

Multilingual Approaches to Libretto: The Language(s) of Present-Day Opera

Thousands flock into a grand auditorium, arriving there to see the show. Although most of the audience are primary English speakers, the drama about to unfold before them is set in Paris, France. The curtain rises, the orchestra begins to play, and the first words are sung—in Italian.

If the reader is somewhat familiar with opera and wanted to venture a guess at the show described in the scene above, they might leap to *La bohème*, that heartbreaking tragedy of the everyday with music by Giacomo Puccini and a libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (based on Henri Murger’s novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème*).¹ Or, perhaps this was interpreted as a description of *La Traviata*, an operatic favorite written by Giuseppe Verdi and Francesco Maria Piave (based on Alexandre Dumas fils’s play, *La Dame aux Camélias*).² Or, instead, this might have been Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*,³ or even Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *La bohème*⁴—two more repertory standards that fit the bill. In fact, however, the above happens to be a description of the Royal Opera House’s General Rehearsal for their 2024 production of Umberto Giordano and Luigi Illica’s verismo masterpiece, *Andrea Chénier*.

This phenomenon—stories derived from one culture, presented in the language of second, and then received by audiences from a third—is hardly limited to Italian composers adapting the works of French novelists and playwrights. Since opera’s inception, it has been a multicultural and multilingual art form—composers and librettists adapting and retelling stories in new languages befitting their audiences and the stylistic trends of their day. That history, along with the technologies and techniques that it has led to, and the expectations that it has created for opera’s audiences, now shapes the tools that modern composers and librettists have available to them—the languages of present day opera.

Opera’s Multilingual History

Throughout its history, the language in which opera has been presented to its audiences has always been a matter of great significance. Initially opera throughout Europe was sung in Italian, which had become an “international language of music.”⁵ Eighteenth century opera was dominated by Italian compositions and the works of composers like Mozart, who were also writing in Italian. Even while other cultures worked to establish their own musico-dramatic

¹ See “Musical Works Cited” for information on individual musical works.

² Not to be confused with his father, Alexandre Dumas père, who authored *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*.

³ The librettist for *Manon Lescaut* is a matter of significant complication, including contributions by the composer, the publisher (Giulio Ricordi), and five separate librettists whom Puccini hired: Ruggero Leoncavallo, Marco Praga, Giuseppe Giacosa, Domenico Oliva, and Luigi Illica. See Kendall, Colin. *The Complete Puccini*. Ch. 4, *Manon Lescaut*.

⁴ Libretto by the composer.

⁵ See Salzman and Desi. *The new music theater: Seeing the voice, hearing the body*, p. 78–95.

traditions (like English ballad opera or the German Singspiel), Italian opera continued to be a dominant force well into the 19th century, through the works of Bel Canto composers, like Rossini and Donizetti. In some places, like Covent Garden, this even meant that non-Italian-language works were translated for performances, not into the language of the audience, but rather into Italian, as their audience was used to hearing.⁶

Throughout the twentieth century, several divergent linguistic paths for the opera presentation emerged. During the earlier half of the century, it became the typical for German opera companies to present all of their performances in German, translating Italian works and other foreign-language pieces for their audiences. Similarly, the English National Opera (formerly Sadler's Wells Opera) was formed in London, presenting grand opera, but exclusively in English.⁷ Meanwhile, many other companies moved toward presenting exclusively in the original language of the works, using various aids to assist their audience's understanding—such as plot summaries in program books or translated librettos, which audience members could use to follow along with the action taking place on the opera house stage.

This all changed in the early 1980s, with the advent of surtitling. First used in Beijing in 1983, within two years this innovation had made its way to New York, Copenhagen, and Toronto, where Canadian Opera Company trademarked the term “surtitled.”⁸ These little words projected above the stage fundamentally changed the way audiences interacted with opera—allowing listeners to hear the original language in which the work had been written, while still understanding, at least for the most part, the nuances of what was happening within the drama. Of course, surtitles (also sometimes called supertitles) were not universally welcomed by the opera-going community. In 1989, music critic and conductor, Robert Anderson responded to a letter to the editor of *The Musical Times* with a veritable tirade on the subject of the newly-minted technology, calling it an “extraordinary device for distracting attention from what is sung” and suggesting that the “serious member of the audience” was now forced to choose between “frustrated exhaustion” and closing their eyes.⁹ Even as initial resistance to surtitling began to die down, many still pushed back against its application to operas which were being performed in the audience's native language. In a Guardian article responding to Covent Garden's first surtitled production of *Billy Budd*, in 2000, critic Andrew Clements wrote the following:

If the battle against English surtitles for foreign language works has to be conceded now—there's no doubt comprehension is increased for non-linguists—introducing them for works sung in the vernacular is another matter. When opera ceases to be a medium in which the drama is presented through the symbiosis of the music and words, and instead is turned entirely into an exercise in reading, with the addition of some more or less

⁶ See Mateo, Marta. *Multilingualism in opera production, reception and translation*, p.329.

⁷ “History of ENO.” English National Opera, 2024.

⁸ “Theatre Surtitles: Past, Present, and Future.” Theatre in Paris, 2024.

⁹ Anderson, Robert. “Letters to the Editor.” *The Musical Times*, May 1989.

engaging background music, then the medium is devalued, and it really will become museum art of a vacuous and purely decorative kind.¹⁰

While Clements raises important issues about the way in which an audience can be engaged by, or even immersed within the drama of the operatic stage, the truth of the matter is that surtitles are an invaluable tool for most opera-goers' understanding, provide greater accessibility to the art form, and, regardless of the advantages and disadvantages they provide, they are here to stay. In the twenty or so years since that article was written, surtitles have become ubiquitous—used in university productions, regional theaters, and very nearly every traditional space in which opera is being presented. Looking forward, however, this innovation that was designed for history's sake—to allow audiences an optimal experience of existing works—now greatly effects the kinds of subjects for opera that modern librettists and composers can successfully undertake.

Multilingual Operas

One interesting possibility made possible by opera's unique linguistic infrastructure, within which its audience is perfectly used to watching entire shows in languages that they don't speak or read, is works that are themselves multilingual—operas in two or more languages.

Multilingual works are not new to opera, or vocal music in general. Works which intermix Latin with an audience's native language have long been common, leading to a well-established term to describe that technique: macaronic. This term, which was derived from a poetic form which mixed Latin and vernacular language to comic effect, has now become commonly used to describe any vocal works that mix two or more languages.¹¹

Non-theatrical examples of this are often works that interweave Christian religious text with more modern poetry, like Elgar's oratorio, *The Dream of Gerontius* (based on John Henry Newman's poem of the same name) or Britten's *War Requiem* (which juxtaposes traditional requiem text with poems by Wilfred Owen). Perhaps the most famous example of this in the concert repertoire, however, is a secular work—Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, which sets a collection of medieval poems, mostly in Latin, but also several in each of *Mittelhochdeutsch* (Middle High German) and *ancien français* (Old French).

On the operatic stage, this mixture of vernacular language with Latin is also a frequent occurrence. Act I of *Tosca* closes with Scarpia, the opera's villain, singing in Italian about how he intends to entrap Tosca, killing her lover and forcing her to sleep with him, while the chorus gathers into the church around him, praying the "Te Deum" in Latin. In his final solo line of the aria, Scarpia exclaims, "Tosca, mi fai dimenticare Iddio!" (Tosca, you make me forget God), before joining the chorus in finishing the "Te Deum"—elucidating for the audience just how vile his obsession with Tosca has become and how deep his hypocrisy runs, mixing his plan to assault Tosca with prayer.

Similarly, the Britten and Plomer's three *Parables for Church Performances* (*Curlew River*, *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, and *The Prodigal Son*) employ a combination of Latin and

¹⁰ See Clements, Andrew. "Incomprehensible." *The Guardian*, 2000.

¹¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, "Macaronic."

English. Here, Latin-language plainchant bookends either side of the dramas, lending a ritualistic quality to the performances. The production notes for *Curlew River* direct that “The opening and closing sections... should be performed in a fairly naturalistic, although ceremonial, style. The action of the story should be as formalized as a ritual.” To this end, the Latin serves as kind of primer for the audience, helping them to understand that despite its linguistic comprehensibility, the internal sections of the shows are not reality, but a heightened version of it.

Examples of non-Latin secondary languages included within primarily single-language librettos also pervade the operatic canon. Many examples of this phenomenon are enacted by characters who are simply performing in a second language within the story of the opera. Two of Richard Strauss’s operas, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Capriccio*, feature such instances, with Italian singers performing music in Italian, within the context of the larger German-language opera. Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* contains a similar instance, an old frenchman singing a couplets in French, during a ball scene, in Act II.

Sometimes, however, secondary languages in primarily monolingual librettos are instances of a kind of diegetic language—that is to say, the actual language the characters would be speaking, if the libretto’s language was a reflection of the character’s native tongue. Most examples of this are very brief, employing a hint of localized language for some kind of dramatic or thematic effect. This kind of multilingualism can be seen at the end of “Dovunque al mondo” in *Madama Butterfly*, when Pinkerton breaks from the Italian of the rest of the aria, exclaiming “America Forever”—underscoring for the audience the character’s nationalist pride and his dismissal of Japanese culture. Another example, in the same two languages, is Britten and Piper’s *Death in Venice*, wherein a German novelist, Aschenbach, visits Italy. The libretto has Aschenbach singing in English throughout, but the Italian characters constantly address him as “the Signore,” constantly reminding the audience of his otherness, that Venice is not where the character belongs.

Silent Night

An innovative and omnipresent use of this kind of diegetic multilingualism can be seen in Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell’s Pulitzer-prize-winning opera, *Silent Night*. The libretto features five languages, three of which are representative of the native languages of the opera’s characters. The story, which is based on the 2005 film, *Joyeux Noel* (which is, in turn, inspired by true events), follows three groups of soldiers in World War I, who undertake an unauthorized ceasefire to celebrate Christmas, 1914. The original film is quadrilingual, in nearly equal parts English, German, and French (with additional prayers and songs in Latin). The multilingual nature of the work is fundamental to understanding the story, which is about a group of individuals who come to understand one another, despite their circumstances, and set aside their cultural differences out of respect for each other’s humanity.

Mark Campbell’s libretto preserves this diegetic approach to language, directly representing the languages that the characters are speaking through their sung language—an approach that might seem the default to modern audiences, but is a departure from the historical norm of opera (where Carmen sings in French, Cio-Cio San, in Italian, and Dido, in English). Certainly, Campbell’s approach is the clearest way that the audience can understand the barriers

to comprehension between the characters in *Silent Night* and the allows the audience to follow the action, as soldiers switch into second or third languages, hoping that the members of the other armies will understand them.

This kind of direct representation seems important to Campbell and Puts throughout the work. The opera's story is bookended by moments of music within the drama, opening with a scene on an opera house stage and closing with German soldiers humming a song taught to them by the Scots.¹² Compound this with the actual ceasefire being precipitated by a moment of shared music making between the Scottish army and an enlisted German opera singer, the story itself allows for a great deal of diegetic music—singing, playing the harmonica, and even bagpipes. Between these two forms of diegesis, the linguistic and the musical, the opera is able to relay its events in a much more naturalistic way than the operatic genre typically allows, focusing its audience on the everyday beauty of its story.

The original film, *Joyeux Noel*, opens with a striking linguistic juxtaposition, between three school children, one French, one English, and one German, who are reciting rhymes in school, words meant to instill in them a duty to their homeland and a hatred of their country's enemies. While this image is omitted from the opera, which begins with the film's third scene, Campbell and Puts invoke this same approach of showing this unity of the three cultures, divided simply by language, in several key moments throughout the opera.¹³ The first of these is in Act I, scene ii, which sees all of the soldiers hunkering down for the night, the evening of December 23rd. As they move toward sleep, they begin to sing, each in their respective languages, a shared dream—a vision of home, of their loved ones and of safety and of rest. This shared vision is underscored with a shared melody, sung in a round by the three armies—showing that although their words may be different, their minds are not.¹⁴ A sharp contrast to this moment appears in Act II, scene iii, when the audience hears the leaders of the three armies, the Kronprinz, the French General, and the British Major, each having just learned of the ceasefire that has taken place. In a moment of ironic unity, all three rage over what the troops have done, declaring that the soldiers will pay.¹⁵ Through these moments, Campbell and Puts highlight one of the more important messages of the story—that those who fight the war, regardless of side, have much more in common with one another than they do with those that are forcing them to fight.

Operas Written for a Non-First-Language Audience

Another mode in which operas can take advantage of the art form's unique linguistic paradigm is through works that were never intended for a first-language audience. As with the

¹² Interestingly, this opening scene is the reason that the opera is pentalingual, as opposed to the movie, which is only quadrilingual. While in *Joyeux Noel*, the opera scene is in Latin (a setting of the "Ave Maria" text), in Campbell's libretto this has been replaced by entirely original Italian text, perhaps for a more realistic representation of a typical opera performance.

¹³ The opera subsequently returns to the movie's second scene, simply switching the order in which the audience in show the declaration of war in Scotland and Germany.

¹⁴ Campbell, Mark. *Silent Night*, libretto. p.21-23

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.57-60

earlier macaronic examples, these seem to originate with Latin-language librettos, their writers relying on opera's historically-Christian audience to be comfortable listening to music sung in Latin. There are at least two early operas that fall into this category. The first, *Sub olea pacis et palma virtutis*, is a baroque opera by Czech composer Jan Dismas Zelenka and librettist Matouš Zill, which was commissioned for the coronation of Charles VI.¹⁶ The choice of language for this piece may simply have been a matter of ceremony for the coronation and also likely felt fitting for the work's subject matter—the life of a Czech saint, Wenceslaus. Moreover, the decision to present in Latin likely felt a natural for this work, which despite being called an opera, doesn't have a clear dramatic structure, and, for a modern audience, would likely feel more like an oratorio or similar form of choral-orchestral work bearing strong allegorical themes. The second early example of an opera in Latin is actually a rarely-performed work of Mozart's, *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, which he wrote when he was only 11.¹⁷ The opera is a secular work, with a libretto by Rufinus Widl, which retells the myth of one of Apollo's lovers, Hyacinth, and the tragic story of his death. Interestingly, neither of these two operas constitute a diegetic use of Latin, the characters in the two being Czech and Greek, respectively.

The real emergence of Latin-language opera, however, comes in the 20th century, with Stravinsky's 1927 opera, *Oedipus Rex*. The opera's libretto was originally written in French, by Jean Cocteau, but Stravinsky decided to have Abbé Jean Daniélou translate it into Latin, which he called, "a medium not dead, but turned to stone."¹⁸ It was important to Stravinsky that the language of the piece be removed from the everyday, claiming that he chose Latin to aid in presenting an "archetypal drama of purification." This separation from the everyday can also be seen through the opera's solution to the issue of audience comprehension, as well—its narrator. The opening text outlines directly what the important aspects of the drama are meant to be:

You are about to hear a Latin version of *King Oedipus*.

This version is an opera-oratorio; based on the tragedy by Sophocles, but preserving only a certain monumental aspect of its various scenes. And so (wishing to spare your ears and your memories) I shall recall the story as we go along.¹⁹

The events of the story are clearly secondary in this description. It's the "monumental aspect" of the Grecian tragedy that the opera focuses on. Not direct communication of any of the details, but rather a removed experience of the broader drama. To this end, having no first-language audience serves authors' goals perfectly.

¹⁶ The work's full title is *Sub olea pacis et palma virtutis conspicua orbi regia Bohemiae Corona: Melodrama de Sancto Wenceslao* (Under the Olive Tree of Peace and the Palm Tree of Virtue the Crown of Bohemia Splendidly Shines Before the Whole World: Melodrama to Saint Wenceslaus).

¹⁷ Osborne, Charles. *The Complete Operas of Mozart: A Critical Guide*. p.29-34

¹⁸ Horowitz, Joseph. "Repertoire Note: Oedipus Rex."

¹⁹ Stravinsky, Igor. *Oedipus Rex*, vocal score. Front matter (unnumbered).

Satyagraha and Akhnaten

This particular linguistic approach to opera writing, “elevating” the operatic language out of the common parlance, seems to have appealed greatly to another, even more recent opera composer: Philip Glass. A staunch minimalist, although he prefers the phrase “music with repetitive structures” to describe his music, Glass seems to have latched onto this idea of using historical languages to remove any sense of direct communication with his audiences. While he has also written two operas in Latin, the most interesting case studies for language in his operas can be found in two of the three operas from his “Portrait Trilogy.” The trilogy, which is a set of operas each about the life of a man who has “changed the course of history with their minds,” features *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhnaten*.²⁰ While the first of these is in English, the latter two are both presented in historical languages, without any intension of finding a first-language audience.

Satyagraha is a portrait of the life of Mahatma Gandhi. While a fairly modern story, the libretto by Constance DeJong is adapted from the Bhagavad Gita, one of the central texts of the Hindu faith. This document is written in Sanskrit, which is said within the Hindu tradition to be 5000 years old (although, modern scholars tend to attribute it to the first century CE).²¹ For the opera, this means that a story which takes place from 1893-1914 is being told through text that, while an inspiration to opera’s characters, has nothing specifically to do with the drama’s action and was written nearly two millennia before it takes place. As these texts are set, within the opera’s action, they are often broken down, with a level of repetition that realistically removes any interest semantic comprehension, even were one to understand Sanskrit.²² Although this approach is pervasive, there are several moments in the opera where it becomes particularly pronounced. One such instance can be found at the opening of Act II, “Confrontation and Rescue,”²³ where the chorus sings a few sentences of text, that the opera’s guide translates to:

This I have gained today, this whim I’ll satisfy;
this wealth is mine and much more too will be mine as time goes on.
He was an enemy of mine, I’ve killed him, and many another I’ll kill.
I’m master here. I take my pleasure as I will;
I’m strong and happy and successful.
I’m rich and of good family.
Who else can match himself with me?²⁴

²⁰ Levy, Katelin. “Philip Glass’ ‘Portrait Trilogy.’”

²¹ The Metropolitan Opera. *A Guide To Satyagraha*. p.14

²² According to the most current census information, there are less than 25,000 speakers of Sanskrit remaining in India, for none of whom it is their native language. See McCartney, Patrick. “Searching for Sanskrit Speakers in the Indian Census.” *The Wire*, May 10, 2020.

²³ Glass, Philip. *Satyagraha*, vocal score. p.94-101

²⁴ The Metropolitan Opera. *A Guide To Satyagraha*. p.28

This text, which would take about 30 seconds to speak aloud in Sanskrit, stretches over approximately 10.5 minutes of the 15 minute scene, becoming much more of a texture of sound, than any semblance of real language.

The most extreme form of this sort of dissolution of language, however, comes at the opening of Act III, where the Sanskrit is actually abandoned altogether.²⁵ For nearly the first two minutes of “New Castle March,” the chorus sings on syllables (“Ba” and “Ah”) before one of the characters, Kasturbai, sings the act’s first meaningful text.

This kind of ritualized abstraction of text from meaning results in a very different opera-going experience than a work like *Silent Night*, where an audience member can follow a clear one-to-one relationship between the text and the drama (assisted by surtitles, even if not fluent in the languages being sung). Glass’s approach, while certainly manifested in a novel way, isn’t new to opera—early operas, such as Handel’s and those composed by the Bel Canto composers often set text in a similar way, repeating words freely, setting the text with musical concerns privileged far above dramatic ones. For Glass, this approach to meaning seems to align with his impression of what opera does well. In an interview, just before the *Satyagraha*’s premiere, he said the following of its language:

“The language of the opera is a language that I chose for its sound value: Sanskrit, which is a beautiful vocal language... I decided to use that text... as a commentary on the action that we see on stage so that the singers are actually singing in a language that we don’t understand. For me, when I hear opera, I find that the literal content of the language is always a problem... I get torn between literary comprehension and musical comprehension. It’s not a very pleasant experience. So in my own operas, I just separate the content of the language into the sound and the meaning.”²⁶

Interestingly, *Akhnatén*, the final opera of the “Portrait Trilogy,” takes a considerably less abstracted approach. Its libretto, which was written by the composer, Shalom Goldman, Robert Israel, and Richard Riddell, is still primarily in languages not likely understood direct by its audience—Egyptian, Arcadian, and Hebrew.²⁷ And, similarly to *Satyagraha*, these are all drawn from existing texts, which interact with the drama in a representative way, as opposed to a literal one. This is further compounded by the ritualistic treatment of the chorus’s text, several sections of the opera having no text at all, but simply vowel sounds, like a vocalise.²⁸ And yet, the dramatic structure of the work and the precise action of the story are significantly clarified by two elements of the opera’s construction, which are always presented in the language of the audience.

The first of these is the narration. Similar to the approach Stravinsky, Cocteau, and Daniélou took with *Oedipus Rex*, the authors of *Akhnatén* accompany the drama with a spoken

²⁵ Glass, Philip. *Satyagraha*, vocal score. p.160-163

²⁶ Wentz, Brooke. "Philip Glass on Moondog, Pop Music, and Mahatma Gandhi." *Interview*.

²⁷ Glass, Philip. *Akhnatén*, vocal score.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94-112

narration, provided by the character of Amenhotep. This narration, though still heightened stylistically, is always intended to be presented in the primary language of the audience and has been adapted for English, German, and Italian-speaking audiences.

Secondly, one passage of sung music is also translated into audiences' native languages: the final scene of Act II, Akhnaten's aria, "Hymn."²⁹ This aria, which marks the climax of the opera's story, sees Akhnaten praying to Aten, whom Akhnaten marks through his rule as a singular god, saying here, "Thou sole god / There is no other like thee."³⁰ The aria invokes phrases like, "according to thy will," "on high," and "Thou dost raise him up," mirroring biblical descriptions of the Christian god, a technique which becomes clearly intentional through the chorus's off-stage response in Hebrew, the Bible's Psalm 104, "Praise the Lord, my soul." Here, through the combination of these two languages and the clarity created through Akhnaten's sudden shift into the audience's native tongue, the opera highlights what it is about Akhnaten that Glass considers worthy of portraying—his establishment of one of history's first monotheistic religions.

Opera in Invented Languages

A final possibility allowed for by the unique infrastructure of opera's multilingualism is the creation of operas in invented languages.

One such existing work, *Angel Fighter*, with music by Harrison Birtwistle and libretto by Stephen Plaice, employs a libretto written in a combination of English and Enochian, a supposedly "discovered" angelic language.³¹ The opera's story, which is drawn from Genesis, focuses on the altercation between Jacob, singing in English, and an angel, singing in a mixture of English and Enochian. Another such work, *'u'*, is a Klingon-language opera, which was composed by Eef van Breen to a libretto by Kees Ligtelijn and Marc Okrand.³² The opera premiered at the Haag, in 2010, and went on to have several subsequent performances in the Netherlands and in Croatia. Lastly, composer Paul Corfield Godfrey recently announced that he had been granted permission by the Tolkien estate to use Tolkien's original text in a 15-hour operatic adaptation of *The Lord of Rings*, for which he and Volante Opera plan to release a complete recording in 2025.³³ Although, nothing specific has been said in terms of language in any of the press releases, one could reasonably expect that any faithful adaptation of Tolkien's epic would contain songs in Quenya (Tolkien's modern form of Elvish).

²⁹ Ibid., p.134

³⁰ Ibid., 141

³¹ Edward Kelley, a 16th scribe, and his colleague, John Dee claimed to have learned Enochian, the language of angels through visions of Kelley's. Modern analysis suggests that the language is of English derivation, and so likely was simply invented by Kelley and Dee. See Asprey, Egil. "'Enochian' language: A proof of the existence of angels?." Skepsis.

³² See "'u' - The Opera."

³³ See Godfrey, Paul. "Coming Soon."

Although these examples are all operas that haven't made it into the genre's "mainstream"—haven't yet been featured on opera's largest stages or being engaged with by a particularly wide audience—they speak to a possibility that resonates with modern opera's creators. So while only a handful of these works currently exist, with the ever-multiplying number of literary languages created in works of science fiction and fantasy and the capacity that opera has to operate within languages foreign to its audience, it's very likely that this sub-genre of the art form will continue to grow.

Opera's Multilingual Future

If the history of opera's multilingualism and the many ways in which it has manifested in opera's performances teach us anything, it is that change is inevitable for the art form. While, in this moment in history, the way that operas are typically produced—presented in their original languages, accompanied by surtitles in the primary language of the audience—seems the epitome of the operatic experience, innovation will continue. As librettists and composers continue to stretch the capabilities of multilingual opera, opera in historical languages, and opera in fictional ones, opera companies will continue to find increasingly effective ways of presenting these works. Moreover, cultural and social trends will continue to drive opera's technology. Even now, the rise of non-traditional performance spaces calls into question the practicality of surtitling an original-language performance, when the stage becomes smaller, or the audience gets closer, or the proscenium (from which the titles hang) disappears. Modern drives for accessibility and for audience diversity are also creating new needs for opera—especially a need to be more adaptable when it comes to presenting for an audience with a multiplicity of primary languages. Fortunately, opera remains uniquely capable. Across its hundreds of years of history, the art form has consistently pierced cultural and linguistic barriers. As long as its creators, its producers, and its performing artists continue to innovate, the art itself will always prove capable of communication.

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