Review

Svadba on the Beach: Opera for the Streaming Age

Online stream produced by Boston Lyric Opera and Opera Philadelphia, premiere January 28, 2022 on operabox.tv

Composer and librettist: Ana Sokolović
Milica: Chabrelle D. Williams (vocal), Victoria L. Awkward (dancer)
Lena: Brianna J. Robinson (vocal), Jackie Davis (actor)
Danica: Maggie Finnegan (vocal), Jay Breen (dancer)
Zora: Mack Wolz (vocal), Sarah Pacheco (dancer)
Nada: Vera Savage (vocal), Emily Jerant-Hendrickson (dancer)
Ljubica: Hannah Ludwig (vocal), Sasha Peterson (dancer)
The Betrothed: Olivia Moon
Director: Shura Baryshnikov
Conductor: Daniela Candillari
Screenwriter: Hannah Shepard
Director of photography: Kathrine Castro
Production designer: Ana Novačić
Costume designer: Albulena Borovci

Digital opera creation has been increasing steadily over the past few decades, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed a considerable acceleration in the production of online-only new compositions and adaptations. In 2014, Marcia J. Citron observed that "opera in medial form is a product of the general societal trend toward media convergence":[1] the now rapidly growing quantity of operas designed for digital streaming demonstrates that her predictions are bearing fruit. Recent outputs range from "digital shorts" of around five to ten minutes to episodic series and longer works. Though many predate the pandemic (and opera's relationship with film media of course extends far longer), the makeshift online music-making that became commonplace in the past two years has yielded a wealth of novel digital operatic experiences.[2] While many companies around the world focused on offering free streams of live performances from their archives of "Live in HD"-style broadcasts, North American organizations especially have been at the forefront of offering new online commissions, notably Opera Philadelphia, Boston Lyric Opera, and Los Angeles Opera. Such opera-style "shorts" include, among many others, Caroline Shaw's *We Need to Talk* (2021, OP), Raehann Bryce-Davis's *Brown Sounds* (2021,

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LA), Angelica Negrón's *The Island We Made* (2021, OP), and Ellen Reid's *desert in* (2021, BLO), an eight-part series. This film of Ana Sokolović's popular opera *Svadba* (2011), co-produced by Boston Lyric Opera and Opera Philadelphia, offers a further twist in creating a filmed version of a contemporary work that both builds on and strikes out in different directions from existing models of opera- films and uses of multimedia in live opera.[3]

I use "digital opera" here to refer to pieces released for online consumption, normally asynchronously, or as a live event on web platforms.[4] Digital operas encompass diverse aesthetic approaches from slick, polished videos to rough-around-the-edges Zoom-operas, and vary widely in length, from five-minute "opera shorts" to hour-long films like *Svadba*. Some avoid the explicit label of opera, instead employing the term "digital short," particularly those in the sub-thirty-minute category. These sometimes feature filmed live singing (without audiences), though more typically audio is recorded and processed digitally, or are electronic compositions. *Svadba*, which was filmed on Ballston Beach in Truro, Massachusetts, offers a film adaptation of an opera that already has an extensive performance history. Joining a robust roster of productions of the opera across Europe and North America from the past decade, in venues ranging from major houses to small festivals and conservatoires, there is plenty of room for this version of the opera to add a unique audio-visual experience, richer with varied aesthetic possibilities than a straightforward stream of a live performance.

Svadba takes place the night before a wedding in an unspecified time and place, focusing on the intimate preparations between the maid of honor, Ljubica; three attendants or bridesmaids (Danica, Zora, and Nada); and an elder woman, Lena. Olivia Moon makes brief featured appearances as The Betrothed, which is not actually a role in Sokolović's original score, and has not to my knowledge been performed onstage as a silent role in any production (no vocal writing is added in the film). The film's unique twist on the opera is its doubling of the original six vocal roles for sopranos and mezzo-sopranos—sung *a cappella*—through the addition of six on-screen dancers and actors. Although the score is dubbed continuously over the action, the singers are seen only in intermittent scenes filmed from the recording studio, and no acts of singing are visible from the actors performing the narrative in the setting of a beach and cottage. Separating these filmed scenes from the footage of the singers is intended to represent the "contemporary and ancestral worlds … cast in conversation with one another": "the Storytellers oversee the action, appearing in ceremonies and dreams and speaking across time."[5] Though more unseen than seen, the voices are ever-present throughout the film, watching over the action. In keeping with the opera's ritualistic and dream-like atmosphere, the six vocalists' roles are not clearly defined—they are certainly *not* narrators—rather suggestive of a cross between ancestral spirits, and the muses and goddesses who appear in prologues of seventeenth-century operas.

The description of the opera as "une affaire des femmes" by *Le monde* on the occasion of *Svadba*'s European premiere at the Festival Lyrique in Aix-en-Provence in 2015 is even more apt due to the doubling to twelve female roles.[6] It offers, in Lucy Caplan's perceptive description, "a world beyond the male gaze, at least temporarily":[7] this filmed production also has an all-woman creative team. The composer is joined by conductor Daniela Candillari, director Shura Baryshnikov, screenwriter Hannah Shepard, director of photography Kathrine Castro, production designer Ana Novačić, and costume designer Albulena Borovci. This production thus reflects three patterns in twenty-first-century opera: a carving-out of space for feminist and women-centered works;[8] the growth of digital opera and resurgence of the older genre of the opera-film popular in the second half of the twentieth century; and renewed interest in myth, folktales, and ritual in opera.[9] As a digital media object, *Svadba* provokes novel analytical challenges of audio-visual correlation, the association between the film and the opera as conceived staged live, and body-voice relationships.

In a 2019 interview, Sokolović emphasized that *Svadba*'s attraction lies in its universality, that she chose to use "a local tale to tell a simple universal story. . . . Serbian audiences will understand maybe 5 percent more than other audiences will. . . . I'm addressing a global audience."[10] Sokolović's resists her music being typecast, and it's clear that *Svadba* treads the line between its inspiration from Balkan folklore and wishing to represent an "enduring archetype of human experience," as the on-screen text reads at the beginning of the film. Audiences can enjoy a playlist curated by the conductor on the BLO website featuring a range of Serbian folk music, offering a fascinating aural grounding for listening to the opera,[11] but the film itself offers few obvious visual cues attributable to its Balkan influences. Frequent appearances of wheat grasses and flowers, both in situ along the beach and gathered by the women, hint at folk symbolism, representative of fertility and prosperity in many cultures. Stronger perhaps are the Stravinskyian influences, well acknowledged by the composer herself ("Stravinsky, he's my idol," expressed Sokolović in 1999[12]). *Svadba* in any production invites comparisons with both *Les noces* and *The Rite of Spring*; Sokolović conceived of her opera as a Balkan spin on the former: "To have this connection with Stravinsky, I wanted to use the same kind of traditional text from Serbian traditional literature about a wedding."[13] By focusing on a smaller group comprising only the bridesmaids and one female elder, *Svadba*'s scope is far more intimate than the community of parents, bridegroom, and chorus in *Les noces* (although the bridesmaids' texts and roles bear strong similarities), but its intimacy is charged with a warmth and playfulness that distinguishes it from the violence of *The Rite*. For example, in scenes 3 and 4 ("Love Suit/Dance" and "Fight"), where the bridesmaids act out a gender-role battle, they encircle Milica, dressed in her bridal white satin slip (fig. 1)—this is one of several moments

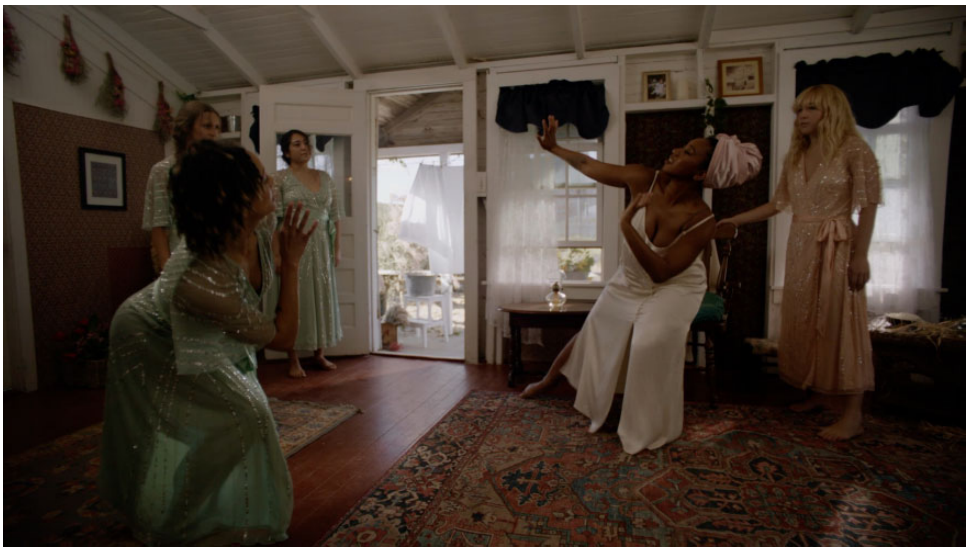

Figure 1 Jay Breen (as Danica, left) and Victoria L. Awkward (as Milica, in white) dance as other bridesmaids look on in *Svadba*. Photo courtesy BLO.

resembling the surrounding of *l'élue*, but transformed from sacrificial threat to lighthearted game.

Although there are moments of tension and almost hints of physical conflict in *Svabda*, the scenes lack any real sense of threat. We witness vigorous, fast, whirling dancing both in the cottage and on the beach, sometimes mimicking combat, but with the exception of brewing jealousy from maid of honor Ljubica, which almost boils over, the more energetic choreographed passages remain exuberant expressions of camaraderie and excitement. The camera's positioning in each scene enhances the affectionate intimacy of the group, with persistent low-angle and eye-level shots and only few frames at a distance, almost always placing the viewer inside the scene. On the beach, it feels that the women are walking toward or running ahead of me; in the cottage, I am situated as another onlooker in the circle, invited into the group. Throughout, the visual rendering of *Svadba*'s rituals as bodies in harmonious and nourishing relationships with natural surroundings offers a mellow tranquillity even in moments of exuberant dance. The focus, in this *affaire des femmes*, is on care, strength, and community among women.

Much of the film *Svadba*'s aesthetic appeal lies in its use of the environment of a picture-perfect Cape Cod beach and cozy cottage. Early autumn sun douses the scenes in a warm, hazy glow, the filming blessed with favorable October weather to achieve stunning shots of the women on the beach, striding across the shore with sheaves of flowers and grasses as if emerging from a mythical land of goddesses, whether dancing with abandon in their underwear on white sands set against deep blue sea, or the just-perfect waning sunlight glinting off the beads in their dresses

(see fig. 2). Every scene seems almost perfectly curated for an Instagram feed; as the women gather in a rustic kitchen lit only by the glow of late-afternoon sun, remnants of feminine domesticity are strewn in a quite deliberate haphazard nature: a floral enamel pot; a wicker basket full of flowers; macramé hanging plant pots; trailing vines; chintzy, kitschy mugs (see fig. 3). *Svadba* is not all flowers and sunshine, portraying the bittersweet sense of loss surrounding the evolution of female friendships after marriage that underlie the celebrations and rituals, a solemnity of preparation, and there is the potential for an ever-so-faint thread of fear or darkness to be drawn out through the opera's attachment to ritual and the searing intensity of the score. Most productions however—including this film—only barely allude to such undercurrents, with the exception of Perm Theatre's 2020 staging, where the women are dressed in black against a dull, slightly clouded backdrop, with little movement from their positions. Most have similarly embraced the aesthetic of joyful bridal shower: productions from Opera Philadelphia (2013) and San Francisco Opera Lab (2016), which use modern dress—nightclub and formalwear—both had the potential to hint at slightly ominous sub-themes, but the latter especially, set as a fun-filled bachelorette party complete with the audience at surrounding tables, projected scenes of cheerful celebration. The 2015 Aix performance allowed a slightly sombre atmosphere to develop in the latter half of the opera, though maintaining its Provençal shabby-chic setting. The UK professional premiere of *Svadba*

Figure 2 Milica (Victoria L. Awkward, center) and her bridesmaids return to the cottage after gathering decorative flora in *Svadba*. Photo courtesy BLO.

Figure 3 The women prepare Milica (Victoria L. Awkward, center) for her hair dyeing ritual in *Svadba*. Photo Courtesy BLO.

at Waterperry Opera Festival in August 2022 aimed for a similar variety of rustic flair as we find in this film, with bohemian-style vintage dresses and chintzy ephemera dotted around an outdoor performance space, although with greater aesthetic variation and a deliberate eschewing of carefully curated elegance: director Rebecca Meltzer affirmed that

> in an effort to avoid the commercial opulence so often associated with marital celebrations, our reading centres on the experience of six young women who belong to an alternative community with sustainable, environmental, and spiritual foundations.[14]

The film of *Svadba* is saturated with warmth, softness, and exuberance; its sharper edges come entirely from Sokolović's searing score rather than from visuals.

The film also offers more potential for the different perspectives present in Sokolović's libretto to be distinguished and represented in ways not as easily achievable in live productions—e.g., the abstract voice that is not *quite* a narrator; the girlfriends' conversations; moments of storytelling inspired by folksongs and folktales, or the bride's thoughts—through the manipulation of camera angles, choreography, and the natural scenery. Memory and imagination can play out in a way not possible in a live staged performance: when Milica lies on the beach alone in scene 5, for instance, as she allows herself to reflect and dream, we see scenes from the day just gone and anticipation of reunion with her beloved pass across her mind's eye,

scenes of a wedding in exuberant color (the eventual beach ceremony that we glimpse in the film's closing moments is more restrained in palette, thereby highlighting the unreal-ness of the bright colors in Milica's daydreams). Citron's extensive discussions of opera-films argue that "imaginative takes on visually reproduced opera" can "seriously affect our view of the source opera,"[15] and Yayoi Uno Everett has similarly emphasized in her analysis of multimodality how in filmed live opera multiple narrative possibilities exist simultaneously.[16] *Svadba* in film form certainly opens up numerous possibilities for narrative interpretations that may contrast with those emerging in live performances, although Sokolović's avoidance of linearity and conventional narrative formats largely inhibits the kind of analysis Citron suggests, where we can set the story of a "source" opera against its filmed depiction. This is a key distinction between this film and those of canonic operas that Citron has analyzed widely.[17] *Svadba* is held together by a rough temporal arc—dusk to evening, twilight to dawn—and transitions through time are managed beautifully through the use of natural light in the beach setting; more sophisticated representations of the opera's overlapping temporalities and blurred lines of fantasy and reality are possible in the film. With no setting or time period specified, there also does not seem to be any *particular* significance to the Massachusetts filming location other than a logical choice for BLO, though I would hazard any viewer familiar with the East Coast might recognize the Cape (as I did before knowing the location).[18] The rustic, oceanside setting certainly allows for more visual representation of the central importance of nature in the folk traditions represented in the libretto, if in the abstract rather than specifical symbols—reflecting, perhaps, Sokolović's emphasis on universality. Similarly, the vast expanses of shoreline and sky suggest a visual manifestation of the liminality of the "plot," unfixed in space and time; scenes hover between present and past, memory and daydream, just as Milica is on the threshold between old and new lives, and just as the coast itself can function as a precarious border. The frame of Milica and her bridesmaids preparing for the wedding functions as a rough narrative, but the libretto offers stylized storytelling, not a traditional plot; as mentioned already, there are also visual moments added to the film where Milica's daydreaming or imagination plays out on screen, in a way impossible in live performance. Moreover, although the six roles are technically different characters, there is little representation of individual perspectives: the bridesmaids sing as a group, and Milica's solo passages are abstract, poetic musings, rather than the kind of direct self-expression of a conventional aria. The exceptions are her line repeated sporadically "I am my mother's only child" ("Mene majka jednu ima") and the final couplet of scene 5: "Be patient, my love / Tomorrow I'll be yours!" ("Ćekaj me dragi, ćekaj me / Već sutra tvoja biću ja!").[19]

The single most striking—and often unsettling—quality of the film is the disjunction between what we see and hear, enacted through the splitting of each role into singer and dancer or actor.[20] As mentioned above, we witness no singing, lip-

synching or miming, and only occasional hints of (silent) speaking from the dancers acting out the seven scenes on the beach and in the cottage onscreen. Contemporary operas often make use of unseen voices—and acousmatic vocal sound in opera has, of course, a much longer history—or voices mediated and transformed digitally (e.g., in Michel van der Aa's works, notably, as Jelena Novak has analyzed in detail[21]); Tereza Havelková's recent work on multimedia in opera has explored in detail the interactions of "live" and "mediatized" vocal sound in contemporary operas.[22] Unseen sound sources in film are unremarkable in themselves, but this production goes further, eschewing all direct connections between what we see and hear: not only do we not see singing, mimed or otherwise, there are no occasions on which musical sound is presented as existing in any form in the filmed world we are watching. The fundamental quirk of opera that everyone sings no matter how implausible it might be that one *would* sing in a given situation is hardly relevant here, because the persons to whom a spectator attributes dramatic agency (i.e., the onscreen actors) do not engage in any singing, even in passages where the bridesmaids are effectively acting out storytelling passages—in these scenes, although we continue to hear the unseen singers, the expression of the stylized story is brought to life through choreography. This description may give the impression I am in fact describing a ballet, and dance *is* central to *Svadba*, but it is not a danced narrative, per se.

It is a strange sonic experience as a viewer: the women's movements in the cottage and on the beach are always "accompanied" by the music, but their own voices and bodies are muted throughout. We never hear anyone sing, speak, or make any noise with their bodies whatsoever—when they dance and hit the floorboards or sand, there is no sound; when they are close together, there is no breath or audible sense of bodies touching. Only sounds from the natural world are permitted to break through from this world: we hear the rustling of grasses and wind, and waves lapping the shore. As in other aspects where film can offer a wider variety of audiovisual content than a typical live production, it follows, ironically, that this *Svadba* features a more varied soundscape, despite the film itself feeling insistently muted. Allowing only nature's sounds to filter through from the beach setting perhaps enhances the positioning of the on-screen women as acting out figuratively a meditation on the opera's core themes of love, marriage, friendships as filtered through a folkloristic lens, rather than as primarily portraying specific characters in a fictional dramatic narrative. We might also interpret these moments as a sonic representation of the natural themes described in the libretto—references to grasses, flowers, sky, stars. At the beginning of scene 7, "Blow, blow the gentle wind" ("Duni mi, duni, lađane"), this is used as a quite literal sound effect; the line is preceded by the singers' voices accompanied by the rustling of the wind, the subtitles reading that they "fade into the breeze." While *Svadba* as a film participates in the history of existing opera-films, it strikes me as a world away equally from the classics

(Bergman's *Magic Flute* or Griffi's *Tosca*) and more recent filmed live productions of contemporary works (e.g., Everett's analysis of Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* and John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*).[23] Its release mode also differs, primarily designed to be experienced not on the "big screen" of the movie theater, but from the intimacy of our laptops, tablets, and home televisions.

As a film, *Svadba* fits neither with a model where the music functions purely as a soundtrack (an operatic "music video") nor with filmed versions of live performance. The filmed sequences do not simply respond to and execute a narrative implied by the music, because there is no conventional plot in Sokolović's combination of stylized folk-storytelling passages and meditative, poetic reflections in her libretto. The singers as Storytellers act as our guides aurally through their ever-present voices, and although more unseen than seen, they hold the significant opening position of inviting us warmly into the drama. They are first on screen see at the beginning of the film, and although the initial moments of laughing and smiling faces shows a pre-performance moment, close-up camera shots on each of the six singers' faces in turn, and a gradual shift to serious, focused facial expressions, signal the transition to storytelling, accompanied by gentle gongs, rain sticks, and ocarina (not notated in the score). The choice to represent these two worlds in two separate visual-physical domains also has a more grounded effect, however, calling attention to the mechanisms of creating digital opera. The clips of the singers resemble behind-the-scenes rehearsal or recording footage—microphones and scores are occasionally visible; the singers are dressed in all black against the black backdrop of the recording studio (see fig. 4). Other recent digital operas have integrated similar features (raw footage of Zoom meetings and audio editing, for instance), which highlight the messy, fractured, buffering aspects of online creation, as well as the (dis)connections arising from collaboration in virtual space.[24] We can see this as a pandemic-era version of calling attention to opera's modes of creation as part of the performance or production, such as where putting on a show is part of the plot; a contemporary example would be Robert Lepage's 2012 production of Thomas Ades's *The Tempest* at the Met, which stages Prospero's island as a theater, an opera house within an opera house.

Svadba avoids unprocessed or unfiltered elements intended to underline the quirks of virtual opera creation, using neat and carefully chosen excerpts of recording studio footage. When the film cuts to the singers, the impression is sometimes of unwelcome juxtaposition with the dreamy Cape Cod world, but if a viewer remembers their roles as ancestral spirit voices (or Storytellers, as the synopsis puts it), these moments also act as a reminder of their guiding, watchful presence. Indeed, the experience feels notably different to an opera-film where we might cut to the orchestra and singers recording, as we understand the singers not only as the recorded voices behind the faces but as participants in some loose form in scenes we see play out on screen. The very first line, for instance, "Milica, Friend! You're

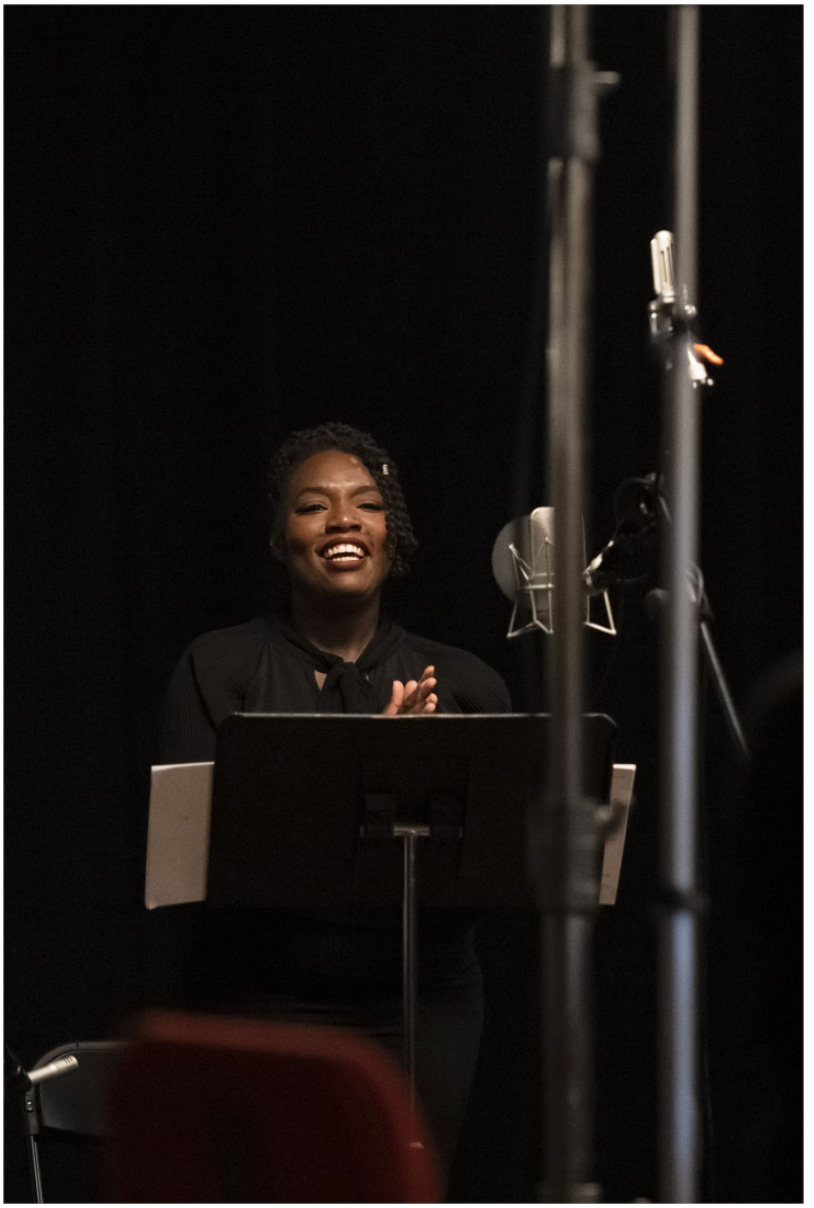

Figure 4 Chabrelle D. Williams as Milica (Vocal) in Boston Lyric Opera's 2022 production of *Svadba*. Photo by Liza Voll.

leaving home forever!" ("Milice, drugarice! Odlaziš iz doma zauvek!") can be heard both as the singers ventriloquizing on behalf of the bridesmaids, and as the ancestors calling. On some occasions where the text is written from a more abstract, third-person perspective, the interpolation of the singers' footage represents their role as Storytellers extremely well, as in the beginning of scene 5 ("Bath"), when

Milica wanders to the twilight shore alone. A soft, ringing gong accompanies the voices [from around 30:00], heralding the transition to a reflective nighttime scene. The text's sensuality (see below) is enhanced by close-up shots of Milica's prone body on the sand, but its repeated imperative command again draws attention to the haunting, guiding voices of her ancestors—also featuring close shots of the singers' faces.

Osu se nebo zvezdama

Kosu ti vodom . . . zvezdama

Ruke to vodom . . . zvezdama

Noge ti vodom . . . zvezdama

Nedra to vodom . . . zvezdama

The sky is covered with stars . . .

Wet your hair with stars

Wet your hands with stars

Wet your legs with stars

Wet your chest with stars

With most of the opera dominated by collective action and movement, Milica's crepuscular contemplations are a moment of deep calm where the sense of disconnect between what we hear and see diminishes. Sokolović's score emphasizes this scene's function as both a moment of introspection and solo contemplation for the bride—a welcome break, perhaps, from the hustle and bustle of wedding preparations—and as a bridge between evening and dawn. Her characteristically uncompromising dissonances are woven into a softly undulating, slowly moving, elastic texture distinct from the sharp articulations elsewhere (the score instructs "all accents in this section are slow and long"), underscored continually by a gently ringing gong. Although the mismatch between what we hear and see has the potential to be greater here (one person on screen but six voices), there is in fact much more clarity, as we can easily interpret Milica's time alone as accompanied by her inner thoughts and the guiding voices of her ancestors.

Experiencing audio-visual disjunction throughout *Svadba* is not necessarily unpleasant, but certainly unsettling at first. Despite the gloriously abrasive vocalizations with their terse dissonances and arresting timbres, the absence of sound attached to the bodies dancing across the screen and the pervasive mismatch of sound and action caused everything to seem *too* muted. Occasionally, we see the dancers' mouths moving as if conversing, but the sound does not fit: for example, in scene 2, "Colouring Hair," as various colors and dyes in small glass bowls are

prepared, the score specifies that the attendants chatter "irregular and incomprehensible voiced talk,"[25] but there's no direct correlation to the brief mimed chatter of the actors on screen and the audible vocalizations.[26]

Sometimes my discomfort at the disconnect between what we see and hear was powerful. For example in the closing scenes, in which Milica puts the finishing touches to her bridal outfit and the ceremony is prepared. The visuals are nothing new—bridesmaids and Lena bustling in the cottage—but this is the musical and dramatic climax of the opera, in my view Sokolovic's writing at its most powerful. Following the line "A ja ću tebe ljubiti" ("That I might kiss you") concluding Milica's extended solo vocal passage—first entirely *a cappella*, then accompanied by long held notes from the rest—Danica initiates a motif on "ya," eight quick thirty-second notes ending on a held note, taken up in turn by each singer as throaty, forceful, almost howling vocalizations. These grow steadily louder as voices are added and the texture thickens, resulting in powerful dissonances; Ljubica's lower note resounds, adding a depth not as present in the close, high-pitched clusters we often hear in the opera. Milica is not participating, adding only two measures reciting a single syllable "bi" on one note (mm. 698–99), but she bursts back in at the top of the texture on repeated high A5s: here, the singing reaches peak intensity as she starts a new verse on the line "Odbi se loza od grozda" ("The grape from the vine detached"), while the bridesmaids sing their next verse "Ne plači dušo devojko" ("No tears, darling girl!"). Sokolović's score here perfectly encapsulates Milica's emotion of painful separation from her family life, apprehension and sorrow intermingled with the excitement of her imminent new life with her betrothed, but it is for me the moment of maximal audio-visual incongruence in the film. The onscreen action appears entirely detached and undisturbed by the wrenching emotions of the music, leaving me dissatisfied, rather than intrigued by the potential value in deliberate disjunction.

On rewatching *Svadba*, although my discomfort remained in some passages (notably scene 7), I found myself paying closer attention to the nuances of the dancers' movements, finding the incongruence at times freeing. In both more choreographed and freer passages, their bodies wield multiplicities of expressive potential. Dances appear laden with symbolism, if rarely obvious; take the end of the first scene, for instance, where the bridesmaids insist that the bride won't forget them, her girlfriends, singing "nećeš" (and eventually just "će") repeatedly, "you will not." In the film, Milica dances an extended solo in the cottage, and, contrary to the insistence the score implies, the bridesmaids are doing very little on screen, sitting and busying themselves with tasks, and blurred out of focus. Her movements are free and lively, not stylized; although there's no obvious connotations to each gesture, the scene captures well the mixed emotions Milica is processing in the transition between her old and new lives, and the solo focuses our attention visually on her body rather than on the bridesmaids. The scene of the bridesmaids dancing exuberantly in their underwear by the sea (from around 13:15) is one of several instances of

the choreography working in harmony with the natural setting to evoke compellingly the sense of joyful abandon afforded the women in this space, while the wide-open spaces of the beach suggest an expansive freedom less achievable in the confines of a theater. Although dance has featured in most stagings of *Svadba* to date, it is central to the film, and plays a significant role in articulating emotion and atmosphere, rather than as a decorative addition. The focus on visual and physical expression is paramount, and is a large part of what makes the film attractive as a substantially different production of the opera, as opposed to a filmed version of a performance.

While *Svadba* may be low on experimental or radical multimedia techniques, it certainly prompts us to consider how adaptations of contemporary operas for new cinematic formats and creating digital opera from scratch will change our experiences of opera-on-film in a thoroughly online age. João Pedro Cachopo has offered a skeptical view as to whether opera-film "might be construed as an independent (hybrid) genre," instead arguing that it should be "seen as corresponding to an autonomous task, endowed with an autonomous purpose," that purpose being a "translation" between opera and film.[27] Examining this process in the remediation of contemporary, rather than canonic operatic repertoire opens up, I'd argue, fresh avenues of analytical possibility, particularly in the context of the close relationship of contemporary opera-films like *Svadba* with new operas created exclusively as online, digital products. As streaming opera continues to evolve in post-pandemic futures yet to be glimpsed, investigating the ensuing myriad aesthetic and collaborative potentials will also invite us to reexamine modes of spectatorship, as well as economic infrastructures of commissioning and accessing opera online. In terms of accessibility, online-only operas are usually far cheaper than attending a live performance, and theoretically have an immediate global reach. A few caveats are necessary, however: many opera-shorts are free, some cost $10–15 (*Svadba* is $15 to rent), but others sit upwards of $30; internet access is itself a privilege not afforded to all, and it is unclear whether the mechanisms are in place to effect a global spread to diverse audiences. As Cachopo suggests, it's still unsettled as to whether "audio-visual reproduction of opera entail[s] a democratization of the experience of the genre."[28] Both BLO and Opera Philadelphia have strong platforms for streaming opera, offering subscription packages as well as pay-per-view options, though more detailed examination of analytics is needed to understand the reach and dissemination of individual pieces (who is watching, and where?), and it remains to be seen both how this will evolve as live performances return to normality. In the meantime, *Svadba* offers us an exquisitely produced opera-as-film experience, undoubtedly broadening the horizons of realizing contemporary operas in alternative forms.

Jane Forner

NOTES

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1. Marcia J. Citron, "Visual Media" in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 922.

2. For a philosophical assessment of opera and media in pandemic times, see João Pedro Cachopo, trans. Rachael McGill, *The Digital Pandemic: Imagination in Times of Isolation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

3. See, for instance, several pieces in this journal on the topic, including João Pedro Cachopo, "Opera's Screen Metamorphosis: The Survival of a Genre or a Matter of Translation?," *Opera Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2014): 315–29; Danielle Ward-Griffin's review of the Metropolitan Opera's "At Home" gala in April 2020, "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: The Met 'At Home' Gala," *Opera Quarterly* 36, nos. 1 – 2 (2020): 50–58, and discussions on Marina Abramović's use of multimedia in opera in the "Review Colloquy: 7 *Deaths of Maria Callas*, Live stream from the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, September 2020," *Opera Quarterly* 36, nos. 1 – 2 (2020): 74–98.

4. One model that gained popularity during the pandemic was for a live online "première" event, aimed to engineer a sense of social gathering and occasion, but online operas are typically (though certainly not always) made available to watch later.

5. *Svadba* Synopsis, Boston Lyric Opera, https://blo.org/svadba/. Accessed April 14, 2022.

6. Marie-Aude Roux, "L'opéra 'Svadba,' une affaire de femmes, à Aix-en-Provence," *Le monde*, July 4, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2015/07/04/svabda-une-affaire-de-voix-de-femmes_4670147_3246.html. Accessed March 25, 2022.

7. Lucy Caplan, "Harbors and Horizons: Gender, Voice, and Ritual in *Svadba*," Boston Lyric Opera website, January 25, 2022. https://blo.org/harbors-and-horizons-gender-voice-and-ritual-in-svadba/. Accessed April 10, 2022.

8. In this respect as well as Sokolović's writing for upper voices, *Svadba* builds on her earlier vocal work, *Sirènes* (*Six voix pour six reines*) (2000). See Tamara Bernstein, "The Vocal Music of Ana Sokolović: Love Songs for the Twenty-First Century," *Circuit: Musiques contemporaines* 22, no. 3 (2012): 19–35.

9. See e.g., Márta Grabócz, "Archetypes of Initiation and Static Temporality in Contemporary Opera: Works of François-Bernard Mâche, Pascal Dusapin, and Gualtiero Dazzi," in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013), 101–24.

10. Branislava Trifuović, "An Important Thing that Western Contemporary Music has Forgotten about: Joy. An Interview with the composer Ana Sokolović," *New Sound International Journal of Music* 54, no. 2 (2019): 17.

11. Daniela Candillari, "The Richness of *Svadba*: Exploring the Sounds of Serbian Music," Boston Lyric Opera website, January 25, 2022, https://blo.org/the-richness-of-svadba-exploring-the-sounds-of-serbian-music/. Accessed March 29, 2022.

12. "Mon idole, c'est Stravinski." Ana Sokolović in conversation with Francoise Davoine, "Sérieuse, audacieuse, bienheureuse . . . Généreuses! Rencontre avec Isabelle Panneton, Marie Pelletier et Ana Sokolovi," *Circuit: Musiques contemporaines* 10, no. 1 (1999): 76.

13. Ana Sokolović, "On *Svadba* (Wedding)," Queen of Puddings Music Theatre YouTube Channel, April 11, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGtN7WRz4Fo. Accessed March 30, 2022.

14. Rebecca Meltzer, *Svadba*, Director's Note, Program, Waterperry Opera Festival, 2022, 16.

15. Citron, "Visual Media," 923.

16. Yayoi Uno Everett, "Opera as Film: Multimodal Narrative and Embodiment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and the Body*, ed. Youn Kim and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 399–417.

17. See also Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), and "Opera and Film" in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. David Neumeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 44–71.

18. It is worth noting that Boston Lyric Opera is partly funded by a grant by the state agency, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, so choices of location are also typically influenced by practical as well as aesthetic considerations.

19. Ana Sokolović, *Svadba* Libretto. All English translations of the libretto are by Lydia Perović.

20. I am not aware of a staging of *Svadba* to date that has similarly split the roles into two singing and nonsinging parts.

21. Jelena Novak, *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

22. Tereza Havelková, "Minding the Gap: The Politics of the Body-Voice Relationship in Multimedia Opera," *Opera Quarterly* 36, nos. 1–2 (2020): 27–49.

23. For an analysis of three Italian film-operas including Griffi's *Tosca*, see Cachopo, "The Aura of Opera Reproduced: Fantasies and Traps in the Age of the Cinecast," *Opera Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2018): 266–83.

24. For example, Courtney Bryan's *Blessed* (Opera Philadelphia, 2020); Shirish Korde and Elli Papakonstantinou's zoom-opera *Aède of the Ocean and Land* (2020).

25. Scene 2, m. 127. Sokolović, *Svadba* score (Boosey & Hawkes, 2011), 30.

26. There are strong reminiscences here of the first scene of *Les noces*, which is centered on the bride's hair, the bridesmaids combing and plaiting her tresses.

27. Cachopo, "Opera's Screen Metamorphosis": 325.

28. Cachopo, "The Aura of Opera Reproduced": 266.