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**FRANCES STARK**  
**TEEN O.P.E.R.A**  
**(TEEN ORCHESTRA PLAYS, EVERYONE READ ALONG)**

**JUNE 22 – AUGUST 10, 2018**  
**OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 6:00 PM**

Opera's defining characteristic — a kind of full body singing — epitomizes the notion of an 'acquired taste': not only is it's sound so distinctly different from the pop singing voice we are accustomed to, but the lyrics it delivers are difficult to comprehend, often obscured even further by a foreign language. I liken it to the adult voices in the animated Peanuts cartoons — a garbled gibberish whose content never gets received; what the grown-ups say isn't meant to matter to the forever young. The Magic Flute is one of the few operas I have seen performed in my lifetime. When I had the opportunity to see it as a teenager the only thing I knew about opera was that it's not easy to like unless you know a lot. To prepare, I listened to a recording while looking at the liner notes which didn't help much... but the Queen of the Night grabbed my attention, and when Papageno and Papagena sang their climactic aria I was transfixed. It was delicious, almost hardcore — percussive and intoxicating. These, it turns out, were the 'hits' of this widely circulated work that has been consistently in production for over 200 years — yet in the opera house the rest of it never came into focus. Re-encountering The Magic Flute as an adult through Ingmar Bergman's (1975) film version allowed me to connect the lyrics quite closely to the music by way of the English subtitles. I read them aloud to my very young son, who surprisingly took most of it all in and even asked if we could watch it again after it had ended. He was particularly fond of Papageno, as was I.

Without Papageno it might not have broad appeal, let alone exist at all. Papageno's part was written to be performed by the writer himself and that writer also happens to be the person who convinced Mozart to compose the score — Emanuel Schikaneder. He was the director of the Freihaustheatre — a people's theatre, not a court theatre. He often starred in his own productions and was known for connecting his audience to the texts through his comedic and emotional appeal. Papageno is based on a popular character of the time, Hans Wurst — a coarse, comedic folk character whose popularity was waning due to censorship ("wurst" means "sausage" in German). The libretto, widely dismissed as a poorly written mash-up of existing tropes is indeed an amalgam of popular fairy stories, but what distinguished it was its attempt to weave in elements of Freemasonry that celebrated enlightenment ideals. Mozart and Shikaneder were both involved in a Masonic lodge popular with scientists and musicians critical of the monarchy which consistently took hostile actions against them. Their defense of the fellowship feels sincere, especially in the context of so much rumination on the simple erotic drive to be kissed and unite in bliss. The fellowship celebrated by their opera revered science, ancient culture and music, but was shut down by a tyrannical leader. Today's elite institutions that shape our experience and the leaders that control them are failing us. Their earth-threatening indifference to science and their disdain for culture that values kinship over capital leave us struggling to find sustenance in a world that doubts art's capacity to edify.

#### About the Adaptation

I commissioned the conductor, Danko Drusko, to write a score that could be played by a small string orchestra with the vocal parts written for wind instruments. Before he wrote the arrangement we lightly abridged it. We then put together an ensemble, made up of Los Angeles area musicians, age 12–19, forming a group specifically for this project. These youths graciously devoted themselves to learning this opera in only a few short weeks under the remarkable tutelage of Danko and Ameena Maria Khawaja. And they all did it in the unlikely context of an art studio — in order to perform it in its entirety for my project which didn't seem to have any obvious precedents. Unfortunately, a few parts could not be filled by young players so the part of Tamino was played by a trumpet player from the LA Philharmonic who also coached our wind soloists. The French Horn and Tuba were played by studio musicians. Our youth orchestra was joined by a handful of studio musicians in order to form a full orchestra for the recording of the overture, the part of the score which plays before the curtain rises.

The libretto I present in this movie is a complex hybrid of several existing translations, including my own. I tried to keep the lyrics close to the original German when possible, yet also tried to make it accessible to a modern viewer — all while getting the English lyrics to match precisely with the original melodies composed for German words, thus fusing the lyrical content as closely as possible to the musical form.