

## Introduction

This is my third book of librettos and once again I have taken a different approach to the form. Similarities to my earlier efforts will also be obvious – a willingness to locate opera well away from great theatres, a certain irreverence, an avoidance of the tragedies and horrors of the European genre, et cetera. The main consistency in my approach lies in my belief that different times and places call for different operas. This idea is taken a little further in the present collection.

Each of these librettos refers to a particular place, and is meant to be performed there, although there is no reason why people elsewhere shouldn't borrow it if they so desire. This idea is a little more radical than it sounds. The events of most of the great European operas have a location – Nuremberg (Wagner's *Meistersingers*), Rome (Puccini's *Tosca*), or, let us say, Seville (Rossini's *Barber*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*). Et cetera. How important these places, these settings, were to the composers, I cannot say. Audiences, I am inclined to think, rarely locate the famous operas in actual places; they all occur in the spaces of the imagination, that is to say inside the minds of those who watch them. Once this relationship between the events being staged and the minds of the listeners, the viewers, has been established, the opera is secure because it no longer needs location. It wanders the firmament as freely as Goldilocks or Macbeth (can you tell me where Dunsinane is? Yes, it's in Scotland, but *where?*)

So each of the librettos refers to a particular place: how innovative is this, if at all? How important?

To the librettist, very. I wish to give the places of my country a voice. This means the people too. In writing these librettos I have imagined them being performed in front of visitors to the opera's region, people who, I hope, will feel that they are being both accepted and to some degree inducted by watching a performance. If libretto, music and performance are good, then there is an assertion and acceptance of local pride. Nations need to be built on pride or prides, silly as some of them may be.

To the composer in the act of deciding whether or not they want to set a particular libretto, not important at all. They will judge what they read by whether or not it gives them expressive opportunities within their scope. If they decide to compose, however, the spirit of the chosen place will enter them to some degree. They will be setting events, and dialogue, yes, but also something more, flowing in from outside the particulars on the page.

To the audiences, if I may look that far ahead, both yes and no. They will want a good show, or they'll be bored, or stay away. If the performance is successful, however, they should feel that they've encountered something which is not theirs, but which they can have access to while they are in the region that gave rise to it. I see these librettos as a means whereby local lore, legend and atmosphere can be displayed with pride and accepted with respect. In that sense, then, each of these librettos is the beginning of a dialogue between those who know something and those who are curious to find out.

The librettos in this collection, or rather the events they depict, are a somewhat scattered collection of things that entertain, interest or amuse one particular writer, which means, obviously enough, that they are limited by their creator's mind. I will be pleased if this project succeeds, but much more pleased if what I offer here gives rise, eventually, to a new tradition in which the contents of this book are not the quirky offerings of one writer, but a tiny part of a much greater practice which has subsumed its beginning.

I put them before you in hopes of your enjoyment, amusement, or what you will. I think acceptance would be enough.

C.A.E.