

*La Princesse des Grenouilles et La Grenouille*

My libretto, *La Princesse des Grenouilles et La Grenouille*, is an adaptation of “The Frog Prince” from brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. In their tale, a frog (actually a prince) fetches the golden ball of a spoiled princess in exchange for her allowing him into the castle. The princess is disgusted by the frog and throws him against the wall, which suddenly triggers his transformation into a prince. In other versions, the frog fetches the ball in exchange for a kiss, which turns him into a prince. Following this, I did a bit of research about frogs, and found that both natural and unnatural phenomenon can trigger a sex change in frogs. This phenomenon created an avenue for me to explore the idea of gender fluidity as well as homosexual relationships in a way that’s important but not overblown.

I hope, through this text, to normalize same-sex relationships and gender-fluid characters, or at least present a different narrative than the one more commonly found in the media. Not that great strides haven’t been made to increase gender/sexual orientation diversity in modern media, but the gay/trans characters often presented are heavily-stereotyped. I wanted to create a relationship between two characters where their love for the fundamental essence of who their partner is matters more than their physical anatomy; they love each other for who they are, and who they are isn’t entirely their sexuality/gender identity. The point isn’t that sex doesn’t matter; it’s a part of someone’s identity and will always be a factor in both the development of the soul and of a relationship. The point is that gender identity is a spectrum; even physical representations of sex (i.e. presence of certain reproductive organs) can be ambiguous or changed, breaking the last barrier in terms of confining individuals to a binary identity system that in past times was repressive and in modern times is becoming somewhat increasingly irrelevant.

The libretto isn’t a character-heavy one. Princess Grenouille is a hot-headed, strong-willed female who is used to getting what she wants, much like the spoiled, frog-flinging princess from the Grimm’s tale. Despite her childish nature, she does have a good heart and worries sometimes a little

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too much about what the people she cares about think of her. This desire to live up to people's expectations contributes to her difficulty in coming to terms that she has to grow up and one day assume the great responsibility of ruling Anura — she doesn't feel she is ready and is afraid to let her loved ones down, though she hides it with her quick tongue and fiery temper. Although her music calls for a coloratura, a vocal characteristic typical of sirens, Gren doesn't really fit into the stereotypical siren archetype because she doesn't use her power to manipulate others, nor does she die in the end. The Maid is a relatively mild-mannered, gentle character. She balances out Gren's hot-headed nature, and intuitively knows how to calm her down when she's in a fit. It could be said that she is more of a songbird than Gren is a siren due to her servile nature, but the Maid does have moments where she has a quiet spunk of her own that emerges only in dialogue with the Princess. This comfort and skill arises from years of growing up with the Princess; there is no one else in the world she is more comfortable around or can speak so freely with, making the Maid's attachment to Gren logical and meaningful. There is very little information given in "The Frog Prince" about the frog's personality, making her one of the first major changes to this old story.

The Queen, the Baker, and the Fruit vendor, though supplementary characters not found in "The Frog Prince", still play a crucial role in the opera. The Queen is regal, noble character who is a fairly stereotypical mother, save for the bit of sarcasm she responds to her daughter with in Act II. This was meant to show that the Queen herself was once as childish as Gren was, but changed her ways as she accepted the responsibility of being Queen. By including this moment of "imperfection", I wanted to make her a more dynamic character that one could see Gren growing up to being similar to. The Baker and Fruit vendor are meant to act as a sort of plot guide, orienting the audience to movement of the story as well as provide a view into the daily lives of the citizens. Their scene at the end, however, is perhaps one of the most important: now that the Princess and the Maid have set a precedent for same-sex relationships to be acceptable, the long-time friends are now able to truly express how they feel about each other (not explicitly, but through their actions).

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The Baker in particular, a mezzo-soprano having both the bright green coloration of females but also the dorsal stripe of a male, is meant to symbolize the fluidity and ambiguity of gender.

In terms of the sex, I would want to cast solely people who identify as women (trans women included) from different nationalities/races/ethnicities to align with the all-female population of Anura (the frog nation). It's time that marginalized people are given more opportunities for major roles in the mainstream. Additionally, all the characters are frogs and everyone will be wearing green, so I think a diverse cast will add a layer of individuality and represent the genetic diversity that is required in a population of any species in order for that species to thrive that a homozygous, white cast would lack.

In terms of vocal casting, Gren would be a coloratura to play on her dramatic nature. The Maid would be a lyric mezzo-soprano to allow her the flexibility to sing a bit higher in general when she's a female and a bit lower when she's a male. The queen would be a dramatic mezzo-soprano to represent her noble and motherly nature. The Baker is also a lyric mezzo-soprano because they're an androgynous, older frog that is both male and female. Lastly, the fruit vendor a soprano to balance out the lower tones of the Baker, providing a balance and allowing their music to create a nice harmony.

My libretto is rather different from the operas studied in class; no one dies, there's no real "siren", and all the characters live happily ever after. However, the underlying social commentary presented is unique and not something to be overlooked or underrated. The plot revolves around strong individuals, and challenges many of the stereotypes regarding not just females in positions of power, but of relationships among women (or lack thereof, even in a platonic manner). A positive, different view of women as well as gender-fluid individuals such as the one I present in my libretto is much deserved and long overdue.