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Opera Neo Announces Release Dates For First of its Kind Fully Virtual Magic Flute Movie in Four Episodes

*Opera Neo will release the first of four episodes of its full virtual production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte)* on August 15, 2020. The pioneering production uses green screen technology to bring together singers in virtual environments, accompanied by a symphony orchestra, to create a fully immersive operatic experience, all performed from the homes of the artists around the country.*

SAN DIEGO – August 11, 2020 – **Opera Neo** is delighted to present a first of its kind endeavor: a fully-realized production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte)*, created entirely from the homes of the artists, around the United States and abroad.

The production will be released in four episodes, beginning on **Saturday, August 15** at 6:00pm PDT. With direction by **David Radamés Toro**, and music direction, cinematography, and video editing by Opera Neo Artistic Director and producer **Peter Kozma**, the project combines the work of over 65 artists, including singers, orchestra members, graphic designers, and a sound engineer.

This unique collaboration began in late May and is culminating in the release of a virtually crafted operatic mini-series. The use of technology to synthesize performances into a cohesive whole evolved out of the need for remote collaboration, since artists cannot be physically together.

“The onset of the pandemic left all of us in the opera world reeling,” says the company’s Hungarian-born artistic director, Peter Kozma. “But we realized that even with pandemic-induced budget constraints, we couldn’t sit back; we wanted to create an opportunity for our artists to come together and share their work with our audience.”

Access to each individual episode is \$7.99, or \$24.99 for all four, available on the company’s website, www.operaneo.com. Episodes are 30-40 minutes each and, and will be available

on-demand for a year following their release. The opera is sung in German with English dialogues and supertitles.

Creating a Virtual Opera

To create a fully realized virtual operatic movie in three months, Opera Neo's leadership team needed to invent and refine the process on the go. "We began by working together with a few of our artists on some experimental recordings," says Kozma. "We discovered that with some ingenuity and a lot of rigor, patience, discipline, we could create something far beyond a 'zoom opera'."

Though unable to sing together in real time, the production process began with extensive music rehearsals via Zoom, with artists singing individually, and receiving coaching and feedback from conductor Peter Kozma and pianists **Korey Barrett**, **Kihwa Kim**, and **Elden Little**. Kozma and the pianists worked together to create accompaniments of the entire opera for singers to rehearse and record their parts.

"It's hard to express the happiness I felt when I could rehearse again with other musicians, even in this altered format, after months of being unable to do so because of COVID-19," says soprano **Sara Womble**, who plays the opera's heroine Pamina. "While Mozart and Schikaneder could certainly never have imagined their opera being brought to life in this way, I think this production utterly captures the joy, playfulness, and humanity that's right there in the original creation."

The company provided singers with green screens, tripods, costume pieces, and props, and members of the production team held individual meetings with singers to instruct them on detailed set-up and camera work, setting precise measurements and camera angles. Director David Radamés Toro led filming rehearsals with the singers, working on character development, as well as adapting their stage acting training to the more intimate format of film.

"The great difficulty of, course, was not having the visual connection between performers, not being in a room together and sharing energy," says Toro, "but we worked hard to find a way around this and build authentic relationships and chemistry between the characters." For all its challenges, there were aspects of the filmed format that Toro, Kozma, and the cast enthusiastically embraced. "Film gives the opportunity for close-ups," says Toro. "We can show the audience these intimate relationships with the characters that are not always easy in a large theater."

Baritone **Luke Harnish**, who plays the loveable bird-catcher, Papageno, said of the process: “the lack of physical proximity between colleagues required that we attack this project with an optimistic spirit of trust, resilience, and imagination. While the distance was a barrier to the creative process in its early stages, the resulting efforts are sure to provide a new lens through which to experience opera.”

Toro and Kozma worked together in filming sessions to coach the singers not only on their acting, but on how to film themselves, most on their cell phones set on tripods. “To be able to composite the singers believably together into a cohesive film, we needed to be painstakingly accurate and consistent with our camera angles, blocking, and sight lines,” says Kozma.

Because the project took place in the homes of singers and orchestra members, collaborators often included family and pets. “Working remotely has been a surprisingly rewarding and intimate experience,” says tenor **Andy Zimmermann**, who plays the heroic Tamino. “Virtually, the whole company has seen my home, my family, and even my dogs. This opera is truly 100% home-made!”

The post-production process is complex and extensive, with Kozma editing the singers’ videos together into virtual environments created by graphic designers **Alyssa Knittel** and **Madison Harvey**. Sound engineer **Daniel Rumley** is synchronizing the individually recorded tracks of 27 singers and 31 orchestra players.

“I am so proud of my team,” says Kozma, “and delighted to share the work of these dedicated and resilient collaborators with our audience. We hope that those experiencing it in their homes around the world will share in the joy that we have had in making it.”

Quotes

Peter Kozma, Artistic Director, Opera Neo

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David Radamés Toro, Director

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Luke Harnish, baritone (Papageno)

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Sara Womble, soprano (Pamina)

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Andy Zimmermann, tenor (Tamino)

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