

Nkeiru Okoye, Composer

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Program Notes and Information

We've Got Our Eye on You

A Chamber Opera

Music and story by Nkeiru Okoye

Libretto by David Cote

Approximate duration is 60 minutes

Cast of 5, SATB chorus, and chamber orchestra

INSTRUMENTATION – ORCHESTRAL SCORE

1 Flute (Piccolo)

1 Oboe (English Horn)

Clarinet 1 in B \flat (Bass Clarinet)

1 Bassoon

1 Horn in F

1 Trumpet in B \flat

1 Tenor trombone

1-2 Percussion**

Strings

**triangle, Roto-toms, Drum set, castanets, Bell Tree (Mark tree), Tambourine, Glockenspiel

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

This work has elements of opera, musical theater and pop. Cast members are encouraged to sing stylistically, especially where indicated in the score.

ABOUT

We've Got Our Eye On You is a 60-minute opera loosely based on Ancient Greek myth, made famous in the “Stygian Witches” episode from 1981 fantasy classic *Clash of the Titans*. Taking inspiration from that and a dizzying range of influences—Gilbert & Sullivan, the Gershwins, Monty Python, Stephen Sondheim and Aretha Franklin—the opera uses broad laughs and keen, unexpected pathos to explore the unleashed desires of three highly unusual sisters torn between dignity and desire. The story takes place in Ancient Greece, in and around a cave inhabited by the Graeae, or Gray Sisters—Enyo, Pempredo and Deino—eyeless siblings who share an external eyeball. A Chorus of Greeks introduces the sisters, who are cooking a man in their cauldron as they prepare for a visit from Pythia, the Oracle at Delphi. Pythia arrives and soon has a vision that the ladies will be “known” by the hero Perseus, who is on the hunt for Medusa. Inflamed by the idea of a strange man but honor-bound to protect their half-sister, the sisters vow not to tell. Inwardly, however, they fantasize about knowing him. Will romantic impetuosity ruin all? Is Perseus

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hunter or prey? Mixing broad feminist comedy with elegant, witty songwriting, the opera explores and critiques notions of heroism, chastity and the phenomenon of “hooking up.”

NOTE: The development of *We've Got Our Eye On You* received funding from OPERA America's Opera Grants for Female Composers program, supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

CAST

The Graeae (The Gray Sisters)	ENYO , the scorned sister	Soprano
	PEMPHREDO , The clueless sister	Soprano
	DEINO , The curious sister.....	Soprano 2
PYTHIA , Oracle at Delphi.....		Mezzo-soprano
PERSEUS , Son of Zeus		Baritone

SATB Chorus

* Colorblind casting is encouraged. The role of Pythia gains interpretive insights when performed by an African American mezzo or soprano 2 who has experience with performance practices of traditional African American churches and jazz.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

CHORUS. This is a group of Greeks commenting on the action, clarifying plot points or offering a moral. They worship Pythia (acting as her backup singers) but regard most of the other characters with cynicism and/or amusement.

THE GRAEAE (THE GRAY SISTERS). According to myth, the Graeae were three gray haired hideous hags; but some writers called them beautiful as swans. We decided to go with a younger characterization, so feel free to play them like modern young women: sassy, bossy, neurotic and so forth. They are blind, but they share an external eyeball. So they are both vulnerable and fearsome.

ENYO. Her name mean “destroyer of cities.” She’s the oldest sister, the bossy, and impatient one. Tough and martial, she likes fighting and laying waste to cities. She’s also the most sexually aggressive of the sisters, although this comes from having been burnt in love.

DEINO. Her name means “horrified dread.” The middle sister. Deino dreams of gaining more worldly experience, and is sick of living in ignorance. She tends to be sarcastic and sassy, and likes to play head games with others.

PEMPHREDO. Her name mean “alarm.” The youngest of the three, Pempfredo is naïve, easily confused but also devious. She has a naturally scratchy, unpleasant voice, which her sisters tease her about. Due to getting picked on, she aspires to be as cool as her sisters.

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PYTHIA. Also known as the Oracle at Delphi, the Pythia is the priestess who lives in the Temple of Apollo on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. The Delphic Oracle was famed for her prophecies, sought by kings and demigods. While receiving a prophecy, she goes into a trippy trance. Our Pythia is a fabulous diva. She's cool, sardonic, worldly, not impressed by anyone's attitude, especially the arrogant hero Perseus. With the Gray Sisters she reveals her indulgent, maternal side, even though she disapproves of the girls' poor impulse-control. If Pythia lived in our world, she'd be a beloved jazz diva, like a cross between Whoopi Goldberg and Zsa Zsa Gabor.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

Scene 1: Wasteland outside of Tartarus, cave interior visible

A Chorus of Greeks enters to introduce the Gray Sisters, who stir a large cauldron that contains a not-quite-dead man. They sing a cooking song. Pythia, the Delphic oracle, visits the Sisters for lunch. She brings gifts: a new set of armor for Enyo, whose boyfriend is Ares, the god of war; licorice root to soothe Pempfredo's harshly scratchy voice; and wine for Deino, who enjoys a little nip. Suddenly, the oracle prophesizes that a hero is coming to find out the whereabouts of their sister, the Gorgon Medusa. Pythia notes that he will bear the mark of Zeus and will be "known" to all three. The news inspires Deino and Pempfredo, who have never known a man (besides as lunch) to fantasize about having one: Deino with lustful passion, and Pempfredo with clueless curiosity.

Scene 2: Outside the cave

Perseus enters in search of the Gray Sisters, noting that he plans to use heavy flirtation to get information out of them. Pythia appears and predicts that it is he—not the Sisters—who will be seduced. Perseus scoffs at this. He is madly in love with Andromeda, his love back home, and would have to be drunk to dote on another (and he never drinks)... although, he admits, he does have a thing for women in armor. Before entering the cave, Perseus disguises himself, covering his mark of Zeus.

Scene 3: Inside the cave

While Deino and Pempfredo are out checking the mantraps for fresh ingredients, Perseus discovers Enyo alone in the cave. He is drawn to her new form-fitting armor, and she seizes the change to repay Ares' latest indiscretion. Feeling empowered by her conquest, Enyo leaves to destroy a city, and Perseus laments his infidelity. Meanwhile, Pempfredo, just outside the cave, ingests Pythia's throat remedy and sings a few notes, marveling at her new sound. Perseus mistakes her voice for that of Andromeda who, he thinks, followed him. He confesses that he forgot her for a moment and agrees to blindfold himself, as punishment before she comes to him. Following their interlude, Pempfredo speaks in her natural shriek. Perseus, realizing he's been duped, removes his blindfold, but not in time to catch Pempfredo sneaking out the door. Perseus curses himself, then is startled when Deino enters, carrying the eye. Trying to comfort the distraught stranger, Deino offers him a taste of her wine, calling it party juice. Perseus, never having imbibed wine, drinks it in one gulp and becomes intoxicated and puts the moves on Deino, who also can't resist.

Scene 4: Inside and outside the cave

Shortly after, Perseus wakes up next to Deino. She is smitten, but he rebuffs her, prompting Deino to muse about (possibly) feeling used. Perseus turns over in his sleep, accidentally revealing the mark of Zeus. Deino rushes to tell her sisters, both of whom report similar encounters. Outraged, the sisters decide to confront Perseus, only to discover that he has their eyeball and will return it only if they reveal Medusa's

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whereabouts. They have no choice but to comply. As Perseus runs off to find Medusa, he tosses the eye to Pythia, outside the cave. Already aware of what has taken place (she is the Oracle, after all), Pythia shares words of wisdom with the sisters: Leave the berry on the vine; true love can wait. The Chorus (and Perseus) return to bid us farewell.