

## ***THE HOURS*, Kevin Puts, Libretto by Greg Pearce**

By Carol Crocca

I can do no better than to quote the following reviews, which precede the presentation at the Met.

By [Joshua Barone](#), nytimes.com, Sept. 9, 2022

“Renee Fleming makes her highly anticipated return to the Met in the world-premiere production of Pulitzer Prize–winning composer Kevin Puts’ *The Hours*, adapted from Michael Cunningham’s acclaimed novel.

Fleming, the superstar soprano, was mulling over new projects when Paul Batsel, her right-hand man, suggested “The Hours,” Michael Cunningham’s [1998] novel inspired by Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway,” which weaves together one day in the lives of three women across time: Woolf, writing her book; a midcentury homemaker named Laura Brown, who is reading it; and a 1990s editor named Clarissa Vaughan, who, like Clarissa Dalloway, is organizing a party, here for a friend diminished by AIDS.

The Philadelphia Orchestra premiered “The Hours” in concert form earlier this year, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Reviewing that performance, Zachary Woolfe [wrote in The New York Times](#) that, “the new work is, like ‘Silent Night,’ direct, effective theater, with a cinematic quality in its plush, propulsive underscoring, its instinctive sense for using music to move things along.”

### **[From an interview with the singers]**

**[Renee] FLEMING [who sings Clarissa Vaughan]** Kevin is not afraid to write something that’s moving and beautiful for the general public. And that is something that, in my lifetime, composers in opera have struggled with.

**[Later]** Well, I’ve always wanted to play Meryl Streep [laughs]. But also, for me, this is one of the only times I’ve gotten to perform a period from my own lifetime. I still have clothing from the ’90s.

**[Joyce] DiDONATO [who sings Virginia Woolf]** You do get the cutest clothes from that period. I have a little bit of wardrobe envy.

**Based on the concert version premiere of the opera,** by Opera Philadelphia, [Zachary Woolfe](#), March 20, 2022, [nytimes.com](#) wrote:

With each of the two acts unfolding in an unbroken stream, Puts moves smoothly between parlando sung conversation and glowing lyrical flights. The stylization of opera allows him to bring his characters together in the same musical space, even if they are otherwise unaware of one another. So there are, for example, ravishing duets for Woolf and Laura, one in which they sing lines from “Mrs. Dalloway” in close harmony over trembling strings. Puts is acute in using the chorus, which will presumably be offstage in a full production, to convey further shadows of these women’s interior lives.

Puts’ work is attractive and skillful. Yet much of it, despite lots of activity and ostensible variety in the orchestra and among the singers, gives a sense of engulfing sameness of musical texture and vocal approach. The arias, if you set the words aside, are more or less interchangeable: pristinely soaring. The saturated orchestral colors recall Nelson Riddle’s symphonic pop arrangements and Samuel Barber’s gently reflective soprano monologue “Knoxville: Summer of 1915.” But Riddle songs are just a couple of minutes long; “Knoxville,” about 15. Over a couple of hours, it’s lovely but wearying.

Clarissa dominates the opera’s final scenes, when “The Hours” is at its finest: the emotions sincere and persuasive, the music fervent.

From *The Hours* by Kevin Puts: A New Opera by [Francesca Grossberg](#), May 16, 2022, [fieldstonenews.com](#):

Puts has been composing for decades. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 2012 for his debut opera, *Silent Night*, which follows soldiers in World War I. I had the opportunity to interview Puts, during which he described the differences between the process of writing *Silent Night* as compared to *The Hours*.

“You can do things with music that you can’t do in a book or a film. For example, you can’t really deal with simultaneity successfully in a book or a film, but in an opera you can conceivably have characters from these different time periods: Virginia Woolf in the 1920s, Laura Brown in the 1950s, and a more contemporary character Clarissa Vaughn who is living in the 1990s in New York. They can sing simultaneously and appear simultaneously on the stage and they can work together in music and harmony. It was interesting to blur the lines between these characters that are separated by years.”

I look forward to finding out if Renee Fleming’s prediction of the opera as “moving and beautiful for the general public” is fulfilled.