

VICTORIAN
OPERA



Aaron Copland

THE SECOND HURRICANE

A Youth Opera

6-15 October 2017

Horti Hall

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The Second Hurricane

In *The Second Hurricane* a group of teenagers impulsively set out to make heroes of themselves when disaster strikes a nearby town. They soon find they are of no use, and when the hurricane returns, they are left totally helpless. In a world obsessed with individuality, they learn instead to foster a sense of collective identity through communal solidarity. In doing so they find a way to live and work together – where the hero is 'we', not 'me'.

Copland and his librettist Edwin Denby wrote this piece in a time of great political and economic uncertainty. Of all things, the penultimate number of the opera is an adapted version of a folk-song from the American Revolution. It is a call to arms for the characters. It demands the 'haughty pretenders' to 'surrender with shame'. A new revolution is being called for. In the final number, the chorus and principals discover 'a new idea of what life could be like'. Their clear manifesto: if we 'joined together' as equals with 'everybody as good as everybody else', we would be 'feeling happy' and 'feeling free'.

The United States presidential election of 1936 – the year before *The Second Hurricane* was written – was won in a landslide by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The fourth runner-up, with 0.17% of the vote, was Earl Browder leader of the Communist Party USA. He campaigned under the slogan 'For a Free and Happy America'. Aaron Copland supported Browder's candidacy. That his slogan became the final lyric of the opera is hardly a coincidence.

In 1953, Copland was compelled to deliver testimony in a McCarthy hearing (Copland

would go on to memorably describe McCarthy as a 'plebeian Faustus'). Through careful evasion Copland avoided having his livelihood and reputation systematically dismantled by McCarthy. This fate, of course, befell many other artists and thinkers of the time who had leftist political sympathies. While Copland's relationship with Browder was indeed questioned, *The Second Hurricane* was thankfully never brought up.

If McCarthy and his cronies had read the score closely they might have noticed that underneath this seemingly simple and naïve piece is a quietly radical message. The show is a kind of American-Lehrstück. It is surprisingly strange and experimental in its form. Indeed, the performance notes in the score insist on an ascetic Brechtian performance style, and for the director 'to sacrifice his knowledge of adult theatricality for his feeling for what young adults are really like on stage'. This has very much informed my approach to the piece.

Here the hurricane becomes a psychological space where the self-absorbed protagonists are confronted with their immaturity and foolhardiness. In the process, perhaps unwittingly, they are radicalised. They return – for better or worse – to attempt a revolution in their community. The show has a sense of social purpose and a subversive edge that is intriguing and perhaps compelling today, and is well-matched by Copland's sly, ebullient score.

**Alastair Clark, Director
2017 VO Developing Artist**

PRODUCTION

The Second Hurricane

Composer Aaron Copland

Librettist Edwin Denby

Running time is approximately 60 minutes, with no interval

Creative Team

Conductor Angus Grant

Director Alastair Clark

Set and Lighting Design Eduard Inglés

Costume Supervisor Joanne Paterson

Production Manager Eduard Inglés

Production Stage Manager

Marina Milankovic

Deputy Stage Manager

Chantal Trimboli

Repertoire/Pianist Tom Griffiths

Cast

Queenie Shimona Thevathasan

Gwen Saskia Mascitti

Gyp James Emerson

Lowrie Thomas Harvey

Butch Lachlan McLean

Fat James Young

Jeff Dorcas Lim

Chorus

Soprano

Amanda Hargreaves, Annabella Merakis, Anushka Tiwari, Brianna Ekberg, Chloe Toh, Christelise de Graaf, Elizabeth Potter, Emilie Washington, Hannah Kostros, Harmony Lee, Jamilah Dogar-Hurd, Katia Lang, Kelsey Cotton, Madeleine Sullivan, Maia Hanrahan, Maggie Orr, Rosemary Cocklin, Sarah Amos, Sophia Wasley

Mezzo-soprano

Erin Towns, Freya Boltman, Hayley Jobson, Katrina Couroyannis, Kristina Fekonja, Matilda-Pearl Muir, Miriam Whiting-Reilly, Olivia Federow-Yemm, Olivia O'Brien, Rachel Amos, Stella Joseph-Jarecki

Tenor

Freddie Grieves-Smith, Lachlan McLean, Nicholas Christie, Zac Mistri

Bass

Harrison Dart, Jack Jowett, Kevin Jung, Maurice Wan, Oscar Harwood, Simon Wright, William Clarke

Featuring singers from the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE)

Acknowledgements

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