

Program Notes

The Enchanted Pig (2006)

Jonathan Dove

Born: July 18, 1959; London, England.

Libretto by Alisdair Middleton

Generously humorous and drawing heavily from fairy tale tropes, *The Enchanted Pig* is a chamber opera characterized by variety. Jonathan Dove composed roles for both opera and musical theater performers, noting in the libretto that characters were written with specific stylistic intentions—including a range of operetta, vaudeville, and musical comedy. Through each of these genres, *The Enchanted Pig* offers musical complexity and challenging vocal lines. Aside from the central heroine and the Pig, all actors cycle through multiple roles often sharing the same stock character personality, showing cyclical patterns, and giving actors quite a challenge. The staging of the opera is also quite flexible, with the number of singers varying based on the company.

Dove's compositional voice places an emphasis on melodic strength and dramatic story, which explains his primary compositions of opera and vocal music. He began his musical career as a répétiteur, arranger, and later chorus master with opera companies gaining a familiarity with vast amounts of repertoire and styles which all live within his operatic compositions. The subjects of his operas often juxtapose the serious and silly, as shown in his first and most commonly performed opera, *Flight*, which simultaneously addresses the mundane worries of airport travel with the political difficulties and gray areas of the refugee crisis. While his subject matter varies immensely, his works are united in their dramatic intention and expressive emotion.

The plot features familiar stereotypes—the witch, a transforming prince, and even a bratty bride—and is based on Romanian and Norwegian folk tales. It also resembles the famous story of the frog prince (the frog, of course, subbed by the titular Pig), interweaving myth and fable seamlessly. The music transcends the tropes its supports. While the story may be a child's fairytale, the music is anything but child's play. This work is through-composed and orchestrated with unexpected instruments, like spoons, anvil, and accordion.

Dove also pays overt tribute to the genres he borrowed from in the construction of *Pig*: those who listen closely may notice material from musicals like Steven Sondheim's *Into the Woods* (a humorous reference on the line “a very nice pig,” nodding to Sondheim's “a very nice prince”) and Bernstein's *West Side Story* (both *Pig* and *West Side Story* have a “Tonight Quintet”). Dove also borrows from iconic operas like Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (the motif during the departure of the boats in the first act) and the witch's spell is borrowed directly

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from SFCM's fall opera, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* (where Humperdinck in turn borrowed themes from Wagner). These references are used humorously, and support similarities of tropes between these genres and often fall within similar moments plot wise to these iconic shows in the repertoire.

The Enchanted Pig was composed as a family opera for a community theater known as the Young Vic Theater, and now has received more than 150 performances internationally. The stereotypical plot structure, references to beloved works, and layered fairy tales make this piece loveable, and the message speaks loudly about acceptance and true love. Indeed, like many iconic works, true love can conquer all—even if, in this case, the prince is a pig.

- Camryn Finn, M.M. '23 and Monica Slater, M.M. '23