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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

_The Donnelly Opera_ was written with support from many different artists and faculty at the Don Wright Faculty of Music and elsewhere. I would like to thank my advisor Prof. Omar Daniel, and second reader Prof. John Hess. Also Prof. Peter Paul Koprowski, Prof. Paul Frehner, Prof. David Myska, Prof. Kim Lundberg, Prof. Torin Chiles, and Prof. Jay Hodgson. Furthermore, I would like to thank the musicians and performers: Rae Cunningham, Ron George, Anna Grigg, Jake Schindler, Ethan Lacey, Jessica Clark, Stephanie Brassard, Grayson Nesbitt, and Adam Ianetta. I would also like to thank conductor Ben Leibovitz, director Erin Dickau, and costume designer Becky Lenko. I am grateful to the late Chris Doty for providing the initial idea to pursue this topic.

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

The suspects of murder are heard outside of the courtroom single.
Will file without the conviction of Carroll the others go free without a

Bb Cl. f

Hn. f

Vc. f

Toms

Pno. mp

Will trial I had all the details yet the court system fails every time I was

Bb Cl. p

Hn. p

Vc. p

Perc. Cymbal

Pno. f

The Donnelly Opera
Will

careful with the evidence, I scoured high and low, I had witnesses to the

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Perc.

Pno.

There's no justice for the Donnelly Opera
Will
Hutchinson, this is the day that our case has been dealt a crucial blow!

The Donnelly Opera
jury were biased, the judge made it certain that no one ever knew that these men have killed my kin though their alibis were thin and held no weight. The whole.
town had set its mind to be deaf and to be blind to my family's horrible fate! There's no justice for the Donnellys.

There's no justice for the Donnellys.
The boy John-ny O’ Con-nor was staying with my folks. He helped a-round 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-scaped.
There's no justice for the Donnelly's.

When mobs get away with murder!

The Donnelly Opera
Will: There’s no justice for the Donnelly!

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

Pno.: 

F

Moderato (q = c. 108)

mp with hope

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

Charles: Oh? Do - tell?
mit-tee and there are things James will reveal.

That sounds promising.

Pizz.

Triangle

The attorney could withstand the vigilant's fury by moving the case from Toronto to
"This will re-move the bi-as from the ju-ry."

"That sounds pro-mis-ing."

"Your fam-ily has a rep-u-
ta-tion for caus-ing prob-lems in the town."

"When a cow seemed to go"
Charles

Vc.

Pno.

Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

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

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

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

missing or some-one's cut-ter, you were blamed when a barn was burned down.

The Donnelly Opera
Will

but still they blamed it on us.

Damn! the town still blamed it on us!

Charles

While listening to the townsfolk I have recently observed they're

But still they 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 husband makes his own wine.

A lovely broach my dear.

keep sake from my mother though I'd sell it for a price because in truth, I have another but
Mary
this one's pret-ty nice.

Will
No thank you ma'am just of-fer-ing the comp-li-

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.
Capriccioso \( \text{q.} = 54 \)

Pno.

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

Charles
I gave your week-ly pay yes-ter-day.

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

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

crown is not here for you to abuse. But I don't think that boy should go bare-foot so here's a
Mary

Thank you. I'll not ask again, you have my word!

Charles

sum to pay for John-ny's shoes.

Bo Cl.

Vc.

Pho.

Norah

Freely \textit{s}=108 Norah gets up from sitting on Will's lap

Should we really ce-le-brate al-rea-dy?

Even though the suspecs now sit in a

Pno.
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

 Strict Time (Like clock) \( \frac{3}{4} = 64 \)  

 Strict Time (Like clock) \( \frac{3}{4} = 64 \)
Norah
real-ly big shock that they all had an al-i-bi for 2 O’ Clock? James

B♭ Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

L animated

Ma-her says that they were all in Strat-ford. Now what on earth would they be do-ing there? A

Norah
wit-ness says he called on big Jack Ken-ne-dy to bo-row a drug be-cause of a cough-ing

Pno.
Norah

That must have been quite the walk e-spe-cia-ly at 2 O' clock.

Norah

The Thomp-sons said that Car-ol slept at

Norah

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

cause of their creαky floor. They will do all things to block the

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

truth getting out a-bout 2 o’clock!

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

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

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.
Norah

sleep in bed, his story seems to change what ever suits his need. Then how did all our family end up

Vc.

Hold till breath is exhausted

Norah takes time to catch breath

dead?

And John-ny is the only one who's

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Timp.

Pno.
Norah will ing to talk a bout what really 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

two but the girl is only a youth. She

saw her fa ther fast a sleep can that really be the truth? ’Cause I heard a real-ly loud
Norah

I had retired to bed around midnight. I took to the side further from the wall.

We had Will's brother John staying with us. The two of them stayed up much later.

Bb Cl.

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

Lights change to signify a flashback to event
Norah: Have you seen any of them?  
Will: What are they doing to my horse?  
Hn.: A mess of them. Your brother's out there too.  
Pno.: How many, Will? How many did you see?  
Will: He holds a grudge because I married you.
What could they want at 2 O'clock?
Norah

271

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

Perc.

271

Slapstick or Snare

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

Pno.

271

With urgency

Gunshot signifying that John has been shot

Hn.

274

Vc.

274

Pno.

274

Will

279

Expressivo \( \frac{q=72}{\text{mp}} \)

Bb Cl.

279

Damn it John!

Hn.

279

Vc.

279

Expressivo \( \frac{q=72}{\text{mp}} \)

Pno.

279
I told you not to open up that door and now your blood is spilled up.

There was no way to protect you.

He's dying, Will. It seems unlike that he will survive.
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.
Freely \( \text{simply} \)

Norah

\begin{align*}
\text{In paradisum} & \quad \text{deducant te angelii,} \\
\text{in tu adven} & \end{align*}

B♭ Cl.

Freely \( \text{simply} \)

Norah

\begin{align*}
\text{tu suscipient} & \quad \text{te martyres,} \\
\text{et perducant} & \end{align*}
in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem

Chorus Angelo

rum te suscipiat, et cum,

La zaro quondam pauper ater

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

B♭ Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

V

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Charles

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera
vic - tion is our case a - gainst James Car - roll for the kill - ing of your mo - ther.

And we will con - vict now that there's a wit - ness from the in - side, James Fee-he-ley.

Now that the trial is to be moved, no more bi - as or shift - ing the blame.
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.

Grave $d = 60$

Grave $d = 60$

W
There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.
Norah and Will hurry off agitato **=60**

Mary runs on stage in a fit

You'll not believe what I have learned.
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 re-placed, un

Our home is laid waste, 
At least that can be re-placed, un

like children. 
My kids were safely tucked in bed.
Mary

If it weren't for Bob Donnelly they'd

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Timp.

Pno.

400

400

400

400

400

400

400

400

400

400

If it weren't for Bob Donnelly they'd

were't for Bob Donnelly they'd

be dead! I'm the boy's
Mary

mother

I must keep him healthy

and health is expensive.

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera
John-ny, dull as gold that had just been 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

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

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

As gold.
It's not about the...
Mary

money. It's not about the money, but if you gave me money.

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 alarm, but

morendo

morendo

morendo

morendo
Mary

this, this will keep my John ny from coming to harm, for

B♭ Cl.

friends of the killers say they will

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

non legato

The Donnelly Opera
Mary

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Toms

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera

Mary

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Mary

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

thou sand!

for my sweet
Will and Norah enter.

Will

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

Norah

So we rushed to see why

Will

Since it was nearby was he planning to go.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.
Charles, he was boarding on a train he was going to let us down he was leaving for A-

Though he did tell us one crucial
fact that the defence for the villains knows They know you’ve been paying the O’Connors! They already doubt the O’Connors fitness they will
Mary drops bag of money making loud bang. She quickly picks up

Norah

Mary

Will

think we've been bribing our most important witness.

B♭ Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

What have you there?

No-thing at

We've been bribing our most important witness.

What's in your hand?

On-ly my hard earned wage!

II

Agitato ≈ 108

Norah

Mary

B♭ Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Agitato ≈ 108

non legato
Norah: Looks like a whole year's wage!

Will: Did you just

Hn.: ord.

Vc.: Cuivré

Toms:

Pno.:
Norah

Are you so need-y? There won't be just-ice if you are greed-y!

Mary

liar but I just learned there was a fire our house was burned!

Bb Cl.

Culvée

Hn.

Vc.

Toms

Pho.

Norah

you liar so need-y no just-ice so greed-y

Mary

burned! no liar just learned a fire house burned!

Will

Why would you pay her yet a-

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Toms

Pho.
Will gain?

Charles Al-right, e-nough! Things don't look good.

Bb Cl. Cymbal choke

Hn. Let's adjust our expect-a-tions

Vc. the case is not lost though there might be some comp-li-ca-tions But here, a

Perc. Things don't look good.

Pno. I should've thought things through I am so sor-ry to the both of you. Let's adjust our expect-a-tions
Charles remembers the letter from the attorney general and grabs it from his desk.

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

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

Charles: No.

Hn.: pp

Vc.: pp

Perc.: pp

Pno.: pp

The Donnelly Opera
it's to stay right here.

Can there be just-ice for the Don-nel-lys?

There's no just-ice for the Don-nel-lys!

Just-ice for the Don-nel-lys!
Norah: "Justice for the Donnelly's!

Will: "There's no justice for us!

Charles: 

B♭ Cl.: 

Hn.: 

Vc.: 

Timp.: "pp"

Pno.: 

There's no justice for the Donnelly's!
Norah: us!

Mary: There's no justice for the Donnellys!

Will: Just ice for the Donnellys!

Charles: There's no justice for the Donnellys!

Bo Cl.: Just ice for the Donnellys!

Hn.: Just ice for the Donnellys!

Vc.: Just ice for the Donnellys!

Timp.: Just ice for the Donnellys!

Pno.: Just ice for the Donnellys!
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!

Justice for the Donnellys!

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There's no justice for the Donnellys!

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Just ice for the Donnellys!

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Joshua Richardson

Education

**Western University**, London, Ontario

MMus in Composition (2015-present)

BMus with honors in Composition (2012-2015)


Performances

- 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)

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)