

TOP STORIES

Passover Opera “Sylvia” Examines Pain and Renewal

by: Alan Zeitlin | Friday Mar 15 2013

The first night is going to be different from all other nights. And so is the second.



Julia Adolphe

“Sylvia,” a one-act chamber opera is unique in its venue, its creator and its subject matter. The opera, which will be staged on a docked boat in Brooklyn on March 21 and 22, is written by 24-year-old Julia Adolphe, and it is inspired by the true story of her friend who was sexually abused. The structure is that of a psychodrama, and actors play multiple characters as the title character is a patient who is asked to re-enact scenes from her past.

Adolphe told NY Blueprint that there are two seder scenes. One is before and one is after her relationship with an older man named Nathan, who is a friend of her father.

“What I think is so great about Passover is that you re-enact the flight out of Egypt, especially for children,” Adolphe said by phone. “If we re-enact moments of our lives, we can come away with a better understanding.”

The Cornell graduate, who said she had the idea for the story since she was 16, decided that an opera was the most fitting vehicle.

“I think that opera challenges you to act out your dreams, your fantasies and your nightmares,” she said.

The story tells how Sylvia, at the age of 13, has a sexual relationship with Nathan. At first she does not realize it is wrong and is confused.

“It is rape according to the law, but she believes they’re in love,” Adolphe explained. “She then tries to understand how her parents didn’t know the relationship was going on.”

Nathan and her father are both sons of Holocaust survivors. Sylvia is partly drawn to Nathan because her father neglects her and spends his time sculpting images from the Holocaust such as discarded shoes or clothes.

Adolphe added that the opera contains an aria based on a chant from The Book of “Eicha” (Lamentations), in which Sylvia cries out to God that he should pass over the house and not look inside because she is embarrassed about what took place. As she tries to free herself from her personal enslavement, the elements of the seder plate, such as the bitter herbs and leafy greens represent her pain and the spirit of renewal.

Adolphe, who grew up in Manhattan now lives in Los Angeles and is getting her doctorate degree in music composition at the University of Southern California is also a singer/songwriter, and when she sings opera, she’s a soprano.

She said she knows that for many, the opera still bears the stigma of being hard to access. But she feels that “Sylvia,” performed in English and complex with human emotions, is one that people will be able to sink their teeth into.

Baritone Mario Diaz-Moresco, who plays the Male Doctor, Nathan, and Sylvia’s father, said he alters the color of his voice when he changes parts.

He says he has two reasons to be excited for the upcoming performances: “It is rare for such a young person to create an opera so that definitely interested me and this is probably the only time I will be singing on a boat. I think the message of the opera is a strong and universal one... that life goes on no matter what and even after pain, you can get through it and continue to grow.”

The opera will be conducted by Eric Guinivan.

Julia Adolphe’s “Sylvia” will be performed March 21 and 22, at 8 p.m., at Bargemusic, Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn.

\$35 General Admission/\$30 for seniors, \$15 for students

www.bargemusic.com

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