



Opera With A Title

a new opera by Edward Lambert

Drawn from two plays by Lorca, this small-scale opera concerns a troupe of actors in the time of the Spanish civil war. Gay courtships, the bombing of a theatre, a lunatic shepherd, Juliet's erotic love-making and the shooting of a theatre director feature in the dreamscape of this multi-layered work. What's real and what's being imagined by whom are explored in a maze of conflicting emotions and impulses which mirror the political and artistic turbulence of the 1930's.

Opera With A Title

music by Edward Lambert

text by the composer after Federico Garcia Lorca

THE SPECTATOR, a Fascist sympathiser - *bass*

DIRECTOR (FEDERICO), a playwright & impresario (male) - *mezzo-soprano*

MANUEL, a stagehand - *baritone*

SOFIA, a singer - *soprano*

JOSÉ, a singer - *tenor*

The Tenor, Baritone & Bass also appear as THE THREE WIZARDS on WHITE HORSES

Composer's note

The script for Opera With A Title has been extracted and freely arranged from two plays by Lorca, *El publico* and *Comedia sin título*; they are considered 'impossible' plays, an experimental theatre of the imagination and of the sub-conscious, and both are incomplete. In several ways, the two plays are connected and constitute a search for a new form of theatrical expression; like many works of the period, they also call for a new morality of personal freedom. Both examine the nature of illusion and reality, confusing actors inside and outside their roles with audience members inside and outside the 'play'. This androgyny is mirrored in the relationships between some of the characters, with *The Audience* in particular containing episodes of homoeroticism. Both works also feature the character of Director/Author/Playwright/Impresario revealing the pre-occupations of Lorca himself who directed a national touring company in the years of the Socialist government.

Synopsis

This surrealist opera concerns a troupe of actors in the time of the Spanish Civil War. What the actors are playing, and what is happening to them in the real world, are confused: they bring their fantasies to bear on their performances while their characters invade their own personalities. Thus, role-play and questions of gender are examined, each from the other's viewpoint, as well as the nature of theatre and its relevance to everyday life.

A performance of *Romeo and Juliet* has just taken place. The SPECTATOR, *bass*, is offended by the portrayal of Juliet by a male. FEDERICO, the DIRECTOR, *mezzo-soprano*, defends his desire to re-invent the theatre and portray the realities of the world outside.

A rehearsal gets underway: featuring characters from Shakespeare, SOFIA, the company *soprano*, plays PUCK who's in love with OBERON, played by the *tenor*, JOSÉ. They argue, however, and the latter falls for the SPECTATOR who invades the stage and joins in the love-making as JULIUS CAESAR. Meanwhile, MANUEL, a stagehand, *baritone*, declares his love for the DIRECTOR who is threatening to give up the theatre. His passionate protestations are not reciprocated and, wearing an ass's head, he sings a Spanish ballad about the qualities of masks.

Shots are heard and news arrives that a revolution has broken out; the troops are heading their way. For the DIRECTOR, it is time to bring the theatre crumbling down. SOFIA fears for the safety of her children. JOSÉ is for the rebels, while the SPECTATOR is revealed as a Fascist. MANUEL re-starts his song and, as tensions rise, the SPECTATOR gets out his pistol. He is about to shoot at JOSÉ but the DIRECTOR steps between them and is killed. The theatre is bombed and all is dark.

SOFIA as JULIET welcomes THE THREE WIZARDS ON WHITE HORSES into her tomb-like bed but, tired of their romantic serenading, insists on taking the lead; this erotic scene evaporates at dawn. As the dust settles and daylight returns, MANUEL, JOSÉ and the SPECTATOR reflect on what the drama has achieved. SOFIA emerges from her tomb in a blaze of glory and the DIRECTOR flies down from heaven. Now the audience can enter.

Instruments: horn, violin, cello, harpsichord **Duration:** about 47 minutes

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SCENE ONE

In a theatre. Spain. Civil War has recently broken out. The action takes place both on stage and in the auditorium. In the stalls is the Directors's desk and on stage are the paraphernalia of other productions, including a forest and the tomb of the Capulets, and a screen behind which the cast change their costumes every now and again.

The DIRECTOR is on the stage in deep thought.

SPECTATOR (*approaching the stage*)
Am I speaking to the director?

DIRECTOR
At your service.

SPECTATOR
The tomb scene was despicable.
A shocking falsehood; you could tell that Juliet was a boy,
and that they loved in real life.
Why play tragedy so hackneyed?

MANUEL (*passing across the stage carrying an ass's head*)
It's all the same to me that she was a boy. He looked lovely! I cried.

DIRECTOR
Had the curtain risen on the truth,
the stalls would be full of blood.

SPECTATOR
Show us drama as we know it!

DIRECTOR
You come to be entertained.
But I'll show you things you don't want to see
and shout plain truths you don't want to hear.
Why watch what happened once to others?
Instead, see what is happening now around you!
The stage must speak and sing
to pull the walls down
and admit those outside,
those who weep or kill or sleep.

SPECTATOR
Pull down the walls and the roof will collapse!

DIRECTOR
Don't interrupt! A spectator should never be part of the play.

SPECTATOR
I've got a right - I've paid to be here.

DIRECTOR
You're no critic, then! You can like or loathe what we do, but not judge us.

SPECTATOR

The audience reaction counts for everything.

SOFIA (*from behind the screen*)

Manuel!

MANUEL (*re-entering*)

We're waiting for the Emperor's costume.

We need the candlesticks, the chalice, the myrrh, the moon...

(*disappears*)

JOSÉ (*entering following the sound of crashing off-stage,
and disappearing behind the screen to change into his costume*)

It's terrifying getting lost in the theatre!

The horses, the lion's head, the snakes in the sand...

DIRECTOR

We're in no theatre here.

SPECTATOR

We're not?

DIRECTOR

Merely a playhouse where actors

are constrained by an audience;

as a magician deceives, so we spin a web of lies.

Imagine instead: in a small house a woman lies dying of hunger,

her two starving children play with her hands.

All they can find to eat is a tin of shoe polish;

they fall asleep on their mother's breasts

for the last time. That's truth for you.

SPECTATOR (*returning to the auditorium*)

Be thankful the people round here are used to death.

JOSÉ (*popping out from behind the screen; he is scantily clad*)

Death is everywhere, and it's a joke:

at the carnival last year, there was a cellist

whose instrument was made with a crucified cat

nailed to a post, and his bow was made from a bramble.

A crucified-cat cello and a bramble bow!

As the bow was drawn across the cat

it miaowed loudly as it slowly perished,

making music that was all too real.

Real-life live death-music!

Men were dancing to it...

SPECTATOR (*from the stalls*)

What next?

SOFIA (*still behind the screen*)

A Midsummer Night's Dream to cheer us up.

DIRECTOR

Not at all, the plot is dark indeed;

shows that love is pure chance, out of our control.

From moment to moment the lovers' loves change,
and a fairy falls for a donkey.
Give *me* the flower where the wild thyme grows
and love might have succeeded.
There's nothing left for us here:
to see reality is hard, to show it, even more so.
Bring down the curtain!

(The Director goes into the stalls to watch; Manuel joins him. From time to time, the Director goes onto the stage to alter or correct the production.)

SCENE TWO

An enchanted forest. Night.

(QUARTET, later QUINTET)

*From behind the screen emerge two figures in white, bathed in moonlight:
SOFIA dressed as PUCK who wears little bells on his ankles and wrists
& JOSÉ, OBERON the Fairy-King, wearing little more than a vine leaf.
PUCK dances provocatively.*

PUCK

If I were a cloud?

OBERON

I'd be an eye.

PUCK

If I were a piece of poo?

OBERON

I'd be a fly.

PUCK

If I were an apple?

OBERON

I'd be a bite.

PUCK

If I were a breast?

OBERON

I'd be a knife.

PUCK *(hurt)*

Why do you spoil it?

You torment me, interrupt my dancing.

I have no other way of loving you.

MANUEL *(in the stalls, to DIRECTOR)*

You cannot leave: there is too much to do.

DIRECTOR

Only the theatre of the dust remains.

MANUEL

I can't work without you:
If I don't watch the sunrise I love so much
or run through the grass in my bare feet,
it is only to follow you and be with you.

DIRECTOR

You're quoting those lines.
Your masquerade will not succeed with me.

OBERON

I am a man, because I am that, and that alone;
would you were more man than me!
But you're no man.

MANUEL

I only know I love you. Whip me!
See my flesh laid bare!
Plunge into my breast
and see the stream of blood
gushing out. Drink and share it with me...

DIRECTOR

You're making this up. The poet's pen
gives to airy nothing
a local habitation and a name...

MANUEL

Of course. But your lips are on fire.
Be my stallion - find in me your mare!
Crush me against your hairy chest.
How I'm dying to die with you!

PUCK

If I were an ant?

OBERON

Then I'd be earth.

PUCK

And if I were earth too?

OBERON

I'd become water.

PUCK

Then drown me; look on me naked!

OBERON

I despise you, spit on you.

PUCK

I go to find love in the ruins.

OBERON

No, don't go!

PUCK

You don't want me.

OBERON

If I were a grain of sand?

PUCK

And if I were a statue?

OBERON suddenly cries

You'd be my shadow.

And Titania would come to my bed...
and you would sweat under the cushions.
More tears?

OBERON blows a whistle

*The SPECTATOR, who has been watching the scene,
metamorphoses into JULIUS CAESAR
and slowly approaches the stage*

PUCK

I know what you want; I'll run away.

OBERON

The Emperor!

CAESAR (*going onstage*)

Which of the two is the one?

OBERON

I am, my lord.

PUCK and OBERON dance for CAESAR

CAESAR

One is always the one.
Most young men deny it.
I cut off their heads.

PUCK

I'm the one, my lord.

OBERON

You know me, you know I am the one.

CAESAR

(indicating OBERON)

This one is the one.

OBERON

And always the one.
You have no choice but to love me.
The blood drips to the ground
and turns to mud. Men die...

DIRECTOR

I'm leaving to get away from you,
from the society of their kind,
acting life out, all the time deceiving.

MANUEL

If they spoke the truth they'd be thrown out of the theatre.
They'd love to shout obscenities,
but they want to be adored by their audience!

DIRECTOR

Enough of this drama...
I cannot sigh with you.
You're just an stagehand...

MANUEL

Who's pining for you, Federico!
Why am I so weak? I love you.
You have no choice but to love me.
The blood drips to the ground
and turns to mud. Men die...

DIRECTOR

If theatres can't breathe, we must destroy them.
I tell you: there are coffins for us
already prepared, waiting in the wings.
When they come to break down the doors
we will need characters of real flesh
and real blood to confront them.
Like heroes, you must bury the theatre
in the dust to wring out the truths of tombs.

CAESAR

I live on, gorged with blood;
thousands have died for me,
young men burnt under my gaze,
dying of love between my sheets, my battlefields.

PUCK (*to OBERON*)

If I were a moon fish?
Love. To love, Love.
Love of the one with the two.
The love of three which is stifled
by being the one between the two.

MANUEL (*indicating the SPECTATOR*)
See what happens when you take the handrails from the bridge!

DIRECTOR
Only by breaking down barriers can a play be justified

JOSÉ (*as himself*)
Our masks are devouring us.

SPECTATOR (*as himself*)
I reveal my love because I have thrown off my mask;
now let me wrench your mask from you.

SOFIA (*as herself*)
Love looks not with the eyes...

DIRECTOR
If you mock your masks, your characters will crucify you.

OBERON (*to CAESAR*)
I'll open my mouth.
Thrust your sword into my throat and kiss me.

CAESAR
This I shall do.

(OBERON & CAESAR depart, fighting)

PUCK
Ill met by moonlight...

*(The scene fades; PUCK goes behind the screen.
Manuel and Director remain in the stalls)*

SCENE THREE

Interlude. The Bad Shepherd's Song.

MANUEL
(going on stage as NICK BOTTOM wearing an ass's head)

*El pastor bobo guarda las caretas.
Las caretas de los pordioseros y de los poetas
que matan a las gipaetas
cuando vuelan por las aguas quietas.
Caretas de los niños que usan la puñeta
y se pudren debajo de una seta.
Caretas de las águilas con muletas.
Caretas de la caretas
que era de yeso de Creta
y se puso de harinita color violeta
en el asesinato de Julieta.*

*(The stupid shepherd looks after the masks,
the masks of beggars and poets
who kill birds of flight
gliding over quiet waters.*

The mask of gangsters giving grief,
like the rot in a fungus.
The mask of the eagles with their red rags.
The mask of the mask
out of plaster of chalk
set in a violet colour
for Juliet's assassination.)

SCENE FOUR

The theatre. Shots are heard.

MANUEL

What's happening? Lights!

DIRECTOR

Finally, the denouement!

SPECTATOR (*running into the stalls*)

There are troops in the streets.

SOFIA (*runs out from behind the screen*)

Heavens! The children are at home alone!

JOSÉ (*entering*)

Long live the revolution!

SPECTATOR

Let us make a giant wreath from the heads of the rebels.

Let us adorn the facades and the lampposts
with the tongues of those who wish to destroy us.

We must stand firm!

Truth and beauty must bear arms in times like these.

SOFIA

Well said!

DIRECTOR

Why do you say that?

SOFIA

I want to get to play my part.

Shut the doors!

DIRECTOR

Open them! The theatre belongs to the people.

SOFIA

No, they will wreck the place!

DIRECTOR

Let them! We need real blood in here...

Gunpowder rescues poetry!

JOSÉ

The soldiers are advancing.

DIRECTOR

You'll be safer over there. Take cover when the bombs drop.

SOFIA

Oh, my children! They'll kill them!

JOSÉ

The rebels would never do that...

SPECTATOR

They recently gouged out the eyes of three hundred children,
some still on their mother's breast.

I know it to be true, it said so, in the papers.

The revolutionaries put on display little blue eyes that were still alive...

JOSÉ

An air raid!

SOFIA (*fainting*)

Oh, my dear children!

DIRECTOR (*to SOFIA*)

You really must learn not to shout like that. Project your voice like this:

"My children, my children, my dear little children."

And use your hands, convince us with a gesture, trembling...

SOFIA (*fainting*)

Oh, my dear children!

They can't be without me, especially the smallest.

He has fair hair and sings beautifully. I must go to them...

(*she revives and runs off*)

JOSÉ

Brace yourselves! Get down!

SPECTATOR

I'm in God's army. He will guide us, lead us into battle.

When I die I shall be with Him in glory.

My God does not forgive: he will place the rebels in chains.

I am not afraid.

MANUEL

(*continuing his song*)

Adivina. Adivinilla. Adivineta

de un teatro sin lunetas

y un cielo lleno de sillas

con el hueco de una careta.

Balad, balad, balad, caretas.

(*Adivina. Adivinilla. Adivineta*

of a theatre without arches

to a sky full of stone

with the emptiness of a mask.

Baa baa, bleat the masks.)

DIRECTOR

A real play is a circle of a thousand arches
where the air, the moon, and living beings
can enter and exit, and nowhere be at rest.
We tread the boards of a theatre
where true dramas can be shown,
where a real fight shall be fought!

JOSÉ

They've broken down the doors!
(to the SPECTATOR)
I don't believe in your god...
Long live the revolution!
(running off)

SPECTATOR (to MANUEL who has continued to sing)
You're spoiling the performance!

*The SPECTATOR is about to shoot at JOSÉ, but the DIRECTOR steps between them;
he hesitates for a moment...*

God will reward me!

...then he takes deliberate aim and shoots the DIRECTOR

DIRECTOR

Into thy hands...

*A bomb scores a direct hit, and the roof of the theatre collapses;
in the darkness of the auditorium, MANUEL shines a torch
revealing the body of the dying DIRECTOR which he cradles in his arms.*

SCENE FIVE

In the ruins of the theatre: the tomb of the Capulets. Night.

SOFIA as JULIET (lying by the tomb)

Exile, not a friend here, not a soulmate;
and yet I've passed under a thousand empty arches.
Please, a little help...

*Un mar de sueño.
Un mar de tierra blanca
y los arcos vacíos por el cielo.
Mi cola por las naves, por las algas.
Mi cola por el tiempo.
Un mar de tiempo.
Playa de los gusanos lenadores
y delfín de cristal por los cerezos.
Oh puro amianto de final! Oh ruina!
Oh soledad sin arco! Mar de sueño!*

(A sea of dreaming,
A sea of white land
Of empty arches in the sky
My wake among the boats, among the seaweed
my trail through time.
A sea of time
A beach of wood-eating worms,
And a crystal dolphin in the cherries.
Oh the pure unquenchable conclusion!
Oh arch-less solitude! A sea of dreaming!)

(commotion off)

Visitors, more of them, entering my tomb!
I'll cradle them, love them!

*THREE WIZARDS on WHITE HORSES appear
and sing a SERENADE*

WIZARDS

We waited for you in the garden.
A day, a morning, an afternoon...

JULIET

And a night.

WIZARDS

In one day you could throw off your misery:
Let us carry you off, out of this tomb.

JULIET

Where to?

WIZARDS

To the dark places of soft branches,
the lightless moss, where the touch of your fingers
scatters tiny worlds...
and pass into the night.

JULIET

What's the night to me?

WIZARDS

One moment can last the night through.

JULIET *(dismissing their song)*

Enough! words of love trap us in a shattered mirror, like footsteps on water.
You'd cast me back into the tomb again, as if real love were unattainable.
I'm weary of it: men, trees, horses, all the same!
When someone says rock, I hear air;
when someone says air, I hear emptiness;
when someone says emptiness, I hear a headless dove.

WIZARDS

We want to bed you, Juliet: take off your clothes,
show us your rump and we'll whip it with our tails!

JULIET

You can't teach me anything.
The moon thrusts gently, pillars fall,
worms light their way into cherries;
I know your longing.
You want to sleep with me? Very well. But I'm no slave,
I give the orders, I'm in control - I shall mount you!

(they begin their love-making; their ecstasies are vocal)

WIZARDS

Our bounty is as boundless as the sea,
our love as deep; the more we give to thee,
the more we have...

(The DIRECTOR'S wordless voice as birdsong is heard from the tomb)

JULIET

My god, the nightingale!

(lifeless, Juliet collapses into the tomb)

WIZARDS

Our love, come back! The wind breaks the branches of the cypresses... wilt thou be gone?
Parting is such sweet sorrow.

The scene fades

SCENE SIX

The ruins of the theatre with no roof. Dawn is breaking. MANUEL emerges as the dust settles.

JOSÉ *(entering)*

What did they want?

MANUEL

The body of the director.
They found it under the rubble, in the tomb with Juliet.
They were stripping it naked as we came out.

JOSÉ

The theatre in the dust
which reached the tomb.

MANUEL

The truths of tombs!

SPECTATOR *(entering)*

The words were so strong
that the audience inhabited the text.

MANUEL

All theatre comes from dark places.
and has the stench of rotting moon.

As the sun comes up, the tomb opens to reveal the figure of SOFIA dressed very glamorously and surrounded by her children; in a blaze of glory, she steps forward as 'la prima donna' and JOSÉ partners her in a duet.

SOFIA & JOSÉ

We died for real in the gaze of the public
in the hope that love would burst forth
and give new life to our masks.

SPECTATOR

When the nightingale sang, we could not hold back the tears.
That's when the riot started...

JOSÉ

When ideology goes on the rampage it tramples all truths in its wake.

SOFIA

The horses escaped through the orchestra.

MANUEL

Leaving us with the loneliness...

SOFIA

... of a new dawn which will never end.

The DIRECTOR flies into the theatre on a white fluffy cloud. His gunshot wounds can clearly be seen, and he has acquired a large erection. He addresses the company through a megaphone.

DIRECTOR

From the beginning! the lunatic, the lover and the poet...
the bare walls of the drama.

MANUEL

The barricades broken, the roof taken off:
now we've a theatre with no arches!

SPECTATOR

The audience has arrived!

DIRECTOR

Let them in!

The last section of music may form a reprise while the cast take their bows in the traditional manner. Suddenly, there is a blackout, and when the auditorium lights come up again, neither the cast, nor the band are anywhere to be seen. It only remains for the audience to leave the theatre.