shame on you!". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The fourth system shows the piano accompaniment with a tempo change to 2/4 and a dynamic of *p*. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The system also includes a vocal line for the children, marked as "(Horried, Miss Hope bangs on her desk, but the children can hardly suppress their giggling.)". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern.

Miss Hope and Poponel sing a short duet (Example 4.4) which illustrates again the subservient role of the orchestra when used as accompaniment to the voice. In contrast to the angular, chromatic lines of recitative, Menotti's melodies are tonal and expressive. The g minor melody of the duet is supported by rhythmically static chordal accompaniment. The harmonic language is simple, and there is little use of chromaticism

Example 4.4, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, “Duet,” p. 23, mm. 1-12

(30)

Andante

Pop. Why can't you see how lone - some it is to be, be so tall and to know that I still have to

Andante

Bsn., Strgs. *p*

Miss Hope

You'll soon un-der-stand, dear, why God in His wis - dom has made you so tall.

*poco rall.*

Pop. grow? Why

*poco rall.*

+ W.W.

*poco rall.*

(31)

*a tempo*

Pop. have - n't I grown like all oth-er boys in the world? They all have such fun and I'm al - ways a -

*a tempo*

The opera concludes with the children and Miss Hope singing the moral of the story together in a three-part choral arrangement (Example 4.5), thus framing the opera with the teacher and students singing together.

**Example 4.5, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, “Closing Hymn,” p. 69-70, mm. 5-8, 1-4**

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (mm. 5-8) features three vocal parts: Miss Hope (H.), Children, and a string ensemble (Strgs., Hn., Fl.). All three parts sing the same lyrics: "What-ev - er name I have, what - ev - er the face, I won't be con-ceit-ed but neith - er a - shamed. And". The music is in a simple, homophonic style with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The second system (mm. 1-4) features Miss Hope (H.), Children, and a string ensemble. The lyrics are: "glad that God de - cid - ed, de-cid-ed that I should be me." The tempo is marked "Allegro". The string ensemble part includes a woodwind (W.W.) entry in the final measure, marked "ff".

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Miss H.  
What-ev - er name I have, what - ev - er the face, I won't be con-ceit-ed but neith - er a - shamed. And

Children  
What-ev - er name I have, what - ev - er the face, I won't be con-ceit-ed but neith - er a - shamed. And

Strgs., Hn., Fl.  
What-ev - er name I have, what - ev - er the face, I won't be con-ceit-ed but neith - er a - shamed. And

Miss H.  
glad that God de - cid - ed, de-cid-ed that I should be me.

Chil.  
glad that God de - cid - ed, de-cid-ed that I should be me.

Allegro

W.W.

## Conclusions

Menotti's *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is a fine children's opera and is appropriate for children of all ages. The opera is ideally suited to introduce a young person to opera for the first time because it is brief, funny, expressive and offers a variety of musical styles. At forty-five minutes in length the opera is appropriately long to suit the needs of elementary-aged children. Menotti does not use any spoken dialogue in the opera, but children are made to feel comfortable with the singing because of the variety in the vocal lines.

Menotti's approach to vocal writing consciously avoids the use of lengthy, reflective arias in favor of constant action. Declamatory passages move the story along, while short, diatonic melodies reflect on the action and help to delineate the personalities of each of the characters. Recitative passages are angular and feature an increased use of chromaticism. In contrast, reflective moments are written with more fluid melodic passages. These melodies are short, diatonic, and feature simple, tonal accompaniment. With the structure, Menotti has maintained the traditional form of conversational recitative leading into reflective arias, but he has kept the reflective passages appropriately brief and non-repetitive so that the opera never becomes bogged down in lengthy reflection.

Although the orchestra is subservient to the voice throughout the opera, musical interludes are interspersed to add variety and also participate in the drama. The orchestral accompaniment is sparse and predominantly chordal in style. Menotti tends to favor sustained chords in the bass with upper parts often doubling the voice in more melodic passages. Orchestral accompaniment during recitative is rhythmically active, which, again, helps to propel the action forwards. Solo orchestral passages between



vocal lines are often imitative in nature. The limited accompaniment allows the solo voices to stand out above the orchestra, which allows children to hear the operatic style of singing clearly and become familiar with it. By keeping the orchestration light, Menotti insures that more of the text will be able to be understood, so that the audience will be able to follow the plot.

The opera requires skilled singers for the adult roles both to meet the requirements of vocal production and histrionics. The character of Miss Hope presents a particular challenge. The declamatory lines must be communicated in a way that is conversational and easily understood, but Menotti has made this task difficult, due to the angularity of the vocal lines and the high tessitura. The score also demands fine musicianship from the children's chorus as. Overall the children's melodies are diatonic, have few large skips and harmonies are doubled in the accompaniment. The children's choruses are scored for three-part harmony with the lowest descending to b and the highest ascending to g<sup>ii</sup>. Most of the singing for the children occurs in the middle of the head register, between f<sup>#i</sup> and d<sup>ii</sup>, which encourages good tone and healthy singing practices.

The most successful feature of *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is Menotti's vocal writing, which highlights the supremacy of the voice in the texture and establishes a style of expression that is natural and can be easily absorbed by the audience. Most of the singing is in a style somewhere between recitative and arioso and unfolds in a quasi-conversational manner. Occasionally, these vocal lines develop into melodic singing, but Menotti controls the melodies by keeping them short so that the action is nearly continuous. The lines of recitative, which are angular and peppered with chromaticism,

contrast with calm, sequential, and entirely tonal melodic passages. Menotti's melodic style comes straight out the Italian lyric opera tradition, and his melodies are both memorable and expressive. Menotti often employs the use of sequences rather than direct repetition of the melodic line, which adds variety and avoids inertia.

Menotti's approach to orchestration is apt, because it allows the voice to serve as the primary expressive means, without relegating the orchestra to a completely subservient role. Although the accompaniment is light, often featuring sustained bass pedals and rhythmically stable chords in the treble, instrumental interludes are lively, expressive and rhythmically varied. Often these passages develop melodic material from the vocal lines. One prominent example of the orchestra being used as a participant in the drama is during the game of "cat and mouse" that occurs between Poponel and Mad Dog when Poponel attempts to hide from the criminal in the darkened classroom. Menotti depicts this musically with alternating passages, the first featuring staccato eighth-notes, played pianissimo, and ascending chromatically, and the second consisting of a rapidly descending pattern of triplet eighth-notes, played forte, which interrupts the first theme.<sup>127</sup> These two passages are repeated in alternation as Poponel continues to elude his captor by hiding in various places around the classroom and Mad Dog gives chase.

The weakest feature of the opera is the libretto. While younger children will have no problem accepting certain inconsistencies in the plot, older elementary-school children will undoubtedly question some of the more outlandish aspects of the story. One noticeable inaccuracy occurs when Miss Hope calls Dr. Shrinck's office, and his secretary tells her that he has gone out to the opera for this evening. This is illogical in

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<sup>127</sup> Menotti, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, 63, mm. 1-12.

the sequence of events, since the children have just arrived at the first day of school, and it is clearly still morning. There is also an inconsistency regarding the shrinking machine. Dr. Shrinck tells Poponel that he can only be shrunk one time, so he must take care not to reverse the effects. Dr. Shrinck demonstrates the power of the machine on his assistant, Nurse Procter, however, who assures Poponel that there is no need to be afraid, because she has been shrunk many times.

## Chapter 5: *A Wrinkle in Time* by Libby Larsen

Libby Larsen's opera, *A Wrinkle in Time*, was premiered at the Playhouse Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware on March 27, 1992. Evelyn Swensson and Leland Kimball, Opera Delaware's Artistic Director, approached Larsen about the prospect of composing an opera for children after reading a 1988 *Wall Street Journal* article, in which Larsen stated, "[I wish to] know the performers as truthfully as possible and then still create the piece I want to write."<sup>128</sup> Swensson felt that Larsen would be an ideal candidate to work with Opera Delaware, cast singers and write an opera just as Menotti had done with *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*. A meeting took place on May 1, 1989, between Libby Larsen, Evelyn Swensson and members of the Educational Advisory Council, who provided a list of thirty possible opera subjects that had been recommended by educators. After a long day of meetings and discussions about Opera Delaware's educational philosophy, Larsen read the three most highly recommended books for children in one evening. The next morning, she announced that she had chosen Madeline L'Engle's 1962 novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*, as the subject for the new opera.<sup>129</sup> Larsen stated four reasons for choosing this book over all the other suggestions:

1. The children are the heroes. They go bravely in search of their father, in spite of evil forces that try to discourage them, and they find him.
2. Their adventures in time and space suggest new combinations of sound in the orchestra.

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<sup>128</sup> Pam Lambert, "Orchestrating a Life in Music," *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 1988.

<sup>129</sup> Leland P. Kimball III, "Up Close and Personal With Evelyn Swensson," *Inside Opera* 2/2 (February 2000): 3.

3. The three comic characters, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which, Mrs. Whatsit, suggest off-beat styles of music for each of these magical mediums.
4. She believes in the future and in the future of opera. In order to have her works produced more and for a longer period of time, she wants to choose subjects that will appeal to generations to come.

### Cast

Meg, soprano  
Charles Wallace, boy soprano  
Calvin, baritone  
Mrs. Whatsit/Beast, mezzo soprano  
Mrs. Who/Beast, contralto  
Mrs. Which, soprano or tenor  
Mr. Jenkins, baritone  
Mrs. Murray/Happy Medium/Aunt Beast, soprano  
Mr. Murray, tenor

### Orchestra

3 flute  
Oboe  
2 clarinet  
Bassoon  
Horn in F  
Trumpet  
Trombone  
Tuba  
Percussion  
Timpani  
Keyboard (synthesizer)  
Strings

### Synopsis<sup>130</sup>

*A Wrinkle in Time* is a fantastical journey through time and space. L'Engle's novel tells the story of Meg Murray and her younger brother Charles Wallace. Meg is an

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<sup>130</sup> Libby Larsen, *A Wrinkle in Time*, libretto by Walter Green (Boston: ECS Publishing, 1991).

awkward, angry adolescent who is bullied at school and wants desperately to fit in. Although she is intelligent, Meg is bored by the monotony of school, and disappoints her teachers with her academic performance. Her younger brother, Charles Wallace, is an exceptionally bright five-year old who has the ability to read the thoughts of his sister and mother. Their mother is a biologist and their father is an atomic physicist who was sent on a top-secret mission and has not returned.

The children encounter three whimsical figures, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which and Mrs. Whatsit, who live together in a house in the woods that is rumored to be haunted. At first the children think that these women are merely eccentrics, but they come to learn that they are extra-terrestrial beings who have traveled extensively throughout the universe trying to battle an encroaching evil force. The women explain to Meg, Charles Wallace, and their friend Calvin, how they have learned to travel freely about the universe using a process they call “tessering” or “wrinkling.” The women explain that tessering involves traveling through the fifth dimension. By moving through a tesseract, they have discovered a way of traveling in which the shortest distance between two points is not a straight line.

Together they lead the children on a journey across the galaxy, first to the planet Uriel, where the children see first hand the Dark Thing that threatens the galaxy. Then they travel deep into Orion’s belt where they meet the “Happy Medium,” who reluctantly shows the children a chilling vision of Earth in her crystal ball. Finally they travel to the planet Camazotz where Mr. Murray is being held prisoner. The inhabitants of Camazotz have succumbed to evil and are held prisoner by the living brain, IT, who has hypnotized the citizens into sharing one mind. They manage to free Mr. Murray from IT’s control,

but Charles Wallace falls under his spell. Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murray are able to tesser away to save themselves from IT, but they leave behind Charles Wallace. Meg realizes that she is the only one who can save her brother from the control of IT. She returns to Camazotz and uses love, the most powerful force in the universe, to conquer the evil brain and save her brother from IT's grasp.

### Prologue

A spot light reveals Meg Murray in a fight with another child while other children surround them and begin to taunt Meg with shouts of "Oddball! Oddball!" Meg is knocked down, and the other children run off, leaving Meg all alone.

### Scene 1

It is a dark and stormy night. Meg and her mother enter the kitchen of their home where Charles Wallace, who has anticipated their arrival, has already begun to make hot cocoa. Mrs. Murray consoles Meg about her most recent fight. She tells her daughter that she must not be so hot-headed and learn to find a "happy medium." The family is surprised by the appearance of Mrs. Whatsit at their door. She explains that the windy night has blown her off course, and she temporarily lost her way. After making small talk and eating sandwiches, Mrs. Whatsit gets up to leave. As she does, she casually tells Mrs. Murray that there is such a thing as a tesseract. This statement sends Mrs. Murray into a panic, much to the bewilderment of her children.

### Scene 2

Meg is teased by her classmates, which results in her getting into another fight. Meg is sent to the principal's office. The principal wonders aloud if Meg's poor attitude is a result of her father being absent for so long, and he tells her that she and her family must "face the facts," and accept that he is not coming home. Upset, Meg runs out of the office.

### Scene 3

Later that same day, Meg and Charles Wallace decide to go visit Mrs. Whatsit. On the way to her home, they run into Calvin O'Keefe, an older boy from Meg's school. Calvin admits that he has always been oddly fascinated by the spooky old house where Mrs. Whatsit lives. Calvin and Meg are instantly drawn to one another, and he decided to accompany them. They find Mrs. Who in a rocking chair. She speaks to the children in cryptic verses, offering quotations in foreign languages, then translating them aloud. The children ask to see Mrs. Whatsit, but Mrs. Who tells them she is busy. Mrs. Who sends the children on their way, telling them that it is not time, but not to worry because they will not leave without them. The children do not understand much of what Mrs. Who has told them, but they go on their way.

### Scene 4

At the Murray house, Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin have just finished dinner and are washing the dishes. Calvin notices a photo of Meg's father, and inquires about him. Meg tells Calvin how he has been gone for five years on a top secret mission. At first he would write every day, then his letters stopped. The two are interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which and Charles Wallace, who announces that it is time to go find their father.

### Scene 5

A beam of light descends on Meg, Calvin, Charles Wallace, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit, and Mrs. Which. Meg finds herself all alone in darkness. When the lights finally come up, the six of them are standing in a sunny field in front of a mountain. Mrs. Whatsit tells the children that they have just traveled to the planet Uriel. The women tell the children that they have done so by "tessering," or traveling through a "wrinkle" in space and time. Mrs. Whatsit further reveals to the children that she and the other two ladies are not what they appear. She demonstrates this by changing herself into a half human, half horse creature. She takes the three children for a ride high up into the clouds where they can see the whole planet. The beautiful creatures of Uriel dance below them in an idyllic garden. Suddenly, a large black shadow begins to creep across the garden. Mrs. Whatsit brings the children back down to the same flowering field in which they had previously stood. Meg instinctively asks if this darkness is what her father is fighting. Mrs. Which tells Meg that her father is trapped behind this darkness on a planet that has already succumbed to it.



## Scene 6

The group tesser to a foggy planet in Orion's Belt where they meet the Happy Medium. She looks into her crystal ball and sees the Earth being covered by the Dark Thing. She reluctantly shows this image to the children after Mrs. Whatsit insists that they know what they are up against. This Dark Thing looks like a giant black cloud, and they learn that many planets have already succumbed to its power. Mrs. Which explains that this Dark Thing is pure evil, and its encroachment has been fought throughout history by many beings, including notable earthlings such as Jesus, da Vinci, Shakespeare, Bach, Einstein, and Gandhi. The women transport the children off to Camazotz where their father is being held captive. The women explain that they cannot accompany them to find their father, and impart a gift to each of the children. In addition to telling her to stay angry, Mrs. Who gives Meg a large, thick pair of spectacles.

## Scene 7

On the planet Camazotz everyone and everything looks and behaves identically. Children bounce balls in tandem to a steady, pulsing rhythm. One child bounces his ball out of synch, and is reprimanded by the others. The children find a building called CENTRAL Central Intelligence. Inside, they meet an eerie man with red eyes. He speaks to the children without moving his mouth, and he tries to hypnotize them by commanding them to look into his eyes. Charles Wallace believes he can stand up to the man, and looks into his eyes despite Meg's protests. Charles Wallace begins to emit a blue light, and when he speaks, his voice is that of the Man With Red Eyes. He tries to convince Meg and Calvin that the Man With Red Eyes is their friend, and that they should turn themselves over to him. Charles Wallace leads Meg and Calvin to a room where Mr. Murray is being held in a clear cylinder. Using Mrs. Who's glasses, Meg is able to gain entry into this cylinder. Mr. Murray cannot see Meg until she gives him the glasses to put on.

## Scene 8

Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murray follow Charles Wallace into a room where they see IT, a grotesquely large, living brain that emits a steady, pulsing beat. They try to resist IT's control by speaking out of synch with his steady beat, but they find it nearly impossible. Calvin orders that they tesser away immediately. The three find themselves on the planet Ixchel. Meg has been severely traumatized and is too weak to stand or speak. They are approached by three large, docile creatures with long tentacles and no visible eyes. Calvin tries to communicate their situation to the Beasts. One of them picks up Meg and carries her off to a place where

they dote on her and nurse her back to health. When Meg's health is restored, she admonishes her father for leaving Charles Wallace behind. Meg focuses her thoughts on Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Whatsit, and is able to summon the three ladies to Ixchel. The three maintain that they can do nothing more to save Charles Wallace from the control of IT. Meg realizes that she is the closest person in the world to Charles Wallace, and that only she can save him.

### Scene 9

Mrs. Which and Meg tesser to Camazotz, and Meg goes in search of Charles Wallace alone. She finds him in the room with IT, and he once again tries to convince her to give herself over. Meg declares that love is the one thing that IT does not have and tells Charles Wallace that she loves him. Charles Wallace suddenly breaks free from his trance and the two quickly tesser away, finding themselves reunited with their parents and Calvin back at their home.

*A Wrinkle in Time* deals with many universal themes, particularly the clash between good and evil and the supremacy of love. On a more personal level, the story deals with conformity, acceptance of one's flaws and family relationships.

The protagonist of the story, Meg Murray, is presented as an awkward and troubled adolescent. She wears glasses and braces and finds herself repulsive, especially compared to her beautiful and gifted mother. Meg is picked on by her classmates and does not get along with her teachers, but she is not blameless in the matter. Meg is stubborn, defensive and quick to anger. She is also disinterested in school and does not apply herself to her studies. Meg is a very relatable character for most adolescents who often have negative feelings about their physical appearance and have adversarial relationships with adult authority figures.

Contrasts play an important role in shaping the important themes in the story. There are the contrasts between the characters representing good -- the Murray family, Calvin, the three ladies, and the Beasts, and those representing evil -- the Man With Red Eyes, IT and Mr. Jenkins. Characters are either cast in one light or the other, and there is no ambiguity. This theme also appears within individual characters. Meg's mother chides her for always seeing things in black and white, and she encourages her to learn moderation and find a "happy medium." Contrast between extremes is also demonstrated by the planets Earth and Camazotz. On Earth, Meg wants to conform and be just like her classmates. However, once she travels to Camazotz and sees firsthand the horror of a homogenous society that shares a common mind, she learns to be more accepting of her own faults. The story also celebrates the creativity of individuals by naming historical figures such as Jesus, da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, Einstein and Gandhi as fellow soldiers in the battle against evil. It is not surprising that all of these individuals promoted beliefs that, in their own time, were considered radical or ran counter to those that were generally accepted.

The story also explores elements of the family relationship and the transcendent power of love. Throughout the story, whenever Meg has moments of self-doubt, she reassures herself by thinking of how much she knows her mother loves her, and how strongly she loves her brother, Charles Wallace. When her father fails to save Charles Wallace on Camazotz, Meg is initially furious with him. In the years of his absence, Meg had elevated her father to the status of a superhero in her own mind. When he makes a mistake, Meg's image of him is shattered. Meg later apologizes when she realizes that he is a fallible creature, just like her. Love's ability to conquer all is depicted by the final

scene in which Meg is able to free her brother from the clutches of an evil brain by declaring her unconditional love for him.

This story explores universal themes such as good and evil, the power of love and family relationships. This story also explores the personal growth of the adolescent protagonist, Meg. Throughout the journey, Meg must learn to rely on herself and embrace her faults if she is to succeed with the rescue of her father. Although the themes presented are universal, the story does contain some scientific language and descriptions that might be too sophisticated for younger elementary school children. The frequent shifts in space and time might also prove confusing for younger audience members. It is for this reason that the recommended audience for this opera is children in grades 5-8. Older children who are already familiar with the story will be delighted to see the characters and creatures they have read about come to life on the stage.

### Musical Features

Although Larsen's score is enhanced by the addition of modern elements, such as the use of synthesizers and tape effects, she retains the form of traditional opera by using clear examples of aria, recitative and ensemble singing. There are no key signatures, and the meter is varied. There is no overture, but Larsen does begin the opera with a prologue in which we see Mr. Murray tessering. This action is accompanied by timed tape effects and the adult chorus singing the syllable, "ah," with no notated pitches, creating a cacophony.

The first scene presents the vocal style that comprises much of the opera. The style is conversational, falling somewhere between recitative and more florid singing. Characters speaking to one another often have vocal lines that overlap slightly, so that the

singing is continuous, which makes the music sound even more like spoken conversation (Example 5.1).

**Example 5.1, *A Wrinkle In Time*, vocal style, p. 82, mm. 1-4**

423 Very freely, recitative

Meg: What do I know?

Chr: Tell me a-bouthin', Meg

Cal: fame-ly Aren't you two the Murry kids?

425

Meg: He's a couple of grades a-bore me

Chr: Tell us what you're do-ing here

Cal: What is this? ... Aren't

Pno: mf stop pizz.

Music critic Daniel Webster wrote a description of Larsen's music that is particularly apt, stating, "Its clear textures, easily absorbed rhythms and appealing melodic contours make singing seem the most natural expression imaginable."<sup>131</sup> Short arias develop naturally out of more conversational passages. In the first scene, for instance, Meg and Charles Wallace sing back and forth while making hot cocoa. Meg digresses into a brief, reflective aria when the subject turns to their father (Example 5.2).

<sup>131</sup> Daniel Webster, "Wrinkle in Time at Playhouse Premiered by Opera Delaware," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 1992.

**Example 5.2, *A Wrinkle In Time*, “Aria,” p. 11, mm. 1-8**

The musical score for Example 5.2, "Aria," p. 11, mm. 1-8, is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled Meg, Perc, Synth, and Pno. The Meg staff contains the vocal melody with lyrics: "Lan-terns in the sky! Light-ing the way for the an-gels, and for the child-ren," and "and for all peo-ple who are search-ing for hea-ven!". The Perc staff includes dynamic markings like *P* and *mp*. The Synth staff has a handwritten instruction: *Poco agitato (poco a poco accel. to III.)*. The Pno staff features a forte (*f*) marking and a *Meno Mosso* section. The score is numbered 11 at the bottom.

The melody is tonal and the accompaniment is generally sparse to allow the voice to stand out. Meg and Charles Wallace’s mother sings a similarly reflective aria when the children have gone off to the home of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which. Alone in her laboratory, she laments over not knowing the whereabouts of her husband.

The rhythmic, school yard taunting of Meg’s classmates (Example 5.3a) foreshadows the music that accompanies the residents of the planet Camazotz (Example 5.3b). At first, Meg wishes she could pretend to be just like everybody else, but after

seeing conformity taken to such an extreme as on Camazotz, Meg happily embraces her faults.

**Example 5.3a, *A Wrinkle In Time*, “Taunting,” p. 15, mm. 1-4**

The musical score is arranged in seven staves. The first staff, labeled 'Meg', contains whole rests. The second staff, labeled 'Children', features a melody with lyrics: 'Meg, Meg, Meg, Mur-ry! Quick come and hur-ry! Lis-ten to her wor-ry!'. The third staff, labeled 'Woman and Man', continues the melody with lyrics: '(b) unat-trac-tive girl and the ba-by boy cer-tain-ly aren't all there'. The fourth staff, labeled 'Tape', contains whole rests. The fifth staff, labeled 'Perc', shows a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 3 with a *pp* dynamic marking. The sixth staff, labeled 'Synth', contains whole rests. The seventh staff, labeled 'Pno', shows a piano accompaniment with a 'Tpt. consort' annotation above the first measure.

Example 5.3b, *A Wrinkle In Time*, "Camazotz," p. 171, mm. 1-16

93  $\text{♩} = 120$  Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin enter the town on Camazotz. Each  
There are identical houses, on identical streets. Identical yards.

High, low woodblock *sim.* *guero ff*

94  $\text{♩} = 120$

Runch A 25 A 25

A whistle sounds. The doors open. Identical business people  
kiss their spouses goodbye and leave for work.  
The spouses return inside and shut the identical front doors.

94 *guero ff* *sim.*

95 *step-pick* *paper* *guero ff*

stop *ff* *ff*



This is not the only instance of musical foreshadowing. In Scene 2, Meg gets into a fight and is sent to the Principal's office. It is clear that the Principal is losing patience with Meg, since she is frequently getting into trouble (Example 5.4a). He sings a rhythmically accented melody which is fairly static apart from frequent leaps of a sixth.

**Example 5.4a, *A Wrinkle In Time*, “Principal Jenkins,” p. 69, mm. 1-4**

The musical score for Example 5.4a, "Principal Jenkins," from *A Wrinkle In Time*, measures 1-4. The score is written for a vocal soloist (Mr. J.), percussion (Perc), piano (Pno.), and a character (Meg). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody for Mr. J. is characterized by frequent leaps of a sixth. The lyrics are: "up with your grade if you ap-ply your-self, but some of your teach-ers are not" and "You could do your home-work, Mar-gar-et. Is some-thing both-er-ing you? are you us-bep-py-atho". The score includes a section marked "Secco" and "fl. P" (flute, piano) and "Vac. Cb. P" (vacuum cleaner, piano).

This same melody appears on the planet Camazotz, sung through Charles Wallace's body by the Man With Red Eyes (Example 5.4b). He even sings the same words as the Principal, calling Meg "a belligerent, uncooperative child."

**Example 5.4b, *A Wrinkle In Time*, “Man With Red Eyes,” p. 205, mm. 1-4**

Jeffrey

1234

Charles Wallace has been absorbed by the Man With Red Eyes. Charles cannot speak with his own voice. When he tries, his voice is the voice of the Man With Red Eyes.

(can be sung with feedback microphone)

Tam-tam

Timp

4

ch

A27

harp con. solo

stgs.

stgs.

The music of the three eccentric ladies, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which is cast in a much more dramatic, and stylized manner than the Murray family. This helps to clarify that they are, in fact, celestial creatures. The three women are characterized by angular vocal lines, and the frequent use of melismatic passages (Example 5.5). Again the accompaniment is sparse, with only repeated sixteenth notes in the percussion, and brief flourishes from the woodwinds which imitate the vocal line.

**Example 5.5, *A Wrinkle In Time*, “Mrs. Which,” p. 60, mm. 1-8**

The image displays a musical score for the vocal line of Mrs. Which and the piano accompaniment. The score is written for Mrs. Which (Vocal), Percussion (Perc), Synthesizer (Synth), and Piano (Pno). The tempo is marked as 40 beats per minute (♩ = 40). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The vocal line begins with the lyrics "nights, Wild nights are my" and includes a handwritten note "Sust. High har". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and duplets. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system covering measures 1-4 and the second system covering measures 5-8. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "glo-ry, wild nights" and includes a handwritten note "sub pp". The piano accompaniment continues with a complex rhythmic pattern, including a handwritten note "f" and a dynamic marking "p".

Rhythm is one of the most interesting features in the score. Throughout the opera there is frequent opposition between duple and triple meter, and repeated use of triplets and duplets. This adds rhythmic variety to the vocal lines, and also serves as a musical depiction of the contrasts that are so prevalent in the text. Another interesting feature of the rhythm is the regular pulse that is associated with the people of Camazotz and IT. In the penultimate scene, Meg and Calvin have to resist turning themselves over to IT by not giving in to this persistent beat. They attempt to keep it out of their heads by repeating

words out of rhythm with IT's pulse (Example 5.6). Mr. Murray tells them not to repeat a nursery rhyme, as it is inherently rhythmic, so Meg begins to recite the Gettysburg Address, instead.

**Example 5.6, *A Wrinkle In Time*, "IT's Chant," p. 243, mm. 1-4**

inkle in Time/Larsen

379 *ff*

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth...

*f*

No! Too rhyth-mic!

five and one times six is six and one times seven is seven and one times

## Conclusions

Despite the use of modern instruments and effects, Libby Larsen's opera is very traditional in form. There are examples of recitative, arioso singing, ensembles, and arias. The aria texts reflect on emotions or events, and the plot is generally advanced through recitative, or short, melodic passages sung in a conversational style.

Although Larsen does not use a key signature, the music is tonal throughout, with clear cut melodic lines. The accompaniment is sparse, which allows the voices to stand out. Much of the recitative is sung unaccompanied or over sustained chords. Typically, the accompaniment consists of sustained chords, or, in some cases, doubles the vocal line. The orchestra is used in a secondary role and is more active in the interludes between sung passages. The use of the synthesizer is particularly notable, because it effectively establishes a mood by creating eerie, electronic sounds. These unfamiliar noises create a sense of foreboding when the children are about to go into dangerous situations, such as when they first encounter IT.

Larsen imbues the text with much rhythmic variety. There is a frequent opposition between duple and triple divisions of the beat, which adds a lilting feel to the music and helps to propel the action forward because the music never becomes predictable. The push and pull of the rhythm also adds to the conversational style of the vocal lines. Instead of being strictly metered and regular, the lines have flexibility, which more closely resembles human speech. The melodies are original, and there are a few examples of repetition when the composer seeks to draw musical parallels between certain characters or situations.

The roles of Meg and Calvin can be sung by musically mature high school students or young adults. The role of Charles Wallace is apt for a young, male soprano.

Although the part is melodically simple and set within the range of a sixth, from f<sup>i</sup> to c<sup>ii</sup>, the rhythm is challenging and must be sung properly in order to resemble speech patterns. There is a chorus, which could be comprised of a combination of adults and children.

Of the four operas included in this study, Larsen's is the most traditional in form, with recitative, aria, and ensemble numbers fully realized throughout. To this traditional style, Larsen has added a distinctly modern flair with the use of synthesizers, tape effects, and a lushly chromatic, yet tonal, score.

The most successful feature of Larsen's opera is her skillful vocal writing, which uses three distinct styles to delineate the major characters of the opera. For the human characters of Meg, Charles Wallace, Calvin, and Mr. and Mrs. Murray, Larsen uses a vocal style similar to that of Menotti's, in which chromatic declamatory passages develop into brief arias that are more stable, both tonally and rhythmically. The declamatory passages unfold naturally in a conversational manner. Although highly chromatic at times, these passages are not overly dissonant or atonal. This demonstrates what Mary Ann Feldman describes as Larsen's "liberated tonality, without harsh dissonance, and pervading lyricism."<sup>132</sup> Larsen also uses rhythm to further define the characters. The vocal lines for the human characters avoid the use of regular rhythmic patterns or accents, and there are frequent alternations between duple and triple meters. This lack of metric regularity gives freedom to the vocal line and more closely emulates natural speech patterns.

The celestial characters, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which and Mrs. Whatsit are characterized by highly stylized vocal lines, which are more traditionally operatic in

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<sup>132</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Libby Larsen," accessed April 23, 2010; <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

sound than the conversational lines of the human characters. The writing for these parts features lengthy melismas in the solo passages, as well as the use of traditional, three-part harmonies in the ensemble sections. In addition to using functional harmony, these ensemble sections feature more regularly metered rhythms and the use of melodic sequences to vary the vocal line.

Finally, Larsen distinguishes the evil characters in the story with a third, distinct style, which is characterized by incessant repetition of the melodies and rhythms. Meg's schoolyard detractors as well as the inhabitants of Camazotz are characterized by repetitive melodies with regular rhythmic accents, which repeat over and over without variation. Similarly, Meg's principal and the Man With Red Eyes sing a recurring melody that is built around the interval of a minor sixth.<sup>133</sup> In both of these instances, dominant male characters are attempting to get Meg to conform to their own standards of normalcy against her will. In both situations, rhythmic counting is also a feature of the vocal line. The principal uses counting as a relaxation technique, while the inhabitants of Camazotz use it to attempt to hypnotize outsiders. Larsen's use of three different musical styles in the score delineates the characters musically and also illustrates links between parallel characters and situations.

The weakest feature of the opera is the inclusion of several lengthy ensemble numbers which are reflective in nature, and do not further the plot. A typical feature of traditional opera is the alternation of recitative passages in which the plot develops, and arias, where characters reflect on their feelings or a particular situation. Composers of children's operas often choose to limit the length and frequency of reflective passages so

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<sup>133</sup> Larsen, *A Wrinkle in Time*, 67-72, 236-250.

that the children will not lose interest and become bored.<sup>134</sup> Much of the libretto is balanced between scenes where the plot is advanced, and those where no new information is introduced, and characters reflect on their feelings or on past situations. However, there are several situations in which the reflective scenes outweigh the surrounding action scenes. This occurs notably in Scene Three when the children visit the women at their home, and again in Scene Five when the group is looking down on the planet Uriel. In both of these scenes, the characters are speaking in quotations, both literary and Biblical, which do nothing to advance the plot. When comparing them to the rest of the opera, an audience that is unfamiliar with the source material will find these scenes out of place and dramatically static.

*A Wrinkle in Time* is sophisticated literature for young-adults, filled with symbolism and subtext. Larsen manages to cover most of the significant events in the story in an hour-long opera, but some important aspects had to be pared down in order to fit into the allotted time. Children who have studied the novel will have no trouble following along with the action, and will find that the music and live action enhance the images described in the original text. Larsen's score brings to life the important themes of love, acceptance of one's flaws, and the eternal battle between good and evil forces.

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<sup>134</sup> Malone, "Opera For America Youth", 272.



## Chapter 6: *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey* by Evelyn Swensson

The world premiere of *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey* took place on March 7, 1998 at the Grand Opera House and featured a cast of forty-four and a children's choir with twenty-two voices. Evelyn Swensson conducted nine performances to packed houses. The thirty-piece orchestra included members of the Renaissance music group *Piffaro*, who performed on authentic period instruments. Brian Jaques, author of the original novel, *Redwall*, traveled from England to attend the world premiere. Jaques, who had previously declined offers from Sony to use his characters in a video game, was enthusiastic when Swensson contacted him about adapting his opera into a novel. Jaques explained his decision by saying, "If I am to leave footprints in the sands of time, I want them to be true quality."<sup>135</sup>

### Cast

Matthias, child soprano  
Abbot, baritone  
Constance, mezzo soprano  
Methuselah, non singing  
Brother Alf, tenor  
Basil, tenor  
Sister Clemence, soprano  
Hugo, tenor  
Jess, mezzo soprano  
Warbeak, soprano  
Julian, baritone  
Captain Snow, baritone  
Cluny the Scourge, bass baritone  
Sela, mezzo soprano

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<sup>135</sup> Caryl E. Huffaker, "*The Legend of Redwall Abbey*- a wondrous children's opera," *Kennet Paper* 19 March, 1998.

Chickenhound, tenor  
Foremole, bass  
Voice of Asmodeus, an adder

### Synopsis<sup>136</sup>

Evelyn Swensson's libretto was adapted from Brian Jaques's 1988 novel *Redwall*. This wildly popular book is the first in a series that now includes twenty novels, a graphic novel, and a series of three picture books.<sup>137</sup> The action takes place in Redwall Abbey, a place filled with peace-loving mice, badgers, squirrels and other animals. The Order of Redwall was founded after the arrival of Martin, a great warrior mouse whose ancient sword is revered throughout the land. Martin led a valiant effort to repel invading foxes, vermin and wildcats from the Abbey against great odds, but was severely injured in battle. The Founders of the Abbey nursed him back to health, and Martin underwent a "mouse miracle"<sup>138</sup> and renounced the life of a warrior. This miracle led the Founders of Redwall to base their order upon healing the sick and injured and never harming another creature unless the Abbey would be under attack.

### ACT 1: Scene 1

The curtain opens to the Great Hall of Redwall Abbey, where the tapestry of Martin the Warrior serves as the backdrop. The creatures of Redwall are gathering for a great feast to celebrate the silver anniversary of Brother Methuselah. The brothers and sisters of Redwall introduce themselves and present the Legend of Martin the Warrior and the founding of Redwall Abbey. The feast begins, but is quickly interrupted by the arrival of Sister Clemence who alerts the creatures to the arrival of Cluny the Scourge and his evil minions to Mossflower Woods.

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<sup>136</sup> Evelyn Swensson, *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey*, (Woodstock, IL: Dramatic Publishing, 1999).

<sup>137</sup> Redwall Abbey, accessed January 27, 2010; <http://www.redwall.org>

<sup>138</sup> Brian Jaques, *Redwall* (New York: Firebird, 1986) 15.

## Scene 2

The rat soldiers arrive at the abandoned Church of St. Ninian and decide to set up camp until better accommodations can be found. Cluny orders the soldiers to round up local rats to serve him and kill any that do not cooperate. Cluny takes a nap and has a vivid nightmare in which Martin the Warrior is approaching him with a giant sword. He is awoken by the return of the rats and the new recruits. Cluny and Redtooth lead the march towards Redwall Abbey.

## Scene 3

Matthias and Constance Badger are guarding the gate at Redwall Abbey when Cluny and his army approach. Constance permits only Cluny and Redtooth to enter and speak to the Abbot. Cluny reads the Abbot the terms under which he expects the mice to surrender. He wavers only when he sees the tapestry of Martin the Warrior and is reminded of his dream. Cluny offers to give the Abbot one day to decide if they will surrender, and then leaves.

## Scene 4

Cluny meets with his spy, Shadow, near the gate of the Abbey. He asks Shadow to slip into the Great Hall and steal the tapestry of Martin the Warrior. Finding the sentry mice asleep at their posts Shadow easily enters the Abbey. Matthias is awoken by a distant voice saying, "Help me Matthias, don't let them take me." Believing it to be the voice of Martin the Warrior, Matthias runs to the great hall and interrupts the robbery. Constance Badger and Mr. and Mrs. Churchmouse join the chase. Mr. Churchmouse is stabbed and Constance delivers a mighty blow to Shadow's chin. Lurking in the shadows, Cluny grabs the tapestry from Shadow's paw and absconds, leaving his injured soldier behind.

## Scene 5

Matthias follows after Cluny and hides in Mossflower Wood. Cluny's army has captured a family of voles, and Matthias sees them tied up and being guarded by rats. He meets Basil Stag Hare, who agrees to help create a diversion so that Matthias can rescue the voles. Matthias and Basil complete the rescue, and Matthias returns to Redwall.

## Scene 6

Matthias finds Methuselah in the Great Hall. He has discovered a riddle written on the wall behind the tapestry that reads, "Who says that I am dead knows naught at all. I am that is, two mice within Redwall. The warrior sleeps twixt hall and cavern hole. I am that is take on my mighty role. Look for the sword in moonlight streaming forth at night when day's first hour reflects the north. From o'er the threshold seek and you will see, I am that is my sword will wield for me." Methuselah and Constance notice that "I am that is" is the letters in "Matthias" rearranged and believe that Martin foresaw the birth of Matthias and knew that he would be called on to defend the Abbey. Calling on the help of the moles, the group discovers a secret tunnel that leads to the tomb of Martin the Warrior deep inside the Abbey. There they find another riddle, "By the moonlight on the hour. Watch the beam reflect my power, I am that is stand true and tall oh warrior mouse, protect Redwall." Matthias deduces that he must use Martin's shield to reflect the moonlight, which will point the way to his sword.

## Scene 7

Sela the fox arrives at St. Ninian's to bring healing herbs to Cluny and his forces. Sela is a spy who gives word to her son, Chickenhound, when and where Cluny's forces will attack. She asks him to deliver a message to Redwall that she will tell them Cluny's secrets, but for a price.

## Scene 8

Chickenhound is met at the gate by Constance. He tells her he has information for sale and Constance yanks the note from his hand and threatens him with a stick when he asks for his reward. Chickenhound retreats, but tells the badger that she will pay for her actions.

## Scene 9

Matthias inserts the shield into a hole cut out of the bell tower, and it reflects the moonlight to the weathervane on the top of the tower. The group decides that the sword must be on the roof. The agile Jess Squirrel volunteers to climb up to retrieve it. She makes it to the top, but is attacked by a flock of sparrows. Jess manages to escape, and when she comes down, she tells the group that the sword was not there. Constance finds an injured sparrow named Warbeak. She is hostile at first, but Matthias bribes her with candied nuts, and she agrees to take him to meet

the sparrow king, Bull Sparra. The scene ends with the sound of Cluny and his army approaching offstage.

## ACT 2: Scene 1

Matthias and Warbeak enter the Sparrow Court. The mad sparrow king wants to kill Matthias, but Warbeak persuades him not to. Matthias is taken prisoner. Matthias meets Warbeak's mother, Dunwing, who tells him the story of an older sparrow king who once stole a sword from the mice and brandished it on his wing. The mad Bull Sparra stole the sword from the king and took it to hunt in the woods. He was approached by Asmodeus the snake and dropped the sword in fear, and it was retrieved by the serpent. The sparrow king was killed in the attempt to save Bull Sparra from Asmodeus, and Bull Sparra seized power.

## Scene 2

Jess and Basil go to St. Ninian's to retrieve the tapestry. The rats have the on a pole, and Basil creates a distraction so that Jess can steal it back. She meets up with Basil, who gives her a decoy banner, and he runs back to Redwall with the tapestry. She tricks the rats into following her by offering them the fake tapestry. They promise not to hurt her family if she returns the banner, which she gives them. Jess disappears by the time the rats realize they have been tricked.

## Scene 3

Dunwing has let Matthias escape, but he is attacked by the sparrow king as he climbs down from the Abbey roof. Matthias and Bull Sparra tumble off of the roof and land in the pond. The great fall kills the sparrow king, but Matthias escapes with only a few bumps and bruises. He is rescued by Constance and taken to the infirmary.

## Scene 4

Chickenhound is seen running from the Abbey with a bag of stolen items. He declares that he has killed Brother Methuselah, who tried to stop him from robbing the Abbey, and he takes off into Mossflower wood.

### Scene 5

Matthias and Basil are resting in the infirmary. The Abbot gives Matthias the news of Methuselah's death. After the Abbot leaves Matthias tells Basil what he has learned from the sparrows and his intent to find Asmodeus. Basil tells Matthias where to find Captain Snow, an owl, who Basil believes can help Matthias find the snake. He also gives Matthias a medal that Captain Snow awarded to him for bravery to ensure that the Captain will not eat Matthias on sight. Matthias sneaks out of the Abbey.

### Scene 6

Matthias is walking through Mossflower Woods when he meets a group of shrews. After a brief debate over whether or not the shrews should allow Matthias to pass through their territory, the shrews concede and agree to accompany him to find Captain Snow.

### Scene 7

Matthias makes his way to a barn where he is greeted by Julian, a large ginger cat who, luckily, has no taste for mice. Julian tells Matthias that he used to be good friends with Captain Snow, but that they had a terrible fight. Julian tells Matthias where Captain Snow can be found. As Matthias leaves the barn, Captain Snow swoops down at him. Matthias waves the medal and calls for a truce. Captain Snow tells him the way to Asmodeus's cave, but bets the mice that he will not survive a confrontation. Matthias makes Captain Snow agree to never eat another mouse or shrew if he is able to regain the sword.

### Scene 8

Matthias arrives at the cave of Asmodeus, where he is surprised to find that the shrews have decided to accompany him. Matthias and the shrews split up and take different tunnels and Matthias quickly locates the sword. One of the shrews starts to make noise, which awakened Asmodeus. The cave is filled with confusing tunnels, and Matthias is quickly trapped. Hypnotized by the serpent's evil gaze, Matthias nearly succumbs to the snake, but he is encouraged by the voice of Martin the Warrior, who tells him to pick up the sword and strike. Matthias does what he is told and defeats the serpent.

### Scene 9

Matthias returns to the barn to give Julian and Captain Snow the good news. Captain Snow agrees to make good on his bet, and Matthias encourages the cat and owl to reconcile as friends. Warbeak arrives to tell Matthias that Cluny has attacked Redwall. She announces that she is queen now that the sparrow king is dead. She offers the sparrow forces to help in defense of the Abbey. The shrews offer their help as well and the group makes haste back to Redwall.

### Scene 10

Cluny is standing before the Abbot, demanding that he kneel or be killed. Matthias arrives and tells Cluny that it is his destiny to slay him. Matthias and Cluny battle, and Matthias retreats up the stairs to the bell tower. Cluny takes a hostage and demands that Matthias surrender. Instead, Matthias cuts the ropes to the Joseph Bell, and it falls on Cluny, killing him. The rats retreat, but the Abbot has been badly injured. His dying instructions are that Matthias should not enter the order as a brother, but serve as Warrior Mouse of Redwall to defend the Abbey from evil.

Condensing Jaques's 350-page novel into a ninety-minute opera is not an easy task, and several aspects of the story are omitted in order to fit into the time constraints. The essence of the tale is a clash between good and evil forces. Jaques structured his novel by chapters which alternate between the actions of the creatures of Redwall and those of Cluny and his army. Each chapter ends with a cliffhanger, which heightens the drama of the story and also casts the actions of the two camps in stark contrast with one another, highlighting the good versus evil dichotomy. Swensson retains this alternating structure in her libretto. This structure does not prove to be as effective when translated to the stage, and some transitions feel forced or abrupt. It is easy to imagine younger audience members or those unfamiliar with the story becoming confused by the constant shifts in the action. This structure does help to keep the story constantly moving, and scenes are appropriately short to hold the attention of a young audience.

By casting the hero, Matthias, as an adolescent mouse, Jaques is making the protagonist more relatable to his target audience. Matthias's character in the opera does not undergo the same personal transformation as he does in the novel, however. In Jaques's novel, Matthias is described as a "young buffoon of a mouse"<sup>139</sup> who wants desperately to be accepted as a brother in the order of Redwall. It is only through the unraveling of the riddles of Martin the Warrior that Matthias becomes aware of his destiny, and that his self-confidence grows. By eliminating this growth from the opera, the composer somewhat diminished Matthias's reliability to the audience as a hero who has obvious flaws and self-doubt is somewhat diminished. An appealing aspect that is retained in the opera is the fact that heroic acts are performed by both male and female characters. Although males outnumber the females at Redwall Abbey, the heroism of Constance Badger and Jess Squirrel are particularly noteworthy.

Another aspect that comes off as a bit awkward in the stage version is the handling of the riddles of Martin the Warrior. In the novel, these clues are discovered and solved slowly over time. Because of the condensed format of the opera, this happens almost immediately. In the book, these clues, along with Matthias's gradual transformation, foreshadow that he will become the next Warrior Mouse. In the opera, however, the audience is expected to accept this information simply by having it told to them. Older schoolchildren may have difficulty believing this. Also, by not giving the audience a chance to try and solve the riddles on their own, a key educational aspect from Jaques's text is removed.

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<sup>139</sup> Brian Jaques, *Redwall* (New York: Firebird, 1986), 13.



## Musical Features

Swensson's score combines a broad variety of musical styles to depict the diverse creatures that populate the world of Redwall Abbey, ranging from American musical theatre to plainchant. Most of the songs are short, and there are examples of solo arias, duets, ensemble singing and dance interludes. The melodies are simple and memorable and the melodic range is fairly narrow; rarely exceeding one octave. The use of repetition is important in keeping the audience oriented amidst the constant action, and certain motives appear and reappear multiple times throughout the opera. The structure of this opera is more traditional in nature, with large ensemble numbers and even dance interludes. Although the running time is longer than both of the previously discussed operas, the on-stage action depicts the type of pageantry typically associated with grand opera. Swensson structures *Redwall* as a "numbers" opera, in which distinct scenes of varied and often dramatically different musical styles are connected through spoken dialogue, which serves to elucidate the plot. While there is a medieval feel to certain parts of the score, there is not one prevailing musical style. There are some examples of chant, hymns, sea shanties and marches. The music is tonal, and harmony and accompaniment are simple.

Melody is the primary means by which musical and dramatic clarity is achieved throughout the score. Each of the main characters sings an aria or portion of an ensemble song which clearly delineates their personality musically, while also expressing it in the text. The creatures of Redwall are painted with stately, diatonic melodies with a narrow melodic range and mostly static accompaniment. Sustained accompanimental figures of open fourths and fifths predominate in the music associated with Redwall, thus evoking a medieval tonality.

**Example 6.1, *Redwall*, “Overture,” p. 1, mm. 1-9**

The bass accompaniment is static, with open fifths moving in octaves and maintaining the medieval sound by avoiding triadic harmony. A churchlike atmosphere is also evoked in the repeated sounding of the chimes.

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Brother Alf and Matthias. This song also introduces important thematic material that will be associated with the Abbey throughout the opera. The chorus begins in the key of F major and the opening verse is sung by the brothers. The melody is mostly stepwise, with no leaps larger than a fourth. The range is one octave,  $e^{bi}$  to  $e^{bii}$ . The brothers' opening lines alternate between F major and F Lydian with the occasional raised fourth degree. The main source of interest in this song is the harmonic progression by fourths. Before the entrance of each new singer, the key modulates to the subdominant. The harmonic progression of the song is as follows: F major -  $B^b$  major -  $E^b$  major -  $A^b$  major -  $D^b$  major -  $G^b$  major - C major - F major. Measures eighty-eight through ninety have the progression  $G^b$ -D-G-C. The  $G^b$  chord resolves to D, the secondary dominant of the destination key of C major. This modulation sets up the first entrance of Matthias, the mouse who is destined to become the hero of the opera.

Example 6.2, *Redwall*, “Brothers of Redwall,” p. 12, mm. 1-23

19 live a life that by our-selves we nev-er could af-ford. 23 All Al-le-lu-ia! 24 Brothers We

25 bake our bread in the ov-ens and make our cand-les of wax. 29 And grow our food in the gard-ens and

31 sew our hab-its of flax. 33 All Al-le-lu-ia! 35 Alf I am Bro-ther Alf, as-

37 sis-tant to the Ab-bot. 39 I preach and teach, give help to each, and wash the Ab-bot's

The stately introduction to the founding of the order of Redwall Abbey is sung by the Abbot (Example 6.3a). This song is tonal and sung in the key of D major. Again, the range is very narrow, with most of the melody falling within the range of a major sixth. The only area of harmonic tension occurs when Brother Alf interjects to tell the story of

how Martin the Warrior nearly lost his life defending the Abbey (Example 6.3b). One of the most important characteristics of the inhabitants of Redwall Abbey is their fantastic culinary skills. So it is appropriate that when Friar Hugo is telling the brothers about the celebratory feast he has prepared, his description of the main course is treated with a hymn-like reverence (example 6.3c).

**Example 6.3a, *Redwall*, “The Legend,” p. 21, mm. 1-6**

Abbot

Red-wall Ab-bey is a place of peace, in Mar-tin's time it was not so. He fought man-y fox-es and a great wild cat. But

**Example 6.3b, *Redwall*, “The Legend,” p. 22, mm. 1-6**

Brother Alf

that was ver-y long a-go. Mar-tin the war-rior wound-ed in the war lay bleed-ing, dy-ing in the snow. The

19 J. = J

*Id #1*

*Id #2*

*Local*

Hugo: "My piece de resistance."

Gray - ling a la — Red - wall, baked in Goose - ber - ry wine —

*Piano*

A (Trumpets)

*Id #1*

*Id #2*

*Local*

Mint and ho - ney and beech - nuts, too. - This dish will be di - vine! — vine! — Let us say the grace. Then Hu - go may serve his

*Piano*

#4A The Grace

Abbott

F# E A B C# A/C# D A E A/E E A A

Sela the Fox's gypsy song is the only example of melismatic singing (Example 6.5) in the entire opera. While singing of healing herbs and potions, her vocal flourishes convey the exoticism of her character. Sela's aria also features some of the most rhythmically active accompaniment in the opera. The open fifths in the bass repeat an insistent, ostinato figure.

Example 6.4, *Redwall*, "Cluny," p. 68, mm. 1-17

1 2 Rats 3 4 5

Clun - y, Clun - y, Clun - y the scourge. A ruth - less rat from the sea. A

6 7 8 9 10 11

most un-scrup-u-lous scound-rel. His vic-tims all a-gree! Clun - y is the law!

Gmi Dmi Bb Gmi A Dmi C Dmi

12 13 14 15 16 17

Clun - y says to kill! We must o-bey the law and so our ans- wer is: We will!

C Dmi Gmi Dmi A7 Dmi

*ff*

**Example 6.5, *Redwall*, “I am Sela,” p. 57, mm. 1-18**

The musical score is for the song "I am Sela" from the opera *Redwall*, measures 1-18. It is written for a vocal soloist and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked  $J = 130$ . The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The piano accompaniment is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The vocal line includes lyrics and melodic notation. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The lyrics are: "La la la la la la la la la la. La la la la la la la la la la. I am Se - la, gyp - sy heal - er. My mag - ic spell. Will make you well. La la la la la la la la la la." The score is numbered 1 through 18, corresponding to the measures.

Along with the use of distinct melodies, Swensson employs repetition of themes to keep structure amidst all the action. The “Legend” theme appears twice in Act I and is sung again in the finale. Cluny’s theme appears three times in Act I and once in Act II. The opposition of these two themes plays out musically in much the same way as Jaques’s use of short, alternating chapters, casting the two camps in stark opposition to one another while propelling the action forward. The most frequently repeated motive in the opera is that of Martin the Warrior’s ghost, which also appears when Matthias and the others discover Martin’s riddle (Example 6.6). This motive appears a total of six times.



The first occurrence is when Cluny lays down to nap and has a nightmare about a mouse with a giant sword coming after him. It appears again when Cluny first sees the tapestry of Martin the Warrior. The same motive is used to signify Martin's presence when Methuselah discovers the scroll, which leads them deep inside the Abbey to find Martin's tomb. The motive consists of stacked minor seventh chords on top of a major triad, whose roots are separated by a semitone. The minor seventh chords descend by a half step, while the major triads ascend by the same interval, so there is an unceasing clash. The first three appearances all span nine measures and follow the progression  $Dm^7/E^b$  -  $E^b m^7/E$  -  $Em^7/F$  -  $Fm^7/F^\sharp$  -  $F^\sharp m^7/G$  -  $Fm^7/F^\sharp$ . The harmonic rhythm changes every measure at first, but the fourth chord is sustained over three measures and the fifth over two. The rhythm changes to a more insistent pattern of eighth notes followed by triplet eighths.

**Example 6.6, *Redwall*, "Martin's Ghost," p. 39, mm. 1-9**

The musical score for Example 6.6, "Martin's Ghost," measures 1-9, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1 through 5, and the second system covers measures 6 through 9. The music is written for piano in 4/4 time. The harmonic structure is characterized by stacked minor seventh chords on top of major triads, with roots separated by a semitone. The chords progress as follows:  $Dm^7/E^b$ ,  $E^b m^7/E$ ,  $Em^7/F$ ,  $Fm^7/F^\sharp$ , and  $F^\sharp m^7/G$ . The harmonic rhythm changes every measure at first, but the fourth chord is sustained over three measures and the fifth over two. The rhythm changes to a more insistent pattern of eighth notes followed by triplet eighths. The score includes dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte).

## Conclusions

Melody and repetition are the two most important musical means used by Swensson to convey the story. Melody helps to delineate characters musically while the repetition of certain musical motives or melodies throughout the opera provides familiarity for the audience. This musical repetition also helps the audience to keep track of the plot, despite rapid shifts in both action and location. The texts of the majority of the ensemble singing are purely reflective or instructive in nature and do not advance the action. By contrast, the majority of the solo singing has dramatic purpose and reveals key elements of the plot. The alternation between short solo passages that tell the story and memorable, reflective ensemble numbers again helps to keep the audience abreast of all of the action.

Most of the singing occurs in the middle of the vocal register, and the ranges of the vocal parts are kept relatively narrow, most within an octave. The text is set syllabically and follows natural stress patterns of speech. The majority of the music is diatonic with infrequent modulations to closely related keys, particularly the subdominant. The accompaniment is largely static, often sustained fifths in the bass. The predominant use of open fifths in the bass and avoidance of triadic harmony reinforces the medieval sound that is established in the Overture. The opera is scored for chamber orchestra, and the use of period instruments is optional, but encouraged since it enhances the early music timbre evoked earlier in the score.

The strongest feature of *Redwall* is Swensson's use of melodic variety to delineate distinct characters musically in order to reinforce what they are communicating verbally. The music for *Redwall* is stylistically diverse, and features examples of plainchant, four-part hymns, marches, and pirate songs. Swensson's tunes are memorable, and her vocal

writing is apt. Particularly noteworthy is the music for the role of Cluny, which requires the vocal talents of a robust baritone to bring the evil rat-king's sea shanties to life. By using a broad range of musical styles, Swensson adds interest and exoticism to the score, while reinforcing the nature and motives of the individual characters.

Although nearly every major character is associated with a particular melody, there are three themes which recur throughout the opera and function as leitmotifs, these are "The Legend of Redwall Abbey," "Martin's Ghost," and "Cluny's Theme." Each of these themes is associated with a particular character, or group of characters, and reappears at key moments to give insight to the audience or to recall an earlier event. For example, the theme of "Martin's Ghost" haunts Cluny throughout the opera, first appearing to him in a dream and reappearing when he enters the Abbey. These themes also serve as the linking material between individual scenes, again recalling earlier events or foreshadowing upcoming conflicts.

The weakest feature of the opera is its use of spoken dialogue rather than recitative or solo singing to reveal important aspects of the plot. Similarly, most of the ensemble singing reflects on emotions or past events and does not further the action. Much of Act I consists of spoken dialogue in which important aspects of the story are revealed, followed by short solo passages that continue this action. These solo passages lead into a reflective ensemble number, which is often repeated over several verses. Act II is mainly comprised of an alternation between dialogue and reflective arias. In her dissertation, Martha Malone states, "in children's opera, the continuation of the story is of paramount importance, even within emotionally expressive arias."<sup>140</sup> Malone goes on to explain that this is why many composers of children's opera use fewer arias and other

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<sup>140</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 272.

similarly reflective moments than are found in traditional operas. Although the music is lively and tuneful, the excessive use of both reflection and direct melodic repetition causes certain scenes to become static, and diminishes the overall effect of the score.

At nearly an hour and a half in length, this opera is at the outer limit of what most children can handle. This opera is most appropriate for older elementary school children or middle school children. Although some of the original story has suffered in its translation from novel to stage, the music and drama provide sufficient interest so that certain vagaries in the plot can be forgiven. The clash between good and evil forces combined with a large cast creates a great spectacle that is very exciting for children to watch. This opera can accommodate a large chorus of up to twenty voices, and the roles of Matthias, Cornflower and Ambrose Spike can be sung by children. A talented cast of male singers is needed for the roles of Brother Alf, Friar Hugo, The Abbot, Cluny, Julian and Basil. The large size of the cast make this opera ideal for performance in community theatres, high schools, colleges or professional opera companies. The need for strong male voices does present a potential problem for high school performance, because there may not be enough males who are able to sing these roles comfortably.

## Chapter 7: *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by Evelyn Swensson

Evelyn Swensson's tenth children's opera premiered at the Grand Opera House in Wilmington on March 2, 2002 and was the highlight of Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre First Annual Children's Opera Festival. The festival took place over two days and featured *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* performed by Baltimore Opera, *Oh, Freedom* performed by Virginia Opera, *Araboolies of Liberty Street* performed by the Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre, *The Little Sweep* presented by the Harrisburg Opera, and two performances of *From The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by Opera Delaware.<sup>141</sup> The opera is adapted from E.L. Konigsburg's 1967 book of the same name, which was awarded the 1968 Newberry Medal for its contribution to children's literature. Based on favorable reviews from national publications such as *Opera News*,<sup>142</sup> Opera Delaware was invited to New York City to perform selected scenes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on July 13, 2003. This was the second trip to New York for Opera Delaware, which had previously been invited to perform scenes from *The Trumpet of the Swan* at the 2000 National Opera Association Convention.

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<sup>141</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* Folder: "From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler World Premier Program," March 2, 2002.

<sup>142</sup> David Shengold, "Review of *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*," *Opera News* 66/12 (2002), accessed April 22, 2010;  
<http://www.operanews.com/operanews/templates/archives.aspx>

### Cast

Mrs. Frankweiler, mezzo soprano  
Mr. Saxonberg/Belletti, bass baritone  
Claudia Kincaid, soprano  
Jamie Kincaid, soprano  
Kevin Kincaid, soprano  
Mrs. Kincaid, soprano  
Mr. Kincaid, baritone  
Lenny and Lou, baritones  
George Washington, tenor  
Statue of Liberty, soprano  
Miss Clendennan/Jenny Lind, soprano  
P.T. Barnum, tenor  
John Lindsay, tenor  
Morris, baritone  
Parks, baritone  
Hortense/Times Reporter, soprano

### Orchestra

Violin  
Viola  
Cello  
Bass  
Flute  
Oboe  
Clarinet  
Saxophone  
Trumpet  
French Horn  
Trombone  
Tuba  
Timpani  
Drums  
Piano or Synthesizer

## Synopsis<sup>143</sup>

E.L. Konigsburg's book tells the story of Claudia Kincaid, a precocious eleven-year-old tired of the injustices of being an underappreciated oldest sibling. Her revenge is carefully planned, Claudia will run away to New York City, where she will live in the relative comfort of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She saves her money and decides on her nine-year old brother Jamie as her traveling companion. Claudia's plan is to stay away from home just long enough to make her parents and siblings realize just how important she is. While in the museum, Claudia becomes fascinated with a statue of unknown origin. Determined not to leave the museum until the mystery is solved, Claudia tracks down the statue's previous owner, a Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, in the hopes that she can help unravel the secret. The backdrop of the Met lends itself wonderfully to a musical score, and Swensson brings the art work to life in a diverse and tuneful score.

Swensson's libretto remains quite true to Konigsburg's original story, often using text directly from the book with few modifications. Konigsburg's book begins with a letter from Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler to her lawyer, Mr. Saxonburg. Swensson creates a prologue in which Saxonburg visits Mrs. Frankweiler, prompting her to write the letter. This editorial decision is successful in that it establishes context to Mrs. Frankweiler's opening "Letter Aria," and it allows Saxonberg to introduce and describe the four Kincaid children, his grandchildren, to the audience.

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<sup>143</sup> WD-ODA Vertical File: Evelyn Swensson, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, Score, March 2, 2002.

## ACT 1: Scene 1

Mrs. Frankweiler meets her lawyer, Mr. Saxonberg, in her home to discuss changes she would like to make in her will. Mr. Saxonberg is very distracted, and shows interest only when Mrs. Frankweiler asks him about his grandchildren. He proudly gushes to her how smart and talented he finds his four grandchildren, and rushes off before they have a chance to discuss the will. He tells Mrs. Frankweiler to write down all of the changes and send them to him in a letter, which she begins to do as soon as he leaves.

## Scene 2

It is recess at the school, and the children are outside playing with jump ropes, hula hoops, and other toys. The children tease Claudia for being brainy and different and teasingly call her “Straight-A Claudia Kincaid.” Alone, Claudia reveals that she has decided to run away. She sings a soliloquy in which she describes her reasons for wanting to leave her family. Claudia feels that her parents expect too much of her in terms of chores and taking care of her brothers, and she is tired of being teased by children at school simply for being smart.

## Scene 3

It is morning in the Kincaid house, and the family is frantically trying to get everyone off to school and to work on time. Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid are well intentioned, but they are simply too busy to spend much time with their four children. Claudia tells Jamie of her plan to run away to New York City. She has found a train ticket and wants him to come along with her. The children decide to leave on Wednesday, since that is the day they have their music lessons, and it will be easy to sneak clothes out of the house in a violin case.

## Scene 4

The children arrive in New York City to find John Lindsay campaigning to be mayor. A crowd on the street sings his campaign song, “Celebrate New York.” Lindsay is hosting an impromptu pageant on the street, and a number of iconic figures pop up, including George Washington, P.T. Barnum, Jenny Lind, Giovanni Belletti and the Statue of Liberty. The children begin their long walk to the Metropolitan Museum, where a crowd of visitors are anxiously gathered to get inside. Once they successfully get past the guards and into the museum, Claudia tells Jamie



of her plan. Each night when the museum closes, they will hide in a bathroom stall until the watchmen have completed their nightly inspection. After that, they are safe to wander the museum as they please, as long as they stay away from alarms.

### Scene 5

It is early morning in the museum, and crowds are lining up to see the “Little Angel” sculpture that was believed to have been created by Michelangelo, but nobody can prove it. The custodians, Lou and Lenny, sing about how New Yorkers are always standing in line for one thing or another, whether it’s for the subway or to buy a cup of coffee. The Kincaid children and a crowd of visitors gather around the sculpture of the “Little Angel.” Claudia is immediately captivated by the urge to discover the secret surrounding its creation. Claudia and Jamie visit the Met library to read up on Michelangelo in order to try to solve the mystery.

### Scene 6

Reporters have flooded the Kincaid household looking for clues into the disappearance of Claudia and Jamie. Claudia has sent her parents a letter that they are in New York and that they are safe, but with no other details. Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid believe that the letter may have been written under duress. Even the children from school feel sorry for teasing Claudia and want her to come back.

### ACT 2: Scene 1

The children wake up in the museum and realize that it is Sunday morning. Instead of going to church like usual, the two decide to pay a visit to the medieval wing and look at examples of beautiful stained glass windows. As much fun as they are having, the children are beginning to feel homesick as they remember how happy their parents were to see them any time they returned from a trip. Claudia tells Jamie that she cannot possibly go home without having learned the mystery of the “Little Angel.” Once she has solved it, the two can go home.

## Scene 2

Mrs. Clendennan and her students are in the museum looking at the Egyptian exhibit. She shows them all kinds of garments worn by Egyptian men and women, and tells her class that even men and children wore makeup. Claudia and Jamie pretend to be part of her class as they try to avoid Morris, the chief of security.

## Scene 3

Lou and Lenny find Claudia's violin case and her clothes stashed inside one of the Egyptian sarcophagi. Morris suspects that it is the missing Kincaid children whom he read about in the newspaper. Morris is determined to find and catch Claudia and Jamie. The children learn that the sculpture was sold to the museum by a Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler of Connecticut. Claudia believes that Mrs. Frankweiler holds the key to solving the mystery of the sculpture and the children board a train to go and find her.

## Scene 4

Back in Mrs. Frankweiler's house, her butler and maid, Parks and Hortense, talk about what a recluse she has become since the death of her husband. They recall days when they lived in Manhattan, and friends were always dropping by to play poker or admire her wonderful art collection. The two suggest that perhaps the widow Mr. Saxonberg with his four lovely grandchildren might be the perfect companion for her. They are interrupted by the arrival of Claudia and Jamie. Mrs. Frankweiler invites the children in, but she will not tell Claudia the secret. Instead, she gives the children one hour to search through her mixed-up files, organized by a system known only to Mrs. Frankweiler. If the children can find the necessary documents without misplacing any of her files, she will leave them to the children in her will. While they are working, Mrs. Frankweiler calls Mr. Saxonberg to let him know that the children are safe and asks the whole family to come celebrate at her house. Claudia and Jamie are able to figure out how Mrs. Frankweiler has organized her files, and find the writings with early sketches of the angel, which proves that it was made by Michelangelo. Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid arrive, and promise that they will devote more time to their children.

Children can relate to the characters Claudia and Jamie Kincaid, who are also good role models. Like most adolescents, Claudia Kincaid feels neglected and unappreciated by her well-meaning, but overextended parents. As the eldest sibling, she feels as though she has the burden of additional responsibilities around the house, but sees no rewards. Like many children, Claudia thinks about improving her situation by running away. Unlike most children, however, Claudia actually hatches a clever plan to run away, while still maintaining all the comforts of home. Claudia maps out every detail, from how the trip will be financed, where they will sleep and bathe, and even how to avoid being caught by security guards. Claudia decides upon Jamie as an ideal traveling companion, because she knows that he has saved up a lot of money from winning card games.

Throughout the story, the children use logic and reasoning to solve problems that arise and, eventually, to solve the secret of the Little Angel. Despite being known as a straight-A student, Claudia still feels that she is unremarkable. By solving the mystery of the Little Angel, Claudia feels that she will have finally accomplished something special and unique. Claudia realizes that the reason she left home was because she wanted to keep a secret of her own.

This story has a strong moral message about believing in yourself and having confidence in your abilities. The Kincaid children are exceptionally clever and resourceful, and the children in the audience can share in their adventures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## Musical Features

Most of the music is in a style typical of American musical theatre with some added operatic flourishes. The score is filled with musical variety running the gamut from jazz, rock, and dances to hymn singing. The opera has examples of traditional forms including solos, duets and ensemble singing. There are also several dance interludes that occur after the children have fallen asleep and exhibits from the museum begin to come alive. Although the opera is comprised of predominantly original material, Swensson quotes heavily from both operatic and other musical sources in a very effective manner. Throughout the opera, she uses distinct melodies, repetition of themes and musical quotations to create a score that is unpredictable, yet familiar and approachable for audience members, both old and young. The score is tonal and distinctly American in sound, serving as a fitting tribute to Konigsburg's beloved New York City.

Claudia's Act I aria, "Claudia's Soliloquy" (Example 7.1) is the standout solo piece of the entire opera. It is performed in an arioso style. The opening measures have a quasi recitative style leading into a more florid vocal line. The diatonic melody is simple and falls within the range of a ninth, from  $b^{ii}$  to  $d^i$ , with most of the notes falling comfortably in the head register for a soprano. There are no large skips or difficult chromatic passages. This aria would be suitable for a young soprano to perform. In his review of the world premiere performance, opera critic David Shengold remarked that Claudia's solo would "make a fine audition song for child sopranos."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Shengold, "Review," accessed April 22, 2010;  
<http://www.operanews.com/operanews/templates/archives.aspx>

**Example 7.1, *Mixed-Up Files*, “Claudia’s Soliloquy,” p. 18, mm. 1-20**

A Tempo  $\text{♩} = 120$

14 jus - tice! 15 16 I'm the old - est child and the 17 on - ly girl, so I do much more than my 18

19 part. 20 To my par - ents I've on - ly an in - it - ial 21 on the list of chores on a chart. 22 23

A Tempo A little slower

24 Spoken: I'm bored. I am bored with the same - ness of ev - 'ry day. No - thing ex - ci - ting ev - er 25 26 27 28 29

*mf*

30 comes my way. I am bored be - ing "Straight A 31 Claud - i - a Kin - caid." 32 The smart - est girl in — 33

The other Act I standout is the rousing “Celebrate New York” (Example 7.2a), a spritely ode to the history of New York City. The song depicts a pageant scene on the sidewalk when the children first arrive in New York City. Mayor John Lindsay is

introducing his new campaign song, which is performed by a diverse cast of characters from New York's history, including George Washington, P.T. Barnum, the Swedish nightingale Jenny Lind, as well as Lady Liberty herself. The melody of the song is original, but Swensson intersperses many musical quotes, which add both familiarity and humor to the score. A quote from "Yankee Doodle" is immediately followed by Jenny Lind and Giovanni Belletti singing the duet from Act I of *Don Pasquale* (Example 7.2b). The duet is introduced by P.T. Barnum, whose vocal line is derived from the melody of the duet.

Example 7.2a, *Mixed-Up Files*, “Celebrate New York,” p. 30, mm. 1-13

The musical score is for measures 36 through 48 of the piece "Celebrate New York" from the album *Mixed-Up Files*. It is written for voice and piano. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Measures 36-38: The vocal line begins with "Cit - y full of im - mi - grants. Cit - y full of schemes! In". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex, syncopated pattern in the left hand. Measures 39-41: The vocal line continues with "eigh - teen fif - ty Bar - num brought the Swe - dish night - en - gale, Jen - ny Lind a gen - u - ine Ce -". The piano accompaniment continues with similar patterns, featuring many triplets. Measures 42-44: The vocal line has a long rest in measure 42, followed by "leb - ri - ty! — For - ty thous - and peo - ple — were there to meet her boat." The piano accompaniment continues with a consistent eighth-note pattern. Measures 45-48: The vocal line has a long rest in measure 45, followed by "I in - vent - ed pub - li - ci - ty! —". The piano accompaniment continues with a consistent eighth-note pattern. At the end of measure 46, there is a section of piano music marked with a repeat sign and a key signature change to two flats (B-flat and E-flat). This section continues through measure 48, featuring a more complex piano accompaniment with many triplets. A spoken instruction is written above the piano part in measure 47: "Spoken: 'and now Miss Lind and Mr. Belletti will sing a duet by Donizetti!'".

36 Cit - y full of im - mi - grants. 37 Cit - y full of schemes! 38 In

39 eighth - teen fif - ty Bar - num brought the Swe - dish night - en - gale, 40 Jen - ny Lind a gen - u - ine Ce -

42 leb - ri - ty! — 43 For - ty thous - and peo - ple — were there to meet her boat. 44

45 I in - vent - ed pub - li - ci - ty! — 46 47 48

Spoken: "and now Miss Lind and Mr. Belletti will sing a duet by Donizetti!"

**Example 7.2b, *Mixed-Up Files*, “Celebrate New York,” p. 31, mm. 1-3**

Example 7.2b shows a musical score for the song "Celebrate New York" from the album *Mixed-Up Files*, measures 49-51. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line features three characters: Jenny Lind, Giovanni Belletti, and an unnamed character. The lyrics are: "Ser - va... gra - zie, gra - zie, ser - va, si - nor Bra - va, va - be - nis - si - mo - co -". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand, with triplets and accents.

Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid are characterized by their opening duet (Example 7.3), and they come off as robotic automatons in their delivery. Accented eighth notes reinforce the sense of urgency and chaos of the household in the morning. The repeated rhythmic pattern of the vocal line appropriately matches the short, choppy phrases of text.

**Example 7.3, *Mixed-Up Files*, “Check the Chart A.M.,” p. 22, mm. 1-5**

Example 7.3 shows a musical score for the song "Check the Chart A.M." from the album *Mixed-Up Files*, measures 1-5. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line features two characters: Mrs. Kincaid and Mr. Kincaid. The lyrics are: "Rise and shine! Rise and shine! Will you be my Val - en - tine? Drink your cof - fee. Eat your bun. Tie my tie and kiss me hon.". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand, with triplets and accents. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 110$ .



Musical quotation, as well as the use of entire sections from other works, is one of the most prominent features of Swensson's score. The melody of "The Met" (Example 7.4) invokes Virgil Thompson's "The Vote," from *The Mother of Us All*.<sup>145</sup> Twice in the opera, the strains of the "Toreador Song" from *Carmen* appear as a countermelody to "The Met" theme. This is a pun on the possible confusion between the Metropolitan Museum and New York City's other Met.

**Example 7.4, *Mixed-Up Files*, "The Met," p. 40, mm. 1-7**

19 MET! The MET! We're go-ing to the MET! The Met-ro-pol-i-tan Mu-se-um-of art!  
 Solo - "Toreador Song" from "Carmen"  
 20 To-re-a-dor, en gar de! To-re-a-dor, to-re-a-dor  
 21  
 22  
 23 Not to Lin-corn Cen-ter to see her coun-ter-part the Met-ro-pol-i-tan o-per-a  
 24  
 25

The exhibits in the museum lend themselves to some lovely dance interludes during sequences while the children sleep and the artwork around them appears to come

<sup>145</sup> Virgil Thompson, "The Vote," in *The Mother of Us All* (New York: Music Press, 1947), 134.

to life. After deciding to spend their first night asleep in a sixteenth-century bed, the children fall asleep to the strains of a Thomas Morley dance tune. After bathing in the fountains, the children fall asleep, and water sprites emerge and dance to an excerpt from Delibes's *"The Automat."* In lieu of Sunday church services, the children make their way to the medieval wing of the museum, at which point a plainchant melody develops into a polyphonic hymn, and in the Egyptian wing, mummies arise from their sarcophagi and dance to an excerpt from Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*.<sup>146</sup> Just as the children in the story are privileged to view many great works of art, the children in the audience will also be treated to quotations from great musical works of varying styles and from different eras.

Ms. Clendennan's Act II "Egypt" aria (Example 7.5) offers some of the most rhythmically interesting accompaniment, as well as melismatic singing and the use of chromaticism in the vocal line.

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<sup>146</sup> Modest Mussorgsky, "Persian Dance," in *Khovanshchina* (national music drama in five acts), completed and orchestrated by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (Paris: W. Bessel; Weisbaden: Breitkopf and Hartel, 1956), 175.

**Example 7.5, *Mixed-Up Files*, “Egypt,” p. 74, mm. 1-6**

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Egypt" from the opera *Mixed-Up Files*, measures 1 through 6. The score is written for a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a rest in measure 1, followed by a melodic phrase in measure 3. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. The lyrics are: "Here we ob-serve the art - of an an-cient civ-il - iz-at-ion E-gypt was, and E-gypt is, a fa-ci-na-ting-na-tion. A Children".

**Conclusions**

Swensson's vocal score is tuneful, witty, and very accessible to audiences unfamiliar with opera. The predominant musical style is that of American musical theater, with operatic flourishes. The traditional operatic forms of recitative, aria, duets, ensembles and even dance interludes are all present in the score. Swensson helps the listener achieve a level of comfort with the musical material by juxtaposing popular elements with classical flourishes, both original and quoted. This is an ideal way to introduce young audiences to the sound of opera and the trained operatic voice. The children's melodies are diatonic, straightforward and very singable. The range of the children's solo and chorus parts falls within the range of an octave, and the majority of the vocal lines lie in the middle of the vocal register. Only Claudia's part demands a range of greater than one octave, spanning from  $b^{ii}$  to  $e^i$ . A young soprano performing

this part must have good vocal technique to be able to shift between chest and head tones, and should be careful not to carry the chest tone too high into the head register.

The original songs are diatonic and modulate infrequently to closely related keys, generally the dominant, subdominant or relative minor. The accompaniments are simple and frequently double the vocal line. The “Egypt” aria is a rare example of an ostinato bass line being used in the accompaniment.

The text setting for the adult leads is typically in the middle register, allowing for excellent diction and clarity of the text. The ensemble numbers, such as “The Met,” feature very fast tempi as well as descending vocal lines, which can make the text difficult to understand. The same is true for Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid’s duet. The performers must be careful that the tempo is brisk enough to communicate the frantic pace of the family, but not so fast that the text cannot be understood.

Swensson’s use of an inclusive musical style, blending musical theatre, opera, jazz and popular music, in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* is an effective approach because it introduces audience members to a variety of musical styles, while appropriately matching this music to corresponding scenes from the novel. Swensson’s lyrical original melodies weave in and out of a score that also includes well-placed musical quotations to instruct the audience, while also bringing to life the works of art that serve as the backdrop for the action.

Swensson is sensitive the needs of the voice, and sets vocal lines so that most of the singing occurs in the middle register, allowing for the best possible diction from the singers. Her melodies are lyric and singable, coming straight out of the American musical theatre tradition. Even Swensson’s original melodies evoke a sense of

familiarity that immediately puts the listener at ease. Quotations from popular pieces of musical Americana, such as “Yankee Doodle,” also contribute to the sense of familiarity that the score evokes. Swensson uses diverse musical styles to correspond to the particular pieces of art that are being depicted in the story. For example, the “Egypt” aria uses chromatic melismas and trills based around the interval of a minor-second to evoke and “exotic” quality.<sup>147</sup>

Although the inclusive musical style is ideal for accomplishing the musical’s didactic purpose, there are times Swensson’s own voice gets lost in the score. This is particularly evident in Act II, where there is an over-reliance on musical quotes instead of the pleasing balance of new and old that pervaded much of Act I.

The opera is scored to accommodate a large cast. The world premiere performance featured a children’s chorus of twenty, a teen chorus of fifteen, and an adult chorus of thirteen. This would be an ideal opera for a performance combining the forces of elementary and high school students.

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<sup>147</sup> Swensson, *Mixed-Up Files*, 74-78.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

It has been demonstrated here and elsewhere that the practice of conducting opera outreach to young people is an important part of the operatic culture in North America, with the potential to influence millions of children each year. Programming and performing works tailored to suit the specific needs of young audiences have proven to be valuable educational and cultural tools that have provided substantial benefits for children, opera companies and the future of opera in general. Early exposure to the arts has been shown to increase the likelihood of adult attendance at professional arts performances. Early exposure can also combat negative stereotypes about opera and operatic singing that typically arise once a child reaches adolescence.

This study considered one example of successful operatic outreach that was developed by Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre in order to contribute to the increasing number of musicological studies of music composed for children, in general, and its role in the twenty-first century, in particular. The developing field of opera for young people has contributed a canon of original operas and musical works that now number in the thousands.<sup>148</sup> Here, four such operas were evaluated and criteria for their study were proposed. Furthermore, by identifying those aspects of opera that were most pleasing to children, we have suggested procedures that producers and composers can follow to present opera in a way that would appeal not only to children, but also to the general public.

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<sup>148</sup> Maria Rich, ed., "Directory of Operas/Musicals for Young Audiences," and OPERA America, "Opera For Youth Directory," accessed 10 January, 2010; <http://www.operaamerica.org/applications/ofyd/index.aspx>

As has been demonstrated, the two most important factors in conducting effective opera outreach are repertoire and preparation. There is disagreement in the opera community about whether it is better to use standard or original works to introduce opera to the young. Based on this study, original opera appears to be the best tool for conducting outreach. Works composed specifically for children can take into consideration their unique needs. Children are more likely to develop a personal connection, and, thus, a favorable opinion of opera, if the characters, themes and music presented are appealing and relevant to their own lives and experiences. It is necessary that these works be of high musical quality and incorporate elements of traditional opera, so that children do not form false opinions about what opera actually entails. Certain inherent qualities of opera are already likely to be appealing to most children. These include "over the top" characters, fantastical elements and the visual spectacle of lavish costumes, scenery and staging.

No matter what type of operatic outreach is being conducted, it is necessary that children be adequately prepared before attending the performance. Preparatory materials vary between opera companies and may include CDs or DVDs, printed study guides, or visits from opera professionals. The effectiveness of preparatory materials in adequately preparing students for the experience of live opera is enhanced when these lessons are incorporated into the school classroom. Included in the preparation should be general information about opera and its history, as well as general information about the important jobs of the composer, librettist, conductor, stage manager, and choreographer in staging a professional opera. The bulk of the materials should focus on characters and important themes in the opera. Ideally, themes from the opera will serve as a basis for

study in other subjects, so that students can see firsthand the diverse nature of opera. By knowing and understanding what to expect prior to the performance, the actual experience will be strengthened because the children will be able follow along and understand the story with ease.

Outreach programs are further enhanced when children play an active role in the experience. Over the past twenty years, opera outreach has been tending towards the creation of more hands-on programs. Although touring to schools is still the most common method of conducting outreach, the advent of create-and-produce programs, such as OPERA America's *Music!Words Opera!*, has allowed children to learn about opera by actually participating in its creation.

Based on this study, the educational and artistic strategies of Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre have been shown to be highly effective in educating young people about the craft of opera and exposing them to high quality operatic performances. These strategies included allowing young people the opportunity to participate in professional opera; providing high quality study materials; and performing works based on high quality children's literature that was taught in the Delaware school curriculum. Their unique model of conducting outreach proved to be an effective educational tool reaching nearly 10,000 students each year and should be emulated in other school systems.

Of the three composers of children's opera whose works were studied here, each shows a unique approach to the task of composing music for children. Menotti's opera is the most modern in style, with lengthy arias, interludes and ensemble numbers eliminated in favor of a fast-paced score, which is propelled forwards by short, conversational vocal lines. Larsen's score is imbued with a similar use of conversational vocal lines to propel



the action, but she does not shy away from the use of arias, ensembles and choral numbers in a traditionally reflective manner. Swensson's operas feature examples of a wide array of musical styles and genres, but seem to be more firmly rooted in the tradition of American musical theatre than grand opera.

Each composer uses the repetition of themes or lyrics to help orient the listener or to provide some kind of commentary on the action. In *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, Menotti uses a repeated orchestral motive of rapidly descending triplets every time the students break into hysterics. There is also a short, march-like motive that appears when Poponel disarms the bandit, and again at the conclusion of the opera. This can be analyzed as Poponel's victory theme, whose appearance at the end signifies that everything has turned out well. Larsen uses repetition to draw parallels between characters and situations. Similar melodic material equates Meg's classmates with the inhabitants of Camazotz, and the use of the same melody for Principal Jenkins and the Man With Red Eyes demonstrates the wicked nature of both of these characters. In *The Legend of Redwall Abbey*, there are themes closely associated with Redwall Abbey, Cluny, and Martin the Warrior. The repetition of these themes helps to orient the audience amidst the constant shifts in action and changes in location.

Each composer has made allowances which account for children's lack of familiarity with opera and their shorter attention span. Menotti's opera is extremely brief; comprised of only one act and lasting forty to forty-five minutes. Libby Larsen's opera is also composed in one act and runs approximately one hour in length. Swensson's operas take place in two acts and run for ninety minutes. Although Swensson's operas are considerably longer than the other two studied, she is the only

composer to use examples of popular music styles and quotations from familiar melodies in addition to traditional forms. By incorporating familiar elements alongside less familiar ones, children are less likely to be bored or feel uncomfortable with the music presented.

With the exception of *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, the role of the orchestra is subservient to that of the singer. In order to allow the voice to stand out above the orchestra, all three composers employ the use of fairly static accompaniment figures in the orchestra, which typically double the voice or use sustained chords. Clarity of the vocal lines is also achieved by the register in which they are written. Most of the singing occurs in the middle register of each voice part, which ensures that the singers will not have to modify the vowel sounds in order to achieve a consistent tone quality. Only in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* does the orchestra share the spotlight with the singers. Swensson intersperses the score with dances and other instrumental interludes, which introduce a variety of classical music to the audience in much the same way as Claudia and Jamie Kincaid are introduced to fine works of art in the book.

The themes presented in these stories are universal and cover topics such as tolerance, conformity, family relationships, good versus evil, and love. Despite its lack of a literary model, Menotti's opera has a clear moral message that is effectively communicated to the audience. In each of the other three operas, the respective composers have successfully identified themes from the literary work, and given them new meaning by translating them into music. In each case, the protagonists and the heroes of the opera are young people, which is both appealing and relatable for the

audience members. In her dissertation, Martha Malone noted a lack of strong female characters in most popular children's operas.<sup>149</sup> All of the operas included in this study feature strong, female characters who are also good role models. Even though the protagonist is male, the only student to go against the crowd and reach out to Poponel in *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* is Lizzie Spender. Likewise, Jess Squirrel and Constance Badger both perform heroic tasks in *Redwall*.

For more than four decades, Opera Delaware's Family Opera Theatre has been offering unique and innovative operatic outreach to children in the greater Wilmington area. The legacy of this company now includes the addition of twelve original children's operas to the canon. The works commissioned by Opera Delaware have been shown to be of high quality and based on some of the best literary works written for children.

Early education and exposure to opera is important to insure that opera will continue to remain a healthy and vital artistic force for many years to come. Thanks in part to the contribution of Opera Delaware and other organizations performing opera outreach across North America, millions of schoolchildren are being exposed to opera each year. It is certain that among these young people is the next generation of great opera singers and composers.

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<sup>149</sup> Malone, "Opera For American Youth", 271.

## Appendix 3.1

Wilmington, Delaware, Opera Delaware Archives: Family Opera Theatre Folder

### Opera Delaware Family Opera Theatre Production List 1969-2007

- 1969- *Hansel and Gretel*; Engelbert Humperdinck
- 1970- *Help, Help, The Globolinks*; Gian Carlo Menotti
- 1971- *The Little Sweep*; Benjamin Britten
- 1972- *Oliver*; Lionel Bart
- 1973- *Pinocchio*; Jim Eiler, Jeanne Bargy
- 1974- *Wizard of Oz*; A. Baldwin Sloane, Paul Tiejens
- 1975- *Peter Pan*; Mark Charlap  
*Little Red Riding Hood*; Seymour Barab
- 1976- *Help, Help, The Globolinks*; Menotti
- 1977- *Sleeping Beauty*; Ottorino Respighi (U.S. Premiere)
- 1978- *Sound of Music*; Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein
- 1979- *Wizard of Oz*; Sloan, Tiejens  
*Amahl and the Night Visitors*; Menotti
- 1980- *Babes in Toyland*; Victor Herbert
- 1981- *Peter Pan*; Mark Charlap
- 1982- *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*; Menotti (World Premiere)
- 1984- *The Child and the Enchantments*; Maurice Ravel
- 1986- *Hansel and Gretel*; Humperdinck
- 1987- *Help, Help, The Globolinks*; Menotti
- 1988- *The Nightingale*; Charles Strouse
- 1989- *Charlotte's Web*; Strouse (World Premiere)

1990- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; John McCabe (U.S. Premiere)  
*A Bride From Pluto*; Menotti  
*Charlotte's Web*; Strouse

1991- *Ballad of Baby Doe*; Douglas Moore

1992- *A Wrinkle in Time*; Libby Larsen (World Premiere)  
*America Before Columbus*; Joseph Robinette, Kate Waring

1993- *The Enormous Egg*; Evelyn Swensson (World Premiere)

1994- *Charlotte's Web*; Strouse

1995- *The Phantom Tollbooth*; Arnold Black (World Premiere)

1996- *The Jungle Book*; Swensson (World Premiere)

1997- *The Wind in the Willows*; John Ratter, Evelyn Swensson (World Premiere)

1998- *The Legend of Red wall Abbey*; Swensson (World Premiere)

1999- *Charlotte's Web*; Strouse

2000- *Trumpet of the Swan/Louis' Trumpet*; Swensson (World Premiere)

2001- *The Cricket in Times Square*; Mel Marvin

2002- *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*; Swensson

2003- *The Enormous Egg*; Swensson

2004- *The Hobbit*; Allen J. Friedman

2005- *The Secret of NIMH*; Swensson (World Premiere)

2006- *Billy Lee's Washington*; Swensson (World Premiere)

2007- *The Adventures of Beatrix Potter and Her Friends*; Swensson

## Appendix 3.2

### WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder

#### **JOB DESCRIPTION**

**DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION** (Responsible to Artistic Director) *EVELYN SWENSSON 82-'92*

Originate, Organize and coordinate Educational Projects such as:

- I. **Family Opera Theatre Productions**
  - \* Find suitable works to perform (with learning connection) or commission new works. (Plan several years in advance.)
  - \* Insure that qualified singers (adult and students) audition
  - \* Recruit and train orchestra (adult and student)
  - \* Plan study guide for school teachers; provide copy about composer and librettist; choose teacher to write lesson plans
  - \* Take responsibility for production, beginning to end
- II. **Previews of Family Opera Production**
  - \* Plan appropriate scenes for schools who request it.
  - \* Schedule previews for reading council workshops (2)
- III. **Education Advisory Council**
  - \* Invite teachers, plan meetings, promote net-working
- IV. **Model Projects Initiative**
  - \* Recruit teachers to attend workshops on textbooks; participate in workshops; keep in touch with teachers
- V. **Lecture Series**
  - \* Decide on theme; contact lecturers, singers, instrumentalists, evaluators; locate sponsoring organizations; choose music; schedule rehearsals, etc
  - \* Work closely with humanities forum and with OperaDelaware Managing Director on budgeting
- VI. **Christmas Carolers, Community Programs**
  - \* Answer all inquiries, choose music contact singers, etc.
- VII. **Children's Chorus**
  - \* Recruit, rehearse, choose music for community programs
- VIII. **Represent OperaDelaware**
  - \* Work through Opera America, National Opera Association, and Opera For Youth, Inc., to promote educational opera projects
  - \* Answer all inquiries about our education programs

## Appendix 3.3

### WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder

#### Family Operas/Musicals by Evelyn Swensson (1992–2001)

Are you a Community Theater, School, College, Church or Opera Company looking for a musical version of a story which offers a wide range of leads, and chorus parts, for students and adults? These have played to great success in 30 states and provinces in the U. S., Canada and New Zealand.

- *THE ENORMOUS EGG* (Butterworth)      Setting: U. S. – New England and D. C. in the 1950's  
Subject: Nate, a young boy, saves his pet dinosaur from extinction with the help of Congress.
- ★ *THE ADVENTURES OF BEATRIX POTTER* – Play by Joseph Robinette  
Setting: England, 1890–1940      Subject: Her biography, which includes five of her stories.
- *THE JUNGLE BOOK* (Kipling) – Play by Joseph Robinette  
Setting: Jungle and village in India, school in England.  
Subject: Mowgli, a lost boy, raised by wolves, then villagers, grows to manhood and learns wisdom.
- ★ *ANNE OF GREEN GABLES* (Montgomery) – Play by Joseph Robinette  
Setting: Prince Edward Island, around 1900.  
Subject: An orphan girl finds a home and grows up to be a teacher.
- *THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS* (Grahame)      Music: John Rutter      Play: Evelyn Swensson  
Setting: England – a Fantasy  
Subject: Friends persuade Mr. Toad to become law abiding and unselfish.
- ★ *THE HOME COMING* (Hamner) — Play by Christopher Sergel  
Setting: Virginia mountains in the 1930's at Christmas.  
Subject: Pilot of TV series, *The Waltons*. John Boy looks for his father, late coming home in a snowstorm.
- ✱ *THE LEGEND OF REDWALL ABBEY* (Jacques)  
Setting: Medieval England – a Fantasy.  
Subject: Matthias, a novice (a mouse) outwits an army of rats and saves the Abbey and woodland creatures
- *ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT* (Mary Higgins Clark)      Setting: New York – the present.  
Subject: A mother searches for her lost 7 year old daughter, finds her playing Mary in a Christmas pageant.
- *THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN* (E. B. White) – Play by Joseph Robinette  
Setting: Canadian woods, Boston, Philadelphia, and Billings, Montana.  
Subject: Louis (Loo-ee) a trumpeter swan, born without a voice, becomes a professional trumpet player.
- ✱ *FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER* (Konigsburg)  
Setting: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.      The 1960's.  
Subject: A brother and sister (9 & 11) run away from home, hide in the museum and solve a mystery.

★ Dramatic Publishing Co  
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Chadds Ford, PA 19317  
Phone: (610) 459-5443  
FAX: (610) 459-2414  
eswensson@mymailstation.com

## Appendix 3.4

WD-ODA Vertical File: Family Opera Theatre Folder

### How to Write a Musical

#### ***Define Your Audience***

OperaDelaware Family Theatre performs for families;  
needs to be entertaining and educational.

#### ***Choose Story (original, or based on book)***

Original: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*---Gian Carlo Menotti  
Based on Book: March 1991---*Lion, Witch and Wardrobe*---C.S. Lewis  
October 1991---*Charlotte's Web*---E.B. White  
March 1992---*A Wrinkle in Time*---Madeleine L'Engle  
March 1993---*The Enormous Egg*---Oliver Butterworth

#### ***Obtain Performance Rights***

*A Wrinkle in Time*---Norman Lear, Hollywood producer  
*The Enormous Egg*---Brad Waishren, Hollywood producer

#### ***Write the Show***

- A. Libretto---Research material, consult experts; choose scenes (decide what to leave out or change). Decide where songs come naturally in the story; write dialogue (be true to the book---kids know it!). Put in stage directions (consult with stage director).
- B. Lyrics---Choose rhythm and style for each character (consult with choreographer). Write, first in prose, what song should say; then write lyrics in poetry form (verbs needed for action). Be sure to include refrains that people will remember.
- C. Music---List characters by voice type and range; make a chart of all musical numbers, time signatures and keys to insure variety. Decide the form of each song (AABAC, etc.). Chart melody using rhythm and range of speaking voice; chart melodic patterns---decide highest points and endings; decide where to underscore (orchestral accompaniment under dialogue)---compose play offs (music between scenes). Compose overture last.

#### ***What Next?***

Send libretto to experts to make any technical, scientific corrections; check accuracy of musical notation.



## Appendix 4.1

WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* Folder

# OPERADELAWARE

PRESENTS

The World Premiere Performances of

## ***THE BOY WHO GREW TOO FAST***

A One Act Opera For Young People

Text and Music by **Gian Carlo Menotti**

September 24 at 8:00 p.m.

*The Guild of OPERA Delaware invites all guests attending the World  
Premiere performance on Friday, September 24, to a party in  
the lobby areas of the Grand Opera House  
immediately following that performance.*

September 25 at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

September 26 at 2:00 p.m.

Music Director and Conductor: EVELYN SWENSSON

Director: **GIAN CARLO MENOTTI**

Assistant to Gian Carlo Menotti: ROMAN TERLECKYJ

Set Design: CYNTHIA du PONT TOBIAS

Lighting Design and Special Effects: PATRICIA A. CONNORS

Costume Design: JOSEPH BRUMSKILL

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Miss Hope .....         | DENISE COFFEY    |
| Lizzie Spender .....    | MIRIAM BENNETT   |
| Mrs. Skosvodmonit ..... | SARA HAGOPIAN    |
| Poponel .....           | PHILLIP PETERSON |
| Dr. Shrink .....        | FRANK REYNOLDS   |
| Miss Proctor .....      | JOY VANDEVER     |
| Little Poponel .....    | PETER LUGAR      |
| Mad Dog .....           | ALAN WAGNER      |
| Policeman .....         | THOMAS LITTEL    |

Scene 1: Classroom

Scene 2: Doctor's Office

Scene 3: Classroom

## Appendix 4.2

WD-ODA Vertical File: *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast* Folder

OPERADELAWARE

### "THE BOY WHO GREW TOO FAST"

#### CHILDREN'S COMPANY

|                     |   |                                       |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Allen, David        | - | Tower Hill School                     |
| Bennett, Miriam     | - | Bayard Middle (Newark)                |
| Boettcher, Karl     | - | St. Edmonds                           |
| Bossert, Gary       | - | Greenwood Elementary (Kennett Square) |
| Davis, Susan        | - | Unionville                            |
| Dennis, E Brooks    | - | St. Edmonds                           |
| Devilbiss, David    | - | Chadds Ford                           |
| Dickson, Andrew     | - | Tower Hill School                     |
| Forbush, Meg        | - | Hillsdale (West Chester)              |
| Hammond, Sandy      | - | Kennett Middle                        |
| Hofman, Lisa        | - | Harlan                                |
| Janney, John        | - | Corpus Christi (Elsmere)              |
| Jims, John          | - | Mary D. Lang (Kennett Square)         |
| Logothetis, Michael | - | Tower Hill School                     |
| Lugar, Peter        | - | A. I. duPont Middle                   |
| McCausland, Julie   | - | Middle School (Unionville)            |
| Malone, Philip      | - | Mary Magdalen                         |
| Raleigh, Lloyd      | - | Tower Hill School                     |
| Shirar, Julie       | - | A. I. duPont Middle                   |
| Smallwood, Susan    | - | St. Matthew's                         |
| Somerville, Rob     | - | P. S. duPont                          |
| Swann, Daron        | - | Christ Our King                       |
| Williams, Chanel    | - | Colwyck (New Castle)                  |
| Unger, Sarah        | - | Kennett Middle                        |

## Appendix 5.1

WD-ODA Vertical File: *A Wrinkle in Time* Folder

**OperaDelaware Family Opera Theatre  
and  
The Playhouse Theatre**

**present**

**The World Premiere of  
A WRINKLE IN TIME**

**March 27, 28, 29, 1992**

**Music by Libby Larsen  
Libretto by Walter Green  
Based on the novel by Madeleine L'Engle**

|                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Producer</i>                 | CAROLE MOTTEL           |
| <i>Conductor</i>                | EVELYN SWENSSON         |
| <i>Stage Director</i>           | LELAND KIMBALL          |
| <i>Set Designer</i>             | LELAND KIMBALL          |
| <i>Costume Designer</i>         | CAROLE MOTTEL           |
| <i>Lighting Designer</i>        | MATTHEW R. GRAY         |
| <i>Make-up Designer</i>         | YOKO HASHIMOTO-SINCLAIR |
| <i>Wig Designer</i>             | JOHN BOWEN              |
| <i>Choreographer</i>            | KATHY KERCHNER          |
| <i>Production Stage Manager</i> | KATHY KERCHNER          |

**OPERADELAWARE**

**47th Season**

**Eric W. Kjellmark, Jr.** *General Director*      **Leland P. Kimball** *Artistic Director*  
OperaDelaware is a member of Opera America, American Arts Alliance, American Council for the Arts, Greater Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, Opera for Youth, and the Delaware Theater Association. OperaDelaware is the recipient of the first Governor's Award for the Arts (1981).

The commissioning of this opera was made possible in part by a grant from Evelyn and Sig Swenson.

This production is made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Delaware State Arts Council, a state agency committed to enhancing and supporting the arts in Delaware. The State Arts Council provides technical and financial assistance to artists and serves as a clearinghouse for information on the arts. A grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Opera for a New America also contributed to this production.

## Appendix 6.1

WD-ODA Vertical File: *Redwall: The Legend of Redwall Abbey* Folder

# REDWALL

World Premiere - OperaDelaware

Directed by Leland Kimbal

Musical Directed & Conducted by Evelyn Swenson

March 7 & 8, 1998

## Cast

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Cheesethief .....                       | Carlos Alicea      |
| Constance .....                         | Lois Alt           |
| Sela .....                              | Tina Betz          |
| Methuselah/Wormtail .....               | Kurt Bieg          |
| King Bull Sparra .....                  | Gerald Blanchard   |
| Friar Hugo/Kilconey .....               | Brandon Burk       |
| Scumnose .....                          | Andrew Curtin      |
| Abbot .....                             | John Dennison      |
| Mrs. Church .....                       | Lisa Dodgson       |
| Redtooth/Captain Snow .....             | Jack Hollister     |
| Cornflower .....                        | Caitlin Ganc       |
| Silent Sam .....                        | Conner Gardner     |
| Jess .....                              | Marie Rose Gardner |
| Basil "Stag" Hair/Ragear .....          | Rob Hull           |
| Alf .....                               | Elliot Jones       |
| Winifred .....                          | Dayle Joseph       |
| Clemence .....                          | Elizabeth Mack     |
| Matthias .....                          | Eric Miller        |
| Squire Julian Gingervere/Mangefur ..... | Ray Murphy         |
| Mrs. Vole .....                         | Rupal Pinto        |
| Fangburn .....                          | Carl Pouncy        |
| Dunwing .....                           | Stephanie Santer   |
| Shadow/Chickenhound .....               | James Smith        |
| Darkclaw .....                          | Justin Vye         |
| Cluny The Scourge/Asmodeus .....        | Alan Wagner        |
| Warbeak .....                           | Jennifer Zetlan    |

/ALL

## Appendix 7.1

WD-ODA Vertical File: *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* Folder

# OPERA DELAWARE

57TH SEASON – 2001/2002

Leland P. Kimball III, General Director    Julie W. Van Blarcom, Executive Director

## **From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler**

Music and Libretto by Evelyn Swenson

Based on the book by E.L. Konigsburg

Performed by arrangement with Simon and Schuster. All rights reserved.

March 2 and 3, 2002 at 3:00 p.m.

Conductor ..... Evelyn Swenson  
Stage Director ..... Leland Kimball  
Choreographer ..... Anna Marie Leo  
Set Design ..... Alisa Kraut  
Lighting Design ..... Erik Morra  
Costume Design ..... Fatima Lavor-Peters  
Production Manager ..... Maureen Mooney

Scene: New York City and Connecticut in the '70's

There will be one intermission.

OperaDelaware gratefully acknowledges First USA for support of the singers in this production.

Family Fun Day made possible by MBNA.

Proceeds from the Family Fun Day activities for *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* will benefit programs of the Auxiliary of the A. I. duPont Hospital for Children.

OperaDelaware programs in the 2001-2002 season are supported by Basell, the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency committed to promoting and supporting the arts in Delaware, JPMorgan Chase, MBNA America, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

OperaDelaware is a member of Opera America, American Arts Alliance, American Council for the Arts, Greater Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, New Castle County Chamber of Commerce, Opera for Youth, and the Delaware Theater Association.

OperaDelaware is the recipient of the first Governor's Award for the Arts (1981).

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Signature

March 9, 2010

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Signature

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