

Nkeiru Okoye, Composer

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Program Notes and Information

600 Square Feet

A micro-opera

For soprano, baritone, clarinet, viola and cello

Music by Nkeiru Okoye

Libretto by David Cote

Approximate duration is 12 minutes

Cast: Alexandra (Soprano) and Lance (Baritone)

Ensemble: Clarinet, Viola, and Cello

600 Square Feet was Commissioned by Baldwin Wallace Conservatory Voice Performance program in Collaboration with Cleveland Opera Theater and Onsite Opera

ABOUT WORK

A young couple, Alexandra and Lance, share a small but cozy apartment. They have hit a rocky patch in their relationship. In fact, they just broke up. But, rather than move out, they break up the apartment. Alexandra takes the bedroom; Lance stays in the living room. The reason for their fight: Lance saw Alexandra having coffee with a mutual friend and assumed they were having an affair. Meanwhile, Alexandra demands to know what Lance was doing downtown, not at his office. Both refuse to explain, yet each badly misses the other — in the next room. Can ex-lovers cohabit in only 600 square feet without total honesty? See if love or stubbornness will triumph in this short romantic comedy about trust, boundaries, and real estate.

Nkeiru Okoye's witty, graceful score for soprano, baritone, clarinet, cello and violin, after a humorous libretto by David Cote, surveys the ups and downs of relationships. From escalating arguments to tender confessions of heartbreak, *600 Square Feet* takes inspiration from bel canto, rom-coms, and '90s love duets.

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ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Alexandra is a computer engineer. She can hold her own with nerds, but can be quite femme in her tastes and habits. Alex took Lance to see his first opera, something about a player who had dinner with a statue. She stops arguments by vocalizing, a tic she picked up after the opera.

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Program notes for "600 Square Feet"

Lance is in advertising. He wants to start his own branding and marketing business. His parents split after his mother's serial affairs. Lance surprised himself by falling deeply in love with Alexandra, after years of short-term relationships. Lance is easygoing; Alexandra is driven.

SYNOPSIS

In a prologue, Alexandra and Lance tell us they just broke up. Since they're both fond of the apartment, instead of moving out, they decided to break up the apartment, too. Alexandra sleeps in the bedroom, Lance in the living room.

Rewind a few hours to the argument that caused the split. Lance saw Alexandra having coffee downtown with a mutual friend and assumed they're having an affair. Meanwhile, Alexandra wants to know what Lance was doing downtown, since he had texted her that he was having a meeting at the office. Neither will explain what they were doing on the day in question.

At the height of their argument, their neighbor, Mrs. Kerputnik, bangs on the wall.

Days later, Alexandra and Lance are living apart, yet together. Alexandra complains that Lance leaves hairs in the sink after shaving; she can't believe she once found that cute. Grumbling, he tries to sleep on the couch, but the pillow smells of Alexandra's soap and shampoo. Both ex-lovers are troubled by the traces left behind.

Finally, after weeks have passed, there's a confrontation. They accuse each other of missing them more. But the pretense won't last. Lance breaks down and admits he can't stand it anymore. He explains what he was doing that fateful day, as does Alexandra. They talk simultaneously and over each other. He was buying an engagement ring; she was meeting Jeremy to plan a birthday party for Lance.

They realize: It was a total misunderstanding, and an engagement announcement is in the future.