Surtitles.com articles in full

WAGNER IS LETTER PERFECT

The Canadian Opera Company's impressive new production of **Lohengrin** is the first occasion I have totally enjoyed a Wagner opera. There have been passages of peak pleasure in the past, yet it seemed highly unlikely I would ever spend four hours in the O'Keefe Centre as a contented captive of Hitler's favorite composer.

The reason for this transformation was not hard to discover, being written in foot-high letters on the proscenium of the stage. Surtitles, the COC-developed technique for projecting a running, capsulized translation in English of a foreign-language opera's libretto, is a marvellous boon. Those prepared by Gunta Dreifelds for *Lohengrin* were pungent and erudite.

Secure in knowing exactly who is doing what to whom and why, one can bask contented, allowing the often glorious music to soothe the soul. Wagner's subtle blending of four trumpeters (heralds) on stage with others in the orchestra had a particularly haunting beauty.

Vocally, this was a mixed opening night with the few disappointments offset by some unexpected pleasures. You could sense the widespread dismay when general director Lotfi Mansouri craved audience indulgence, at the outset, on behalf of American soprano Janis Martin. She would continue to sing the role of Ortrud, he said, despite being indisposed with a cold.

As the applause thundered at the close for this truly Wagnerian-sized interpreter of his works, all one could suggest was she had either been gifted with a miraculous cure or had given one of the greatest germ-defying performances of the century. Her evil, treacherous Ortrud made you feel like standing up and having a good hiss.

A second American soprano, Ellen Shade, may have looked decidedly non-Aryan as the saintly, self-tormented Elsa, but the voice rang true and that mattered more than her paranoid hallucinations accounting for the bulk of the plot. I had some difficulty in fully enjoying Siegfried Jerusalem in the title role of the hero knight. This might have been because the costume of this distinguished German tenor seemed somewhere between Superman and Liberace with a hairstyle more reminiscent of Tom Jones than the Holy Grail.

Australian bass Donald Shanks sang superbly and looked suitably regal in his COC debut as King Henry. Canadian baritone Theodore Baerg was also clear and commanding as the king's herald. But all one can suggest for Ukrainian-born baritone Nicola Farbricci (singing the villain's role of Frederick of Telramund) is that he was the victim of an instant indisposition.

The direction of Nando Schellen and the design of Wilfred Werz were adequate. But the expanded orchestra (76) and choir (70) responded nobly to conductor Michel Tabachnik in his Canadian debut.

Lohengrin will be performed Sept. 20, 24, 28 (7:30 p.m.) and Oct. 2 (2 p.m.)

By Bob Pennington, Staff Writer, *The Sunday Sun*, September 18, 1983

OPERA ENJOYS ITS CHARMED LIFE

Devotees Grow in Numbers as They Grow Younger, Too

PHILADELPHIA, April 26 – This is a city of regulated routine. It does not usually teem: not with dignitaries, like those about to assemble at the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, and certainly not with opera.

Until Friday, that is, when Opera Fest Philadelphia started. It is a two-week event 400th anniversary of the birth of the art form, in Italy, and this city's legacy as the birthplace of American opera, with the anonymous publication here of Andrew Barton's two-act comedy, "The Disappointment," in 1767. The festival offers performances of Verdi's "Falstaff" by the Opera Company of Philadelphia, Cavalli's "Ormindo" by the Curtis Institute of Music, John Duffy's "Black Water" by the American Music Theater Festival and Richard Wagner's "Chekov Trilogy" by the Academy of Vocal Arts. Everything, alas, but "The Disappointment."

The festival has also attracted to the city the 27th annual conference of Opera America, a service organization for North American opera companies. General sessions start on Monday at the Doubletree Hotel, across from the historic Academy of Music, and run through Wednesday.

The conference is in danger of turning into a party. Such affairs usually project a certain forced cheeriness, however drab or dire the workaday realities. But here there is ample cause for optimism. Indeed, at a time of perceived crisis in the American classical-music world, opera seems somehow exempt, living a charmed life.

"Opera's audience is growing, and it is also growing younger," Marc A. Scorca, the president of Opera America, said on Wednesday from the organization's headquarters in Washington.

Opera America's latest overall attendance figure for opera performances in the United States and Canada, 7.1 million for the 1994-95 season, represented approximately a 10 percent increase over the previous season. And figures from the National Endowment for the Arts show an increase of almost 25 percent in the American opera audience from 1982 to 1992. All of this during a period in which it has increasingly been asserted (though usually without proof) that audiences for classical music in America are aging and declining.

True, there have always been some people eager to read opera out of the normal run of classical music, often for unsympathetic reasons. "To write a successful opera a knowledge of harmony and counterpoint is not enough," H.L. Mencken wrote in 1920. "One must also be a sort of Barnum." He added, "An opera may have plenty of good music in it and fail, but if it has a good enough show it will succeed."

In some ways the show, if not always the singing, may be better than ever just now, with greater attention paid to theatrical values. And at a time when even traditionally staid classical-music institutions are beginning to grasp at Barnum, when multimedia is king in the culture at large, opera comes with a broad appeal built in.

"The art form has some intrinsic resonance with the popular music videos that the young people are watching," Mr. Scorca said. "When I have sat down to watch some music videos, I have been struck by the mixture of music and words and visual images, not in a specific marriage of image to word and word to music but in a large, sweeping fusion of these elements into a big emotional message."

Opera's appeal to the youth market is indeed anomalous, as figures compiled by the National Endowment in 1992 confirm. Opera, they show, was the only one of the traditional performing arts to have grown in attendance in the age group 18 to 24 over the previous decade: an 18 percent increase despite a 16 percent decline in the individuals in that group.

Mr. Scorca's recourse to pop music itself illustrates what he called a "huge demystification" of the medium. Perhaps the biggest factor in demystifying opera has been the use of titles for works in foreign languages and even in English.

"They've changed the experience of opera, and I think most of that change is for the good," said Paul Kellogg, who directed the Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, N.Y., for 18 years and is now the managing director of the New York City Opera. "I really believe that the development of supertitles is in large measure responsible for the development of the audience currently coming to the opera. The coincidence is too great."

For good or ill, demystification takes other forms as well. As a matter of course nowadays, opera is ripped from the headlines, often with a sensationalist tinge. Recent examples have included John Adam's "Death of Klinghoffer," Stewart Wallace's "Harvey Milk" and Michael Daugherty's "Jackie O." "Black Water," a work by Mr. Duffy and the novelist Joyce Carol Oates loosely based on the 1969 drowning incident at Chappaquiddick, Mass., is receiving its premiere production here this week. (It is probably not a stop on the Presidents' tour.)

In addition, the medium has more or less infiltrated popular culture, in everything from Three Tenors concerts to operatically scaled musicals. A recent production of Puccini's "Bohème" at the San Francisco Opera seems to confirm what the current Broadway rock hit "Rent" suggests, that the work is a particular favorite of young audiences. In fact, especially outside major cities, the current operatic surge is rooted in the standard European warhorses: the very thing orchestras are now lambasted for resorting to.

As often as not in commercials, opera is a foil, roundly mocked for its stereotypical absurdities. But at least its name is spelled right.

"There is a whole new climate" for opera in this country, two panelists said in identical terms at a recent forum, "The Fat Lady Sings On: Behind the Opera Boom," at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The panelists agreed on little else except to lament the byproducts of heightened commercialization, for example, the "manufactured career" of the young French tenor Roberto Alagna.

North America, to be sure, has been experiencing an opera boom for some time. More than half of Opera America's 123 professional member organizations, Mr. Scorca said, have entered the organization since 1970, more than two-thirds since 1960.

"Opera is still new in this country," Mr. Scorca said, Philadelphia's early start notwithstanding. "The growth in audience is a result, for one thing, of access to live-performance opportunities that may not have existed 5 or 10 years ago."

It is worth recalling that American orchestras enjoyed a similar boom for 25 years or so, until harder times set in a decade ago. And it is also true that even in boom times, nothing is ever easy in the arts. Long-range growth and a fresh wave of excitement do not necessarily translate directly into dollars.

In any discussion of finances among American opera companies, it should be recognized, as Opera America does in some of its statistics, that there is the Metropolitan Opera, with its annual budget of $160 million and an endowment of $145 million, and there is everyone else.

"It's almost an oxymoron to talk about economic well-being in opera, because there really is no such thing," said Mr. Kellogg, with a current annual budget of $27 million and no endowment at the City Opera. "The Met, of course, doesn't have any problem at all. But most opera companies in the country have problems, perhaps not constant but certainly periodic, because it's just so expensive. In today's funding climate, there's no way of avoiding crisis from time to time. It's the nature of the game."

Joseph Volpe, the general manager of the Met, disagrees about his "problemless" operation. And at the City Opera, crisis has been more constant than periodic over the last decade, but Mr. Kellogg announced with pride that the company would end its current year with a balanced budget. An even larger outlay is in the offing, he said, "to beef up artistic standards." Mr. Scorca spoke for the rest of the country: "By and large, opera companies are doing fairly well financially. Now, 'fairly well' is relative. Every year, roughly half of the companies incur a deficit, and roughly half incur a surplus. The fact that the companies are surviving and growing is an indication that the same ones aren't incurring those deficits year after year."

Opera America figures show that its member companies derive just over half of their income from the box office and other sources of revenue. The rest must be raised through contributions, some 40 percent of that money comes from individuals.

Several company directors cited the stock market boom as a major factor in the current fundraising climate. Despite cutbacks by public agencies and heightened competition from social and humanitarian causes, the financial situation remains basically healthy for opera.

"Given the number of opera companies in the world today and the number of symphony orchestras," Mr. Volpe of the Met said, "if you boil it all down, I guess people are finding it easier to fundraise for opera

companies than for symphonies, because why else would there be a discrepancy? And I think it's because the people enjoy the product more. People get much more excited in an opera house than in a concert hall, and that's why they're here. It's as simple as that."

Even in better days of the National Endowment for the Arts, the awards were valuable as much for cachet as for the piddling amounts involved. Most opera companies have weathered the reduction or elimination of grants in financial terms.

Matters are different in Europe, where arts institutions are dependent on far larger subsidies, which are in many cases being drastically reduced. The Scottish National Opera recently lost 90 percent of its grant from the Arts Council of Britain, and the Royal Opera has canceled plans for some new productions.

As the London retrenchment illustrates, the very complexity of opera presentation that makes for such an unwieldy financial situation in the first place also allows for a certain flexibility in times of crisis. Every area of expenditure is an area for potential cutbacks. Productions may be scuttled, simplified or carried out with other houses. Only the largest companies retain fixed bodies of instrumentalists and choristers, so the musical scale may be altered.

But stopgaps carry their own risks. And here is where opera may be separating itself from the rest of the classical music world.

"The problem is the theory that if things are bad, you have to cut back," Mr. Volpe said from his comfortable position at the Met. "The Met used to do that, too, canceling productions. You can't cut back on your product. You have to keep raising the money and doing more.

"People in the symphonic world are setting up an atmosphere that's not very exciting, and I think that has a lot to do with their problems. Ticket buyers don't want to hear that there's a financial crisis, and they'll get less than they expected. They want more than they expected."

To judge from recent past results and immediate prospects, operagoers have been getting just that.
James R. Oestreich, *The New York Times*, April, 28, 1997

TITLES CAN LET OPERA FANS IN ON JOKE

Millions of radio listeners heard the laugh last month, when the Metropolitan Opera broadcast Mozart's *Cosi fan Tutte* across North America, but fewer than 4,000 of us – those actually in the auditorium – knew what exactly was so comical.

What assaulted our funny bones was the sight of the maid Despina making her second-act entrance, pulling the entire set behind her on a rope, as the translation of her Italian words appeared simultaneously on the backs of seats in front of us: "What a rotten life, being a chambermaid!"

It was one of the great sight gags in recent Met history and those present had every reason to laugh. Of course, Despina always complains when she makes her entrance, even in productions in which the set has arrived before her. But I'd never heard a laugh like that and I wouldn't have heard it this time had it not been for Met Titles.

Met Titles are the latest and most sophisticated development of a phenomenon introduced in Toronto back in 1983 that projects condensed translations of the opera's words either above the stage proscenium – hence the original designation, "surtitles" – or on the Met's special seat attachments that can be turned on or off according to the patron's wishes.

The Met was the last major opera producer in North America to introduce these translations. James Levine, the company's music director was adamant in the widely held belief that surtitles were distracting, forcing patrons to divide their attention between the stage and the projected words.

Ideally patrons should be able to take in the stage and the titles in one glance, but in many theatres – especially the Met's Lincoln Center home, where the proscenium rises 54 feet – that is possible only from the balcony or the back of the main floor.

Even so, surtitles have become wildly popular, in use from Helsinki to Tokyo.

Not that John Leberg, who developed surtitles for the Canadian Opera Company, regards them as a panacea for operatic communication. The former COC director of operations sees them as merely another tool in making opera accessible to the public.

"We had a problem of accessibility in 1983 when we were doing two very literary operas (Strauss' *Elektra* and Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea*)and we wondered how the audience was going to understand what was going on." Leberg recalls that Lotfi Mansouri, the COC's general director of the time, said: "Subtitles work in films. Is there any way we can make them work in opera?"

So Leberg and company "came up with a simple solution of projecting slides above the proscenium.

"We had a couple of months to play with the system, experimenting with the right size for the words and the right colour for the screen," he explains briefly. It would have been easier with a video projector, but we had only a $10,000 budget so we settled for a simple carousel with a xenon bulb."

Simple or not, the audience took immediately to surtitles and Leberg soon found himself invited all over the continent to demonstrate the new system.

When the New York City Opera rented the Canadian Opera production of *Elektra* for presentation at Artpark, in Lewiston, N.Y., the new surtitles were included.

That led to more than a little confusion when New York City Opera general director Beverly Sills promptly announced to her American colleagues that her company had invented them.

Other companies, reluctant to acknowledge the COC's trademark, gave them different names, such as the exotic OpTrans.

Whatever the designation, credit has since pretty well reverted to Leberg and his colleagues, who were initially so unaware of the eventual universality of their invention that they had no idea surtitles would ever be used again.

But the multilingual Gunta Dreifelds, then a COC production assistant, remembers well the public reaction.

"The idea took off like wildfire," says Dreifelds, to whom fell the task of writing almost all the COC's surtitles, more than 60 operas' worth.

"Within six months more than 200 companies were using them.

"We started in '83 with three trays of 80 slides, or 240 per act. There were 20 characters per line with a maximum of two lines. But later, with computer generated characters, we could add to the length of the lines and unconsciously we now write more."

Dreifelds says Leberg "is right when he says that we tend to overwrite. Less is more. The idea should be not to direct attention away from the stage."

Even when longer than Leberg would like, surtitles represent a drastic condensation of what is actually being said on stage, producing the danger of misrepresentation by over-simplification. And there's the problem of conveying thoughts expressed by one language in another.

"Strauss operas are very psychological," Dreifelds says, "with almost no plot action on stage, so there is a temptation to try to get everything in.

"I also try to reflect something of the character of the production. When we did a Wild West-style *Don Pasquale*, Ernesto entered saying: "Buon giorno," but my titles read: "Howdy, pardner."

In preparation for writing the titles, Dreifelds listens to the music, divides up the score musically and decides where the titles should go. Because current COC production *Luisa Miller* is based on a play by Schiller, Dreifelds also read the original play in German before confronting the libretto.

"It is eerie how different words appear on screen," she admits. "I work on a laptop during rehearsal so I can anticipate lines that turn out to be unintentionally funny.

"German is a difficult language to translate because the verb can come two pages later. And you sometimes need a lot of English words to do the work of two or three in German.

"But surtitles are here to stay. I have worked with directors who initially opposed them but have come away smiling. When you listen to the Met broadcasts on radio you hear laughter now where you never did before. People are actually understanding the words."

William Littler, *The Toronto Star*, April 12, 199

MYSTIQUE OF OPERA IS DUE FOR A RUDE JOLT AS SUBTITLES ARRIVE

English on Screen Over Stage Wins Hearts of Audiences; What Figaro Really Says

NEW YORK – "*Siete ben fortunato! Sui maccheroni il cacio v'e caccoto!* » sings Figaro to the lovesick count in Rossini's "The Barber of Seville."

When Frederick Burchinal sings it tonight, at the opening of the New York City Opera's summer season, the audience will know that he means, "You're in luck! The cheese fell right on the macaroni!" They'll know because as he sings, the English translation will appear – in white letters on a long, black screen – right above the stage.

Later, disguised as a drunken soldier, the count will irk his rival, Dr. Bartolo, by calling him "Dr. Busybody, Dr. Barbarian" and "you ugly baboon." The audience will laugh at his words, not just his tipsy swagger.

From aria to aria, 580 subtitles will carry the audience through every plot twist, lovers' tryst and villain's aside.

"This will revolutionize opera," predicts Beverly Sills, the retired singer who runs the New York City Opera. "You don't have to sit there for hours anymore wondering, 'What the hell is going on?'"

Even the Met?

One might expect such crowd-pleasing tactics from the New York City Opera, which has a tradition of trying to popularize opera and markets its seasons by offering catchy packages such as "Unforgettable Death Scenes." The surprise is that, far from considering the move a low-brow sellout, other opera houses are rushing to follow the company into subtitles.

"It's the greatest thing to hit opera since the long-playing record," exults Terry McEwen, the director of the San Francisco Opera. Since the New York City Opera used subtitles for one production last September, they have been tried in Boston, Houston, Cincinnati, San Francisco and Portland, Ore. Subtitles will make their debut this fall in Seattle, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and Tulsa, Okla.

Even at the stuffy Metropolitan Opera, general manager Anthony Bliss says subtitles "undoubtedly" will be used for some operas "when the technology is more sophisticated."

The curtain may even be going up on an international movement to make opera more understandable. Major opera houses in England and Australia are starting to use subtitles. Sonya Friedman, a New York film maker who writes many opera subtitles, say the revered La Scala in Milan recently asked her about the possibility of titling – in Italian – productions of American operas by Leonard Bernstein. (In this case, there wasn't enough time.)

Subtitles go by many names, some of them trademarked. They call them OpTrans in Pittsburgh, Supertitles in San Francisco, and just plain Titles in Boston. Except for some doubting divas and pouting purists, they generally are getting raves. Opera companies say subtitles attract new audiences and donors. One house even plans to

use them to market balcony tickets: The soprano's face may be a distant blur, but you get a great view of her words.

TV GOES FIRST

Nearly 13 million people went to the opera in the U.S. last year, more than double the number of a decade earlier, and the popularity of subtitles television operas is widely held to be a major reason. From the first time English titles were used on a live televised opera in 1977, for "The Barber of Seville" with Miss Sills, audiences loved them, and thereafter complained if the titles weren't used.

The Canadian Opera Company of Toronto first thought of moving titles from the bottom of a TV screen to the top of a stage. Early last year the company was doing a complex, unfamiliar work, "Elektra" by Richard Strauss, and didn't want to put off its audience. The idea of singing the German opera in English was rejected; "Translations usually aren't as literate," says John Leberg, the company's operations director.

And as anyone knows who has heard opera in English, one often can understand only about half the words anyway. Houston even plans to use subtitles when it performs "The Magic Flute" in English.

So the Canadian company got in touch with Miss Friedman, who had written the subtitles for about 50 TV operas, which is to say most of them. Miss Friedman had recently titled a television "Elektra," and she adapted her translation for the stage in Toronto. The company was so pleased it immediately declared titles a permanent feature. After the New York City Opera's own experiment last fall with "Cendrillon" (that's Cinderella for those who need subtitles), it declared the same intent.

The technology is deceptively simple, and only now are opera companies beginning to learn that the potential for disaster is enormous. "It is another thing that can go wrong in the art form for which the greatest number of things can go wrong," says Mr. McEwen, the San Francisco director.

Before the curtain goes up tonight at the New York State Theater, two people will enter the projection booth at the second balcony level carting eight carousel trays – just like the ones used for vacation slides—full of subtitles for "The Barber of Seville." Because of the necessary split-second timing, the process requires a technician to run the projectors and a musician to read musical cues.

Jacqueline Jones, a voice coach, will sit slouched over a score marked in pencil by Miss Friedman, the translator. She will hear the music through headphones, and when singers open their mouths for a titles line, Ms. Jones will shout a number to the projectionist.

The slides show one or two lines of 30 characters each, and Ms. Jones will call out code-like instructions to run the slides in rapid succession or to leave long pauses when the screen is black: "357, go. To black. 358, go. To black. Three in a row, starting with 359: Go. 360, go. 361, go."

The process can never be totally automated, even though some houses are putting titles on computer disks and transmitting them with fancy video projectors. Because singers don't sing at the same speed every time, and an aria might get more applause tonight than next week, someone who knows music has to "conduct" the titles.

Plenty can go wrong: The titles can go on too early, ruining a punch line. They also can come too late, or, if a slide is missing or warped, not at all. At a dress rehearsal for "Barber," dialogue sometimes hung above an empty stage.

During a recent opera in Boston, one slide was upside down. At a Wagner opera in San Francisco, a typo turned "Is that a threat?" into "Is that a treat?"

Some things one might think would be tricky aren't. Titles don't have to be continuous, since a lot of opera is repetition or someone singing "la la la" (it isn't considered necessary to include every word anyway). And when there is a stage full of people all singing different things, it is generally clear from the story line who is singing what. For instance, only two people in "Barber" could be the source of "We're so thrilled to be together we can hardly stand it."

One of the biggest problems has been literal translations that sound silly. San Francisco recently subtitles for "Siegfried," and when the naïve, dumbfounded hero removed Brunnhilde's chest armor and declared, "This is not a man," the line got such guffaws it was removed after opening night.

The biggest brouhaha thus far, and apparently the only one in which a singer became outraged, was Houston Grand Opera's subtitles for "Tosca." Soprano Eva Marton, as Tosca, told her lover in the first scene to paint the eyes in a portrait like hers. The slide has her saying, "Give her black eyes," and the guest audience at a dress rehearsal cracked up. The ruffled singer demanded that the titling be stopped for the rest of the rehearsal and that the titles be re-edited.

Tenor Placido Domingo, who also appeared in Houston's "Tosca," told Scott Heumann, the translator, that the audience may be better off not knowing how melodramatic some opera is. "Perhaps ignorance is bliss," he suggested.

Ingvar Wixell, who played the evil Baron Scarpia in "Tosca," told Mr. Heumann, "You don't need to subtitle when I sing 'Help, I'm dying.' When I'm stabbed and stumbling around the stage, it's perfectly clear what's happening." (Mr. Heumann says he took out "anything that looked like a silent movie.")

Still, many singers applaud the titles. Michael Devlin, an American who sang in a subtitled "Carmen" in Toronto, says, "I felt good being on stage and knowing people out there understood what I was singing." It may even affect the acting in opera; in the subtitled "Cendrillon," Miss Sills says, "One of the singers said they were able to perform a little less broadly but people understood what their actions meant."

Minor Backlash

Paolo Montarsolo, an Italian bass-baritone, thinks titles are a good idea "for a serious, slow opera like Verdi, with dead people, or Wagner, where it can take half an hour to say 'I love you.'" But in a fast-paced comic

opera, Mr. Montarsolo feels, subtitles are redundant and distracting. He says audiences for "Don Pasquale" in San Francisco, where he sang the lead, "missed some of the very quick visual gags because they were following the titles."

And there has been a minor audience backlash. In a survey in Portland, Ore., about 100 people out of an audience of 1,800 opposed the titles. "The vociferous ones said that if people can't take the time to study the libretto and learn the opera, they shouldn't come," says Robert Bailey, the general director of Portland Opera. In Houston, an opera fan recently canceled her subscription, saying the subtitles were "distracting," and she couldn't ignore them.

Most opera companies don't mind sacrificing a few purists because they believe subtitles will pull in a vast new audience.

Patricia O'Neill, the development director of the Pittsburgh Opera, says, "There are lots of young people in this corporate town, middle managers, who don't go to opera because they're afraid to. What if somebody asks them a question in the lobby and they don't understand what's going on?" The Pittsburgh Opera is hoping titles will beckon to enough of the intimidated that it can schedule three performances of each opera next year instead of two.

The New York City Opera says subtitles already are helping ticket sales. Among an audience last week for the subtitled "Barber" at Artpark in Lewiston, N.Y., was Wayne Senn, a retired credit manager, who said: "I liked opera on the radio, but what were they saying? I would never have paid the money before (subtitles), just to hear nice sounds."

Screens on the Seat-back?

Even among the cognoscenti, subtitles are drawing some bravos. Before John Briggs saw Verdi's "Simon Boccanegra" in Houston with titles, the retired insurance executive had seen it at major opera houses all over the world. "I am an opera snob," Mr. Briggs says. "But the libretto is complex, and the titles turned on a new light once in a while."

Corporations and private patrons are turning out to be eager donors to the subtitle effort — which can cost an opera house $40,000 at the outset—because they like the visibility of their efforts. Several enterprising opera companies are duplicating their slides and renting them to other companies for $3,000 an opera.

Some companies are so caught up in the subtitling wave they are even talking about the feasibility of installing individual electronic subtitle screens in the backs of opera house seats.

Peter Weinberg, a producer for "Great Performances" on the Public Broadcasting Service, says all this effort simply seeks to eliminate the unavoidable handicap of history that shuts out modern audiences. "Opera was written for people who knew the language and the stories," he says. "There was never intended to be any mystery."

Meg Cox, *The Wall Street Journal*, Friday, July 6, 1984

TFT TURNS 40 A success that spans the two solitudes

Guy Mignault, artistic director of Théâtre Français de Toronto, has to be the most welcoming theatre manager in the city. There he is, at the top of every performance, enthusiastically greeting the audience, offering heartfelt thanks to the sponsors and reminding us all to turn off our cellphones with a comic turn. His most recent schtick was to stop his little curtain-raiser to answer an embarrassing ring from his own phone. The caller? Supposedly it was Governor-General Michaëlle Jean calling to RSVP for the company's 40th-anniversary gala to be held tonight at Casa Loma.

We did more in one night for the recognition of TFT…than we had in our previous 37 years.

Maybe it's thanks to the ever-ebullient Mignault, who not only administers the company and directs a few shows every year but also regularly takes to the boards, that the Théâtre Français de Toronto (TFT) is facing a very healthy middle age, with an expanded playbill, rising ticket sales and a balanced budget.

Or maybe it's just the surtitles.

Two years ago, at the suggestion of one of his board members and following the lead of the Canadian Opera Company, Mignault instituted English-language surtitles for some of the French-language company's performances. The response was instantaneous: Some in the French community accused the TFT of selling its soul to the devil, but in the rest of the city, unilingual friends and spouses suddenly found they could tag along with francophone theatregoers for an evening of Molière or Tremblay in the original. Even the occasional deaf patron shows up.

Today, ticket sales are up 20 per cent; the company can boast about 1,000 subscribers, a number it last saw 15 years ago; and, for the first time, people of influence in Toronto have heard of the TFT, the largest French-language theatre in Canada outside Quebec.

Molière still draws the crowds

"Our studies showed most Anglophones in Toronto did not know the Théâtre Français existed," Mignault said in a recent interview in French. "When we did the first night of surtitles … we did more in one night for the recognition of TFT among Toronto's Anglophones than we had inn our previous 37 years of existence," he added with a laugh.

Mignault is often laughing. He has a convivial personality and he plays front man for the TFT like one of old actor-managers of the British stage. A board member once suggested he shouldn't run the TFT as though it was

his personal company, but Mignault, who used to own his own summer theatre in Quebec, could only shrug his shoulders. "The theatre is like my living room," he says. "It's not megalomania; it has to work that way."

Mignault, who had occasionally worked with the TFT when he was still based in Montreal, arrived in Toronto in 1997 with no intention of staying. The theatre was looking for a replacement for the much-respected Diana Leblanc, but despite being in a bit of a career funk, Mignault was planning to say no thanks and return to his comfortable house in Montreal. And then, he got chatting and a new excitement overtook him.

"At 49," he said, "what do you do? Buy yourself a big TV and a La-Z-Boy, or take on some challenges? I embraced the challenges."

His interviewers had not bothered mentioning that the company was carrying a $100,000 debt on a $500,000 annual budget. "It was a six-month honeymoon, followed by two years of hell," he said. "I discovered there were some skeletons in the closet."

Leblanc's six-year stint in the 1990s produced some artistic triumphs, but, like lots of arts companies in the years of the Ontario Conservatives' funding cutbacks, TFT was suffering. Leblanc was forced to mount ever smaller and smaller seasons and subscription audiences were in decline.

Of course, the TFT had suffered lots of ups and downs over its 40 years. The Théâtre du P'tit Bonheur was founded by a group of enthusiastic amateurs in 1967. Toronto director John Van Burek started working with the company in 1970, established its first full season and took it professional in 1973. It celebrated its 20th anniversary by changing its name to the more transparent Théâtre Français de Toronto.

That same year, however, it was forced out of its then home in Adelaide Court when the other two companies in the complex went bust, and it has been dreaming of a permanent home ever since. It performed briefly at Harbourfront's du Maurier Theatre before TFT's own financial troubles forced it out of that venue too. Since 1989, it has performed in the upstairs space at Canadian Stage's Berkeley Street headquarters, but its offices are across town on Dundas Street West and its rehearsal space changes from year to year.

When he arrived, Mignault promised that the company would celebrate its 35th anniversary in a new home. He has since realized that was naïve (a recent plan to move into the Distillery District fell through). Still, the theatre's board is committed to finding a home within the next decade.

Apart from real estate, the conundrum for all its artistic directors has been the same: how to program a playbill for a company that is very small with an audience that is very broad. Like Toronto's small but diverse French-speaking community, TFT's audience is composed not only of franco-Ontarians and transplanted Quebeckers and Acadians, but also francophone Europeans and Africans and other immigrants whose second language is French rather than English.

Mignault's approach has been populist. He continues to program the new Quebec plays that have always given the company its artistic profile, but the boisterous productions of Molière draw the crowds. Last year, *The Miser* – with surtitles, of course – broke previous box office records.

Meanwhile, Mignault, whose company is also benefiting from a growing demand for French-language education and activities in the city, has expanded the playbill to nine shows from three, including four specifically for young audiences. He has added more co-productions with other francophone companies from across the country and tries to include material that acknowledges Toronto's diversity. This winter, for example, playwright Glen Charles Landry will unveil a version of the Don Quixote story that opens on the Toronto subway.

Mignault, the Montrealer who didn't plan to stay, recently bought a house in the Danforth neighbourhood and has no intention of leaving this multicultural metropolis. In 2006, when TFT's production of *The Miser* won a Masque, Montreal's annual theatre award, for best production from outside Quebec, he visited his old hometown to accept the prize and brought along a message: "I said, 'I invite you cordially to come and visit *la francophonie Canadienne*. You'll see some remarkable things are going on. Contrary to the old beliefs, Toronto isn't boring at all.'"

Kate Taylor, *Globe and Mail*, Thursday, November 15, 2007

On Screen, on Deck
Words and Music

The Canadians have created something that makes opera understandable and accessible to many who love the music but can't understand the words. It's called "surtitles," the live-theatrical equivalent of English subtitles, projected above the stage's proscenium arch. The running translations worked beautifully for New Yorkers as the City Opera adapted the Canadian Opera Company's idea to its opening-night performance Wednesday of the Massenet opera "Cendrillon."

Purists may imagine problems, but in practice surtitles are splendid. The clear print of the translation is flashed only long enough to convey the singers' meaning. Sonya Friedman, whose subtitles have enhanced televised opera, avoids the wordy ramblings of most printed librettos.

Above all, this device didn't intrude on the fantasy world of the Cinderella fairy tale. When Faith Esham, as the enchanted heroine, lamented the momentary loss of Prince Charming in French, the surtitle's legend said, "Alas, I think all of that was a dream." The audience was caught in the same dream, made more real by the clarity of the language.

The New York Times, September 23, 1983

AUDIENCE LIKES TO READ BETWEEN LIN

Audience opinion ran strongly in favor of the projected subtitles used in the Canadian Opera Company's presentation of *Elektra* last night at the O'Keefe Centre.

Never before employed in a North American opera house, "sur-titles" are lines of English translation illuminated against a black screen stationed just below the top of the proscenium arch. Superlatives such as "marvellous" and "fantastic" were common among the patrons, and only two of the 23 questioned expressed unqualified disapproval of the technique.

Even those with smattering of German or a good knowledge of Strauss's opera regarded the projections as useful "to fill in the gaps." Dr. A. Hutchison from Toronto said that "your eyes can glance up or you can listen for the German … you've got time to read it, so you don't miss any of the action."

Margaret Filshie, an editor for University of Toronto Press, felt that the sur-titles were "useful for tonight especially, because there's so much in the text… A good English translation well sung would be less disruptive, because you keep looking at the sur-titles and back to the drama on stage. On the other hand, the drama of the sung German is much more powerful."

One patron sitting at the back of the theatre experienced no difficulty in reading the titles, but was troubled that "only certain lines were translated." Another disliked the "modern" idiom of the English translation but approved of the technique in principle. All but one preferred sur-titles to sung translations, the traditional solution to the language barrier in opera. Only the two patrons utterly opposed to any sort of translation found the sur-titles uncomfortable to watch or distracting.

Toronto record retailer Sam Sniderman (who speaks German) echoed the opinion of many when he said that sur-titles, while very helpful for a highly charged opera like *Elektra*, would be unnecessary in standard repertoire chestnuts such as *Carmen* or *La Traviata*.

Arthur Kaptainis, *The Globe and Mail,* January 22, 1983

CAPIRE O DISTURBARE L'OPERA?

Trent'anni fa in Canada furono per la prima volta adottati in un teatro i sopratitoli con la traduzione del libretto cantata in lingua originale. Molti critici e artisti, come Fedele D'Amico o Riccardo Muti, li osteggiarono o tollerarono appena: oggi nuovi sistemi multimediali forse esagerano con le opzioni per lo spettatore, ma alla fine chi li vuole ignorare può tenere gli occhi aperti sulla scena…

C'era un tempo, nemmeno troppo lontano, in cui lo spettatore poco informato non aveva altra alternativa che armarsi di libretto e lumicino o rassegnarsi a indovinare quello che succedeva sulla scena. E poi, giusto trent'anni fa, arrivò l'invenzione destinata a cambiare il corso delle cose per quello spettatore ma anche per i cartelloni d'opera, che si aprirono a repertori meno noti e fino ad allora improponibili per le barriere linguistiche. L'invenzione dei sopratitoli si deve alla volontà di un manager operistico, Lotfi Mansouri, e alla realizzazione di un gruppo di suoi tecnici alla Canadian Opera Company di Toronto, dove il 21 gennaio 1983 una rappresentazione di *Elektra* veniva accompagnata per la prima volta da proiezioni del testo sull'arco scenico. Fu un successo da subito. Nel giro di pochi mesi il sistema fu adottato da numerosi teatri e compagnie d'opera nel Nord America per diffondersi e affermarsi anche in Europa nel corso degli anni Novanta. Una certa diffidenza da parte del pubblico, ma soprattutto la forte resistenza di direttori musicali e numerosi registi non riuscirono tuttavia a ostacolarne la diffusione. Anche nei pragmatici Stati Uniti l'inizio non fu facile. Nel 1985 l'allora direttore della Metropolitan Opera di New York, Anthony A. Bliss, meditando di introdurre sperimentalmente un sistema di titolatura in teatro, dovette affrontare il direttore musicale James Levine, tutt'altro che favorevole all'idea : « Dovranno passare sul moi corpo, se credono di poter mostrare quelle cose nel mio teatro. Non posso credere che non vogliano che il pubblico sia concentrato sugli esecutori per tutto il tempo. » La critica non fu da meno : il direttore di « Opera News » Robert M. Jacobson definiva i sopratitoli « un patetico espediente di marketing per il pubblico marginale » e Anthony Tommasini nel « New York Times » asseriva che « i sopratitoli rompono il legame fra la musica e l'ascotatore », ammettendo tuttavia che « sono una distrazione, sebbene accettabile visti i vantaggi ».

Anche nel nostro Paese – dove il Maggio Musicale Fiorentino già nel 1986 aprì pionieristicamente l'era dei sopratitoli in Italia nei *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* diretti da Zubin Mehta e la regia di Michael Hampe – gli oppositori furono molti, a cominciare da Riccardo Muti, che riuscì a bloccare l'adozione di un sistema di titolazione alla Scala per numerosi anni, subendola soltanto all'epoca del trasloco nel 2002 al Teatro degli Arcimboldi, dotato di un sistema di display individuali, poi mutuato anche nella storica sala de Piermarini. Ma anche allora Muti dichiarava : « Questo metodo almeno salvaguarda la libertà di scegliere. Però, visto che si è campato finora senza questi ausili, non si capisce la ragione di questa fregola tremenda. »

Altro storico oppositore fu Fedele D'Amico, strenuo difensore delle traduzioni ritmiche contro il mito trionfante della versione originale, unico elemento originale in un genere dominato dal primato dell'interprete. A sostegno delle sue tesi, ancora nel 1971, D'Amico citava il caso del *Pierrot Lunaire* di Schoenberg, «in cui le parole quasi fronteggiano la musica, con un loro peso sematicamente autonomo. Naturalmente ci si obietta la faccenda dei valori fonici : estromettere dal *Pierrot* il suono della lingua tedesca pare sacrilego. Eppure Schoenberg stesso ne patrocinò una versione inglese, e basterebbe. »

L'opera (originale) per tutti

Rendere l'opera accessibile a un vasto pubblico è diventato un problema da quando l'opera divenne una genere popolare nell'Ottocento. Allora, era del tutto accettabile tradurre nella lingua del Paese, magari adattando le opere agli usi locali. Lo stesso Wagner tradusse e adattò alla prosodia del francese molti passaggi del *Tannhäuser* nel 1861, ma anche Verdi e Rossini non si sottrassero alla regola di servire il gusto

imperante nella capitale francese per garantire un successo alle proprie opere. Traduzioni ritmiche erano la norma prima che nel primo dopoguerra venissero progressivamente abbandonate in favore delle versioni originali, ritenute più rispettose delle intenzioni di compositore e librettista. Salvo alcune importanti eccezioni, che sopravvivono a tutt'oggi come la Komische Opera di Berlino o la Volksoper di Vienna o l'English National Opera di Londra, dove l'opera si dà ancora nella lingua de luogo. Per tutti gli altri teatri i sopratitoli hanno rappresentato una soluzione conveniente in grado di conciliare l'esigenza di ampliare il repertorio con il rispetto dell'integrità dell'opera rappresentata.

Dal 1983 la tecnologia ha fatto passi da gigante in questo campo. La tradizionale proiezione sull'arco scenico (in qualche caso sostituita con un pannello elettronico) rimane a tutt'oggi il sistema più diffuso, sopratutto per i costi relativamente contenuti, ma limitato nelle possibilità. Il principale concorrente è il sistema a display individuali, sviluppato dai tecnici della Santa Fe Opera nei primi anni Novanta e adottato per primo dalla Metropolitan Opera di New York nel 1995. Nonostante i numerosi vantaggi – in primis, la scelta fra diverse lingue e il diritto « democratico » dello spettatore di non utilizzarli – il limite principale è costo elevato (si parla di un migliaio di euro a display) e la complessità dell'installazione, che ne ha limitato la diffusione a sale destinate a subire significativi lavori di restauro o di nuova costruzione. Fra queste, la nuovissima Royal Opera House di Muscat, nel sultanato dell'Oman, è stata dotata di display individuali in grado di supportare contenuti multimediali, aperti, se necessario, a opportunità de merchandising e marketing (l'installazione è stata curata dalla Radio Marconi di Lecco). E tanto per confermarsi all'avanguardia in questo campo, il Maggio Musicale Fiorentino per la settantacinquesima edizione ha inaugurato un sistema misto che comprende l'applet OperaVoice », sviluppata dalla società Prescott Studio di Scandicci, per la visualizzazione di titolatura nel proprio smartphone.

Un'esplosione tecnologica che rischia di far explodere il « fattore distrazione" (la definizione è di Anthony Tommasini) e magari far perdere di vista il motivo per il quale i sopratitoli sono stati sviluppati. « Un'opera è un'esperienza per l'occhio – la scena – e l'orecchio – la musica – e parla direttamente ai sensi. Se aggiungiamo la dimensione del testo, occorre capire la semantica del linguaggio, aggiungendo in questo modo una dimensione che può limitare le altre due. Se si deve pensare al significato delle parole, il godimento stesso dell'opera può venire limitato », riassume il capo-drammaturgo dell'Oper Frankfurt, Norbert Abels.

Parole che fanno tornare tenere a mente quanto scrisse Sergio Sablich nelle note del programma di sala dei *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* al Maggio del 1986 a illustrazione del suo lavoro di traduzione : « Non foss'altro perché è nuovo e sperimentale, il nostro lavoro presuppone non soltanto la comprensione ma anche, in un certo senso, la complicità del pubblico. Forse questo strumento da noi aggiunto servirà ad entrare dentro la magia del teatro. Se così non fosse, abbassate lo sguardo e non ve ne curate. Comunque vada, vincerà sempre Wagner ».

« Un'idea nata in autostrada »

L'invenzione ufficiale dei sopratitoli si deve a Lotfi Mansouri, allora sovrintendente della Canadian Opera Company di Toronto. Gunta Dreifelds era un membro del team, che con il direttore tecnico John Leberg lavorò alla realizzazione pratica del progetto. Gunta Dreifelds (nella foto) ha lasciato la COC da diversi anni ma continua a collaborare come consulente indipendente nel campo della tecnologia nel campo della titolature di eventi live. È anche presidente della società Surtitles™, che annovera la Canadian Opera Company come cliente principale, e si occupa di traduzioni in inglese di libretti d'opera e di testi teatrali.

Com'è nata l'idea?

« Di solito in inverno a Toronto si allestiva una produzione di operetta, normalmente in lingua inglese. L'idea venne a Lotfi Mansouri : voleva aprire il repertorio a opere meno note, cosa che gli riuscì con opere russe, ceche o ungheresi, che divennero molto più popolari dopo l'introduzione dei sopratitoli. Mansouri era un patito di cinema e dopo aver visto un film sottotitolato, ci chiese se non potessimo fare lo stesso con le opere dal vivo. Inoltre, aveva visto un qualche spettacolo teatrale in Giappone con delle scritte su dei pannelli ai lati del palcoscenico. Mansouri affidò il progetto a John Leberg, il direttore tecnico. Narra la leggenda che John rimase bloccato nel traffico dell'autostrada rientrando a casa. Guardando uno dei pannelli segnaletici luminosi che annunciava quanto era lunga la coda, John ebbe l'intuizione che forse quella poteva essere la soluzione. Tuttavia, quei segnali a LED avevano delle forti restrizioni di spazio (si usano nelle autostrade o nelle stazioni solo per annunci brevi) e costi proibitivi. E così optammo per delle diapositive de vetro a 35mm ».

Quale fu la reazione?

« Prima che il pubblico scoprisse di che si trattava, c'era molta resistenza. Gli argomenti che venivano usati erano « non servono », « possiamo leggere il libretto prima » o « sono un fattore di distrazione ». Anche la critica era piuttosto scettica. Quando li abbiamo usati per la prima volta, in moltissimi sono venuti a vedere. La risposta del pubblico fu favolosa e anche la critica ne parlò positivamente. Nell'arco di sei mesi il nostro sistema fu adottato da oltre cento compagnie, principalmente nell'America settentrionale. Anche il Teatro alla Scala li utilizzò nel 1986, durante una tournée all'Expo di Vancouver. In quegli anni, viaggiavamo moltissimo per adattarli alle esigenze di ogni teatro. L'idea era di occuparci dell'installazione, e quindi la compagnia li prendeva in carico ».

Avete brevettato il vostro sistema?

"Non ci fu possibile, perché non abbiamo inventato nulla, ma solo utilizzato tecnologia esistente in un modo, per così dire, non convenzionale : utilizzavamo diapositive e un proiettore. Abbiamo però depositato la parola « supertitles »***** e quindi, ogni volta che un teatro o una compagnnia utilizza questo termine, deve dire che è stato inventato dalla Canadian Opera Comapny nel 1983.

*****La parola che la Canadian Opera Company ha depositato e «***surtitles*** ». GD

Sstefano Nardelli, *giornaledellamusica.it*, n.299, gennaio 2013

LASA OPERAS

Operteātros—Losandželosā, Kentuki, Aļaskā, Edinburgā, Sanfrancisko, Milānā, Arizonā, Parīzē, Melburnā, arī Metropolitenā Ņujorkā gandrīz visur titru sistēmas ieviešanai klāt stāvējusi latviete Gunta Dreifelda Kanādas latvietei Guntai Dreifeldei ir reta profesija – viņa ir operas titru producente. Pašlaik Gunta liek titrus operām Rīgā, bet Kanādā viņu gaida atgriežamies vīrs Džo, bērni Lienīte un Toms un kaķi Juris un Muris.

Gaišmatainā Gunta vairākas reizes uzsver, ka viņai laimējies īstā laikā atrasties īstā vietā un ka viņa ir ļoti apmierināta ar apgūto profesiju, atzīstot, ka savā jomā bijusi pioniere: "1983. gadā Kanādas Valsts operas mākslinieciskais vadītājs bija Lutfi Mansūrs (Lotfi Mansouri), pēc izcelsmes Amerikā dzimis irānis. Viņš vēlējās, lai operas tiktu dziedātas oriģinālvalodā, tad tās skan vislabāk—bija noskatījis, ka tā dara Japānā. Libreta tulkojums tur bija lasāms uz slīdošiem titriem blakus skatuvei. Tas ir kaut kas līdzīgs filmu titriem, tikai šeit darbs nenotiek automātiski. Operators visu laiku seko, lai titri neaizskrien uz priekšu vai neiekavējas, vēro, vai dziedātājs ar āriju jau nav gabalā, kad titri vēl tikai tulko iepriekšējo dziedājumu. Visu izrādes laiku notiek titru pielāgošana darbībai uz skatuves.

Kad 1983. gadā tapa šī projekta ideja, pie rokas gadijos es. Pārzinu angļu, franču, vācu valodu, mācos itāļu valodu, pašvaki, bet spēlēju arī klavieres, labi zinu mūziku. Es mīlu teātri, dziedu sieviešu korī, esmy izpildījusi arī nēģeru spiričuelus, jo gribēju izbaudīt vietējo kolorītu.Nēģeri ir tik muzikāli, viņi notis nepazīst, bet dzied jau no šūpuļa."

AR BALTU SKAUDĪBU

Par titriem turpinot, Gunta saka:"Šajā jomā viss ļoti mainās. Kad mēs sākām, apritē vēl tā īsti nebija ne mobilie telefoni, ne datori, ne videokasetes. Titrus rakstījām ar rakstāmmašīnu, likām uz slīdītes, projicējām kā diapozitīvus. Tagad tehnoloģija strauji gājusi uz priekšu. Man darbam nepieciešamas četras labas lietas – tehniskais aprīkojums, dators, projektors un manas valodu un mūzikas zināšanas. Kad titru sistēma sāk strādāt, operas apmeklētāji izrādes laikā gūst patiesu baudu—klausās dziedājumu oriģinālvalodā, iedziļinās notiekošajā uz skatuves un titros lasa libreta tulkojumu dzimtajā valodā."

Izrādās, ka pašos pirmsākumos jaunievedums nemaz netika tik viegli ar urrā pieņemts. Metropolitena operā Ņujorkā diriģents Džeimss Lēvine (James Levine)teica: "Šito sistēmu tikai pār manu līķi!" Par laimi, Lēvine ir dzīvs un vesels, bet titri operas pavada jau daudzos operteātros –Losandželosā, Kentuki, Aļaskā, Edinburgā, Sanfrancisko, Milānā, Arizonā, Parīzē, Melburnā, arī Metropolitenā Ņujorkā. Gandrīz visur sistēmas ieviešanai klāt stāvējusi latviete Gunta Dreifelda. Pašlaik Gunta ieradusies Rīgā, lai sagatavotu titrus operām *Salome* un *La Bohème*, māklsinieki tās dzied itāļu un vācu valodā, bet titri būs latviešu un angļu valodā:

"Visā pasaulē teātriem trūkst naudas, bet titru sistēmas ieviešana ir dārgs prieks un liels kapitālieguldījums. Pirms desmit gadiem Kanādā par vienu projektoru samaksāja 75 tūkstošus dolāru, bet bija vajadzīgi divi. Pateicoties Latvijas Nocionālās operas ģildei Amerikā un 'tās priekšsēdētāja Ilgvara Spilnera kunga atbalstam, Rīgā tagad ir labāka titru raidīšanas sistēma nekā Kanādā, es jūs par to apskaužu."

Izvaicāta, kādam jābūt titru producentam, Gunta skaidro: "Tas ir ļoti sasprindzināts un niansēts darbs, cilvēkam, kas to dara, jāmīl opera, jāpārzina tehnika, jāprot rīkoties ar datoru, jāpārvalda svešvalodas, viņam jābūt ļoti vispusīgam un brīvam, jo gandrīz katru vakaru jābūt teātrī. Es negribēju visu dzīvi pavadīt teātrī, tāpēc man visur ir asistenti. Es tikai novedu darbu līdz pirmizrādei. Arī šeit mans ir asistents Valters Līcis, es priecājos, ka latvieši ir ļoti spējīgi cilvēki."

Gunta pārliecināta, ka operai ir liela nākotne: "Māte stāstīja, ka Latvijas pirmās brīvvalsts laikā operai bija ļoti liela nozīmes valsts kultūras dzīvē. Eiropā arī tā ir. Amerika pati ir jauna, un opera tur ir tikai 30 vai 50 gadus, tautā šī māksla vēl nav īsti iegājusi. Rīgas opera ir finansiāli trūcīga, bet tas, ka šurp nāk arvien vairāk jauniešu, ir veselīguma pazīme."

Ir lietas, kas Guntai saistās tikai ar Latviju, un tās ir ļoti mīļas: "Jūs varbūt to neizjūtat tik dziļi, bet es redzu, ka Latvijā mākslinieki pieder tautai. Kanāda arī lepojas ar savām slavenībām, bet kultūru bauda atsevišķs iedzīvotāju slānis, pārējie dzīvo savu dzīvi. Reta talanta piemiņa pēc nāves tiek godināta tā kā Latvijā, kur Mirušo piemiņas dienā visas mākslinieku kapu kopiņas mirdz svecīšu liesmiņās, katrs, kas iet garām, noliek savu gaismas stariņu... Tas ir svētīgi."

Gunta un viņas dzīņumāsa Daina piedzima Toronto. Uz jautājumu, cik viņai ir gadu, Gunta atsak – par daudz, lai es uz šo jautājumu atbildētu. Māsa Daina jau astoņus gadus dzīvo Jūrmalā un strādā Jūrmalas alternatīvajā skolā par angļu valodas pasniedzēju, bet Gunta, lai arī sirdī un domās ir šeit, par pārcelšanos uz pastāvīgu dzīvi Latvijā nedomā:

"Mans vīrs Džo ir no Kalifornijas. Iepazināmies, pateicoties Plāsido Domingo (Placido Domingo), kurš Losandželosā dibināja jaunu operteātri, bija tur māklsinieciskais vadītājs. Viņa uzaicināta, devos turp ieviest titru sistēmu un satiku Džo. Tagad mūsu bērni jau ir lieli, Lienei ir divpadsmit gadu, Tomam - desmit. Liene Latvijā pirmo reizi bija sešu mēnešu, tad pusotra gada vecumā, kad kopā ar Baņutu Rubesu taisīju *Tango Lugāno* -- strādāju ar gaismām. Toms arī ne vienu reizi vien bijis Rīgā."

Gunta saka, ka viņa ir pasaules pilsone un viņas mājas ir teātris. Viņa jūtas kā mājās jebkur, kur pārkāpj teātra slieksni: "Labprāt būtu kļuvusi par dziedātāju vai aktrisi, bet man nav dotību un nav arī pretenziju. Man aizkulisēs patīk labāk nekā uz skatuves. Man ir ķēriens uz valodām, un mans darbs ir radošs un interesants. Nekādās skolās savu profesiju neesmu apguvusi, dzīve piespieda iepazīt tehniku un visas manas dotības apvienot."

PATĪK LIELPILSĒTAS

Gunta un Džo dzīvo Toronto poļu rajonā. Tur dzīvo viņu draugi ukraiņi, kanādieši, igauņi, poļi, saskarsme ar viņiem paplašinot redzesloku. "Negribēju palikt dzīvot Losandželosā, jo tur ir piesārņots gaiss. Amerika man arī tik ļoti neiet pie sirds kaut gan man patīk tur aizbraukt uz neilgu laiku. Eiropa un viss eiropeiskais man ir daudz tuvāks. Cilvēki bieži domā, ka Kanāda ir tā pati kā Amerika, bet pagājušajā gadā mēs dzīvojām Virdžinijā, un es ļoti izjutu starpību. Kanādā nav jāasimilējas, tā ir multikulturāla valsts, kurā dzīvo daudzu tautību cilvēki, vairāk nekā jebkurā citā pasaules valstī. Amerikā mani uzskata par ārzemnieci, jo, lai gan esmu dzimusi Kanādā, man esot neliels akcents, bet latvieši neuzskata par īstu latvieti, jo neesmu augusi Latvijā.

Man patīk lielpilsētas. Esmu dzīvojusi Monreālā, Ņujorkā... Berlīnē kādai dāmai pieskatiju viņas četrus suņus, un pilsēta man patika. Skolā ar Dainu gājām Minsterē. Mans sapnis ir dzīvot Venēcijā. Varbūt tas kādreiz piepildīsies, bet pagaidām esmu tur bijusi tikai sešas stundas karnevāla laikā. Taču uz Venēciju jābrauc septembrī, bet operā tieši tad sākas sezona."

Guntas sirdī īpaša vieta ir Rīgai, šeit viņa pirmo reizi ciemojās "sliktajos laikos" 1980. gadā. Atgriežoties Rīgā atkal un atkal, viņa secina: "Pilsēta ir ļoti mainījusies. Cilvēki tagad ir daudz līdzsvarotāki, nestreso, tik ļoti netiecas pēc ārzemniekiem. Viņiem ir vairāk pašapziņas nekā pirms divarpus gadiem, sejās biežāk redz smaidus. Un Latvijā ir man tik mīļā jūra. Daina dzīvo Jūrmalā, es vienmēr apmetos pie viņas."

MĀSAS PĒRK KĀPOSTUS

Dvīņumāsas pirmo reizi izšķīrās, kad Guntai bija jādodas mācīties uz Minsteri, Daina viņai sekoja pēc gada. Tagad abas dzīvo katra savā pasaules malā un satiekas reti. Taču dvēsliskās saites saglabājušās. Gunta stāsta dīvainu atgadījumu: "Daina dzīvoja Āfrikā, bet es Venecuēlā. Mēs reizi gadā pērkam kāpostus, un izrādās, ka neatkarīgi viena no otras to bijām darījušas vienā dienā! Tādu sakritību mums netrūkst. Daina ir vienīgais cilvēks pasaulē, ar kuru saprotos bez vārdiem, un man reizēm šķiet dīvaini, ka cilvēki bieži vien nesaprot, ko es domāju. Saikne ar māsu ir tik cieša, ka nav svarīgi, kurā pasaules malā katra no mums atrodas, un arī vārdi nav svarīgi, galvenais ir apziņa, ka mēs esam. Sazinamies regulāri ar epastu, lai gan tas negarantē anonimitāti un vēstuli aizstāt nevar."

BĒRNIEM TRĪS PASES

Guntas dzīvē daudz nozīmējusi folklora: « Vecāki mums pie gultiņas dziedāja *Tek saulīte tecēdama*, un es saviem bērniem to dziedāju. Pirmās iepazinu latviešu pasakas. Mūs izglītoja latviešu skolās, mums bija draugi latvieši, un tas viss kopā saglabāja latvietību asinīs. Tautas dziesmās izpaužas latviešu attieksme un lakonisms – bez straujiem žestiem un skaļiem vārdiem visu var pateikt četrās rindiņās. Abiem bērniem ir trīs pases – Kanādas, Amerikas un Latvijas. Nezinu, kā viņi jutīsies pasaulē, pie latvietības ir jāpiestrādā. Daudzi latvieši atgriežas dzimtenē, svešatnē latvietība vairs nav tik stipra. Liene un Toms arī droši vien būs kosmopolīti, latviešu un franču valodu viņi apguva gandrīz vienlaikus un bieži pat jauca vārdus, vēlāk viņi iemācījās arī angļu valodu. Daudzi latvieši Sibīrijā arī nerunā latviešu valodā, bet ir latvieši. Man gribētos savest kopā austrumu un rietumu trimdas latviešus, tas ir liels garīgs spēks un potenciāls."

Gunta saka, ka latvieši pasauli var pārsteigt ar savu sīkstumu, izturību, dziedāšanu, liniem, dzērvenēm, rakstainajiem cimdiem un zemāko dzimstību zemes virsū. Par dzērvnēm esot īpaša runa – pasaule tās tikai tagad atklājot, bet mums šīs veselīgās ogas ir izsenis Dieva dotas... Vaicāju, kā Guntas vīrs izturas pret sievas dzimtenes mīlestību. Gunta saka: "Viņš pieņem latvietību, šajā ziņā ir ļoti pretimnākošs. Grūtāk to bija pieņemt manai vīramātei. Viņa dzīvo Klusā okeāna krastā netālu no Sanfrancisko un ir izcils cilvēks, kas pieņēma mani bez ierunām, kaut gan viņai ar daudz ko bija jāsamierinās. Mēs ilgi neprecējāmies, un bērniem ir mans uzvārds. Tagad jau četri gadi, kopš ar Džo esam precējušies. Vīra māte baidījās, ka Liene un Toms nerunās angliski un viņa nevarēs saprasties. Bērni sākumā runāja latviski, jo mūsu auklīte bija latviete. Vīra mātei bija jāsamierinās arī ar to, ka mūsu dzīve nav normāla, jo Džo un mani saista teātris, un tas nebija viņas sapnis. Taču pamazām viss nokārtojās. Manai ģimenei Džo arī ļoti patīk. Kāds viņš ir? Par savu vīru publiski grūti runāt. Uz viņu var paļauties, viņš ir ļoti elastīgs."

Vaicāju, kur Gunta šogad svinēs Jāņus. Viņa vēl ir neziņā: "Līgovakarā vislabāk būt Monreālas latviešu īpašumā Tērvetē. Varbūt mēs saulgriežus nesvinam etnogrāfiski pareizi, bet viss izpušķots, cilvēki var būt gan peldkostīmos, gan tautas tērpos. Tiek sakurts ugunskurs, un katrs no sirds iesaistās svētku svinēšanā, nevis noskatās to no malas kā šovu. Šovasar arī gribējām doties uz Tērveti, bet šajā laikā Garezerā notiks Kanādas Dziesmu svētku kopmēģinājums, un laikam jau turp dosies arī tērvetieši. Taču, lai kur arī mēs šajā naktī būtu, atradīsimies latviešu vidū.

Tekla Šaitere, *SestDiena*, Laikraksta *Diena* pielikums, 17. jūnijs, 2000