



# Regina

## Marc Blitzstein

Based on *The Little Foxes*  
by Lillian Hellman

# Study Guide



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## Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

Thank you for joining us for our final production of the 2007-8 season. As you read this, and prepare or reflect on the performance, I ask that you consider the power of opera to explore the stories of our time. Set in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Regina* is at first glance a historical dissection of turn of the century American greed that led to the Great Depression. It explores what race meant in a country that but fifty years prior allowed slavery to exist. We have certainly progressed as a society since then, haven't we?

But considered as a work written in 1949, *Regina* was first seen in a country where many were engrossed in McCarthyism, and on the edge of an emerging civil rights movement. Lillian Hellman and Marc Blitzstein knew that these venomous characters were, unfortunately, very alive in their mid-century world. Had anything changed?

Fifty more years later, have we moved on? Mortgage crises, talk of corporate malfeasance and stock market concerns, racial unrest throughout the world – where would the Hubbards fit in today?

As an eternal optimist, I believe, like Horace Giddens, that there is hope – there is “a friendly, nourishing rain that fills the earth”, and that in telling cautionary stories like *Regina*, we can, as a society, continue to evolve to honour our better, rather than baser, natures. *Regina* connects us, generation to generation, to our social history, and in doing so, demonstrates the power of music and theatre to be central to our lives.

Timothy Vernon and Glynis Leyshon have created a wonderful production, and together, the artists and administration of Pacific Opera Victoria thank each of you for supporting this kind of artistic endeavour. We value your belief in our company, and hope that *Regina* is a truly meaningful experience for you.

David Shefsiek, Executive Director

## About This Study Guide

This study guide has been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

**Teachers:** Your comments and suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire at the end of this study guide.

*Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their voice for opening night.*

## Resources

While links and resources are mentioned throughout this study guide, particularly in the *Learning More* section, the following resources are of particular value:

Eric A. Gordon. *Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989

Deborah Martinson. *Lillian Hellman: A Life with Foxes and Scoundrels*. Counterpoint, 2005

<http://www.usoperaweb.com/2002/jan/index.html> (US Operaweb: the Blitzstein Issue)

<http://www.marcblytstein.com/> (The Marc Blitstein Website)

In addition, Pacific Opera Victoria's website provides more information about *Regina*, including our newsletter and biographies of the performers and creative team: <http://www.pov.bc.ca>.

Pacific Opera Victoria's Study Guides for *Regina* and other recent operas may also be downloaded from our website at [http://www.pov.bc.ca/involve\\_education.html](http://www.pov.bc.ca/involve_education.html).

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# Regina

Based on *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman

**Music and Libretto by Marc Blitzstein**

*First Performance Shubert Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut, October 6, 1949*

*First Broadway Performance, 46th Street Theatre, New York, October 31, 1949.*

**Dress Rehearsal April 15, 2008**

**Performances April 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 2008, 8 pm**

**Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC**

Sung in English with English surtitles

## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Cast in order of vocal appearance

Addie, the housekeeper .....	Tracie Luck
Cal, the butler .....	DeAndre Simmons
Jazz .....	Louise Rose
Alexandra Giddens (Zan), Regina's daughter .....	Robyn Driedger-Klassen
Regina Giddens .....	Kimberly Barber
Birdie Hubbard, Oscar's wife .....	Kathleen Brett
Oscar Hubbard, Regina's brother .....	Gregory Dahl
William Marshall, visitor .....	J. Patrick Raftery
Benjamin Hubbard, Regina's brother .....	Doug MacNaughton
Leo Hubbard, Birdie and Oscar's son .....	Lawrence Williford
Horace Giddens, Regina's husband .....	Dean Elzinga
Conductor .....	Timothy Vernon
Director .....	Glynis Leyshon
Set Designer .....	Pam Johnson
Costume Designer .....	Erin Macklem
Lighting Designer .....	Alan Brodie
Choreographer .....	Anne Wootten
Resident Stage Manager .....	Jackie Adamthwaite
Assistant Stage Managers .....	Steve Barker
.....	Connie Hosie
Chorus Master .....	Michael Drislane
Répétiteur .....	Mark Payne

With the Victoria Symphony and the Pacific Opera Victoria Chorus

*Regina*, an opera by Marc Blitzstein, based on *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman

Version for Scottish Opera restored by Tommy Krasker and John Mauceri

Presented by arrangement with Tams-Witmark Music Library, Inc.,  
560 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10022

This production is being recorded by CBC Radio Two for future broadcast on *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera*, heard weekly beginning at 1 p.m. – 92.1 in Victoria.



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ARTIST SPONSOR FOR KATHLEEN BRETT: **Dr. Erika Kurth**

Cast and programme are subject to change.

# Synopsis

*The opera takes place in spring 1900, in Bowden, Alabama, in the Giddens house.*

**Prologue:** Late morning, veranda of the Giddens house.

The servants Cal and Addie sing a hymn, *Stand where the angels stand*. As Jazz and the field hands (the Angel Band) arrive, the music slips into ragtime over Addie's protests (*stop that sinful music!*). Jazz tells Addie that Alexandra (Miss Zan) likes their music and asks Addie what kind of music she likes; Addie sings the hymn again; Jazz laughs – *That's the same song, we just raggin' it*. To prove it, Zan and Jazz urge Addie to sing the hymn again while the band animates it with a layer of ragtime.

They are interrupted as Regina, unamused by the racket, tells Alexandra to do her hair as they are having company for dinner.

**Act 1:** Living-room of the Giddens house, the same evening

Birdie, Regina's sister-in-law, sends Cal for her music album and chats to Addie about their guest, William Marshall, whose cultivated manners remind her of how her parents used to go all the way to Europe just to listen to music. *When someone is pleasant and nice to you, oh, doesn't it make you think of music too? Tonight someone has been nice to me.*

Birdie's husband Oscar berates her for chattering and drinking too much. With dinner over, the others join them, conversing politely: *The talk is small and delicate. The wine is old and fine*. Oscar's brother Ben tells Marshall that Birdie is the only Southern aristocrat among them: *Twenty years ago we took over their plantation, their cotton, and their daughter*. Now they are planning to set up a deal to build a cotton mill in partnership with Marshall, *to bring the machine to the cotton, not the cotton to the machine*.

Regina admires Marshall's big-city sophistication and sings in honeyed tones of his *old-time chivalry and the glow of gallantry*. She promises a party when he returns in a week to complete the deal. When Alexandra asks if Jazz and the Angel Band can play, Regina refuses – until Marshall comments that coloured bands are quite the fashion in Chicago.

After Marshall leaves, Ben, Oscar, and Regina gloat over their prosperous future and make plans for the money. Ben wants a stable; Oscar anticipates taking a few trips. Regina dreams of going to Chicago, and *when I know the right things to buy, I shall go to New York and Paris and buy them*. Birdie would like Lionnet, her family plantation, back the way it used to be: *Nobody ever lost their temper at Lionnet. No one was nasty-spoken and mean*. And she wants Oscar to *stop shooting animals just for the killing – you only throw them away*. The quartet *Now we'll Be Big Rich* grows in volume until Ben shuts them up with a roar, saying *Four conversations are three too many*.

Ben then gets down to the last bit of business: He and Oscar have put up their share of the money for the deal, but Regina's husband Horace, who is ill in a Baltimore hospital with heart trouble, hasn't contributed his third. Regina demands a larger return. Ben agrees to increase Horace's return to 40 per cent if Horace is home in a week with the money – the extra profit will come out of Oscar's share. Ben assures Oscar the money will eventually go to Zan and to Oscar's son Leo. When Ben hints that Leo and Zan might even marry, Birdie is shocked, but Oscar perks up. Regina sees some difficulties: *Leo is such a wild boy. There were those times when he took a little money from the bank ... and they are first cousins*. Oscar reminds Regina that their grandparents were first cousins, and to placate Oscar, she agrees to consider the marriage.

Regina tells Alexandra to go to Baltimore to bring her father home. Although both Birdie and Addie offer to accompany her, as she is only seventeen, Regina insists Alexandra go alone, promising it will be exciting for her to be on her own. When she tells Zan it's for Horace's sake, that he can get better at home, Alexandra agrees to go.

Ben doubts Horace will actually return, but Regina reassures him: *Oh, Horace will want to come back with Alexandra. Men are so fussy about young girls travelling alone.* Ben marvels: *I never thought of that. How do you do it, Regina?*

Regina responds with an exultant, lyrical manifesto:

*If you want something that's over the wall,  
don't wait – and don't hope – and don't beg – and don't crawl –  
Oh no, you must take what you want...  
To want and to take is the best thing of all.*

As the others leave, Alexandra wonders what it would be like to fall in love (*What will it be?*). Birdie lingers to warn her that they mean to make her marry Leo. Oscar returns for Birdie and slaps her face. Zan hears her cry, but Birdie says she has only twisted her ankle.

## **Act 2, Scene 1.** Living-room of the Giddens house a week later, evening

Leo dawdles about, sampling the goodies laid out for the party (*Deedle doodle*). Oscar catches him snitching a cigar and tells him to clean up his act, to stop chasing married women, and to work harder at his bank job so that Horace will think him a fit husband for Alexandra. Leo mentions that Horace's safety deposit box contains \$88,000 worth of bonds. Oscar is intrigued and hints that since Horace never looks in the box, it would do no harm if Leo were to take them, but Leo doesn't catch his drift.

Zan arrives with Horace, who is exhausted from the trip and suspicious of Regina's motives in having him brought home so suddenly. Addie fills him in on the family's schemes, including the plans to have Zan and Leo marry. The others greet Horace with cordial pleasantries, but very soon Oscar is berating Birdie, and Horace remarks that it's just like old times.

Alone, Regina and Horace talk politely, resolving not to quarrel. When Horace asks why Regina sent Zan for him, she insists that she simply wanted him home. Horace tells Regina she is still beautiful and that he has very little time left. Regina asks if the doctors ascribe his bad heart to his fancy women; he reminds her she hasn't wanted him in ten years.

Regina has Ben tell Horace of the pending deal with Marshall, of the plans to increase profits by paying cheap wages, and of the agreement to sweeten Horace's share out of Oscar's portion. Horace is not interested in investing. Regina is furious.

## **Scene 2.** Ball-room and veranda of the Giddens house the same night

The guests arrive, gossiping cynically about the Hubbard family. As the party continues, Oscar and Ben send Leo off to steal Horace's bonds. Meanwhile Horace arranges to have his papers and safe-deposit box brought round next day so that he can make a new will.

Between the dance numbers the Angel Band play and drily observe the goings on. Jazz's little brother Chinkypin slips in to watch.

Leo returns with the bonds and begins flirting with the wife of a co-worker at the bank. As Birdie approaches him, Leo rudely tells her she looks a sight and asks if she has been drinking. Birdie is devastated. Addie comforts her with a blues song.

With Horace still adamant against investing in the deal, Regina deliberately flirts with an old beau, but makes it clear that she prefers riches: *You've a thousand rivals – things.* As Marshall wishes Regina good night, he puzzles her by saying the deal is settled. Regina confronts Ben, who tells her only that Marshall now has his money. Horace is amused that Regina won't have her millions after all. Against the background of a rambunctious dance – a galop – Regina, thwarted and furious, lashes out at her husband, crying *I hope you die soon!*

**Act 3:** Living-room of the Giddens house, the next afternoon

Birdie, Alexandra, Horace, and Addie enjoy the quiet rain.

*Consider the rain.*

*The falling of friendly rain that serves the earth, then moves on again.*

*Consider the rain. Some people eat all the earth.*

*Some stand around and watch while they eat, and watch while they eat the earth.*

Birdie admits she drinks too much and recalls her happy youth. She tells how everyone else knew Oscar was courting her only for the cotton on Lionnet. She confesses that she dislikes her own son Leo, who isn't kind, and she begs Zan not to end up like her.

As Zan walks Birdie home, Horace tells Addie to take Alexandra away, using money he has set aside for her.

Horace then shows Regina the empty safe deposit box and explains that Leo has stolen the bonds for Oscar and Ben. Regina sees this as an opportunity to blackmail her brothers, but Horace tells her he will treat the bonds as a loan and they will be the only legacy he leaves Regina in his new will.

As Regina snarls her contempt for him, Horace has a heart attack. He reaches for his medicine, but the bottle falls and breaks. There is another bottle upstairs, but Regina does not move to get it. She waits as Horace struggles to the stairs and collapses on the landing. Only then does Regina call for help. Addie and Cal bring Horace upstairs.

Leo, Ben, and Oscar arrive and, seeing the empty safe-deposit box, realize Horace knows about the theft. Regina tells them Horace will pretend he lent the bonds to them – but that once he dies, she will demand a 75 percent share in exchange for her silence. Ben calls her a greedy girl and tells her she'll get much further using smiles and womanly softness. As he finishes, she says, *I'm smiling Ben.*

Alexandra and Addie appear with the news that Horace has died. As Oscar and Ben mouth platitudes about how loved and respected Horace was, Alexandra wonders whether any of them really loved him. When, in anguish and rage, she demands that her mother tell her what her father was doing on the staircase, Regina brushes off her questions. Regina then threatens to go to court if her brothers don't agree to her terms. Given how many people they have already cheated, she is sure to win. Ben resignedly agrees.

Alexandra tells her mother she is going away, leaving Regina alone despite her triumph. The field hands' hymn is heard in the background: *Is a new day a-coming? Certainly, Lord.*

## Musical Styles in *Regina*

In *Regina*, Marc Blitzstein incorporated a wide variety of musical styles, from both popular and classical idioms. Their interplay creates a new style, as was popular with many mid-century classical composers working in theatre. George Gershwin adapted jazz in *Rhapsody in Blue* and traditional African American music in *Porgy and Bess*; Aaron Copland incorporated American folk songs into the ballets *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring*; and Leonard Bernstein fused Latin dance rhythms and New York street sounds into his trio of American Musicals, *On the Town*, *Wonderful Town*, and *West Side Story*.

Below are brief descriptions of various musical styles, and where they can be heard in *Regina*.

**Spiritual** – A distinctly American form which blends sounds from the experiences of enslaved African Americans, including traditional African music and Christian hymns. Spirituals developed into gospel songs, such as that call and answer “Is a new day coming – Certainly Lord!” that ends *Regina*.

**Ragtime** – The precursor to 20<sup>th</sup> century jazz, which adds irregular syncopation to create a casual, popular feel. Ragtime was popular in the late 1890’s through the 1910’s, and Scott Joplin (whose music was heard in *The Sting*) is one of the best-known composers of ragtime. You can hear ragtime sounds in the opening section of the Act III Rain quartet.

**Dixieland Jazz** – One of the first forms of contemporary Jazz, developed by Afro-Creole musicians in New Orleans, and prominently seen in elaborate outdoor funeral bands. Eventually, this music began to be performed in club settings, was heard in black communities in the Deep South, and was later embraced by a wider community. The character of Jazz, played by Louise Rose, sings in this style.

**Blues** – A jazz lament, originally defined more by subject matter than form. Blues highlight and contrast the major and minor keys, finding the pathos in the flatted notes. Addie sings a number entitled “Blues” to soothe Birdie in Act II.

**American Folk Song** – Alongside the tradition of African American Music, American Folk songs of the Appalachian region and the West developed. Directly tonal, with large sweeping intervals, many sound as open and expansive as the land itself. Although not an authentic folk song itself, Horace’s “Consider the Rain” has many of these qualities.

**Broadway Ballad** – Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers/Oscar Hammerstein were proponents of a form of the Broadway ballad, heard in musicals. Alexandra’s “What would it be”, written at the request of the producer for a “tune” is in this form.

**Ballroom Dances** – Music with standard rhythms and forms, many with specific European origins. At *Regina*’s party, Blitzstein has the drama unfold over a series of dances, including the Viennese **waltz** (*Regina*’s flirtation with John Bagtry), the bohemian **polka** (the party’s opening chorus), and the French country **galop** (the driving finale where Ben, Oscar and Leo’s treachery is revealed).

## Marc Blitzstein: The Composer and Librettist

Marc Blitzstein was one of the 20th century's most important American composers, lyricists, and critics. He was also a masterful pianist, coach, and accompanist. His work encompasses not only operas, but songs, orchestral and instrumental works, film scores, and translations.

He was born in 1905 in Philadelphia, where, as he says, *At the age of 3, I was a wunderkind (read "brat-prodigy")*.

He studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger (who was, incidentally one of the teachers of Victoria's own Robin Wood). He also studied in Berlin with Schoenberg, known for his avant garde atonality and the 12-tone scale. Blitzstein was frequently at odds with Schoenberg, and his musical theories eventually evolved in step with his political theories: he began by writing intellectually challenging, elitist music but, as his political views changed, he began to compose along the lines of the socially conscious popular theatre created by Bertolt Brecht, aligning himself on the side of melody, harmony, and the perfect affinity of words and music.

His first opera was the politically charged work *The Cradle Will Rock*, written after his wife, the writer Eva Goldbeck, died of anorexia in 1936. Although Blitzstein was homosexual, the marriage had been one of affection and intellectual comradeship, and in his grief he plunged into the work, which he dedicated *To Bert Brecht: first because I think him the most admirable theatre-writer of our time; secondly because an extended conversation with him was partly responsible for writing the piece*. The result, written in just five weeks, was a glorification of steelworkers and an attack on capitalists.

John Houseman, later a producer and Academy-award-winning actor, agreed to produce *The Cradle Will Rock*, with Orson Welles, then just 22, as director. The production was part of the federally funded WPA Theater Project. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) was one of the social programs President Franklin Roosevelt set up to alleviate unemployment during the Great Depression. Originally focussed on manual labour, the WPA eventually expanded to include the Federal Theatre Project, which provided employment for actors, writers, musicians, and artists – and affordable entertainment to some 15,000,000 people between 1935 and 1939.

The story of the premiere of Blitzstein's opera *The Cradle Will Rock* is the stuff of legend. It sounds as if it should be a movie – one of those manipulative, inspirational sagas that bring the audience cheering to its feet as the music swells triumphantly. Indeed, in 1999, Tim Robbins created *Cradle Will Rock*, a semi-fictional movie based on the story, with a cast including Hank Azaria, Joan Cusack, Bill Murray, Vanessa Redgrave, and Susan Sarandon. But the actual events are as startling as any piece of fiction.

Three days before its premiere, scheduled for June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937, the opera was cancelled, ostensibly due to funding cuts. Conservative members of Congress had been attempting to cut the WPA's funding, and *The Cradle Will Rock's* subversive, pro-labour message might well have influenced them to cut deeper. In addition, the 1930s were filled with violent labour action and conflict between management and organized labour. Just over two weeks earlier, on May 30, Chicago police had fired on a crowd of supporters of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, killing ten in what has become known as the Memorial Day Massacre.

Blitzstein's biographer Eric Gordon recounts what happened after Blitzstein and Welles were told the opera could not be performed:

*Undaunted by the withdrawal of government support, Welles and Blitzstein were determined to rock New York with their Cradle. They located the dusty, unused Venice Theater 20 blocks uptown, and the audience marched. Scores, sets, costumes and props remained locked in the Elliott. An hour late, Blitzstein began, fully prepared to sing the entire score at the piano himself, if necessary; for it was considered a breach of union contract for the actors to appear on any other than the federal stage.*

Houseman recalls the amazing performance that then took place:

*The curtain rose on Marc Blitzstein sitting pale, tense, but calm, at our eviscerated piano... We could hear Marc's voice behind us setting the scene: Streetcorner, Steeltown, USA, followed by a short vamp that sounded harsh and tinny on our untuned upright. Then, a most amazing thing happened. Within a few seconds, Marc Blitzstein became aware that he was no longer singing alone. It took our handheld spotlight a few seconds to locate the source of that second voice. It came from a stage right box in which a frail girl in a green dress was standing glassy eyed and frozen with fear only half audible at first but gathering strength with every note ... Our actors had been forbidden to appear onstage. There was no ruling against their appearing in the theatre. And that's what they did. They acted all over that house, improvising with amazing ingenuity. Spontaneously, unrehearsed, undirected, they played each scene in a different and unexpected part of that theatre. Between the seats, in the aisles, in stage boxes upper and lower, in the rear of the theatre, so that the audience sometimes had to turn and stand to see them ... It was a most glorious evening and the cheering and the applause lasted so long that the stagehands demanded an hour's overtime, which we gladly paid them. We made the front page of every newspaper in the city and ran for eleven performances to packed houses.*

Leonard Bernstein, who became perhaps the most famous American conductor and composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (he is probably best known for his 1957 musical *West Side Story*) saw a 1938 production of *The Cradle Will Rock* on Broadway, produced it at Harvard, and became Blitzstein's protégé and friend.

During World War Two, Blitzstein joined the US Army Eighth Air Force and worked as music director of the American broadcasting station in London. Out of his service came *The Airborne Symphony*, for soloists, male voice choir and orchestra, first performed in 1946 with Orson Welles as narrator and Leonard Bernstein conducting. It has been called the single most powerful American composition to emerge from the Second World War.

Back from the war, Blitzstein composed a number of scores for Broadway plays, including *Another Part of the Forest*, Lillian Hellman's prequel to *The Little Foxes*.

He also started work on *Regina*, which was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in 1946. It took Marc Blitzstein three years to write the opera, which opened on Broadway in 1949 and closed after 56 performances.

Blitzstein's greatest commercial success came from his translation of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's 1928 masterpiece *The Threepenny Opera* for a 1954 revival starring Weill's widow Lotte Lenya. A previous English translation had been a flop on Broadway in the 30's.

In 1958, Blitzstein received a subpoena to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), a committee of the US House of Representatives that was created in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and subversive (particularly communist) activities. HUAC was renamed the House Internal Security Committee in 1969, and finally abolished in 1975. When he testified, Blitzstein freely admitted his former membership in the Communist Party (he had quit the party in 1949), but refused to cooperate further. Blitzstein was blacklisted although, as he was not working in television, radio or film, he was not as severely affected as many others on the blacklist, whose careers were destroyed.

An extract from his FBI File reads:

*The subject stated . . . that he had nothing further to add to his testimony before the government committee ... and that he resented the attempts of the FBI to interview him as he considered it an invasion of his privacy. The subject was cold in his manner toward the agents and exhibited no inclination to cooperate. In view of the above, no further efforts are warranted to interview him again ... NY will remain alert for any information of subversive activity on the part of the subject and will reopen investigation if warranted in the future.*

Blitzstein's last completed theatrical work was the opera *Juno* (1959), based on Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock*.

In 1964, while spending the winter in Martinique, Blitzstein was robbed and beaten. He died in hospital on January 22. He left unfinished two one-act operas, *Idiots First* and *The Magic Barrel*, intended as part of a set of one-acts called *Tales of Malamud*. He also left unfinished *Sacco and Vanzetti*, an opera commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. *Idiots First* and *Sacco and Vanzetti* were completed by Leonard Lehrman, who in 1969 had produced *The Cradle Will Rock* in Boston for the first time since Bernstein's production of it at Harvard 30 years earlier.

## Mack the Knife

Blitzstein's masterful translation of *The Threepenny Opera* popularized it in the US, giving an American voice to this important work by German dramatist Bertolt Brecht and composer Kurt Weill. Blitzstein's translation also introduced the song *Mack the Knife* to English-speaking audiences, spawning an avalanche of performances and recordings that transformed a German opera tune into an American pop classic.

NPR's Murray Horowitz credits Blitzstein's translation for unleashing *Mack the Knife* on the world. While keeping the meaning and black humour of the original, Blitzstein's edgy translation relied on simple, single-syllable words that opened the song to a provocative new world of rhythmic possibilities. Many performers, among them Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Dean Martin, Ella Fitzgerald, the Doors, Duke Ellington, Marvin Gaye, and, most popular of all, Bobby Darin, made the song swing. As a result, Horowitz notes, *More versions of Mack the Knife have appeared on Billboard's Top 40 than any other song*.

The song remains irresistible. In 2006, as a guest on BBC Radio 4's long-running program *Desert Island Discs*, crochety American Idol judge Simon Cowell chose Darin's version as his top desert island song, calling *Mack the Knife* the best song ever written.

What a testament to the power of a good translation!

<b>1<sup>st</sup> stanza of original German</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> stanza of literal translation</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> stanza of Blitzstein's translation</b>
<i>Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne Und die trägt er im Gesicht Und Macheath, der hat ein Messer Doch das Messer sieht man nicht</i>	<i>And the shark, he has teeth And he wears them in his face And Macheath, he has a knife But the knife one doesn't see</i>	<i>Oh the shark has pretty teeth, dear And he shows them pearly white Just a jack knife has Macheath, dear And he keeps it out of sight</i>

# Evolution of *Regina*

## From Broadway Play to Hollywood Movie to Great American Opera

### The Playwright: Lillian Hellman

*Regina* is closely based on a stage play by Lillian Hellman, an American playwright and motion-picture screenwriter. She was known for her powerful dramas with their strong moral centre and sense of justice, for her passionate support of left-wing causes, and for her succession of love affairs with a variety of men, including a 30-year romance with mystery and crime writer Dashiell Hammett.

Lillian Hellman was born in New Orleans in 1905. Her mother, Julia (Newhouse) Hellman, came from a family of wealthy and successful businessmen and bankers. Julia's mother, Sophie Marx Newhouse, was a domineering woman, vice-president of the family banking consortium known as the Marx Company.

Against Sophie's wishes and despite threats of being cut out of the will, Julia had married Max Hellman, a womanizing salesman from New Orleans, whom the Newhouse clan considered very much beneath them. Max was charming, but not particularly good at business. His side of the family, two loving sisters, lived in genteel poverty. The contrast between the two families deeply affected Lillian, and she was aware very early of the gulf in wealth, status, character, and behaviour between the shabby Hellmans and the prosperous, snobbish, often vicious Marx and Newhouse clan.

After briefly attending university, Lillian began writing book reviews and short stories. In 1930 she moved to Hollywood with her husband, screenwriter and press agent Arthur Kober, and worked as a script reader for MGM. Her marriage broke up shortly after she met Dashiell Hammett and began a life-long love affair with him (although both had many other lovers along the way). Hammett, a charming, talented, alcoholic writer, popularized the genre of hardboiled crime fiction with his novels featuring detective Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*) and Nick and Nora Charles (*The Thin Man*). In fact the character of Nora Charles was inspired by Lillian Hellman.

Hammett mentored Hellman as a writer, critiquing her work, insisting she write draft after draft until the work was tight and perfectly polished. Their artistic collaboration resulted in Hellman's first play, *The Children's Hour*, based on a true story about two schoolteachers charged by a young student with lesbianism. The play was a sensation, establishing Hellman as a writer to be reckoned with and triggering a job offer from Hollywood producer Samuel Goldwyn. Hellman worked as a screenwriter on such films as *Dark Angel*, *These Three* (her adaptation of *The Children's Hour*), *Dead End*, and *The North Star*.

In 1936–37 Hellman visited Spain, where she witnessed the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, and traveled in the Soviet Union. These experiences, along with her observation of the rise of Nazi Germany, honed her anti-fascist convictions and her support of left-wing causes.

Hellman's next play, *The Little Foxes*, also owed much to Hammett's guidance. It too was acclaimed by critics and audiences when it premiered in 1939, and it ran a year on Broadway before touring across the US. It was nominated for the 1940 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play.

Hellman wrote yet more plays: *Watch on the Rhine*, *The Searching Wind*, and the prequel to *The Little Foxes*, called *Another Part of the Forest*. Meanwhile Hammett stopped writing, started drinking more heavily, and became more and more involved with the American Communist Party.

In the early 50s, Hellman and Hammett, like many other people working in the Hollywood movie industry, were called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee as part of its attempt to root out suspected communist sympathizers. Both Hammett and Hellman refused to provide names of communist sympathizers to the committee. Hellman told the committee: *To hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions.* Both were blacklisted, and Hammett was sent to jail.

After being blacklisted, Hellman could no longer work as a screenwriter and was forced to sell her home. She adapted works from other writers, creating, for example, the original libretto for Voltaire's great satire *Candide*, with music by Leonard Bernstein. She wrote three more plays, *The Autumn Garden*, *Toys in the Attic*, and *My Mother, My Father and Me*. In the 1960s and 1970s she wrote three memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman*, *Pentimento*, and *Scoundrel Time*; the latter recalled her experiences during the McCarthy era. A section of *Pentimento* was the basis for the 1977 movie *Julia*, about a friend of Hellman's who was involved with the anti-Nazi resistance. The film starred Jane Fonda as Lillian Hellman, Jason Robards as Dashiell Hammett, and Vanessa Redgrave as Julia. How much of Hellman's memoir is true has been disputed, and the identity of Julia has never been revealed.

Lillian Hellman died in 1984. During her life she was twice awarded the New York Drama Critics Circle Prize and the Gold Medal for drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She is remembered today as an outspoken, controversial, courageous and outrageous figure, and the writer of some of America's finest dramas.

### **The Play: *The Little Foxes***

The title of *The Little Foxes* comes from the biblical Song of Solomon: *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*

The prologue of the 1941 film clearly labels the Hubbard family as the little foxes: *Little Foxes have lived in all times, in all places. This family happened to live in the Deep South in the year 1900.*

The predatory Hubbard clan is based on Lillian Hellman's own family – the Marx and Newhouse families on her mother's side. Lyon Hall, a mansion in Demopolis, the original home town of the Marx and Newhouse families, resembles the plantation Lionnet. The soft-spoken, ladylike Birdie bears a resemblance to Hellman's mother Julia.

The Newhouse and Marx family wealth came from various sources, including liquor, cotton, and banking, as well as a company that became so notorious for exploiting workers and meddling in the politics of Latin America that its very name has come to epitomize the worst sort of sordid, profiteering capitalism: this was the United Fruit Company (UFCO).

Lillian's Aunt Rosa Marx had married Charlie Weinberger, a leading New Orleans banana merchant who worked for UFCO. Charlie's brother Jake, nicknamed *The Parrot King*, traded in tropical fruit and birds and owned Bluefields Fruit & Steamship Company in Nicaragua until he sold it in 1922 to his son-in-law, Samuel (*Sam the Banana Man*) Zemurray, who would eventually control UFCO.

In 1910, with his first partner, Ashbell Hubbard (another name that found its way into *The Little Foxes*), Zemurray bought land in Honduras to establish banana plantations. When the Honduran president would not grant him the tax, land, and transportation concessions that he wanted, Zemurray eluded US Secret Service agents who had been monitoring him, and hired mercenaries to invade Honduras! The Honduran president stepped down shortly after, to be replaced by a more tractable president, Manuel Bonilla, who granted Zemurray a large tract of land and waived his taxes for the next 25 years. Zemurray's company, Cuyamel Fruit, prospered and became UFCO's biggest competitor. In 1930 Zemurray sold out to UFCO, becoming its largest shareholder, and eventually taking control of the company in 1933.

Zemurray and the Weinbergers lived in palatial homes in New Orleans. As a girl, Lillian visited often; she grew up hearing the stories of their exploits and the family gossip about their scandalous behaviour.

As for the character of Regina herself, her name comes from a relative, Regina Marx, but her character is modelled after Hellman's imperious grandmother Sophie. Hellman's biographer, Deborah Martinson, notes that Sophie, who, on the 1900 census listed her job as *Capitalist*, was *a classic battle-ax who subjugated nearly everyone except her brother Jake* (who was the counterpart of Ben Hubbard in *The Little Foxes*).

When *The Little Foxes* premiered in 1939, the character of Regina in all her glorious toxicity was portrayed by Tallulah Bankhead in a performance that received enormous critical acclaim. In her autobiography Tallulah said,

*Regina was a rapacious bitch, cruel and callous. Etched in acid by Miss Hellman ... she was a frightening opportunist who stopped at nothing to further her prestige and fortune. All in all, Regina Giddens is the best role I ever had in the theatre ... It established me as a dramatic star, an emotional actress worthy of the critical halos voted me. (Someone has said that a halo only has to slip eleven inches to become a noose.) The Little Foxes did me another service. Since I received ten percent of the weekly box office receipts, it enabled me to wipe out my debts.*

In its review of the play, *Time* commented,

*The Little Foxes ... is the season's most tense and biting drama ... Study of a rapacious Southern family on the make at the turn of the century, The Little Foxes catches the Hubbards – who by sharp bargaining and hard ways have achieved small-town prosperity – on the point of becoming heel-grinding, big-time industrialists...*

*Playwright Hellman describes the Hubbards as people who "eat the earth." But she has not made them all of one piece: between the crude short-changer Oscar and his greatly aspiring sister is the difference between a rat and an eagle. Not instinctive, but icily calculating, is their family sense: the same greed which divides them among themselves unites them against others. Ben Hubbard perceives they are less a family than part of a race – a race of sharp-toothed, flourishing little foxes for whom the turning century promises a world of plunder.*

*Time*, New Play in Manhattan, Monday, Feb. 27, 1939

Robert Benchley said of it, *The Little Foxes is a play to put into a small box and tuck under your pillow at night. You may have nightmares, but they will do you good.* (New Yorker, 1939).

### **The Movie: *The Little Foxes***

In 1940 Lillian Hellman went to Hollywood to write the screenplay for a movie version of *The Little Foxes* for producer Samuel Goldwyn. The director was William Wyler, who had previously directed *These Three*, a film based on Hellman's play *The Children's Hour*, for which Hellman had also written the screenplay. Wyler, one of Hollywood's most respected directors, was a good friend of Lillian Hellman, and his wife, Margaret Tallichet, was, like Hellman, the descendant of an influential Alabama dynasty that had settled in the same small Alabama town: Demopolis.

For the movie, the role of Regina went to Bette Davis. There were epic battles between Davis and Wyler, who disagreed on the interpretation of Regina's character. Wyler wanted her to maintain some charm, even some sensuality, while Davis presented Regina as icily venomous and insisted on wearing harsh white makeup to make her appear older. At one point Davis even walked off the set and Wyler filmed around her for a couple of weeks, until she finally returned to complete the picture.

Despite the conflicts on the set, the movie was critically acclaimed and received nine academy award nominations, including best actress, best picture, and best director. It is still considered a masterpiece of cinematic craftsmanship:

*This was one of the first Hollywood films to suggest the power of the screen to reveal character with a richness usually found only in plays and novels. Wyler's use of long takes to allow Davis to reflect her character's thoughts and feelings through body language was a revelation to serious critics of the cinema.* (Frank Miller, *Turner Classic Movies*).

## The Opera: *Regina*

*Regina* was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in 1946. Koussevitzky, a Russian-born conductor, composer, and double-bassist, was a champion of modern music, and had commissioned a number of great 20<sup>th</sup> century works from prominent composers, including Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G* and his orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Gershwin's *Second Rhapsody*, and Prokofiev's *Fourth Symphony*. In 1942 he founded the Koussevitzky Music Foundations to continue to commission new works – such as Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, Douglas Moore's opera *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, and Copland's *Symphony No. 3*. Following Koussevitzky's 1951 death, his widow, Olga Koussevitzky, presented acclaimed solo bassist Gary Karr (now a resident of Victoria) with his magnificent doublebass, which is now known as the Karr-Koussevitzky bass.

When Marc Blitzstein approached Hellman about doing an operatic adaptation of *The Little Foxes*, she was astonished and said, *Of course you may do it if you really wish to, but I don't know how you can add anything to the Hubbards that will make them any more unpleasant than they are already.*

Because an opera involves both words and music, there are unique challenges. Battles between composers and librettists have often come with the territory. Writing his own libretto sometimes helps a composer avoid this problem – unless, as in Blitzstein's case, he is adapting a work by a living playwright who happens to be very possessive of her work and who objects strenuously to anything that doesn't fit into her particular vision.

Hellman was notorious for disrupting rehearsals of her plays in order to tell the actors and directors how things ought to be done. (Mike Nichols actually had to bar her from rehearsals of a 1967 revival of *The Little Foxes*). Not surprisingly, she was equally protective of her play and objected to changes in her story, particularly the strengthening of the black characters, and the infusion of the spirituals and ragtime numbers.

But Blitzstein wanted to do something more than just set Hellman's words to music. In his book *Beautiful Mornin': The Broadway Musical in the 1940s*, Ethan Mordden comments:

*Blitzstein's approach to Hellman was, however, faithful, very creative, expanding and tightening the play ... It is worth noting that a host of opera adaptations of dramas ... simply set the spoken text to music. What Blitzstein sought was something new: music as alchemy... Regina is something new: a play excavated so that music can flood it ... Regina was a reinvention.*

Tommy Krasker, who worked on the 1992 Scottish Opera restoration of *Regina*, provides an overview of what Marc Blitzstein went through while writing the opera:

*The work evolved over three years of intensive composition – plus an additional decade of revisions and refinements...*

*The sounds of Dixieland jazz were crucial to Blitzstein's expansive adaptation; to him, they represented "the first voice of protest of the colored people in a secular way." By mid-July of 1946, Blitzstein had resolved to include a rag-time band onstage... In the ensuing months, he expanded the tune into an elaborate musical prologue that ... intertwined spirituals of the old South with the rhythms of ragtime – playfully at first, then exultantly.*

*Protests from Lillian Hellman hastened this prologue's demise. Throughout 1948 and 1949, Hellman sent lengthy missives to Blitzstein voicing specific objections to his adaptation; predictably, most of these focused on elements that strayed from her play. The prologue was a constant thorn in her side. On September 7, 1948, she labeled it "unworthy" and "unnecessary". Following this attack, Blitzstein halved the scene and removed all the dialogue...*

*Blitzstein devised one other extensive addition ... a ball given by Regina ... that would incorporate period dances, advance the story-line and, as in the prologue, allow disparate characters to reveal themselves through commentary and confrontations. He scripted a passage in which Regina*

*carefully chose and candidly described her guests, composed a suitably embittered response for the ensemble, and let the jazz band comment on high-tone Southern pretensions. The character who symbolized the faded aristocracy found comfort in a servant woman's spiritual evocation of the Blues; the new South rejected the old during a highly romantic waltz.*

*[Then] producer Cheryl Crawford ... demanded that Regina be reduced from three acts to two. The Party scene ... was an unfortunate casualty: almost fifteen minutes were eventually deleted.*

In asking for these cuts, Cheryl Crawford was trying to ensure popular success for the opera, which was being staged on Broadway; Broadway audiences were accustomed to seeing theatre and musicals rather than opera. She also urged Blitzstein to write a couple of songs that might become hits by themselves – Alexandra's aria, *What Will It Be?* was one, along with Birdie's aria, *Lionnet*, and Regina's aria *The Best Thing of All* (which Blitzstein liked to call Regina's *bullfighter number* or *toreador song*).

Crawford was an unusual producer in many ways: a woman in a predominantly male occupation, she successfully brought *Brigadoon*, *Porgy and Bess*, *One Touch of Venus*, and *Paint Your Wagon* to Broadway. *Time Magazine* noted her combination of *hardheaded business instinct and high-minded theatrical taste* and recalled how she *startled hard-shelled Broadway during the run of Brigadoon. With big profits in sight, she gave her cast of 62 what no performers expected from a producer: hospitalization insurance, free advanced acting lessons from Director Lee Strasberg, [and] a week's vacation with pay.*

Cheryl Crawford believed deeply in *Regina*:

*I'm going to see to it that the audience sitting before Regina has an emotional experience they won't forget. That is theatre. That's why I'm in it ... As a play, this must have had a considerable catharsis for an audience or it wouldn't have run so long. I think the music adds bigger values – more emotion, more passion, more tenderness.*

Others were less sure about *Regina* as a Broadway opera. When Blitzstein invited the Metropolitan Opera star Risë Stevens to play the title role, she declined, saying that works like *Regina* should only be performed in the opera house. Eventually Blitzstein and Crawford selected Jane Pickens, who had studied at the Curtis Institute and at Juilliard, but was best known as a member of a popular '30s group called the Pickens Sisters.

In his biography of Blitzstein, Eric Gordon reports Tallulah Bankhead's reaction to news of the opera:

*"Who's playing me?" she inquired. When she heard the role had been offered to Jane Pickens, she growled, "Pickens? I didn't even like her when she was with the Andrews Sisters." However, she graciously offered Pickens her help on delivering the line Regina addresses to Horace at the end of Act II: "I hope you die. I hope you die soon. I'll be waiting for you to die."*

*"Well, of course," Bobby Lewis [the director] reminded her, "she'll be singing the line."*

*"She's going to sing it? What the hell do you think I did?"*

*Regina* had its first performance at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven on October 6, 1949, just a few weeks before its Broadway premiere on October 31. New York Times reviewer Jack Gould wrote that in the role of Regina, Jane Pickens *sings and acts with the ferocity of a poisonous snake*.

*Regina* uses spoken dialogue, recitative, and aria, often within a very brief span, adding great range to the dramatic potential – but, as Eric Gordon says, *When Regina appeared on Broadway, some in the audience demanded their money back at intermission – they had thought they were to see a musical ... The critics both damned and praised the work. Some condemned it for having spoken dialogue, and others for being too operatic.*

*Regina* closed after seven weeks. New York City Opera revived it in 1953 and again in 1958. The 1953 version restored the scene that Cheryl Crawford had asked Blitzstein to cut but deleted other sections. Brenda Lewis, the original Birdie, took on the role of Regina. The 1958 version, directed by Herman Shumlin, the original director of *The Little Foxes* and a former lover of Lillian Hellman, cut out even

more, including the ragtime numbers by the Angel Band. Tommy Krasker, who eventually collaborated on the restoration of *Regina*, notes:

*Sadly, this version – which was ultimately recorded – strayed furthest from Blitzstein's original intentions by eliminating the jazz band altogether (apparently for budgetary reasons). Hellman later praised this production as the opera's "best interpretation", no doubt because it came closest to simply setting The Little Foxes to music. But as Eric A. Gordon notes ... the 1959 City Opera version is "wrongly...regarded as Blitzstein's definitive edition of the work;" it, in fact diminishes Regina – not merely in size, but in stature and scope.*

Only two recordings of the opera have ever been made.

Shumlin's heavily cut 1958 version was recorded on a shoestring budget in one 5-hour session. In an interview with US Operaweb, Brenda Lewis recalled how this recording was made.

*Marc was desperately anxious to have Regina recorded. Columbia was not about to invest in the recording because it didn't have the smell of profit about it. They finally agreed to put up enough to pay for the costs of the studio and recording equipment for five hours. Marc got a \$5,000 grant to pay the personnel from the Koussevitzky Foundation which had helped fund the original commission also. The only way the recording could be done was without any rehearsal time, in other words cold and straight through from beginning to end. It was decided that ... the recording had to be made immediately after it had been performed so that the performance in a sense would be the rehearsal for the recording.*

*On the evening of April 27, 1958, we finished the performance ... and piled into taxis in front of City Center in our costumes and makeup and headed downtown to the studio. At the stroke of midnight we started to record. During the taping we were taking off our makeup and costumes when we weren't singing. There were no retakes. Most recordings, as you well know, are put together in bits and pieces ... But what you hear in the Regina recording is hot off the griddle. It was do or die ...*

*We finished at 5 a.m. and everybody packed up and went home. The only thing we had not recorded was the high 'C' at the end of Regina's second act aria when she sings to Horace, 'I hope you die!' We had not recorded it because we weren't sure what would come out of me at that point at 3 a.m.! So, with everything else shut down, they gave us a tiny studio with a piano and a tape recorder and Marc and I went in and I knocked out high Cs until we were sure we had one that was right and would fit ... everyone who heard it ... would say that the recording was like a kick in the stomach it had such urgency.*

The only other recording of the opera was made in 1992 by John Mauceri and the Scottish Opera Orchestra, with Katherine Ciesinski and Samuel Ramey. In an effort to come as close as possible to the composer's original intentions, it restored nearly all the music written for the opera. As Mauceri explained,

*The impetus for this new performing edition of Regina came from Leonard Bernstein. It was some 18 years ago, when in the months following his wife's death, Lenny and I began discussing projects. "I swore an oath on Marc's grave," he said to me, "that I would fix Regina." "Well, why don't we do it together?" I said. In those days Tommy Krasker was my student at Yale and we met with Lenny a number of times to discuss the necessary restorations...*

Mauceri and Krasker went on to complete the restoration, sifting through copies of thousands of *Regina* manuscripts including notes, piano-vocal sketches, and full orchestral scores to restore Blitzstein's original vision, including the reconstruction of the prologue and party sequence.

Pacific Opera Victoria's production of *Regina* is based on this restored version of the opera.

## About POV's Production

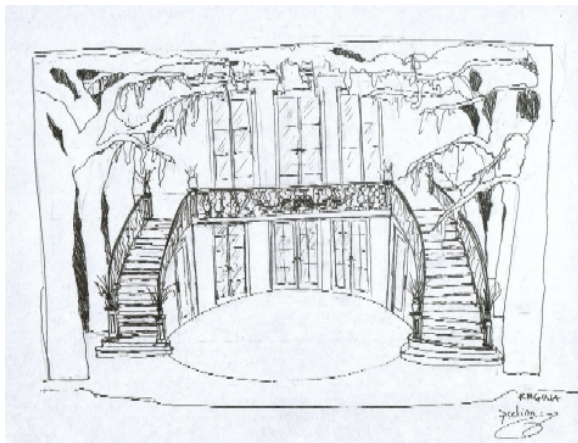
Pacific Opera Victoria's April 2008 production of Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* is the Canadian premiere of the opera. The production will be recorded by CBC Radio for future broadcast on *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera*. And in early 2009, POV's production will travel to Salt Lake City to be presented by Utah Opera.

The set for *Regina* was designed by Pam Johnson, and built in Pacific Opera Victoria's Opera Shop.

It shows the Hubbard home and includes a revolving turntable so that the scene can change easily from the outside to the inside of the home. The colour scheme is basically black and white, to evoke a sense of old black and white films and to hint at the stark contrast between black and white, good and evil. Spanish moss with a lace-like effect, as well as curtains and upholstery with a lacey pattern, create an atmosphere reminiscent of the old South, particularly the fading aristocracy represented by Birdie Hubbard.

Lace of course can also be used to partially conceal, to hide sordid things behind a lovely exterior as the social pretensions of the Hubbards only partially conceal their rapacious greed.

The costumes are of the era around 1900; Birdie's is a little more old-fashioned and fussily lacey; Regina presents a more modern, streamlined, armoured silhouette. The costumes echo the black and white palette of the set. Regina's clothing provides the only slashes of colour.



Sketch (above) and Model (right) of Pacific Opera Victoria's set for *Regina*



# Learning More

## Elementary and Middle School Students

### Spirituals

*Regina* begins and ends with the sound of spirituals, sung by the black servants and field hands. These simple, hopeful songs frame the opera, evoking the ambience of the American South and adding beauty and warmth to the drama, in vivid contrast to the evil and greed exhibited by the Hubbards. The spirituals also act as a sort of commentary (similar to a Greek chorus) on the action of the opera.

Spirituals are religious folk songs (spiritual songs) that were created and sung by black slaves in the southern United States. Sometimes called Negro Spirituals, these songs are now recognized as a uniquely American musical form, and they are among the most familiar and beloved of folk songs. Examples of well-known spirituals include *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*; *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*; *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*; *Go Down, Moses*; *He's Got the Whole World In His Hands*; and *Jacob's Ladder*.

Through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Africans were kidnapped and transported to America to work as slaves. Those who were brought to the United States worked for the most part on the cotton plantations in the southern US. According to the 1860 U.S. census, nearly four million slaves were held in the 15 states in which slavery was still legal. Slavery was finally abolished in 1865 after the US Civil War.

Spirituals, many of them based on stories from the Bible, expressed religious faith, provided comfort, and eased the drudgery of the work the slaves had to do. They also expressed a yearning for freedom. Some spirituals even had lyrics with a hidden meaning; they functioned as codes, helping slaves to communicate as they tried to escape to Canada through the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, but a network of people and places that helped slaves to escape. The escaping slaves moved northward from hiding place to hiding place under cover of darkness and disguise. In many spirituals, references to Heaven or the Promised Land meant the North or Canada.

Some songs – called signal songs – communicated in code that a certain event, such as a planned escape, was about to happen. Other songs – called map songs – actually gave directions to help escaping slaves find their way to freedom. A famous map song, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, referred to the constellation known as the Big Dipper (the gourd), which points to the North Star – the guide to freedom in the north.

*When the sun goes back  
and the first quail calls  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The old man is a-waitin' for  
to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd*

*The river bed makes a mighty  
fine road,  
Dead trees to show you the way  
And it's left foot, peg foot,  
traveling on  
Follow the drinking gourd*

*I thought I heard the angels say  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The stars in the heavens gonna  
show you the way  
Follow the drinking gourd*

*Chorus  
Follow the drinking gourd,  
follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin'  
to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd*

*The river ends between two hills  
Follow the drinking gourd  
There's another river on the  
other side  
Follow the drinking gourd*

See [http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/What\\_The\\_Lyrics\\_Mean.htm](http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/What_The_Lyrics_Mean.htm) for an explanation of the codes in this song.

Another famous coded song is *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, which begins as follows:

*Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.*

*I looked over Jordan and what did I see,  
Coming for to carry me home?  
A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home*

The chariot represents any means of transportation to take the slaves to freedom. The band of angels was the people of the Underground Railroad who guided them. The Jordan River was also a name for the Ohio River or any other body of water which slaves crossed to freedom.

### **Activities**

1. Select a spiritual and discuss what the words mean. Is the song based on a story from the Bible? Does it express faith and hope for a better life? Could the words contain a secret code?
2. Sing! Spirituals have been sung by slaves in the fields, by children in church, and by some of the greatest singers ever, including Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, Jessye Norman, and Kathleen Battle. They are a real joy to sing and are easy to learn.

To start, here's a link to the music score for a particularly well known spiritual, *He's Got the Whole World in his Hands*, along with short audio and video excerpts of the great American contralto Marian Anderson singing it: <http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/anderson/spirimage8.html>

More examples of musical scores from Marian Anderson's Music Collection, along with audio and video extracts are available at <http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/anderson/spirit.html> .

You can find more information about Spirituals on these web sites:

<http://www.negrospirituals.com/> (includes some mp3 recordings of spirituals as well as song lyrics)

<http://spiritualsproject.org/work/education.php>

<http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/>

[http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?ID=318](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?ID=318) (A lesson plan to help teachers introduce students to the role that spirituals have played in African American history and religion.)

## Middle School Students

### Character analysis

Read the synopsis of *Regina* and, if possible, Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes*.

**Create a character sketch** for one of the main characters

Consider the following questions:

- What can be assumed about this person?
- What is the character's relationship with the other characters?
- Why does the character make the choices he or she does?
- Include evidence from the opera to support your claims.

Include information about the following:

- Character's Name
- Physical Characteristics (style and physical attributes)
- Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how does he/she think?)
- Emotional Characteristics (is he/she generally cheerful, sad, snobbish, "off-balance" etc.?)
- Family background
- How the events in the opera have affected the character
- Other interesting facts

After seeing the opera, look at your character sketch again. Does any aspect of the performance or the music you heard change your view of the character you have profiled? Why?

Do the emotions conveyed through the music fit the character sketch?

**Create a journal or blog** from the point of view of your character

Choose a point of conflict for the character you chose for your character sketch, and write a journal or blog of those events from the character's point of view, using the character profile for assistance. Take on the persona of that character and refer to the character in the first person. Remember to express only information that your character would know.

## High School and Post-Secondary Students

### American History

The Hubbard family in *The Little Foxes* was based in part on Lillian Hellman's own extended family, among whom was Samuel Zemurray, who eventually became president of the United Fruit Company (UFCO), a monopoly notorious for its predatory methods of making enormous profits, including bribery, exploiting workers and the environment, and instigating the fall of troublesome governments.

*Pursuing profits and fleeing diseases afflicting their crops, the United Fruit men skipped from one country to the next in Central and South America, perfecting their pattern: strong-arm their way in; destroy natural habitat to make way for banana plantations; enslave the native population in low-wage, dangerous servitude; suppress labor movements; watch their banana crops fall prey to blight; spray the groves with toxic pesticides that also poisoned the workforce; and, when spraying failed, abandon the land for greener pastures on which to inflict their "progress."... The behavior also earned the company an enduring nickname: El Pulpo – the octopus. And no wonder: By the late 1920s, United Fruit was an international conglomerate, outstretched tentacles everywhere. The company owned 1.6 million acres of land, employed 67,000 workers and did business in thirty-two countries. It was worth more than \$100 million and would stop at nothing to keep business humming.*

Emily Biuso, *The Nation*

In 1985 UFCO became Chiquita. Even Chiquita admits on its website that its predecessor companies, including the United Fruit Company, *made a number of mistakes – including the use of improper government influence, antagonism toward organized labor, and disregard for the environment. These actions clearly would not live up to the Core Values we hold today or to the expectations of our stakeholders.*

### Activities

Read about Lillian Hellman's family connections with UFCO in the section entitled "The Play: *The Little Foxes*" in this study guide. Then find out more about UFCO and the history of related conflict in Central America. Use the resources below as a starting point. Select an historic character, a story or an event that interests you, or read one of the poems or works of fiction listed on the next page. Discover more, and prepare a report or presentation.

### Resources about UFCO

<http://www.unitedfruit.org/chron.htm>

The United Fruit Historical Society presents historical timelines of UFCO and its successors from 1848 to 2005, and biographies, including that of Samuel Zemurray (a relative by marriage of Lillian Hellman).

[http://www.business.uiuc.edu/Working\\_Papers/papers/06-0115.pdf](http://www.business.uiuc.edu/Working_Papers/papers/06-0115.pdf)

*Good dictator, bad dictator: United Fruit Company and Economic Nationalism in Central America in the Twentieth Century.* This is a very readable paper by Marcelo Bucheli, author of *Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000.*

<http://www.chiquita.com/>

The Chiquita website, which includes a large section on Corporate Responsibility. See also <http://www.chiquita.com/chiquitacr1/6backgrnd/crp92.asp>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiquita\\_Brands\\_International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiquita_Brands_International)

Wikipedia entry on Chiquita. A good starting place for further research on more recent controversies regarding the company.

## Fiction and Literature Resources

Banana republics and the operations of the UFCO have inspired many works of literature, including these:

- Gabriel García Márquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Márquez won the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature.
- *La Casa Grande* by Alvaro Cepeda Samudio (1962)  
On December 6, 1928 Columbian government forces fired on striking UFCO workers. The number killed has never been confirmed; estimates vary from 47 to 2000. This event, known as the Banana Massacre, inspired both *La Casa Grande* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
- Miguel Angel Asturias: *The Banana Trilogy*. Asturias won the 1967 Nobel Prize in Literature. The books in *The Banana Trilogy* are *Viento fuerte* ("The Cyclone"), 1950; *El papa verde* ("The Green Pope"), 1954; *Los ojos de los enterrados* ("The Eyes of the Interred"), 1960.
- Pablo Neruda : "United Fruit Company," from his book of poems *Canto General* (1950). Neruda won the 1971 Nobel Prize in Literature. Several translations of this poem are available online; one can be found at: <http://www.redpoppy.net/poem26.php> .
- O. Henry (William Sydney Porter): *Cabbages and Kings* (1904). In this book the author coined the term *Banana Republic*, defined as a small country, especially in Central America, that is politically unstable and whose economy is dominated by foreign companies and depends on one export, such as bananas. O.Henry's book is about the fictional country of Anchuria – a thinly disguised Honduras. The text of the book is online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/henry/henry.html> .
- Joseph Conrad: *Nostromo*. This 1904 novel is set in Costaguana, a fictional South American banana republic, although the business is silver mining rather than fruit. But Conrad's novel can be read as foreshadowing the capitalist imperialism that affected Latin America through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The text is online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2021/2021.txt> .
- Kurt Vonnegut, Jr: *Cat's Cradle* (1963). This classic satiric science fiction novel is set partly in San Lorenzo, a fictional banana republic, complete with an anti-communist, pro-American dictator. Wickedly funny, this bizarre novel skewers science, technology, the arms race, religion, politics, and much more.
- Georges Remi (Hergé): *The Adventures of Tintin (Les Aventures de Tintin)*. This series of comic books began appearing in 1929, and the stories are set in a variety of real and fictional lands, including San Theodoros, a fictional South American banana republic. San Theodoros lurches from coup to coup as two arch-rivals continually swap control of the country. General Alcazar is supported by the International Banana Company, and General Tapioca is the pawn of a fictional Stalinist state. The two banana republics and their revolving dictators are mentioned in four of the Tintin books: *The Broken Ear*, *The Seven Crystal Balls*, *The Red Sea Sharks*, and *Tintin and the Picaros*.

## History of British Columbia and Victoria: The Dunsmuir Family

The prologue of the 1941 film *The Little Foxes* labels the Hubbards as the greedy, destructive foxes of the title: *Little Foxes have lived in all times, in all places. This family happened to live in the Deep South in the year 1900.*

Characters like the Hubbards can be found everywhere. Lillian Hellman said, *I simply happened to write about the South because I knew the people and I knew the place ... but I didn't mean it to be just for the South.*

Some people might consider the Dunsmuirs, especially Robert Dunsmuir, to be British Columbia's equivalent of the Hubbards: a family who became extremely rich by exploiting workers for profit.

Victoria coal baron Robert Dunsmuir was British Columbia's first millionaire. He immigrated from Scotland to Vancouver Island in 1850 and worked as a miner at the Hudson's Bay Company coal-mine near Fort Rupert. He began his rise to power when his co-workers went on strike. Dunsmuir crossed the picket line, was promoted for his loyalty to management, and eventually established coal mines of his own. In 1884 he was contracted by the Canadian government to build the Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E & N) Railway. He was paid \$750,000 (an amount that would be worth far more today) along with some two million acres of land, covering one-fifth of Vancouver Island.

Not unlike the Hubbard family, Dunsmuir was notorious for using ruthless labour practices to increase his profits.

*Robert Dunsmuir was and has remained the most controversial person in the province's history. He has been recognized by most historians as a great builder, a pioneer industrialist intent upon shaping his province as much as increasing his personal fortune. He has, on the other hand, been more recently presented, by writers probing the province's early industrial activities, as British Columbia's chief symbol of unbridled capitalism, and a ruthless exploiter of men and material.*

Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online

Robert Dunsmuir's son James (1851 - 1920) followed in his father's footsteps. He apprenticed in the mining industry and then studied mining engineering. He became mine manager for his father and continued his father's reputation for exploiting workers and opposing unions. He established the town of Ladysmith as a shipping point for the coal from the family's mines and as a bedroom community for the miners. Eventually he became both Premier (1900 to 1902) and Lieutenant-Governor (1906 to 1909) of British Columbia.

The Dunsmuir family is a glamorous part of regional history. They were the social elite of the region, and they built two castles in the Victoria area, which remain well-known landmarks to this day.

Robert Dunsmuir built Craigdarroch Castle in Victoria for his wife, Joan, but died in 1889 before ever having a chance to live in the castle. Joan lived there until her death in 1908. After her death, the castle property was subdivided and sold. In 1919 the castle was converted into a military hospital for veterans of World War I. It subsequently was used as Victoria College, forerunner of the University of Victoria. From 1946 to 1967 the Victoria School Board had its offices in the castle. The Victoria Conservatory of Music occupied it from 1967 to 1979, after which the Craigdarroch Castle Historical Museum Society restored the castle and opened it to the public.

James Dunsmuir began building a castle in 1908 on Hatley Park on the Esquimalt Lagoon. He lived at Hatley Park with his wife Laura until his death in 1920. Laura remained there with one of her daughters, Eleanor, until her death in 1937.

In 1940, the Canadian Government purchased Hatley Park from the Dunsmuir family, and it was for 55 years a military training institution. In 1995 Royal Roads Military College was closed and Hatley Park became Royal Roads University.

One of the famous people who came to Victoria to visit the Dunsmuir family was Tallulah Bankhead, the glamorous, outrageous American actress and movie star who portrayed Regina in the premiere of *The Little Foxes*. Tallulah was a good friend of Dola Dunsmuir Cavendish, one of the daughters of James and Laura Dunsmuir. Tallulah and Dola travelled together, and Tallulah visited Dola often in Victoria where the two threw lavish parties, both during the war for officers at the Esquimalt naval base, and afterward, well into the 1960s until both women died, Dola in 1966, Tallulah in 1968.

In another way the Dunsmuir family was not unlike the Hubbards: they quarrelled among themselves, notably over Robert Dunsmuir's will, which left everything to his wife and nothing to his sons James and Alex, who had worked for their father's business for two decades on the expectation that one day the business would be theirs. It was another decade before the subsequent dispute with their mother was settled. Alex Dunsmuir then built a magnificent mansion, Dunsmuir House, in Oakland, California, as a gift for the love of his life, Josephine Wallace, but he died on his honeymoon, she the next year. Dunsmuir House is now a National Historic Site.

After Alex died, leaving everything to his brother James, another battle ensued when James, by then premier of BC, was sued by his own mother over control of Alex's estate. Mother and son did not speak again; James relented only in time to attend her burial.

## Activities

Find out more about the Dunsmuir family and the history of Vancouver Island, using the resources below as a starting point. Select an historic character or topic that interests you, discover more, and prepare a report or presentation.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Dunsmuir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Dunsmuir) (Robert Dunsmuir)

<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=39618> (Robert Dunsmuir)

<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=41471> (James Dunsmuir)

<http://www.craigdarrochcastle.com/visitor.htm> (Craigdarroch Castle and the Dunsmuir Family)

<http://www.hatleycastle.com/> (Hatley Castle)

<http://www.dunsmuir.org/> (Dunsmuir House in Oakland)

<http://www.royalroads.ca/about-rru/the-university/news-events/rru-news/2006/family-history-relived.htm>

(Article from the Victoria Times Colonist, August 1, 2006, about the descendants of the Dunsmuir family)

## Math and Economics

Money is very, very important in *Regina*. Horace tells Addie he has set aside \$1700 for her. The bonds stolen from his safety deposit box are worth \$88,000. But the events in the opera take place in 1900. What are these amounts of money worth in today's money? It's not as simple a question as you would think. There are many ways of figuring out the value of money at different times.

For instance, in 2006, \$1,700 from 1900 would be worth \$42,103 if calculated as purchasing power based on the Consumer Price Index (which compares the cost of things the average household buys such as food, housing, transportation, medical services). This is how much money you would probably need today to buy an item that was worth \$1,700 in 1900.

But \$1,700 from 1900 would be worth \$194,018.57 if calculated based on the unskilled wage rate. This is a way to determine the relative cost of something in terms of the amount of work it would take to produce, or the relative time it would take to earn its cost.

Clearly it is hard to say specifically how much Addie's \$1700 is worth today, or how much Horace's \$88,000 in bonds would be worth. But in both cases, we are talking about a lot of money!

## Activities

There are several other ways to compare the value of money in different years. To learn more, go to these web sites:

<http://www.projects.ex.ac.uk/RDavies/arian/current/howmuch.html> . This is an intriguing list of sources for exploring more about the changing value of money in many times and places.

<http://www.measuringworth.com>. Online calculators let you compare the value of money in one year against the value in another using different methods. The site also includes a useful glossary of economic terms.

Devise some questions to test with the various calculators. For example:

How much might Horace's \$88,000 in bonds be worth today, based on the various calculation methods?

In 1883 the Government of Canada paid Robert Dunsmuir \$750,000 to build the E&N Railway. How much would that be worth today?

## All Students

### A Review of the Opera

Before you see the opera, you might read a few examples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper, or have a look at some online reviews of opera. Here are a few examples of reviews of *Regina* from the Internet:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,934294,00.html>

Time Magazine's review of the 1949 Premiere of *Regina*.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,818243,00.html>

Time Magazine's review of the 1953 revival by New York City Opera (City Center Opera).

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CE2DC153AF931A25753C1A964958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all>

Edward Rothstein (New York Times) reviews a 1992 production by New York City Opera.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03E4DB113EF932A15753C1A9659C8B63&fta=y>

Bernard Holland (New York Times) reviews a 2003 production by the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C04E5DE1E3FF932A3575BC0A9639C8B63>

(Anne Midgette (New York Times) reviews a 2005 Summerscape Festival production.

After seeing *Regina*, **make some notes in point form**, answering the following questions:

What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?

What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?

What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Would you have done something differently? Why?

What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?

**Discuss your reactions** with your fellow students. Feel free to go beyond the questions listed above.

Then begin to **outline your review**. Keep in mind that a review should contain the following:

A clearly stated purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

A brief plot synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

A coherent series of paragraphs comparing and contrasting things you liked or didn't like

A summary / closing paragraph

Your review should capture the interest of the reader.

Once your outline has been completed, write your **rough draft**.

**Exchange reviews** with other students to critique and edit. Focus on effective and logical expression of ideas and correct grammar and punctuation.

**Edit and revise** your review until you have a polished final version.

Students might submit their writing for publication such as a school newspaper. Students are also welcome to send the reviews to Pacific Opera. We would love to hear your thoughts!

## Teacher's Comments

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Subjects: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year?  Yes  No

If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera?  
 Yes  No

If not, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would you add/delete?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?  
 Yes  No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals?  Yes  No

How would you like to receive information?  Fax  Email  Letters  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Further comments and suggestions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

**Pacific Opera, 1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC V8T 5A4 Fax: 250.382.4944**  
**Email: mwoodall@pov.bc.ca**