

Royal Opera House Application (Librettist/Director)

Writing

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The Perfect Opera (2017)

The Conductor/Compere enters. Rapturous applause from the singers and band. The Conductor takes their place, prepares themselves, and starts the band going in a gentle vamp before turning to the audience. This vamp accompanies their every spoken section. The following is written to indicate timing for one interpretation where patter supports comedic delivery; as with all the following libretto, the natural comic rhythms of a given performer take priority, even if - especially if - that means adjusting the following lines into more standup-like prose. Rhythmically:

Compere: Ladies, and gentlemen, and of course dear genderqueers,
Good evening, good people, we'd like to welcome you
To a
Spectacle
Tonight!
To the
Comedy?
Not quite.
To the
Op-er-ra?
Not right.
To the
Comedy op-e-ra worldwide spectacular
Once we acquire our basic desire
Of touring the planet from London to Thanet
To sing and do things that might bring to a king
Or a dog all the bog-standard jogging of cogs
That cause joy unalloyed - *[To person in front row]* I hope you're not annoyed?
'cos this.
Is.
Kinda comedy, almost op'ra, close to cabaret, and yet not quite'cha
Box-ticked categorised pigeonholed vanilla whip,
With no whip,
'cos whipping's too wisqué, *[Emphasised lisp]*
We're a
Wonderful, wittily, prettily, willingly half-cast half-caste half-arsed half-art
Quite dramatic,
Operatic
Comediatic *[Pronounce with four syllables, third a diphthong.]*
Show by a fanatic;
We're emphatic
As that lady in the attic,
That our partly-art, halfly-fart, craftily-mastered mardi gras
Of ev'rything that we desired,
In this show that we have sired,
From jokes and songs that made us wired,
In which the piece was deeply mired,
When its plot was firstly fired;
[To same front row person.] That is to say this show you've hired
A seat to watch, it has acquired
As required
Quality and quintessence, so we could claim it's inspired,
And it's tragic that too quickly you've got tired!
[Beat.]
Anyway.
[Beat.]
Tonight:

Ladies, and gentlemen, and of course dear genderqueers,
 Good evening, good people, we did not want to show
 A good
 Op'ra.
 Tonight,
 We did not want to write
 Merely
Great
 Op'ra.
 Oh no.
 We wanted
 To write
 The.
Perfect.
 Op'ra.
[In band: chm-chm on an instrument. Gradually pick up tempo.]
 So,
 In order
 To write the perfect op'ra,
 We
 Have done
 Gargantuan amounts
 Of audience research.
 We
 Have made...
[Beat; scan audience; reveal as an intense, exciting secret]
 A list.¹

The **Soprano** rips the cover off the onstage board, revealing a long list of things found in *The Perfect Opera* (See Appendix for full list). Each is painted onto a yellow light, which can be illuminated when appropriate. From this point on, the singers rush around to prepare for the start of the opera proper; the **Tenor** turning their tartan scarf into a kilt, the **Soprano** moving the chairs out of the way, the **Baritone** fashioning a cloak out of the board-cover etc., all resetting anything another's just adjusted.

And we now know
 What we will find in
 The
Perfect
 Op'ra.
[chm-chm. Increasing accelerando through following. Singers exit. Listed items briefly flash as they are mentioned.]
 It should have a moral,
 And social re-le-vance -
 But not force ideas down your throat.
 It should be in German,
 Or Russian or Italian,
 Or French, but not Thessalian,
 Though atapinch,
 Then English.
 Ladies, and gentlemen, and genderqueers,
 Please welcome before you the spectacle here,

¹ A List.

When an item from the list is ticked off, it will be indicated in a footnote, and accompanied by a single high C on a child's xylophone.

For it must be based on a classic tale,
It must be purely original, *[Pronounce phonetically]*
Be both at once, or else we fail,
So enter stage right *[Beat.]*
MACBETH!²
*[The **Tenor** enters, and strikes a kilted pose.]*
[Beat; now slow, relishing the moment]
Riding.
A camel.³

Front of Camel and **Rump of Camel** suddenly enter as the **Camel**, and **Macbeth** mounts. The whole thing should be in the style of a Western movie's opening. The **Camel** crosses the stage.

Rump: Macbeth!

Compere: He rides a camel now!...

² Classic Story

³ A Pantomime Camel

Wigmore Hall Voiceworks song project (2017)

Flying

It feels like flying;
Falling helplessly, laughing hysterically,

Like in dreams, but real,
Knowing who watches you soar and adores you,
Forgetting it all but the air in my hair-

One moving moment, never to stop
But onwards it rushes, tsunami to shore
Unending, delightful,
Moving, unstoppable; stone to the floor
I fall.

Cold, alone, no-one watching me,

Still, a stone, who cares to see

Flightless and grounded, sombre and sad,
Not feeling like flying, not feeling so free,
Unless someone asks to see
Me
Falling.

Death is a future, here it is now.

Nobody's There!

Nobody's there! I can feel them watching me. They can't speak, won't speak. Some are silent, some are shifting. Traces of what they were before this. They want me to stay - but I don't want them to hear.

Aah— [*Use extensively, with virtuosity*]

Nobody dares! I can feel you watching me. You can't speak, won't speak. You are silent, you are shifting. Traces of what you were before this. You want me to stay - but I don't want you to hear.

Aah— Yuu— [*Use extensively, with virtuosity*]

Nobody cares! I can feel me watching me. I can't speak, won't [speak]. I [am silent], I [am shifting]. [Traces of what] I [was before this]. I [want] me [to stay - but] I [don't want] me [to hear.]

Aah— Yuu— Mmmoo— [*Use extensively, with virtuosity*]

Nobody mehs. Ko can feel ko considering me. You can, won't speak. You're shifting, still silent. Traces of what you hoped before this. They want- ko ko here.

Are you moved by music's melody alone?

Ko ko. Ko ko. Ko, ko, ko. Ko. Ko ko ko oc.

Are you moved?

Comic Sketches (various)

Emergency Cord

[A group of people stand, as if on the Underground]

Announcement: Thank you for travelling with us today. In the event of an emergency, please use the Emergency Cord.

[Terrorist runs on and starts to rummage in bag]

Person 1: Look, a terrorist! Use the Emergency Chord! *[They sing, building any chord from the bottom up; terrorist flees. Assembled people high-five]*

Sky Double Plus

Onstage, in a labcoat, the Professor.

Professor: Hello, and welcome to Sky Labs. First, we brought you Sky – hundreds of channels of live television, many of which were football - there was so much football.

Then, we brought you Sky Plus – the power to rewind live television. Did you miss what that guy just said to the other guy? You've forgotten who they are? Rewind right to the beginning of Primeminister's Question Time, and find out!

But there's more! As the amount of football we broadcast tended towards infinity, the laws of physics were no longer a problem. Here at Sky, we've now invented Sky Double Plus – the power to fastforward live television. That's right – to fastforward live television. *[Increasingly grim]*. And we did. Right to the end. The end of Sky Double Plus, the end of the world, even the end of time. *[Breaking down]* I'm... I'm so sorry mother. I'm so sorry for what will happen to you...

[Suddenly enthusiastic again] So say goodbye to free will and embrace eternally pre-determined actions and evil face-sucking monsters with Sky Double Plus! Trust us - we know you'll want to choose to.

Great Men

[The Officer runs on and thrusts the Duke of Wellington into the Plain Man's arms so that the Duke is held up.]

Officer: *[Pointing dramatically]*. Quick, take the Duke to Waterloo! If he's not there soon, the French will win!

Plain Man: But sir, why must I carry the Duke of Wellington?

Wellington: *[In a deep, meaningful and arch voice]*. Because, my boy, some men are born great, but others have great men thrust upon them. *[Plain Man staggers off with Wellington.]*

A Speaks (2017)

A: Virginia and I are a bit... *strange*. But I'm better than her, because I have friends. They're very supportive. They'd retweet, if I ever Tweeted asexual stuff. But there's not much... Asexual characters always get rewritten as heterosexuals once the writers get bored. The record goes to Dr. Who. 45 years assuming a near-immortal alien from outer space was asexual - or, at least, lacked human-compatible genitals. Then 2005 reboot: the writer said, I quote "asexuality was boring". Ridiculous. Imagine it:

"Name's Bond, James Bond – no I don't want to have sex, I'm saving the world."

"Here's looking at you kid – and you, and you, you're all lovely people, that plane has 18 seats; let's get away from these Nazis!"

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn. I've never loved you, the past twenty years have been a lie, and on the subject of representation, why do we iconic heterosexual men all have troubled relationships with alcohol?"

Maybe a European film. I've always loved the way European languages have a gender-neutral term – he, she, it; er, sie, es – to describe things, even when they have a gender, like animals.

'Er, Sie and Es stand in a row;
Er and Sie fall in love.
Er and Sie have a life, a child,
They conjugate and consummate together.
Es stands at the end, alone.
Er and Sie grow old together,
While Es is neutral, is nothing.
Er and Sie love together, forever
While Es just is, at the end of the row,
Two forgotten letters on the long-forgotten stone.'

Like a grave, the closet is warm, safe, and advert-free. Yoghurt - eat this, because sexy women do. Drive this car: strangers with above-average facial symmetry will try to break in. Underwear - hey; I'm just wearing pants, presumably in case of emergency sex... and I'm broke, so they're all I can afford. [*A gives a confused shrug*].

We've all got to eat. I work for someone who calls people like me 'perverts'. It's easy to say.

The Hummingbird (2017)

The Flock Chorus

Flock & The Goose: *[Entering]* On on! On on! On on!
Long gone, long gone, long gone,
Our homes and hopes, but our hunger's
Not gone, not gone, not gone.

We're going, we're gone, on on!
Long lost, long lost, long lost,
Our songs, ourselves - but our danger's
Not lost, not lost, not lost.

The Goose's utai

The Hummingbird: I want to join you, Wanderer; Wanderer please stop!
I want to join you, wandering and free. *[The Goose stops - the Flock flies on]*

The Goose: You want to join our journey?
We who wander like ghosts?
No-one chooses this.

Many years have passed since I
Was raised by a lake
Far away in the warm South.
The year I grew up,
Men drained the lake and we fled.

We're bound by hunger,
Knowing our journey won't end.
Don't follow until
You have nothing left to lose. *[Exits.]*

A War Game (2018)

The game resumes at a higher pace. Incapacitated limbs carry to the next section. Only natural sounds from the moving of feet, breathing, and possibly, towards the end, grunts of effort.

Third recitation - Spear (Troy, Heroic hexameter; Long-Long L-L L-L L-L L-short-short L-L)

Watch this hero fall, black rivers now *pouring* from me
Staining ground on which I have earnt much *honour* fighting,
Slaughtering brave foes from all the *kingdoms* of this world,
Tearing limbs from bronze-clad killed and *killer* alike,
I split shields and swords, I'm burning their *tar-black* sea-ships,
Striking through their armour, darkness *clouding the eyes* of
Soldiers, shepherds, husbands of my fresh-*captured* slave-girls -
Now I am destroyed but I don't feel *any* sorrow;
Glory shall be granted to my *conqueror's* household,
Dying well brings glory to my kin *and to me*. [*Perishes*]

A Member of the Company: Peace!

Company: War!

The game resumes at a higher pace. Incapacitated limbs carry to the next section.

Sixth recitation - Scimitar (Third Crusade, Maqama)

As wind-wraiths whipped the desert to whittle my bones,
I walked alone to Acre, shielded on Salah ad-Din's highway by my sultan,
So safely smiled at a stranger.
Forward came the light brigand,
And I wet my lips to greet him in harmonious verse,
But his whetted sword outmatched my tongue's pen,
And he stole my corpse's gold, and so used my tongue, that my head's vault did crack. [*Perishes*]

When all of one faction is dead, and their final recitation given, the interlude becomes:

A Member of the Company: Victory!

Company: Victory!

A Member of the Company: Peace!

Company: War!

The fighting resumes; now each person fights for themselves. The tempo is increasingly fast.

Seventh recitation - Longsword (Late Medieval Japan, utai)

We fight for our lords,
For their orders, not ourselves,
Though they don't love us;
For them we wronged each other.
My life fades like snow;
Like all triumphs on this earth. [*Perishes*]

A Member of the Company: Peace!