

FROM VOLCANO (CANADA):

A SYNONYM FOR LOVE

A co-production with Toronto's Classical Music Consort



photo of Scott Belluz and Tracy Smith Bessette by John Lauener

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a site-specific staging of a 3-character Handel opera about love and betrayal, designed to be installed in a boutique hotel. The audience buys a ticket for a specific character, and follows that character throughout bedrooms and hallways and stairwells. A new libretto in English keeps the love triangle theme, but subverts it for a 21st century audience by adding a bi-sexual twist. The show runs 90 minutes, no interval. There are 3 singers and 14 musicians.

It sold out its premiere run in Toronto, and garnered rave reviews:

"an unqualified success... a beautifully sung, nicely played mix of reality and fiction, opera and art installation that flowed so smoothly as to belie the intricate and fragile logistics that kept it moving forward... This is one of those must-see shows..." – **Musical Toronto**

"sexy, stylish... a hip contemporary look at an open gay female relationship and what happens when one of the partners sets her sites on some male amusement... authentically delectable" — **The Toronto Star****** 4 stars (out of 4):

"A modern sensibility and gorgeous melodies. It's the most original show in town." — **NOW Magazine** NNNN 4 Ns (out of 5)

The History

In 1707, at the age of 22, a young genius named George Frideric Handel moved from Germany to Italy, and composed a cantata for three singers called *Cor Fedele* (*The Faithful Heart*). This piece served as a laboratory in which Handel experimented with diverse musical and dramatic forms. It was a remarkable new direction, but the cantata was never performed publicly in Handel's lifetime. After Handel's death in 1759, it was thought lost to history.

In 1960 a single complete copy was found in a private library in Germany. Nearly three hundred years after it was written, this remarkable work by a young genius, received its world premiere in London, England, in 2000.

This production marked its Canadian premiere as a staged work.



photo of Emily Atkinson by John Lauener

THE ORIGINAL

Cor Fedele (also known as *Clori, Tirsi, e Fileno*) centres on the theme of love. The piece, written in Italian, charts the course of a love triangle between two shepherds (Tirsi and Fileno) and a shepherdess (Clori). In Handel's version, the parts are usually sung by two sopranos and a counter-tenor, with one of the women pretending to be a man (a common conceit in opera of that era).

The object of the men's love (Clori) is unable to decide between them. The men alternately foreswear her, and fall back in love with her. Much poetry ensues. In short, it's a mess – a delightful, painful, glorious exposé of the human heart. At the end, they all agree on the inevitability, and impossibility, of love.

OUR VERSION

Three guests are staying at the historic Gladstone Hotel in Toronto - one of the most beautiful boutique hotels in the city. A woman orders drinks. The man with her goes to check on their room. Another woman – who has just checked in, and who also happens to be the first woman’s partner – sits hidden in a corner – spying and seething.

This is the beginning of our love triangle. In our version, the two sopranos remain women – one is gay, one is bisexual. The man is straight, and desperate for commitment. Everyone is at the same hotel. They all sing like angels.

The audience is initially seated at tables scattered through the ballroom, and – as the opera progresses – they follow a specific singer through the hotel. “Staff” will guide them from location to location, as they pursue their character:

Clori - soprano. The object of affection. Bisexual. Hard to pin down.

Phil - countertenor. Making his move. Straight. Sings like an angel.

Theresa - soprano. Loyal. Gay. A fireball.



photo of Tracy Smith Bessette by John Lauener

The opera is sung in a new English version by award-winning writer, and internationally recognized theatre maker Deborah Pearson. This libretto is created specifically for the production at the Gladstone setting. The score has been rearranged so that each of the three audience tracks will allow for every audience member to understand the whole story, but to spend more time with one character, and thus be immersed in that character’s point of view. The audiences meet whenever there are duets or trios, or whenever one character is eavesdropping on another. These scenes happen in stairways, in bedrooms, in hallways. The finalé will occur back in the ballroom (the same room from the beginning of the opera), where a truce of sorts is made, with each other, and with life.

ARTISTIC TEAM:

Composed by | George Frideric Handel

New Libretto by | Deborah Pearson

Music Direction by | Ashiq Aziz

Stage Direction by | Ross Manson

Starring | Emily Atkinson, Scott Belluz, Tracy Smith Bessette

Scenic Design by | Julie Fox

Production Manager, Technical Director, and Lighting Designer | Douglas J. Morum

Orchestra | Classical Music Consort

**PROFILE: VOLCANO**

Volcano is a Toronto-based, concept-driven, independent company characterized by formal experimentation, risk-taking and multi-disciplinarity. It has won or been nominated for over fifty awards at the local, national and international level.

Volcano has been called “the best independent theatre company in Toronto” (NOW Magazine), an “explosive company” (The Independent, UK), and “one of those companies that every great theatre city needs - bold, experimental and bubbling with ideas.” (Toronto Star).

Recent shows include *A Synonym for Love* (Toronto); *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* (Premiere Production: Edinburgh, Toronto); *The Four Horsemen Project* (Toronto, Berlin, Dublin, Ottawa, Vancouver, Victoria); *Goodness* (Toronto, Edinburgh, New York, Winnipeg, Victoria, Vancouver, throughout Ontario and across Rwanda); and *Another Africa* (a 3-continent collaboration, which premiered as *The Africa Trilogy* at the Luminato Festival, and went on to the Canadian Stage Co. in Toronto).



photo of Scott Belluz and Tracy Smith Bessette by John Lauener

PERFORMER BIOGRAPHIES:



“THERESA”: SOPRANO EMILY ATKINSON is an American singer based in London. She earned a degree in music education from the Crane School of Music in New York before studying singing at the Royal College of Music, London. Emily has been heard on BBC Radio 3’s ‘Early Music Show’ as an oratorio soloist with the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge and Florilegium and on ‘In Tune’ with her vocal quartet The 1607 Ensemble, with whom she has

also appeared at several festivals throughout Europe. She has sung solo roles in Handel’s *Messiah* and *La Resurrezione*, Bach’s *Mass in B Minor*, *St John Passion* and *St Matthew Passion*, and Haydn’s *Die Schöpfung*, and is a regular soloist with London’s Sweelinck Ensemble for their Bach cantatas series. A highlight of working in London has been the opportunity to perform several recitals of baroque chamber music at the Handel House Museum, in the very room where the great composer once rehearsed.



“PHIL”: COUNTERTENOR SCOTT BELLUZ: Praised as "gifted and impressive" (*Globe and Mail*), countertenor Scott brings his impeccable musicianship and dramatic versatility to repertoire ranging from 17th Century to newly composed works. He has received great acclaim for his "brave vocal performances" (*Toronto Star*) in the world premieres of numerous Canadian operatic works with Tapestry New Opera, Soundstreams, Chants Libres and most recently in

the dance/opera *From the House of Mirth* choreographed by James Kudelka for Coleman Lemieux Compagnie. Scott has also performed lead roles with Pacific Opera Victoria, Chicago Opera Theatre and Underground/Opera. On the concert stage, Scott recently performed in the Stratford Festival's *Night Music* series with the trio Music in Common. Other recent concert performances have included appearances with the Aradia Ensemble, the Thunder Bay Symphony and the Classical Music Consort. Scott is a featured vocalist on the Juno nominated CD *Salsa Baroque* with Ensemble Caprice. Upcoming engagements include: Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* with the Aradia Ensemble, Handel's *Orlando* with Opera in Concert and an evening of the music of Henry Purcell with Toronto Masque Theatre.



“CLORI”: SOPRANO TRACY SMITH

BESSETTE: Celebrated for her radiant warmth and clarity of expression, Ms. Smith Bessette is sought after for both the concert and the opera stages. Recent engagements include a concert of Rameau arias from *Dardanus* with Bernard Labadie and the New World Symphony in Miami Beach and the role of Janthe in Marschner’s *Der Vampyr* at the Lanaudière Festival. Ms. Smith Bessette also specializes in early music performance and has worked with many world renown conductors

and ensembles including Hervé Niquet (Le Concert Spirituel), Marc Minkowski (Les Musiciens du Louvre Grenoble) and Kevin Mallon (Aradia Ensemble) with whom she has recorded three CDs for the NAXOS label. Educated at the Universities of Calgary and Toronto, Ms. Smith Bessette also trained with the Atelier lyrique de l’Opéra de Montréal and the Centre de formation lyrique at the Opéra de Paris. After completing her Master’s in Early Music performance at McGill this May, she will continue her studies in the Doctorate of Music program next Fall.

CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES:



LIBRETTIST: DEBORAH PREASON is a live artist, playwright and producer. She is founder and co-director of the multi-award winning Forest Fringe, an artist-led network committed to fostering a safe space to show work at various stages of development at the Edinburgh Festival. Her creative practice spans playwriting, solo performance, devising, dramaturgy, and community and public art projects. She is committed to being formally inventive with every project she takes on. Deborah has been a resident artist with Rules and Regs, and is an

alumni of the Royal Court Invitation Young Writers Programme (UK), the Tarragon Playwrights Unit (Canada), the Banff Playwrights Colony (Canada), and the Traverse Young Writers Programme (UK). She has also run workshops for Central School of Speech and Drama (UK), the University of Toronto Department of Ethics, Volcano and Queen’s University (Canada). She is currently a member of the Battersea Arts Centre’s Artist Teacher Exchange Programme where she is working with Stuart Silver to develop a piece of performance with the Burntwood School for Girls.



CONDUCTOR: ASHIQ AZIZ: Ashiq, “young firecracker” (*Toronto Star*) is a conductor and harpsichordist committed to producing thought-provoking, historically informed performances of music from the Baroque and Classical periods. Artistic director of Toronto’s Classical Music Consort and its Underground /Opera series of edgy and engaging productions of 18th century dramatic works, Ashiq’s work as a guest director has taken him to the US, UK, and Sweden. Recent engagements with the

CMC have included the Canadian premiere of Haydn’s *La Fedelta Premiata* for Opera in Concert, Handel’s *La Resurrezione* and *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, as part of its 2010 and 2011 Springtime Handel Festivals, and a complete cycle of Haydn’s London Symphonies. Along with the multi-disciplinary performance company Opera Erratica, he has produced three Underground /Opera productions, of Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, and *Orlando Lunaire*, an originally conceived site-specific piece interweaving movements from Handel’s *Orlando* with Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*. Educated at Upper Canada College, the University of Toronto, and the Royal College of Music, London, Aziz has studied period performance direction with Andrew Parrott, Laurence Cummings, and Adrian Butterfield, conducting with Raffi Armenian, Peter Stark, Ivars Taurins, and Paul Spicer, and harpsichord with Terry Charlston and Charlotte Nediger.



STAGE DIRECTOR: ROSS MANSON is an award-winning director, and the founding artistic director of Volcano, an internationally acclaimed theatre company based in Toronto. Over the past 19 years, Ross has directed over twenty shows for Volcano, which have toured around the world, and won or been nominated for over fifty local, national and international awards (including Dora awards for Ross as a director, a play-maker and a co-producer), a KM Hunter Award for his body of work as a theatre artist, a Harold award for

arts community service, and the Best of Edinburgh award for his production of *Goodness*, by Michael Redhill). He has also directed for various companies across Canada, as well as in Helsinki (Svenska Theatre) and in Munich (BeMe). Ross was recently a finalist for Toronto’s Rita Davies and Margo Bindhardt Cultural Leadership Award; the Ontario Premiere’s Award for Excellence in the Arts; and the 2010 Siminovitch Directing award. Ross trained in England at the University of London (MA in Theatre, specialty in Directing), in Germany (Directing apprenticeship, Stadttheater Freiburg), and in Canada (Banff School of Fine Arts and Mount Allison University).



SCENIC DESIGN / JULIE FOX: Since graduating from the National Theatre School in 1994, Julie Fox has worked as a set and costume designer for theatres and dance companies across Canada, including the The Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Canadian Stage Company, NAC, Soulpepper, Tarragon, Manitoba Theatre Centre, The Citadel, Theatre Junction, Theatre New Brunswick, The Grand Theatre, MoonHorse Dance Theatre, Chartier Danse, Susanna Hood/hum and Volcano. She has received three Dora Mavor Moore Awards for outstanding set design, and has been nominated many times. She has taught at Concordia and The National Theatre School.



TECHNICAL DIRECTOR / LIGHTING DESIGNER DOUGLAS MORUM: Over the years Doug has been a Production Manager and Technical Director for many theatre companies around Toronto including but not limited to: Obsidian Theatre, Human Cargo Theatre, Modern Times Theatre, Queen of Puddings, The Company Theatre, Pleiades Theatre, Theatre Panik. Doug also works as the PM/TD for George Brown Theatre School.

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For more information, and to look at video from the project, visit www.volcano.ca



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