

Liszt's Dante Symphony [can not] be received at any higher value than that of a solemn travesty of all that is noble, beautiful and uplifting in the art... The cacophony of the work is intolerable.

– Boston Gazette, February 28, 1886.

Candide

"A Really Spectacular Disaster"



Leonard Bernstein's career began in very exciting times. America became a haven for many musicians fleeing Hitler and the growing Nazi menace in Europe.

In "*The Rest is Noise*" author Alex Ross describes Hollywood in the 1940s. Arnold Schoenberg lived just down the road from Tyrone Power. Igor Stravinsky lived just off Sunset Strip. Sergei Rachmaninov lived 'in the center of the movie colony', Bruno Walter lived next door to Alma Mahler. Otto Klemperer lived on the same street as Otto Preminger, Hanns Eisler lived close to Thomas Mann and Aldous Huxley. Erich Korngold lived in the elite Toluca Lake development, near Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. Charlie Chaplin and Charles Laughton were part of the crowd. "At a dinner at Harpo Marx's, the comedienne Fanny Brice walked up to Schoenberg and said 'Come on, Professor, play us a tune.'"

In Disney's *Fantasia*, dinosaurs danced to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, and he wrote "a *Circus Polka* that was danced by fifty young women and fifty elephants in pink tutus at the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus".

Such a community was bound to come to the attention of the House Un-American Activities

Committee, with serious consequences for Bernstein.

Candide debuted in Boston in 1956, and opened in New York later that year. Some say that the FBI had infiltrated the orchestra, so successfully that their agents outnumbered the musicians. Richard Wilbur, who wrote many of the lyrics, said "I can see why the story might arise. The swats we took at [Senator] McCarthy did alarm our producers."

The show received some favourable reviews, and some not so friendly. Critic Walter Kerr wrote: "Three of the most talented people our theatre possesses - Lillian Hellman, Leonard Bernstein, Tyrone Guthrie - have joined hands to transform Voltaire's *Candide* into a really spectacular disaster."

The show failed financially, closing after only seventy-three performances. Nor was it successful when it opened in London three years later. Bernstein's music nearly sank with the show, but fortunately was recorded by Columbia and created something of a cult following. Meryle Secrest* writes of his contribution: "His overture... has exactly the right mocking, impish, nose-thumbing mood, full of preposterous assertion, parodying false hopes and revealing, behind the buffoonery, the occasional moment of tender melody, summing up in its vitality and headlong pace all that Voltaire's satire implied."

Of necessity many changes had been made to the original story, and parts omitted through the timidity of the producers – understandable given the political climate at the time.

Fortunately for us, it was revived in 1974, by Robert Kalfin, who saw the original and recognized its potential. He commissioned Hugh Wheeler, who wrote the book for *A Little Night Music*, to write a new version. The new show ran to packed houses for 741 performances.

Bernstein was not happy. He wanted to restore some of the material that had been omitted, and eight years later the New York City Opera presented yet another improved version. Critic Peter Davis wrote "This is probably Bernstein's grandest, wittiest, most sophisticated theatre score, showing the full range of his talents... simple ballads, intricate ensembles, zany operatic parodies, a Coplanesque choral finale of heart-stopping beauty... and irresistible tunes at every turn."

We will be presenting the Scottish Opera version of the Opera-House version. This incorporates changes negotiated by British playwright John Wells, and directed by Jonathan Miller for Scottish Opera. It subsequently became the definitive version, and was conducted and recorded by Bernstein himself shortly before his death.

Bernstein told his musical adviser, Matthew Epstein, "There's more of me in that piece than anything else I have done."

The website dedicated to Bernstein, <http://www.leonardbernstein.com/>, says "Like its hero, *Candide* is perhaps destined never to find its perfect form and function; in the final analysis, however, that may prove philosophically appropriate."

Are you wondering about the illustration on page 1? It shows the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami of 1755 in Lisbon, which caused *Candide* all sorts of trouble. To find out exactly what sort of trouble, come along. Newcastle Civic Theatre, Saturday July 23 at 8pm and Sunday July 24 at 2pm.

* Much of the material used in this and the previous issue of *Cacophony* is sourced from "Leonard Bernstein – A Life" by Meryle Secrest.

Bernstein on Beethoven



Here's an interesting link, as Bernstein takes us inside the mind of Beethoven and his 5th Symphony. Why does it sound like it does? : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0wO7q6_qRk

The late 1920s saw the emergence of a new musical genre - Now Opera. Typical was the plot of Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins*, memorably described by Nicolas Slonimsky in his reference work *Music Since 1900*: "A cuckolding libertine pushes the husband of his mistress to his death in the cogs of a monstrous machine and strangles her when he finds out that she has become a promiscuous prostitute, whereupon the foreman, Maschinist Hopkins, dismisses him from his job ostensibly for inefficiency."

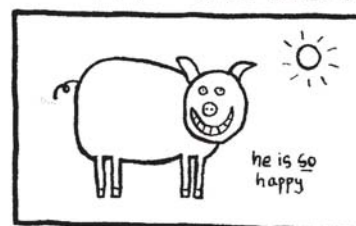
And you thought the plot of *Candide* was bizarre?

- adapted from "The Rest is Noise", by Alex Ross

With every passing hour our solar system comes forty-three thousand miles closer to globular cluster M13 in the constellation Hercules, and still there are some misfits who continue to insist that there is no such thing as progress.

— Ransom K. Ferm

THE PIG OF HAPPINESS



May his JOYFUL SMILE remind us how much there is to be HAPPY about

There is, as in most libraries, a heavily charged erotic atmosphere in the Reading Room [of the London Library]: a girl undoing a button of her cardigan lifts a head from every arm-chair. It is hard not to imagine urgent ecstasies in the more secluded areas of Biography, but . . . the nearest I got to anything really scandalous was a report that there was a man in the French Pub in Soho who claimed to have made love to a girl among the Early Fathers. This is on the top floor and would seem to be the safest place. Frances Partridge said she thought it was very likely. 'They'd have been overexcited by all those books on theology'.

John Wells, *Rude Words*(1991)

Cacophony is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com

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