REGINA

a chamber opera in one act

for five voices, violin, clarinet, accordion, and piano

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition
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ABSTRACT

*Regina* is a one-act opera based on the true story of Regina Jonas, the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in the Jewish faith, in 1935. Jonas struggled to gain this recognition and subsequently perished in the concentration camp at Auschwitz. It was only in 1991 that another woman uncovered the papers that proved Jonas’ legacy. This opera follows Regina, waiting to be uncovered in the piles of paper records locked away in East Berlin, and through vignettes of her past. This is paralleled with the story of Anna, who is desperately fighting against her Nazi father’s legacy. Anna believes that, if she can uncover stories like Regina’s, she will free herself of her father’s torment. Regina is similarly haunted by her mother’s ghost, whose discouraging words have shaped Regina’s lifelong self-doubt. Both Regina and Anna need to be set free.

This opera uses leitmotifs to differentiate the two main characters, but these themes are also often used as signifiers of the common struggles that both characters embody and represent. As well, they employ rhythmic and melodic styles that pervade both the vocal and instrumental parts throughout the opera, thus unifying the characters’ goals. Because of the fact that the opera takes place in multiple time periods (sometimes simultaneously) the various choices of instrumentation and harmonic material often reflect these temporal shifts (for example, the accordion is often associated with Regina’s path to ordination, her relationship with her rabbi, and a time of joy and calm before the war.) In addition, melodic and rhythmic motifs are used to represent specific as well as general events, such as the three-note “ordination” theme and the two-chord repeated motif in the piano. The overall extended tonal style contributes to a largely lyrical setting of Maya Rabinovitch’s libretto.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Maya Rabinovitch for writing the original libretto to this opera and for her positive spirit of collaboration. Thank you to my supervisor, Gary Kulesha, whose invaluable advice through the years has shaped my thinking as a composer and musician. Lastly, my undying gratitude and love go to my dear wife Erica, and to the brand new addition to our family. May we always make music together.
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REGINA: A Chamber Opera in One Act

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CAST OF CHARACTERS and INSTRUMENTATION

Regina (Soprano)
Anna (Soprano)
Regina’s Mother (Alto)
Rabbi (Baritone)
Anna’s Father (Bass-Baritone)

Bb Clarinet
Violin
Accordion
Piano

DURATION: approximately 30 minutes

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The opera is cast in six scenes. The first takes place in the archives in East Berlin in 1991, where Regina waits to be found and Anna enters, searching. The second scene flashes back to 1932, where Regina and a Rabbi make plans to put her on the path to ordination. Scene 3 consists of a both present (1991) and past (1935) wherein Regina remembers fondly her ordination but remains trapped in the archives. Scene 4 jumps ahead in time to 1942, where Regina and her mother wait together in fear at home, as the Gestapo march outside. Regina and her papers are then locked away indefinitely. The penultimate scene happens out-of-time, and is an aria about Regina’s life calling: to be a rabbi and to help people. The finale revisits 1991, where Anna yearns to absolve her family’s tainted past. Haunted by the ghost of her father, she nonetheless overcomes his legacy to create a new one for herself, by uncovering Regina’s. Regina has been found and Anna has found her, setting them both free.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The length of breaks between scenes should be determined by staging requirements. Since each scene takes place in a different time period, the director should determine the amount of set change necessary between each scene to indicate the shift in time. If stage space and resources are limited, multiple time periods on the same stage may be demarcated physically and kept separate, at the discretion of the director, and as long as this is clear to the audience.
SCENE 1 - "In The Archives: 1991"

Largo \( \frac{1}{4} = 50 \)

Regina
(Soprano)

Anna
(Soprano)

Regina’s Mother
(Alto)

Rabbi
(Baritone)

Anna’s Father
(Bass-Baritone)

B♭ Clarinet

Violin

Accordion

Piano

Here I am.

Regina sits and waits, just another photograph in a folder amongst the piles of papers of the archives in East Berlin, 1991.
Here I am.

Waiting.

Waiting in this purgatory between life and after.
Anna enters the archives, searching, then stands in place. She and Regina do not see each other.

Anna:

Piu mosso \(\frac{d}{=60}\)

Subito meno mosso \(\frac{d}{=50}\)

Life and nothing. For what? How long can I be expected to sit here?
After every thing.

Every day of my whole life. Every day.

When I was a little girl,
There's never been any thing for me. I've been here for so long. For-got-ten. For-got-ten. All ev-i-dence wiped a-way. I'm chance to get rid of my old life. My old life. I'm

For so long. For-got-ten. For-got-ten. All ev-i-dence wiped a-way. I'm

And now this is my

My old life. I'm
Anna

here. Now. Read-y, Read-y. I'm standing here, in a place I don't know.

Bb Cl.

rubato

Berlin, Nine-teen nine-ty one. This is my chance.

Vln.

Pno.
Anna: A chance to change my life. I've almost given up hope.

Bs Cl.: to change my life.

Pno.: It's almost over.

M.: off-stage, parlando Why are you still doing this to yourself?

Bb Cl.: Oh, Regina.
I still believe.

Almost every part of me is wiped away.
SCENE 2 - "A Student, A Promise: 1932"

Recitativo, rubato \( \frac{j = 60}{p} \)

When I was young, I didn’t know the levels I could overcome. Who-ever thinks a-bout that?
Animato $= 72$

Regina, you’ve got it! Yes! Your grasp of the Talmud. The intelligent questions you ask. The commentary. I’m impressed. Why not...
You're a smart kid, Regina. Why not?

Regina's Mother suddenly appears, but only as a ghost to Regina, haunting her thoughts.

This is silly. A silly game.

More than a mother or a teacher.

I always wanted to be something more.
Make a diff'rance for more than just my-self. And why
Sil-ly game.

And why
Reg.

real

ly

think

it's

pos-

si-

table?

M.

It's

Rab.

Rab-

ni-

cal

school? No. But there are oth-

ther ways to get there.

Bs Cl.

Vln.

f

f

subito

subito

subito

subito

No. But there are oth-

ther ways to get there.
And I believed it.

self-ish.

And we can get there.

Regina returns to the archives.
Regina reminisces on how she came to be ordained as a rabbi. But, the happy memory is made bittersweet by her fears of being trapped in the archives, never to be discovered.

Anna, meanwhile, is at the airport, bags in hand and ready to begin her search, but is haunted by the ghost of her father.
There are times when I think I hear
memories.

Adagio subito $\frac{q}{60}\,$
When I was young, my mother used to tell me that my father was a good man.
But I know that's not
What are you doing here? Anna.

I am a good person, though.
And I will prove it.

What are you going to find?

You need evidence.

Nothing.

REGINA
thought there was a point. A reason you put this inside me. How stupid of me.

I land in Berlin. Ready to get to work.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing. —

How stupid of me.
And all I have to hold on are my memories from my past...

come sopra, ma un poco meno animato
Regina's mother continues to haunt her, feeding her thoughts of self-doubt.

Oh, Regina, you've

Regina, thank you for coming here today.

Poco rit.

Largo \( \frac{4}{4} = 50 \)
done so much. Isn’t it enough?
Let it go.

This is it. You got it.
did it. A

Nine-teen nine-ty one. Rea-dy to do what I need. Fi-nal-ly, a

M.

did it. You did it. You did it.

A

F.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Acc.

Pno.
chance, my chance. For good in this world.
For good in this world, Good in this world.
176
Reg.
Anna
Rab.

It's not that easy to change who you are.
For good in this world.

182
Reg.
Anna
Rab.

For good.
For good.

It's not.
It's not.

It's not.

It's not.

It's not.

For good.
For good.

It's not.
It's not.

It's not.

It's not.
Regina returns sadly and briefly to the present (1991), believing that her mother may have been right all along, and that she is doomed to be forgotten.
Spoken freely, to audience: "When they asked us to register all our belongings - books, papers - I followed. I just went along. As I'd always done."
What are we going to do?

Is that all you can think about?

Don't talk to me like that!

Don't you...
I don't think I can do this.

I'm scared.

We'll be together.

And when we did have to leave, all of our belongings - papers - they were taken away too.
SCENE 5 - "Regina’s Destiny"

236 Arioso \( \text{\textit{d. = 44}} \)

Reg. \( p \) legato e dolce

245

Reg. in me. There is something in me. There is something in

Pno. \( \text{\textit{mp}} \) sempre con Ped.

254

Reg. me. I know it. I know it. There is something in

Pno. \( \text{\textit{mf}} \)

262

Reg. me. There is

Pno.
I woke up one day and I knew this was it.

And it is. And it is.

And it is.
There's no body there.

Ev'rything was locked a-way.
Ev’ry piece of my life erased.
Here I am, waiting.

Hello?
And I find rooms and rooms,

Here I am, waiting.
And I find rooms and rooms,

Anna

I find more and more.

Anna

Bb Cl.

Vln.

Acc.

Pno.

I find more and more.

Anna

Bb Cl.

Vln.

Acc.

Pno.

I find more and more.
Anna, why are you doing this?

Anna, why are you doing this?

Anna

Piles and piles of people’s lives.

And

Anna, why are you doing this?

Anna

chance to make it right.
then I see it.

You think this will make a difference for you?

It's in your blood, Anna.

I'm ready to give up.

A chance.

Your? My chance.

It's in your blood, Anna.

I'm ready to give up.
Stop! I hear someone.

If only I could help one

Why would it have happened for you and no one else?

Anna,
It's too late. One person. I could liberate.

It's too late to get out.
Here I am.

There was never any chance for you.

Too late.

myself from this.

There was never any chance for you.
Anna frantically searches through the piles of paper, trying desperately to ignore her Father’s harsh words.

You’re a murderer, Anna. It’s in your blood.

Here I am.

It’s not too late.
Anna confronts her father for the first time.

Anna

E-nough.

E-nough!

E-nough!

Your blood.

Your blood!

Here I am.

I'm here, wait-ing.

Wait-ing in this

It's here.

Wait-ing.

I found it.

A. Pno.

Reg.

F.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Acc.

Pno.

Anna

Pno.
Regina sees Anna for the first time. They face each other, with hope.

Here I am.

They see each other, with hope.

Here I am.

I found her.