



BACKGROUNDER

This work unites Nordic Mythology and opera into a truly new and thrilling musical theatre. *Odin, the Opera* preserves both myth and opera traditions while offering a fresh, exciting vehicle that is irresistible to audiences of almost any age and aesthetic sensibility. The libretto will be realized through spoken word, street singing, and chanting. The orchestra will consist of eleven amplified percussionists performing exclusively on recycled materials. These never-heard-before sounds will provide a fresh approach for the traditional forms of both the myth and opera formats. For example, spoken word in Recitatives and street singing in Arias - both will be stretched and challenged technically, yet the composition will stay in the framework of traditional operatic format. The libretto for this work will contain no profanity. A Greek chorus appears periodically to mark significant junctures throughout the story.

The stage setting and costumes (all constructed from recycled materials) will be steeped in the mythology yet have clear traces of contemporary society to suggest that even today, we live in the same situations as those of ancient times. This also supports a basic theme of the opera: history continues to repeat itself, yet people do not seem to learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before.

The Norse Myths, some more than a thousand years old, are stories of the Viking Gods. They begin with the creation of the world and end with the demise of the world - an apocalypse called Ragnarok, which destroys everything on the earth including the Gods.

The opera is based on a story set in primitive Viking times. It's the tale of Odin, the God of War and Knowledge, and the evolution that occurs when a primitive, violent society is introduced to the concepts of knowledge and thinking - The Birth of Civility. As the God of War, Odin is the most violent person imaginable. At Odin's command, his posse, the Berserks, will kill anyone for anything. As the God of Knowledge, Odin realizes that, through education people gain thought, insight, and a host of emotions (civility). Therefore, he knows once his troops gain knowledge and learn to think for themselves, they will become ineffective warriors and that will be the end of his army and his power. As both the God of War and the God of Knowledge, his deepening intelligence and the coming of civility begin to humanize him and simultaneously depletes his strength as a warrior. He is aware that he can't stop war, and he can't stop knowledge so he becomes trapped and defeated by his own duality, long before Ragnarok.

All characters eventually gain knowledge (civility) in the course of the opera, and as they do, the essence of their character changes. Knowledge and the ability to think neutralizes the unbridled violence and effectiveness of the Vikings. But eventually, just as violence was misused, the power of knowledge each character now possesses becomes misused (i.e., greed, lust for power, selfishness, hatred, etc.) and/or creates so much confusion it leads to the mental breakdown or personal apocalypse of each character before Ragnarok even takes place.

Throughout the opera, there is a Narrator who periodically appears on a live television screen to comment about the mythological events onstage, draw comparisons between those events and life today and offer insight into the events about to unfold onstage.

CHARACTERS

ODIN - An agile man who has been around for centuries. He sports a grey beard, a hooded shirt as blue as the sky, a grey cape and a broad-rimmed hat. He has one shifty eye and a patch over the other. He is very aloof, totally fixated on his thoughts and has been a fixture in both Scandinavian and German mythology. He and wife FRIGG have a son BALDAR. He also has a deceiving mistress, LOKI. His quest for knowledge has led him to sacrifice one of his eyes and voluntarily hang from the Tree of Life for nine days & nights in order to gain knowledge (the Birth of Civility). When the opera begins, ODIN has completed those tasks and has returned to life as a new man. As both the God of War and the God of Knowledge, his deepening intelligence and the coming of civility begin humanizing him and simultaneously depleting his strength as a warrior. He knows that he can't stop war and he can't stop knowledge, so he becomes trapped and defeated in his own duality long before Ragnarok.

GIANTS - The first creatures to inhabit the earth. They are simple, primitive, against change or progress, and thrive upon creating chaos. They are the arch enemies of ODIN and his posse, who represent change. Their leader, LOKO, and his scheming & chaotic nature leads to confusion within the ranks, which causes the Giants to fragment and weaken.

LOKI/LOKO - LOKI is a devious female who has the ability to turn herself into a man and back again. LOKI is an attractive woman in her late 20s with a vocal range to sing as a female, but has the ability to sing low and guttural in the character of the male counterpart, LOKO. LOKO is the stronger, dominating character who controls the dual life. LOKO, the leader of the GIANTS, has a final goal of defeating ODIN at Ragnarok. LOKO sex-shifts into the female LOKI in order to seduce ODIN and get him to commit the unclaimed souls (souls not predestined for heaven or hell) to her care. Then LOKO will take over the souls and train them to fight on the side of the GIANTS at Ragnarok (against ODIN). In the midst of all the deception, sex changes and lies, LOKI/LOKO has a personal apocalypse in which nothing makes sense, there is complete identity confusion and he/she breaks down in the form of an Aria.

BESERKS - ODIN'S army. A group of crazy, mad, yet effective warriors so over the edge their name has been immortalized. They could not function in any way other than being the most mean, gruesome and effective warriors that world has ever known. They would kill instantly on ODIN'S command without giving it any thought. They simultaneously represent the two opposing forces of repulsion and

attraction. Legend says that in battle, they would howl like wolves and growl like bears, become so enraged they would bite off the ends of their shields, foam at the mouth, have enormous strength and be invulnerable to fire and iron. As trained killers who must act immediately on instinct, the acquisition of knowledge & civility had a devastating affect upon their combat capabilities. When ordered to execute LOKI - a premeditated murder - they realize the difference between killing someone in the heat of battle and thinking about and planning their demise. They are developing a sense of conscience, which ultimately impairs their effectiveness as warriors.

FRIGG - wife of ODIN, mother of BALDAR. In her 40s or early 50s, she is attractive, promiscuous, shares a deep knowledge of the destinies but is in a constant state of obsession & compulsion about BALDAR'S safety. As a result, she has made pacts with all the evils, poisons and forces of death (except one) to guarantee BALDAR'S life eternal. She is devastated by BALDAR'S death and by the fact she couldn't see it coming.

BALDAR - Young (late teens or early 20s). He is the monolithic good guy. It is only BALDAR and The RAVENS who have a grip on reality, the coming of civility and understand balance and control in life. BALDAR is killed early in the opera, but returns throughout to offer ODIN comfort and counseling.

THE NARRATOR - In their 20s and with a good comedic sense, he/she is the conscience throughout the entire production. He/she periodically appears as a weather person on a television screen by interrupting the action onstage reporting about the relationship of today's society to the events on stage and offering forecasts about events that are about to unfold.

VALKYRIES – Nine beautiful young women who work for ODIN and choose who is to go to battle and die. They inhabit Valhalla, the place in the sky ODIN has created for his warriors to live, eat, and drink for eternity. In the opera, Valhalla is in the form of a Viking ship that appears to be suspended above the stage. Inside the ship are the musicians of the percussion orchestra who simultaneously double as inhabitants of Valhalla.

RAVENS - Two male RAVENS are ODIN'S link to world information. Each morning, they fly around the world, make observations and report back to ODIN. They, as BALDAR does, see the world from a balanced perspective and are very frustrated that others don't see it the same way. They can't communicate this to anyone else, because no one else is listening. The more they try, the more frustrating it becomes.

GLYTHIA - A priestess who always carried a hammer. She presides over the funeral of Baldar.

DWARF – a midget who periodically wanders about the stage but never speaks

FROMIN – Odin's number two man. He makes several appearances in the opera but rarely speaks.

OLD WOMAN – LOKO/LOKI disguised as an Old Woman in Act I Scene 10, meets FRIGG and gets her to divulge the one poison that will kill her son, BALDAR.