



Exotic Dominions and Mythic Realms

An Operatic Travelogue

Art Axelrod



The Guild of Mercury Opera Rochester

Guild Address:

P.O. Box 92245
Rochester, NY 14692

Mercury Opera Website:

www.mercuryoperarochester.org

Guild Website:

<http://www.mercuryoperarochester.org/guild.htm>

Guild Contacts:

Dr. Agneta Borgstedt, Chair – (585) 334-2323
Mary McNamara, Vice Chair – (585) 473-5456
Helga Strasser, Tour Coordinator – (585) 586-2274

Setting an Opera

- ◆ An Opera is a Music Drama
- ◆ There are Three Components:
 - The Libretto (plot and text)
 - The Music
 - The Setting (scenery and costumes)
- ◆ This evening, we'll talk primarily about Settings – particularly, exotic ones

How Does the Composer Choose the Setting?

- ◆ The setting of the original work from which the opera was adapted;
- ◆ The setting may invoke a strong sense of place, emotions or drama to contemporary audiences;
- ◆ The story would only make sense in an exotic locale;
- ◆ It's good theater!

Our Journey Begins



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Our Itinerary *To Hell and Back . . .*

1. Hades
 - ♦ Gluck, *Orfeo ed Eurydice*
2. The American Wild West
 - ♦ Puccini, *Girl of the Golden West*
3. Ancient Ceylon
 - ♦ Bizet, *Pearl Fishers*
4. Seville, 19th Century
 - ♦ Bizet, *Carmen*
5. Easter Sunday, Rural Sicily, circa 1900
 - ♦ Mascagni, *Cavalleria Rusticana*
6. English Fishing Village, 19th Century
 - ♦ Britten, *Peter Grimes*
7. Ottoman Palace, 18th Century
 - ♦ Mozart, *Abduction from the Seraglio*

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Our Itinerary ... to Heaven's Gate

8. Central Asian Nomad Camp, Medieval Era
 - Borodin, *Prince Igor*
9. Parisian Café, 19th Century
 - Puccini, *La Bohème*
10. German Forest Village
 - Weber, *Der Freischütz*
11. Mythic China
 - Puccini, *Turandot*
12. A Kingdom Under the Sea
 - Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko*
13. The Bridge to Valhalla
 - Wagner, *Das Rheingold*

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The Gates of Hell



The Gates of Hell

Orpheus at the Gates of Hell from *Orfeo ed Euridice*

(Video)

Dame Janet Baker (m) 1982
London Philharmonic Orchestra,
Glyndbourne Festival Chorus and
Corps de Ballet, Raymond Leppard,
cond.

Orfeo ed Euridice

Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714 - 1787)

Libretto by Raniero da Calzabigi

First Performance, 1762, Vienna

An operatic setting of the Greek myth of
Orpheus and Eurydice

"Orpheus at the Gates of Hell"

Orfeo ed Euridice

Eurydice has died. Her lover, Orpheus, the mythic bard, resolves to go down to Hades and using his bardic powers, to bring her back.

Here, armed only with his lyre, he confronts the Furies at the Gates of Hell.

The American Wild West, 1849



The American Wild West

Minnie's Bible Lesson from *The Girl of the Golden West*

(Video)

Carol Neblett (s) – (1983)

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House
Covent Garden, Nello Santi, cond.

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The Girl of the Golden West (La Fanciulla del West)

Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Libretto by Gelfo Civinini and Carlo
Zangarini, after play by David Belasco,
The Girl of the Golden West, 1905

First Performance, New York, 1910

At a "49er" mining camp, our gal Minnie,
the only woman in the camp, tends to
the miners and saves her innocent lover
from hanging.

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Minnie's Bible Lesson

La Fanciulla del West

California, 1849: The miners are drinking at the Polka Bar, at the foot of the Cloudy Mountains.

Minnie, the only woman in the camp, gets the rowdy miners in order and gives a Bible reading.

The lesson ends when the Wells Fargo wagon arrives.

Pearl Fishers of Ancient Ceylon



Ancient Ceylon

The Arrival of the Priestess Léïla from *The Pearl Fishers*

(Video)

Annick Massis, Léïla (s) - 2005
Orchestra and chorus of La Fenice,
Venice, Marcello Viotti, cond .

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The Pearl Fishers

Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875)

Libretto by Eugène Cormon and Michel
Carré

First Performance, 1863, Paris

Village of the pearl fishers, ancient times:
The virgin priestess, Léïla, must live
alone to pray for the village, but is
loved by two of the men.

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The Arrival of Léïla

The Pearl Fishers

The head priest has arranged to have the virgin priestess Léïla stay at the village.
In this early scene, Léïla has arrived and is being greeted by the villagers.

Seville



Seville, 19th Century

Habañera from *Carmen*

(Video)

Marina Domashenko, Carmen - 2003
Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet of the Arena
di Verona, Antonelli Bertoni, cond .

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Carmen

Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875)

Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic
Halévy, after novella by Prosper
Mérimée, 1845

First Performance, 1875, Paris

The soldier, Don Jose, falls for the
dangerously beautiful and capricious
cigarette girl, Carmen

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Habañera Carmen

19th Century Seville, a square outside a cigarette factory: At the end of a shift, Carmen, the beautiful, flirtatious, capricious cigarette factory worker, enters and sings the Habañera, "L'amour est une oiseau rebelle", to the crowd about her attitude toward love.

Rural Sicily – Easter Sunday



Rural Sicily

Easter Sunday Procession from *Cavalleria Rusticana*

(Video)

Elena Obraztsova, Santuzza (s) - 1982

Orchestra and Chorus of La Scala,
Georges Prêtre, cond.

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Cavalleria Rusticana

(Rustic Chivalry)

Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945)

Libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and
Guido Menasci, after play by Giovanni
Verga, 1883

First Performance, 1890, Rome

Betrayal, heartbreak and honor in a small
town in rural Sicily

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Easter Sunday: A Small Town in Rural Sicily Cavalleria Rusticana

The villagers mount their Easter Sunday procession. Santuzza, betrayed by her lover and excommunicated from the Church, can only look on mournfully.

Note: This production, directed by Franco Zeffirelli, is a movie version, filmed on location.

An English Fishing Village



An English Fishing Village

**"Oh, hang at open doors the net, the
cork" from *Peter Grimes***

(Video)

1981

Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera
House, Covent Garden, Colin Davis, cond.

Peter Grimes

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)

Libretto by Montagu Slater, after the
collection of poems by George Crabbe,
The Borough, 1810

First Performance, 1945, London

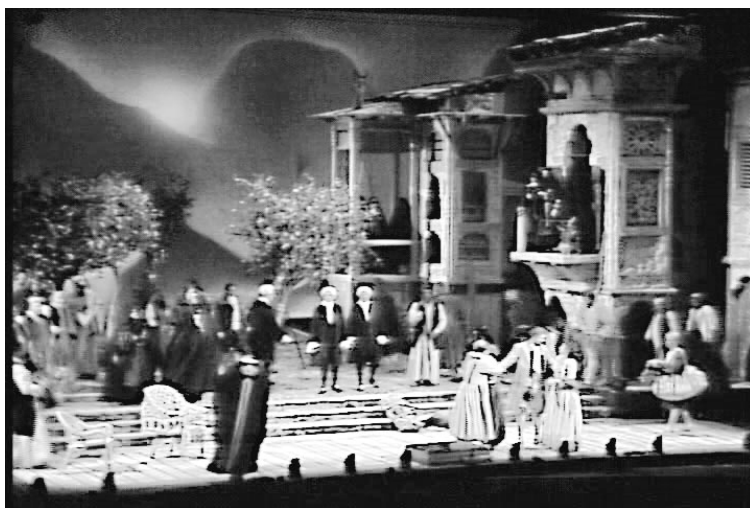
The misfit fisherman, Peter Grimes, is in
conflict with his fellow townspeople and
his inner demons.

English Fishing Village

Peter Grimes

Sunday morning in a small fishing village,
19th century. The townspeople begin
their activities.

Palace of an Ottoman Pasha



An Ottoman Palace, 18th Century

Finale from *Abduction from the Seraglio*

(Video)

Deon van der Walt (t), Belmonte; Inga Nielsen
(s), Konstanze; Lars Magnusson (t), Pedrillo;
Lillian Watson (s), Blonde; Oliver Tobias
(spoken role), Selim Pasha
1988

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera
House, Georg Solti, cond.

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The Abduction from the Seraglio

(Die Entführung aus dem Serail)

W.A. Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Libretto by Gottlieb Stephanie the
Younger, after Christoph Bretzner,
Bellmont und Constanze, 1781

First Performance, 1782, Vienna

The Spanish lady, Constanze, captive of
the Ottoman Pasha Selim, is rescued by
her lover, Belmonte

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Final Quartet and Finale

Abduction from the Seraglio

Constanze and her servants Blonde and Pedrillo are captives of the Ottoman Selim Pasha. Constanze's lover, Belmonte, has come to rescue them, but he, too, is captured by the Pasha.

Finally, the Pasha magnanimously releases all of them. In the final quartet, the four former captives sing the praises of the Pasha's magnanimity as they prepare to sail home.

Prince Igor

In the Camp of the Polovets Khan



Central Asian Nomad Camp,
Medieval Era

Polovtsian Dances from *Prince Igor*

(Video)

1998

Kirov Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet, Valery
Gergiev , cond.

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Prince Igor

Alexander Borodin (1833 – 1887)

Libretto by composer and V.V. Stasov,
after anonymous epic poem, *Song of
Igor's Campaign*, 12th Century

First Performance, 1890, St. Petersburg

Prince Igor of Seversk and his son,
Vladimir, lose a battle with the forces of
the nomad Khan Konchak

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Polovtsian Dances

Prince Igor

Igor and Vladimir have been defeated by Khan Konchak and have been captured. Konchak, out of respect for the Russians' valor, treat them as honored (albeit reluctant) guests.

Here, the Khan treats the Russians to an evening's entertainment.

Paris: Left Bank Café



A Café in the Paris Latin Quarter

Musetta's Waltz from *La Bohème*

(Video)

Hei-Kyung Hong, Musetta (s) – 2003

Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro della
Scala, Milan, Bruno Bartoletti, cond.

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La Bohème

Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi
Illica, after Henry Murger, *Scènes de la
vie de bohème*, 1845

First Performance, Turin, 1896

The life, loves and tragedies of a group of
artists in 19th century Paris

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A Café in the Paris Latin Quarter La Boheme

The four artists, along with Rodolfo's new love, Mimi, are celebrating at the Café Momus. Marcello, the painter, has recently broken up with his lover, the singer Musetta. Musetta arrives with a wealthy older man. She tries (successfully) to win back Marcello by making him jealous, singing the aria "Quando m'en vo soletta".

A German Forest Village



A German Forest Village

Hunters' Chorus from *Der Freischütz*

(Video)

1968

Chorus and Ballet of the Hamburg State
Opera, Hamburg Philharmonic State
Orchestra, Leopold Ludwig, cond.

(Television Production)

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Der Freischütz

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 - 1826)

Libretto by Johan Friedrich Kind, after
Appel and Laun, *Gespensterbuch*, 1811

First Performance, 1821, Berlin

A young hunter is enticed into making a
pact with a demon to obtain some
magic bullets in order to win a shooting
contest. After near tragedy, he is
redeemed and wins his bride

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Hunters Chorus

Der Freischütz

On the day of the great Shooting Contest,
the hunters gather at the village tavern
and sing the praises of the hunters' life.

Mythic China



Ancient Mythic China

The Riddle Scene from *Turandot*

(Video)

Eva Marton, Turandot; Plácido Domingo,
Calaf; Hugues Cuenod, Emperor
Altoum - 1988

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Ballet,
James Levine, cond.

Production by Franco Zeffirelli

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Turandot

Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato
Simoni, after Carlo Gozzi, *Turandot*,
1762. (Opera completed by Franco
Alfano)

First Performance, 1926, Milan

Prince Calaf, enamored of Princess
Turandot, must answer three riddles to
win her, or else lose his head.

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The Riddle Scene

Turandot

Princess Turandot asks Prince Calaf the Three Riddles. If Calaf answers them correctly, he wins her hand, if not, he loses his head.

Calaf correctly answers, as confirmed by the chorus of Priests, "Hope", "Blood" and "Turandot".

An Undersea Palace



A Kingdom Under the Sea

In the Court of the King of the Ocean Sea from *Sadko*

(Video)

Vladimir Galusin (t), Sadko; Sergei
Aleksashkin (b), The Sea King;
Valentina Tsidipova (s), Princess
Volkhova - 1994

Orchestra and Ballet of the Kirov Opera,
Valery Gergiev, cond.

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Sadko

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)

Libretto by composer and Vladimir
Bel'sky, after an epic poem from the
11th Century *Novgorod Cycle*

First Performance, 1898, Moscow

The minstrel Sadko charms the daughter
of the King of the Ocean Sea, who
assists him in becoming a wealthy
merchant.

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The Underwater Palace of the King of the Ocean Sea

Sadko has descended under the sea to the palace of the King of the Ocean Sea to pay his respects. He plays and sings for the Royal Court in order to charm the King and win the hand of Princess Volkhova.

The Bridge to Valhalla



The Bridge to Valhalla

Entry of the Gods into Valhalla from *Das Rheingold*

(Video)

James Morris, Wotan; Siegfried Jerusalem,
Loge; Christa Ludwig, Fricka - 1990

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James Levine,
cond.

Otto Schenk, Director

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Das Rheingold

Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883)

Libretto by the composer, primarily after medieval
Austrian epic, *Nibelungenlied*, c. 1200

First Performance, 1862, Vienna

Part I of the four-part cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung*
(*Der Ring des Nibelungen*)

Through theft, deception and treachery, Wotan, King of
the Gods, arranges to have the fortress, Valhalla,
built. Among other treacheries, the sacred Rhinegold
has been stolen from the river Rhine, to the dismay
of its caretakers, the Rhine Maidens.

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Entry of the Gods into Valhalla

Das Rheingold

At the finale of the opera, Wotan and the rest of the Gods cross over the Rainbow Bridge into Valhalla, as the Rhine Maidens lament.

The Fire God, Loge, a major accomplice and instrumental in the deception, but not one of the Wotan's people, holds back.

There's No Place Like Home!



Thank You And Good Night

Playlist
Exotic Lands and Mythic Realms
An Operatic Travelogue

Art Axelrod

Hades

1. **Orpheus at the Gates of Hell from *Orfeo ed Euridice*** (4:06)
Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714 - 1787)
London Philharmonic Orchestra, Glyndbourne Festival Chorus and Corps de Ballet, Raymond Leppard, cond. (1982)
Dame Janet Baker, Orfeo
MediaID (DVD)

The American Wild West

2. **Minnie Gives a Bible Lesson, “Dove erevamo”, from *The Girl of the Golden West*** (4:15)
Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)
Carol Neblett, Minnie; Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Nello Santi, cond. (1983)
Kultur D2038 (DVD)

Ceylon

3. **The Arrival of Léïla, “Sois la bienvenue”, from *The Pearl Fishers*** (2:02)
Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875)
Orchestra and chorus of La Fenice, Venice, Marcello Viotti, cond.
Annick Massis, Léïla; Yasu Nakajima, Nadir; Luca Grassi, Zurga; Pier Luigi Pizzi, director (2005)
Dynamic 33459 (DVD)

Seville, 19th Century

4. **Habañera from *Carmen*** (4:02)
Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875)
Orchestra, Chorus and Corps de Ballet of the Arena di Verona, Antonelli Bertoni, cond.
Marina Domashenko, Carmen (2003)
TDK DVUS-OPCAR (DVD)

Rural Sicily, 1890

5. **Easter Sunday Procession from *Cavalleria Rusticana*** (4:12)
Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945)
Orchestra and Chorus of La Scala, Georges Prêtre, cond.
Elena Obraztsova, Santuzza (1982)
Movie version, filmed on location, Franco Zefferelli, dir.
Deutsche Grammophon B0004353-09 (DVD)

Street Scene - English Fishing Village

6. **“Oh, hang at open doors the net, the cork” from *Peter Grimes*** (5:08)
Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)
Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Colin Davis, cond. (1981)
Kultur D2255 (DVD)

An Ottoman Palace

7. Finale from *Abduction from the Seraglio* (2:13)

W.A. Mozart (1756 - 1791)
Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Georg Solti, cond. (1988)
Deon van der Walt, Belmonte; Inga Nielsen, Konstanze; Lars Magnusson, Pedrillo; Lillian Watson, Blonde; Oliver Tobias, Selim Pasha
Kultur D2098 (DVD)

In the Camp of Central Asian Nomads

8. "Polovtsian Dances" from *Prince Igor* (3:39)

Alexander Borodin (1833 - 1887)
Kirov Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet, Valery Gergiev, cond. (1998)
Philips B0001093-09 (DVD)

Paris in the 19th Century

9. At the Café Momus (Musetta's Waltz) from *La Boheme* (5:08)

Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)
Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro della Scala, Milan, Bruno Bartoletti, cond.
Hei-Kyung Hong, Musetta (2003)
MediaID (DVD)

Beer Garden - German Forest Village

10. Hunters' Chorus, Act III from *Der Freischütz* (2:21)

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 - 1826)
Chorus and Ballet of the Hamburg State Opera, Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra, Leopold Ludwig, cond. (1968)
Television Production directed by Joachim Hess
ArtHaus Musik 101271 (DVD)

China

11. Riddle Scene from *Turandot* (8:42)

Giacomo Pucini (1858 - 1924)
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Ballet, James Levine, cond.
Éva Marton, Turandot; Plácido Domingo, Calaf; Hugues Cuenod, Emperor Altoum (1988)
Production by Franco Zeffirelli
Deutsche Grammophon B0000852-09 (DVD)

A Kingdom Under the Sea

12. The Court of the King of the Ocean Sea from *Sadko* (2:10)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)
Orchestra and Ballet of the Kirov Opera, Valery Gergiev, cond. (1994)
Vladimir Galusin, Sadko; Sergei Aleksashkin, The Sea King; Valentina Tsidipova, Princess Volkhova
Philips B0006619-09 (DVD)

Valhalla

13. Entry of the Gods into Valhalla (Finale) from *Das Rheingold* (3:33)

Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883)
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James Levine, cond. (1990)
James Morris, Wotan; Siegfried Jerusalem, Loge; Christa Ludwig, Fricka
Production by Otto Schenck
Deutsche Grammophon 440 073 036-9 (DVD)

TT = 51:31