

THE MAN IN THE MAN-MADE MOON LEFRAK CONCERT HALL APRIL 15, 2015

The Man in the Man-Made Moon was written and composed between 1952 and 1955 and performed in Cambridge and Waltham MA in February, 1956. This is its first public performance since then.

How did this rather unusual work come about? In the Summer of 1952, my 9-year-old cousin appeared to have taken quite literally references by adults to “the man in the moon”. Whether he actually believed that there was a man in the moon or faked it to confound his relatives, he liked talking about “the man in the moon”. When I saw in the papers a reference to a future “man-made moon” I brought it to my cousin’s attention, and he started laughing. Together we speculated on what would happen when the man in the moon encountered a man-made moon. Our imaginations ran amok, filled with alliterations upon the letter “m”.

Soon, the question of what would happen in a confrontation between the man in the moon and a new nocturnal rival preoccupied me enough as to involve a presumptive libretto for a (very) light opera. During my senior year of college, I discussed the progress of this libretto with classmates, gratefully receiving some of their suggestions as to how to proceed. For much of the process I had no idea what the outcome of the confrontation of men in moons might be. Then news from Scandinavia came to my rescue. The *first* trans-gender operation had occurred, to blazing headlines all around the world. The man in the man-made moon could have the *second* one! Then all would be well.

The libretto lay dormant during much of my army service the next two years. But the last Summer of my service (1955) had me active with an amateur Gilbert & Sullivan company directed by Peter Kline, who encouraged me to complete the music and agreed to perform it on the spot. He also suggested my changing the working title “The March of Science” to its present, much more appealing one “The Man in the Man-Made Moon”. I was unable to complete the score in time for Peter’s group to perform it that Summer, but his stage director, Mary Jean Kreek, who was a Wellesley student, encouraged me to take the show north with me to where I was enrolled for a Master’s degree at Brandeis University.

Originally there was to be no overture. The necessary rehearsal of the audience for the final note was to take the place of an overture. But the overture was added at the last minute. Wishing for a performance at Harvard, I learned that the use of Paine Hall would be free, but only if a Harvard organization sponsored it. I approached the president of the Harvard Music Club, Mark Lindley, who put one condition on his organization’s sponsorship: the score must contain the name of his girlfriend, “Hope”. Since the opera was already complete and in rehearsal without the name “Hope”, it seemed best to add an overture so that the name “Hope” could appear in the score. This was accomplished by starting with a C-clef designed so that it looked more like an “H” than a whole note (“o”), a half note with stem down (“p”) and then an eighth note double-stop, stem-down (“e”).

Now that this work is seeing the light of day after nearly 60 years, I am amazed at how little contemporaneity it seems to have lost. It is being performed by people about the same age I was when I wrote it, and they seem to have taken to it almost as if it could have emanated from within their midst. Though artificial satellites and trans-gender operations are almost commonplace today, the sense of their novelty remains sufficient that forays of imagination about what they might entail, made when they were on the cusp of the new, do not seem to be excessively dated. And scientists and reactionary congressmen seem to be feuding much as they did in the 1950's. The performers seem to inhabit the youthful flippancy that informs the entire work. The piece and the performers appear to be one in youth. Only the composer, like Dorian Gray's picture, seems to have aged.

And that is, perhaps, the source of the ambiguity I am feeling at the experience of its revival today. On the one hand, working toward the performance has made me feel young again. I am invigorated to be back in the world where nothing is too sacrosanct to be parodied and word-play is uninhibited. On the other hand, this is the one work from my youth that I cannot imagine duplicating today. A fugue on the text "How Crazy Can You Get?" is something I would shy away from after a lifetime of experience. And the idea of composing the most lyrical expression imaginable for the text "the complete and final destruction of the universe" in which beauty and terrible irony converge, seemed the height of innocent daring then; after learning about how many religious people see the fiery end of the world as "the rapture" I could never get myself to give them fuel anymore.

What I hope saves the day for listeners who are closer to my present attitudes than to those I felt in my early 20's, is that for all the parodies, including the touches of musical quotations, I always applied the best craft I was capable of. That, and the overarching message (which preceded the slogan by almost a decade) "make love, not war", leaves a good feeling in me, which I hope you will share.

I am deeply grateful to the directors of this performance, Nisan Ak and Alex Schirling, and to the principals, Matthew Perez and Jonathan Caro. Mr. Perez served also as the overall producer who somehow found people for all the roles and all the instruments despite the gridlock of schedules with which everyone at Queens College is familiar. These four are a treasure. Their enthusiasm has proved contagious. The performers in the other roles, the choristers and orchestra members also gave generously of their time far beyond what they could be compensated for. I hope that the piece itself proves rewarding enough for their wonderful effort.

An annotated libretto is also available for distribution. Remember that you, the audience, get the final word, but you must *sing* it: "QUITE".

Joel Mandelbaum