

# OPERA AT RIDERWOOD NOTES & NEWS

for April 1, 2022  
Email Edition

## THIS WEEK'S NEWS

### WETA To Re-Broadcast *Fire Shut Up In My Bones*

(Updated from Cubby-delivery Edition)

John Szabo writes that "(T)he Met opera *Fire Shut Up in my Bones* (will air) Friday on PBS station 800 at 9 PM, (and) the opera "Eurydice" by Matthew Aucoin will be broadcast on Sunday, March 27, at noon on PBS station 800.

*Fire* is a new opera from the Met that is

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## Opera Trips Continue

By Leah Solat

Sondheim's *Into The Woods* was sold out, again proving that operas belong in the Riderwood Trips coverage. But, sorry to say, some folks missed making the trip as part of the group. Do register early!

April's trip is to Clarice Center for "Later That Same Evening." Co-commissioned by Maryland Opera Studio and the National

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## NEXT WEEK IN ENCORE

After a 20<sup>th</sup> century classic, *Peter Grimes*, we will travel back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century classic, the tragic tale of young love *Romeo et Juliette* as Charles Gounod composed it and the Salzburg Festival staged it in 2008 with Rolando Villazón and Nino Machaidze singing the lead roles. I don't know why Anna Netrebko wasn't engaged to appear with Villazón, her usual partner at the time. But, if you find out, do tell me!

## Grimes Characters & Cast: Page 3

Encore Opera • Every Friday • 1 PM • Encore Theater

Notes by Clinton Marshall

## Peter Grimes

Benjamin Britten

English Subtitles • 149 Minutes

This week's opera, *Peter Grimes*, is a departure from the type of operas that we have enjoyed on Friday afternoons in the past at Riderwood. Instead of focusing primarily on entertaining and providing uplifting, memorable tunes, *Peter Grimes* is an intense drama which encourages us to explore, examine, and question several important and relevant issues in our lives.

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976) composed *Peter Grimes* toward the end of World War II and it had its first performance on June 7, 1945 at Sadler Wells in London, England. An immediate success with the public and the critics, the box office matched or exceeded those for *La Boheme* and *Madame Butterfly*, which were being staged concurrently by the company. Many musicologists consider *Peter Grimes* among the outstanding achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I strongly encourage all of our Riderwood residents to approach this opera a bit differently. Do not expect tuneful episodes or memorable arias and duets. *Peter Grimes* is a tragedy from start to finish, but it's also a masterpiece of musical theatre. The sheer force of the music lifts the narrative to realms rarely reached in 20<sup>th</sup> Century opera. On Friday, think of yourself as a juror who is listening to the presentation of evidence and weighing the innocence or guilt of the main character. Britten purposely presents portions of the narrative in a very ambiguous manner so that it is up to us to decide what is the truth. He challenges his audience to do the work.

*Peter Grimes* is a dark story of isolation and alienation –

**Continued Page 2**

the solitary outcast set against the collective insanity and mob rule of the crowd. This opera has a grim and dark story. It is a powerful and mysterious tale of social exclusion, hatred and injustice. The community establishes itself as a group character in its own right – suspicious, gossipy, hypocritically self-righteous and vengeful. Is the seafaring community ultimately responsible for Grimes's fate?

This is a big opera with a very tight focus. Grimes is the ultimate outsider, one whom Britten associated with strongly. He's far from a hero, not even close, but he's no pantomime villain either. Britten reveals a wounded man beneath the menacing facade. This ambiguity runs throughout the piece, Grimes's nastiness set against the overwhelming mob-like behavior of the townsfolk. Benjamin Britten stated "*This is a subject very close to my heart – the struggle of the individual against the masses. The more vicious the society, the more vicious the individual.*" There are moments in Peter Grimes that may remind you of the Salem Witch Trials, the McCarthy Senate Hearings, Anti-Semitism, the Civil Rights Movement and numerous other historical struggles and events.

Now you get to decide. Was Peter Grimes an evil, demented criminal from the very beginning or was he driven to unspeakable deeds by the unrelenting pressure from the townspeople? Or was he a victim of circumstance and not responsible for any criminal act?

Which was it? **You Decide!**

### SYNOPSIS

Opera in a prologue and three acts.

The opera opens with Peter Grimes being questioned at an inquest over the death of an apprentice. The outspoken townsfolk of The

Borough believe Grimes is guilty. The coroner, Mr Swallow, declares the boy's death to be accidental but advises Grimes not to get another apprentice.

Ellen Orford, the schoolmistress, attempts to comfort Grimes as he rages against the community's attitude towards him. The Borough apothecary Ned Keene, finds Grimes a new apprentice from the workhouse. Nobody will volunteer to fetch the boy, until Ellen – whom Grimes wishes to marry – offers.

Ellen brings John, the new apprentice, to Grimes at the tavern. That evening, Grimes immediately sets off to his hut, despite the fact that the Borough is being hit by a terrible storm.

On Sunday morning, while most of the town is at church, Ellen talks with John, Grimes' new apprentice. She is horrified when she finds a bruise on his neck. When Ellen confronts Grimes about it, he brusquely claims that it was an accident. Growing agitated at Ellen's concern and interference, he strikes her and runs off with the boy.

Grimes striking Ellen does not go unseen. The people of The Borough form a mob and march up to investigate Grimes's hut.

As the mob marches off, Ellen, Auntie, and her 'nieces' sing sadly of the relationship of women with men. 'And shall we be ashamed because we comfort men from ugliness?' the nieces sing.

When Grimes hears the mob of villagers approaching, he gets ready to set out to sea. He tells John to be careful climbing down the cliff to his boat, but the boy falls to his death. When the mob reaches the hut, Grimes is gone and they find nothing out of order, so they disperse.

The noble Captain Balstrode discovers a jersey

washed ashore. Ellen recognizes it as one she had knitted for John.

The elderly laudanum addict Mrs. Sedley tries to convince the authorities that Grimes is a murderer. The mob goes off in search of him again.

John's death has pushed Grimes over the edge. Ellen and Balstrode find him, and the old captain encourages Grimes to take his boat out to sea and sink it. Grimes leaves.

The next morning, the Borough begins its day anew, as if nothing has happened. There is a report from the coast guard of a ship sinking off the coast.

- Clinton Marshall

## CHARACTERS AND CAST

Peter Grimes, a fisherman: Jon Vickers, tenor  
John, Grimes' apprentice: name unavailable, silent

Auntie, landlady of The Boar: Elizabeth Bainbridge, contralto

Ellen Orford, a widow and schoolmistress: Heather Harpe, soprano

Captain Balstrode, retired merchant skipper: Norman Bailey, baritone

Aunties Nieces: Marilyn Hill Smith, (Anne Pashley,) sopranos

Bob Boles, fisherman and Methodist: John Dobson, tenor

Swallow, a lawyer: Forbes Robinson, bass

Mrs. Sedley, widow of an East India Company's factor: Patricia Payne, mezzo soprano

Rev. Horace Adams, the rector: John Laningan, tenor

Ned Keene, apothecary / quack, Philip Gelling, baritone

Dr. Crabbe, Ignatius McFayden,

Dr. Thorp: name unavailable, silent

Hobson, the carrier: John Tomlinson, bass

### **Re-Broadcast From Page 1**

getting excellent reception from critics and listeners.

The Met's webpage reports, "Opening Night of the 2021–22 season (was an) historic occasion—the Met's first performance of an opera by a Black composer.

"Yannick Nézet-Séguin conduct(ed) Grammy Award–winning jazz musician and composer Terence Blanchard's adaptation of Charles M. Blow's moving memoir, which *The New York Times* praised after its 2019 world premiere at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis as "bold and affecting" and "subtly powerful." Featuring a libretto by filmmaker Kasi Lemmons, the opera tells a poignant and profound story about a young man's journey to overcome a life of trauma and hardship. James Robinson and Camille A. Brown—two of the creators of the Met's sensational recent production of *Porgy and Bess*—co-direct(ed) this new staging; Brown, who is also the production's choreographer, becomes the first Black director to create a mainstage Met production. Baritone Will Liverman, one of opera's most exciting young artists, stars as Charles, alongside soprano Angel Blue as Destiny/Loneliness/Greta, soprano Latonia Moore as Billie, and Walter Russell III as Char'es-Baby."

## Opera Trips from Page 1

Gallery, this opera was inspired by five of Edward Hopper's New York City paintings. As the opera unfolds, the characters from the paintings vividly come to life to intertwine in interesting ways centered around the solitude that a large, bustling city can invoke.

Plans for May include a trip to Strathmore for Maryland Lyric Opera's concert production of *Don Carlo* and a trip to the Kennedy Center for Washington National Opera's exciting production of *Carmen*. (You can immerse yourself in *Don Carlo* with Encore opera's showing plus WNO's live production plus the Met HD's production of *Don Carlos* in the original French!). -Leah Solat

## Opera at Riderwood

**Opera At Riderwood is a resident group presenting recorded operas weekly as *Encore Opera* and live operatic concerts as *Purple Lady Productions*. *Notes & News* is published every week to inform the opera community at Riderwood and is distributed without charge to the cubbies of residents without email.**

Residents are invited to join and work with O@R members who wear many hats and fill many shoes: Mike Beard, David Blackman, Paula Cook, Joe Davidson, Judith Dighe, Trudy Downs, Betty Dunkins, Irwin Goldstein, Maxine Goldstein, Sallie Holder, David Knutson, Sally Koenig, Joan Kugler, Gene Martin, Sally Porter, Leah Solat, Mary Ann Stroker, John Szabo, and Millie Trimble, among others.

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## COMING IN APRIL

April 1	Peter Grimes	Britten
April 8	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod
April 15	Three Penny Opera	Brecht
April 22	Il Trittico	Puccini
April 29	Cosi Fan Tutti	Mozart

All performances at 1:00 PM  
Encore Theater, LSC

**Pending Schedule changes may switch dates between *Electra* and *Don Carlo*, currently set for June 3 and July 22, respectively.**

FRIDAY, 1:00 PM • ENCORE THEATER  
**OPERA NOTES FOR**