

The Great Gatsby

OPERA IN TWO ACTS

Music by John Harbison
Libretto by John Harbison (after the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald)
With popular song lyrics by Murray Horwitz

Commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera
to commemorate James Levine’s 25th
anniversary as Music Director



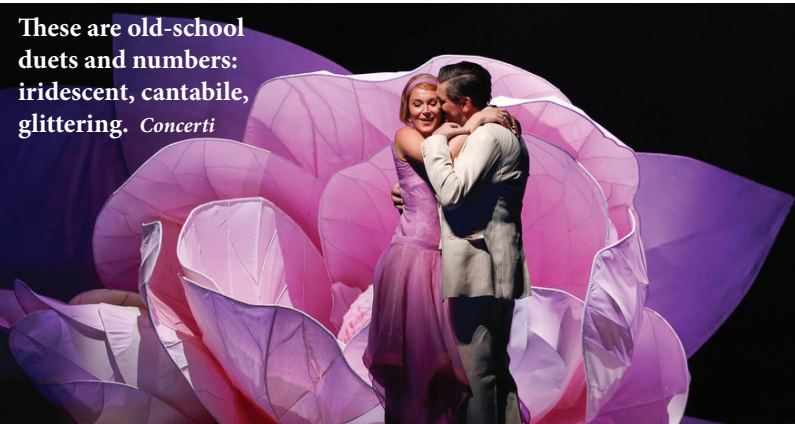
A magnificent
European
premiere

Elbmargarita

Synopsis

Fitzgerald’s magnificent portrait of the Jazz Age – in all its idealism, hopes, excesses, nostalgia, and decadence – remains one of the most widely read American novels. It tells of the rise and fall of Jay Gatsby and his love for Daisy Buchanan, married to brutish Tom. Daisy’s cousin Nick Carraway shares with Gatsby proximity and background – veterans of the Great War arrived from the Midwest to seek their fortunes. Gatsby’s lavish parties contrast with the intimate, intricate web of the protagonists’ relationships; their reckless actions turn an American dream into something more akin to a Greek tragedy.

A formidably crafted score. *Concerti*



These are old-school
duets and numbers:
iridescent, cantabile,
glittering. *Concerti*



Harbison sound[s] . . . very American. He generously borrows from the dance music of the Roaring Twenties: jazz and blues illustrate the opera’s society scenes, which maintain something of *verismo* in the best sense. *Concerti*

Cast

DAISY BUCHANAN Soprano
MEYER WOLFSHIEM Bass-baritone
JAY GATSBY Tenor
HENRY GATZ Baritone
TOM BUCHANAN Tenor
MINISTER Bass-baritone
NICK CARRAWAY Baritone
JORDAN BAKER Mezzo-soprano
MYRTLE WILSON Mezzo-soprano
GEORGE WILSON Bass
RADIO/BAND VOCALIST Tenor
CHORUS OF PARTYGOERS

Orchestration

FULL: 3(pic).2+ca.2(Ebcl)+bcl.ssx.2
+cbn/4331/timp.3perc/pf.hp.bjo/str

ALTERNATE: 2(pic).2(ca).2(Eb,ssx)
+bcl.2(cbn)/2.1(Bb).1.1/timp.2perc
(timp)/pf/bjo/str(min32221)

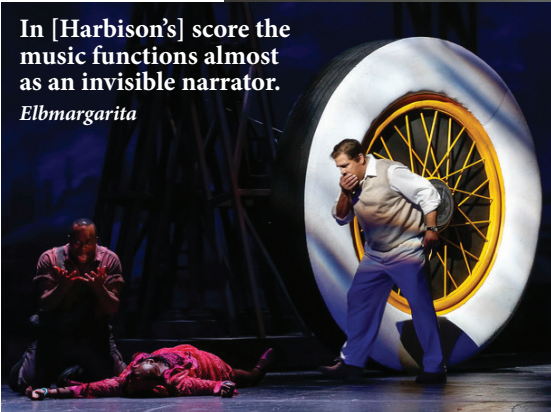
STAGE BAND (from the orchestra):
solo violin, cl(ssx), tpt, tbn, tba,
perc(trap set), pf, bjo

Harbison’s dazzling score. . .
a feast for the ears. *Capriccio Forum*

An experience. . . that deeply impressed.

Musik in Dresden

A brilliant, evocative, pungently
imaginative work.
Boston Music Intelligencer



In [Harbison’s] score the
music functions almost
as an invisible narrator.
Elbmargarita



Photos

John Harbison: Julian Bullitt.
All others: Daniel Koch,
Semperoper Dresden.
Used with permission.

Design

John & Sarah Schaffer

The Great Gatsby

John Harbison

The music . . . pulses like the life of New York.
Elbmargarita



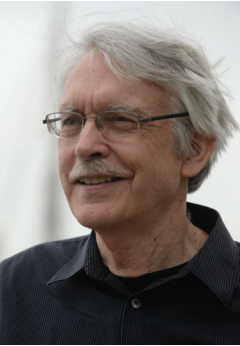
Performance History

Semperoper Dresden (revival) | Dresden | forthcoming 2017
Semperoper Dresden | Dresden | 2015
Emmanuel Music (concert) | Boston and Tanglewood | 2013
Aspen Music Festival (alt orchestration) | Aspen | 2012
Opera Parallèle (alt orchestration) | San Francisco | 2012
Metropolitan Opera (revival) | New York | 2002
Lyric Opera of Chicago | Chicago | 2000
Metropolitan Opera | New York | 1999-2000 WORLD PREMIERE

Future performances will find a
thankful public. *Musik in Dresden*

JOHN HARBISON

John Harbison’s music is distinguished by its exceptional invention and deeply expressive range. He has written for every conceivable concert genre, ranging from grand opera to the most intimate, works that embrace jazz along with the classical forms. His prolific, personal and greatly admired music written for the voice encompasses more than 70 works including choral, voice with orchestra, chamber works with voice, and the operas *Full Moon in March*, *Winter’s Tale*, and *The Great Gatsby*.



“an exceptionally unpretentious, blessedly practical oeuvre in which the lyrical strain predominates.” *Gramophone*
“...a triumph of individual voice over all the styles and techniques at his disposal...” *The New York Times*

Praise for the 2015 Semperoper production:

This *Great Gatsby* is a captivating, moving work, which the Semperoper lovingly stages between rose-colored longing for love and the rusty industrial charm of the 1920s. *Elbmargarita*

The Staatskapelle Dresden always found the right tone in the midst of this variety of moods, brilliantly bringing together not just the sound of the easy, decadent party life, but also the boredom and melancholy in the middle of the excess. *Elbmargarita*

Visually stunning, the new production offers a fresh take on the opera, a work that portrays the clash of glittery romance with gritty reality as the story speeds to its tragic end. *Boston Musical Intelligencer*

This *Great Gatsby* is a period-true, brightly colored pleasure. One would like to see more of this recent American opera in this country. *Der Tagesspiegel*

The artistic level, from picture to musical realization by Wayne Marshall and the Dresden Staatskapelle, is striking [and] above all visibly comes alive in Keith Warner’s fascinating staging. *Musik in Dresden*

The iridescent bronze-tinted woodwinds conjure up moments of Richard Strauss; the sumptuously smooth, supplely phrased strings sing as though they wanted to justify Wagner’s deep reverence for his “Wonder Harp” (Wagner’s nickname for the Staatskapelle). *Concerti*

Harbison’s music is based on the European musical tradition. Next to shades of the golden 1920s and musically illustrative imitations of industrial sounds, one can hear the history of opera into the twentieth century. . .Often, the music suggests a deeper meaning of the scenery. *Sächsische Zeitung*

The music of the American composer revealed itself to be. . .masterfully crafted, showing the many sides of today’s music...encompassing the entire palette of modern tone colors from jazz, blues, tango, and Charleston, to symphonic constructions in the spirit of Puccini and Richard Strauss’ *Rosenkavalier*. *Musik in Dresden*

A work of skill, subtlety, and charm. *Financial Times*

A vibrant stage production of The Great Gatsby. In the foreground, a man in a white shirt and tie sits at a desk, typing on a vintage typewriter. Behind him, a large group of performers in 1920s-style costumes are dancing and socializing. A woman in a shimmering, sequined dress is being lifted into the air by several men. The background is a deep blue, suggesting a night sky.

A true Grand Opera, with an authentic American vernacular flavor
Boston Musical Intelligencer

A stage production of The Great Gatsby. A man in a red shirt and dark overalls stands in the center of a stage set that resembles a workshop or a garage. He is surrounded by various mechanical parts, tools, and a large green barrel. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows.

A display of remarkable virtuosity. . . heart-wrenching in its power.
San Francisco Chronicle

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RECORDING (3 discs)
The Metropolitan Opera



Praise for THE GREAT GATSBY

Harbison’s *Gatsby* . . . is streaked with magnificence . . . Frequently breathtaking. . . the score evokes the novel’s boozy, gaudy atmosphere, and preserves the fragile musicality of Fitzgerald’s prose. *Newsday*

Out of one national classic, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, John Harbison has fashioned another, one of the best operas composed by an American to date. *Boston Globe*

The Great Gatsby is, above all, an opera of great intelligence, subtlety and expertise. *Los Angeles Times*

Harbison is a master at capturing mood, psychology and emotion in his characterful orchestral writing. . . the best thing his opera does is dramatize the subversive nature of the novel, eroding the forced Roaring ‘20s gaiety and emptiness with dark currents. *Los Angeles Times*

It is a deftly made work. . . that gives us all the traditional ingredients: carefully gauged changes of pace, extended arias, neat ensembles, vivid choruses, and, in particular, a number of telling orchestral interludes that underline the narrative. *New York Post*

The first new opera. . .that has definite survival potential. . . a cunningly organized structure of dramatic parallels and musical interconnections, its symmetries as subtle as those in Berg’s *Wozzeck* and its tried and true operatic devices applied as surely as those that animate great operas from Monteverdi to Britten. *New York Magazine*

This might be the best American opera of the past 30 years: it personifies aspects of American life deep in its bones, without sentimentality. It moves. It’s big and it’s bold. *Arts Fuse*

A stylized illustration of a woman in a long, flowing yellow dress with a white sash. She is standing with her arms slightly out to the sides. The background is a light, textured grey.

Almost Wagnerian . . . where thematic material reveals psychological connections. *Boston Musical Intelligencer*

A stage production of The Great Gatsby. A woman in a long, flowing pink dress is standing on a white, ornate balcony or platform. She is looking towards a man in a white suit who is standing on the stage below. They are holding hands. The background is a deep blue with a pattern of white musical notes.