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The Donnelly Opera

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Graduate Program in Music

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Abstract

The Donnelly Opera is a one-act chamber opera based on an infamous Southwestern Ontario event: the murder of the Donnelly family in 1880. The libretto was written with the consultation of various historical sources. Modern text setting practices are utilized with careful attention to the use of perfect rhymes and natural syllabic emphasis to help maximize audience comprehension. The opera uses traditional vocal archetypes of aria, recitative, and ensemble singing. The main focus of the opera is the dramatic portrayal of the events that took place leading up to the second murder trial. It is written for four vocalists (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone) and five instrumentalists: clarinet, horn, cello, piano, and percussion, (timpani, chimes, toms, cymbal, and triangle) and is approximately 25 minutes in length.

Keywords

Music, opera, Canadian opera, the Donnellys, Canadian history, chamber music
Acknowledgements

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Finally, I’d like to thank my wife Jenny Richardson for her unending support, as well as the rest of my family.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... iv
Score ........................................................................................................................... 1
Curriculum Vitae .......................................................................................................... 67
The Donnelly Opera

Libretto and music by Joshua Richardson
Run Time Approx. 26 mins

Norah Donnelly - Soprano
Mary O’Connor – Mezzo-Soprano
William Donnelly – Tenor
Charles Hutchinson – Baritone

Bb Clarinet
French Horn
Cello
Percussion (Timpani, Chimes, Tom-toms, cymbal, triangle, slapstick)
Piano
There's no justice for the Donnelys.

The suspects of murder are heard outside of the courtroom singly.
careful with the evidence, I scoured high and low, I had witnesses to the crime. There’s no justice for the Donnellys.
Will
Hutchinson, this is the day that our case has been dealt a crucial blow! The

Bb Cl.
Hn.
Vc.
Chm.
Pno.

Toms

The Donnelly Opera
Will

35

jury were biased, the judge made it certain that no one ever knew that these

Hn.

Vc.

Toms

35

mf

Cymbal

Perc.

Pno.

35

men have killed my kin though their alibis were thin and held no weight The whole

38

The Donnelly Opera
town had set its mind to be deaf and to be blind to my family's horrible fate! There's no justice for the Donnelly Opera.
The boy John-ny O’ Con-nor was staying with my folks.

He helped around the farm with ploughing and plant-ing and he shared my fa- ther’s bed.

And when the mob showed up that night he hid and he saw ever-y thing and e-scape
d
There's no justice for the Donnelly's.

When mobs get away with murder!
Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Chm.

Pno.

Charles, I have a lead that may pro-fit our case a great deal an old friend was a part of the vigilance com-

Oh? Do tell?

The Donnelly Opera
mit-tee and there are things James will reveal.

That sounds promising.

Yes, that sounds promising.

The attorney could withstand the vigilantes' fury by moving the case from Toronto to...
That sounds promising.

This will remove the bias from the jury.

Your family has a reputation for causing problems in the town. When a cow seemed to go...
missing or someone's cut-ter, you were blamed when a barn was burned down.

I never claimed that we were angels but there are things I won't allow.

We work hard for what we own, yes we burned a barn but we never stole that cut-ter or that cow.
Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

but still they blamed it on us.

Damn! the town still blamed it on us!

While listening to the townsfolk I have recently observed they're blamed it on us.

blamed it on us.

blamed it on us!

Damn! the town still blamed it on us!
Charles saying that the Donnelly's only got what they deserved.

Now that it's likely that the trial will be moved the odds of a conviction are so very much improved.

Will sits down and Norah sits on his lap to share a drink from a flask

We should have some booze to celebrate the news!

You know I don't drink!
Then for me and for No - rah.

My hus - band makes his own wine. It was a

A love - ly broach my dear.

Keep - sake from my mo - ther though I'd sell it for a price be - cause in truth, I have an - o - ther but
this one's pretty nice.

No thank you ma'am just offering the compliment.

Mary

Charles

Mis-ter Hutch-in-son, my John-ny needs shoes.

I gave your weekly pay yes-ter-day.
Mary

We had some unforeseen debt and since John-ny is your main wit-ness he’s un-a-ble to work.

Charles

The

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Charles

crown is not here for you to abuse. But I don’t think that boy should go bare-foot so here’s a
Thank you. I'll not ask again, you have my word!

sum to pay for John-ny's shoes.

Should we really cele-brate al-rea-dy? Even though the sus-pects now sit in a

Freely Norah gets up from sitting on Will's lap

Freely
The last trial didn't go so well. But

shouldn't we consider why the case was lost? When the judge practically begged for a conviction. The suspects even swore on the word of God and don't you think it's odd a
Norah says that they were all in Stratford. Now what on earth would they be doing there?

Mother says he called on big Jack Kennedy to borrow a drug because of a coughing

The Donnelly Opera
Norah
scare. That must have been quite the walk e - spe-cia-ly at 2 O’ clock.

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Pno.

Norah
The Thomp-sons said that Car - rol slept at

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

their house and that is what they swore if he had wok-en up they would have heard him be-
Norah

cause of their creaky floor.

They will do all things to block the

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

truth getting out about 2 o’clock!

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

Three men said they played cards with Pitchfork Ryder. He told police that he was fast a-

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

\[ \text{The Donnelly Opera} \]
Hold till breath is exhausted

Norah takes time to catch breath

And John-ny is the on-ly one who's
Norah

will ing to talk about what real ly hap pened at 2 O'clock.

Some one's daugh ter had a wok en at two but the girl is only a youth. She

did not real ly be the truth? 'Cause I heard a real ly loud
Norah

I had re-tired to bed a-round mid-night I took to the side furth-est from the wall.

Vc.

Freely \( \text{q} = 108 \)

mysteriously

Pno.

mysteriously

Norah

We had Will's bro-ther John stay-ing with us

The two of them stayed up much lat-er.

Bc Cl.

mysteriously

Vc.
Norah

Will came to bed a-round one.
I had on-ly just fall-en back to sleep when I heard:

Lights change to signify a flashback to event

Agitato \( \frac{1}{4} \)

\( \frac{1}{4} \)
Norah: How many, Will? How many did you see?

Will: A mess of them. Your brother's out there too.

Norah: What does he want?

Will: He holds a grudge because I married you.
What could they want at 2 O’clock?
Norah

John, it's hard to ignore but do not open that door!

Perc.

Slapstick or Snare

Pno.

with urgency

Pno.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Damn it, John!

Expressivo q=72

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

Pno.

Will

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera

33
Norah: We need to pray while he is still alive. I’ll fetch a piece of holy candle.

Norah goes and searches around for candle in shock.

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.
Freely \( \text{mp simply} \)

Norah

In paradisum de du-cant te an-ge-li, in tu-o ad-ven-

Freely \( \text{simply}\)

Norah
tu sub-sci- pi-ant te mar-tys res, et per-du-cant te
Norah

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

V

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Charles

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

No rah, I can see you'd love to tell your test i mo ny but our best chance for se cur ing a con-
And we will 
convict 
now that 
there’s a 

witness from the in
side, James Feeheley.

Norah 

Now that the trial 
is to be moved, no more bias or shifting the blame.

The Donnelly Opera
And no more smearing of the Donnelly name. So let's go see James and see how it goes.

Yes, let's go see James and see what he knows. Let's hope it's enough to convince the

Norah

Will

Charles

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.
Norah

There will be justice for the Don...

Will

There will be justice for the Don...

Charles

jury of the suspects’ guilt. There will be justice for the Don...

Hn.


Vc.


Pno.

There will be justice for the Don...

B-Cl.

There will be justice for the Don...

Hn.


Vc.


Timp.


Pno.

There will be justice for the Don...

The Donnelly Opera
Norah and Will hurry off

Mary runs on stage in a lit

You'll not be - lieve what I have learned,
Mary

Our home on Princess Street was burned!

Mary takes off her scarf, and then her coat throwing both to the ground as she rushes toward Charles

Can you believe it?
And ev'ry thing with in it lost, and ev'ry thing with in it lost like our beds and our spreads and our quilts and our cup-boards.

I fear what all these things will cost!
Our home is laid waste. At least that can be replaced, un-
like children. My kids were safely tucked in bed.
mother I must keep him healthy and health is expensive.
Mary

John-ny, dull as gold that had just been

Mary

mined but gold is worth much more once it's been refined.
Mary

Ever since he took the Donnelly hire, they've made him work

Bb Cl.

and work and work and work! he's been tried and tested and put through the fire.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera
At thirteen years old, my boy's as precious as gold!

As gold, It's not about the

The Donnelly Opera 49
It's not about the money, but if you gave me money.

I swear it would be for John's care.

Not to cause a-larm, but
this, this will keep my John ny from coming to harm, for

friends of the kil-lers say they will
Mary

pay

four

thou-

sand!

for my sweet
Will and Norah enter.

Charles! The witness who was going to be the case's salvation.

We went to meet him at the hotel but the staff said he'd left for the train station.

So we rushed to see why. We both had to know.

Since it was nearby, was he planning to go...
Charles, he was boarding on a train he was going to let us down he was leaving for A-

mer-i-ca he was getting out of town. Though he did tell us one crucial
Will

fact that the de-fence for the vi-gi-lan-ties knows

They know you've been

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Chm.

Pno.

Will

pay-ing the O'-Con-nors!

They al-read-y doubt the O' Con-nors fit-ness they will

Perc.

Pno.
Norah
Mary
Will
B Cl.
Hn.
Vc.
Pno.

Mary drops bag of money making loud bang. She quickly picks up

What have you there?

No-thing at

think we've been brib-ing our most im-port-ant wit-ness.

What's in your hand?

On-ly my hard earned wage!

Agitato \(q=108\)

The Donnelly Opera

57
Norah: Looks like a whole year's wage!

Will: Did you just

Bo Cl.: 

Hn.: 

Vc.: 

Pno.: ord.

Norah: You're such a liar!

Mary: I'm not a

Will: pay her yet a gain?

Bo Cl.: Cuivré

Hn.: 

Vc.: 

Toms: 

Pno.:
Will

Charles

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

548

548

548

548

548

548

Charles

I should’ve thought things through.

I am so sorry to both of you.

Let’s adjust our expectations.

Charles

the case is not lost though there might be some complications.

But here, a
Charles remembers the letter from the attorney general and grabs it from his desk.

The letter from the attorney general. It should bring some good news.

Will: What does it say? Is the trial to be moved?

Charles: No.

The Donnelly Opera
it's to stay right here.

Norah

Just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Hn.

There's no just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Vc.

Chm.

Pno.

Just - ice for the Don - nelys!

F

Spirito

 accel.

mf

Spirito

576   accel.

Norah

Just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Will

Just - ice for the Don - nelys?

Charles

There's no just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Hn.

mf

Vc.

Chm.

Pno.

mf
Norah: Just ice for the Donnelly!

Will: There's no just-ice for

Charles: There's no just-ice for us!

B♭ Cl.:

Hn.: f

Vc.: f

Timp.: pp

Pno.: f

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

us!

Just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Mary

There's no just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Will

Just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Charles

There's no just - ice for the Don - nelys!

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Timp.

Pno.
There's no justice for the Donnellys!

There's no justice for the Donnellys!

There's no justice for the Donnellys!

There's no justice for the Donnellys!

Just ice for the Donnellys!

Just ice for the Donnellys!

Just ice for the Donnellys!

Just ice for the Donnellys!

The Donnelly Opera
Joshua Richardson

**Education**

**Western University**, London, Ontario

MMus in Composition (2015-present)

BMus with honors in Composition (2012-2015)


**Performances**

The Aeolian, “A String Octet”, the RebelHeart Collective  
Composer (June 17, 2017)

Beal Secondary School, “From Sea to Sea”, The London Singers/ Beal Singers  
Composer (June 8, 2017)

Von Kuster Hall, “Mary O’Connor”, for soprano and piano trio  
Composer (March 16, 2017)

Von Kuster Hall, “Piano Quartet for the Stratosphere”, Ensemble Made in Canada  
Composer (October 27, 2015)

Von Kuster Hall, “A Querulous Quartet”, for Saxophones  
Composer (March 23, 2015)

The McManus Theatre, “P&J the Sandwich Musical”, Actors’ Equity Co-op Workshop  
Composer/ Book (2007)

The Palace Theatre, “P&J the Sandwich Musical”, Actors’ Equity Co-op Production  
Composer/ Book (2006)

The London Fringe Festival, “Oscar, Emily, & the Giant”, Pretentious Theatre  
Composer/Book (2005)

The Arts Project, “You, Me, & Them”, Pretentious Theatre  
Composer/Book (2005)

**Honours**

**Western University**

Dean’s Honor List (2012-2015), Gold Medalist

Ontario Arts Council Theatre Creators’ Reserve Grant (2007)

London Arts Council Grant (2005 & 2006)

The London Fringe Festival “Best Original Production” for Musical “Oscar, Emily, & the Giant” (2005)

Professional Development

**Scriptlab** Certificate in Musical Theatre Writing (2006-2007)  
Instructor Jim Betts

**Smile Theatre** Workshop in Musical Theatre Writing (2008-2009)  
Instructor Leslie Arden

Experience

Dash Quest Heroes, a mobile game published by Tiny Titan Studios  
Music and sound designer (2017-present)

Piano Tuner, Self Employed (2004-present)

Maud, a mobile video game published by MagicWalnut  
Music and sound designer (2014)

Coffee Break, a short film  
Composed and produced soundtrack (2007)

Activities

Church worship leader at New Song Fellowship, London Ontario (2002-present)