

## ***Between what opera is and how it is portrayed***

Composer Matthew Peterson in conversation with Ona Jarmalavičiūtė

Swedish-American composer Matthew Peterson is an independent, vital voice in the new opera world. He studied at Gotland School of Music Composition, Indiana University School of Music, and St. Olaf College. Like his varied education, the music of this composer defies categorization and embraces many different genres. His dynamic, socially relevant, true-crime opera *Voir Dire* (a French legal term, meaning, in English, to speak the truth under oath) was in the making for many years and went through a series of rejections and rewrites due to its being a straightforward portrayal of today's justice system, unequipped to account for the human element. The opera is based on real court cases, witnessed by lyricist Jason Zencka; thus, it examines the real tragedies of ordinary people, presenting a bitter critique of the situation. Themes of drug abuse, fractured families, economic precarity, and sexual violence are openly explored on stage, provoking diverse reactions from the public and raising major contemporary societal debates. On the occasion, after many years since its composition, of an audio recording of *Voir Dire* being publicly released in 2020, its composer Matthew Peterson discusses in this interview public reactions to it and the creative opportunities offered by the challenge of adapting the opera to the audio recording format.

*What most attracted you to Jason Zencka's experiences in court?*

I was 24, I'd just earned my master's degree and I stopped for a day in Stevens Point Wisconsin to visit Jason en route to Minneapolis, Minnesota. We were planning to write an opera about a North Dakotan far-right partisan named Gordon Kahl who had killed two US Marshals during the farm crisis.

*While composing the piece, you delved into the inner workings of the justice system. Did you do any research in order to understand court proceedings?*

We sat in the courtroom together. That was about it. I would call him on Skype; I would write him emails and ask questions about courtroom procedure. Sometimes he would correct me after I'd already composed something, usually when I'd had to leave out or abbreviate a part of the libretto. We had a good collaboration on those things; we saved our fights for bigger issues like how the opera should end, or the title!

I'd actually been in court myself in 2002 at age 18, the Cavalier County Courthouse in Langdon, North Dakota. The county sheriff who must have been 70 years old had caught me and some friends drinking at a bonfire in the Pembina Hills, and of course we were underage, so I had to go to court a couple weeks later. I told my parents I was going fishing all day when really I had a court date. In the courtroom were sitting next to a man there on assault charges who smelled like he's been detoxing in the jail for a day or two, and he was giving the three of us some hard looks, so we tried not to make eye contact. In our case judge granted leniency and let us off with a warning because the sheriff had written him a note telling the judge how, after the sheriff had written us up, he had got his car stuck trying to drive back across the prairie and we'd pushed him out! We were pretty nice boys after all, I guess.

*What were the most unexpected or challenging aspects of creating an opera on the topic of crime? Did the theme itself cause you to take many creative risks while composing this opera?*

This opera was based on and adapted from true stories. The characters were based on real people, Jason combined different stories into new stories. To do justice to the truth of the subject matter, *Voir Dire* needed to be true, and I felt that musically it required both directness and circumspection. I put a great deal of thought into this aspect, and a great deal of pressure on myself to reach every single audience member, no matter what - obviously an impossible task, but it was a goal worth aiming for. Sometimes that meant writing a really simple, emotional, almost banal song like the Alycia Simpson

aria; sometimes it meant creating something really dissonant and complex like Professor Milton's scene, A Plea. Perhaps the biggest risk was how diverse and eclectic the piece was overall, like channel surfing musically, but that's how the courtroom is. One person goes out, another comes in. New person, new crime, new story.

*Peterson holds degrees from the Gotland School of Music Composition (artist diploma), Indiana University School of Music (M.M.) and St. Olaf College (B.M.). How did these three institutions change you and make you the composer you are today? Would you say there are elements from these institutions that could be found in opera?*

I began composing at St Olaf College. Composer Mary Ellen Childs was a visiting instructor and I - a double bass student at the time - took her composition course. She is a brilliant artist and my first composer-role-model; she introduced me to an entire world of music I didn't know existed and I was hooked. Jason and I wrote our first opera during our final year at St Olaf College. I didn't know anything about opera. I'd never even seen an opera! It was my second year of composing, and I, along with several other student composers, were asked to write an opera scene for the new lyric theater program. I asked Jason, a religion student, because he was the only writer I knew. As the other composers dropped out of the project, we grew our scene into a short opera, *The Binding of Isaac*, a modern retelling of the biblical Abraham and Isaac story. I discovered I had a natural aptitude for song and writing for the stage. So St Olaf was where it all started.

At Indiana I studied with Sven-David Sandström. He was my idol. All his students loved him. He was so wise, so generous and caring, and a truly great composer. I learned so much about composing and being a composer from his music and his example. Sven-David truly loved his music and he loved composing. His example gave me the courage and inspiration to find my own voice and to use that voice to give others as much music as I can. I don't think I would have had the guts to write the Alycia Simpson aria if I hadn't had Sven-David's example to inspire me.

*Your work can't be categorized. How did you free yourself of the academic training and the structures you are taught, which are difficult to break?*

That's a good question. I think about this often, how I ended up where I'm at. I think that a certain part of my composing voice was there from the beginning: my rhythmic vitality, elements of my harmonic language and melodic sensibilities. Ultimately a composer is accountable to his or her own creativity and conscience, and the development of that can take time and experience, just like growing as a person does.

I don't want to badmouth academia. I learned a lot in my studies, I was exposed to so much incredible music, I met so many people that are still important to me today - but I definitely needed to get away from a certain mindset that I think academia, in particular American academia, instills and encourages in too many composers. At least it did back then, the 2000s, because a lot has changed since. Still, studying composition at a top graduate program in the US is academically rigorous more than creatively rigorous. You're being prepared to be a professor, not a freelance composer - and a possibly negative side-effect of learning all that theory, repertoire, and analysis etc. is that some students start thinking that in order to justify their existence as a creative artist, they have to be every great composer rolled into one. I think subconsciously I felt that. There is this attitude about what music is worth knowing, and what composers should aspire to. That every piece should be serious, full of references, composed for posterity. At Indiana, certain composers and movements were totally ignored; there was this attitude of 'this is the music/composer that is worth knowing,' 'this composer is superior to that composer,' that kind of thing. In hindsight, some of my teachers were really clueless, and it's not their fault, it was a generational thing. And I maybe wasn't confident enough yet - I felt deep down that I was a fraud, because, for example, Prince, No Doubt and the musical *Rent* were more musically formative for me than, say, Ravel, and I was hiding this from my teachers. I liked Steve Reich and

Meredith Monk more than “smarter” music like György Kurtag or Kaija Saariaho. I liked them too! But it didn't speak to me in terms of being a language I felt was true to my experience of being alive. One of my teachers actually said “Minimal music is for minimal minds” and I felt ashamed, when what I should have done is tell him to screw off. Politely.

Moving to Sweden in 2008 was freeing, both in and of itself, moving to a different country, but also because what I was seeing in my colleagues there, who were young musicians from very different backgrounds. Some had been working in theater, some were coming out of electronic dance music or rock or whatever. They were freer, there wasn't the “academic” mentality in the same way. We had a band together, we listened to music, we talked about life. And that was the final piece for me, that year where I experienced so much freedom and so little prejudice.

Ultimately, I'm also a composer that wants to do many different things - I'm composing for different mediums, I'm writing pieces that are serious and pieces that are lighter. I actively pursue different kinds of opportunities, from fun solo works to large scale works. I'm constantly reacting to the world around me, and I always try to follow my conscience and compose with integrity. I really do care about other people and their experiences, and I want to serve that in my music in some way. Creating music is my way of sculpting meaning out of the strangeness, the pain and beauty of existing in the world.

*When composing the music, what was your approach towards the text? What elements did you choose to combine music with text? What music elements were the most important while composing the score?*

I think everything comes from the text, in a way. When it comes to how the text affects me as a composer, it's like a chemical reaction between two substances. Something new is created. Jason's text is so percussive and incisive, that my music became that way.

*The plot of the opera is filled with strong, ever-changing emotions. Was music the main emotional cultivation tool in the opera? Was it challenging to compose music for altering emotional affect rapidly with every scene?*

I remember walking home to my apartment from the Gotland composer school in fall 2008, and I was mentally singing through the fugue from the child-pornography case where the clerks of court are describing the PDF images of child pornography, and it hit me, the text, and the heaviness of that case. I was obsessed with the piece being *true*. At times it was really challenging, because of how tragic some of these cases are, and how far they were from anything I'd gone through. Sort of like method acting, I was able to find a sliver of something I recognized, understanding how things could turn out that way. In that way I was even able to make the audience see a known pedophile as a three-dimensional character and give a rapist an honest, emotional aria without glamorizing in any way what he had done.

*All the characters in the opera are complex and multi-dimensional. Were you musically forming the characters differently, while knowing that they would be sung by the same performer?*

Well, each character really only sings one multi-dimensional, dynamic character. The other characters are small roles that don't experience any arc; they're a prosecutor, or a bailiff, someone who is a foil to a main character like Alicia Simpson or Dr. Milton.

*How did you musically balance the wholeness with the fragmentation of the work? What determined the unique structure of the opera?*

Dramatically and dramaturgically, Jason started with the libretto for individual court cases - the Dr Milton child pornography case, the Alicia Simpson bond hearing, the Kalcek rape trial. Only later did

he start fitting them together, using the Jeffrey Schumacher matricide case, the opera's dream sequence, as a through-line, with scenes woven in between the different court cases.

As Jason starting putting the pieces together, arriving at a through-line - and we arrived at a title, *Voir Dire* - my music coalesced around a single tetrachord of four descending notes: C B A, and G#/G. This tetrachord formed the basis for the music, in different ways for each scene: the Bond Hearing's machinery-of-the-courtroom bassline, the melodies of Alycia Simpson's devastating ballad, Judge Dodsworth's beat-poet meets lounge-lizard monologues, the twisted-nursery-rhyme ickiness of a fugue depicting images of child pornography, Professor Milton's convoluted chromatic progressions climbing downwards like Jacob's ladder in reverse, the Mother's Ghost with her unearthly vocal harmonies and spectral ostinati. I think of those four notes as a tortured chaconne, as if the sounding notes of humanity have been pressed, ill-fitting, into the strict formal framework of the courtroom.

*What is important while tastefully combining several music genres in one piece?*

I think it's important for it to grow naturally out of the dramatic requirements of the piece, out of the setting, the conflicts, and the characters. I composed most of *Voir Dire* in 2008-2009 at age 24-25, and part of the reason it ended up being such an eclectic work is that's where I was at creatively then. But it was also a conscious dramaturgical choice. There had to be the courtroom of reality and the courtroom of the dream sequence and the music needed to differentiate those settings. So the courtroom reality is rhythmic, disjunct, angular, a malfunctioning legal machine. The music for the dream sequence is dreamier, with its atmospheric orchestration, floating ostinatos, instruments uncoordinated in time - and then there were the individual characters to represent, from Alycia Simpson's direct, heart-on-her-sleeve ballad, a melody with chord changes, to Professor Milton, who is hiding from himself in the most complex harmonies of the opera. There was also the channel-changing nature of the form, and the music is telling us when we're in a different case, a different world.

*The language of the opera is unique - it reminds more rock rap music, not the typical opera lyrics in a libretto. How hard was it to compose operatic music to such different and non-operatic libretto?*

The text is percussive, rhythmic and eclectic, so the music is as well - and I like that. English is a rhythmically complex, percussive language, in Shakespeare's plays as well as hip-hop. Italian is a rhythmically simple, lyric language that lends itself to opera singing. I grew up in the American upper-Midwest, which is where the opera is set. The language and people in the opera were familiar to me, I knew it inside and out.

*The original text was more of a theater play. How did it end up being an opera? How would you define the obscure genre of this piece?*

Jason and I fought a lot during the process of writing and rewriting this piece. I felt at times that Jason would put too much into the text, and not leave enough room for the music. As you say, like a play. Jason thought I was controlling and arrogant. We were both right, I think. Jason is a writer first, librettist second; he's not an opera buff by any means. But that's also his strength; his distance from the tradition frees him from the pressures and preconceptions that come with it. For a time, we called it a ballad opera, but I don't think that really fits after the 2016 rewrites. It's an opera now, albeit an eclectic and unique one. But if we go back historically, take for example Mozart's *Singspiel* like *Die Zauberflöte*, those also were fundamentally different from his Italian operas, but we call them both "opera" today.

*For you in opera, which are more important, music or words? How did you use this dynamic while composing this opera?*

Music. It has to be music. If it's not, it's not a very good or memorable opera and I think *Voir Dire* is both. Of course, that was one of the reasons that Jason and I fought. Jason saw no reason that the text couldn't stand on equal footing, but no one goes to the opera to listen to a libretto. But it's partly thanks to Jason's text that the music of *Voir Dire* is so strong. From August 2008 until August 2009, Jason emailed me the libretto piecemeal as he completed it. I have most of those emails still saved on my computer. I particularly remember one email from September. It was an aria to follow the bond hearing scene, typed in verse in the body of the email. As I read the song, a sort of jailhouse ballad, I was taken in from the first slant-rhyming triplet: "I've never been so cold before / as in this jailhouse corridor / remember I'm from Florida" I can't overstate the importance of that particular aria, Alycia Simpson's aria, in my development as a composer. It gave me the courage to write melodically in a new and very direct way.

*The new elements are mixed with the canonical structure of the opera performance. How do you decide when to change to a new expressive style and when to keep to a traditional way?*

I think of it as 'changing gears' musically and dramatically. We have the law, which is arbitrary and distant, and the human, which is subjective and emotional. We had realism, and dream sequence. And in the opera, these are in conflict, and often juxtaposed very dramatically, so the music has dramatic shifts and contrasts.

*The opera has a moral which is delivered at the end. How do you understand the moral of the opera and how did you decide how to show it in music, text and staging?*

The staging was all David Gately, our creative and insightful stage director; the delivery of the final ensemble was simple and intimate, directed towards the audience. My interpretation is that the main characters' final exhortation to "forget the truth, remember me" is perhaps a challenge for us to reconsider the role of law in society, to shift the conversation from crime and punishment towards justice. A more humanistic approach. I think that is happening now, at least the conversation. One of the patrons at the first hearing was a very wealthy man who thought that the opera was pessimistic. I couldn't disagree more. It's a very dark opera at times but I don't think it's cynical. Then again, this patron thought the other opera on the festival, *Carmen*, was "uplifting and inspiring," so I don't know what he was smoking, if he thought that famous tragedy had a positive message!

*How was the idea to record the opera born? What determined that the release of the recording should happen only now?*

Usually opera companies will decide to record a new opera immediately following the premiere. We had a very successful production, but general director Darren Woods, the opera's champion, was fired during the rehearsal period, so a recording was not in the works. Music director and conductor Viswa Subbaraman and I knew that the best chance to get the opera recorded was to do it independently and as soon as possible, and with the original cast. After managing to raise just enough to cover initial recording costs, we were able to record during two very intense days in June 2018 at Minnesota Public Radio Studios. The release took longer than planned thanks to the rough cut taking a very long time - a year - getting from St Paul, MN to me in Sweden, thanks to, among other things, the recording engineer having his computer stolen when his car was broken into. Per England and I spent every other Wednesday evening from fall 2019 to spring 2020 mixing and mastering the recording, often working until well after midnight. Our initial plan was to release worldwide on May 9, 2020 with a huge release party in Stockholm, but then the pandemic struck.

*You are an avid outdoorsman and live on the island of Lovö, outside Stockholm. How did you choose this lifestyle? What are the main perks of, and challenges with it?*

Two years ago, we moved from Lovö, which is a rural island in Lake Mälaren just outside Stockholm, and last year we bought a house on the lake Barken in the Swedish region of Dalarna. Before Lovö, I lived in Stockholm for six years. It's the biggest city I've ever lived in. There were things I loved, like being able to sing in Gustaf Sjökvists Chamber Choir, go to concerts, and be on the board of non-profit arts organizations like Samtida Musik and Sound of Stockholm Festival, and meet musicians and composers all the time, but by the end I was burning out, and I just had to get out. I couldn't stand the noise, the activity, it was all overstimulating and sometimes I would just isolate myself and then I wouldn't get out to concerts anyways.

The positives for me of living in a rural area definitely outweigh the one negative, which is not living in the center of musical activity in Sweden. But I'm only two hours away from Stockholm, so I get in to the city at least once every two weeks. Living the lifestyle we do, hunting and fishing, having a garden and chickens, picking berries and mushrooms in the forest is just part of who my partner Sara and I are. It's the way we want our daughter Alma to grow up. Living where we do gives me freedom - economic freedom, because the cost of housing is so much lower, literally six or seven times lower, and that leads to artistic freedom, because I don't have to work 200% with composing and teaching just to get by. There's freedom of movement, in the forest or in my boat on the lake, freedom to fill my free time with activities that don't involve any monetary exchange or consumption. So the impacts on my creative work are both quantifiable and unquantifiable. I've composed some of what I regard as my best music when I've been very stressed and unwell, and some of my best music when I've had time, no stress, and am feeling great.

I do think that around 2010, when I lived a really simple solitary lifestyle in the country - I had no car or bike and lived 6km from the nearest main road with a bus stop - my music changed dramatically. Part of that, I'm sure, was the environment I was in, having lots of time and no obligations except a single orchestra commission, part of it was the disenchantment and frustration I felt at the cancellation of the first *Voir Dire* production, and part of it was just me changing as a person and a composer. While I completed the first version of *Voir Dire* there, I don't think it left its mark on the opera in any conscious way, other than that I composed the music, I am who I am, and that lifestyle is an integral part of me.

*You composed total of three operas. Do you see an evolution of you as a composer, while comparing these three operas?*

Yes. Composing *The Binding of Isaac* I knew very little about opera, at least not consciously. Jason and I just felt our way forward, and the result was a piece I'm still very proud of. However, there are these big leaps in time during the opera, leaps of years, so over music between these scenes we projected verses from Genesis to sort of fill in the gaps. In that way we were beginners, but the scenes themselves, the music and text, are really compelling.

When it comes to determining if a subject is right for opera, it has to immediately stimulate my imagination in some way - I have to see it on the stage, or understand what the music is doing. Imagining the Isaac sacrifice, I heard music and saw colors and images, imagining Sarai (Isaac's mother) as a person; I understood what song would bring to her story and character. It felt *honest*, and this is something I'm obsessed with in my music, whether or not such a thing as musical integrity exists.

When it came to *Voir Dire*, I immediately understood the role music would play in establishing the setting and the conflict between the courtroom and the people that came into it. Each person had a story to tell, a world behind them, and here they were, in the courtroom, perhaps recounting - or experiencing - the worst day in their respective lives. That needed opera, it needed music and song. I think the fact that for at least the first year, and maybe until the 2016 revisions, neither Jason nor I knew how the opera ended, if it was a whole or a collection of parts, speaks for itself as to where we were in our understanding of opera. *Voir Dire* took me from point A to point B in terms of understanding dramaturgy, storytelling on stage.

*Lifeboat* is in some ways the opposite of *Voir Dire*. It's a short opera, three characters, beginning-middle-end. Yet like *Voir Dire*, it takes place in a single setting, a lifeboat on the Mediterranean. By the time I composed *Lifeboat* in 2016, I better understood opera as an art form, at least traditionally, and I think that I was interested in following the arc of characters in a more linear narrative, even if it was a short arc.

*The process of bringing the opera to life seems to be long and difficult. What kept you motivated with this project after several cancelled premiere productions and the other challenges you faced? What made you believe in the worth and success of the opera?*

I never gave up on the piece, but I wasn't actively "hunting" opportunities as much as "fishing" for them. Compositionally I'd moved forward, I was working on orchestra pieces, but I was submitting *Voir Dire* to different opportunities, and luckily Fort Worth Frontiers picked it up. I'd invested so much time and work in the opera and I believed in what I'd done. The Alycia Simpson aria was really special; I'd heard concert performances several times. I didn't know what I had with the rest of the opera, because I hadn't heard it, and so many things I'd done had been new for me. The process was incomplete. To use a courtroom analogy, *Voir Dire* was an unsolved case with no leads, consigned to a file folder in the bottom desk drawer.

*How many changes or transformations, musically, did this opera have to overcome? What elements changed from the initial idea the most?*

I think the most important change occurred after the 2014 workshop at Seagle Music Colony. At that time the opera had an important speaking role for the conductor, who played a sort of judge. Jason and I realized that we had to remove that part, and create a new bass-baritone roll, Judge Schumacher. That single character resolved some of the issues with the opera as a whole, and provided a direction for a new and I think more satisfying and effective ending. The Judge inhabits both the real and the dream courtroom, so he's this character who is moving in and out. I love his musical language, this sort of beat-poet meets lounge-lizard thing, with musical textures that seem to come out of a David Lynch film.

*Was it unexpected after so much rejection to receive critical acclaim and sold-out performances?*

No, we knew that *Voir Dire* was unique and memorable. I didn't know how audiences would respond, but I knew they at least wouldn't be bored! I think I was surprised that *Voir Dire* was understood in the way it was, which I believe is owed to director David Gately's vision and direction of five really superb young singer-actors.

*Voir Dire anticipated the major societal debates of the present day. While you were composing the opera, were you already conscious of the relevance of its themes?*

Absolutely. In summer 2008 I saw what was going on in Steven's Point, which was similar to what I was seeing in my hometown Grand Forks ND, as well as where I had been living in Southern Indiana, which is to say the increasing stratification of society along lines of race and class, a decline in the prospects for working-class people, even in more rural regions that were more culturally homogenous. Then the 2008 recession struck and put that development into overdrive. I never had a lot of respect for the institution of police to begin with, and then the smartphone starts allowing people to record all sorts of assaults and murders by law enforcement. The prison industrial complex had grown to maturation out of the 1990's law-and-order politics. It was really a paradigm shift in the way the US was seeing itself and its criminal justice system.

*What can court cases tell one about the present world and human condition? What elements of it you tried to transmit to the audiences attending the opera?*

Right before he began working on the libretto in summer 2008, Jason wrote an email to a former professor that I think sums it up better than I could, with the erudite enthusiasm of a wordy 24-year-old writer: "If the eternal drama of Genesis is played out, over and over, like some Nietzschean can-can I'd breathlessly typed, its contemporary mise-en-scène is undoubtedly the county courtroom. Every homicide takes a page from Cain and Abel, every small business owner who committed some zoning violation and finds himself struck down by a thunderbolt of legalese shares a burden with builders at Babel, every shoplifter or trespasser or 14-year-old dead of an overdose after sneaking painkillers from his grandparents' medicine cabinet is a chip off the oldest block, lunging after that same forbidden fruit as if he and Eve shared a rib." So it's a sort of microcosm of human failure, human fallibility.

*Did your view, understanding, and opinion of the court system change after this experience?*

Sure. While I've been critical of the institution of law, I actually came out of it having a lot of respect and understanding for judges and lawyers, many of whom I think are decent and highly thoughtful people who are acutely aware of the ultimate shortcomings and futility of their profession to account for the depth of human suffering and experience they are confronted with. In other words, they are doomed to fall short of justice, but they go out and do their best, with inadequate tools, to arrive at justice. I'm a little fatalistic as a person, so I can respect that, I think it takes courage and dedication and no small bit of humanity.

*Your collaboration with Jason Zencka is long lasting and the author called this relationship like a marriage, when you pick whom you want to fight with. How would you describe your working relationship him? How did your collaboration evolve?*

Well, I think we're still the same couple having the exact same fights over and over. We're just wiser now, we care for each other more, and maybe take ourselves less seriously than we did at 24, at 28.

*How much deciding power do you have in the staging of an opera, as its composer?*

I suppose it depends. David Gately and I had some good discussions about the opera. He was really interested in my thoughts, and more importantly, he shared his with me. I was so grateful and impressed that such an esteemed and experienced director took my work so seriously. So I trusted him completely.

*The genre of the performance is named as circus with different bits of comedy and drama, (talking animals, magic) when the troupe of five actors each brings alive approximately six characters. What overall impression of genre did you plan to give audiences?*

You know, the original version of the opera was composed for a particular ensemble, a vocal quartet. They performed new music, early opera, all sorts of stuff. The baritone had been a circus performer, so I created some roles - like the macaw parrot - with that in mind. The tenor and baritone were both excellent falsetto singers, and the four singers were very experienced with tight dissonant harmonies. That informed how I composed *The Mother's Ghost*. Then when that production was cancelled, I was left with this piece that had been created for this completely unique ensemble.

*When watching opera, was there anything which surprised you and which you had not expected when composing the piece?*

Seeing the opera for the first time, I was amazed by all these aspects I hadn't imagined - such brilliant staging, evocative and creative lighting, inventive costuming. I had sort of imagined those things in my own simple way, but each person in the team from the stage director to the lighting director brought their own creativity and expertise to the piece. So it was better than I could have imagined.

*What main thing did you take away from the experience of writing and now recording this opera?*

The value of perseverance and believing in myself and my music. I could have compromised with the first ensemble and cut the Kalcek Trial like the soprano wanted, and the opera would have been performed in 2010 after all. But I knew that they were wrong about the trial scene, and to cut it was wrong. I didn't back down, I chose to wait for another opportunity, and then to revise, and those were the right decision. And the Kalcek Trial scene was truly a highlight of the opera, that scene was more or less completely unchanged from when I composed it in 2008.

*Thank you for the conversation!*