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Boston Modern Orchestra Project — Gil Rose, conductor  
 BMOP/Sound 1010 (Full Moon in March)  
 BMOP/Sound 1023 (Winter's Tale)

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# John Harbison

## OPERAS

*Full Moon in March* (1979), *Winter's Tale* (1979)



# Full Moon in March

An opera in one act (1979)



Libretto in English by John Harbison, based on the play by W.B Yeats.

Duration: 33 minutes

World Premiere: April 1979, Boston Musica Viva, Cambridge, MA

Orchestration: S, Mz, T, B; dancer | fl, ob, bcl, perc, pf(prpf), vn, va, vc

Cast: THE QUEEN: *Mezzo-soprano*

FIRST ATTENDANT 1: *Soprano*

SECOND ATTENDANT: *Tenor*

THE SWINEHERD: *Baritone*

**"Compelling... fluid vocal writing."**

- *San Francisco Examiner*

## synopsis

A beautiful Queen has agreed to marry the suitor whose song moves her most. A Swineherd presents himself, and she is both attracted and repelled by him. He never gets to sing his song for her, at least not while alive. Two Attendants describe and comment on the actions and themes of the opera, and eventually take over as the protagonists' voices.

## composer note

In Yeats' astrological-metaphysical system, the full moon has a special place in Phase 15, a phase of complete and unexplainable beauty where opposites unite. March represents the ending of the cycle and the creation of a new one. The characters in the drama meet at a moment of mythic truth remote from motivation or even need to explain. As in an earlier opera, *Winter's Tale*, the intent is to make an emblematic ritual-opera which seeks to circumvent or ignore certain realistic conventions without sacrificing the bedrock operatic essentials, melody and drama. Yeats knew well that music was a willful force when combined with his poetry: "The orchestra brings more elaborate music and I have gone over to the enemy. I say to the musician: 'Lose my words in patterns of sound as the name of God is lost in Arabian arabesques. They are a secret between the singers, myself, yourself. The plain fable, plain prose of the dialogue. Ninette de Valois' dance are there for the audience. They can find my works in the book if they are curious, but we will not thrust our secret upon them.'"

# Winter's Tale

An opera in two acts (1979)

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

World Premiere: August 1979, American Opera Projects,  
San Francisco Opera, Mark Lamos director

Cast & Orchestra: S, 2Mz, T, Bar, B; 6 male, 1 female chorus  
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Libretto in English by John Harbison, based on the play by William Shakespeare.

## cast

ANTIGONUS, Lord of Sicilia: *Bass*

PAULINA, Wife of Antigonus: *Mezzo-soprano*

SHEPHERD, believed to be father of Perdita:  
*Bass*

FLORIZEL, Son of Polixenes: *Tenor*

PERDITA, daughter of Leontes: *Soprano*

TIME: *Bass*

LEONTES: *Baritone*

HERMIONE, Queen to Leontes:  
*Mezzo-soprano*

POLIXENES, King of Bohemia:  
*Baritone*

CAMILLO, Lord of Sicilia:  
*Bass-baritone*

## synopsis

The plot encompasses conflicting deceptions, jealousies, murders, and redemption. Leontes is consumed by irrational jealousy regarding Hermione and Polixenes. His resulting actions cause years of anguish and unhappiness. When Perdita, Leontes' banished daughter, appears sixteen years later, Leontes finally recognizes and accepts her. He discerns the long-hidden truth and all are reconciled. Perdita views the statue of her mother and when Leontes proclaims renewed faith in his marriage, Hermione is brought back to life and descends from the pedestal. Human error has been redeemed.

## composer note

The opera is by no means a transcription of Shakespeare's play, and many of the play's most significant aspects are not present. They are replaced by elements especially suitable to opera, and those elements of the play that suggest the irrational, the symbolic, and the magical are greatly enhanced by the melodic and harmonic life of the opera. ...Time as a narrator is given a prominence much greater than in Shakespeare's play, introducing both Acts, and appearing in the action as well. By eliminating the Autolycus subplot, compressing the action, and focusing on the ritual and lyrical elements in the drama, the opera is closer to Greek drama than it is to Shakespeare. Musically a kind of continuous arioso...the opera's dramatic pace is swift and graphic at first, but evolves gradually toward greater inwardness and expansiveness.