

John Eaton

Operas

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Called by Andrew Porter “the most interesting opera composer writing in America today,” John Eaton is internationally recognized as a composer and performer of electronic and microtonal music. Eaton’s operas include *The Tempest* (1985), commissioned by the Santa Fe Opera, *The Cry of Clytaemnestra* (1980), a work with over 17 productions, including a joint US/USSR staging in Moscow, and *Danton and Robespierre* (1978).

In his chamber, vocal, and orchestral music, Eaton expands the traditional tools of the composer through microtonal scales — using a fuller spectrum of notes per octave than the usual twelve tones — and electronic instruments, such as the Syn-Ket.

Eaton’s composition teachers included Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions. After receiving BA and MFA degrees at Princeton University, he performed extensively as a jazz pianist and synthesist. First joining the Indiana University faculty in 1970, John Eaton is currently Professor of Music Composition at the University of Chicago. He was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, on March 30, 1935.

His awards include a 1990 MacArthur “genius award,” three Prix de Rome and two Guggenheim grants, and commissions from the Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundations, the Santa Fe Opera, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Public Broadcasting Corporation.

PHOTO CREDITS

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John Eaton

Operas

The Cry of Clytaemnestra

Danton and Robespierre



The Tempest

The Cry of Clytaemnestra



Opera in One Act
Duration: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Libretto in English by Patrick Creagh, after Aeschylus

WORLD PREMIERE

March 1, 1980
Indiana University Opera Theater
Bloomington, IN

ORCHESTRATION

3S, Boy S, Mz, 6T, 3Bar, B; non-speaking roles
2(2pic).2.2(Ebcl,bcl).2/2.0.0.0/timp.5perc/2pf/str/t
ape/live electronics

SYNOPSIS

Clytaemnestra takes place primarily in Argos, shortly before Agamemnon's return from the Trojan wars. Other scenes, remembered or imagined by Clytaemnestra, occur in Aulis ten years before, at Troy, and in the future in Argos.

Clytaemnestra, in a fit of grief, seeks her long-dead daughter, Iphigenia, and in a dream-like scene remembers the events that led Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter for "reasons of state." Her lover, Aegisthus, enters, and a quarrel develops in which he reveals that Agamemnon is having an affair with Cassandra, a prophetess/princess of Troy awarded to him as the spoils of war.

Clytaemnestra's children Electra and Orestes recall happier times in contrast with the present tyranny of Aegisthus. Aegisthus enters and bullies the children, but Electra stands up to him, insultingly. Sending the others away, Aegisthus now alone with Electra, finally makes an amorous advance, which she repels.

Aegisthus runs to Clytaemnestra who summons her children to attempt reconciliation. Without knowing of his advances toward Electra, Clytaemnestra tries to explain the aid that Aegisthus provides. Electra violently denounces Clytaemnestra's adultery and betrayal of Agamemnon. Clytaemnestra sends the others away and attempts to reason with Electra. Despite her words, a violent confrontation erupts which ends with Electra banished from the palace, along with Orestes.

Alone, Clytaemnestra laments the loss of her children, the death of Iphigenia, and the passing of innocence. In a final protest against the injustice of the cursed fate of women, she reaches a fevered state and collapses. Unconscious, she dreams of Agamemnon's return and foresees his murder. She awakens knowing that this is what she must do. The beacons flare announcing Agamemnon's return.

Clytaemnestra puts aside her guilt, nostalgia, and regret, and goes triumphantly to meet a man who, as far as she is concerned, is already dead.

PRESS

"Music and text interlock as intricately here as in any great opera you can name, and Eaton's own writing contributes to the horror of the plot itself, in the same way that the grinding, drifting music from *Danton and Robespierre* crushes the listener with an uncanny personification of terror... *Clytaemnestra* is wholly marvelous..."

—Robert Commanday, *San Francisco Chronicle*

The Tempest



Image courtesy Edward Klamm, Santa Fe Opera

Opera in Three Acts
Duration: 2 hours, 30 minutes

Libretto in English by Andrew Porter, after the play by William Shakespeare

WORLD PREMIERE

July 27, 1985
Santa Fe Opera; Santa Fe, NM

ORCHESTRATION

S, 2Mz, 5T, Ct, 5Bar, 3B; Male chorus
4(pic,af).4(ca).4+Ebcl+bcl.4+2cbn/4.4.4.2/timp.perc/
3hp.2pf/str; electronic music; on stage: 4tpt.4tbn/perc

SYNOPSIS

The magician Prospero, rightful Duke of Milan, reigns over an enchanted isle with Miranda, his daughter. He brings forth a tempest which causes the boat with his enemies, Alonso and Antonio, to wash ashore. Fernando, son of Alonso, lands alone and finds Miranda, with whom he immediately falls in love. When Alonso discovers that his son has survived the shipwreck, he blesses the union of Fernando and Miranda and gives Prospero back his kingdom.

PRESS

"The Tempest... is a work of compelling energy, musical diversity and dramatic impact, combining high humor with an evident underlying seriousness of musical-dramatic purpose. Its performance seems certain to secure Eaton's place among major opera composers of the day."

—Robert P. Morgan, *Opera News*

Danton and Robespierre

Opera in Three Acts
Duration: 2 hours

Libretto in English by Patrick Creagh

WORLD PREMIERE

September 21, 1978
Indiana University Opera Theater
Bloomington, IN

ORCHESTRATION

2S, Mz, 3T, 2Bar, B; SATB chorus
4(pic,af).4(ca).4+Ebcl+bcl.4+2cbn/4.4.4.2/timp.perc/
3hp.2pf/str; electronic music; on stage: 4tpt.4tbn/perc

SYNOPSIS

Set against the backdrop of the French revolution, the opera focuses on the conflict between the idealistic Danton and the madman-realist Robespierre culminating in their beheading.



Image courtesy Indiana University Archives