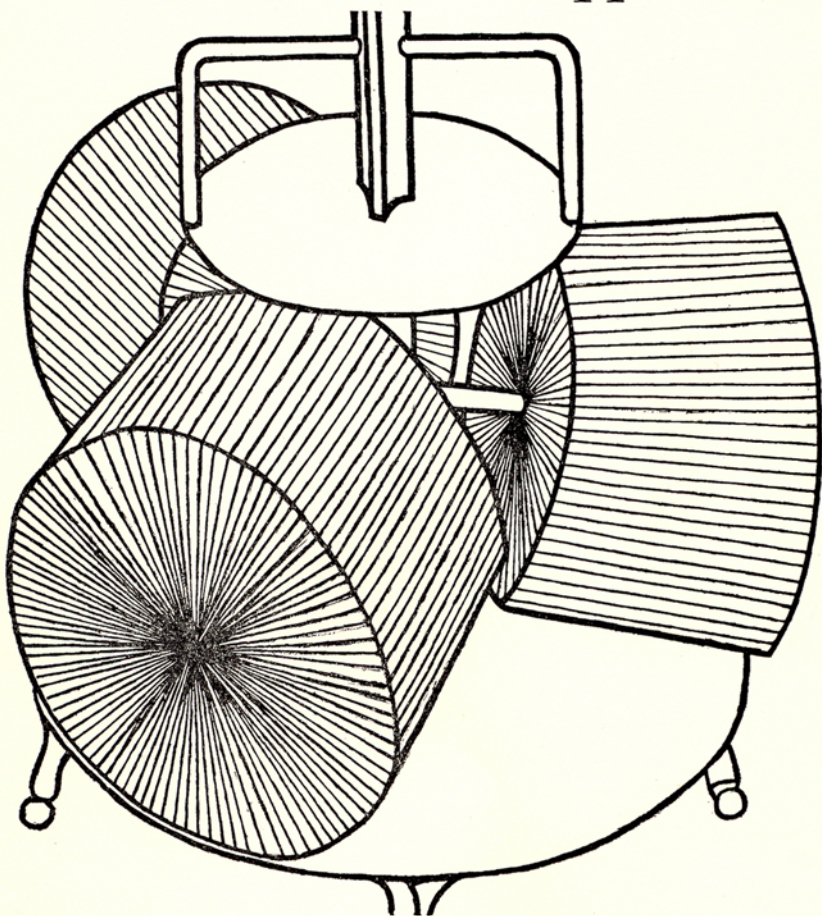


THE *BRIDE* Stripped Bare



By Her BACHELORS, Even.

AN OPERA

by

CHARLES SHERE

Designed, directed, and choreographed by

MARGARET FISHER

Conducted by

MARCELLO PANNI

Produced by

ROBIN KIRCK and DEBORAH O'GRADY

A Workshop Production at

MILLS COLLEGE

November 27, December 1 and 5, 1984

Assistant Conductor, Vocal coaching and preparation:
Christopher Fulkerson.

Assistant to the Director: Larry Neff.

Lighting Design: Nat Fast.

Costume Design: Margaret Fisher and Melody Beylik.

Masks for the Orchestra: Aulia Tisch.

Masks for the Chorus: Beth King, assisted by Mary Ellen Murphy.

Duchamp's Falling Notes: Designed and constructed by Mara Corter.

Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel: Realized by Charles Shere.

Malic Mold: Designed and realized by Jackie Humbert.

Special lighting effects: Kim Swatsler.

Sound Engineer: Toyoji Tomita.

Technical Director: Nat Fast.

Projectionists: Nancy Berry and Tobin Keller.

Master Carpenter: Jerry Carniglia, assisted by Mara Corter.

Wardrobe Mistress: Aulia Tisch.

Stage Manager: Roberta Weir.

Stage Hands: Roberta Weir, Kim Swatsler, Mara Corter, Elizabeth Moore.

Documentation: Violet Murakami.

Construction of the Sets: Mara Corter, Kim Swatsler, Elizabeth Moore, Roberta Weir, Mary Ellen Murphy, Beth King.

Model Theatre Construction: Hank Bergeron.

Production Crew: Patricia Turrigiano, Sue Ellen Monroe, Trisha Kerr, Ursula Cipa, Brian Fergus.

Specialized Assistance: Carniglia-LeGrand Furniture Design; George Coates Performance Works; Night-letter Theatre; Jud Owens; Ma Fish Production Company; Multi-Image Showcase; Robert Hughes; Bassem Elias; Kent Nagano; Richard Zvonar; The Arch Ensemble; Rae Imamura; R. Wood Massi; Marvin Tartak.

THE CAST

Commère, Headlight Child, and Sex Wasp: Anna Carol Dudley and Judy Ruth Hubbell.

Tenor, Heldentenor: John Duykers.

Compère: Barney Jones.

Five Nudes, Nine Malic Molds, Chorus: The Ariel Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, Christopher Fulkerson, *Music Director*; Elizabeth Engan, Barbara Golden, Marcia Gronewold, Marena Lane, Kristin Norderval, Rebekah Levy, Susan Sheldrake, Hannah Jo Smith, Ike Binayos, Ken Cramer, William Halcy, Paul Haverly, Stephen McGaw, Stephen Saxon.

ORCHESTRA

Violin: Nathan Rubin, *Concertmaster*, Adrienne Blackshere, Mary Oliver, Carla Picchi, John Casten.

Viola: Betsy London,* Helen McDermott, Sarah Wilner.

Cello: Ami Radunskaya,* Carla Fabrizzio, Judiyaba, Lucinda Swatsler.

Bass: Ida Bodin.

Flute: Deborah Bachels,* Janet Woodhams, Karen Ottone.

Oboe: Robin May, Claudia Hasegawa.

Clarinet: Larry London,* Tom Rose.

Bassoon: Greg Barber,* Robert Hughes.

Trumpet: Bill Essert.*

Horn: Ross Gershenson,* Richard Burdick, Loren Tayerle.

Trombone: Dan Livesay.*

Bass Trombone: Will Sudmeier.

Tuba: Julian Dixon.

Piano: Rae Imamura.

Harp: Marcella De Cray

Percussion: William Winant, Ward Spangler.

* denotes principal

Special thanks to: Mills College, Steve Weiner, Dean of Faculty; Theatre Department: Howard Malpas and Jim Wright; Music Department: David Rosenboom and Larry Polansky; Audio-Visual Services: Jim Graham; Art Department: Phil Linhares and Joanne Bernstein. Andrew Hoyem, David Lance Goines, Lindsey Remolif Shere, Chez Panisse, Sarah Lutman, Charles Amirkhanian, Mary Hill.

We would like to thank the following individuals and foundations, whose support made this production possible: The National Endowment for the Arts, The L. J. & Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, The American Music Center, Anonymous, Claire Allphin, Samira Baroody, Elmer Bischoff, Margy Boyd, Rena Bransten, Joan Brown, William Brown & Paul Woner, Hilde & David Burton, Joy & Jerry Carlin, Austin Conkey, Dr. Phillip Feiger, Carol & John Field, Betty Freeman, Bonnie Grossman, Dr. & Mrs. Grossman, Lou Harrison, Judy Holland, Yuri C. Mok, John Rockwell, James Schwabacher, Eleanor Sinton, Donald Stanford, Virgil Thomson, Mrs. Phyllis Wattis, William T. Wiley, Donald Yost.

THE BRIDE

Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even

is a painting on glass begun by Marcel Duchamp in 1912, shortly after completing his notorious *Nude Descending a Staircase*, and left definitively incomplete in 1923. The painting is complemented by an extensive series of notes, jottings and sketches Duchamp produced over the same ten years—speculations on color, transparency, language, geometry, and art—written on scraps of paper which were published in facsimile in several installments: *The Box of 1914*, the *Green Box* of 1934, the “White Box” of 1967.

These notes reveal the Large Glass (as the painting is known) to be the depiction of a static moment in the life of a frustrated eros-machine, Bride above (sometimes as bride-motor, sometimes as “sex wasp”), Bachelors below. The latter are the nine “malic” molds, hollow uniforms who secrete a gas which is channeled, filtered, splashed and focussed by a series of mechanical and optical procedures toward the Bride, readying her for the stripping which never, of course, takes place.

I began making this opera in 1964, after seeing a full-scale replica of the Large Glass in the Pasadena Museum’s Duchamp retrospective. My original idea was to leave the opera unstructured, as the Notes were originally published without an imposed sequence. Practical necessity has precluded that idea, and the result is an opera whose performance should be considered as only one of a number of possible solutions.

This is not a conventional opera, though it assumes the resources conventionally available to opera—soloists, chorus, orchestra, dance, the proscenium stage. There is no story plot and very little conventional characterization. I was greatly influenced by the example of Virgil Thomson’s *Four Saints in Three Acts*, but saw the opera as a possibility not only for entertainment but as a sort of workshop in which to attempt an expansive experiment in combined musical textures and procedures. The result is an amal-

gam of conventional and unconventional notation, rhythmic and arhythmic phrases, tonal and non-tonal melody and sonority, and vocally- and instrumentally-dominated sections.

No doubt the opera represents a critic-composer's response to the painting. I wanted to parallel Duchamp's work, though, not exclusively to elucidate it. I have set Duchamp's words, often in my own translation, and have alluded to the events of his painting, but the musical result is not intended to be an analogue, and the stage director is free to follow her own ideas. The repertory of Duchamp images, gestures and attitudes is large and subtle enough to absorb almost any element, random or planned, as relevant to itself.

The opera is very nearly complete, but is performed tonight as a fragment—appropriately, given the nature of its subject, but for practical reasons concerning financing. Opera is enormously expensive, and this opera is unconventional enough to need an experimental shakedown. You will see the whole of the first act, fully staged, and nearly all of the second, in concert form. The program will end with music for the ballet of the Handler of Gravity, from Act III. A full staging of the completed three acts is scheduled for production next July in Herbst Theatre, San Francisco.

SCENARIO

ACT ONE: *Toward the Large Glass*

Scene I: The Box of 1914. Fifteen short speculations: costumes; passages; electricity; mirrors; vision; chance; the bicycle; perspective; skill; chance again; frequency; the pissotiere; the art-ness of painting; separation; and suffering: Duchamp gathering random concepts toward what will be the Large Glass.

Scene II: The Jura-Paris Road. Headlights on the road, 1912: an automobile trip with Apollinaire and Francis Picabia inspires much of the imagery and mechanical metaphor of the Large Glass. (Headlight Child = enfant-phare = en-fanfare = fanfares.)

Scene III: Toward the Title. The axioms of the Large Glass: the waterfall which powers the mill and the illuminating gas secreted by the Molds; rapid and eccentric causality; chance and possibility. And the formative concepts: a hinge picture; a bridge between worlds; relating of similar objects. Finale: the title.

ACT TWO: *The Large Glass*

Scene I: Introduction. Two string quartets and a harp on stage are associated with the Bride; two wind quartets and a piano with the Bachelors. "Litanies of the Chariot" express the tedious bachelor existence.

Scene II: Bachelors. Tenor, compère and men's chorus discuss the color and substance of the bachelors; women's voices hold out a teasing Rhinemaiden promise of energy from outside the Bachelor's limited world.

Scene III: Bride. Sopranos, commère and women's chorus discuss the properties of the Bride as carburetor: the reservoir of love-gasoline, the pulse-needle, the filament substance.

(from Act III) Ballet: Handler of Gravity

The Handler juggles shots from the Bachelors against the laws of gravity. His spasmodic twitchings—like the jerk of the hands on an electric clock—animate the Bride's undressing. There are five slow dances, distantly related to the Sarabande, and one quick. The first is repeated to end tonight's performance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am exceedingly grateful to a number of people and institutions for help and encouragement with this project which has occupied me for twenty years. First, of course, to the late Marcel Duchamp, who kindly consented to the project in the first place, and to Mrs. Duchamp, equally gracious. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, owner of the Large Glass, has been generous in allowing the reproduction of that painting.

Robert Hughes and Charles Amirkhanian have been very supportive of my music over the years, and have been loyal colleagues in sometimes difficult moments. Anna Carol Dudley's singing, Nathan Rubin's violin-playing and Margaret Fisher's dancing have often inspired me, and so has the playing of the Arch Ensemble, who respond so readily to the demands of this kind of music. I am grateful to The Tribune and my colleagues there for an enlightened and generous attitude toward the preoccupied life of a critic-composer, and to the entire musical community for its indulgence of what is occasionally the complicated result.

I have more than one man's share of challenging, interesting and dedicated friends in an amazing variety of life—cooks, painters, patrons, musicians, writers, printers—and I offer this opera to them all as a thing whose virtues are in great measure theirs (but whose faults are quite frankly my own). Finally, of course, none of this would have happened without Lindsey, without whom my life is simply inconceivable.

CHARLES SHERE
November 11, 1984