



## *Wondering If You Will Like The Rake's Progress?*

July 29, 2025 at Glimmerglass Festival

First, let me say that *The Rake's Progress* (in English) is not a work of 19th century Romanticism, that period beloved by opera audiences around the world. It is, however, not atonal nor like 21st century works, but neoclassical: a work in conscious imitation of an older style. This older style, in composer Igor Stravinsky's case, includes imitation of 18th century verse and Mozartean musical forms, and structural elements which were the norm during both the 18th and 19th centuries, such as discrete arias ('numbers') with a beginning, middle and end, duets and trios, a chorus, and even a lullaby.

It was inspired by an eponymous series of 18th century paintings by William Hogarth, and is an old-fashioned morality tale. (Tom, the Rake, might be a younger brother of, say, Don Giovanni, but feckless rather than evil; easily led astray rather than deliberately and irredeemably sinful.)

This morality tale is enlivened, however, by its witty, satiric commentary on modernism – modernism as it was emerging in the middle of the 20th century.

In this regard, we have a miraculous machine which turns stones into bread, a send-up of commercialism and modern enterprise; the Auctioneer Sellem, whose auction presents a commentary on greed and complacency; the ambiguous sexuality of Baba the Turk, whom Tom marries to assert his independence from social norms. And Tom's ultimate fate also has a more modern flavor than an eternity in hell....

The libretto, by literary lights W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman, is widely considered to be one of the best ever written.

In its portrayal of opposing values, the countryside representing nature, love, procreation, and the ordinary rhythm of life, versus the city's commercialism, superficiality, technology and 24-hour schedule, it is more than a morality tale, but becomes a fable for our time.

So, come! – prepared to be entertained, musically stimulated, and tickled by a work created by a quirky, 20th century genius.





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