

Robert Xavier Rodríguez Operas for Youth



Monkey See, Monkey Do (1986)

(Mono ve, mono hace)

Comic Opera in One Act

Libretto in English, with some Spanish, by Mary Duren and the composer (Spanish translation by Josefina B. Garcia available)

Based on a Mexican folk tale

Commissioned by the Dallas Opera

An *Opera News* survey listed *Monkey See, Monkey Do* as the fourth most often-performed contemporary opera in America. This classic comedy is designed for family audiences as well as for younger children and may be toured with puppets, singing actors, or both. An audio tape of the opera is available on rental for performances with puppets.

Duration: 30 minutes

Instrumentation: cl, tpt, pf, perc, grt, acn, vn, vc
Piano reduction available

Cast:

Pedrito, *sombrero salesman* Tenor
Maria, *Pedrito's fiancée* Soprano
Antonio, *organ grinder, Maria's father* Bass
Villager (male)/Antonio's monkey Baritone
Villager (female)/Baby Monkey Soprano
Villager (female)/Girl monkey Mezzo-soprano
Additional villagers, ensemble parts, ad lib

Synopsis:

Antonio, the organ grinder, searches frantically for his pet monkey. Villagers watch as he forbids the marriage of Maria, his daughter, to Pedrito, an unsuccessful sombrero salesman. Wearing all of his hats piled on top of one another, the dejected Pedrito naps under a tree. Pedrito awakens to find that a family of monkeys, led by Antonio's runaway monkey, has stolen his hats; they are wearing them up in the tree. Pedrito, with only his own sombrero left, waves it and calls out to the monkeys to return his hats, but the monkeys only mock him. Seeing that the monkeys imitate, Pedrito cleverly throws his own sombrero on the ground, prompting the monkeys to do likewise in "monkey see, monkey do" fashion. The villagers eagerly buy up the celebrated sombreros, and Antonio, grateful for the return of his monkey, gives his blessing to Maria and the now prosperous Pedrito. The audience joins the cast in a Mexican celebration clapping and singing.

MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO



Acclaim:

"...a stirring musical and visual treat. The score blends elements of Mexican-mariachi traditional folk melodies with the contemporary style of Mr. Rodríguez....The musical score encourages audience participation; the combination of English and Spanish is ideal for the introduction of language study; and the exposure to the Mexican culture fits perfectly into any humanities curriculum."

— Stephen A. Rapp, *Opera Pacific*

"...marvelous...captivating and energetic work...an entire audience of young people will be eagerly rooting for the underdog to become the hero....Certainly a committed production of this work will 'leave 'em wanting more!'"

— Mark Lynch, *Opera for Youth*

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THE · RANSOM OF · RED · CHIEF

Synopsis:

Sam and his partner Bill, two Yankee con men, kidnap the son of a small-town banker, hoping to hold him for ransom. The boy is more than a match for these two, and they quickly realize they have their hands full. Johnny talks incessantly, asking thousands of questions and obviously having a wonderful time. As the men write the ransom note, Johnny stages a mock attack as the Indian warrior "Red Chief." After "Red Chief" inflicts further terrors and humiliations on Sam and Bill, they agree to pay his father money just to take him back.

The Ransom of Red Chief (1986)

Comic Opera in One Act

English Libretto by Daniel Dibbern

Based on the story by O. Henry

Commissioned by the City of Mesquite, Texas and the National Endowment for the Arts

Rodríguez's zestful treatment of O. Henry's classic short story has delighted youth and family audiences alike. Like *Monkey See, Monkey Do*, the opera is designed for easy touring.

Duration: 55 minutes

Instrumentation: fl(pic), cl, tpt, btbn, perc, bjo, acn, pf, vn, vc

Reduced instrumentation: pf, acn, bjo, [opt perc]

Piano reduction available

Cast:

Sam, *a Yankee desperado* Tenor

Bill, *his partner* Basso buffo

Johnny Dorset, "*Red Chief*" (Boy) soprano

Ebenezer Dorset, *his father* Baritone

Offstage chorus of townspeople (ad lib) SATB

Acclaim:

"The ultimate 'outreach' function does not, fortunately, imply any writing down to the audience...Rodríguez produced a score that, on first hearing, was both sophisticated and accessible. The orchestration for chamber ensemble was unfailingly lucid and colorful; ditto for the vocal writing."

— Wayne Lee Gray, *Musical America*

"...enough to convince the most doting grandparent that W.C. Fields was right about children...brims over with tuneful, catchy music, much of it with a strong folk flavor....He also employs sophisticated and difficult music, but it is so slyly and effectively used (mostly in the orchestra) that no one leaves the hall thinking negative thoughts about modern music."

— Olin Chism, *Dallas Times Herald*

"...an exciting, funny, and memorable work for school groups and similar new audiences. It is big enough to deserve full mainstage treatment, yet small and flexible enough to tour."

— Mark Lynch, *Opera for Youth*

For performances

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