

HOOK UP

a modern opera about campus rape culture and consent



HOOK UP REVIEW QUOTES:

"This is opera at its most socially engaged and political. Often this is a recipe for theatrical disaster. But almost miraculously, *Hook Up* actually works. ...It is serious and thought-provoking theatre that speaks to a pressing social issue. But it's also nice to have our brows unfurrowed by lines such as, "those Cheetos are nasty."

~3.5 out of 4 stars, John Terauds, Toronto Star

"*Hook Up* looks at issues that teens are dealing with and treats them with respect, compassion and generosity of spirit."

~Lynn Slotkin, The Slotkin Letter

"Beautiful, gut-wrenching and absolutely riveting."

~Keira Grant, Mooney on Theatre

"Tepperman's libretto is incredible, because it's real. So true it hurts."

~Jenna Simeonov, Schmopera

"An exceptional show...Rich characters. Urgent theme. Powerful production."

~Glenn Sumi, NOW Magazine (NNNN)

"All I'm saying is: I heard belting in a show produced by a company with opera in its name and I'm HERE FOR IT. #LIVING"

~Greg Finney, Schmopera

"There seems to be an increasing appetite for musicals with stories about today, about complex, dark issues that are difficult to talk about. *Hook Up* struck a profound cord with audiences, combining the authenticity of a very real contemporary setting and characters with humour and compassion, to bring a discussion of a very sensitive topic into the shared space of the theatre. ...The entire company gave stunning performances. ...Both for the issues it confronts, and as an artistically accomplished piece of music theatre, this is a must-see event."

~Jennifer Parr, The WholeNote

"The talented people @tapestryOpera have done something seemingly impossible: they made an entertaining, deeply moving and powerful modern opera about campus rape. Worth your time."

~Sarah Fulford, Toronto Life

HOOK UP: SELECTED AUDIENCE RESPONSES

"I was left thinking about how we as young women have the confidence to set our boundaries as we explore our sexuality until that agency is taken away through sexual violence, guilt, and shame."

"All three of the principal characters really felt like complex, and believably young, inexperienced people placed in a near-impossible situation of trying to navigate sex in University, surrounded by a toxic culture."

"I found it really hard to watch but incredibly moving and true. There is something about the form of opera that feels like the absolute right way to tell this story, in the grounded, honest, simple, connected way you have. It feels right. I don't think it could work as effectively in any other form."

"I could not stop thinking about it all night. It was so incredible to see it with my daughter. We have had some really deep discussions these past two days."

"I can see it being performed in high schools to great acclaim as hard-hitting and truthful. It looks unflinchingly at rape culture on university campuses...it is as rampantly denied by the institutions as always; but not here, here it is exposed. It ends with the soprano still alive (proving it isn't really an opera but a musical)."

"What a courageous and true to life story. The emotional reaction of Mindy to the rape was so similar to what we saw in a close female family member, that we both were feeling quite emotional by end."

"I just want to let you know what a powerful impact *Hook Up* had on me. We talked about it for a really long time at dinner last night. My teenaged daughter kept saying that what I was describing was "totally normal" university stuff and that it was maybe a play for grownups, not the kids who were being depicted. I think maybe that's true in an important way. The play managed to take us into the most normal of situations, and then to expose how and why what we consider normal can lead – so quickly – to truly awful experiences. And you managed to capture the moral complexity of the situation so well: who is responsible and who has agency in these encounters? The boys? The girls? The culture? The play wisely doesn't answer this question, implying, perhaps, all of the above."

"This show must tour high schools and should be performed on every campus, especially during fall orientation."

"I truly truly loved it. Still sitting with it today. I love the nuance, the immediacy and the tenderness. And also how sex positive it is. Please remount - it has to come back!"

"It was a fine, fine piece of theatre, extremely well handled. All three of us (different generations) reflected on our own university lives and the kind of sexual activity that was going on. Lots to digest."

"I want to tell you how much I was moved by your show – literally, to tears, several times. The words were so stunning, so simple, so clever, and so heart-wrenching. Thank you so much for telling these stories in a way that makes us all, especially men, question our own implication in a perpetual cycle of blame, abuse, and a baffling lack of accountability."

"*Hook Up* really affected me, especially the last scene. The way Mindy denied the experience and then gave into anger and grief, and how Heather supported her... I felt really shook up for the rest of the day. It's a really powerful work."

"I thought it was fantastic and daring and respectful through every complex moment, and always searingly honest and full of heart. Extraordinary."

"I thought it was basically brilliant. I actually think opera was the perfect form for that story to take place. I thought the simplicity of the story is what worked. Every person has been in that scenario if they went to school or if they've ever had a partying phase. What made the drama was the form – the opera. I specifically loved the way the modern slang/sex talk worked with the operatic form. It made it bigger than itself and allowed for a spotlight on these important conversations."

"I really hope this has a remount. I think it could be a big hit. I think it is exactly right for both high school and university students, as well as a general audience."

"I was blown away by *Hook Up's* one-two punch of gorgeous, slick production values and deep, open-hearted engagement with its theme. The music delivered the incisive text right into our hearts, and I could feel the audience around me collectively holding its breath and exhaling (sighs, laughs, sobs) in response."

"May this work have exposure to the young and the old. May men open their hearts and minds to its truths. Women as well. I am a better human after leaving your show than I was before viewing it. That's the ultimate compliment of art."

"It is such an important piece. I do hope that it reaches that oh so important high school, university and even middle school audience."

"The combination of opera and the contemporary language was really compelling, and I especially liked the relationship between the two women."

"Your opera moved me like I was led to believe opera should."

TORONTO STAR REVIEW:

3.5 out of 4 STARS

New modern opera *Hook Up*: where else do they sing 'those Cheetos are nasty'?

By JOHN TERAUDS - Special to the Star

Wed. Jan. 30, 2019

Music by Christopher Thornborrow. Libretto by Julie Tepperman. Directed by Richard Greenblatt. At Theatre Passe Muraille Mainspace, 16 Ryerson Ave., until Feb. 9. tapestryopera.com or 416-504-7529

Since the advent of issues-based TV like *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix, it was only a matter of time before we would see something similar in live theatre.

Welcome to *Hook Up*. This is not ordinary theatre, but musical theatre verging on opera. Or maybe it's opera verging on musical theatre, created by composer **Christopher Thornborrow** and librettist **Julie Tepperman**, and produced by **Tapestry Opera** in co-operation with Theatre Passe Muraille.

It had its big premiere on Wednesday, with performances running to Feb. 9.

Hook Up is real and raw, set very much in today's sexualized world. It deals with an issue plucked from news headlines but also as old as time: rape.

This is opera at its most socially engaged and political. Often this is a recipe for theatrical disaster. But almost miraculously, *Hook Up* actually works. This is probably because Tepperman has walked that fine line between realism and not bashing the audience over the head with a message.

It's also due to Thornborrow's spiky-yet-musical score filled with clever ensemble singing. The music is very ably rendered by a talented cast of five singer-actors and smoothly backed up by music director/pianist **Jennifer Tung** and percussionist **Greg Harrison** (with **Andrea Grant** adding invisible keyboard help as needed).

The plot is straightforward: high school friends Mindy (**Emily Lukasik**) and Cindy (**Alicia Ault**) have just arrived at their new university. They hear the siren song of freedom. Cindy takes to the party circuit, while Mindy tries to cocoon with her boyfriend Tyler (**Nathan Carroll**), who has come to the same school.

Mindy and Tyler get claustrophobic with each other, a Halloween party beckons and Mindy wakes up naked in the bed of someone she has never seen before. What now?

Aside from a very awkward plot turn when Mindy decides to take a break from her relationship with Tyler, the 90-minute opera fleshes out the characters just enough to get us hooked on the story.

The leads are convincing and never cloying. There is also nice multiple-character work by **Alexis Gordon** and **Jeff Lillico**. All wear body microphones and sing musical theatre-style, but the through-composed score tells us this is meant to be opera.

Hook Up is peppered with real-sounding dialogue that rarely feels forced or contrived. Banks of video screens designed by **Montgomery Martin** effectively provide visual substitutes for a narrator.

Director **Richard Greenblatt** keeps everything simple and straightforward. And despite the unvarnished frankness of the opera, the night of the rape is handled with amazing tact.

Hook Up is not something we can call entertainment. It is serious and thought-provoking theatre that speaks to a pressing social issue. But it's also nice to have our brows unfurrowed by lines such as, "those Cheetos are nasty."

Where else could you hear those words sung?

<https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/review/2019/01/30/new-opera-hook-up-deftly-handles-the-issue-of-campus-rape.html>

NOW MAGAZINE REVIEW

Hook Up adds lots of fascinating notes to the topic of sex and consent

Chris Thornborrow and Julie Tepperman's opera/musical theatre hybrid confronts campus rape culture with urgency and artistry

BY GLENN SUMI

FEBRUARY 5, 2019

Rating: NNNN

HOOK UP by Chris Thornborrow and Julie Tepperman (Tapestry Opera in partnership with Theatre Passe Muraille, 16 Ryerson). Runs to February 9. \$25-\$55. tapestryopera.com

Many shows have taken on the timely topic of sex, consent and rape culture on college campuses, but few have mined it with as much depth and sensitivity as **Hook Up**, a new opera/musical theatre hybrid by **Tapestry Opera**, in partnership with **Theatre Passe Muraille**.

With a score by **Chris Thornborrow** and libretto by **Julie Tepperman**, the completely sung-through show is set at the fictional Lanark University, where Mindy (**Emily Lukasik**), boyfriend Tyler (**Nathan Carroll**) and bestie Cindy (**Alicia Ault**) are freshmen.

The Canadian campus's dysfunctional milieu is established quickly and efficiently in a funny but telling scene in which group leaders (**Alexis Gordon** and **Jeff Lillico**, who play various roles throughout) provide very different lessons to their female and male charges.

Meanwhile, Thornborrow and Tepperman take time carefully constructing the characters. Mindy wants to settle down with Tyler, who seems more interested in playing video games and basketball with his bros. And Cindy,

ignored by Mindy, has been experimenting with sexual freedom – always safely, of course – and has found some new friends.

One of the strongest scenes – both musically and dramatically – is set at a lecture in which the prof (Gordon) delivers an overview of the history of feminism while the two women, in a catty counterpart, argue over their disintegrating friendship.

The way the plot develops – including the appearance of another character at the 11th hour – is surprising but satisfying.

Director **Richard Greenblatt** makes brilliant use of every inch of the TPM space, including the second floor landings and various seats in the audience. **Kelly Wolf**'s revolving set evokes everything from Mindy's cozy dorm room to a sleazy frat house Halloween party. **Monty Martin**'s video projections are used sparingly but effectively, with the most creative and intelligent use of text-messaging and emoticons I've seen in a stage show.

Thornborrow's urgent and characterful score matches the work's various moods, while Tepperman's libretto, from its moments of high drama to its pregnant silences, is masterful.

Gordon and Lillico do lots of fine work filling out the supporting characters. Lukasik's beguiling, layered performance makes Mindy believably contradictory and complex, while the sweet-toned Carroll makes his Tyler intentionally hard to read. And Ault's emotionally direct acting and singing make every moment count.

While the ending feels abrupt, you could argue that the characters' stories will continue, as all great art should, beyond the confines of the theatre.

<https://nowtoronto.com/stage/opera/hook-up-tapestry-opera-chris-thornborrow-julie-tepperman/>

SCHMOPERA REVIEW #1

SO TRUE, IT HURTS: HOOK UP

By Jenna Simeonov

Jan. 31, 2019

Tapestry Opera's latest commission is a compact, intermission-free piece of organic theatre that has all the pieces in place. *Hook Up* is the work of composer **Chris Thornborrow** and librettist **Julie Tepperman**; in 90 minutes of music, singing, and drama that straddles the styles of opera and musical theatre, *Hook Up* tells the story of a young woman's first few months as a new university student.

It's all terrifyingly familiar. There's Mindy, the girl who clutches at her high school posse - her boyfriend and her best friend - and whose homebody tendencies do nothing to prepare her for her first booze-filled night of partying. There's Mindy's best friend Cindy, who is overjoyed to be single for her freshman year, and who dives into her new social life with no fear. There's Mindy's boyfriend, Tyler, who's torn between genuine affection for his girlfriend, and the freshman year opportunities to meet new people and go to new parties.

Hook Up is smartly executed in this world premiere production, directed by **Richard Greenblatt**. The specific story of Mindy, Cindy, and Tyler is put up against its broader themes. The young students arrive, unaware of the strong whiff of a sexually-charged environment. The men and women get advice from their orientation leaders that's conspicuously different - the men are perfunctorily advised to behave themselves, and the women are imperfectly urged to watch their drinks at parties. Cindy and Mindy get into a petty fight during class, first in angry whispers, and then in emoji-speak, all while ignoring the ongoing lecture on Feminism 101.

Tepperman's libretto is incredible, because it's real. The characters spoke to each other the way I would have, and even within the historically conservative "opera world", no one stopped Tepperman from writing in conversations about watching porn as a couple, anal sex, "rules" for one-night-stands, and sex on your period. Thornborrow's music, performed by the simple ensemble of Music Director/pianist **Jennifer Tung** and percussionist **Greg Harrison**, creates a world for Tepperman's words, never demanding undue spotlight, but certainly enhancing their delivery.

I spent the night growing more and more uncomfortable. I'm about ten years out of my university days, long enough to have forgotten a million tiny memories that *Hook Up* seemed hell-bent on digging up and shoving in my face. From the first scene, the piece is teeming with dramatic irony; we know exactly what's going to happen to Mindy as she unveils her naïve expectations of parent-free domestic bliss with her comfort-blanket of a boyfriend.

The party scene put a pit in my stomach, as did everything that came after. The confusion, the horrid feeling of not knowing - *but kind of knowing* - what happened during a blackout, the inadequate explanations to friends and boyfriends, it was all too true. And I loved that nothing got "resolved". For Mindy, who is hit hard by the events of that night, any sort of resolution is still off in the distance. The piece ends only days after the fated party, too soon to demand any sort of tying of loose ends. And even if the *Hook Up* creative team had opted for some sort of "proper ending", it would have become too specific, maybe even to prescriptive, and certainly it would have taken away from the universality of this story.

I hope *Hook Up* gets picked up again, and soon. It's hard to say if it will become part of the 21st-century operatic canon, simply because Thornborrow's score demands singers who are thoroughly trained, both in the classical and music theatre styles. I'm not sure this cast - led by **Emily Lukasik** (Mindy), **Alicia Ault** (Cindy), and **Nathan Carroll** (Tyler) - really represents those who straddle both opera and music theatre, but it's a moot point, since they were beautiful in their roles. **Alexis Gordon** and **Jeff Lillico**, both playing several roles, were actually the ones who brought the tears to my eyes; Gordon in her final scene with Lukasik, and Lillico as Mindy's father, leaving his daughter a perfect voicemail.

<https://www.schmopera.com/so-true-it-hurts-hook-up/>

SCHMOPERA REVIEW #2

By Greg Finney

Feb. 1, 2019

Tapestry Opera dove into 2019 headfirst with some very timely subject matter. *Hook Up*, with music by **Chris Thornborrow** and a libretto by **Julie Tepperman**, tells the story of three young persons as they head off to start a new chapter in their life - university. For some this can be an uplifting, transformative experience. For others, it can be one of the darkest times in our lives. I'm privileged to experience the former; *Hook Up* tells the story of the latter.

Hook Up is the first commission issued by Artistic Director **Michael Hidetoshi Mori** and the score by Thornborrow was a treat. When you walk into a new work, certain tropes and stereotypes come to mind. *Hook Up* bucks all those trends. With an orchestration and sensibility that definitely landed further on the musical theatre side of the spectrum, and it did so in the best way possible. It was at times Sondheim, at times Schwartz, at times Bernstein, but the overarching feeling (*to me*) was akin to John Michael LaChiusa's masterpiece *A Light in the Piazza*. It calls for what I like to refer to as "contemporary legit" singing, which (using female examples) is an amalgam of the older school "legit" (think Julie Andrews) and "contemporary" (think Idina Menzel). It's a remarkably expressive timbre of singing (think Kelli O'Hara or Audra MacDonald).

Tapestry assembled a phenomenal cast of singers for this show.

In the lead role of Mindy, **Emily Lukasik** started the show every bit the ingenue. She has a bright, open, and free placement and an excellent blended register, Lukasik's Mindy went on an incredible emotional journey. Her dedication to the very attached, somewhat shy, girlfriend characterization betrayed Mindy's naiveté, no matter how worldly she wished to present herself. Her final scene alongside **Alexis Gordon** was riveting. Lukasik bared everything in one of the most complete breakdowns I've seen on a stage. Brava! The vulnerability required to produce such a true, cathartic reaction is something few performers possess.

As Cindy, Mindy's best friend, **Alexis Ault** was a treasure. Her spunky character matched perfectly with her brassy-yet-twinkly voice. In Ault's Cindy we find a different young woman, taking life by the horns. She parties, has fun, is outspoken, and to be honest I really want to be her friend. Her voice dazzled in the ensemble singing, especially when paired alongside **Nathan Carroll's** Tyler.

Speaking of Tyler, Mindy's high-school boyfriend, Carroll was everyone's boyfriend - flaws and all. You really felt his love for Mindy and his conflict with wanting to experience more beyond that. His voice was delightful as well! An open tenor with surprising range, his chemistry with Lukasik was fantastic, even if his response to what happens to Mindy is less than stellar.

Singing multiple roles like Dad, Duke, and other university dudes **Jeff Lillico** made solid clear distinctions between each and every appearance onstage. He had an easy-going high baritone to match his ease on the stage. The voicemail he leaves for Mindy as the Dad is an especially touching moment.

The standout for me had to be **Alexis Gordon**, playing multiple roles from Mom, to Residence Advisor (RA) Steph, to the touching Heather, Tyler's new study partner. After establishing their relationship is just platonic, the show ends in a gripping, emotional scene between Heather and Mindy that is a stunning piece of theatre. Gordon gave me my favourite singing of the night. A warm tone full of subtleties, it enabled her to transition well between the multiple roles she played.

All I'm saying is: I heard belting in a show produced by a company with OPERA in its name and I'm HERE FOR IT. #LIVING

I have to applaud Tepperman for making sure it's pointed out how much more aware and vigilant women have to be with their safety. It also highlights the fact that the language used around these warnings really needs to be changed. The girls were given great tips to protect themselves, but the reasoning wasn't "to keep you safe" the reasoning was "you don't want people to think you're a slut." It was also very honest from the guy's perspective as well. I've been in these healthy relationship seminars where your leader is talking about respecting women and their safety in one breath, and then dismissing the meeting with "Let's go hunt some pussy." The two are smartly juxtaposed musically, yet the subtlety may be lost on some of the less woke audience members.

It's tackling a very prescient and current narrative in today's society and it does it through beautiful music, great singing, and some really stellar acting.

<https://www.schmopera.com/bucking-trends-hook-up/>

MOONEY ON THEATRE REVIEW

BY KEIRA GRANT

FEBRUARY 2, 2019

Hook Up, a world premiere opera commissioned by **Tapestry Opera** was like taking a walk down the memory lane of about 20 years, the good, the bad and the ugly. Three high school friends are excited to embark on the journey towards adulthood that is first year University. They soon realize that being away from home for the first time is a lot more complicated than parties and sexual exploration.

Sexual violence as a sensationalistic plot device is a trope in classical opera. *Hook Up* turns this misogynistic convention on its ear by explicitly deconstructing rape culture, making sexual violence the central theme rather than a juicy plot point. Given the dramatic requirements of this intense, 90 minute piece, Tapestry Opera departs somewhat from its usual casting practices. Operas are by and large cast by people who have been extensively trained in classical technique and Tapestry is usually no exception. This work is cast with several performers who use vocal techniques from musical theatre. This choice is all the more interesting because compositionally and structurally this piece is very much an opera.

I was surprised by some of the singing at first, but the whole thing worked dramatically and vocally. The libretto by Dora-nominee **Julie Tepperman** felt like a natural conversation between Xennials and Millennials. It didn't really feel like I was listening to a libretto, but rather the dialog in a coming of age movie, sung. I was focused on the very familiar story of redefining friendships and sexuality in early adulthood the entire time.

The set design by **Kelly Wolf** is another key success of this production. There is a traditional well-furnished single dorm room set centre stage. Different levels are created by using the balcony space at **Theatre Passe Muraille**. There is also projection, used to show text conversations, and scenes of campus life.

Here unfolds the story of Mindy, Tyler and Cindy. Mindy and Tyler have been going steady for two years and are excited about not having to sneak around for the first time. Mindy and Cindy are BFFs with very different personalities. Mindy is an introverted homebody, content to spend every night at home snuggled up with good-guy boyfriend Tyler doing very sexually repressed things in bed. Cindy on the other hand embraces the party and social scenes of campus life, revelling in the free will of adulthood. As they struggle to find

themselves and new common ground, a perfect storm of Mindy's insecurities and hang-ups, toxic masculinity and the normalization of campus rape culture converge to make a first-year girl's worst nightmare come true.

Delivery was emotionally dynamic and intuitive throughout. There are a number of hilarious scenes and conversations and some really dark stuff as well. This show did an amazing job of weaving together the talents of a five member cast of incredible young performers, spectacular singer and actors all. **Emily Lukasik** did an outstanding job of keeping her light sweet soprano voice in keeping with Mindy's straight-laced persona, but demonstrated she could let it all hang out vocally and physically during her drunk scene.

Alicia Ault on the other hand brings a much broader, textured timber to her performance as free-spirited, sexually liberated Cindy. She, Ms. Lukasik, and **Alexis Gordon** as the Feminism 101 professor share one of the most hilarious and complicated moments in the opera wherein Ms. Gordon's lecture is punctuated with replies, asides, and barbs from Cindy and Mindy that lay bare the tensions of their changing values and priorities. Ms. Gordon's rich, velvety voice was also stunning in the role of Tyler's new friend Heather, who brings all of Mindy's insecurities to the surface. The closing scene where the two women forge an unexpected bond is beautiful, gut-wrenching and absolutely riveting. It left a distinct lump in my throat.

Nathan Carroll did a superb job of portraying the complex, softer side of toxic masculinity. His warm, round and very sugary tenor is perfect for the role of boy-next-door Tyler. He also did an outstanding job of injecting significant bitter to the sweet during his explosive and painful to watch outburst during the show's climax.

Jeff Lillico was charming and loveable as kindly, corny Dad to Mindy and I thoroughly enjoyed his heartfelt sung voice message to a much beloved Mindy who is currently isolating herself.

The score by composer **Chris Thornborrow** seamlessly combined a mix of acoustic instruments (**Jennifer Tung**, Musical Direction, Piano; **Greg Harrison**, Percussionist) and electronic sounds, occasionally placing a popular rhythmic overlay on modern classical composition.

Definitely a triumph aesthetically and thematically. If you don't get **#MeToo** after seeing this show, I don't know what will drive it home. Definitely see this and get others to see it too.

<https://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2019/02/02/review-hook-up-tapestry-opera/>

LYNN SLOTKIN REVIEW: THE SLOTKIN LETTER

BY LYNN SLOTKIN

JANUARY 31, 2019

A modern opera about teenage sex, consent and its sobering consequences. The story and production packs a punch. Important theatre.

The Story. From the press information: “Three friends hit university—no parents, new friends, new rules and new normal. But freedom is complicated. **Hook Up** raises questions of consent, shame and power in the lives of young adults navigating uncharted waters on their own.”

Mindy (**Emily Lukasik**), her boyfriend Tyler (**Nathan Carroll**) and her friend Cindy (**Alicia Ault**) are all going to the same university and will live in residence. I reckon they are all 18 year-old or so. Mindy’s parents (**Jeff Lillico** and **Alexis Gordon**) help her move into her single dorm room and leave with instructions to be careful, implied is being careful about ‘sex’. Her father warns her gently about Tyler. Too late. Mindy and Tyler have already had sex and have it as often as they can. Cindy hoped to room with Mindy but Mindy requested a single room so she could have more private time with Tyler.

The friendship of the three changes in university. Cindy feels left out of Mindy’s life because she spends so much time with Tyler. Cindy makes up for it by going to parties and ‘hooking up’ with various partners. Tyler joins a study group and Mindy thinks he might be seeing someone else. Mindy goes to a party with Cindy and things go off the rails.

The Production. **Kelly Wolf**’s set of Mindy’s room is on a movable base and can be rotated for effect. Cindy and Tyler have scenes above the stage that suggest their separate rooms. There are several panels above the stage on which are projected e-mails and text messages from the three friends as well as photos and other images.

As with any opera, I won’t comment on **Chris Thornborrow**’s music except to say that in the scene that changes everything for these three friends, rather than being graphic, what is happening is suggested. Thornborrow’s music is pulsing and gradually driving as the scene builds. **Richard Greenblatt**’s sensitive, clear-eyed direction uses splashes of red projections to add to the heightened emotions. The audience’s imagination kicks in and is more effective than a blow-by-blow graphic depiction of what might be happening.

Julie Tepperman's libretto captures the short-hand of these young adults (teens) on social media so well I had to look some of them up (rofl, tbh) to find out WTF (sorry) they were saying. She has captured the angst of their age, their social pressures and the euphoria of being on their own for the first time and free to do what they like without parents looking over their shoulder, disapprovingly. But she has not drawn them as totally irresponsible. While Mindy and Tyler make out regularly they have limits and those limits are respected. Tyler wants to make sure Mindy is agreeable to some suggestions and if she isn't, he stops. Mindy wants to experiment but will stop if it gets too weird. Cindy seems free and easy but also has a sense of responsibility towards herself and Mindy. Cindy carries condoms. She senses that Mindy might be going into new territory and wants to make sure she is safe. She stops short of insisting she not do what she is about to do. These are friends trying to do right by each other.

There is a scene at the beginning when the friends are welcomed to the school's orientation. They are read the rules from both a man (leading the male students) and a woman leading the women: don't drink in the room, lock your door for protection etc. But the male student says some things as a joke that should set off alarms, suggesting a male culture there is something one should be wary of.

The cast to a person is terrific. Besides being wonderful singers, they are all very strong actors. Mindy, as played by Emily Lukasik is a mix of young euphoria at her new found freedom and soul-crushing despair when she deals with her shattering night at the party. Cindy, as played by Alicia Ault is buoyant, carefree, yet hurt when it seems that Mindy is ignoring her and certainly concerned for her at the party. Nathan Carroll plays Tyler with boyish enthusiasm and certainly naïve confusion as he tries to figure out what his girlfriend wants and what she means when she talks to him. Jeff Lillico plays Mindy's loving, caring father who tries not to be too smothering. While Alexis Gordon plays Mindy's mother with just a touch of anxiousness, Gordon absolutely shines when playing Heather. There is an ache to the performance and a resolve that shows the strength of the character, and Heather's strength is certainly needed. While Richard Greenblatt directs with imagination and care, he deals with the scenes in which Mindy is dealing with the aftermath of the party with such sensitivity and tenderness it's breathtaking.

Comment. *Hook Up* deals with issues that young adults, late teens etc. are dealing with daily. To the people involved these are huge issues. Opera, even a 'small' opera like this, gives the issues size. We seem to have read about these situations for so long—kid goes to a party, gets drunk, is taken advantage of etc. Does this show make it a cliché? No. Not to the women involved, or their friends who feel guilty for not doing more, or their boyfriends who weren't there to help. *Hook Up* looks at issues that teens are dealing with and treats them with respect, compassion and generosity of spirit. It's an important work.

THE WHOLENOTE REVIEW:

Tapestry's *Hook Up* is relentlessly contemporary.

By Jennifer Parr

February 7, 2019

Despite the unbelievably cold weather on January 30 (below -30 degrees with windchill), the audience was packed for the opening night of **Tapestry Opera's** world premiere of *Hook Up* at **Theatre Passe Muraille**.

An irreverent, relentlessly contemporary new hybrid of opera and music theatre, composer **Chris Thornborrow** and librettist **Julie Tepperman's** new work had a powerful effect on the audience. The world they created of three students embarking on their first year at university was familiar and funny, then disturbing and uncomfortable to watch, as it got closer to dealing with the issue at the heart of the opera: consent and campus rape. A difficult subject to deal with in any context, what worked so well here was a libretto that immersed us in the first-year-away-from-home-university context, giving us time to get to know, like, and become invested in the three central characters, laughing at their foibles and lyrics like "those Cheetos are nasty" before more serious concerns took over. The language is sexually explicit but the action is not. The aftermath, on the other hand, of Mindy's despair, we do see, and as it should be, this is hard to watch. What takes the show to a category further beyond the ordinary is a plot turn near the end – which I don't want to give away – that brought home not only the lasting evil and impact of rape, but also carried such a strong message of compassion, of understanding, and of the possibility of recovery that it held us all spellbound, in silence, and in tears or close to them.

Thornborrow and Tepperman first met at Tapestry's annual operatic speed-dating event, the Composer Librettist Laboratory, or LibLab, five years ago, and the success of their first creation (a funny and engaging five-minute opera brief about two students texting each other about dating) led to a commission from then-new artistic director Michael Mori, to develop the piece further. There was comment last night about this piece of artistic match-making, but I think what has made the piece truly great has been the addition of a third person to the mix, acclaimed theatre actor and director **Richard Greenblatt**. Made a part of the collaborative team three years ago as dramaturg and director, Greenblatt has helped fashion a powerful contemporary piece of music theatre that can speak to all – or most – ages. On top of that, he put

together and directed an outstanding ensemble of singing actors (or acting singers) who worked together seamlessly: **Emily Lukasik, Jeff Lillico, Alexis Gordon, Nathan Carroll, and Alicia Ault** – the last making her Tapestry and Toronto professional theatre debut. I will declare my personal interest here by stating that Alicia is a friend and protégé of mine, so I was incredibly proud to see her make such a strong debut.

The entire company gave stunning performances. Lukasik was immediately recognizable as the first-year university student Mindy, thrilled to be away from home and to have privacy for meeting with her boyfriend. Ault was wicked and funny as her rather amoral best friend Cindy. Carroll, whom I hadn't seen before, was funny and real as Mindy's boyfriend Ty, and veteran stars Lillico and Gordon were both excellent in playing a range of different parts, from Mindy's parents, to student orientation leaders, to other students. I have never seen Gordon so strong – funny and versatile in her many different roles, then almost painfully real and touching as 'Heather.' Lillico was equally brilliant, from his role as a slightly awkward loving dad to a brief cameo, dangerous and creepy, as the potential rapist.

Yes, this was billed as an opera and required classically-trained voices for often-challenging music, but it was also sung clearly in a more musical theatre style, with the words having equal importance to the notes. There were no arias, though there were some wonderful full-company songs, such as the opening number about the freedom of getting away to university. It was as if we were simply in a world where people sing instead of speaking, the notes and words coming out as if invented on the spot.

Both for the issues it confronts and as an artistically accomplished piece of music theatre, this is a must-see event.

<https://www.thewholenote.com/index.php/other-media/blog/concert-reviews/28740-concert-report-tapestry-s-hook-up-is-relentlessly-contemporary>

PREVIEW: Shedoesthecity Sex & Relationships

Hook Up: Alicia Ault and Emily Lukasik on Consent, #MeToo, and Changing the Conversation January 25, 2019

***Hook Up*, Tapestry Opera's** latest production, is a blend of opera and musical theatre that illuminates the themes of the #MeToo movement. Through a darkly comedic lens, *Hook Up* explores issues of cyberbullying, privacy and consent—traversing the awkward tensions within friendships, dorm life, and hook-up culture on university campuses.

Emily Lukasik (who plays Mindy) and **Alicia Ault** (who plays Cindy) are the leads in this production. We asked them about their personal connection to the work and how they hope *Hook Up* will instigate both a meaningful conversation and corrective action.

SDTC: What is the story of *Hook Up*?

AA: *Hook Up* follows the journey of three young people, Cindy, Mindy and Tyler, as they start their first year at Lanark University. Their newfound freedom soon becomes complicated as they struggle to deal with such issues as binge drinking, campus rape culture, sexual assault and consent.

Does this story in any way mirror your own experience at post-secondary?

EL: During my third year at post-secondary, there were several incidences of sexual assault on campus. I remember using the “buddy system” to walk home at night and feeling especially frustrated that I no longer felt safe taking my morning shortcut through the forest (where the assaults had occurred).

I ended up organizing an event called “Take Back the Forest” (a spin on the international march “Take Back the Night”), where students walked in solidarity along the campus path. Having grown up attending those annual marches (my aunt was the director of the Sexual Assault Centre in Hamilton), I’ve always been really passionate about issues of sexual assault.

What were the challenges you faced in your respective roles?

AA: It's an incredibly difficult and emotional subject matter, which can be triggering, so immersing myself in that world every day was quite challenging emotionally. Fortunately, Julie Tepperman and Chris Thornborrow did some really in-depth research while writing the show, and they provided us with a resource guide that was extremely helpful, with recommendations for articles and podcasts that we could look into. We also shared book recommendations, one of which I'm diving into right now called *The Red Word* by Sarah Henstra.

EL: Part of what makes this production so unique is that it is *entirely sung*, so one of the biggest challenges for me taking on this role was learning the music. Julie Tepperman (the lyricist) and Chris Thornborrow (the composer) have created something really exciting that almost sounds like speaking, but in a more heightened/visceral form. That definitely made it more difficult to learn than the musical theatre repertoire I'm used to, but the payoff is that it feels so natural singing it.

Another challenge is, of course, the heavy theme of the piece and the intensity of my character's journey. My research included reading survivor stories, chatting with post-secondary students about social media and hook-up culture, going down internet rabbit holes of articles and videos...anything and everything to immerse me in the world of the piece and the heart of the person.

Why is this story especially pertinent to talk about now, and why were you drawn to this production?

AA: From my personal experience, consent wasn't something we talked about in sex-ed at school, or at home for that matter. A lot of people don't understand or have different ideas of what sexual consent means. I think the #MeToo movement has really brought that out into the open and has shown how important it is to start a dialogue and talk frankly about topics like this.

Mindy and Cindy's story in *Hook Up*, enhanced with some incredible music, is a beautiful way to start that conversation. I was initially drawn to this production because of the libretto written by Julie Tepperman. Also, the way Chris Thornborrow set the text to music makes everything feel so raw and real, and raises the emotions to a new level. The story is so fast-paced, since everything happens in real-time, which makes it quite different from other musicals/operas I've been a part of.

EL: In my opinion, this story has always been pertinent to talk about, but it is in this #MeToo era that audiences are more open to receiving it. Now, more than ever, people are having complicated conversations about consent. As a society, we are beginning to understand that in order to end violence against women, we need to look deep within ourselves and our institutions to dismantle the all-too-ingrained ways we perpetuate rape culture. I believe that theatre really does “hold a mirror” up to society. I am so grateful to be part of a production that highlights this important issue and continues that quintessential conversation.

What do you hope audiences take away from this performance?

EL: I hope audiences leave with questions, with empowerment, with rage, with the desire to have more conversations about consent. I hope that a survivor will find hope in feeling understood and maybe even find strength to reach out. I hope that anyone who has ever wondered “what the victim was wearing” will have an insight into the before and aftermath of sexual violence. And I even dare hope that a perpetrator will feel a sense of accountability.

AA: I hope that as the audience is walking away from this performance, they start talking about the topics raised in the show, especially sexual assault and consent. If an audience member has had a similar experience, I hope the show helps them to realize that they are not alone and that there are outlets and support networks available that they can reach out to. Bringing these issues to light and talking about them is the first step towards healing and ultimately prevention.

http://www.shedoesthecity.com/hook-up-alicia-ault-and-emily-lukasik-on-consent-metoo-and-changing-the-conversation?fbclid=IwAR0-nVsaKBaX6KX0SKxlS1Obtv6ERtsVsaZuWVOMeQjsOLZGoqVhHvo_xU0

SESAYA PREVIEW:

New opera hooks teens into conversation about consent and power

by Arpita Ghosal

January 28, 2019

“Consent” means... what, exactly?

Only [one in three](#) Canadians knows the answer to this question, conferring hot-button relevance on *Hook Up*, a new opera by composer **Chris Thornborrow** and librettist **Julie Tepperman**. The timely opera for teens explores topical questions of privacy, consent, and power.

A simple Google search will summon an endless scroll of statistics and stories about the prevalence of sexual assault on Canadian college campuses. In [“We’re Teaching Consent All Wrong”](#), Sarah D. Sparks asserts that “we do way too little, way too late” to teach young people about consent. And “what we are doing doesn’t give students the skills they need to navigate adulthood”. In the same piece, Richard Weissbourd, a child psychologist at Harvard University who studies sex education, warns that “we are failing epically in preparing young people for romantic relationships, and it may be the most important thing they do in their lives”.

This fact is punctuated by a chilling and related statistic: [one in three](#) women will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. Locally, the Ontario government’s repeal of the 2015 Health Curriculum has created confusion about what teachers are permitted to teach in schools, in order to promote healthy relationships. Clearly and urgently, young people (especially when first experiencing freedom away from home) need multiple ways to engage with and understand consent. Their ability to cultivate healthy relationships is at stake . . . and why shouldn’t opera be one of those ways?

In fact, *Hook Up*, “a darkly humourous exploration” of the subject of consent, could be just the right kind of engaging and provocative vehicle to bring this topic to the conversational forefront. A coming-of-age story, it focuses on three young people navigating their first semester at university and being thrust into adulthood. Directed by **Richard Greenblatt**, the show is presented by the cutting-edge **Tapestry Opera** (which produced the runaway hit *The*

Overcoat with Canadian Stage last year), in partnership with **Theatre Passe Muraille**. The cast features musical-theatre heavyweights **Emily Lukasik, Alicia Ault, Alexis Gordon, Nathan Carroll, and Jeff Lillico**. The creators deem *Hook Up* an “unflinching examination of issues around consent, shame, and power” and yes, they “imagine it as a catalyst for discussion about difficult topics.”

The opera was born of Ms. Tepperman’s and Mr. Thornborrow’s shared desire to tell a story that puts “complicated and complex young women at its centre”, while pushing the boundaries of traditional operatic forms to tell a contemporary story. “The opera is set on a college campus, but we believe that rape culture and consent are incredibly pervasive issues throughout society, as evidenced by the groundswell of the #MeToo Movement and the rigorous conversations taking place around the globe, thanks to the strength of women like Christine Blasey Ford.” With sexual assault still a “brutal reality” of modern campus life, they hope *Hook Up* can be the beginning of another vital, necessary and ongoing conversation “in our homes, schools, communities, and in society at large”.

Ms. Tepperman and Mr. Thornborrow met at Tapestry Opera’s Composer-Librettist Laboratory (LIBLAB) back in 2013. What began as a seed scene has evolved tremendously. Their initial concept was a 75-minute piece entitled *Selfie*. At the time, they were motivated by the then-recent suicides of Canadian teenagers Rehtaeh Parsons (April 2013) and Amanda Todd (October 2012) after each had endured endless in-person and online sexual harassment and bullying. “This was the springboard for what would become *Selfie*, a roughly 75-minute piece that was written and composed over two-and-a-half years.”

After a rigorous process of development and workshops, including sharing with invited audiences (including teachers and teenagers), they found themselves “very stuck”. The scope of their story felt too narrow, so they decided not to continue developing *Selfie*. In the fall of 2016, director and dramaturge Richard Greenblatt was brought in to help “refocus and reinvigorate” them. At this point, they landed on a broader theme – one that they had found themselves returning to in their conversations and in their research (even while working on *Selfie*). That theme was rape culture and consent, at large – in particular as they manifest on university campuses.

Given the unsettling nature of these themes, why choose opera for their expression? Opera tends toward “high-stakes scenarios and big emotions” (and its Latin origin means “work”). It was a natural fit for Ms. Tepperman and Mr. Thornborrow because “this is a high-stakes story”.

To be precise, *Hook Up* has a unique form somewhere between opera and musical theatre. It is an opera, in that it is “through-composed”, meaning that all the themes are tailored to the action of the show. And like an opera, there are no musical “numbers”, with verses and choruses, as would be the case with a traditional musical. But the plot moves at a faster pace than an opera, and though there is no spoken dialogue (virtually every word is sung), they warn not to expect much traditional operatic singing. Also, unlike traditional opera, the performers are amplified, and the orchestration includes drums, piano and electronics.

Overall, *Hook Up* is sonically “experimental”, with Mr. Thornborrow’s music “pushing the boundaries of traditional operatic forms...hardcore opera aficionados will likely accuse us of creating musical theatre, but because there are no traditional musical numbers, musical theatre fans will likely relate to it as contemporary opera!” The result is a musical world that they believe is “accessible, authentic, surprising, and fully supports and reflects the emotional stakes and states of being of the characters and situations.”

In light of some of the difficult subject matter, the creators have included a content warning about the show’s use of explicit language and discussion of sexual violence and sexual consent. “We have planned several post-show talks facilitated by CANVAS Arts Action Programs, an organization that uses arts-inspired programs to educate on gender equity, consent, and LGBTQ2S+ inclusion.” Further support in the form of print material will also be available by request at the theatre’s box office.

When it comes to their subject and its groundbreaking aesthetic, Ms. Tepperman and Mr. Thornborrow seem to have their fingers on the pulse of what teens know and like. The operatic, yet accessible treatment of such an affecting topic should make *Hook Up* a creative powerhouse that brings new audiences to the artform. Beyond that, it should provoke thought, spark discourse and shed light on the true meaning of “consent.”

Everyone should experience it.

<http://sesaya.com/2019/01/hook-up/>

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SCHMOPERA PREVIEW:

Tapestry's Artistic Director Michael Mori discusses *Hook Up*

By Jenna Simeonov

January 16, 2019

Tapestry Opera, the Toronto-based opera company with a nearly four-decade-long history of producing new works, rarely puts something on its stage without a great deal of thought.

That thoughtful reputation certainly comes in handy with **Hook Up**, Tapestry's upcoming world premiere set to run January 29 to February 9 at **Theatre Passe Muraille**. Composer **Chris Thornborrow**, librettist **Julie Tepperman**, and director/dramaturge **Richard Greenblatt**, dare to tell an uncomfortably familiar story that, today, is full of the themes that permeate every news story and piece of media we consume.

Originally workshopped under the titles *Cindy + Mindy = BFFs 4EVR* and *Selfie*, the story of *Hook Up* has roots in the culture of cyberbullying, before the recent introduction of anti-cyberbullying laws. "Those laws came into existence over the course of workshopping *Selfie*," says Tapestry Artistic Director Michael Mori.

Though the specific issue saw important change, the creators of what would become *Hook Up* still wanted to tell a story that addressed the underlying themes: self-esteem, peer pressure, and consent.

The plot feels familiar, even for those well beyond their carefree (?) youth. Mindy, her best friend Cindy, and her boyfriend Tyler, all move from their hometown to start at the same university; Cindy finds freedom in being a social party-goer, and Mindy tries out her "grown-up" life, balancing her studies with spending comfortable nights in with Tyler. But when she and Tyler take a break, Mindy gives the party scene a try; when she wakes up, her last memories of the night before are of drinking a lot, and heading upstairs with a strange guy.

You are supposed to be an exploratory, interesting human being when you land in university," says Mori. And in a world of newfound parental freedom and heightened pressure to make friends, it's no wonder that after her first

drunken blackout, Mindy is presented with the question, “What happens when you wake up and you don’t remember what happened to you the night before?”

Mori describes *Hook Up* as having “one foot in opera, one foot in musical theatre.” The cast of singers is classically trained, and experienced in musical theatre; they bring to Tapestry Opera a stylistic edge that Thornborrow’s score uses as a storytelling device.

“The sense of this story being young and spirited and having a little bit of popular influence is why we went in that direction,” says Mori of Thornborrow’s genre-straddling score. “*Hook Up* has the integrity and complexity of opera, but with the brightness and youthful quality of the language that musical theatre has.”

The end result, though it suggests an uncomfortably familiar story, is “not a chastisement.” It’s a chance to hear one young woman’s story, particularly valuable when so often it’s the victim’s voice that is heard the least.

“It’s not black and white. It’s not like there are just good guys and bad guys. But there’s definitely a culture that needs to change.”

The world premiere of Hook Up, directed by Richard Greenblatt, runs January 29 to February 9 at Theatre Passe Muraille, 16 Ryerson Ave. For details and ticket information, [click here](#).

<https://www.schmopera.com/familiar-stories-hook-up/>

OPERA CANADA PREVIEW:

Tapestry Opera premieres *hybrid Hook Up*

By Shauna Cox

January 25, 2019

A theatrical hybrid is making its way to the stage in late January and it's not holding back. **Tapestry Opera** and **Theatre Passe Muraille** present the world premiere of *Hook Up*, a story of the complex freedom and responsibility of being a freshman, away from home for the first time.

Hook Up follows three friends heading into their first year at university, along with all of the new rules, new environment and new freedoms that experience entails. But freedom soon becomes complicated for these young adults. Questions of consent, shame and power begin to surface as they try to figure out what this new life holds and how it works.

For composer **Chris Thornborrow** and librettist **Julie Tepperman**, social media and cyber bullying were at the forefront when a few years ago, they created a seven-minute piece for Tapestry's annual LibLab [now called Composer-Librettist Laboratory] workshop. Originally intended for a middle-to-early high school audience, complications arose as the content was considered troublesome.

"There are big language and content restrictions going into schools" says Tepperman. The pair had to ask themselves how they would share this important issue, while still staying within the education system's guidelines.

The original test piece was soon scrapped and for their second draft, the idea was to target young adults. High school kids aren't likely to look to their own age group as a role model, so the pair pivoted to a university-setting. "They want to look up to someone older, someone in university," says Tepperman.

What was most important for the duo was the placement of the female characters. The story needed to “put women in the centre of the narrative as subjects rather than being peripheral characters,” says Thornborrow.

Thornborrow’s work manages to straddle a variety of genres—he composes classical chamber as well as film music. With this production, he doesn’t have to choose. “Opera sits in between those two worlds,” he says. The chamber music elements show up in *Hook Up*’s upbeat rhythms, adding moments of surprise. From his film work, he uses some of the music to subtly tell the story in the background. Together, these elements “create opera. It’s a heightened experience.”

Working in a more traditional operatic mode was the original choice for the story—until that didn’t work. Having young adults in university singing in full operatic voice “didn’t feel authentic,” says Thornborrow. “It wasn’t a choice of this is the better aesthetic, it was that a musical theatre style is the most effective and impactful way to [tell] the story.”

For most performances, there will be an opportunity for audience discussion after the show facilitated by CANVAS Arts Actions Programs. For Thornborrow and Tepperman, the purpose is to have “a platform for people of all ages to engage in a really difficult conversation that isn’t often talked about” says Thornborrow.

Hook Up premieres January 29th and runs until February 9th, 2019.

Click [here](#) for tickets and more information.

<http://operacanada.ca/news-tapestry-opera-hook-up/>

THE WHOLENOTE PREVIEW

Beat by Beat | On Opera

Hook Up's Uncharted Waters

CHRISTOPHER HOILE

Michael Mori, artistic director of Tapestry Opera has said that his goal for the company is to present one new Canadian opera per year. This year Tapestry is presenting two. The first is *Hook Up* with music by Chris Thornborrow to a libretto by Julie Tepperman running January 29 to February 9. The second is *Shanawdithit* with music by Dean Burry to a libretto by Yvette Nolan running May 16 to 25. Since *Hook Up* will be playing through almost a third of February, I spoke with its creators about how the project came to be and what it concerns.

Tepperman points out that when *Hook Up* officially opens on January 30, it will mark five and a half years that she and Thornborrow have been working on it. Thornborrow and Tepperman met at Tapestry's renowned LibLab (Composer-Librettist Laboratory) that brings eight composers and eight playwrights together to create ten-minute operas. These sometimes become the seeds of full-length works.

That is exactly what happened when Tepperman and Thornborrow met. As Thornborrow says, "The seed scene was about online bullying and slut-shaming at the time we were looking to tell a story that involves young people and women and a topic that was in the news quite a lot."

Tepperman says that "At LibLab we bonded over our both having worked with youth in schools and communities. Young women on both sides of Canada had recently committed suicide due to online bullying because of a sexual assault becoming public. Initially we were thinking of maybe a grade 7, 8, 9 audience and Tapestry was looking for an opera to tour schools. The seed scene was mostly filled with humour with the potential to go darker, which is where we eventually went with it."

The final result is very serious in intent. Tepperman explains: "This is an opera that explores sexual assault and consent in the context of rape culture in a university setting, and though we are focusing on a university setting we realize today that these issues are widespread throughout society far beyond the university campus."

"The opera follows three young people who enter university and have the chance to explore their sexuality but for them these are uncharted waters, and they are not prepared for the pressures of partying, drinking and having sex, or for the consequences."

I ask whether there is a paradox here: a hook-up culture on campus where students have sex with no strings attached; and a culture of consent and shaming where sex turns out to have all kinds of strings attached. Both replied, "Within the context of our story we explore this in different ways," Thornborrow says. "Two of the young people are already in a monogamous relationship, but being in university away from the guardianship of their parents they are free to have sex whenever they want - except that the woman begins to question whether that is all there is. She wonders if they are just turning into their parents. The problem comes with the pressure to drink and how that affects a person's moral compass and the ability to make informed decisions. So we are questioning hook-up culture and the pressures on teens at university campuses."

Tepperman continues: "At the same time we've been very careful that this opera does not become simply a lesson or a brochure; we intentionally end in a place where there are more questions than answers. Hopefully that will spur further conversation. So from the very beginning Tapestry has been interested in engaging professionals who deal with these issues and will be present for talkbacks after performances. This is not about victims and perpetrators but whether



Emily Lukasik as Mindy in *Hook Up*

any piece of art can contribute to a larger conversation."

Why choose opera as the medium to tell this story? I ask. Thornborrow answers: "For me as a composer it is just the impulse to tell stories through music, and I feel opera is a really powerful medium to tell stories of high stakes. At the same time the aesthetic of this opera is not according to traditional opera. We're doing this in a small theatre, we're using microphones; the instrumentation is a drum set and piano; and it moves at a fast clip. People sing usually at the same speed that people would speak, although there are moments that call for full voice. You're getting dialogue at real-time speed with the explosive power of music, with a fluidity between the sung dialogue and the moments of intense emotion. I think that the music amplifies the stories and the emotions from those stories."

"Opera suits the new emotional environment that these 17-, 18- and 19-year-olds find themselves in" Tepperman adds. "And the

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE GLENN GOULD SCHOOL HAS APPOINTED INTERNATIONALLY CELEBRATED CANADIAN SOPRANO ADRIANNE PIECZONKA AS ITS INAUGURAL VOCAL CHAIR AND HEAD OF THE VOCAL DEPARTMENT.

Ms. Pieczonka is the first Vocal Chair in the school's history. She will take on this role in May 2019 as she continues her thriving career as a performing artist. Among her many responsibilities, Ms. Pieczonka will oversee the casting of the school's annual operas and vocal showcase and will supervise the selection of conductors and directors for all department productions. She will also conduct monthly master classes and select all other vocal master class artists.



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Chris Thornborrow

gravity of the libretto really supports the world of the characters. Richard Greenblatt, who has been our dramaturge for the last two and a half years, has kept reminding us 'Story, story, story' and 'clarity of intention.'

Thornborrow also points to the presence of Greenblatt as dramaturge – he will also direct the opera – as a factor that made composing this opera a unique experience: "For me it's been rewarding because the composing has happened in such close proximity to the writing. We [Tepperman and I] would get together every couple of weeks and work on a few more minutes of music and another scene of dialogue. I would play what I had written for Richard and was totally open to questions of speed and timing and whether the music was driving the story forward."

So often when you are composing you are all alone, he says. "With Richard, he would ask, 'Why did you make this choice?' and it was something I was open to and that I am so grateful for. It was such a different experience than writing a symphony or chamber music or even art songs. It was just extraordinary to get that feedback."

About the five-member cast, Thornborrow says, "We have a mix of musical theatre people and opera singers to achieve the authentic voice and aesthetic of this world. For me the show is a hybrid of opera and music theatre, but people can decide whatever they want to decide."

Tepperman and Thornborrow are very curious about how *Hook Up* will be received. Theatregoers will be seeing an opera. Opera-goers will be seeing an unconventional opera in an unconventional space for opera. And the two student matinees will allow students of the same age range as the characters to see themselves represented onstage.

Tepperman says: "We had an almost endless audition process but once we chose our cast we made adjustments so that every singer would have moments when their voice could really soar."

In the cast, soprano Emily Lukasik, who has recently been at the Shaw Festival, plays the main character Mindy. Alicia Ault, who is part of a jazz trio, plays Mindy's best friend Cindy. In the story, the two friends had hoped to room together, but that was prevented by a mix-up in dorm assignments. Nathan Carroll, best known from musical theatre, plays Tyler, Cindy's one-and-only boyfriend since Grade 11. Alexis Gordon, best known from musicals at Stratford, and Jeff Lillico, best known from acting for Soulpepper and for musicals with the Musical Stage Company, play all the other characters including professors, Mindy's parents and various partygoers at a climactic party.

When asked why it took so long for the project to come to fruition, Tepperman answers: "It took five and a half years because the project kept evolving. We had written two separate 90-minute pieces but after various workshops, we decided to throw them out. Under Richard's guidance we finally decided exactly the story that



Julie Tepperman

we wanted to tell. In fact, we worked four or five months just on the story so when we started to write we were really clear about what the story was."

Thornborrow sums up: "Music heightens the emotion of every moment. Whether it is a pedestrian comedic dispute or a devastating revelation, all these moments are heightened by music. These kinds of stories need to be told again and again – first perhaps by theatre companies and now by opera."

Hook Up had a preview on January 29, opened on January 30 and runs until February 9 at the Theatre Passe Muraille Mainspace. Richard Greenblatt directs and Jennifer Tung conducts. **O**

ON OPERA: QUICKPICKS

► **CONTINUING TO FEB 9:** *Hook Up*, Theatre Passe Muraille, 16 Ryerson Ave. Tapestry Opera presents the world premiere of this opera/music-theatre hybrid about three teenagers' different experiences of sex and alcohol in their first year at university. The opera explores the issues of consent amidst the pressures to join university hook-up culture.

► **FEB 3, 2:30PM:** VOICE BOX: Opera in Concert presents *Fierabras*, Jane Mallett Theatre, 27 Front St. E. This is an exceedingly rare chance not only to hear Franz Schubert's opera written in 1823 (but not staged until 1897), but to hear it with an orchestra of period instruments played by the Aradia Ensemble under Kevin Mallon. The Moorish knight

Fierabras, son of the King of Spain, fights against Charlemagne but is in love with his daughter who loves someone else, while in a subplot Fierabras' sister falls in love with one of Charlemagne's knights. Sung in German with English surtitles.

► **FEB 16, 8PM:** Against the Grain Theatre presents *(La) voix humaine*, Gallery 345, 345 Sorauren Ave. AtG usually presents its operas with a twist and in this case it's Francis Poulenc's monodrama for soprano, *La voix humaine* (1959), with a tenor, Jacques Arseneault as Lui instead of Poulenc's Elle, confronting his ex-lover over the phone. Topher Mokrzewski is the pianist and Aria Umezawa directs.



Jacques Arseneault

Christopher Hoile is a Toronto-based writer on opera and theatre. He can be contacted at opera@thewhoelnote.com.