



MUSIC WESTERN
The University of Western Ontario
DON WRIGHT
Faculty of Music

Information

CANDIDE

A presentation of UWOpera and the UWO Chamber Orchestra
February 12-16, 2003 in Talbot Theatre, UWO

Nuclear scientist and Manhattan Project director Robert Oppenheimer once said, "The optimist believes this is the best of all possible worlds. The pessimist fears it is true." He would have known a thing or two about optimism and pessimism, and his words have an eerily appropriate ring for UWOpera's 2003 presentation of Leonard Bernstein's Tony Award-winning **CANDIDE**. Brent Krysa has set this production of *Candide* in 1956 (the year of its original production), against a backdrop of McCarthyism and the Cold War. The work itself is rife with political inferences and lends itself very well to the political fantasy that Brent is creating with this production.

This classic satire puts the philosophy of mindless optimism — everything that happens is for the best — to its true test. Utterly self-absorbed with their own beauty and good fortune, the principal characters of Cunegonde, Candide, Maximilian, and Paquette are thrown into the face of unimaginable (and totally unbelievable!) trials and tribulations as their adventures take them around the world. Our four protagonists ultimately discover this is indeed *not* the best of all possible worlds, but make their peace with it by turning to a simple and tranquil existence.

In light of war, forced prostitution, inquisition, poverty, slavery, beatings, hangings, shipwrecks, and assorted other tragedies, Bernstein's sincere and energetic music combined with Lillian Hellman's and Richard Wilbur's libretto (based on the Voltaire novel *Candide*), come together to create a classic and ever-popular modern opera, one that treads a fine line between that and musical theatre.

Candide runs February 12-16 in Talbot Theatre (Wednesday to Saturday at 8 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 2 pm), three weeks earlier than our productions of previous years. Tickets are available through the Grand Theatre Box Office (519-672-8800). Consistent with our mandate and our position as one of North America's leading opera training centres, two complete casts alternate performances, thereby allowing a greater number of students the opportunity of participating in an fully-staged opera production. The dress rehearsal to which all media are invited will be the evening of Monday, February 10 in Talbot Theatre. Please call (519) 661-3767 if you would like to send a camera crew or reporter.

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CANDIDE — SYNOPSIS

The castle of the Baron Thunder-Ten-Tronck in the fictional country of Westphalia is the setting, and the home of the principal characters: Cunegonde, the Baron and Baroness's beautiful and virginal daughter, Maximilian, their handsome son, their illegitimate nephew Candide, and the Baroness's curvaceous maid Paquette.

The four protagonists live a blissfully happy life, comfortable in the knowledge of their own beauty and good fortune, as they have been taught to be by their tutor Dr. Pangloss, who preaches the philosophy that all is for the best in this, the best of all possible worlds. On this day, though, at the end of class, Dr. Pangloss requests that Paquette remain behind in order to receive an additional lesson in advanced physics. Cunegonde, not wanting to miss out on an additional lesson, finds an excuse to return to the classroom and discovers that Dr. Pangloss's lesson in "advanced physics" is actually a passionate, and willingly received, sexual advance on Paquette. Naïvely she asks for an academic explanation, and in response Dr. Pangloss ad libs an elaborate lecture on the specific gravitational forces that he and Paquette had hoped to demonstrate by their actions. Intrigued by this new bit of information, Cunegonde rushes off to Candide in order that they might try this new experiment themselves, and they find that it does indeed produce pleasant results.

Completely innocent in their actions and therefore having no inhibitions about them, the young couple has not considered privacy to be an issue, and is interrupted in their carnal experiment by Maximilian, who has been spying on them through a window. The wrath of the entire family quickly descends on the innocent pair, and Candide is banished forever from Westphalia. Despite this blow to his fortunes, Candide remains undeterred in his faith in Pangloss's philosophy of optimism, and he trudges away from home, never to return, certain that there is good reason for his banishment. It is at this point, however, that the Bulgarians choose to invade, entering Westphalia on the same route by which Candide is exiting it. The chance encounter leaves Candide captured and tied up in a sack. The Bulgarians proceed to invade the castle and slaughter the entire family, sparing only Cunegonde, who a certain entrepreneurial soldier/would-be pimp has decided will create his fortune as a prostitute for the troops. As the battle continues, Candide's captors are killed, and a troupe of traveling players rescues him. Cunegonde, after servicing the entire army, puts her new-found sexual prowess to use as a sought-after prostitute, and in Lisbon eventually becomes the mistress of both a rich Jew and the Grand Inquisitor, the two men happily finding that a "time-share" deal gives them both adequate access to the girl.

Meanwhile, Candide happens upon Dr. Pangloss, who has miraculously survived the attack on Westphalia, although minus his nose as a result of syphilis. Still adamant in his philosophy of optimism, he opines that even though syphilis is a product of the New World,

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it is the New World that has also given him potatoes, tobacco and chocolate. He chooses the wrong audience for his lecture, though, when a fake corpse to which he has been preaching turns out to be a spy of the Inquisition. Both men are arrested for heresy and taken to Lisbon where Pangloss is sentenced by the Inquisitor to hang. After a whipping that leaves him near death, Candide escapes and is restored to health by a kindly Old Lady and her magic ointments. After his recovery, the Old Lady secrets him to Cunegonde's apartment. Thrilled to find each other still alive, their reunion is cut short by the arrival of the Jew. Infuriated to find Candide in his mistress's apartment, the Jew draws his sword, intending to slice the young man to pieces. Instead, he ends up impaled on his own sword after he drops it and the helpful Candide picks it up to return it to him. Later that night the Inquisitor meets the same fate when he visits Cunegonde. Candide, who has been driven to a jealous rage by Cunegonde's tales of her repeated ravishment, impales him as well and the two young lovers must flee Lisbon to evade the certain retribution that will follow the murder of two such highly esteemed citizens.

Candide and Cunegonde board a vessel heading for the New World and find the Old Lady on board as well. Their bad luck continues as pirates attack the vessel, and Cunegonde and the Old Lady again find themselves to be the spoils of war. Arriving in the New World, Candide is surprised to find both Paquette and Maximilian alive and sold into slavery. Candide relates his adventures to date and swears that he will rescue Cunegonde and marry her. Maximilian, however, is enraged that his bastard cousin should presume to marry a Thunder-Ten-Tronck, and chases wildly after Candide. In the ensuing mêlée, Maximilian is instantly crushed to death by a statue that Candide has hidden behind and accidentally knocks over.

That night, as Candide and Paquette escape into the jungle of South America, they happen upon the magnificent city of El Dorado, whose streets are made of diamonds and whose animals can talk and sing. Their fascination with paradise, however, is short-lived and eventually they load two sheep with gold and jewels and return to Cartagena only to learn that the pirates have taken Cunegonde to Constantinople. Candide accepts the Governor's offer of a boat in which to pursue the pirates, only to learn later that the governor has stolen his gold-laden sheep and given him a leaky boat. Regardless, Candide, Paquette and the Old Lady, who was rejected as an unsuitable paramour by the pirates, find their way to Constantinople where they buy Cunegonde's freedom with the recovered gold. With the last of their fortune they redeem Maximilian who has miraculously survived his crushing and somehow ended up in the same household.

Now reunited but destitute, the four heroes deliberate their next course of action. They agree to visit the Wisest Man in the World, who is rumoured to live in a nearby cave, as luck would have it. The Wisest Man in the World turns out to be none other than Dr. Pangloss, miraculously unchanged, and having finally abandoned his philosophy of the "best of all possible worlds," now espousing a new philosophy of the work ethic. Candide, still loyal to his old tutor, no matter what philosophy he proclaims, decides to follow this new creed, buy a small farm, grow a garden, and milk the cow he has acquired. Even as the others hail his splendid decision, the cows fall over dead with the pox.



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HISTORY OF OPERA AT WESTERN

Opera at the University of Western Ontario enjoys a long and distinguished history, dating back to the 1940s and '50s when Professor Alfred Rosé — a nephew of Gustav Mahler— taught voice and opera at Music Teacher's College. This tradition was continued in the 1970s in the newly formed Faculty of Music when the acclaimed operatic tenor Martin Chambers was on faculty and directed the UWO opera program in fully-staged performances of *The Magic Flute*, *Dialogues des Carmelites*, *The Merry Widow*, and others. During the 1980s opera activity was manifested in concert presentations, scenes and excerpts. The year 1991 saw the revival of the fully staged production, and since then the UWO Opera Workshop, or UWOpera as it is known, has grown in excellence and popularity each year.

Western has long benefited from the presence of active opera professionals on faculty, and since his arrival in 1996, acclaimed Canadian baritone Theodore Baerg has taken the opera program at Western to even greater heights. In 1998 Western became the first university in Canada to use the Canadian Opera Company's Surtitles® technology, with a production of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* in its original Italian. Both the 1999 production of *Die Fledermaus* and the 2001 production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* were sold-out smash hits, and even with the addition of a fifth performance in 2002 *The Magic Flute* was a virtual sell-out. This continuing and growing demand has led to the addition of a sixth performance for 2003, a clear indication of the high calibre of UWOpera's productions and Western's reputation as one of North America's leading opera training centres. Ted Baerg brings extensive experience in the international world of opera to his role as director and producer of opera at Western. Students enrolled in the opera program tackle a broad range of repertoire, from productions that tread a fine line between opera and musical theatre such *Candide* (1993 and 2003), to powerful contemporary works like *The Consul* in 2000.

Many singers who studied at Western's Don Wright Faculty of Music have forged significant careers on the major opera, theatre and concert stages of the world. Among them are Michael Schade, Nancy Argenta, Louise Pitre, Kevin McMillan, Adrienne Pieczonka, Paul Massell, Robert Grenier, Brian McIntosh, and Darryl Edwards — and the tradition continues with a new generation of exciting young singers such as Krisztina Szabo, John Tessier, Jennie Such and others who are taking their places among the rising stars of the genre. Many others such as Robert Cooper and Allison Doig have become highly regarded directors. Western is proud of its long contribution to opera life in Canada and abroad and of its continuing role in training young singers and preparing them for professional life.