

PEABODY OPERA THEATRE  PEABODY CONCERT ORCHESTRA

PRESENT

HIN UND  
ZURÜCK

AND

LES MAMELLES DE TIRÉSIAS

MAR. 17-20

THURSDAY	MAR 17	7:30 PM
FRIDAY	MAR 18	7:30 PM
SATURDAY	MAR 19	7:30 PM
SUNDAY	MAR 20	3:00 PM

A DOUBLE BILL  
OF MODERN OPERA

CONDUCTOR: NICHOLAS HERSH

CO-DIRECTORS: ALISON MORITZ  
AND GREGORY KENG STRASSER

MIRIAM A. FRIEDBERG CONCERT HALL

PEABODY.JHU.EDU/EVENTS

TICKETS AVAILABLE VIA THE PEABODY WEBSITE EVENTS PAGE.

 **JOHNS HOPKINS**  
PEABODY CONSERVATORY





Alison Moritz and Gregory Keng Strasser, directors

present

# HIN UND ZURÜCK

Libretto by Marcellus Schiffer

Composed by Paul Hindemith

and

# LES MAMELLES DE TIRÉSIAS

by Francis Poulenc

(based on the play *The Breasts of Tirésias* by Guillaume Apollinaire)

Alison Moritz and Gregory Keng Strasser, directors  
David Plunkert and Spur Designs, production designers  
Heather C. Jackson, costume designer  
Brian Jones, lighting designer

Priscilla Bruce, hair and makeup designer  
Ben Walsh, production coordinator and stage manager  
Elisheva Pront and Kate Hahn, assistant directors and  
assistant stage managers

Running time approximately 70 minutes, with no intermission

*This opera will be performed in German and French with English supertitles*

## CAST (HIN UND ZURÜCK)

**Helene** . . . . . **Manli Deng\***  
Jiayu Li<sup>‡</sup>

**Robert** . . . . . Randy Ho\*  
Jun Song†

**Aunt Emma . . . . . Tiffany Starks**

**The Professor** . . . . . Lachlan Miller

**Ambulance Man . . . . . Kevin Paton-Cole**

**Wise Man . . . . . Darius Sanders**

**Serving Girl . . . . .** Zoe Sheller

### CAST (LES MAMELLES DI TIRÉSIAS)

**Thérèse/Tirésias/Cartomancienne . . . . . Yi Ding\***  
**Helena Colindres†**

**Her Husband** . . . . . Ben Ross

**Theatre Director . . . . .** Joshua Coleman

**Gendarme . . . . . Jacob Heacock\***

John Arlievsky<sup>‡</sup>

**An elegant Lady** . . . . . Emma Webster\*

Savannah Hirst<sup>‡</sup>

**A Newspaper Vendor . . . . .** Caroline Lacy

**A Woman** . . . . . Christina Stewart

**A Reporter from Paris . . . . . Jun Song**

**Monsieur Lacouf** . . . . . Randy Ho

**The Son . . . . . Darius Sanders**

**Monsieur Presto . . . . . Kaijeh Johnson\***

Kyle Dunn<sup>‡</sup>

**A Bearded Gentleman . . . . . Phillip Barsky**

\* March 17 and 19 cast

‡ March 18 and 20 cast

Please Note: A non-firing prop firearm and loud noises are used in this production

## DIRECTORS' NOTES

Last spring, as we planned Peabody Opera's return to Friedberg Hall, I thought about other instances when the world's stages have stood silent. The first opera that came to mind was Poulenc's irrepressible, irreverent *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. In this work, a meta-theatrical director welcomes audiences back after a long hiatus. When the play version of *Tirésias* premiered during World War I, poet Apollinaire was reacting to nationalist and imperialist forces that lead to the war and the changing gender dynamics in the early twentieth century. Twenty years later, Poulenc (who had attended the play's premiere two decades prior) wrote his opera in the aftermath of World War II. It feels fitting, therefore, for our department to celebrate this return to Friedberg by presenting an opera about cultivating art and joy after a period of struggle, sacrifice, and social upheaval.

In Poulenc's version of *Tirésias*, overt theatricality causes us to question our ideas of gender, nationalism, and identity. Similarly, Hindemith's "Sketch mit Musik" *Hin und Zurück* is a clever experiment using music as a measurement of time, forcing us to examine our relationship to fate, predeterminism, and logic. Here, we see the domestic drama of Robert and Helene played both forwards and backwards (the "Hin und Zurück" of the piece's title). In both of these operas, satire and nonsense serve as a powerful commentary on a world in chaos and a tool for change.

To create our onstage world of irreverent joy, our department has collaborated with area designer and visual artist David Plunkert and his team at Spur Design in Hampden. With Dave as a partner, we have constructed a surround made almost entirely of repurposed and recycled materials. Our goal here is to provide the students with support for their performances but to avoid contributing to the tremendous waste that theatrical construction can generate.

Re-assessing our methods and means has been a theme of this busy season here at Peabody Opera — our other opera projects this year have already included filmed adaptations of Dominick Argento's *Postcard from Morocco* and Frances Pollock's *Earth to Kenzie*, Rossini's rarity *La scala di seta* (performed at nearby Theatre Project for their 50th Anniversary Season), and two large scale scenes programs featuring classics from the opera repertoire, early music, and contemporary opera.

Thank you for your support and encouragement as we return to the stage with great joy and enthusiasm. Please stay tuned for the release of *Postcard from Morocco* later this spring, and announcements about future projects.

With our grateful thanks to the Vocal Studies Department and all of our collaborators here at Peabody.

— Alison Moritz

When Alison called me about marrying a time-reversing German opera sketch with a surrealist gender-bending French one, I was immediately enthusiastic. I am a director who relishes a challenge, and after seeing Dave Plunkert's dada-ist collage-driven artwork, I knew that we could confront those obstacles by making something inventive but true to the spirit of both pieces. Both pieces concern transformation: *Tirésias* is about the transformation of gender and status, but *Hin und Zurück* employs the transformation of time. I was drawn to the cuckoo clock as the vehicle for this show, with its interior chamber harboring a scene of domesticity. I imagined, what if Thérèse, the (somewhat) titular character of *Tirésias*, witnessed the clock opening and the events of *Hin und Zurück* unfold? How would she react? How would it drive the actions in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*? Alison grew the idea further: that same vehicle of time, which contains the symbol of the life that Therese desperately wants to escape, would double as the machine which produces all the artificial life in its second act.

I loved creating this world for *Hin und Zurück*. The characters are residents of a cuckoo clock themselves: toys. The only exception is Helene, who experiences freedom in the form of an affair. What is it like to wake up early, completely revitalized, and joyous? It must be nice, but Helene, unfortunately, doesn't get to enjoy it for long, because her husband rears his head and puts the whole thing to rest. She forces herself to snap back into being a toy: rigid, stiff, trapped. To that end, *Hin und Zurück*, although incredibly funny and whimsical in tone and text, really is a tragedy. "There must be love," Thérèse and her husband proclaim at the end of *Tirésias*, which is precisely what Helene is missing. Afterall, what kind of love would isolate you in a never-ending cycle of a role you never wanted to play?

Many thanks to Alison Moritz for allowing me to explore these questions. Also eternal gratitude to Nick Hersh, Ben Walsh, Ben Young, Dave Plunkert, Heather Jackson, Brian Jones, Elisheva Pront, Kate Hahn, the Peabody technical staff, and the extraordinary cohort of musicians who supported us in creating this world.

— Greg Strasser

## HISTORICAL NOTE

### Opera and Geometry

Francis Poulenc's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* and Paul Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück* are superficially similar. Obviously short and weird, they also share a deeper, "geometrical" affinity for curves, circles, and cycles. I'll explain.

### Make Wheels, Not War!

Poulenc's *Les Mamelles* may be the perfect opera for the perfect storm of 2022. It is based on Guillaume Apollinaire's play, first published in 1918, a year two catastrophes occupied many minds: the Great War and the Spanish Flu. And at least for Americans during Poulenc's 1947 debut, war and plague still occupied us: World War II and New York's smallpox epidemic. Moreover, since play and opera share a text, both reflect epochal concerns about sex and gender. Happier themes than death, but difficult nonetheless.

Flash forward to 2022. War in Ukraine, COVID the world over, and questions of sexual identity and gender fluidity embodied everywhere. Poulenc's opera should be relatable. And yet, it does not easily surrender its meanings. But it does repay close reading, especially when approached as surrealism.

In his play's preface, Apollinaire argues surrealism is not simply symbolism. It's more akin to how humans sometimes imitate nature: aslant. For example, when we first imitated walking we didn't retrace the leg and the foot: 2 vertical lines atop a horizontal one, all joined together with hinges. Instead, we drew one line and connected it at both ends to create...a circle, a wheel, a revolutionary idea!



Hugo Ball in costume in an advertisement for the Cabaret Voltaire, 1917.



Original costume designs for *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, 1917.

stretches this almost instantaneous point in time to nearly four minutes. Communal voices mourn through music that is by turns lilting, solemn, even glorious.

The world is upside down. Peace, health, even the anatomical basis of sexuality seem to have flown away like Thérèse's breasts. But that doesn't mean look backward, stand your ground, or see the world only through a single perspective, as if sighting down the barrel of a gun. That leads to death. Instead, Poulenc's surrealism encourages us to watch for ambiguities, listen from multiple vantage points, and move around from perspective to perspective to gain a fuller understanding. In other words, progress along a curved line...a circle, a wheel, a revolutionary idea!

And that's how we should approach Poulenc: playfully but intentionally.

Take Presto and Lacouf's act 1 duet. Superficially, it confuses the location of Zanzibar with a similarly named dice game. Puns and homonyms abound in this operatic version of Abbott and Costello's "Who's on first?" But the duo's blithe misunderstanding also imitates something more serious: resistance to seeing things from another's perspective. Mutual misunderstanding leads to mutual destruction and the duet ends in a duel. This may be a polka but make no mistake, this is also war.

That is why the choral moments that follow sound so suddenly grave. By contrast, in Apollinaire's play this takes no time. Two placards are flashed to the audience, essentially headstones explaining how both Presto and Lecouf were mistaken. But underscoring the cause of their deaths as few other art forms can, Poulenc



Tristan Tzara and Sonia Delaunay in Dadaist costumes, 1923.

### Circles or Cycles?

Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück* was inspired by reverse motion in cinema: camera footage played backwards. So, less *Memento* than *TENET*. And, as in this opera, one of the most common uses of reverse motion is to restore things to the way they were. This use dates back to the technique's 1896 origins. The Lumière brothers' *Demolition of a Wall* is reputedly the first example of reverse motion. This simple film shows a wall slowly being demolished and then, as the footage runs in reverse, it miraculously rebuilds itself. Thus, the film seems to end where it began. Time has been negated, along with the effects of gravity and sledgehammers.

This also apparently happens in Hindemith. And, weirdly enough, in Wagner's *Ring* too—but over four days versus Hindemith's 12-minute, gleeful concession to short attention spans. At the end of *Götterdämmerung* we face the same stage picture that began *Das Rheingold*: a world flooded by the Rhine. Similarly, at the end of *Hin und Zurück*, we seem to be right back

where we started: with the aunt merrily knitting like a doddering icon of Greek fate. However, because we experience opera with our eyes and our ears, Hindemith complicates matters. If we listen to its harmonies, we may realize that reality has not simply been rewound.

The opera ends in the key area of G-sharp, meaning that we may be about to enter the largely theoretical and unexplored world of G-sharp major, with its six sharps and one double-sharp. Perhaps this is a new beginning for everyone. After all, G-sharp is enharmonically equivalent to A-flat, the Sage's key area. So, if this ending is still under the spell of the Sage, then maybe he really has reversed fate and, as he promised, "all will be well, as it was before."

But "as it was before?" How well were things before, given that Helene was having an affair? Perhaps the opera is going to start over again and lead once more to murder-suicide. After all, this final key area of G-sharp is the leading tone to A, the key area that begins the opera. This may be a short opera compared to the *Ring*, but it may also be the world's longest musical loop.

Poised between these two interpretations, Hindemith asks whether we are doomed to repeat or are capable of breaking free of the past. Does time run in circles or cycles, loops or spirals? But this opera only articulates the question. It does not answer it. We take a round-trip journey, there and back—*hin und zurück*, as the Germans say. But it is up to us decide, when we return home, whether we are going to act differently or not.

### Empathy and Flexibility

Both of these operas encourage us to open ourselves to change while warning against clinging to a single perspective or to the past. They invite us to approach the world with empathy and flexibility. Not bad advice for today, given all the givens.

— Daniel H. Foster (Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Liberal Arts)



# PEABODY CONCERT ORCHESTRA

Joseph Young, conductor

Ruth Blaustein Rosenberg Artistic Director of Ensembles

## Violin

Sheila Esquivel  
Jiwon Han  
Ran Huo †  
Erin Kim ‡  
Jinsol Lee  
Bartholomew Shields  
Chih-Chun Wang  
Kuan Hao Yen  
Sixuan Zhu

## Viola

Aidan Deighan  
Michael Halbrook ‡  
Olive Loentz  
Rachel Riese

## Cello

Shawn Hsu ‡  
Mira Hu  
Emmanuel Losa  
Ethan Oh

## Double bass

Katelynn Baker ‡  
Taylor Martin

## Flute

Kelly Li ‡  
Zishu Xie

## Oboe

Elizabeth Perez-Hickman ‡  
Santo Villatoro

## Clarinet

Baiyu Chen  
KaiKin Lee ‡  
Xujing Yao

## Bassoon

Brittney Delpey ‡  
Lara Ann Villanueva

## Horn

Teresa Deskur ‡  
Gaoxu Yang

## Alto saxophone

Caleb Swisher

## Trumpet

Wyeth Aleksei ‡  
Chase Domke  
Evan Kirshen ‡

## Trombone

Spencer Smith

## Tuba

Miles Devlin

## Timpani

Hyunwoo Kim ‡

## Percussion

Yufeng Liu

## Harp

Xilin Yang

## Keyboard

Megan Angriawan  
Yilin Chi  
Seung Hyun Lee  
Yuelin Zhong

§ Guest Artist

† Concertmaster

‡ Principal

## PRODUCTION STAFF

**Co-Directors** . . . . . Alison Moritz  
Gregory Keng Strasser

**Music Director and Conductor.** . . Nicholas Hersh

**Assistant Conductor.** . . . . Samuel Hollister

**Production Designer.** . . . . David Plunkert  
Spur Designs

**Costume Designer** . . . . . Heather C. Jackson

**Lighting Designer** . . . . . Brian Jones

**Hair and Makeup Designer** . . . . Priscilla Bruce

**Production Coordinator/** . . . . . Ben Walsh  
**Stage Manager**

**Assistant Directors/** . . . . . Elisheva Pront

**Assistant Stage Managers** . . . . . Kate Hahn

**Light Board Operator** . . . . . Joshua Cookson

**Follow Spot Operator** . . . . . Angela Che  
Marissa Scotti

**Vocal Coaches** . . . . . Laurie Rogers  
Jonathan King  
Joy Schreier

**German Diction Coach** . . . . . Randall Scarlata

**French Diction Coach** . . . . . Claire Webber

**Rehearsal Pianists** . . . . . Samuel Hollister  
Kim Zhang  
Nahyoung Kim

**Production Manager.** . . . . Ben Young

**Lighting Coordinator** . . . . . Natalie Colony

**Additional Lighting** . . . . . Josh Cookson

**Audio-Visual Coordinator** . . . . . Adam Scalici

**Stage Coordinators** . . . . . Kenneth Johnson  
Rachel Hurtt

**Wardrobe** . . . . . Olivia Heaner  
Tara Dougherty

**Costume Assistance and Crafts** . Stephanie Parks  
Sarah Cubbage  
Ryan Davis  
Bill Jamieson  
Chelsea Dean

**Hair and Makeup Assistants** . . . . Nicole Stover  
Sara Anderson

**Supertitles.** . . . . Sydney Macnabb  
Marissa Scotti

**Props Assistance** . . . . . Mollie Singer

**Production Photographer** . . . . . Ed Davis

**Program Design** . . . . . Amelia Stinette

**Cover Design and Art** . . . . . David Plunkert

## Special Thanks

Chesapeake Shakespeare Company, Olney Theatre Center, The Clarice at the University of Maryland, Theatre Development Fund Costume Collection, Baltimore CENTERSTAGE, Loyola University, and Ford's Theatre

