The Donnelly Opera

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree 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.
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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 just ice for the Donnelys.

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

f

Pno.

p
careful with the evidence, I scoured high and low, I had witnesses to the 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 Donnelly Opera.
The boy John-ny O’ Con-nor was staying with my folks.

He helped around the farm with ploughing and planting and he shared my father’s bed.

And when the mob showed up that night he hid and he saw every thing and escaped simply a tempo

The Donnelly Opera
There's no just ice for the Don-nel-lys. When mobs get a-way with mur-der!
Charles, I have a lead that may pro-fit our case a great deal. An old friend was a part of the vigilance committee...
mit-tee and there are things James will re-veal.

That sounds pro-mis-ing.

pizz.

mf

Triangle

p

Yes, that sounds pro-mis-ing.

The a-storn-ey ge-ne-ral could with-stand the vi-gi-lan-tes' fu-ry by mo-ving the case from Tor-on-to to
Will

Charles

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

Will

Charles

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

Charles

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

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...
Charles

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

Vc.

I never claimed that we were an-gels but there are things I won't al-low.

Pno.

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

Blamed it on us.

Blamed it on us!
Charles saying that the Donnelly 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!
Mary

Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Mary

Will

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

Mary

Will

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

Mary

Pno.

Mary

Pno.

Mary

Pno.

Mary

Pno.

Mary

Pno.
this one's pret-ty nice.

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

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

I gave your week-ly pay yes-ter-day.
139

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

143

crown is not here for you to a - buse. 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

Norah gets up from sitting on Will’s lap

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

Even though the su-spects now sit in a

K

Freely

Pno.
The Donnelly Opera

Norah

The last trial didn't go so well.

Bb Cl.

Portamento

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

shouldn't we consider why the case was lost? When the judge practically begged for a conviction. The

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Norah

suspects even swore on the word of God and don't you think it's odd
Norah says that they were all in Stratford. Now what on earth would they be doing there?

Mother says he called on big Jack Kenne dy to borrow a drug because of a coughing
Norah

b

Cl.

Hn.

Pno.

179

scatter. That must have been quite the walk especially at 2 O’clock.

Thomp-sons said that Carol slept at their house and that is what they swore if he had woken up they would have heard him be-

184

188

The Donnelly Opera
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-
Hold till breath is exhausted

Norah

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

Norah takes time to catch breath

And Johnny is the only one who's

dead? 

The Donnelly Opera
Norah will-ing to talk a-bout 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

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

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

Vc.

Freely

Pno.

mysteriously

P

Norah

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

B♭ Cl.

mysteriously

Vc.

mysteriously

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

Will came to bed a-round one.

I had on-ly just fall-en back to sleep when I heard:

Bb. Cl.

mp

Hn.

mysteriously

Pno.

Lights change to signify a flashback event

Vc.

\[ \text{accel.} \]

\[ \text{Agitato} \quad \text{q.}=84 \]

\[ \text{p} \quad \text{mf} \]

\[ \text{f} \]

\[ \text{p} \quad \text{mf} \]

\[ \text{p} \quad \text{mf} \]

\[ \text{p} \quad \text{mf} \]
Norah: How many, Will? How many did you see?

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

Noted: What does he want?

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

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

Perc.: 

Pno.: 

Gunshot signifying that John has been shot

Slapstick or Snare

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Will

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

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

Damn it John!
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 unlikely that he will survive.
Norah

We need to pray while he is still alive. I'll fetch a piece of holy...norah goes and searches around for candle in shock.

candle.

detached

Bb Cl.

Hn.
Freely $\text{simply}$

Norah

In paradisum deducant te angelii, in tuo adversum

Bb Cl.

Freely $\text{simply}$

Pn. $mp$

Norah

tu susceptant te martyres, et per ductant te

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pn.
Norah

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

V

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Charles

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.
vic-tion is our case a-gainst James Car-roll for the kill-ing of your mo-

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

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

Will

Charles

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.

There will be justice for the Donnellys.
Mary takes off her scarf, and then her coat throwing both to the ground as she rushes toward Charles.
Mary

And ev'ry thing with in it lost, and

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

Mary

ev'ry thing with in it lost like our beds and our spreads and our

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

Mary

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-

like children. My kids were safely tucked in bed.

Mary

Bb Cl.

Vc.

Pno.

Hn.

Vc.

Timp.

Pno.

The Donnelly Opera
If it weren't for Bob Donnelly they'd be dead. I'm the boy's...
Mary

mo—ther

I must keep him healthy

and health is ex—pen—sive.
Mary

428
John-ny, dull as gold that had just been mined

Hn.

428

Vc.

428

Pno.

428

428

428

428

428

428

428

428

John-ny, dull as gold that had just been mined but gold is worth much more once it's been refined.
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.
At thirteen years old, my boy's as precious as gold!

As gold. It's not about the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Bo Cl.</th>
<th>Hn.</th>
<th>Vc.</th>
<th>Pno.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
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</tbody>
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The Donnelly Opera
It's not about the money, but if you gave me money, it would be for Johnny's care.

Not to cause a alarm, but morendo

Morendo

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

friends of the killers say they will

non legato
Mary

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Toms

Pno.

Mary

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

four

thou-
sand!

for my sweet

The Donnelly Opera
Will and Norah enter.

Will

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

Hn.

mf agitato

Norah

So we rushed to see why We both had to know

Will

Since it was nearby was he planning to go.

Hn.

mf

Vc.

mf

Pno.

mf

508

3

The Donnelly Opera
Charles, he was boarding on a train he was going to let us down he was leaving for A-

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

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

They know you've been

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Chm.

Pno.

Will

pay-ing the O’Con-nors!

They al-ready doubt the O’Con-nors fit-ness they will

Perc.

Pno.
Norah:

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

What have you there?

Will:

think we've been bribing our most important witness.

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Agitato \( \approx 108 \)

Norah:

What's in your hand?

Mary:

all.

On - ly my hard earned wage!

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

Agitato \( \approx 108 \)
Norah

Looks like a whole year's wage!

Will

Did you just

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Pno.

You're such a liar!

I'm not a

pay her yet again?

Cuivré

Toms

Pno.
Will

Charles

Bb Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

548

Gain?

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

548

I should've thought things through. I am so sorry to the both of you. Let's ad-just our ex-pect-a-tions

552

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

556

556

556

556

f

Jj

The Donnelly Opera
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.

Pno.

Will

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

Charles

No

Hn.

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.

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: Just ice for the Donnelly's!

Will: There's no just-ice for

Charles: 

Bb Cl.: 

Hn.: 

Vc.: 

Timp.: 

Pno.: 

The Donnelly Opera
Norah

"Just ice for the Don-nelly's!"

Mary

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

Will

Just ice for the Don-nelly's!

Charles

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

Bo Cl.

Hn.

Vc.

Timp.

Pno.

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)

The London Fringe Festival “Best Production & Funniest Production” for Musical
“P&J the Sandwich Musical” (2004)
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)