And the Rat Laughed
An opera
Based on Nava Semel’s book.
Music by Ella Milch-Sheriff.
Libretto: Nava Semel and Ella Milch-Sheriff

OperaYork presents
And the Rat Laughed
A Hidden Child Remembers the Holocaust

An opera
Based on Nava Semel’s book.
Music by Ella Milch-Sheriff.
Libretto: Nava Semel and Ella Milch-Sheriff

Geoffrey Butler, Artistic Director/Conductor

Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts
November 5 and 7 at 8 pm
November 8 at 2 pm
Nava Semel : Author

Nava Semel, born in Tel Aviv, holds an MA in Art History and is an art critic. Semel has worked as a TV, radio and recording producer, and as a journalist. She has written poetry, prose for children and adults, television scripts and opera libretti, in addition to translating plays. Semel has received several literary prizes, including the American National Jewish Book Award for children’s literature (1990), the Women Writers of the Mediterranean Award (1994), the Austrian Best Radio Drama Award (19996), and the Tel Aviv Woman of the Year in Literature Award (2007).

Ella Milch-Sheriff : Composer

Born in Haifa, Ella Milch-Sheriff began her composer career at the age of 12. Ella graduated in composition from the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University. Ella composes for opera, and has written chamber, orchestral and vocal music as well as popular music and solo works. Her music is performed widely through Israel, Europe and USA and of note, is her refined arrangements of songs by Kurt Weill for mezzosoprano and chamber orchestra.

In 2005, Ella Milch-Sheriff was awarded the prestigious “Israeli Prime-Minister Prize” for her musical works and the opera, “And the Rat Laughed” conceived with Nava Semel and based on her book received the “Rosenblume Prize” for achievement.

Project Consultant: Peninah Zilberman
Synopsis

And the Rat Laughed is an opera by Ella Milch-Sheriff based on the novel by acclaimed Israeli author and child of Holocaust survivors, Nava Semel. The novel and opera support understanding of the themes of “Remembering the Holocaust”, “Hidden Children” and “Righteous Among the Nations.”

This is a story set in 2099, where paralysis of emotions is balanced by story tellers embedded with memory chips. The story moves to 1999, where a grandchild has a school assignment to learn about her family history.

The grandmother tells of being given to farmers to hide her, while her parents try to survive the war in Poland. Abused and left in a pit, her only companion is a rat she befriends. After financial support from the parents stop, the farmers offer her to the local Catholic church, suggesting she be turned in for a Nazi reward, or for her to be killed.

The local priest chooses instead to save the young child. Returning to the timeframe of 1999, with the people from the future watching, we learn that through the remembrance of the story with her family, a resolution takes place for the grandmother/child, with the story ending on stage, with the grandmother, herself as a child and grand-daughter and people of the future bathed in a circle of light and happiness.

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Canada-Israel Cultural Foundation
La Fondation Culturelle Canada-Israel
Artistic Director & Conductor: Geoffrey Butler

Cast
Melanie Gall ........................................ Lima Energelly
Andrew Tees ........................................ Stash
Adriana Albu ........................................ Grandmother
Angela Burns ....................................... Granddaughter
Einat Aronstein ..................................... Little girl
Dion Mazerolle ..................................... Priest/Father Stanislaw
Gerrit Theule ....................................... Farmer
Ramona Carmelly .................................. Farmers Wife

Crew
Stage Director ................................. Penelope Cookson
Technical Director/Set Designer .......... Frank Pasian
Production manager/Lighting Designer  Chris Humphrey
Wardrobe Mistress ............................ Amanda Eason
Property Manager ............................ Ron Winton
Stage Manager ................................. Dan Stoyles
Set Construction ............................ Doug Bisset, Dan Stoyles, Ron Winton
Super Titles ...................................... Yan Li

Opera York Chorus
Farah Hack, Nava Lightstone, Julia Morgan, Charlotte Mundy

Opera York Orchestra

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<th>Violin I</th>
<th>Violin II</th>
<th>Cello</th>
<th>Bass</th>
<th>Flute</th>
<th>Oboe</th>
<th>English Horn</th>
<th>French Horn</th>
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<th>Trombone</th>
<th>Percussion</th>
<th>Accompanist</th>
<th>Personnel Manager</th>
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| Valerie Sylvester–ConcertMaster
Rachel King
Leonid Peisahov
Louise Pauls
Dmitri Atanassov
Xiaoling Li |
| Janet Horne
Carmen Nemeth
Elena Spanu
Natalie Wong |
| Tom Mueller
Kerri McGonigle |
| Kerri McGonigle |
| Neal Evans |
| Sreten Marinovic
Milan Brunner |
| Barbara Bolte
Karen Ages |
| Karen Ages |
| Seanan McGee |
| Sam Cancellara
Steven Abra |
| Philip Trow |
| Lorne Grossman |
| Michael Capon
Yan Li |
| Philip Trow |

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| Sreten Marinovic
Milan Brunner |
| Neal Evans |
| Karen Ages |
| Karen Ages |
| Yanzing Li |
| Michael Capon
Yan Li |
| Philip Trow |

Personnel Manager
Philip Trow
Geoffrey Butler: Artistic Director

A graduate of the University of Toronto, Mr. Butler’s interest in conducting was fostered from an early age through his enrolment in the world renowned St. Michael’s Choir School, and later at the University of Toronto’s opera school. After graduating, Mr. Butler went on to further studies in both conducting and singing, at home and abroad. As a guest conductor, he has performed with the Niagara Symphony, the Canadian Chamber Orchestra, the Hart House Orchestra, the Oakville Symphony in both their main season and at the Oakville Waterfront festival, and the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra. He was music director for the premier of the David Warrack musical Piper with Open Call Music Theatre and conducted Puccini’s Suor Angelica at Queen’s University, Kingston. He has been Artistic Director for Opera York’s productions of Boheme, Marriage of Figaro, Magic Flute, Don Giovanni and Carmen.

Penelope Cookson: Stage Director

A graduate of the University of Toronto Opera school, Penelope has been an artistic director, stage director and singer for many opera companies and ensembles around Toronto including Opera York and Brampton Lyric Opera. For Opera York she has been artistic director for the 2004 Carmen and stage director for Boheme.

Adriana Albu: mezzo soprano

Romanian-Canadian mezzo-soprano Adriana Albu has become known both in North America and Europe not only for her versatility as a singer, but also for her stage prowess and vivid portrayal of characters in opera and on the concert stage. Adriana has been praised by Opera Canada as “An excellent Cherubino, Romanian mezzo Adriana Albu sang with nice tone and looked every bit the love-struck teenager...”. For her Carmen role Lo Specchio raved “… mezzosoprano romeno Adriana Albu, voce e statura artistica di primissimo piano” and Echo Germanica added “In Adriana Albu artistic director Geoffrey Butler found not only a beautiful and temperamental Carmen, but one that understood to create nuances that were befitting a fine actress.”

Einat Aronstein: soprano

Born in Israel, she was a member of the Moran Choir and performed with the choir in concerts in Israel and abroad (Spain, Taiwan, the Netherlands, the USA, Canada, Switzerland, Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic). She has performed in numerous Israeli Opera productions such as La Boheme, Carmen, Werther, The Eternal Road, Turandot, Tosca, Otello and has been an opera soloist in Israeli Opera Productions of The Little Magic Flute (Mozart), The Shepherd Boy in Tosca (Puccini), Street Child in Andrea Chenier (Giordano), A Boy in Die Zauberflote (Mozart) and Hansel in Hansel und Gretel (Humperdinck). She was The Girl in Half a Moon Tale (Michael Shenhav), a world premiere created for Einat Aronstein.

And premiered the role of The Girl in A Rat Laughs (Ella Sheriff) with the Cameri Theatre and the Israeli Chamber Orchestra. As a concert soloist she has sung with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor Zubin Mehta, the Israel Chamber Orchestra, conductor Yuval Ben Ozer, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, conductor Stanley Sperber and with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, conductor Gabor Hollering.

Angela Burns: soprano

Originally from Port Elgin, Ontario, Angela is a graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University’s Bachelor of Music: Honours Performance and Post Grad Diploma in Opera where she studied with Kimberly Barber. Summer instructional programs include Opera Nuova in Edmonton, University of Manitoba’s Contemporary Opera Lab in Winnipeg, Queen of Puddings: Songs and Scenes in Toronto, Opera Workshop in St. Andrews by the Sea, New Brunswick, as well as the Casalmaggiore International Festival in Casalmaggiore, Italy. Angela’s interest in new opera has led her to premier the roles of Katherine in Glenn James’ To Daniel, Mortimer in Meagan Bunce’s Mortimer and Esurient in Luke Nickel’s Jack and his Jillions.
Ramona Carmelly: mezzo soprano

Ramona has captivated audiences in more than a dozen languages, in concert, opera and theatre, cabaret and jazz, as well as the great masses by Dvorak, Haydn and Mozart, and was featured soloist in Mahler’s symphony #3 with conductor Richard Bradshaw. Ramona made her TV debut in an episode of Zoe Busiek: Wildcard as the oblivious diva amid murder and mayhem. An avid collaborator with local contemporary composers, Ramona recently created the title role of Emily Carr, in Emily, the Way You Are, a one woman chamber opera written for her. Previous appearances with Opera York include Marcellina in The Marriage of Figaro and Ciesca in Gianni Schicchi.

Melanie Gall: soprano

Soprano Melanie Gall recently traveled to Argentina and Uruguay to sing at their Semaine de la Francophonie celebrations. This spring, she also sang a series of 6 solo recitals at the American Spring Festival in the Czech Republic. In addition, she has performed in South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Melanie has performed the roles of La Fee in Massenet’s Cendrillion, The Queen of the Night from The Magic Flute and Gilda from Verdi’s Rigoletto. Melanie’s first book, Europe: A Savvy Girl’s Guide was released by North Sky Press and Sandhill Books. As well, Melanie has done voiceover work and has appeared on Law and Order: SVU, Ugly Betty and the upcoming NBC show Kings.

Nava Lightstone: soprano

Nava holds a degree in Music from the University of Ottawa, where she was extremely active in both the musical and broader artistic community. She is currently the Head of Box Office and Finance for the Classical Theatre Project, teaches music, and continues to perform with various ensembles around the Toronto area. Selected Credits: La Boheme, Carmen, Romeo et Juliette (Opera Lyra Ottawa); The Magic Flute (Bytown Operaworks); Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, Les Dialogues des Carmelites (University of Ottawa); Mozart’s Requiem, Dvorak’s Te Deum, Jenkins’ Mass for Peace (University of Ottawa); Lord of the Rings Symphony, Hayley Westenra (National Arts Centre); Roger Hodgson (Elora Festival Singers/Casinorama). Other performances with: National Arts Centre Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, Elora Festival Singers, Ewashko Singers, Calixa Lavallee Ensemble, Lachan Chamber Choir.

Dion Mazerolle: baritone

Originally from New Brunswick, the baritone Dion Mazerolle is known for his versatility within the realms of opera and concert recitals. Having travelled extensively, he has performed in different companies around Canada, United States and Europe. He has performed for companies such as Orlando Opera, Opera Ontario, Calgary Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Opera de Montreal, Opera York and Brasov State Opera in Romania. With the Brasov State Opera, M. Mazerolle toured 20 cities in Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland as the Villains in Offenbach’s Les contes d’Hoffmann. Former member of Atelier lyrique de l’Opera de Montreal, M. Mazerolle is the winner of numerous prizes including Grand Prize of the Young Artist Competition from Societe Radio-Canada, Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation and Jeunes ambassadeurs lyriques. He was been recorded and heard on numerous occasions by CBC-Radio and SRC-Radio for Saturday Afternoon at the Opera and different concert program series. During his past season, Dion Mazerolle was performing Aeneas in Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas with Masques Ensemble at the Montreal Baroque Music Festival and Domaine Forget. He was also heard during the Montreal Chamber Music Festival for “Virtuoso Night at the Opera” with Paul Merkelo, MSO’s trumpet solo, Rachel Barton Pine, violinist, James Campbell, clarinetist and Kevin Loucks, pianist.
Julia Morgan: mezzo-soprano

Julia graduated from the University of Toronto Opera Program in 2007. A few of Julia’s roles include Cherubino, Orlofsky, Bianca, Frau Reich, and Second Woman. Julia’s upcoming performances include In Recital with Amanda Johnston at Haleconian Hall and Hansel in Hansel and Gretel with the Saskatoon Opera School Tour.

Charlotte Mundy: soprano

A graduate of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music, Charlotte recently appeared in the world premiere of the groundbreaking opera Childrens Crusade and as a soloist with the Windago ensemble. Upcoming performances include the premiere of a new work by Torontonian composer Patrick Power, and performance of Prose Collection with the Earwax Ensemble.

Gerrit Theule: bass baritone

Acclaimed for his “well rounded notes and his talent for bombast” (Toronto Star), Canadian-American bassbaritone Gerrit Theule is the young voice to watch on Canada’s opera scene. Originally from Winnipeg and a veteran of the University of British Columbia’s opera program, his repertoire encompasses such diverse roles as the title role in Bartok’s Bluebeard’s Castle to both Mozart’s and Rossini’s Dr. Bartolos. This season has him making a number of appearances including a return to the operetta stage with Toronto Operetta Theatre’s The Bird Seller, and making his Opera Kitchener debut as Don Magnifico in La Cenerentola. Last season included a variety of performances in the Toronto area including a “sonourous” (Opus Canada) Dr. Bartolo for Opera York’s Il Barbiere Di Siviglia, an appearance in Opera in Concert’s Snegurochka where he made “a stentorian (Grandfather) Frost” (Opera Canada), and an acclaimed performance as the Commendatore in Opera York’s Don Giovanni. Recent credits also include the Cook and Farfarello in Opera in Concert’s Love For Three Oranges, as well as Colonel Calverley in Patience with Toronto Operetta Theatre.

Andrew Tees: baritone

Now an alumnus of the Canadian Opera Company’s Ensemble Studio, baritone Andrew Tees has caught the attention of opera impresarios in both the U.S. and Canada. In Europe, he made his debut in Holland with the Dutch Radio Orchestra in Venus und Adonis, a work by Henze he first performed with the COC. He was engaged as the Pirate King in Cleveland Opera’s production of The Pirates of Penzance and starred as Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro for Opera Ontario. The swaggering toreador Escamillo in Bizet’s Carmen was his debut role for Manitoba Opera in Winnipeg. For the Toronto Symphony, he was featured in a Halloween ‘Pops’ concert conducted by Eric Kunzel and starred in the staged premiere of R. Murray Shafer’s Zoroaster for Soundstreams Canada. In Thunder Bay, he was engaged for an Italian Opera Evening conducted by Geoffrey Moull. During the 2002–2003 season, the busy baritone was featured by the Edmonton Opera as Silvio in Pagliacci and reprised his role as Figaro for Pacific Opera Victoria in Le Nozze di Figaro. He sang the role of Danilo in Lehar’s Merry Widow for Orchestra London. Also were concerts devoted to the music of Richard Rodgers with the Hamilton Philharmonic, Carmina Burana with the Amadeus Choir and the local première of Christos Hatzis’ Kyrie in a return engagement with Soundstreams. Composer Ian McAndrew cast Mr. Tees in the première of his new opera, Cassandra, heard in Hamilton and Toronto. For the Canadian Opera, he was featured in mainstage productions of Otello, Billy Budd and La Fanciulla del West. Heard also as Hercules/Orestes in Giasone, he appeared as soloist in the Altamira Festival and starred as Tarquinius in the Ensemble production of Britten’s The Rape of Lucretia, repeating his interpretation of the Etruscan general later in Amsterdam. Additional mainstage assignments include the Marquis in La Traviata and he covered the roles of Marcello in La Bohème, Don Giovanni in Don Giovanni and Belcore in L’Elisir d’Amore.
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“And the Rat Laughed” has been produced by Opera York in partnership with the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. Opera York thanks the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, UJA Federation for their participation and support of this production.

Joseph Gottdenker, in memory of the members of the Gottdenker and Zuckerbrot families, who perished during the Holocaust, and those who miraculously survived but have since passed away.

May and Fred Karp and family honour the memory of the victims of Fascism and racial hatred.

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