

Season 1 Episode 5:

“The ‘O’ Word”

Matthew: [00:00:00] Today, we'll be having a conversation with Lori about the "O" word: Opera! Let's boogie.

Lori: [00:00:07] So we're going to talk about the "O" word today. Um, will be opera. No, [ontology's] the other, other, "O" word. Oh, J.W. is coming in clutch. Amazing. You just had that, like, on hand. That's amazing.

J.W.: [00:00:30] I was reading it right before. Matt and I are book twins. Anyway, continue.

Matthew: [00:00:35] And normal twins.

J.W.: [00:00:38] That's true.

Lori: [00:00:41] The premise of this episode, what I really wanted was to kind of do like a beginner's guide to opera, like opera for dummies, you know? I'm pretty sure that that's a trademarked title, so that's why I didn't use it. And also, it's not nice. We don't gatekeep around here, that's bullshit. I also don't know if I'm allowed to say bullshit. I'm sorry. Anyways...

J.W.: [00:01:02] We're gonna have to cut the whole thing now.

Lori: [00:01:06] Ah! All right. So when I was trying to think of how I wanted to do this, I talked to a good friend of mine. He is an opera director and I was like, listen, I don't really know how to go about this, you know, what things to listen to, what to listen for, how to listen to it. It's just, I don't even know where to begin. And he was like, *Well, then don't. Let them decide.* So I said, *Brilliant, Jim.* So that's where I came up with the idea for a fantasy style bracket. I tried to find, so I went ahead and did eight pieces and I tried to get as much variety in terms of eras, time, languages, kind of like a set of sensibilities as I could. And what was great about making this bracket? Actually for me was I noticed the gaps in my own opera knowledge. I was making it and I thought to myself, damn, I really don't know any operas before 1700, do I? So now I, I get to work on that. So that's, that's fun. So since, you know, anyone listening to this is not going to be able to see anything, I'm going to go ahead

and just name off the pieces that are for our consideration today. Oh, and with that bracket, I asked everybody to listen through all eight pieces and then go ahead and have all of them duke it out for the champion spots. So which of the eight pieces came out on top? So we're looking at "**When I am laid in earth**" from Dido, so that's the earliest one I have on here. "**Di timpani e trombe**" from *Agrippina*, Handel, the act one trio from "**Così fan tutte**" by Mozart. We also have the act one finale from "**The Barber of Seville**" by Rossini, "**Va pensiero**," the chorus from *Nabucco* by Verdi. "**The Watch Duet**" as it's colloquially known, from *Die Fledermaus* by Strauss. We have the duet plus chorus, the "**Ave Maria**" from *The Dialogue of the Carmelites* by Poulenc. And then "**I see Forio standing still**," which is from *Marnie* by Nico Muhly. So I tried to give also a variety of arias, duets, small ensembles and large ensembles, just so it wasn't dominated by any one sound. The further back I got the harder it was to find large ensembles because a lot of early opera was very much based in solo singing. So, so yeah, I went ahead and I already did my bracket as an example to show everybody. The idea, not that I thought anybody here didn't know how to do a bracket, but you know, just in case. But yeah, we can actually, we don't have to start with, with me. I would love to hear what other people thought about the selections and which one ultimately won out for you.

J.W.: [00:04:06] I can go. So they were paired up between two arias against each other, then two duets, then two small ensembles, then two choruses. So for the first one, it was "**Dido's Lament**," versus "**I see Forio standing still**," and I had "**Dido's Lament**" winning, 'cause I'm biased. I love, I love that aria. It's like my favorite ever. And then I had "**The Watch Duet**" beating "**Ave Maria**" for the duets. I had "**Ma, Signore**" beating "**Soave sia il vento**" for the small ensembles.

And then I had "**Va pensiero**" beating the Handel one, the choruses. And so then I had, so between, "**When I am laid in earth**" and "**The Watch Duet**", I had "**When I am laid in earth**," and then between "**Ma, Signore**" and "**Va pensiero**," I put "**Ma, Signore**." And then I had "**Dido's Lament**" winning the whole thing, because as soon as I saw "**Dido's Lament**" I was like, *I'm sorry, that just won*.

Lori: [00:05:27] I had some reservations about adding that one, just cause it's like a seminal classic. Like it's, you know, people who

don't listen to opera actively typically know that one. So, but it is, it's gorgeous and loved for a reason.

J.W.: [00:05:41] Yeah, I would have, so like "**The Watch Duet**," it was probably my second favorite, but unfortunately lost in the semis. Um, I'd put that over the Rossini. The hardest one for me was Rossini versus the Mozart one, because those are, those are so [00:06:00] different in character and Rossini, he's just like, I think from the little I know about opera, in my opinion, I've seen, he does comedy better than Mozart, but Mozart has like way more lyrical writing, especially in the duets and trios and small ensembles and stuff like that. But I don't know. I love the staging in the example you put for the Rossini, it was really good.

Lori: [00:06:26] Yeah. I was hoping, I was hoping that I could find that video because that was the first time I'd ever heard it. And I remember just being floored to death by just how good it was. I agree with you on the Mozart and Rossini thing. I've sung both. I've actually done this trio before, and it's the most beautiful piece of music I've ever gotten to sing. It was such a delight. But there's something about like Rossini and the whole bel canto tradition of opera that is [00:07:00] so impressive. Like vocally, it is just, it's like the Olympics for singers. Bel canto opera quite literally translates to "beautiful singing." So the entire point of these operas is to be, like, these death defying stunts of vocality. And it's meant to just be totally impressive, very flashy. And the opera plots, aren't always like lighthearted and fun, I think that they tend to be, there are some tragic ones, but I tend to think that the comedies are like, are very, very fun. Very interesting though, that the earliest selection here won out for you. Were you expecting that? Was it just over when you saw that?

J.W.: [00:07:46] I wasn't familiar with any of the other ones except for "**Ma, Signore**." cause I've seen "**The Barber of Seville**," but I've actually never seen any of the other operas fully on the list. So I was like, *Hmm, this is good*. It was all new. It was, it was sweet. It was exciting.

Lori: [00:08:06] Yay. Awesome.

Matthew: [00:08:11] I wanted to quickly point out. Sorry, Karen. No, you're good. There's a comment on the video for the Mozart

selection that's like, "The director should be shot for ruining one of the most beautiful set pieces in all of opera with some ridiculous direction. Totally out of keeping with the music."

J.W.: [00:08:30] Oh, so funny. I saw that too.

Matthew: [00:08:32] I was dying.

Lori: [00:08:33] They're just, they're just sitting on a bench.

Matthew: [00:08:37] I don't know what the passion comes from.

J.W.: [00:08:39] I just imagine some, like, 65 year old dude, just like typing like one, one letter a minute at his keyboard. Just, like, super mad at this YouTube video.

Matthew: [00:08:52] Douglas Lee. Sorry, Doug. Go, Karen. I'm so sorry.

Karen: [00:08:57] No, it's okay. So my list was exactly the same as J.W.'s.

Lori: [00:09:04] No way! Down to everything?

Karen: [00:09:07] We'll know. My winner was "Tristan [und Isolde," by Wagner].

Lori: [00:09:15] I am confused because that was not on the bracket, Karen.

Karen: [00:09:22] Yes. My bracket was exactly the same up until the winner.

Matthew: [00:09:33] A dark horse.

J.W.: [00:09:34] Came out of nowhere.

Karen: [00:09:39] Because you didn't have, you didn't have it on the list and it should have been on the list.

Lori: [00:09:45] I am very sorry, but you all know my thoughts on Wagner...

Matthew: [00:09:54] He's a white supremacist.

Karen: [00:09:56] He is.

Lori: [00:09:59] Yes.

Karen: [00:09:59] But "**Tristan**" is...

Lori: [00:09:59] It's a very beautiful work, also a classic. Wagner is a monolith in the opera world unto himself. There's quite literally no touching him or his work, which is disappointing to me. The only reason I didn't include it on here, I think, is because I wanted to point some attention at other operas that were happening around the same time. 'Cause he dominates the canon in a lot of ways. And I was just hoping to add something that may have been maybe a little lesser known, or it doesn't get as much attention, but it's just as rich in its storytelling and its musical makeup. But I would love to know more about your process, about how you, how and why you inserted "**Tristan**" into the bracket and it's taking home the gold for you.

Karen: [00:10:57] It's just, I have a massive amount of respect for it because I had to do a piano reduction of it when I was in a harmony class and ever since then, I'm like, It's just, I respect it, the music specifically, and so I'm biased, you know, it's kinda like how J.W. saw "**Dido's Lament**" and was like, *Ah, It's gonna win*. It's like that, it's just an inherent bias.

Lori: [00:11:39] Now say that you didn't insert "**Tristan**" into the winner's spot. Who on the bracket that I made would have taken it?

Karen: [00:11:47] "**Ma, Signore**." So it would be different from J.W.'s.

Lori: [00:11:52] Okay. Yeah, I was a little bit afraid of that. I'm not going to lie. I'm like, *what if I make this bracket and we all end up having the same champion? That is going to be embarrassing!* But I'm already so happy that it is not going that way.

Karen: [00:12:05] I will say though, that bias did like play, more than just me bringing in an outside one, because I did know "**Dido's Lament**". I did know "**Die Fledermaus**." And that played into it. All right. Good stuff. Anyone want to contest and say, *no, this is my winner, and here's why*.

Liv: [00:12:34] Sure, I can share, but I don't think I'm right. I'm not confident in my choices. Anyway. "**Dido's Lament**" was the one I was most familiar with, for sure. So for that reason I did not pick it because I was like, *I want to hear new things*. That's more exciting to

me right now. So I picked "I see Forio standing still" for arias. For duets, "The Watch Duet," small ensembles, Rossini, "Ma signore," choruses, Handel. I thought it was fire. I was like, it's just kind of a banger. Um, okay. The two semifinalists then, I picked "I see Forio standing still" and "Ma, Signore," for a winner of "I see Forio standing still," but I'm a little biased cause I like Nico Muhly.

Lori: [00:13:28] I also like Nico Muhly. So, I'm really, really happy that that ended up on somebody's championship spot. If you still have a working UCLA VPN, you can actually watch *Marnie* on Met Opera on Demand. It is a stunning production from top to bottom. The costuming is to die for, I would do anything to be one of the little shadow Marnies wearing the fabulous colored coats.

Um, so good. It's uh, and it's, um, it is based on the, uh, Alfred Hitchcock movie of the same name. I'm pretty sure it's the same title. Yeah. But it's absolutely stunning and it's a really beautiful, aria for the title character, because she is this woman who is kind of like a con artist and she goes from job to job and jumping from identity to identity, and in this moment she's talking about her horse Forio and how he would never betray her trust and he would never do anything to hurt her. So it's a very humanizing moment for her character. It's very, very beautiful. I'm really, really happy that it came out on top for you.

Liv: [00:14:49] Yeah, I'll definitely watch that. I was very struck by the costume. I just immediately loved her look like before she even started singing so I picked it because it was the one that I would most want to watch even knowing nothing about it.

Lori: [00:15:05] All that makes me really happy. And that is the most recent opera out of the timeline. It was, I believe it premiered in 2017, so that's like, it's very new, super different now. Um, so, and I do, I feel a little bad about pitting Handel against Verdi, the "Va pensiero" versus the "Di timpani e trombe," only because I think "Va pensiero" is just stunningly beautiful. And it's, it's very dramatic. And I think it's kind of what people think of when they think like opera or maybe it's not, I don't know. Maybe that's just what I think of when I think of it. But I felt, I felt like it was a little unevenly matched. So also happy to hear that Handel is getting some representation on the bracket is exciting. And so far we haven't had anyone pick the same winner. So that's also really cool.

Karen: [00:16:10] For the arias, to pit the oldest one and the newest one against each other, just happened?

Lori: [00:16:17] It actually, you know, it's funny. It did kind of just happen like that. Like I said earlier, opera, it's harder to find ensemble singing because it is so based in solo singing. And then as far as the Muhly, it was just, it was just the one piece from the opera that I really, really, really remembered when I was trying to think of something very recent, so it just, it was kind of a coincidence that it happened like that. But I think it's kind of funny that it's like two ends of the opera timeline, um, are now opposing each other. And I was, I was also thought to myself, *Oh, is this unevenly matched as well?* But apparently it's not.

Matthew: [00:16:57] I went into this, you know, I know nothing about opera and I hate opera and I hate old white men. So I was like, this is not going to be a super fun exercise, but it was great. It was actually really fun. I went into it like, okay, I'm going to put myself in the mindset of like the bourgeoisie listening, you know, trying to like self reflect, you know? I had never heard "**Dido's Lament.**" Um, and actually that one lost to "**I see Forio standing still,**" even though I'd never heard of it. It wasn't the same as Liv, who I think chose that because she was more interested in it, even if she didn't, I don't know. I don't want to put words in your mouth anyway. And then, "**Ave Maria,**" I really enjoyed. And then "**Ma, Signore**" and "**Va pensiero.**" So those are my four quarterfinalists. And then, "**Va pensiero**" was the semifinalist between that one and "**Ma, Signore,**" which I thought was very funny, and that's why I picked it. I was like, okay, I get, I'm not laughing at all, but I get like, why it is funny or like humorous. And like, I usually don't in old things. And then "**Ave Maria**" beat Nico Muhly. I liked that one a lot. And that one ended up winning, "**Ave Maria.**" I thought that was really, really interesting and really pretty and really weird, which I love.

Lori: [00:18:41] The video. Is that staging at the end not gorgeous where they all lay down and like take their arms out? Oh my God, that moment gives me chills every time. That full production is also available on Met Opera on Demand with the incomparable Isabella Leonard in the lead role who also plays Marnie in Nico Muhly's *Marnie*. She is amazing. I would do anything for her. It's a very beautiful opera. It's just exquisite. And I love that it is a female

dominated cast. There are very few male singing roles in it, so you get a very large variety and also there are roles for, um, very mature women singers. And that's not always the case, you know, like opera...people like to say, like opera is not like musical theater in the sense that, like, it's not about your looks. It's about the music first and it's about the voice first. I think that that is true to some extent, but I do think that is becoming less true. The further along we get in time, I think opera is starting to take on some of the sensibilities of like, you know, *we want people on stage to look "good,"* so to see, you know, much older women and to hear their voices that have matured, you know, to what people might think is past, you know, singing prime is really, really excellent, and it's a really fantastic production, so I'm also really happy that that one ended up. Any of these could have ended up on top and I would have been thrilled.

J.W.: [00:20:28] Yeah, and that one was like probably my favorite staging wise. The stage seemed really deep. Yeah, which I was expecting and maybe hadn't seen before.

Torrey: [00:20:41] I guess I'm last. I had not heard of any of these pieces cause I also don't really enjoy opera, unfortunately. I only know "**The Barber of Seville**" performed by the one and only Bugs Bunny, so that's unfortunately the extent of my opera knowledge. I liked "**Dido's Lament**," that was really awesome. And then I also really enjoyed "**Ave Maria**." "**Ave Maria**" ended up being one I was choosing between, "Ave Maria" and another one. And then I liked the Mozart a lot, but I'm just biased, 'cause I really like Mozart's sound. And then, Handel also is one of my favorites. So putting up my two favorite guys almost, it was like, *Oh*, but Handel ended up on top and choosing between "**Ave Maria**" and Handel was really hard, but I think I chose Handel just because I like the sound better, but that's honestly just biased.

[00:22:00] So yeah, Handel ended up being the champion for me, but again, I think it's just 'cause, biased just because I love Handel's sound. I love a lot of his work, but "**Ave Maria**" is beautiful in the stage production as we were talking. Oh my gosh. I was blown away when they, like laid on the floor. I was like, *Oh my gosh*. So it was very beautiful. And another reason I liked it is it reminded me of the beginning of *The Sound of Music* when they're in the convent scene together. It's after the beginning credits and they sing in the

church and then it's it's right before "**How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria.**" Okay. Anyways. I think also just, you know, it sounding similar to that was like, *Oh, this is really nice.* So, but all in all, it was really great to learn about opera, about all this stuff I'd never heard of before. So thank you.

Lori: [00:23:18] Yeah, thank you. That's exciting. I don't know if I've told you this before Torrey and if I haven't, I'm sorry for breaking your heart, but I have never seen *The Sound of Music*, so I unfortunately don't know. I'm so sorry, I'm not, I'm not keen on the comparison, but I agree, I feel like [Handel] has a very exciting style. I got to see the opera that this is from, *Agrippina*, in February, right before being able to go and see things was no longer a thing. They actually did a very interesting, like, out of period staging. *Agrippina* is, I believe it's about, like an actual queen. I don't know, but it's based on, like, real stories who might be about real people. It's ancient, it's a totally ancient thing. But what they did is they took it and they upgraded it to be in our contemporary times. So costuming was contemporary, the set was contemporary. Everything looked very much like it came out of 2020. I personally love out of period stagings of operas. I think that they are so neat and the story, it sticks, it's this woman and she's like, I'm going to lie, cheat, scheme, and kill my son's way to the throne and nobody is going to stop me. They're very much, you know, it's a tale about corruption and greed and wealth and, you know, like stepping over people to get to the top. That doesn't sound like anything that we know at all, right? So, to see stories that transcend generations upon generations of time, but still be very relevant to things that we know are that are going on now, and to see them represented in that way that looks very familiar to us, even though the music sounds very dated and very old, I think it's really neat and I really enjoy when, directors and producers can pull that off because I think that there, there are ways to do it not well, and it doesn't communicate, but I don't know, their production worked for me. I thought it was fabulous. So, thank you all. Thank you all for sharing your champions. I'm really excited that no one's champion was the same as anybody else's if I recall, and mine will not ruin that. So when I decided to do my bracket, so for the arias, what came out on top was "**I see Foria standing still,**" like I said, "**Dido's Lament**" is a classic and I do love it. You guys know that I am all for that new music stuff, so, and I'm a big fan of *Marnie*. And then out of the

duets, this was tough. I love "The Watch Duet" from *Fledermaus*. *Die Fledermaus* is an operetta, so it kind of lives, you can kind of say it lives in like a halfway house point between musical theater and opera. Although I kind of think that like opera and musical theater as umbrella terms are silly, um, but more on that. Maybe some other times, um, I've also performed in *Die Fledermaus*. It's very fun. It has spoken dialogue. And so it's akin to a musical in that way, but all of the vocal stylings and all of the musical sensibilities still align with opera. I had to go with the "Ave Maria" just because that particular staging is just so stunning in its simplicity. And it's also just a beautiful opera and it's a really beautiful moment. When it came down to the small ensembles between "Ma, Signora" and, "Soave sia il vento," I had to go with the Mozart. I sung this trio before, like I said, and it is just some of the most beautiful music and Mozart really knew how to write for singers and it just had so much beautiful, lyrical quality to it. It might be one of my favorite opera trios of all time. Um, the large ensemble chorus was a no brainer for me. I love "Va pensiero" so much, not to say that Handel does not absolutely slap, he does, love *Agrippina*, but "Va pensiero" is just extra beautiful, very powerful and very rich as far as storytelling goes as well. So that gets me down to, I would just say my semifinalists, were "I see Forio standing still" and "Soave sia il vento," and I had to go with Mozart, my trio, "Soave sia il vento." I just really, really love this trio so much. Very beautiful and shout out to Mozart, if you're listening to this, big fan. Now that we've all shared our brackets and thoughts, does anyone else have anything else they'd like to say about any of the pieces or any questions or anything that you want to discuss further? As we've got time.

What are the current trends in opera?

Lori: [00:28:55] Current trends, you know, that is a question that I personally feel I have no authority to answer. Emily Spitz just saying, "feminism." Yes, I would say, so the paper that I wrote for MUSE this last quarter about *The Exterminating Angel* by Thomas Adès was really pushing this idea that a lot of things that are cinematic are starting to make their way into opera in a big way. So some of it is starting some new operas kind of sensationalized in that way. It's like it's trying to be bigger and grander and more advanced technologically than it was before, which also means that the boundaries of staging, the boundaries of the voice, the

boundaries of music, and the boundaries of instruments and standard orchestration for opera are all being challenged and being pushed. So, the sensibilities and the stylistic tendencies of now is, it's really hard to know what to expect because people are also, you know, taking those expectations and pulling them down and tearing them down everyday too. I've seen some really interesting productions in the last couple of months. Some are being staged outdoors. Some are starting to incorporate multimedia elements, such as projection work...that's kind of the one that I can think of, is a lot of projection work is starting to make its way into staging that I'm seeing. So I think that people are trying to really be unconventional and kind of push what opera means, what it means to us and what it will mean to us going forward.

Karen: [00:30:48] So I've never seen *The Barber of Seville* and I didn't look it up cause I wanted to ask this question. Is it a pirate opera?

Lori: [00:30:57] No.

Karen: [00:31:00] That makes me sad.

Lori: [00:31:02] I'm sorry. I'm so sorry to disappoint. If you want a pirate opera, *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan is fun. They're a British duo who did some fun operettas. *Pirates of Penzance* does fall into the same kind of category that *Die Fledermaus* does, so also very fun. So, *The Barber of Seville* comes after Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* and in *The Marriage of Figaro*, we have a count who tells his servant Figaro, like, "Hey, I'm going to have sex with your wife tonight, because I can," and Figaro said, "Okay, bet," so he tells his wife and Figaro, his wife, Susanna and the Countess who is married to the count, all come up with this very elaborate scheme to totally embarrass the count and turn him, you know, make him fall flat on his butt in front of everyone. And that was a big thing for opera around this time. It started to become less about entertaining the aristocrats and it started to become about also entertaining, like regular people. There's a name for this, I think, I don't remember the name for it right now, but it's just this idea of like, starting to move away from things that only catered to the entertainment sensibilities of aristocracy. So, uh, *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart totally is making fun of like rich folks, absolutely making fun of them, but in a way that's very subversive,

so they don't totally realize that they're being made fun of. So they still throw all their money into it and be like, *Oh yeah, it's all very good*. People who are, you know, who are like Figaro and his wife are like, they're in on the joke. So it's very clever in that way. But what *The Barber of Seville* is, is that it's effectively story-wide, even though musically, it comes later after *The Marriage of Figaro*, it is a prequel to *The Marriage of Figaro*. It is a story of how the count and Figaro meet. And it is the opera where the infamous "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro" comes from. So, no, not a pirate opera, but still pretty fun. No, Karen says no, we're not about it. Only pirate operas. They exist also. Well, I don't know if *Bluebeard's Castle* is really a pirate opera, but it might be, I've never seen it by Bartók. So if you, yeah, if you want some weird, like, really super heavy dramatic, and it's actually pretty short too, so, uh, yeah. Or *The Flying Dutchman* by Wagner. That also kind of lives in that pirate realm. So since I know that you're a Wagner stan now, or at least a Tristan stan.

Karen: [00:34:02] Unfortunately, I am a Wagner fan.

Lori: [00:34:05] That's okay. I forgive you. Oh, someone's screen-sharing my own comments on the "Ave Maria" video. Yes. *"So exquisite, so simple."* It's true. It's such a small, simple gesture, but it just is, it just takes my breath away every time I see it. You couple that with that beautiful French music and I am just sold.

J.W.: [00:34:33] I was so excited. I didn't even, I saw this comment yesterday when I was, like, listening to it, but I wasn't looking at names at all. And then I came back and I was just scrolling and I was like, wait, that's Lori with 10 likes on a YouTube comment.

Lori: [00:34:53] I guess you could say, I'm famous now. A lot of these, a lot of the productions that I have seen are done by the Metropolitan Opera, just because when I was still a student at UCLA, they had access to, they give you access to Met Opera on Demand and the Met Opera House has a lot of issues, and a lot of problems, do not get me wrong, like a lot, but they are the premier opera house in the world. They are. And their productions are typically really top quality and they obviously have a ton of money, so they can really pump out some very, like, visually just, absolutely impressive work. Musically, you know, it's, it can be here and there. It depends on who's conducting, who's directing. It really

takes a village to get a full scale opera onto the stage. There's a lot of people who go behind it. So that is certainly not a one man island, even though sometimes when we're listening to it or watching it, we just see the opera stars up there and we're like, wow. Um, but there was an entire crew of people behind the scenes making it all happen, pulling it together to make the vision happen. And I think that, you know, opera is really interesting because it is, you know, in this way, it kind of suspends reality, but also very much critiques reality. And that's all it's ever really done. Throughout history, it encapsulates pop culture. As much as anything else that we consider commercial or contemporary, it is always critiquing, and making commentary on things that are relevant at any given moment throughout time. So, that's why I said in the prompt that I think opera is a very overgeneralized, like, umbrella term, but I don't think that it deserves to be because as you can see from this roster of just these eight pieces, opera is very diverse. It has a lot of variety, and it's always saying something different from the next. So I, you know, I don't know what you can call it. You know, it may be destined to live under that umbrella term of "the 'o' word," you know, for the rest of time, who knows. But even more now with the standards being challenged and pushed all of the time, you know, might start to see some new terms and new ideas emerge. I'm talking a lot, somebody else say something.

I love when you speak about opera, that's why I'm here to learn.

Thank you. I appreciate that. I do. I do like to talk about it a lot, which is why I'm making you all do it too. And if nothing else I'm really.

Karen: [00:37:54] Oh, sorry. I was just going to say, I think that the Met broadcasts once a week on Sundays. I'm not sure if it's through NPR. But I think my grandma listens every Sunday.

Lori: [00:38:09] Oh, that's wonderful. Does your grandma have any favorites?

Karen: [00:38:17] I'm sure she does.

Lori: [00:38:20] I think that you're right. I think so. They do. And lately since the shelter in place and the pandemic has started, they've also been, they have been streaming for free on there, on The Met on Demand website as well. So you don't even have to

have a membership or subscription or anything to watch their weekly or nightly live streams. And then I believe PBS as well. They have the Great Performances at The Met series, so you can watch their full productions for free. If you have access to public cable. I would also like to give a plug to non-major opera houses. I talked a lot about The Met today, because that's where a lot of these clips that I've gotten are from, but there are a lot. And I mean, a lot of opera's being written constantly. I think that sometimes there's this an idea that opera is dead. It is not dead. It is just changing very, very rapidly to the point where it's almost unrecognizable as like, as opera. And that's kind of what's exciting about it. And indie opera houses are very much keeping people interested, and they're also utilizing the main feature of like, what's keeping, you know, we can't go to live performances right now, but I've been watching a lot of filmed performances, through these independent opera companies, Beth Morrison Projects comes to mind, The Industry, which is an LA-based company. I know that there's also an independent company in San Diego that, or the San Diego Opera does program like one or two new works a season, which is fantastic because not everybody does that. I think they ought to, but I think keeping an eye on new opera and opera that is not going to be in the standardized canon any time soon, or maybe ever, is a really good place to keep your eyes and your ears, because if you want to know where it's going, that's, that's how you're going to know. Shoot, I'm planning on it. I'm trying. San Diego, here I come, maybe. We'll see. But yeah, and I also have a Google Drive of some free recorded performances from aforementioned independent companies, if anybody would want a piece of that. So I've got a couple. Ask and you shall receive. I haven't been able to watch a lot of them yet, just because I haven't been thinking about it as much. There was, they were going to do an opera called *Angels and Bone* at LA opera, and I was going to go see it, and then they were like, it's canceled and I wept and then, but then they actually streamed it, but I was so afraid of the visceral nature of the content that I actually put it off. It's not available to watch anymore. So, if anyone ever figures out that plug, please hit me up.

Matthew: [00:41:32] Can confirm that Lori was talking about it for years going to see it. And then it was canceled.

Lori: [00:41:40] I was very excited about it. I wanted to see it really bad.

Have you checked Reddit per chance?

Cause when, when I need theater things, I always find them on Reddit. It's delicious.

Oh, I didn't see. I didn't even think about checking Reddit, so thank you. Oh my gosh. Um, yeah, we're getting to the end of the hour here. So please, if anyone has any more things that they want to say about anything, really.

Torrey: [00:42:13] I'm actually interested in Emily's question that, um, that she put in the chat, um, I think that sounds really interesting. I feel like you're the perfect person to ask.

Lori: [00:42:26] Okay. "Do you think opera will die because donors keep us locked in the canon or do you think major companies will successfully start to do more contemporary works and getting younger audiences? I want people's hot take on this." Amazing. I think that Emily has a point that yes, the people who keep opera houses, major opera houses running are typically wealthy white donors, and they want to see...

J.W.: [00:42:51] You forgot old.

Lori: [00:42:53] Yes, they are old. They are typically, so, you know, I think a lot of what keeps the opera feeling inaccessible to young people like us too is, the fact that it's dominated and controlled by people who are older than us, typically have more money than us, and look differently than we do. So, you know, and they have the hold on what, you know, they want to see. And they're like, *if you don't do it, I'm not going to give you my money anymore*. And opera houses rely on that. So, I do think Emily is absolutely correct. I think that some places are already starting to do the good thing of at least trying to program one new work a season. Even The Met is doing a better job. Like this upcoming season was going to have *Dead Man Walking* by Jake Heggie, which is very, very compelling and also a premiere of an opera, *The Fiery Angel*. These are not normally things that they would probably do. And they also premiered *The Exterminating Angel*. I like to think that they are going to start getting more invested in contemporary works. I think

that their donors are going to be pissed off, but they have to be thinking forward. Opera is moving forward. So the institutions that keep it in place have to move forward too, they don't really have a choice. And if they don't then, you know, go under. I guess, you know, and I, again, I applaud independent opera companies too, because they are the people who are most interested in doing the new stuff and they are, their audiences are definitely the younger set, as far as I know, and as far as I can see, I think that it's good to get familiar with the canon and like very standard works that you see performed all the time, but the new stuff is what's exciting to me at least. So what do you guys think if you do, if you think at all?

Liv: [00:45:05] I don't think, but the new stuff I'm, I'm into that. The little I know about opera, I think was spurred by an initial interest in contemporary opera.

J.W.: [00:45:20] I feel like, at least for me, the benefits of like getting to know, and this goes for like Western concert music in general, is like getting to know the historical stuff. It just like makes your experience of the stuff that's going on now, like way better, because you like, kind of get the context which they're coming from. So yeah. Canons are odd, but. It just, I mean, just from like a consumption viewership standpoint, it makes, I think just makes the overall experience more enjoyable. And it's like fun. Just kind of like diving into, like, even though I'm not gonna defend canons at all, but it just makes, it's just fun to like find out new things at base, and there are structural problems that need to be addressed, obviously, but that was kind of, when I was first getting into, like, it was mostly like symphony concerts and stuff like that. It was the same sort of deal. And then I feel like, like when I'm approaching or when I had approached learning about opera in the past, it was similar to like, okay, just like watch all these staples and then get to know all the cool stuff. And then you realize that like, Oh gosh, these, we got to diversify like crazy, but it's like a necessary step. A lot of the time, which is unfortunate.

Matthew: [00:46:41] So I don't see the problem with letting opera, like there's no danger of opera being forgotten about like the amount of scholarship and resources that go into like preserving what we already have, or like, what we already know about the past and the history of opera and all the manuscripts that we have, it's like, there's no danger of that being lost. So the, the, the kind of

fascination with like, make like, *Oh, opera is dying*. It is dead. Like you're, you're, you're holding up a corpse on stage, you know, like these, this is the current...the canon we're talking about is not a living tradition, which doesn't mean it's not important, but again, I think there's no risk of it being totally forgotten about. There's just no need to have it be a living tradition except that old people want to watch this stuff. They already know. Yeah. So for me, it's like restoring a house. Like I like what J.W. said, like...now I forgot what he said, but I liked something that J.W. said, but it's like restoring a house. It's like old buildings in San Francisco, for example. A lot of them are torn down and replaced, because people think they're ugly or something, but also because like, structurally, they will not stand if there's an earthquake, like they're not safe to live in anymore. And so, you know, there's no risk of losing that architectural information, but we also don't need it anymore. 'Cause it builds houses that kill people. I think that's a really good metaphor for thinking about it. It's like, it doesn't need to be a living tradition anymore. You don't need to keep it alive in order to preserve it. You can build the new stuff and keep people safer or, you know, have people live better lives. Within that, I also think it's interesting. I'm going to totally mangle this, but there's like something in Japan, like every, every few decades they would rebuild the temples in the city square or something, to preserve the knowledge of how to build them, so they would just take it apart and then build it up again exactly the same way. So they never forgot how to do it exactly the right way. And it's a little bit like that. Like you can make something a living tradition by doing that, but it requires tearing the whole thing down and then rebuilding it again, you know, rather than, I don't know, putting in new supports to hold it up.

Lori: [00:49:39] Hmm, no, that's really, that's really interesting. Cause I didn't, I didn't really think of it like that, but it makes me think if we, you know, if we treated this like a house that needs to be torn down to continually remember how to rebuild it, then what comes, you know, what becomes of opera? Does it become, do we just keep writing the same things and presenting the same things over and over again? Or will there continue to be new and like boundary pushing things that make you even question what opera is or what, what can fall under that term?

Matthew: [00:50:16] Yeah. I mean, for me, it comes back to something I think Elizabeth Le Guin said about how, you know, the people who were listening to these operas when they were being written were like, so sick of all the old stuff, they were like, *Oh, that's, that's already, that was a year ago. Like that sucks. We're already onto the new thing.* And now we're like, *No, we need to only listen to that stuff.* You know, they were already over it. It's like 200 or 300 years later and we're like, *Oh no*, you know, like we're listening to it in a way that they totally did not listen to it at all.

Lori: [00:50:48] No, that's true. And I also like, even the difference between the *Poulenc*, which was 1954 and the movie, which is 2017, it's like night and day. To me, at least, like when I looked up when the, when *The Dialogue of the Carmelites* was written, I was shocked that it was written in the 20th century. I was actually surprised because to me it sounded older, whereas the Muhly sounds very new. Like that sounds like it was certainly three years ago to me. Um, so, you know, I think that, you know, and like the, just the difference in before, you know, like it could take a composer's entire life for the aesthetics and the sensibilities and the qualities of the music to change and be something completely different. And now it takes a matter of a few years for something to sound completely different than anything else.

Matthew: [00:51:45] And for me, Lori, like you are the person who could keep a tradition alive of opera. Like you're the only person I've met that is so interested in contemporary opera. I mean, I don't meet a lot of people who are interested in opera at all, but like, that's really important to like, you know, you don't keep it alive by doing the same thing over and over again for 400 years. You keep it alive by progressing and by staging new productions and writing new works and...that's living, you know, it's not a living tradition to keep, you know, doing Wagner every, every season. It's a living tradition to create new stuff. So I feel like you, you're a really good person to lead that charge. I mean, maybe it's already being led, but you know, yeah. This is a great, great topic. Thank you. I'm editing all the parts out that I've talked in. So don't, don't worry about this point.

Lori: [00:52:45] Oh, please do not do that. No, this is, I think this is probably a good place to, to end too. We've, it's already past three, but gosh, I want to thank you all so much for being here. I was

really, really excited to do this and I was really happy with the interactive listening, like kind of prompt going into this. I think that, hopefully it excited you about opera and it made you maybe think differently about it or your relationship to it or what you could have with opera, maybe change, and if it didn't, then it's okay. I still don't feel like it was a waste of time. Thank you all very, very, very much for participating. This was so fun.

J.W.: [00:53:30] Thank you, Lori.

Liv: [00:53:33] Thank you so much.