THE OPERA SHOW IS AN AMAZING COMBINATION OF MUSIC AND SPECTACLE. WHERE DID THE IDEA ORIGINATE?

I wanted to present a concert of classical music as a spectacular “MTV style” event. I wondered what would happen if you applied 21st century production values to awe inspiring music which has survived for centuries; music that is full of joy, which raises emotions and transcends time. The idea seemed so compelling to me: great music interpreted in a fresh modern fashion.

SO THIS IS A 21ST CENTURY PRESENTATION OF A CLASSICAL ART FORM. IS THAT WHY YOU CHOSE TO PRESENT IT IN THREE ACTS?

I loved the idea of a triptych concert. I had never worked with three acts, but it gives the show a classical structure, like a ballet or an opera. There is also something intriguing about the form and the opportunity to explore the subject in three different ways. Essentially the audience gets a 3-for-the-price-of-1 deal!

THIS SHOW TAKES THE AUDIENCE ON AN OPERATIC JOURNEY THROUGH TIME. WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

In Act I, the audience is transported to an enchanted Italian garden -- a dreamscape -- populated with kites and confetti, flying birds and a garden of colorful balloons. It is a Baroque folly, conjuring Venice, Paris and the court of the Medici when opera was born. But in this case, it is Baroque with contemporary twist – a la John Galliano! The overall effect I am going for is to infuse opera’s Baroque classical origins with a youthful energy that you would find on the fashion catwalks of Milan or Paris today.

Continued…
THE OPERA SHOW CONTAINS 20 OF THE MOST FAMOUS AND BEAUTIFUL ARIAS AND SOME CONTEMPORARY AND SYMPHONIC MUSIC AS WELL. IT MUST BE INCREDIBLY DEMANDING BOTH VOCALLY AND PHYSICALLY FOR THE PERFORMERS.

Definitely. The challenge is to create a structure, which supports virtuoso vocal performances night after night. It is physically difficult to sustain the voice singing this kind of material. In an opera, a performer doesn’t sing this many arias in one evening. I knew I needed to structure each act so that they have time to recover before having to launch into another major bout of singing. It’s an athletic spectacle – it’s the race of champions, and thrilling to watch every night.

I WAS SURPRISED THAT SOMETHING CALLED THE “OPERA” SHOW ACTUALLY HAS SO MUCH DANCE.

I wanted to incorporate dance because it was a way to visually interpret and animate the arias without diminishing what I consider to be most beautiful music ever written. For example, there is a duet between a dancer and a musician in Act III. The dancer taps the opening drum of Habanera from Bizet’s Carmen and the violinist “answers” the tap with the violin. The result is a battle between the feet and the hand. The violinist is voraciously bowing Bach’s Toccata and Fugue whilst he is furiously tapping and sparks are flying from the floor. It is a wonderful moment of virtuosity between a classical musician and an accomplished dancer. The chemistry is incredible!

THE MUSICIANS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THIS PRODUCTION, DON’T THEY?

Absolutely. They are onstage for the entire evening. The challenge for the musicians is that they have to learn this music by heart. They can’t have any sheet music because they are part of the action on stage as a classical performance group. In modern times, you don’t see a lot of sheet music when you are watching the Rolling Stones!

Musically The Opera Show is quite string oriented – in fact, it is almost a chamber piece. This music is daunting, particularly when you consider there are only 8 musicians. There is a string quartet, two woodwinds, a percussionist and a flamenco guitarist (because every opera should have one!)

THE OPERA SHOW TAKES US THROUGH THE AGES, FROM THE BAROQUE PERIOD, TO POST WAR EUROPE AND PROPELS US INTO THE FUTURE. IT’S LIKE A TIME MACHINE ON STAGE. HOW DO YOU IT?

Smoke and mirrors, darling!

Seriously, there is a lot of “theatre” in this production. The use of dance, video, projection, smoke, fire, pyrotechnics and exceptional costume, lighting and set designs have allowed me to transport the action in unconventional ways. I am engaging the audience by inviting them to interpret that theatrical language for themselves.

Continued…
SO WE GO FROM A BAROQUE GARDEN IN ACT I TO 1940’S EUROPE IN ACT II – WHAT A TRANSITION! IT’S A KNOCKOUT.

I had been reading a lot about Spanish Civil War and thought it would be interesting to set Act II in Madrid just after the Civil War. This was a time of fear -- every day people were afraid of being turned in by their neighbors. And yet, even in the midst of this tense time in history, music gave them hope and joy. So we set this Act during that time in the 1940’s. It opens in the home of a working class family, (played by the five dancers) living in two rooms in Madrid. We see them come home from work, they eat dinner, go out at night, come back drunk -- very simple lives, yet all the time they listen to operas on the gramophone or the radio.

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT GOING ON ABOVE THEM.

That’s right. On the top level of the set, there is a recording studio where elegantly dressed musicians prepare for a recording session. The opera diva, dressed in furs arrives last. The scene is in complete contrast to the one below.

On the lower level, a woman gingerly selects a record, reverently dusts it off and puts it on the gramophone. As the needle drops, the diva above her begins to sing. The family responds to the music with dance. Using the form of a ballet, we see how the music affects the lives of those listening.

It’s my way of telling the story of how music left the opera house, came into the living rooms of every day people and nourished them through hard times.

ACT III THEN PROPELS THE AUDIENCE FORWARD BEYOND THE 21ST CENTURY. WHERE ARE YOU TAKING US?

The question for me was how far could we stretch this glorious music, which has survived centuries outlasting fashions, political regimes and even. Surely, I thought, it could survive a bit of a contemporary twist!

But I don’t want to give away all my secrets. Let’s just say Act III is fueled by futuristic fashion, special effects and digital orchestrations. It is Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Dvorak and Puccini as you have never heard or seen before!

ULTIMATELY, WHAT DO YOU WANT AUDIENCES TO TAKE AWAY FROM THE OPERA SHOW?

In my journey exploring the music and expressing my reaction to it through dance, characters, and theatrical effects, I never expected the response we have had. It has been profound and almost spiritual for some people. I cannot claim to understand why, but the music and the images stay with you and haunt and delight you long after the experience. It all resonates. To be able to make such a connection with an audience is what every artist wants.