



# ‘The Flood’ and ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ Reviews: Premieres in Pursuit of Reinvention

A revitalizing Opera Columbus presents the world premiere of Korine Fujiwara’s time-hopping story of family trauma; Opera Philadelphia continues its overhaul with the North American premiere of a staging of ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ from 1991 that still feels fresh.

## OPERA REVIEW

By *Heidi Waleson*

Updated February 11, 2019 04:15 p.m. EST

### Columbus, Ohio

Korine Fujiwara’s “The Flood,” given its world premiere on Friday at the Southern Theatre by its co-commissioners, Opera Columbus and ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, is a remarkably sophisticated piece of storytelling. Stephen Wadsworth’s libretto is like three-dimensional chess: Four related narratives—from 1913, 1940, 1970 and 2014—unfold simultaneously. They are artfully layered and knitted together by Ms. Fujiwara’s music, and in a taut 80 minutes we come to understand the roots and branches of a century-old family trauma. As Clement (a 2014 character) sings, “My grandma said that flood would never stop drowning people.”

The flood in question is the 1913 inundation that destroyed Franklinton, a riverside neighborhood in Columbus, wrecking thousands of homes and killing more than 90 people. The opera’s 1913 action features Anna, who is dying from injuries she sustained in the flood, attended by her



Naomi Louisa O’Connell, Daniel Stein, Szymon Komasa and Melissa Harvey in ‘The Flood’

husband, William, and their African-American servant, Frances. A century later, Clement’s daughter, Annie, wonders about her late mother’s secrets. Connecting Anna and Annie are the two intermediate vignettes: In 1940, Hans, who was Anna’s lover, and feels responsible for her death and those of his first wife and children in the flood, can’t help unleashing his grief and guilt on his 10-year-old daughter, Schatzi. In 1970, Schatzi is the adult Alice, a psychologist who has spent four years confined in an asylum, grappling with the pain her father passed on to her. Alice was

Annie’s mother and Clement’s wife; Frances was Clement’s grandmother.

Despite its surface complexity, the story unfolds clearly. Charlie Corcoran’s evocative set places four small rooms, each with distinctive period details and colors (and Anita Yavich’s time-appropriate costumes), side by side. David Lander’s lighting and Mr. Wadsworth’s direction deftly shift the focus to whichever narrative is foregrounded at any given moment while subtly indicating how it relates to the others. Ms. Fujiwara’s accessible tonal idiom is similarly coherent throughout. While each “room”



has its own musical personality, the poignant sections in which characters in different periods actually sing together—a trio, a sextet, and even an octet—dovetail perfectly. The dramatic arc builds persuasively to the climactic moments, shifting with increasing speed between scenes to the culminating revelation.

The fine cast included Naomi Louisa O’Connell, who excelled in Anna’s two passionate, hallucinatory arias; Melissa Harvey, whose high, piercing soprano made her believable as the 10-year-old Schatzi; and Szymon Komasa, who was wrenching as the bitter, broken Hans. Amanda Lynn Bottoms brought a richly expressive mezzo to Frances. Kevin Deas (Clement) and Meroë Khalia Adeeb (Annie) shared an appropriately contemporary vibe; Lacey Jo Benter (Alice) seemed uncomfortable when the role ventured into higher territory. Daniel Stein was a careful William, and Robert Kerr and Bill Hafner were the two asylum doctors, both spoken roles.

Conductor Steven Osgood drew a warm sound from the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, which sounded bigger than its complement of 16 players would suggest, and skillfully managed the opera’s complicated vocal choreography.

The company’s energetic general and artistic director, Peggy Kriha Dye, mandated a locally focused subject: The commission is part of her five-year effort to rebuild Opera Columbus into a community necessity after a financial crisis sidelined it for a while. Yet while the place names in the piece—Franklinton, the Scioto Mile, Poindexter Village—may resonate specifically with local listeners, the larger themes, and the inclusion of African-American characters, should give “The Flood” a reach beyond parochial borders.

\*\*\*

### Philadelphia

Opera Philadelphia is well into its own reinvention, with two successful season-opening festivals, O17 and O18, under its belt and a

Ad

