

The Property

A
KLEZMER
OPERA



Music by Wlad Marhulets
Libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann

Lyric
Unlimited

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

World Premiere

Music by Wlad Marhulets
Libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann
Original graphic novel by Rutu Modan

THE PROPERTY

Adapted by Stephanie Fleischmann and Eric Einhorn from the graphic novel by Rutu Modan

Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago
Wednesday, February 25, 2015, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, February 26, 2015, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, February 27, 2015, 1 p.m.

The North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, Skokie
Wednesday, March 4, 2015, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, March 5, 2015, 7:30 p.m.

Regina Segal..... JILL GROVE
Mica Segal ANNE SLOVIN
Roman Gorski..... JAMES MADDALENA
Tomasz..... NATHANIEL OLSON
Man..... SAM HANDLEY °
Woman..... JULIANNE PARK

Accordion..... STAS VENGLEVSKI
Clarinet..... JIM COX*
Double Bass..... DON JACOBS*
Drum Set..... BRANDON PODJASEK
Violin..... ALEX KOFFMAN*
Piano..... CELESTE RUE

Conductor..... MICHAEL LEWANSKI
Director..... ERIC EINHORN
Set Designer..... WILLIAM BOLES
Costume Designer..... IZUMI INABA
Lighting Designer..... ERIC WATKINS
Projection Designer..... HILLARY LEBEN
Assistant Director..... TARA FAIRCLOTH
Stage Manager..... KRISTEN BARRETT
Assistant Stage Manager..... DONALD CLAXON
Rehearsal Pianist..... CELESTE RUE

° *Alumnus, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center*
* *Member, Maxwell Street Klezmer Band*

Scenery and costumes constructed by Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Memory and Reckoning and *The Property* are supported by an **Anonymous Donor, Goldman, Sachs & Co., Mr. and Mrs. Eric L. Hirschfield, Seymour H. Persky, and Mary Stowell**, with cosponsorship by **Joyce E. Chelberg**, the **Polish Cultural Institute New York**, and the **Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Chicago**, with additional support from the Katherine A. Abelson Educational Endowment Fund, Raymond and Inez Saunders, and Penelope and Robert Steiner.

Lyric Unlimited was launched with major catalyst funding from the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** and receives major support from the **Hurvis Family Foundation**.

Cover: An imagined look at old Warsaw through the Fotoplastikan.

THE PROPERTY

Story Of The Opera

TIME: Fall, early 2000s.

PLACE: A Jewish cemetery in Chicago
and multiple locations in Warsaw.

The opera will last approximately 80 minutes. There will be no intermission.

In the wake of her son Reuben's funeral, Regina Segal, still very much in mourning, travels from Chicago to Warsaw, Regina's birthplace, with her granddaughter Mica (Reuben's daughter) in tow. Regina has not been back since she fled Poland on the eve of the Nazi occupation in 1939; all of her immediate relatives perished during World War II. She and Mica are making the trip with the goal of reclaiming the family apartment seized by the Nazis—a common practice for the families of displaced Jews—a task Reuben would have taken care of if he'd lived.

Regina carries with her a lifetime of memories and long-buried family secrets. Mica, a professional archivist, has never been to Poland. Eager

to connect with the past, about which her grandmother refuses to speak, she is confounded by Regina's stubborn refusal to carry out their mission once they arrive. As grandmother and granddaughter each make their way through a haunted landscape, that of a radically altered Warsaw, they encounter Roman Gorski, the current occupant of the family apartment, and Tomasz, a young tour guide, each of whom sheds a different light on the Segals' journey. Regina and Mica have no choice but to navigate the chasm between their generations, fallout from the Holocaust, as past and present coalesce and the truth of their family history unfolds.

In conjunction with Lyric Opera's performances of Mieczysław Weinberg's *The Passenger*, Lyric Unlimited is collaborating with a variety of cultural institutions to present Memory and Reckoning: A Series Exploring Mieczysław Weinberg and *The Passenger*. Performances of *The Property* are presented in partnership with the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts.

We are proud to partner with the following organizations:

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WLAD MARHULETS is a composer of film and concert music. He has worked on such films as *Ruby Strangelove*, *Young Witch*, *The Giver*, *November Man*, *Orchestra of Exiles*, *Sabotage*, and *Juggle & Cut*, among others. Marhulets's music has been performed worldwide by renowned ensembles such as the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre National de Lyon, the Sinfonietta Cracovia, the Lithuanian choir Jauna Muzika, and the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra. He has received the Susan W. Rose Fund Grant, the Peter D. Faith Prize, and five ASCAP Awards (including the prestigious Leonard Bernstein Award). A full scholarship student during his tenure at The Juilliard School, he studied composition exclusively with Oscar and Pulitzer Prize-winner John Corigliano (*The Red Violin*, *The Ghosts of Versailles*). Marhulets's most notable concert pieces include the Klezmer Clarinet Concerto (commissioned by David Krakauer), the oratorio "Return" (written for the beginning of the Polish Presidency in the European Union), and the string quartet "Dybbuk" (in the repertoire of Kronos Quartet). Currently Marhulets is working on orchestral piece commissioned by the Festival of Jewish Culture in Krakow.



STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN (*Librettist*) is a playwright and librettist whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Opera libretti include: *The Long Walk*, music by Jeremy Howard Beck, commissioned by American Lyric Theater (premiere: Opera Saratoga, July 2015), and a commission from Houston Grand Opera's HGOco, with composer David Hanlon, premiering May 2016. Plays and music-theater works, presented

internationally and across the U.S., include: *Red Fly/Blue Bottle*, *The Secret Lives of Coats*, *Eloise & Ray*, *Tally Ho*, *The Street of Useful Things*, *What the Moon Saw*, *Omonia-3*, *The World Speed Carnival*, *The Hotel Carter*, and lyrics/dramaturgy for *The Greeks* and *The Americans*; at venues including EMPAC, Noorderzon (NL), Exit Festival (France), Red Eye, Roundhouse Studio (London), Synchronicity, Son of Semele, Roadworks (Chicago); and Here Arts Center, New Georges, Mabou Mines/*Suite*, Juilliard (NYC). Fleischmann is a recipient of a Howard Foundation Fellowship in Playwriting, two NYSCA Individual Artist commissioning grants, an NEA Opera/Music-Theater commission, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, MacDowell and Tennessee Williams Fellowships and the Frederick Loewe Award, among others. An ALT Resident artist, an alumna of New Dramatists, and a former Playwrights Center Core Writer, she teaches at Skidmore College.



JILL GROVE (*Regina Segal*) has repeatedly scored great successes at Lyric Opera, where the mezzo-soprano's appearances in ten roles since 2003-04 have included most recently Ježibaba/*Rusalka* (2013-14), the Witch/*Hansel and Gretel* and Klytämnestra/*Elektra* (both 2012-13). She reprised the latter role earlier this season at Michigan Opera Theater in Detroit. Other recent performances include Auntie/*Peter Grimes* (Canadian Opera Company), one of her

Metropolitan Opera roles (DVD). German repertoire includes the Ring in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Munich, and at Lyric; and Strauss's *Die ägyptische Helena* and Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (DVD) at the Met. In Italian repertoire she is a celebrated Amneris/*Aida* (Lyric, Toronto, San Diego, Dayton), Ulrica/*Un ballo in maschera* (St. Paul, New Orleans), Azucena (Houston), Preziosilla (San Francisco), and Zita/*Gianni Schicchi* (Los Angeles-DVD). She created the role of Anne

Kronenberg/Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk* at Houston Grand Opera. Concert activities include recent performances with the Utah Symphony, American Classical Orchestra, and Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra. Grove has also been highly successful with the major orchestras of London, Toronto, Los Angeles, Washington, San Francisco, and Houston. The mezzo can be heard on CD in *Harvey Milk*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Peter Grimes*, and *Die ägyptische Helena*.



ANNE SLOVIN (*Mica Segal*) made her American mainstage debut in January 2014 as Frasquita/*Carmen* as an artist-in-residence at Pensacola Opera. In Pensacola, she also appeared as Clorinda/*La Cenerentola* and, with the artist-in-residence program, as Fiordiligi/*Così fan tutte*. Recently the soprano has distinguished herself in competitions: she was first-place winner of Austin's Franco-American Vocal Academy Grand Concours de Chant; won

the Prix Leoš Janáček (second place) at Montreal's Czech and Slovak International Vocal Competition; and won second-place honors at the Harold Haugh Light Opera Vocal Competition in Jackson, Michigan. Slovin was named Best Female Voice at the Buxton International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival in Derbyshire, England, portraying Elsie/*The Yeomen of the Guard* (2013) and Aline/*The Sorcerer* (2012). She is a 2013-2014 recipient of the Farwell Trust Award from Chicago's Musicians Club of Women, and spent the 2011-2012 academic year studying voice in Paris on a grant from the Frank Huntington Beebe Fund. She has performed throughout the Chicagoland area, including roles with Main Street Opera (Suor Genovieffa/*Suor Angelica* – professional operatic debut), Evanston Savoyaires, the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company, and Light Opera Works. Slovin is an alumna of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music.



JAMES MADDALENA (*Roman Gorski*) first gained international recognition for his extraordinary portrayal of the title role/John Adams's *Nixon in China*. The baritone premiered that role at Houston Grand Opera, sings it on CD, and has reprised it for ten major companies internationally, most recently for his Metropolitan Opera debut. His association with Adams has also included creating the roles of the Captain/*The Death of Klinghoffer* (Brussels world premiere, subsequently Opéra de Lyon, Brooklyn Academy of Music, San Francisco Opera, Vienna Festival, CD) and Jack Hubbard/*Doctor Atomic* (San Francisco Opera world premiere, reprised for Maddalena's Lyric Opera debut). He has also been featured with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the leading orchestras of Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco, Rome, and London. Among his other major operatic world premieres are Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk* (Houston), Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (San Francisco), David Carlson's *The Midnight Angel* (St. Louis), Mark Adamo's *Little Women* (Houston), Kirke Mechem's *John Brown* (Kansas City), Paul Moravec's *The Letter* (Santa Fe), Lewis Spratlan's *Life is a Dream* (Santa Fe), and Tod Machover's *Death and the Powers* (Monte Carlo). In January 2014 he appeared in the American premiere of Mieczysław Weinberg's *The Passenger* (Houston Grand Opera, later Lincoln Center Festival). Maddalena's large discography can be heard on nine major labels.



NATHANIEL OLSON (*Tomasz*), a native of Chicago, Illinois, is rapidly establishing himself nationwide. Highlights in the baritone's current season include Jacob Grimm/*The Brothers Grimm* for Lyric Opera's Opera in the Neighborhoods program, Haydn's *The Creation* for the Wheaton College Artist Series, a recital tour of South Korea with soprano Julianne Park, and a solo recital with pianist Kevin Murphy at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. Olson made his television debut on a WTPV PBS special, "The American Songbook," broadcast last May. Previous credits include Copland's *Old American Songs* with the Peoria Symphony and Manitowoc Symphony, the Brahms *Requiem* and Bach's *St. John Passion* with the Columbus (Indiana) Philharmonic, a Carnegie Hall Neighborhood Recital, recitals with baritone Timothy Noble and soprano Sylvia McNair, and Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra celebrating the 25th anniversary of Ravinia's Steans Music Institute. He debuted at Carnegie Hall in Marilyn Horne's "The Song Continues" in 2013. Olson is an alumnus of the Ravinia Festival Steans Music Institute, Indiana University, and Wheaton College.



SAM HANDLEY (*Man*), an alumnus of Lyric Opera's Ryan Opera Center, has been seen on Lyric's mainstage in 14 roles since the 2008-09 season, among them Peter Quince/*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Count Horn/*Un ballo in maschera*, and Dulcamara/*L'elisir d'amore* (student matinees). The American bass-baritone has appeared at the Castleton Festival (*Il trittico*, *La bohème*), and this season sings the Speaker/*Die Zauberflöte* at Opera Colorado and the U.S. premiere of Roger Waters's *Ça Ira* with Roger Waters and the Nashville Symphony. Recent highlights include his role debut and European debut as Escamillo/*Carmen* in a new production at Theater Aachen; his Asian debut in Beijing, China, at the National Centre for the Performing Arts as Basilio/*Il barbiere di Siviglia*; and his Severance Hall and Carnegie Hall debuts in *Salome* with The Cleveland Orchestra. Other successes include Don Magnifico/*La Cenerentola* (San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and the title role/*Don Pasquale* (tour with The Santa Fe Opera). Handley has sung several world premieres, including music of Scott Gendel and Dan Black with the Madison Contemporary Orchestra. He has been a guest artist with the Houston Symphony, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Ravinia.



JULIANNE PARK (*Woman*), a native of Washington state, the soprano made her New York City debut in Nico Castel's production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* with NY Opera Studio. As a resident artist for Dicapo Opera Theatre, her roles included Mimì in *La bohème* and Mercy Lewis/*The Crucible*. With the Princeton Opera Festival she portrayed Lucy Brown/*The Threepenny Opera*. Other appearances range from the United Nations to banquets of the ambassadors of Kosovo, Albania, and Kyrgyzstan, to a solo tour in China (including a performance for the former prime minister) and The Mezzo International Television Competition in Hungary. In 2015, she undertook a duet tour in South Korea and has appeared as a guest recitalist for the International Artist Series in Seattle, Washington. She served for two years as a project leader with *Sing for Hope* NYC, and her outreach in music extends to villages in Malawi and Mozambique, Africa, with *World View International*. The soprano holds degrees from Boston Conservatory, New Jersey City University, and Indiana University, where she sang many major roles.



MICHAEL LEWANSKI (*Conductor*) enjoys a varied career as a champion of both contemporary and standard repertoire. He is conductor of the internationally acclaimed Chicago-based Ensemble Dal Niente, and was appointed assistant professor of instrumental ensembles at the DePaul University School of Music in 2012, after having served as an adjunct professor since 2007. Lewanski is the conductor of the DePaul Chamber Orchestra and Ensemble 20+ (20th- and 21st-century music), and frequent guest conductor of the DePaul Symphony Orchestra and Wind Ensemble. His recent and upcoming guest conducting activities involve Chicago Symphony Orchestra Chamber concerts, the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Chicago Chamber Musicians, Spektral Quartet, Rembrandt Chamber Players, and Fifth House Ensemble, as well as a residency at Harvard University and a Latin American tour with Dal Niente. He has led more than 150 world premieres. Lewanski was conducting assistant at the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. The Georgia native made his conducting debut at age 13 with the Savannah Symphony Orchestra. At 16, he was the youngest student ever accepted into the conducting class of the legendary Ilya Musin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia. He attended Yale University.



ERIC EINHORN (*Director/Co-Adapter*) collaborated with Stephanie Fleischmann in adapting the graphic novel by Rutu Modan to create *The Property*. Einhorn debuted at Lyric Opera remounting Richard Jones's production of *Hansel and Gretel* (2012-13), which he also recently directed at the Metropolitan Opera. Last season Einhorn returned to Milwaukee's Florentine Opera (*Giulio Cesare*), the Pacific Symphony (Orff's *Carmina Burana*), as well as to the Met (*La Cenerentola*). He is the founder of On Site Opera, a site-specific company in New York City, where he has directed *The Tale of the Silly Baby Mouse* at the Bronx Zoo, *Blue Monday* at the Cotton Club, and *Pygmalion* at Madame Tussaud's wax museum. His association with Pittsburgh Opera includes productions of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *Carmen*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Xerxes*. Other recent projects include productions for Portland Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Utah Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Fort Worth Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, and Gotham Chamber Opera. A proponent of Holocaust art, Einhorn has directed several pieces on the subject, including Hans Krása's *Brundibar* with Michigan Opera Theatre, Adam Silverman's *Korczak's Orphans* (co-director of the world-premiere staging) with Real Time Opera, Jo Ellen Hubert's *While Childhood Slept* with the Holmdel Theatre Company, and *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* at Oberlin College.



WILLIAM BOLES (*Set Designer*) is a Chicago-based scenic designer who has designed both in the United States and internationally. His work has been seen at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Victory Gardens, A Red Orchid Theater, American Theater Company, The Hypocrites, Side Show Theater Company, About Face, First Floor Theater, and Opera Northwestern, among others. Boles received his BFA from the University of Central Florida and did his Master's studies at Northwestern University. He is the recipient of the National Design Award from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for his design of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. Upcoming projects include a world premiere at Skylight Music Theater in Milwaukee, as well as a new play devised with Pig Iron Theater Company that will be presented in this year's Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville. See more of Boles's work at williambolesdesign.com.



IZUMI INABA (*Costume Designer*) is very excited to be working with Lyric Unlimited for the first time. She is a freelance costume/makeup designer in Chicago area and her recent design credits include *Lions In Illyria* (Lifeline Theatre), Young Playwrights Festival (Pegasus Players), *The Mousetrap* (Northlight), *Animal Farm* (Steppenwolf for Young Adults), and *Season On The Line* (The House). She has also designed productions for CPS Chicago Shakespeare, Griffin, Steep, Gift, Buzz 22, Raven, A Red Orchid, 16th Street, Porchlight, and many others. Inaba is a company member at Red Tape and a resident designer at Albany Park Theatre Project. She has received two Non-Equity Jeff Awards and the 2014 Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. She holds an M. F. A. in Stage Design from Northwestern University.



ERIC WATKINS (*Lighting Designer*) has designed extensively for both opera and theatre nationwide. Among his operatic credits are *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Lithuanian National Opera; *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *La finta giardiniera*, all for San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program; and *Il matrimonio segreto*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and *Lucrezia*, all for Boston University Opera Institute. His designs for theater include productions for the Washington Shakespeare Company (*The Miser*), Meade Theatre Lab (*Funeral Potatoes*), and Florida Repertory Theatre (*The Shape of*

Things, *Visiting Mr. Green*, *Noël Coward at the Café de Paris*). Watkins is currently assistant lighting designer at Lyric Opera of Chicago, where this season he has worked with D. M. Wood (*Anna Bolena*), Duane Schuler (*Capriccio*, *Don Giovanni*), and Fabrice Kebour (*The Passenger*). At San Francisco Opera from 2011 to 2013, he worked in a highly diverse repertoire with such designers as Chris Akerlind, Chris Maravich, Paul Pyant, Joel Adam, Simon Mills, and Guido Levi.



HILLARY LEBEN (*Projection Designer*) is an award-winning animator, motion graphics designer, and projection designer working throughout Chicago. A graduate of the School of the Art Institute, she has designed projections for CSO, Chicago Opera Theater, Court Theater, and Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. She also spent four years working as art director and projection designer for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's "Beyond the Score" series.

Leben also freelances as a motion graphics designer throughout Chicago at places such as The Andy Nebel Company, Crossfire Productions, Adelstein Liston, and Answers Media. Her films and 2D puppet animations have been screened at film festivals in Illinois, Michigan, and California, and have aired on the Travel Channel, TBS, and Lonely Planet TV. When she is not waiting for RAM previews, she spends her time drawing for her comic blog (www.thehillside.com) and learning to dance Tango. www.hillaryleben.com

2014 / 2015

6th

Composer's Note by Wlad Marhulets

The creation of this opera is a modern social media story that has its roots in another world altogether. Cayenne Harris, director of Lyric Unlimited, learned of my existence from reading online an interview of David Krakauer. She was looking for someone who could write a klezmer opera, and since I had written a klezmer clarinet concerto for David Krakauer that had much success, she must have thought I was a good prospect. But it wasn't so much my own experience with klezmer music that wound up resonating with me so personally with the proposed project. Indeed, the very storyline of *The Property* reaches far deeper into my own life, and in the strangest way.

I distinctly remember my beloved grandmother Antonina, who is ninety now and still resides in Belarus, sharing family secrets with me as a child—just like Regina in *The Property*—talking to me about living a Jewish life, the Yiddish language, about a world long gone. When I was a little older we moved to Poland, which was a safer place for us, but we were still outsiders. We coped by denying our Jewishness

not only to others, but to ourselves as well, creating some kind of a secret out of a truth that was always there.

When I was sixteen years old, my brother Damian brought me a record called “Klezmer Madness,” featuring the clarinetist David Krakauer. I had never heard anything so wild and full of energy, and it was intrinsically Jewish. The experience made me decide to become a musician on the spot. Soon I started a klezmer band that exclusively played the music I composed. We performed in synagogues and, ironically, churches, and even in front of ambassadors. Living with this music made me feel fearless. I was tapping into some kind of a mystical powerful energy. A mere five years after hearing klezmer for the first time, I was living in New York, speaking English, studying with John Corigliano at The Juilliard School, and David Krakauer was performing my works. It is safe to say I no longer felt like I was an outsider.

Klezmer, in essence, describes the secular musical tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. The word “klezmer” consists

THE FOTOPLASTIKON

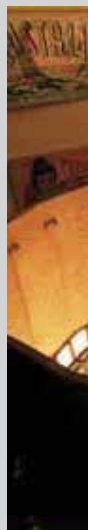
For the people of Warsaw, the Fotoplastikon was more than just a frivolous amusement. Built in 1905, the Fotoplastikon survived both the Nazi invasion and Soviet control. It served as a reminder of better times, and of other places where things were different. It was also a meeting place for dissidents and revolutionaries, where jazz music could be heard and pictures of western life could be peeked at. In the words of Polish poet Tadeusz Chudy:

To the accompaniment of music
the pictures roll on

All this is for you, dear viewer

The giant drum turns slowly

Like the cosmos, back to the world
of the past.



CC IMAGE COURTESY OF GIL ELIAM ON FLICKR

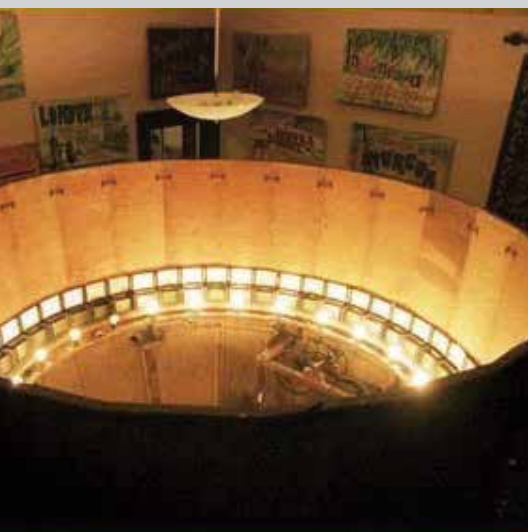


Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery, Warsaw.

of the Hebrew words *kli* (vessel) and *zemer* (song), which literally means “vessel of song” or “musical instrument.” Although klezmer is primarily instrumental music, klezmer melodies were taken from liturgical vocal tunes. Klezmer musicians, known as *klezmerim*, would perform such tunes at weddings and other celebrations. The vocal quality of playing is the key component of klezmer style. Melodic lines often feature musical ornaments that imitate the human voice. Such ornaments include *krehtsn* (sobs), *glitsn* (glissandos), *kneytshn* (wrinkles), and others. They contribute to the vocal character of playing and produce what is known as the “tear in the voice” sound.

Stylistically, klezmer is influenced by music from different European countries, particularly Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine, Greece, and Turkey. Some of the most popular klezmer dance forms include *freylekh* (based on traditional Bulgarian and Romanian dances with 3+3+2 rhythm), *hora* (Romanian dance form in hobbling 3/8 time), waltz (coming from Russia and Poland), and *kolomeike* (fast Ukrainian dance in 2/4). Hence, klezmer is not a distinct musical style but rather a mixture of multiple influences. It constantly evolves and reinvents itself.

The late twentieth century was a time of revival for klezmer music. Numerous musicians combined klezmer with free jazz, funk, hip-hop, drum and bass, concert, and folk music. Given that klezmer is deeply rooted in vocal music, combining it with the world of opera seems like a natural step in its evolution. Today, the word “klezmer” is used to describe many



www.atlasobscura.com/places/warsaw-fotoplastikon

Director's Note by Eric Einhorn

I have directed several Holocaust-related pieces (Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, Krása's *Brundibar*, and the musical *While Childhood Slept*), so I was immediately excited by Anthony Freud's idea of commissioning the world's first klezmer opera based on a Holocaust theme. The piece was to be a companion to *The Passenger*, yet explore an often-neglected Holocaust narrative: second-generation survivors. Second- (and third-) generation survivors are the children and grandchildren of survivors of the war. Much has been written in recent decades by and about the extended families of survivors and the lingering effects of the war on individuals and families. Whether the survivor speaks openly about his experience during the war or keeps it entirely a secret, the Holocaust continues to cast its shadow over each generation.

Telling a cultural story in a "native" musical style allows the audience to get even closer to the emotional core of the story – just as Anthony did by commissioning the mariachi operas *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* and *El Pasado Nunca Se Termina*. As a Jewish artist, I found this assignment incredibly compelling. Klezmer seemed like the ideal musical language for this kind of story, as it also spans multiple generations of the Jewish experience and was undeniably transformed by the war.

After extensive research, we chose to adapt Ritu Modan's moving graphic novel, *The Property*, not only for its appropriate subject matter, but also for its incredibly complex and well drawn (pardon the pun) characters – a must for any work on stage. The story also lent itself to the kind of intimate storytelling that is only possible in the smaller performance venues selected for this production.

The Property centers around Regina Segal and her granddaughter Mica as they travel to Warsaw, where Regina has not been since she fled before World War II. All of the immediate family that Regina left behind perished during the war. The women make the trip to reclaim a family apartment seized by the Nazis, a fairly common practice for the families of displaced Jews that continues throughout Europe today. Regina, having fled Poland on the eve of the Nazi occupation, brings with her a lifetime of memories and family secrets. Mica, on the other hand, brings with her a desire to connect to the past, about which her grandmother refuses to speak. It is through the exploration of memories that Regina and Mica connect, and we, the audience, understand the true nature of their trip.

The importance of these memories played a significant role in the design of the produc-

tion. The story begins in Regina's darkest hour: her son's funeral. Her thoughts and memories are in disarray; the world is fragmented and needs order. The set acts as a reflection of that chaos. It is through her return to Warsaw that she and Mica are able to create order and reconnect the shadowy past with a more hopeful future.

These ideas are manifested not only through the collage-like architecture of the set, but also by a machine that features quite prominently in the graphic novel: the Fotoplastikon. Built in Warsaw in 1905, the Fotoplastikon is a stereoscopic entertainment in the tradition of the German kaiserpanorama that not only survived both world wars but remains one of the few such contraptions in the world still in working order. The Fotoplastikon eluded Nazi control during the occupation, serving as a meeting place for members of the resistance. The wooden structure features approximately 25 viewfinders through which visitors can watch a series of rotating three-dimensional images of wonders of the world, both near and far – conjuring better times and possibilities for other ways of life.

Regina returns to the Fotoplastikon hoping to see the pictures she remembers of far-off Sweden that gave her hope as a young girl. Instead, though, she finds that the old pictures have been replaced by sanitized photos of pre-war Poland, a kind of modern-day propaganda that seem to antagonize her youthful memories. The architecture of the Fotoplastikon, as well the stereoscopic viewfinder, have been incorporated into the scenery and the video projections. At times, the entire set becomes the Fotoplastikon, through which we see Regina's past and Mica's present.

The scenes in the opera, like those in the graphic novel, shift cinematically. New discoveries lead to steps forward in the narrative, as well as steps further back into the exploration of memory. Every element of the production (scenery, costumes, video, and lighting) has been designed to help navigate this ever-shifting landscape. In the end, though, it is the characters who make this a journey worth taking. The words they speak and the music they sing (beautifully crafted by Stephanie Fleischmann and Wlad Marhulets, respectively) make you understand the true value of connection, family, love, and forgiveness.

– January 5, 2015

different musical movements, but to me, more than anything, it means color or emotion. It's the emotion behind the sound that makes it sound "klezmer," no matter what musical style it is infused with.

The Property is a through-composed piece. The characters represent different generations (young and old), different cultures (Jewish, American, and Polish), different languages (English, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish), and different times (now and then). Individuals in *The Property* are each characterized by their own musical language. For example, grandmother Regina has more traditional klezmer music supporting her role, whereas Mica, the granddaughter, is represented through a more youthful and vigorous sound. The difference between characters is emphasized even further by the use of leitmotifs and recurring harmonic progressions. The instrumentation allows for as much flexibility as possible so the music can express these contrasts. The ensemble that accompanies the singers consists of clarinet, drums, piano, accordion, violin, and double bass.

This opera is dedicated to the memory of my mentor and dear friend, Mary Rodgers, who recently passed. She was the daughter of Richard Rodgers and had written wonderful musicals, including *Once Upon a Mattress*. I am proud to say that she was very proud of me, and was most excited about this commission.

– January 8, 2015

A Conversation with Stephanie Fleischmann and Eric Einhorn, Co-adaptors of *The Property*

Director Eric Einhorn and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann worked together to adapt Rutu Modan's graphic novel The Property for opera. In late December 2014, Lyric Unlimited's audience education manager Jesse Gram presented them with a series of questions about the process and the opera via email. Here are their answers.

Jesse: *Do you think graphic novels in general – and this one in particular – are particularly well suited to opera?*

Eric & Stephanie: *The Property* is, as we discovered, very well suited to opera. The complex characters and fast-paced narrative lent themselves to adaptation for the stage. The emotionally driven artwork of the graphic novel creates a solid architecture for an opera. Graphic novels and comic books have long been the source material for some of our favorite movies and television shows, so it is exciting to introduce the medium to opera.

Jesse: *Tell us about the challenge of adapting an opera from a graphic novel.*

Eric & Stephanie: A graphic novel tells its story in pictures. Text is minimal, the thrust of the narrative is conveyed with images. Visual storytelling offers all sorts of highly theatrical possibilities; it's an essential tool of opera, as crucial as music and words. Modan's intensely moving, wild ride of a book contains numerous frames/images that served as signposts for us as we approached the task of adaptation, offering up a kind of synthesis of the story, inspiring us in myriad ways. The story of a grandmother and a granddaughter and a lost past reclaimed, this graphic novel is not particularly epic in the way that a novel can be. Nonetheless, distilling the graphic novel into opera, which is by its nature simultaneously far more compressed and a good deal more expansive than that of the graphic novel, proved a delicious challenge.

Time, in opera, has rules all its own. More than one aria has been known to stop time altogether. The difference in time signature between written prose and opera is substantial. Graphic novels are on the extreme, speediest, end of the spectrum when it comes to time. The graphic novelist can and does transport her characters from one location to the next in the blink of an eye. Rutu Modan sends Regina and Mica on a roller-coaster of a journey through Warsaw. Everyone has a secret. Red herrings abound. Paring down the plot not just to keep the opera at 90 minutes, but to build a dramatic arc, to conjure an eminently stageable flow of events, and, last but certainly not least, to carve out a form that provides a scaffold for the overarching shape of the music, one that allows for musical structures to flourish – space for the emotional expansion that is the hallmark of the aria, for instance – meant to distill, distill, then distill some more. All with the goal of honing in on and exploring the two primary relationships – that of grandmother and granddaughter; and old flames – in all their vivid and endearing complexity.

Stephanie: What's inspiring to me about adapting a graphic novel from the perspective of the librettist is the freedom that comes from working with source material that's fundamentally not about words. It's a freedom that allowed me a great deal of latitude in finding my own language for the opera, in divining the *voice* of the story. I'm intrigued by the way graphic novels work on the reader from the outside in. We may understand in a certain moment, for instance, that a character is distressed. But we often don't know exactly what he is thinking. I saw that as an

opportunity. These characters' thoughts seemed to me ripe for articulating. In a sense the opera becomes a kind of mirror image of the graphic novel – an expression of Modan's story that works on its viewers from the inside out, whose movement, embodied in the music Wlad has written to frame the opera, can be described as a kind of rippling outwards.

Jesse: *Why is the opera in more than one language? The inspiration for commissioning *The Property* – Lyric's mainstage production of Weinberg's *The Passenger* – is in more than one language, too.*

Stephanie: My grandfather, a German Jew, had the foresight to transplant his family to South Africa in 1935, before it was too late. My father was twelve when they left. He never spoke German to us. His refusal to pass his native language on to his children was a kind of survival mechanism, a response to that abrupt, world-changing uprooting. Regina purposefully left the Polish language and a rich repository of memories behind when she was forced to leave Poland and start over (in Modan's book she goes to Israel; we chose to send her to Chicago). *The Property* tells the story of the diaspora experienced by survivors of the Holocaust and their offspring, two generations removed from the rupture. What happens when a member of that third generation, infinitely transposed from her family's antecedents, encounters her lost culture, in effect, for the first time? Language is inextricably linked to culture. Languages bump up against each other, pushing us apart and hurtling us together. Even when we speak the same language, we can feel alien to one another, unable to communicate. But then there are those rare moments when, despite the fact that we don't share a spoken language, we experience the revelation of profound connection.

Jesse: *The novel is all English, but the print format changes to indicate when characters are speaking Polish or Hebrew. Do you try to accomplish something similar in the opera? How? Will people in the audience who don't speak Polish or Hebrew need a translation for those sections?*

Eric: Regarding the practical use of different languages, we followed Modan's lead. In the book, different English typefaces are used to indicate Polish, English, or Hebrew. In the opera, we chose to create an essentially all-English libretto with implied foreign languages. For instance, when Regina and Roman (our two elderly Polish characters) speak, the implication is that they are speaking Polish to each other, even though we hear English. Those rare instances when Polish or Hebrew is heard on stage were created for specific effect – when, for example, two people who don't speak the same language encounter each other. These instances are accompanied by an English translation either by another character or in the video projections. The desire to create a character-driven chamber opera in which an audience could really invest necessitated an English-language libretto, rather than text laden with foreign languages that only had the potential to distance an audience from the characters.

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Launched in 2012, **Lyric Unlimited** is a long-term, evolving initiative that encompasses company activities that are not part of Lyric's mainstage season. Lyric Unlimited's programming stems from the overall vision for Lyric set forth by General Director **Anthony Freud**, Music Director **Sir Andrew Davis**, and Creative Consultant **Renée Fleming**. Its mission is to provide a relevant cultural service to communities throughout the Chicago area and to advance the development of opera by exploring how opera as an art form can resonate more powerfully with people of multiple backgrounds, ethnicities, and interests. Lyric Unlimited leads the development of innovative partnerships with a wide range of cultural, community, and educational organizations to create a breadth of programming through which Chicagoans of all ages can connect with Lyric. In the 2013-14 season, more than 111,000 children, students, and adults participated in Lyric Unlimited activities. For more information about new initiatives and ongoing programming, visit lyricopera.org/LyricUnlimited.

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Costume sketches by Izumi Inaba for Regina, Mica, and Roman