

The Sacred in Opera

December 2012

In This Issue...
Ruth Dobson

Welcome to the December 2012 of the Sacred in Opera Newsletter. In this issue we are pleased to feature two recent sacred operas, *Rendezvous with Destiny*, with music by Theodoros Sflotsos and libretto by Dr. Mozelle Clark Sherman, and *Thérèse & Maurice*, music and libretto by Lisa Neher.

We also want to tell you about the upcoming Sacred in Opera performance during the Portland Convention, which will be at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Portland, January 3-6. The SIO Initiative of NOA will present "The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains" Act IV, Scene II from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, and excerpts from *The Masque of Angels* by Dominick Argento. The performance will take place on Friday, January 4 at 7:30 pm at the historic First Congregational Church in downtown Portland, which is located at 1126 SW Park Avenue, just three blocks from the Hilton Hotel.

Stage direction will be by Kurt-Alexander Zeller. Ruth Dobson will serve as Production Coordinator. Both are members of the Sacred in Opera committee of NOA. Portland's wonderful Consonare Chorale, conducted by Georgina Philippon, will provide the chorus for both excerpts. Metropolitan Opera baritone Richard Zeller will sing the role of the Pilgrim in the Vaughan Williams and well-known Portland baritone Kevin Walsh sings the role of Metatron in *The Masque of Angels*. NOA President-Elect David Holley joins the cast of the Vaughan Williams as the Messenger.

We know you will want to join us for this special performance of excerpts from the sacred opera repertoire.

Sacred in Opera (SIO) Performance

Friday, 4 January, 7:30 pm
First Congregational Church (UCC)
1126 SW Park Avenue
(Three blocks from the Hilton Hotel)
Portland, OR

Program

“The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains”
from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*
Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams
Libretto adapted from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan

Excerpts from *The Masque of Angels*
Music by Dominick Argento
Libretto by John Olon-Scrymgeour

Conductor: Georgina Philippson
Stage Director: Kurt-Alexander Zeller
Pianists: Rodney Menn, Rebecca Stager
and
featuring the Consonare Chorale
Georgina Philippson, Conductor

“The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains”
Act IV, scene 2 of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

The Pilgrim
First Shepherd
Second Shepherd
Third Shepherd
The Bird
Celestial Messenger

Richard Zeller
Stacey Murdock
David Maier
André Flynn
Amanda Jane Kelley
David Holley

Celestial Chorus

Consonare Chorale

Excerpts from *The Masque of Angels*

Dominick Argento
(b. 1927)

Chorus of Cherubim, Seraphim, and Powers
Metatron
Sandolfon
John
Ann
The Spinster
The Professor

Consonare Chorale
Kevin Walsh
Kurt-Alexander Zeller
John Boelling
Natalie Gunn
Nan Wagner
John Vergin



WORLD PREMIERE
of a New Opera
RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

Music composed and conducted by Theoderos Sflotsos
Written and produced by Mozelle Clark Sherman

Friday, April 13, 2012, at 7 p.m.
Saturday, April 14, 2012, at 2 p.m.

Sanctuary of
St. Matthews Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky

Rendezvous with Destiny

NEW MUSIC DRAMA

Composed and Conducted by Theoderos Sflotsos
Written and Directed by Mozelle Clark Sherman
World Premiere, April 13 and 14, 2012
St. Matthews Baptist Church Auditorium
3515 Grandview Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky

When human lives are reviewed, it is obvious that certain people have experienced a discernable tryst or a given moment of time ordained or allowed by God. RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY reveals ten such occurrences as the cast, often in their own historically-preserved words, sings of their extraordinary accounts that have influenced humanity profoundly.

SYNOPSIS: Led by “The Guide” the audience meets...

Mary, the older mother remembering the angel’s visit and Jesus’ birth. With her we praise God for taking a risk to send the Savior through this humble servant.

John F. Kennedy, the President, struggles to write the text of a speech that is destined to fill history and literature pages long after his short life span.

David, the Israelite king, who kills the giant, Goliath, as a youth, and later pleads for forgiveness as an older man searching for God’s blessing.

Bathsheba, David’s beautiful wife, grieving deeply for her lost son. In her agony she entreats the Lord to write her name on the Jewish annals forever.

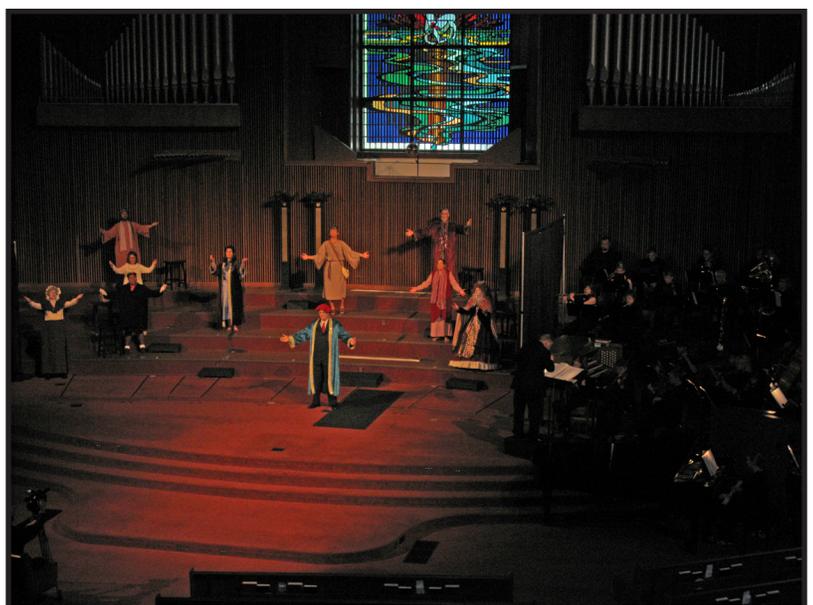
Elizabeth I, English queen whose long reign is celebrated by her last “Golden” speech to Parliament. A pioneer powerful women, she credits God for all she has achieved.

Florence Nightingale, founder of modern nursing and blind in old age; we witness a re-living of her struggles against the strong prejudices of her day.

Judas, the Jewish zealot, liar, cheat, one consumed by avarice, and known as THE MURDERER! After Jesus’ crucifixion, this frantic man searches for God.

Rosa Parks, African-American wife who chose to take a stand. She didn’t come for fortune, fame, or glory for her name, but through quiet strength fought for what’s right.

Destiny, the “Everyman” character who represents all of us as we encounter the Rendezvous at Pentecost, and through its acceptance, find a stronger relationship with the Almighty.



Rendezvous with Destiny

Now is the time for all of us to renew our love for sacred musical drama.

Rendezvous with Destiny is a new, full-length opera with spoken dialogue by a non-singing character, the Guide. It opened last April in Louisville where the no-ticket-required free of charge performances were held in the beautiful St. Matthews Baptist Church auditorium. This World Premiere's no admission cost was made possible by hundreds of individual and corporate supporters throughout the United States.

Rendezvous with Destiny was written and directed by well-known NOA presenters—Founding Director Emeritus of Southern Seminary's Music Drama Theatre, Dr. Mozelle Clark Sherman, book, lyricist and director, and Greek composer, Theoderos Sflotsos, former music director for Hanna-Barbera, Hollywood, and known to NOA as Ted Nichols, composer and conductor. Other works by this team presented at NOA past conventions are: *Word of Honor*, staged in both English and Korean along with the *Sacred in Opera* screen presentation by Dr. Sherman (2005), who are also translated and reduced to piano the original Mozart score of "The Obligation of the First Commandment" for its world premiere performance at the 1987 convention.

This newest work is in two Acts with a 25-piece orchestra; its premiere featured nine professional singers with Louisville roots. There is no chorus. The opera's nine scenes are designed to stand alone or in shorter groupings when needed for a particular situation. The goal of any configuration would be to enrich, enable, and inspire an audience of all ages as they witness the power of music drama and of historical giants when they accept their destiny that still affects us today.



Music Synopsis

Each scene is opened by the "Guide" who prepares the audience for what it is about to see. The Premiere featured acclaimed Chicago actress, DiAne Boese, who met Mozelle Sherman in a church choir. DiAne said, "As often happens when paths merge, I found myself in stages I never expected to be and I am forever grateful."

Note: Each scene closes with an "Interval" sung by the character AFTER their aria; solo orchestral instruments provide a mystical partnership.

Overture: 8-minute introduction of themes and motifs for 25-piece orchestra or piano reduction. Music styles reflect the country of the characters origin, their century, the book's dramatic or lyric themes, and often incorporate familiar melodies in a pastiche of neo-classical harmonic or contrapuntal structures.

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Rendezvous with Destiny

Act I

Scene 1: *Destined* (coloratura soprano) Mary, Older mother of Jesus. This *20-minute aria* was sung by Maggie Garrett, Professor of Voice and Vocal Literature, Quachita University; numerous opera and oratorio roles include Piedmont Opera, Opera Carolina, IU and SBTS Opera; NATSSA 2006 winner; NATS Young Leader Award. She also premiered this aria at the NOA convention in 2010.



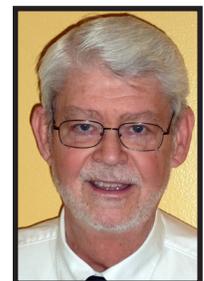
Scene 2: *Ask Not!* (tenor) John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. President is found struggling to write his famous inaugural speech. The *15-minute aria* ends with “God’s work must truly be our own.” Premiere sung by Steven Skaggs, dramatist, soloist and recitalist in sacred and secular fields; Kentucky Opera, Louisville Orchestra, clinician, composer. Associate Pastor for Worship, Glendale, KY.



Scene 3: *The Slayer* (youth tenor or boy soprano—two keys), youthful David volunteers to fight the giant, Goliath in this *six-minute aria* designed to be staged with the older David’s aria without stop, but can stand alone equally well. Premiere sung by Ori Youngblood, high school junior, member of the Louisville Youth Orchestra, U of L’s H S Honor Band, the Wind Band Institute and Concert Band (tuba). He has appeared with Kentucky Opera and is an honor student.



How Long? (tenor), David, second of the Israelite kings, in old age is plagued by past sins, The *six-minute aria* is cast with the younger David, but stands beautifully alone also. This Psalm’s premiere sung by David Brown, founding director, Vocal Music, Youth Performing Arts School, Louisville; international conductor and singer, director emeritus, Stephen Foster Story, private studio voice.



Scene 4: *Guilty, and Yet—Forgiven* (lyric soprano) Bathsheba, ancestor of Jesus through David’s line. In this *10-minute aria* she is found in deep grief after her first son dies. Powerfully premiered by Amanda Woodbury, rising new star of the Los Angeles Opera (2012 winner of the Domingo-Thornton program award); winner of Dallas Opera Competitions, Opera North, and Cincinnati Conservatory Corbett Audience Choice competition.



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Act II

Scene 5: *Kiss my Hand* (spinto soprano) Elizabeth I, queen regent of England and Ireland, presents her “Golden Speech” to her final parliament on November 30, 1601. This *12-minute aria* adds the power of opera to the speech that “ought to be set in letters of gold.” Premiered by Darlene Welch, former Miss Kentucky, third runner-up Miss America; Opera Central Kentucky, Kentucky and SBTS opera, Music Theatre Louisville, recitalist, clinician.



Scene 6: *Darkness into Light* (mezzo soprano) Florence Nightingale, English pioneer of data analysis and graphical managing; mother of modern nursing. This fascinating *14-minute aria* based on her writings and vibrant story was premiered by Rebekah Bortz Hardin of the Kentucky, Cincinnati and Palm Beach Operas; 3-time winner of the District Met Competitions; Guest soloist DAR National Continental Congress in Washington D.C.



Scene 7: *Do Not Ask My Name* (lyric baritone) Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. This powerful *15-minute* dramatic aria reveals the moment when Judas faces his destiny, and we are left to ponder the heart-tearing meaning of his rendezvous moment. Premiered by Anthony Pursley, opera and oratorio soloist, guest sacred music soloist with churches throughout the region, first presented this aria in New Orleans, 2010; pastor of worship and pastoral care.



Scene 8: *Quiet Strength* (dramatic soprano) Rosa Parks, named by Time as one of the 20 most influential 20th century Americans. This *13-minute aria* relives the country-changing story of her refusal to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. The music is set to noticeable African-American styles and magnificently continues her legacy of the power of quiet strength and conviction. Premiere sung by Olivia Duval, described as a “powerful talent” (San Francisco Examiner); young artist S F Opera Center’s Merola Opera; Ducal Palace, Italy; Detroit Institute of Arts; finalist Met Auditions and Bel Canto Vocal Competitions.



Finale: *The Rendezvous* (bass baritone or baritone aria—two keys) sung by “**Destiny**” with entire cast added for the Finale. This work reveals the greatest rendezvous with destiny the world has ever known—Pentecost—where the Holy Spirit or Ghost descended. “Destiny” leads us through the power of that event, and how belief in its sanctified worth can inspire, enrich and empower the world today. Sung in the Premiere by Steven Skaggs; the score is also available for a lower voice.

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Orchestra Tag (optional)

This flexible, full or partial work is available now. Write to Dr. Sherman for information details at tbonesherm@insightbb.com.

1. Full work: running script; all scenes with full orchestration; conductor's score.
2. Full work: running script; all scenes with piano reduction.
3. Individual scenes (includes Guide's introductory lines, piano/vocal score of aria, with its interlude).
4. Individual scenes (includes Guide's introductory lines, orchestral/vocal score of aria and its interlude).

In these individual orders, the interlude in fact becomes a postlude.

5. DVD of premiere production with complete program.

Visit the websites:

<http://www.rendezvouswithdestiny.co>

or <http://www.kirkwell.com/RWD/>

Click on "Mozelle interview."



THÉRÈSE & MAURICE:

A CHAMBER OPERA BY LISA NEHER

Thérèse & Maurice is a 60-minute one-act chamber opera based on the lives and writings of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who lived in France at the end of the 19th century, and Maurice Bellière, a young seminarian with whom she exchanged letters in the last years of her life. Thérèse, a gifted teacher of novices, was assigned the task of writing to Maurice and praying for him after he wrote to the Mother Superior of her convent asking for spiritual help. He cited difficulties adjusting to the rule of seminary, letting go of worldly pleasures, and temptations which he never fully explained but which caused him great anxiety throughout his studies.

19th-century France was dominated by a severe ascetic religiosity, in which a healthy fear of God was encouraged as a part of the Catholic tradition. This contributed to Maurice's feelings of doubt and sinfulness. Thérèse however had felt from childhood an intimacy with God that she related to the closeness and trust that a small child has with a loving father. This gift of understanding inspired her doctrine of spirituality, which she called "the little way." It was an understanding of God that opened doors in Maurice's spiritual life and one which remains powerful to followers of Thérèse (now a Doctor of the Church in the Catholic faith) today.

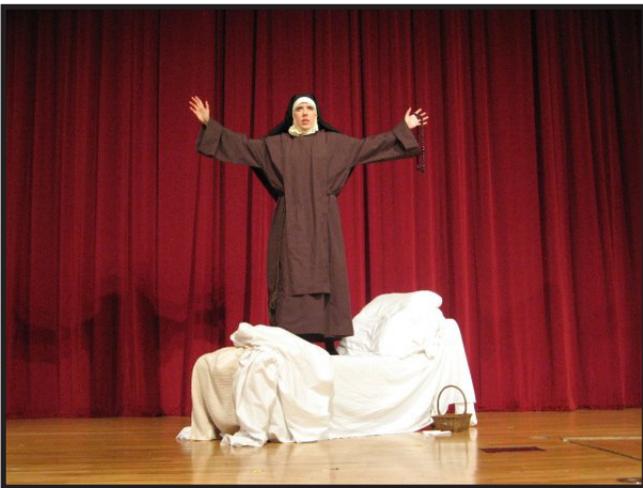
At the same time, Thérèse faced difficult trials of her own. While she felt deep within her heart the calling to be a priest and missionary, her poor health made her unfit for work abroad. Furthermore, as a woman, she would never have the same opportunities to preach as a priest could. In her early twenties, she contracted tuberculosis and over the course of many months she slowly suffered and died from it.

Simultaneous with her illness came a period of spiritual darkness in which she lost her sense of complete trust and safety in her God. This was a tremendous blow to one who had always felt secure in her personal connection to Jesus Christ.

As her strength faded and her letters to friends and family became few and far between, she continued to write to Maurice. It is significant that while she wrote extensively in her journals and poems of her doubts, her letters to him remain full of encouragement and hope. In the final weeks of her life, she was adamant in her conviction that after death, she would continue the work she had always dreamed of: the work of supporting her loved ones and caring for the souls of the world.

What I saw in this relationship was not that Thérèse simply taught the hapless Maurice what she knew to be true, but that both young people struggled in their individual ways to understand their place in the world, to channel their energies into worthy work, and to remain hopeful and trusting in the God they loved so dearly. If Thérèse shared her spirituality with Maurice and thereby opened doors in his mind and heart, the continual sharing of these beliefs also kept her strong and hopeful at a time when she could have easily given up. If Maurice needed her to encourage him on his path to the priesthood, Thérèse needed to know that he could go out and be the missionary she would never be in her lifetime. This relationship, based on mutual support, on a love grown out of friendship and grounded in Christ, along with the natural musicality of their language, was what inspired me to tell their story through music and song.

The opera is scored for two main characters: Thérèse (soprano) and Maurice (baritone), and four-part chorus with short solos who serve as pilgrims, nuns, and priests. The chamber ensemble consists of flute, horn, two cellos, and two percussionists on vibraphone, suspended cymbal, finger cymbals, and bass drum. The instrumental group was designed to be intimate but also dramatic, expressive of a wide variety of moods and as sensitive as the vocal lines. The chorus serves a versatile role, setting mood, location, and reflecting the deepest feelings and concerns of the two protagonists.

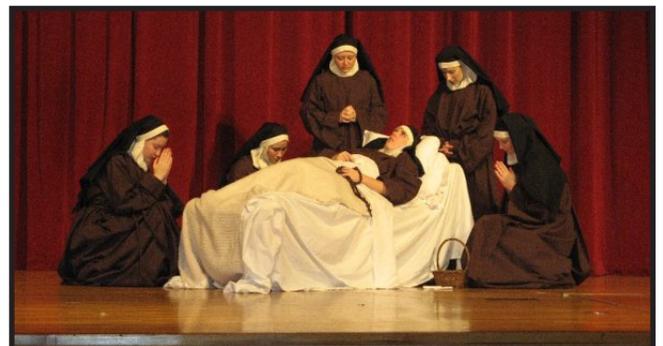


The libretto is almost entirely compiled from excerpts of the letters and writings of Thérèse and Maurice, in English translation, taken from the following sources: *The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux* by Guy Gaucher; *Story of a Soul*, and *St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations*, translated by John Clarke, O.C.D.; and *Thérèse & Maurice: The Story of a Love*, edited by Bishop Patrick Ahern. I was greatly assisted in my research for this project by Fr. Matthias Montgomery, Fr. Bryan Paquette, and Fr. Mark Foley. Where it was necessary to maintain continuity and flow of the story, I paraphrased or inserted a line or two, trying to keep within the spirit and style of their language. The excerpts were arranged in order to most effectively tell the story, and are

therefore not in strict chronological order. The style is part epistolary, part conversational, and though it is organized into short episodes, it is intended to be performed as a continuous story that unfolds without breaks between scenes.

Thérèse herself wrote short plays for her Carmelite community about such exciting figures as Saint Joan of Arc. These plays, as well as many of her poems, were intended to be set to music using common tunes of her day. Though she did not compose music herself, her language has an innate lyricism which leapt straight from the written page to the musical staff. My goal in composing the music was to capture her free outpouring of spiritual inspiration and fervor. Both Thérèse and Maurice led rich and complex lives, full of too many challenges, questions, revelations, and ideas to include in one short opera. Yet one of Thérèse's lasting teachings is the value of small, imperfect acts of love. For me, this opera is one such act.

Thérèse & Maurice was premiered on November 16, 2008 at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, as part of my senior composition recital. Lynelle Tarter performed the role of Thérèse and Andrew Selbie performed the role of Maurice. The production was conducted by Brien Hemann and staged by myself. Excerpts from the opera were performed in December 2009 at the University of Kansas.



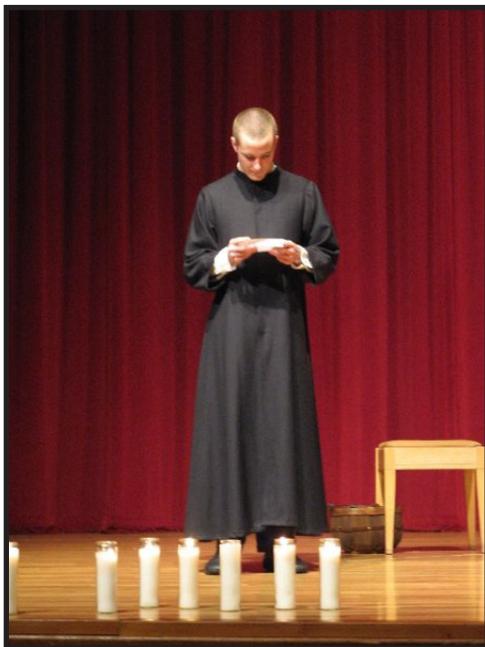
PLOT SYNOPSIS

Scene I

A chorus of pilgrims processes about the shrine of Lourdes, singing a chant-like *Ave Maria*. Among them is a young seminarian, Maurice Bellière (baritone), who offers prayers for his spiritual sister, Thérèse. He speaks directly to her, assuring her he has not forgotten her and that while he knows she is near death, he can feel in his heart that she has not yet gone to God. He cannot stand the thought of facing life without her support, and asks, “How will I bear it?” As he reflects on their friendship, we are carried into the past with him.

Scene II

At the seminary, Maurice writes a letter to the Abbess of the Carmelite community of Lisieux. He explains that he has high hopes of becoming a missionary abroad, yet his vocation is not going well, as he is still distracted by thoughts of life outside his vocation. He asks if a nun would “devote herself to the salvation of his soul” and pray for him.



Scene III

At the convent, Thérèse (soprano) has been asked to be Maurice’s spiritual sister, who will write to and pray for him. She longs for the life of a missionary herself, one in which she could preach the word of God “across all five continents, even to the most remote isles.” However, she is touched by Maurice’s request and sets herself at once to writing a response, assuring him that his own temptations will make him a better saver of souls. After writing, says a prayer for her new “little brother.”

Scene IV

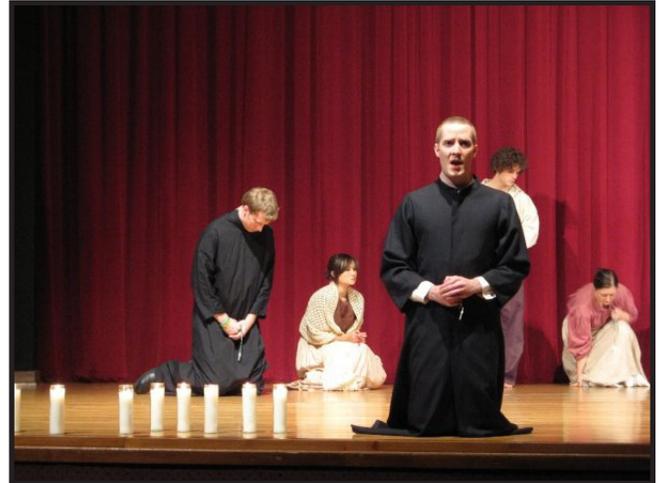
Maurice’s spiritual advisor (bass solo from the chorus) reprimands him for not giving himself completely to God: “You will either be a good priest or you will never amount to anything!” Maurice’s correspondence with Thérèse becomes a dialogue over time and across many letters. As he describes his challenges, Thérèse makes up a parable, likening God’s love to a father who will always forgive His disobedient children if they ask for His forgiveness. Maurice is inspired by the idea of God as a forgiving friend rather than a punisher to be feared. He is filled with confidence that his vocation is real and that he can be a successful missionary.

Scene V

Thérèse falls ill with consumption and recognizes that she will die from it. With her sickness, her heart is invaded by doubts about her connection to God, voiced by the offstage chorus: “Dream on, which will not give you what you hope for, but even deeper night, the night of nothingness.” She sings a desperate aria, trying to claim the darkness as joy, if it is God’s will, but she grows weaker and weaker. Nuns from her convent enter and place her in a bed.

Scene VI

Maurice has exciting news: he has been chosen for a mission in Africa. Thérèse breaks the truth of her illness to him in her own letter. She asks him to pray a special prayer that she has sent him. Maurice reads the prayer, asking God to “set my sister on fire with Your spirit of love.” Deeply shaken, but trying to accept God’s will, he says he will visit the Shrine of Lourdes and pray for her before leaving for Africa. Maurice exits the stage and Thérèse is suddenly filled with inspiration and conviction. Her mission after life will be to spend her time “doing good on earth,” helping Maurice and the missionaries.



Scene VII

Maurice and the pilgrims re-create the opening sequence while elsewhere on stage, Thérèse is in the final throes of her illness, surrounded by sisters. After much struggle, Maurice finally lets go of his need to lean on Thérèse, saying, “Go, little sister! Don’t make Jesus wait any longer!” Thérèse’s suffering melts away and she gently dies, singing, “Oh, how I love You! My God!” Maurice knows that through his spiritual sister he found Jesus and that she will still be with him, even in death. Thérèse joins him on stage as a representation of their spiritual bond and they sing prayers for each other as the opera ends.

Composer Profile:

Lisa Neher is a mezzo-soprano and composer based in Iowa City, Iowa. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR, with degrees in vocal performance, music composition, and theatre, and holds a master’s degree in composition from the University of Kansas. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in vocal performance at the University of Iowa under the tutelage of Katherine Eberle. Lisa writes lyrical, heartfelt music that is infused with drama and that speaks to audiences on an emotional and instinctual level. Her works include solo and chamber music for instrumentalists as well as vocal works in the operatic, song, and choral genres, which represent her deepest passion. Her composition teachers include Michael Johansen and Forrest Pierce. Lisa’s most recent works include her second chamber opera, *White Horizon*, which tells the tale of an arctic expedition gone wrong. For more information, visit her website: www.lisanehermusic.com



The Sacred in Opera

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National Opera Association.

For more information, please visit us online at
http://www.noa.org/initiatives/sio_home.html

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