

Chicago Fringe Opera presents Philip Glass'
IN THE PENAL COLONY



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CAST

(in order of appearance)

The Soldier.....Eric Staves
The Condemned Man.....Matt Katzenmeier
The Visitor.....Zachary Vanderburg
The Officer.....Matthan Ring Black

MUSIC STAFF

Music Director.....Catherine O'Shaughnessy
Pianist, Vocal Coach.....Alyssa Arrigo
Violin.....Brian Beach, Danielle Seaman
Viola.....Timothy Hager
Cello.....Desiree Miller
Bass.....Jackson Kidder

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Director.....George Cederquist
Scenic Designer.....Dan Stratton
Costume Designer.....Stephanie Cluggish
Lighting Designer.....Rebecca Jeffords
Production Assistant.....Jessie Lyons

Run time is 80 minutes, with no intermission

Please visit our website, chicagofringeopera.com,
for full biographies of all our artists.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

As pacifists, Philip Glass and I agree that Franz Kafka's short story is about more than just the idea that capital punishment is bad. No crime is so heinous as to warrant murder.

But what if I lived in a culture where one believed that, actually, yes, some actions should be punishable by death? Such cultures exist, of course. A few months ago, Saudi Arabia held a mass execution of some thirty people.

So I've tried to imagine what it would be like if I was a visitor to such a country. If I was someone outside the culture. Someone who, in the eyes of those handing out punishment, just doesn't understand. Who am I, then, to criticize such actions? Is it actually my right to bring a Western viewpoint and try and change such a culture of death?

The world of this opera is a place where different races are forced to co-exist. In the story, there are three contrasting cultures: the Officer and the Soldier come from one culture, one that has taken over this island in order to turn it into a penal colony. The second culture is that of the Visitor: he's a world traveller, likely from Europe, who has visited many cultures, and who has almost grown accustomed to being out of place. The last culture is that of the Condemned Man. He doesn't speak the language of the ruling military, even though he has been forced to be part of its project, conscripted into standing guard for another officer and ultimately punished for his disobedience.

When I first read the libretto for this opera, this clash of cultures made me immediately think of Guantánamo Bay. A visiting military presence ruling everything, like we Americans do. A foreign inspector, perhaps from NATO or the UN. And a Condemned Man, from yet another part of the world, like the Middle East. I started to think about how these cultures would interact. How, with the clash of cultures, there would be the difficulty of communication: the Officer and Soldier speak one language, the Visitor speaks another, and the Condemned Man speaks a third. This prisoner is in the unenviable position of not only being denied a trial, but also having no idea as to what, specifically, is his fate.

The machine, however, communicates without words. It is understood by all four characters, regardless of their native culture. For the Officer, the machine of death is actually a thing of beauty. The machine isn't what it once was, of course. Parts wear out. Supplies are limited. Regimes change. Bureaucracy gets in the way.

This production focuses on the Officer: how to convince the Visitor that the machine is essential to the penal colony and to its ruling country and its history. The Officer needs the Condemned Man to show the machine in action, and he needs the Soldier

to help with the proceedings. In convincing the Visitor of the machine's necessity, the Officer aims to convince the new commander of the same thing. And the only way for the Officer to achieve this goal is to prove the beauty of the machine.

That's the heart of the opera: not the mortality of capital punishment, but the relationship between art and violence. That something some beautifully designed and engineered could be used for such a dreadful purpose. That's why we chose to perform this piece in an art gallery. We wanted to highlight the connection between beauty and brutality. That death could exist in a place of creation. That Glass's beautiful harmonies could sound so clinical, so precise.

These are contradictions. We get to wrestle with them. Kafka's work is full of contradictions. Glass's work is full of them. The world is full of them.

Welcome to the Penal Colony.

2016-2017 Season

Missy Mazzoli's Song from the Uproar - Fall 2016
Ned Rorem's Our Town - Spring 2017

More info: ChicagoFringeOpera.com/events

Special Thanks

Brian Malnassy at the Lill Street Art Center
Steep Theatre Company
Lester Arguelles
Brian at the Merit School of Music
Maia at the Greenhouse Theater Center
Andre at the Francis Xavier Warde school
Dan Goldrosen at goldrosevideo.com