

Music by Petr Kotik
Master-Pieces (Almost a Lecture)

Chamber opera

(2013 – 14)

(work on the libretto started in early Spring 2013. Composed in April – May 2014)

Soprano, 3 Men (Tenor, Baritone, Bass) Violin (playing also Viola), Oboe, 3 Percussion

Libretto adapted by Petr Kotik in collaboration with Michael Rau: the lecture by Gertrude Stein
"What Are Master Pieces And Why Are So Few of Them."

The theater component created by Michael Rau

Premiere, June 27 2014 at NODO Festival, Ostava, Czech Republic

Staging and Direction by Michael Rau

Kamala Sankaram, soprano

Marty Coyle, tenor

Jeffrey Gavett, baritone

Adrian Rosas, bass

Pauline Kim Harris, Violin

Members of Ostravská banda

Scene 1

Soloist(soprano):

Talk:

I was almost going to talk and not to write and read

Although possibly reading for you as if it had not been printed...

-
-

There is something about what has been written having been printed,
which makes it no longer the property of the one who wrote it

-

I was going to talk and not write

-

But actually it is impossible to talk about master-pieces and what they are

-

Because talking

-

Essentially

-

Has nothing to do with creation.

-

Sing:

I talk a lot

I like to talk and I talk even more than that

I may say, I talk most of the time, and I listen a fair amount too

-

The essence of being a genius is to be able to talk and listen

-

To listen while talking and talk while listening

-

Talk:

But,

And this is very important

-

Very important indeed

-

Talking has nothing to do with creation.

Scene 2

Soloist:

Sing:

All this summer I meditated and wrote about what are master-pieces
and why are there so few of them

And it finally came to the relation of human nature, and the human mind, and
identity.

-

-

What one gradually comes to find out is

-

One has no identity when one is in the act of doing anything.

-

Identity is recognition, you know who you are, because you and others remember
who you are

-

But essentially you are not that, when you are doing anything.

-

Talk:

I am I

Because my little dog knows me,

But recognizing that he knows me,

Is what destroys creation.

-

-

Picasso once remarked:

I do not care who it is

That has or does influence me
As long as it is not myself.

3Men:

(Almost interrupting Soloist)

Talk:

Nonsense /Nonnsense

Small pause

Soloist:

Sing:

There is a great deal of nonsense talked about this subject.

-
-

After all

There is always the same subject

3Men:

(Almost interrupting Soloist)

Talk:

The same subject?

Soloist:

Sing:

-

There are the things you see and everybody might say everything about these things.

-

Any woman in any village or men either if you like or even children know as much of human psychology as any writer and it is not this knowledge that makes master-pieces.

3Men:

(Almost interrupting Soloist)

Talk:

Not at all not at all at all.

-
-

Soloist:

Sing:

At any moment when you are you

You are you

without the memory of yourself

-

If you remember yourself while you are you
You are not for purpose of creating you.

-

Violin = 1 measure

-

I discovered while lecturing that gradually one stopped to hear what one said

-

Instead

-

One follows what the audience hears one say,

-

-

This is the reason that oratory is practically never a master-piece
And very rarely history

-

People who are orators hear not what they are

Talk: Not what they say but what their audience hears them say.

-

-

-

Scene 3

Soloist:

Sing:

Action is direct and effective but

-

Action is necessary and anything that is necessary has to do with human nature and not
with the human mind.

-

Master-piece does not have to be necessary, is not in response to necessity

-

The minute it is necessary it has no possibility of going on.

-

-

Talk:

To come back to painting

-

I said – a picture exists for and in itself

And as the only way the painter has to get the picture to exist

Is to use objects.

That is every one's trouble

-

-

Sing:

Every one who writes or paints is abnormally conscious of events

•

People

•

Objects

•

And landscapes

•

And the minute one is conscious of these things as a subject

The interest in them does not exist.

•

•

You can see that so well in the difficulty when you describe more or less the things that happen

•

You imagine them of course

•

But more or less everybody knows

What is happening

And so what is happening

Is not really interesting,

•

It does not really thrill any one,

•

It excites a little

•

But it does not really thrill any one.

•

•

Talk:

In former times

A painter painted what he saw

Of course he didn't but he could say it,

•

Now, he does not want to say it because seeing it is not interesting.

•

This has something to do with master-pieces and why there are so few of them but this is not everything.

•

•

You see why talking has nothing to do with creation,

•

•

Scene 4

Soloist:

Nothing moves on the stage.
She makes the most important statement.

Sing:

Talking is human; talking is human nature
Human nature has nothing to do with creating master-pieces.

•

Master-piece has nothing to do with human nature or with identity,
nothing to do with identity or human nature,
It has to do with the human mind and entity
With entity and human mind

•

•

A work of art is a thing in itself
A thing in itself
And not in relation to anything.
No relation

•

Talk:

The moment it is in relation, it is common knowledge

•

Violin = 5 measures

Sing:

Anybody can feel and know it
Every one in a curious way sooner or later
Does feel the reality of a master-piece.

•

•

Violin = 1 measure

Every one feels that the thing in itself is what does hold the attention.
A master-piece is a thing in itself, this is what holds the attention

•

The human nature is only the clothing, it is only the surface
The thing in itself is what does hold the attention.

Violin = 1 measure

Talk:

• I have meditated a great deal about that.

Scene 5

Soloist:

Talk:

The manner and habits
Of Bible times or Greece and China
have nothing to do with us today,
but the masterpieces exist just the same

Not because of their identity or human nature

•

Everybody knows everything there is to know about identity and human nature,

•

They exist

because they came to be as something
that is an end in itself

•

•

Violin = 4 measures

Sing:

And in that respect

They are opposed to the business of living

Which is relation and necessity.

That is what a master-piece is not

Talk: Although it may easily be what it talks about.

•

•

Violin = 15 measures

Sing Aria 2:

Another one
Of the curious difficulty is

That

A piece has to begin and end

It is difficult
Because, actually

Master-piece does not do that

It has neither
Beginning or ending

But
After all
Like the human nature to exist
It has to use beginning and ending

Everybody worries
Because a master-piece is not about that
It is not about
Beginning and ending

And anyone
Who is trying to do anything
Anyone is desperately trying
Not having a beginning and an ending

But in some way
One does have to stop

-
-

I stop.

Scene 6

Soloist:

Talk:

I do not know whether I have made any of this clear.
I have it all written down

and now I am remembering

•

And when you remember it is never clear.

•

•

Baritone:

Sing:

Remembering is something curious

Tenor & Bass together:

Remembering is something curious

Baritone:

You begin to work and suddenly you remember something

2Men (Tenor and Bass):

You begin to work and suddenly you remember something

Man (Baritone):

And if you continue to remember,

2Men (Tenor and Bass):

And if you continue to remember,

Tutti: Soloist and 3Men:

Everything gets very confused.

•

Soloist:

•

If you do not remember while you are creating,

If you do not remember while you are writing,

it may seem confused,

•

But actually it is clear

•

And eventually that clarity will be clear,

And everyone will recognize it

•

And everyone will see that it is a master-piece

Short pause

•

•

Talk:

If you remember while you are writing

it will just seem clear,

but the clarity will go out

•

3Men:

All this sounds complicated

Soloist:

but it is not complicated, it is just what happens.

•

•

3Men:

Remembering what you are about to write **is theright thing...? is the right thing?**

Soloist (at * interrupts the men):

You will see immediately how lifeless the writing becomes

•

That is why this kind of writing is so dull

Because it is all remembered,

•

That is why illustration is so dull

because you remember what somebody looked like

•

The minute your memory functions while you are doing anything

It may be very popular but actually it is dull.

•

A master-piece may be unwelcome but it is never dull

Sing (Soloist):

A piece of art may be unwelcome but it is never dull

A piece of art may be rejected but it is never dull

A master-piece is never dull

•

Talk:

And this is why are there so few of them

•

Soloist + 3Men:

Sing :

Mostly

•

People live in identity and memory

•

They know they are they because their little dog knows them,

•

They are not an entity but an identity.

•

•

Scene 7

Soloist:

Talk:

It has been said over and over of geniuses
that they are eternally young

Sing:

It has been said over and over of geniuses
That they are eternally young

-
-

What is the use of being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man,

3Men:

The boy and the man have nothing to do with each other,

Soloist:

Except in respect to memory and identity

-

If they have anything to do with each other
in respect to memory and identity

-

Then they will never produce a master-piece.

3Men (uncoordinated):

Tenor, Baritone:

They will never make a master-piece.

Bass:

Then they will never produce a master-piece.

-

Soloist:

Talk:

Do you understand?
It does not really make much difference

-

because after all,
master-pieces are what they are
and this is the reason
why there are very few of them.

-

Men look at Soloist dumbfounded

Scene 8

Tenor:

Sing:

Try it
Try it
Try it not to be you
•
Are you you
Are you really you
•
Do not think about being you
•
Do not think this way
Does your little dog knows you

Baritone:

Try it just not to be you
•
Try it just not to be you
•
Just try it
•
Does your little dog knows you?

Bass:

Try it just try it
Try it
•
Are you you
Are you you
•
Are you
•
Because your little dog knows you?
Are you that?

Man (1 - any):

Talk:

The moment you are you
The way your little dog knows you
You cannot make a masterpiece

Man (2nd - any):

And that is all of that.

SMALL PAUSE

Soloist:(She is explaining)

Sing:(pianissimo)

It is not difficult
Not to have identity

•

But

•

It is extremely difficult to know it
It is extremely difficult to know

Not

to know not having identity

•

One might say it is impossible
But it is not impossible

Soloist collapses on the couch

•

•

*Soloist leaves the couch, heads to the podium. Man directs this entire aria to the soloist.
He's tender. kind. soothing.*

Baritone:

Sing (falsetto): (*pp*)

Do we know what a master-piece is?

Do we know what they are?

•

•

3Men:

Yes

We know what they are

Yes

We know them

Yes

•

And we also know why there are so few of them.

Bass:

There are so few of them.

Scene 9

Soloist:

Everything is against them

- Everything that makes life go on
that makes identity
Everything
is against them

- Everything
that makes identity is of necessity
is against them
Everything
That is
Is against them

- And the pleasures of life as
And the necessities of life
Makes the necessity of identity

- And it is against master-pieces

- •
And the pleasures that are soothing
all have to do with identity

- And the pleasures that are exciting
all have to do with identity

- And what is more,
there is all the pride and vanity
And Naturally
there is more identity that one knows
And it is all against
Making a master-piece
There is more identity
More than anything else one knows about

- And the worst of all is
That
The only thing most everyone thinks about
is identity
And this really is against
Making a master-piece

- And thinking is something
that does so nearly need to be memory
and is against doing anything

Soloist + 3Men:

And if it is,
Then of course it has nothing to do with a master-piece
It has nothing to do with it

•

Soloist:

Talk:

Mostly,
Master-piece is about identity

•

And

•

Because of that
It must not have any.

•

Nothing could bother me more than the way a
thing goes dead once it has been said.
It does it because of this trouble about time.

•

• **PAUSE!**

Scene 10

Soloist:

Sing:

While you are working
you do not remember yourself as you do create.

•

And yet what you are composing is time and identity
Only,
while you create they do not exist. **Talk:** That is really what it is.

•

It is so simple
Anybody does know that.

Soloist:

To know what one knows is frightening

Man (Baritone):

Anybody does know that.

•

Soloist:

To live what one lives is soothing

Man (Baritone):

Anybody does know that.

Man (Tenor):

And though
Everybody likes to be frightened

Man (Bass):

What they really have to have is soothing

Soloist:

Anybody does know that.

•
This s why master-pieces are so few,

Man (Bass):

not that they themselves are frightening

Soloist:

Of course not!

•
If the author is frightened

•
•

Then
He does not exist without the memory of time and identity,

•
And if he is frightened, he cannot create

•
The work looks like it is something
and it feels like it is something
but the memory of the fright destroys it.

•

3Men:

Although everybody likes to be frightened
What they really have to have is soothing

3Men:

To be able to know , that is...

•

Soloist:

Not to have identity and time
but to work as if there were identity and time FREEZE (fermata)

•

3Men:

Of course/ Of course/ Of course

Man (Tenor):

that is what a master-piece is
and that is why

3Men:

there are so few of them / there are so few of them / there are so few of them

•

Man (Baritone):

And to go on
being not as if there were no time and identity,
but working as if there were

3Men:

It is so very simple / It is so very simple, it is so very simple / it is so very very simple

Soloist:

This is why it is difficult to have anyone who is like that.

• **PAUSE!**

•

Talk:

Anybody

•

Really anybody can know that.

Scene 11

Soloist:

Sing:

What is the use of being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man.

•

what is the use

Soloist:

what is the use

3Men:

what is the use

•

Soloist:

there is no use

3Men:

there is no use.

•

Soloist:

Anybody

Anybody really

Anybody can really know that

•

Soloist + 3Men:

There is no use.

•

Soloist:

There is really no use in being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man

•

It is very interesting

•

Because then man and boy **Talk:** You can be certain **Sing:** Man and boy is continuing
and a master-piece does not continue

it is as it is

but it does not continue.

•

It is very interesting

•

Soloist:

No one is content with being a man and boy and a son and a father

Soloist + 3Men:

No one is content with being a man and boy and a son and a father

•

Soloist:

And the fact that they all die
has something to do with time...

Bass:

but it has nothing to do with master-pieces

•

Baritone:

Talk:

If there was no identity no one could be governed,

Bass:

But everybody is governed by somebody

Soloist:

and that is why they cannot make master-pieces,

•

3Men:

governing is occupying

Soloist:

And that is why it is not interesting...

Scene 12

Soloist:

Sing:

And another thing

•

When you are working

When you are writing

•

Long before you have an audience for what you do

•

Everything is important

One thing is as important as any other thing

Tenor, Baritone:

And

And

When

When you are working you are writing

Long

Long

What everything

Everything is

One important thing is that

Soloist:

•

And you cherish everything that you have ever created.

•

And after the audience begins

Naturally,

they create something

•

That is

•

They create you,

And so, everything is not so important any more,

Talk:

Finally, when you have an audience,

Something is more important than another thing,

Which was not true when you were you

Not the way your little dog knows you

•

•

Soloist + 3Men:

Sing:

There we are

And

There is so much more to say

Soloist

But anyway,

I do not say

that there

is no doubt...

FREEZE

Short silence