

03: Do we still need opera?

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Approaches to opera. Of all things, a genre that not only has more than 500 years under its belt, but also looks pretty old. Its audience anyway. It is dying out, they say. And since opera lovers are generally considered to be conservative, better-off and also a bit snooty, that wouldn't even be too bad. Why do I nevertheless seek access again and again, more or less successfully, even as a woman? Already in the first opera or the story that several of the first operas by Peri, Monteverdi and Landi tell, namely the story of the mythical ancient singer Orpheus. So this story is about a woman having to keep her mouth shut. That she should follow her husband without question or objection, even if he drags her out of the realms of the blessed. Only in Gluck's work does she finally fight back and demand a say, like many women in the Age of Enlightenment. But in the 19th century, women in opera no longer have much to say, even though they sing quite a few arias with quite a few and quite breakneck coloraturas. Moreover, their job is to die for the beloved, even if he is an arrogant and jealous fool, as in Verdi. Or, alternatively, for the father almost always an even bigger douche. But in the avant-garde in the 20th century, everything becomes different, doesn't it? Well, yes. But, funnily enough, one thing isn't. The men still call the shots in opera. Or do you know, say, until the 1980s, a canonical female opera composer? Well, I don't. But that may be due to my lack of repertoire knowledge. I see opera composers throughout most of the 20th century celebrating holy masses of autonomous sound art, so autonomous that they often profess to want nothing to do with their libretti either. Why opera anyway? I can only explain it to myself with this lightning that strikes me through forehead, heart and pelvis to the tips of my toes when a voice sings. So it's not just singing: "Oh yeh, I love you", but its story, its suffering, its longing, its happiness. Art theory, philosophy, psychology united, can shout their souls out that in modernity, at the latest in postmodernity, there is no longer an individual. And although at this very moment it is crystal clear to me that years, studies, weeks, rehearsals, make-up, costumes, lighting are necessary for this one moment and that countless cooks, from the conductor to the director to the dramaturg who knows everything better, have never been involved in the cooking. It is this moment when the most complex, the most artificial art form that we cultivate, and only this, only opera, produces the most authentic moment in a perfect paradox. Pure humanity. Primordial 500 years already, but never obsolete. Crazy enough, and of course purely by chance, pretty much since I, in spite of all this, like a worm's head, have been drilling my way into the sometimes quite sour apple of contemporary opera - that is, since about the turn of the millennium - two outrageous things have been happening. First: composers are slowly but tenaciously conquering the field. And secondly, I am no longer the only one who is telling stories in opera again. Whether the two are connected, I can't say. I suspect it's more of a coincidence. But what I see is that other pieces, other approaches open up. By literally bringing new life to opera with the stories, other people seem to be attracted to it. Participatory operas are opening up to young people and others who are far removed from opera. And now, suddenly, as if a dam had been broken, a fence to any forbidden territory torn down, ideas are emerging. Libretto sketches on the most pressing questions of our present, such as climate change. An opera of the future, a very different work of art of the future. Please enter. But please don't turn off your cell phone yet this time.