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SESSION 4: Ho jo to ho!

San Francisco Opera Guild: Insight Panel

***Die tote Stadt*, 09/22/2008**

Featuring: Dr. Clifford (Kip) Cranna (moderator, company director of musical administration), Donald Runnicles (conductor), Meisje Hummel (revival director), Lucas Meachem (roles - Fritz and Frank)

(transcript read time ~ 36 minutes; audio run time ~ 59 minutes)

[BEGIN AUDIO]

NARRATOR: Welcome to San Francisco Opera's Centennial Celebration.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you all for coming tonight. We've got a great panel on *Die tote Stadt* with us. And we are going to have Donald Runnicles speak to us, and Lucas Meachem, who plays Fritz in the production, Meisje Hummel, who is the revival director for the production, and then we have our favorite moderator, Kip Cranna, with us. So please join me to welcome our panel. (applause)

KIP CRANNA (KC): Thank you. Good evening, everyone. Sounds like you can hear me. I can sort of hear myself. That's a good sign. It's a pleasure to be here once again for one of these little chats about an upcoming production, something new to San Francisco. In fact, we think -- we haven't confirmed this for sure, but we think this is the West Coast premiere of *Die tote Stadt*. And I have some important people involved -- someone's shaking his head out there, so...

M/UNIDENTIFIED: (inaudible) Los Angeles.

KC: OK, well, then we're wrong. He saw it in L.A. But we are very much looking forward to this premiere tomorrow night for San Francisco. And I have some important people involved in that with us, and I want to introduce them to you. First of all, immediately on my left is the director of the production, who has been very much involved with this production in all the places it's been seen. Originally by Willy Decker, but she's worked with him on this production, at the Netherlands and in Barcelona, where she directed revivals of it. And she worked with him on a number of other productions as well. She's worked at the Semperoper in Dresden, where she was an assistant director from 1989 to 2006. She has been the coordinating assistant director at the Netherlands Opera since 2006, and we were just talking about how tough it was to start learning Dutch for that job. And she has served on the directing faculty of the Carl Maria von Weber Conservatory of Music in Dresden from 1989 until 2006. And we're very delighted to have her here, Meisje Barbara Hummel. (applause)

And next to her is the young man who's singing the two roles, the twin roles, of Fritz and Frank in this opera. Those two roles are written to be sung by the same singer. He's a former Adler fellow, we're very proud of that, and a graduate of Merola Opera Program. And he has sung in a number of roles here. You've heard him in the title role of *Eugene Onegin*, as Papageno in our *Magic Flute for Kids* show a few years back, and in productions of *La forza del destino* and *Billy Budd* and *Doktor Faust*. Last season, he made his debut at the Met in *War and Peace*, and other recent engagements include his debuts in Chicago as Oreste in *Iphigénie en Tauride*, which was a show we saw here last spring. He's also appeared as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* in Tokyo, and he has a number of important upcoming engagements. He's going to be really busy. He's going to debut in the title role of *Don Giovanni* in Santa Fe, and I think before that in someplace else -- we can talk about that later. (laughter)

He has debuts coming up at the Royal Opera in Covent Garden, as Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas*, and then more performances coming up in his career at the Bavarian State Opera. Paris, Barcelona, and back to Chicago and the Met. So he's going to be busy. Welcome Lucas Meachem. (applause)

LUCAS MEACHEM (LM): Hi. (inaudible).

KC: And then somebody who's been on many of these panels, and really needs no introduction, but I'll say a little bit about our music director's involvement with this production. He has done actually more than 60 productions here at San Francisco Opera since he became our music director. He became our music director in 1992 but was here with us for the *Ring* before that in 1990. He has conducted this production of *Die tote Stadt* in Salzburg and Vienna, I believe, and he recorded this opera as well. And he was recently appointed Chief conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony, and general music director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, which will be his new main job after finishing his tenure with us as music director this coming spring. But we're looking forward to having him back as a guest conductor frequently after that. He's also -- another busy guy -- is music director of Grand Teton Music Festival, and is principal guest conductor at the Atlantic Symphony. Donald Runnicles. (applause)

So, there's much to talk about in this very interesting production that's not been seen in this town before, and I suppose I will start by asking what I normally do, is, your first involvement in this project and how you got involved. And I suppose, Meisje, that was probably you amongst us who first got involved in this opera working with Willy Decker, is that right?

MEISJE HUMMEL (MH): Yeah, we did it together for the Salzburg Festival, but together with Donald and the Wiener Philharmoniker, from the very beginning. And I was the assistant to Willy Decker. Yeah, and so I saw really this production growing up from the very beginning, from his very first ideas, until the result first in Salzburg, then later in Amsterdam and Barcelona, and now here.

KC: As most of our audience probably know, Korngold was Austrian, and in a way I think he's often been talked about as the Mozart of the 20th century in Vienna. I remember seeing *tote Stadt* there, myself, about 20 years ago or longer, with the great James King in the role of Paul. Very different production from this. So obviously it's a piece that is at home in Vienna. It's kind of like the hometown of this show, I guess. Is it a well-known opera in Vienna?

MH: Yeah -- no, it isn't a well-known opera, because the problem, I think, of the biography of Korngold, was that he had to leave Austria in 1934, I guess. He had done still some work there, here in America, for movies. And, maybe you know, he is very famous, especially in America, as a composer of movie musics. He got two times an Oscar for his music. But he was more or less, after World War II, he was -- not really forgotten, but perhaps. And as I follow the things, in the '90s, he came back to Europe with *Die tote Stadt*, in the early '90s, I can remember.

KC: Unfortunately too late for him, I think he died in the '50s, I think.

MH: '57. Yeah.

KC: So this Korngold revival unfortunately is too late for his benefit. Don, were you familiar with the piece at all when you were asked to conduct it?

DONALD RUNNICLES (DR): I had only been familiar with those two heartthrobs, those two -- the Pierrot's Lied and the Marietta's Lied -- when I was approached back in late 2001, whether I would be interested in doing the production in Salzburg in 2004. But no, I knew nothing about this man and the music, beside the fact that, where the great Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss had little to agree upon, it would appear, in their life, they did agree upon one thing, that Korngold was a genius. And they both said it. And having worked for many years, obviously, both here and elsewhere on both the music of Richard Strauss, but also Gustav Mahler -- Hey, I'd like to have that on my curriculum vitae, on my whatever. But for those two great composers to have recognized this genius, there had to be, there has to be, something quite remarkable about it. And you wait, tomorrow night, those of you who don't know it, ladies and gentlemen, one of our photographers at the dress rehearsal looked at me really quite gobsmacked, as we like to say here. And had never seen this work, and could not understand why in 65 years of professional life he had never encountered this gorgeous work.

KC: It's also difficult. What were your thoughts when you first started looking at the score?

DR: Oh, I think I probably laughed out loud. It's fiendishly hard. If you've been at the first orchestral reading, many more polite members of this orchestra were prone to be a little less polite about the demands it puts on them. It's fiendishly hard. I mean, it is this concerto for orchestra, which would be great except for the fact that it's an opera. For the fact that there are voices. And that one has to not only play this piece, but also play it with taking great care of all that's being sung, in terms of balances. And if I were to level any criticism at this remarkable work, it would be that the young Korngold was still enormously inexperienced in pitting voices against the orchestra.

KC: He was about 23, I think, when this was premiered, is that right?

DR: He was 23 -- he spent three years writing it, so he was -- it's an interesting coincidence. Ladies and gentlemen, those of you who will be attending *Idomeneo* will also be hearing the work of a 23-year-old. The very fact that Korngold's middle name is what it is, was because his father believed this is the new Mozart. It's so disingenuously overly scored, but it's a thrill to make it work. And the vocal lines are fantastic, if it were not for the fact that there's not only one kitchen sink, there are two kitchen sinks in this piece. (laughter)

Everything is in that orchestra. And when he writes for a *tutti* -- it's really rather strange, because I remember speaking to Andre Previn about this piece, because many of you will know and revere Andre Previn, who began his life orchestrally in Hollywood in the '50s writing scores. And he was considered to be an acolyte of Korngold. And he would talk about Erich Korngold, and would talk about the fact that when a movie composer is given a score, literally given a large piece of manuscript paper -- fill it. And fill it quickly. And this is what the young Korngold, who as yet knew nothing of his Hollywood years, he already writes in 1920 as if he's writing a glorious movie score 15 years or 20 years later, where every stave has to be filled with some unbelievably complex, brilliant -- for flute, for piccolo, for third clarinet. And it's a labor of love, but it's also very painful when you work on this work, because there are many revisions we have had to undertake. That is to say, where he has, once again, rather naively, asked the Marie to sing this glorious line in the middle of her voice, in *mezza voce*, along with eight horns, and four trombones, five mallets, three -- and sometimes it's like, I don't know, being in Monterey, you're looking into an aquarium, all you're seeing are --(laughter) -- if it were left to what we're doing with the score. So we've had to -- what was the question? (laughter)

KC: I think that was it.

DR: That was the biggest single challenge in this work of genius.

KC: Well, knowing that, Lucas, what were your thoughts when you looked at the score and were asked to do these parts? (laughter)

LM: Oh, well...

KC: Could you speak up?

LM: My first thoughts were -- well, the music is just phenomenal. My second thought was for the actual production. And I was really worried about it, I got to tell you the truth. I think there's a big thought process that goes into what you like to get out of your opera. And there's one side that says, "If this opera doesn't move me mentally, if it doesn't stimulate my brain, then it's not good opera." And then there's another side over here that says, "If it doesn't stimulate me emotionally, it's not good opera." And this particular production has juxtaposed the two ideas into one. And it's just the most incredible, stimulating, emotional, and cerebral production that I've done -- I think since the *Pique Dame* that we did here, the Tchaikovsky *Pique Dame*, I thought that was actually the best production I'd seen at San Francisco Opera. Anyway, it's just an incredible combination of emotional and cerebral that is just -- I mean, maybe tied for my favorite production that I've ever been involved in, for that reason.

KC: Have you sung "Pierrot's Tanzlied," which is a well-known baritone aria, before you --

LM: Yeah, it's pretty much the most gorgeous piece of music ever written. It's incredible. And actually I think it works really well, because it's really incredible both accompanied by just piano, so it's good as an audition aria, and it's also good orchestrated, as we heard in the Opera in the Park concert. Well, I hope you heard. And yeah, the aria is just phenomenal. I learned it, actually, as soon as I found out I was doing this, I

decided to get on that, like, straightaway. I learned it within a couple of days of finding out I was coming back here to do that.

KC: Are you thinking of doing this role again? Would you do it again, if you were asked?

LM: I am, actually. I'm doing it in Madrid in a few years' time. With Emily, actually, with the soprano who's singing Marie. And I can't wait, it's great, I can't wait to do it. It's wonderful.

KC: It's nice to have another chance already lined up once you've gone to the trouble of learning something.

LM: Yeah, absolutely. And this is a weird piece. Normally with more standard repertoire, I like to get it in once. Like the *Don Giovanni* I'm singing in Santa Fe, as soon as I found out I was doing that, I called my agent and I said, look, I need to do it somewhere else beforehand, because I've never done it. And so I'm doing it New Orleans right after this. With *Die tote Stadt* it's not quite as easy to do that, because there are not too many that come around. So I'm just really happy to get another shot at it in the next few years. It's going to be really good.

KC: For people who maybe haven't finished your studies yet about this opera, we should maybe say a little bit about the source material. It's from an actual sort of little short novella, which I believe was then turned into a play, by Georges Rodenbach, called *Bruges-la-Morte*, which is kind of hard to translate. "Bruges the dead city," I guess would be a close take on it. Meisje, when you were working with Willy on this, did you have any particular point of view that you wanted to bring across in terms of telling the story, this fantasy-reality sort of thing?

MH: That was, I think, the most important point for Willy Decker. Because this opera has more or less two realities. One is the real reality of the widower Paul, who lost his wonderful, beautiful wife years ago -- that's very important -- years ago, and he's petrified. It is not normal grief, it's not normal mourning. He is really petrified, and he preserved everything around himself as it was at the moment of her death. OK, and then when the opera starts, his good old friend Frank comes in, and it seems that, a little bit, the life is knocking at the door. And Frank opens a little bit the door back to life. Because what happened? One day before, Paul met at a street a woman, who is similar for him to Marie. And he never agreed with the situation that Marie has gone forever. So he is living with the hope she will come back. It's crazy, it's understandable, but of course, at the other side, it's a little bit mad. And he sees this woman, and says, "OK, I invite her. Marie is back." And Frank warns him, "Sorry, it can't be Marie. Marie, your wife, is dead, and it is another woman, and it will be dangerous for him and for her. OK, and this woman comes, and it is really another woman. Because she is a dancer in a little touring theatre. And sorry, ladies and gentlemen, at the end of the 19th century, the time of the novel by Rodenbach, or the beginning of the 20th century, it is immoral. A dancer is immoral for a real bourgeois, as Paul is.

KC: I think Bruges is thought of as a very strict, sort of old-fashioned city.

MH: Yes, it's very old-fashioned, it has a brilliant history, but it seems no real life, that's why it's called the death city. And of course this meeting between Paul and this other woman -- her name is Marietta, OK, it's close to Marie, but it is another woman. It's full of misunderstanding, and she goes. Because what should she do with such a very, very strange man who calls her Marie? Who gives her a lot of props, like a scarf, an old lute? That's the moment she sings then this very famous song of Marietta. Yeah, but, it seems that he is

not living. He is not alive, this man. And she goes. And that's the reality. And then something happens, what everybody of us knows. He starts dreaming. At first, he has a kind of conversation with his wife, but of course it's already his fantasy. And she wants him -- and I love this duet, because his wife wants him too, and gives him really the idea, "Go back, please, Paul, I know that you love me. I know for sure. But please go back to life. It is your life. And it doesn't matter when you meet another woman. Why not? Life goes on." And then he starts really dreaming, and these dreams are like fever nightmares. And he has really a lot of strange fictions, and more and more it seems that these fictions will destroy him. But in the result, we saw a way of self-curing. These dreams, fictions, nightmares, cures him, and at the end, he is really able to say, "OK, I understood now. Marie is gone forever. She never will return. And it's my thing to go back to life." Because he is still very young. And we hope, in this production, that he will be able to start a new life. And it's very interesting, it's mostly not written that Korngold was not sure about the title of this opera. OK, "The Dead City," that's very close to the novel by Rodenbach. But he was thinking about a title like "The Triumph of Life." And it seems it's really the opposite to "The Dead City." OK, he decided then for "The Dead City." But the second title, "The Triumph of Life," was very very important for Willy Decker, to show this way of self-curing.

KC: We should have used that for the box office. (laughs) It's a little more attractive, "The Triumph of Life."

MH: Yeah, it's more attractive, yeah? But maybe "The Dead City" is more interesting as an opera title, can be. (laughs)

KC: So the whole concept of hallucinations, or the fantasies that Paul experiences, obviously is one that opens up a whole number of possibilities. Can you talk a little bit about how you treated those in this production?

MH: Yeah, I think in the work between Willy Decker and his really very, very [exact?] costume designer, Wolfgang Gussmann, the first idea is, when we see the very beginning, it seems a normal room. But every part of this room can move. And that's one of the really, I say, brilliant ideas of this team. That they use this to mark really the point when the fiction starts. Everything will move. The floor, the ceiling or the roof, the walls, everything can move.

KC: That's a clue that things are changing. That reality is changing.

MH: Yeah. And that's the moment -- maybe, at the very beginning, you won't see it. Because it starts very, very slowly. And then you see, oh, the floor is moving. Oh, the walls. In the second balcony I know it's not to be seen, unfortunately, but the roof can move too. And then it starts, and then we see really a lot of very, very strong and strange images. How all the people change their self. And the fantasy, this mad fantasy of power, creates really monsters. They are monsters. (laughs)

KC: Your character changes quite dramatically, then, when we see you --

LM: I have three wig changes. Ridiculous. I have three wig changes! I mean costume changes, that's one thing, but -- anyway. (laughter)

MH: And for one, you have only one minute.

LM: Oh yeah, one of my cos-- well, I don't want to break any news to you that's like, going to tell you anything about the show. So I have to get down from being about 18 feet up in the air on top of something. And I have to get down, and I have this costume change that takes literally -- I think they're counting it, they have a stopwatch. It's 60 seconds I have to get out of my wig, to get out of my entire costume, and back into another entire costume, with wig. And I really barely make it every time. So it might make for one interesting evening one of these nights, I might just not be there. Good luck if that happens.

KC: And it's not just any costume change, you're coming back as Pierrot, the *commedia dell'arte* character --

LM: Yeah, I'm coming back as Pierrot, ready to sing this gorgeous aria, huffing and puffing.

KC: I didn't realize you had a wig change in the midst of all that.

LM: I know. But the great thing about the nightmarish scene that unfolds is that with a nightmare, you can do anything. You know, it's almost like a director's play toy. Because you can just make stuff up, because it's a nightmare. And it's really -- I don't know, it's really classy, though, it's so well done. I'm so excited for you all to see it. It's going to be great.

KC: [You get to have?] a lot of fun. It's very much a *commedia dell'arte* scene of all these sort of stock characters having a great time. Was it difficult to make that work?

LM: How many hours did we work on five minutes of music?

MH: I didn't count.

LM: I did. I think it was around 17. (laughter) It was just -- well, it was a wonderful experience. (laughter) No, it was very taxing at times. But I tell you what, and everyone knows it like the back of their hands. We actually had someone who didn't show up. There's a dancer in the scene as well who does a bunch of great, interesting poses. He did not show up for one of the rehearsals because he wasn't feeling well. And we had Larry, the dance --

KC: The choreographer.

LM: The choreographer, step in. And we were able to push him around and show him exactly where to go. And it just went on as if no one was missing at all. Because we all knew our own parts, and everyone else's, so well. But it's a really kooky scene.

KC: So Donald, how does Korngold differentiate musically between the reality and the fantasies? Is there a palpable difference to the scoring, you think? Or in the vocal lines?

DR: I think his use of the orchestra, yes. Certainly highlights where we are in, it would appear, the real world, and when Marietta appears, and this whole exchange, which I think is brilliantly done by Willy. The orchestration, I think, reflects that. It just becomes rather spooky. I think from the outset, this collaboration -- which clearly is what it was -- between the composer and his father, who was in many ways the Commendatore of Korngold's life, with all the good and the bad associated with that. They wanted to create this -- is it dream, is it reality? And I think this is something that Willy has picked up upon brilliantly, and I would completely echo Lucas's words. Of all the productions I've done in the last 20 years, this is in

the top five. Because it does, I believe -- and once again, Lucas said it all -- it's both emotional and cerebral. I think we all relate, as we get older, to our dream world, and the way that people reappear in our dream world, but in completely different guises, and in unexpected situations. There's an awful lot of stuff, *Stoff*, that we still go through in life. And our dream world just gets busier and busier. And I believe that's what the power of this production is. That all of us, in varying degrees, will have experienced the loss of a loved one. And the extent to which one looks for that loved one in other people, or in other situations. And that is what comes across very clearly in this work -- that by the end of this opera, ladies and gentlemen, I do believe you will not want to leave the opera house, in a way, because it's a feeling of -- it's like the great dream that you woke up from, or somebody woke you up from, or a three-year-old just jumped on your chest. And that was the end of the dream, and you're not ready to leave it yet.

And that's what this production manages to do. It's a very blurry, very Freudian -- I mean, it's no rocket science to accept the fact that this opera was written at a time when Freud was Elvis Presley. It's just, everyone was talking about it. Everybody was delving into it, dream life, the whole -- all the sexual innuendos and all the symbolism. It was an unbelievable time to live. And when I say that the collaboration was very important, many of you will know that Julius Korngold was a feared, feared critic in Vienna, who could be -- you think you've read vitriol in this time? Well, ladies and gentlemen, you read some of the Vienna critics, some of the reviews in the first 20 years of the last century. Julius Korngold was, we would consider today, an arch-conservative. Brahms, for him, was his altar. And through his son, his young -- and this is why I say *Commendatore* -- this extraordinary relationship between Leopold Mozart and his son. There were so many parallels, it really is spooky. But Julius Korngold was very, very interested in taking this novel with his son, and turning it into something which people would relate to in 19-- what was it, '21, '22, '23.

KC: The father and son were actually the librettists, I believe. Is that right?

DR: Yes.

KC: They used a pseudonym, or a [*nom de guerre?*] as they say in (inaudible) --

DR: The pseudonym was Frank Schott. Frank being the name of the character, Schott being the name of the publisher of Korngold. And it was written at a time when -- well, I will say something perhaps a little bold, but I do believe in it, because I've worked in this piece for many years. I think that this opera, for both the father and more importantly the genius composer, was a metaphor for post-World War I Austria. I believe Austria still finds itself in that position. A feeling of loss, bewilderment over what we have lost, why we have lost it, and this deep, deep, painful nostalgia for, why can't it all be the way it was before 1914? And while the father, Julius, obviously came of that world, this young man of 20, 21, 22, 23 when the piece was performed, it's extraordinary that a young man -- and once again, this is my feeling, or my interpretation of this -- but that's, for me, what makes this work so unbelievably fascinating. A young man has picked up on a country's crisis of identity. And the piece -- the *tote Stadt* is Vienna, the *tote Stadt* is Austria the *tote Stadt* is this earlier empire, which came to a crashing end, as we know.

And in some ways, the very fact that it's overloaded with symbolism, and overloaded with orchestra, and overloaded with so much, for me speaks volumes, because it's as if he wanted to say everything. Both father and son wanted to say everything with this piece of music. And that's why I am endlessly fascinated

by this piece. And I have done it in Salzburg, yes, done it in Vienna, done it here. And everywhere I do it -- I'm not an ambassador for the piece, because it has been done many, many times before. I think it's the only opera, in fact, that was given a simultaneous premiere, both in Cologne and Hamburg.

KC: Yeah, it's an interesting story. I'm wondering which one Korngold --

DR: Two opera houses gave the world premiere simultaneously.

KC: Or maybe he took the train and got there for the second half (inaudible).

DR: I don't know. But it was that popular a piece.

KC: Well, he was obviously a hot property, if two theatres would actually agree to present his opera on the same night for a world premiere. I mean, we would never do that, because we would want the glory to ourselves, so obviously --

DR: And the money, yeah.

KC: He was hot. (laughter)

DR: Yeah. But getting back to what I said earlier about Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss, who were at that time -- well, no, Richard Strauss certainly, but I'm talking about in the 1909, 1910, '11, the young, the very young Korngold -- a visitation with Gustav Mahler, this man is a genius. These were composers who conducted, they weren't just composers. In fact, they were more famous as conductors, probably, than as composers. But why would Richard Strauss, and why would Gustav Mahler, say something so phenomenal about this young man? Because he was. And at the same time, the tragedy was the fact he was born too late. Because this style -- audiences were prepared to forgive Richard Strauss for being out of touch. Because by the time it was 1921 --

KC: He was already (inaudible) yeah.

DR: -- he was 65. To the end of his life, he was considered as being this -- he still lives in this pre-First World War Vienna, Austria, whatever. But a 23-year-old has no excuse, absolutely no excuse. And the fact that this young man embraced this unashamedly gorgeous, late Romantic vocabulary, for many people was just anathema. Not to mention the fact they loathed Julius Korngold. They loathed the critic. And here was a way, finally, to get back at critics! (laughter)

KC: Many of you, I'm sure, saw Joshua Kosman's sort of think piece in the pink section in the *Chronicle* yesterday, which delved into these issues as well. And the further tragedy that after he came to America, and had a huge success as a movie composer, the war ended, and he tried to turn his attention back to classical composition, but by then it was all very much passe, his style, in terms of what the critics, especially, were expecting. Because we were then into starting into serialism, and all kinds of experimentation in modern music. So it really is a bit of a sad thing that he was a little bit behind his time, I guess you could say.

DR: There are plenty moments in the score, where it is as modern and as atonal as you could possibly want a piece of that time to be. And no one will ever be able to tell you, really. But while he was this late

Romantic, this young man, was he also interested in pushing at the walls like an Alban Berg, and subsequently Webern, and subsequently Schoenberg? Where did his heart lie? Or did, indeed, the influence of his father bear down on him to such a degree that he always felt, no matter how outrageous the harmonies were, it had to end in a major key (inaudible). (laughter)

KC: Certainly the vocal requirements are Wagnerian, are they not? I mean, it's mainly Wagnerian type singers who do these two lead roles of Paul and Marie or Marietta?

DR: Well, they are. I think at any given point, you expect to see John the Baptist's head being presented to somebody on a platter. "Here, Frank, here's your dinner!" Because the writing for voice, as well, it's just huge. And he's clearly implying -- I think in all the roles he wants lyricism. And yet as I said before, pits against this lyrical voice such forces. And also -- look, as you can speak to, too. But you go from the most lyrical intimacy of the "Mein Sehnen, Mein Wehnen," to the scene where you -- without giving too much away -- piggyback the tenor, literally gets a piggyback. And this is highly dramatic stuff. Once again, I think it's -- and you can speak better than I can about this -- but it's, once again, the young man Korngold, he had no vocal types in his head. He didn't have, "Well this is a Papageno voice, and this is an Oreste voice, and this is a Ford voice, or this is a Salome voice, and this is a Mimi." He just -- he wrote what he wanted. And you have to find the voices to make that work. Which is one reason -- bless you, you're sitting here tonight -- but both Emily Magee and Torsten Kerl, I hope are in bed -- (laughter)

KC: Sound asleep.

DR: -- looking after themselves, because tomorrow night, the demands that are put on them are superhuman.

KC: One thing that intrigues me about the score and the story is the importance of religion. Paul has made basically a shrine, or kind of a temple, to his dead wife, and we hear sort of evocations of religious music. Bells are important. Meisje, I'd like to hear your thoughts about how you deal with that, especially visually, in terms of these images that come up about religious spectacle.

MH: Yeah, OK, it was, let's say, not the most important point for Willy to show this very Catholic Bruges. But of course, in the third act, there is a procession. It is written in the score, it's outside of the window, and, yeah, we hear it, we listen to it, but it is more or less not to be seen, because it is fiction.

KC: And Paul sings and describes what --

MH: It's an amazing scene. And I always have the feeling, how can one tenor really sing against this orchestra -- against a chorus, a children's chorus, bells and whatever there is -- but he can. He can. And behind him, we have really a look in his brain or in his fantasy. So we will see a kind of procession, but it is no real Catholic procession. So it's not real, it's a fiction, with a lot of other movements. And with the fourth role of Lucas, he comes as the Pope, and he brings -- (laughter)

-- but without voice, he can really rest a little bit.

LM: It's quite a costume, too. (laughter)

KC: So I think obviously Bruges is, was, known as a very Catholic city. And Paul's religion is -- Marietta makes fun of it, but it's an important aspect of him. And I'd like you to talk a little bit about the whole contrast

between Marie and Marietta. Because there, too, I think we have this sort of contrast, if you will, between -- maybe it's the Apollo and the Dionysus, the classic and the sort of wild. They do represent two different kind of sides of a person's personality, maybe, in a way. Do you think?

MH: Of course, we don't know anything about the real Marie. Because we can follow what Paul says about her, and of course she is a holy person, and she is --

KC: He calls her a saint, yes.

MH: Yes. We see her never in reality. And of course when he dreams about her, and has this really -- I love this conversation, because she is so clear in this conversation -- and says, hey, our time is over, and that was OK. Go back to life. It's wonderful for a wife to say this. (laughs) Yeah, but of course it's his fantasy, and of course she is very lyric in this scene. But that's also the voice problem. Normally for this -- Marie, Marietta, Marietta, Marie -- you should take three singers, three sopranos. Because Marie is lyric. Then you have the normal Marietta, we see her at the beginning, at the end. OK, it's a little bit coquettish young woman.

KC: Like Musetta, in a way.

MH: A little bit like Musetta. And then you have this monster, Marietta created in the fantasy of Paul. Because he can't manage with the real woman. So his fantasy has to create a kind of monster which he can kill at the end. And there are really moments in the third act around this procession, when you know for sure only one of both will leave this room living. But you don't know, will she destroy him, or will he destroy her? And of course he has to kill this monster. Of course this fiction Marietta seduces him -- mocks, really - - provokes him, destroys him. And so that's then the moment he has to say, OK, I have to kill her. And with her, he kills the death. So that at the end -- and for this Marietta you would need, really, another voice, that's then more a Salome.

DR: Isn't this every man's fantasy? (laughter)

MH: To kill --

DR: To have all of that in one woman?

MH: Yeah. (laughs)


KC: It is an amazing scene, and we don't want to give too much away about how all of that is brought about. But we should probably say that hair has a lot to do with it and maybe leave it at that. I think we should probably give our audience a chance to ask some questions of our people up here. I'm sure you all have things you want to know. Go ahead.

F/UNIDENTIFIED: I know in the libretto that the Meyerbeer opera *Roberto le Diable* [sic] figures into it. So you have Paul kind of acting like a priest who's lording over this sanctuary of his wife. But in the background you have the devil looming, and I'm wondering how that figures into the production, if at all.

KC: Thank you for asking about it. I meant to actually bring this up, because Marietta is appearing dancing in an opera, a French grand opera called *Robert le Diable*, Robert the Devil. And it's interesting how that is portrayed in the opera. Can you talk about that a little bit?

MH: Yeah, first musically, of course, because we have really music from Meyerbeer in this opera, but also in a very strange way. Because it's written in the score, if you find a tenor who can do it, that one of the characters will whistle one of the signals from *Robert le Diable*. The real situation in the fiction is that Marietta missed rehearsal of *Robert le Diable* and then she is really in a good mood, and she will try to rehearse it now and here. OK, that's the real situation in the fiction. And that's close now to the Catholic things Willy Decker brings us. It's of course not a real scene from *Robert le Diable*. It is the fiction from Paul. And he sees then his dead wife, Marie, on the cross. And that makes him really crazy. And that's the point he says, "Sorry" -- he interrupts this, he interrupts his own nightmare. He became himself a part of this nightmare. But we know this, that we see ourselves in dreams. And that's the moment he interrupts, because it is so terrible for him that he can't follow anymore.

KC: It's worth mentioning that in -- I've not not actually seen the Meyerbeer opera, but I have read about it -- there is a scene there where Robert, the devil character, conjures up nuns who were unfaithful to their vows, and who were excommunicated, and they have a kind of a witches' Sabbath. So *Robert le Diable* is an interesting enough opera for Marietta to be involved with in this context. Who else has a question? Down here?

M/UNIDENTIFIED:  We saw the final dress rehearsal on Friday. And it is absolutely magnificent, really. The music, the singing, and the staging in particular, I think it's magnificent. One of my reactions to the symbolism -- and I don't think that it's so much anti-Catholic, or anti-religious, or anti-theocracy or fundamentalism. And I've got to tell you, when you opened the box and the tresses fell out, I felt like jumping up and saying, "Take that, [Sarah Palin?]" (laughter)

KC: I don't think I can really summarize that question, but it does refer to the shrine that contains the plate of Marie's hair, and what happens to that at the end of the opera (inaudible) --

[LM?]: Can you see Russia from there? (laughter)

KC: All right, I'm going to go to the back. I'll come back. But let me go back to the back of the room. Who has questions further back there? All right, you're next then, I guess. Go ahead.

M/UNIDENTIFIED: I like very much your statement about the metaphor of the dead Vienna, or that the opera is a metaphor for Austria. I think it fits perfectly that young Korngold produced that too late, wonderful Romanticism, because the whole of Austria was [sticking?] and still yearning for this glorious Romantic period. And Korngold by himself stuck his whole life with this late Romanticism, providing his wonderful film music. You, as a musician, I have a question. Young Korngold, who did he not harvest in his predecessor's world? I hear Puccini, I hear Wagner, I hear Strauss, and all together is blended, ingeniously blended into this intoxicating music. What do you think as a musician about him, as a composer, so closely harvesting his predecessors?

KC: So, who were the composers that Korngold harvested for his own style?

DR: I think he was clearly a devotee of Gustav Mahler, of Richard Strauss, Puccini. He'd studied all these scores -- he must have been two-and-a-half when he did it. (laughter) While still in diapers, he was checking out the way that Puccini doubles the voice and which instruments are used to double the voice, which is, as you know, a familiar technique. Heavy on upper voices and sparing with lower voices. I think it's a good

question. I think that for everybody, even then, Mozart was the model. His father, we know, made him study the scores of *Figaro*, of *Giovanni*. And it wasn't just, "Look at this great music," it was structure. It was the placing of the denouement, when a climax of an act should come. I think that's one of the most extraordinary aspects of this prodigious work, is -- well, it's not giving away too much that there are two pillars, in a way, in this piece, and they're both the same music. And the way, when the same music comes back at the end that you heard early on -- and literally the music ends the first time you've heard this -- you think about going to a *Don Giovanni* and hearing the Commendatore's music for the first time, and then hearing it later on in the opera, and how different it seems once you've lived the life of this work. And all those sort of things.

So I think in terms of harvesting, it's just astonishing. I hear Respighi in there. I don't think that *Pines of Rome* would be conceivable without this work. It should perhaps be pointed out that, as Kip mentioned, that everybody, everybody was clamoring to get the premiere of this work. Everybody. Which is why it did actually come into a simultaneous premiere.

So who was in turn influenced by this work? Composers coming to this and hearing this young man? And at that stage, he never, as we know, he never ever had the success that he had with this work. While there were those who wrote, "This is reactionary, this is music of yesteryear," it had a phenomenal success, this work. And I think that was the greatest tragedy, was that it came to a young man who was 22, 23, enormously impressionable, where his father still bore down on him. And he never recreated that. And yet, in turn, the surrogate became the film score. His opera -- he couldn't have it in America when he came. So a little like Paul, revering his dead wife, the older Korngold worshipped at the altar of his opera that he'd written. And in every film score, or almost every film score that he wrote for Hollywood, he was still worshipping at the shrine of his beloved opera. And if he couldn't write his opera again, at least he would write something similar to it. Which is why we are all so blessed with some of the greatest film scores ever. And talk about harvesting! Woof! I mean, so many of the composers who then, film scorers, went back to this music and --

KC: I thought of that. Those of you who were at the Opera in the Park, we did a Korngold overture there, and it was *Star Wars*, it was -- you know, John Simon obviously studied at the shrine of Korngold.

DR: But then again, *Star Wars* is in 4/4, and it's very, very easy to conduct. (laughter)

KC: [I bet?]

DR: But what may sound simple to you -- and once again, Lucas will attest to this -- what may sound simple to the ear is in this work immensely complex. The tempo changes in this work, there are no three bars where I'm actually in the same meter. It's from fours to threes to sevens to fives. That whole scene -- I mean, basically it's *Ariadne auf Naxos* on steroids.

KC: Yes, very similar. (laughter)

DR: It's just, you have this group of comedians who are emulating this feeling of an opera within an opera. But it's just breathtakingly dizzying the way these different tempi and different meters fly by. And yet for you, you'll just love it. (laughter)

LM: It's so seamless the way it goes.

DR: Oh, really?

LM: I mean, it's not one of these things where you realize the conductor is trying to cool off the orchestra with his hands. It's like -- stop playing! (laughter) (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) And, yeah, it's just incredibly seamless. Really, what you've got now, the orchestra, it almost seems effortless, even though I see the beads of sweat. It's incredible.

KC: I hate to keep favoring the front row, but you have all the questions down here, so one more question and then we'll be done.

F/AUDIENCE: Since you mentioned we will be reluctant to leave at the end of the opera, are you recording or taping this for later presentation (inaudible) --

KC: Oh, the question is whether we're taping this for a later presentation. We certainly will be radio broadcasting the opera in our coming radio season. As far as future media, I think that sort of remains to be determined. Donald has already recorded this opera elsewhere, but --

DR: But I've already announced to the orchestra, after the final dress, I thanked them, and I told them that neither in Salzburg nor in Vienna did I get this performance. And I did it with a fairly famous orchestra there. And they were fantastic. But what this orchestra has done over the weeks is just astonishing. I'm enormously proud and enormously humbled by the way they've taken this work -- and it's brand-new, obviously, to everyone. But I did not get this level of detail in Vienna, didn't get it in Salzburg. And I would also like to say, ladies and gentlemen, we've talked a lot about Willy Decker. Willy Decker is not here, but he most certainly is here. In the spirit of this work, somebody has not died. Meisje has done an unbelievable job. I was there from the outset of this work. There is in no way a sense of, "A-ha, the original director was not here." This is as cooking hot as you could possibly imagine, and Meisje, fantastic.

MH: Thank you.

KC: Great. We have a lot to look forward to. Thank you all very much. (applause)

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[END AUDIO]