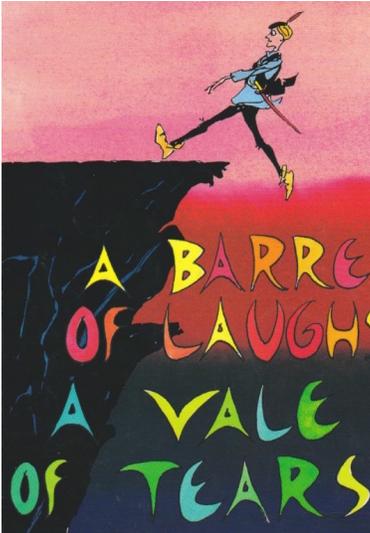


A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears

An opera by Julia Adolphe and Stephanie Fleischmann
Based on the novel by Jules Feiffer



An adaptation of Jules Feiffer’s wonderfully loopy fairytale about a young royal doomed to make everyone around her laugh so hard that nothing gets done in her presence. How to cure her—and her kingdom—of this affliction? Why, send her on a quest, of course. A wild ride of a story involving endless transformation, a forest from which no one ever returns, a Sea of Malice, a Valley of Vengeance, a ruthless bully of a best friend, a spunky lady-in-waiting, a gentle giant, love at almost first sight and more.

This playful, rollicking tale, which plumbs the perils of growing up and into one’s true self, takes Izzy, our young sovereign-to-be, on a journey that tests notions of friendship, identity, and love. Challenging conventional gender roles and relationships of the archetypal fable, the opera places a young woman at the center of a quest narrative that embraces a love of life and childlike wonder even as it explores the complex demands of adult responsibility.

Struggling to discover who she is and what she wants, Izzy (short for Isador) magically transforms into animals and objects to appease or provoke those around her: A singing tree who entertains trapped, lonely forest dwellers; a wild boar who chases after her best friend Tom; a plain pebble hiding from the woman she loves; a mournful eagle on a mission to save innocent children from their aggrieved parents. Ultimately, Izzy undergoes the profoundest metamorphosis of all, transforming into a grown woman, vulnerable and courageous, empowered and caring.

The communal event of opera invites audiences to experience deep emotions and reconnect with childhood memories through the power of music melded with story. Innately theatrical, bursting with color and creativity, Feiffer’s novella not only enchants but also provokes, asking what it means to be innocent, imaginative, and spontaneous in an unpredictable, ever-changing world. As the protagonists grow and change, the music transforms to reflect the characters’ self-discoveries. A harsh, spikey piano melts into a colorful harp, a dark English horn softens and brightens into a flute, and the viola blooms into a full, vibrant cello. In addition to containing moments of lyrical expansion, the text will be playful, both in terms of language and rhythm, containing whole compendiums of the world’s silliest of words, patter-like arias in which syntax runs amok, and circular conversations set in a round—all in the service of a love of language and sound.

The opera’s sense of play extends to form as well as content via Tom, Izzy’s recalcitrant one-time best friend, who rebels against the story and steps outside the narrative. The children’s chorus, which serves as the opera’s collective narrator, grapples with Tom’s attempts to subvert the story and its telling by, for example, critiquing Tom’s music, which, in turn, becomes ever more defiant. Breaking the fourth wall in order to share insights into the art of theater and music making—animating the joys and challenges of storytelling itself—is as essential to the work as the milestones that make up Izzy’s quest.

Capable of veering from disillusionment to hope in the blink of an eye, Izzy finds joy in the simplest of gestures. Her quest for personal freedom and empowerment encompasses the full gamut of human experience. A story of self-discovery and growth, *A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears* is about finding the strength at one’s core—a strength one didn’t even know one had—and learning what it means to grow wise and generous—in spite of oneself.

PRODUCTION VALUES/CASTING

Our intention is to create a work of art that can support expansive production values. However, it's also important to us that the opera can be scaled down to tour outside the opera house, to schools and other community venues. Sharing the work with children who have not had the opportunity to experience opera feels extremely necessary in these times. As is a diverse, color-blind cast that represents the diverse communities we hope to reach.

FORCES

Izzy	Mezzo-Soprano
Lady Sadie	Soprano
Tom	Baritone
Princess Petulia	Soprano
King Whatchamacallit / Andrew	Bass-Baritone
J. Wellington Wizard / Doveen the Serene / Philip the Giant	Tenor
Lucille	Mezzo-soprano
Children's Chorus	

Instrumentation: Flute/alto flute, oboe/English horn, clarinet/bass clarinet, trumpet, horn, piano, harp, percussion, viola, and cello

JULIA ADOLPHE (b. 1988) has been praised for composing music that is “alive with invention” (*Alex Ross, The New Yorker*), “colorful, mercurial, deftly orchestrated” (*Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times*) displaying “a remarkable gift for sustaining a compelling musical narrative” (*Thomas May, Musical America*). Adolphe’s works are performed across the U.S. and abroad by renowned orchestras and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, North Carolina Symphony, James Conlon and the Cincinnati May Festival Chorus, soprano Hila Plitmann, pianist Gloria Cheng, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival, among others. Current commissions include an orchestral work for the LA Philharmonic’s centennial season as well as choral works for the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and Peninsula Women’s Chorus. Adolphe’s 2017 orchestral work, *White Stone*, premiered by the NY Philharmonic, follows on the heels of the NY Philharmonic’s 2016 premiere of *Unearth, Release*, Adolphe’s viola concerto composed for Cynthia Phelps, and *Dark Sand, Sifting Light*, featured during the 2014 NY Phil Biennial. Adolphe has received numerous awards such as a 2017 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, a 2016 Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award, a 2016 OPERA America Discovery Grant, and a 2015 Charles Ives Scholarship from the Academy of Arts and Letters. A native New Yorker living in Los Angeles, Adolphe pursues a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the USC Thornton School of Music.

STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Her “lyrical monologues” (*The New York Times*), “smart” libretti (*Opera News*), plays, and music-theater works have been presented internationally and across the U.S. Opera libretti include: *The Long Walk*, music by Jeremy Howard Beck, (American Lyric Theater/Opera Saratoga, Pittsburgh Opera/Utah Opera); *In a Grove*, music by Chris Cerrone (Mahogany Opera Group, Metropolis Ensemble); *After the Storm*, music by David Hanlon (Houston Grand Opera’s HGOco); *Niagara Falls* with composer/drummer Bobby Previte and director Daniel Fish (Hudson Opera House); *The Property* (Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Lyric Unlimited). Upcoming: new works with Avner Dorman (HGO) and Lembit Beecher (Fourth Wall/Peak Performances, Montclair State). She has received grants/fellowships/residencies including: 2 NYSCA Individual Artist Commissions for her libretti (including *Red Fly/Blue Bottle*), NEA Opera/Music-Theater, Mapfund grant, Frederick Loewe Award, Howard Fellowship in Playwriting, Tennessee Williams fellowship, New Music USA, and residencies at New Dramatists, Macdowell, American Lyric Theater, Playwrights Center. Her work for theater has appeared at venues including EMPAC, Noorderzon (the Netherlands), Exit Festival (France), Roundhouse Studio (UK), Here Arts Center, the Ojai Festival, New Georges, and many more.

JULES FEIFFER (b. 1929) is an American syndicated cartoonist and author, who is considered one of the most widely read satirists in the country. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1986 as America's leading editorial cartoonist, and in 2004 he was inducted into the Comic Book Hall of Fame. He wrote the animated short, *Munro*, which won an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 1961. The Library of Congress has recognized his "remarkable legacy", from 1946 to the present, as a cartoonist, playwright, screenwriter, adult and children's book author, illustrator, and art instructor. Feiffer became a staff cartoonist at *The Village Voice* beginning in 1956, where he produced the weekly comic strip titled *Feiffer*, until 1997. His cartoons became nationally syndicated in 1959 and then appeared regularly in publications including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *London Observer*, *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, *Esquire*, and *The Nation*. In 1997 he created the first op-ed page comic strip for the *New York Times*, which ran monthly until 2000. Feiffer has written more than 35 books, plays and screenplays. He began writing for the theater and film in 1961, with plays including *Little Murders* (1967), *Feiffer's People* (1969), and *Knock Knock* (1976). He wrote the screenplay for *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), directed by Mike Nichols, and *Popeye* (1980), directed by Robert Altman.

HILA PLITMANN A glittering jewel on the international music scene, Grammy award-winning soprano Hila Plitmann is known worldwide for her astonishing musicianship, light and beautiful voice, and the ability to perform challenging new works. She regularly premieres new works by today's leading composers while maintaining a vibrant and extraordinarily diverse professional life in film music, musical theatre and song writing. Described as a performer with "tremendous vocal and physical grace," and "a vocal instrument that is simply unreal in its beauty" Plitmann has been involved in numerous world premiers and is in constant demand as a singer of new and contemporary music. Plitmann has been involved in a great many world premieres, including: Mark Adamo's Opera *Becoming Santa Claus*, with the Dallas Opera; *Paul Revere's Ride* with the Atlanta Symphony, written by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Del Tredici; Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Wing on Wing* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of the composer; *Mr. Tambourine Man* written by Oscar and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Corigliano with the Minnesota Orchestra; Gerard Barry's *The Importance of Being Earnest* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic; *Two Awakenings and a Double Lullaby*, a song cycle written for her by Pulitzer Prize winner Aaron Jay Kernis; Richard Danielpour's *Towards a Season of Peace* with Pacific Symphony; and Frank Zappa's orchestral staged version of the *200 Motels* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She has worked with many of today's leading conductors and appeared as a headliner with the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra and numerous other orchestras and ensembles worldwide. "...the agile soprano Hila Plitmann brought radiant sound, even during passages of sky-high vocal writing..." -- New York Times