

Friday, October 21, 2011, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

The Infernal Comedy: Confessions of a Serial Killer



with

John Malkovich
as Jack Unterweger

Louise Frido, *soprano*
Martene Grimson, *soprano*

Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra
Adrian Kelly, *conductor*

Written and directed by Michael Sturminger

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PROGRAM

Chapter 1: Introduction	Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787): Chaconne, “Lenfer,” from <i>Don Juan</i> (1761)
Chapter 2: Where to begin?	Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805): Chaconne, “La Casa del Diavolo,” from Symphony in D minor, G. 506 (1771)
Chapter 3: Mother	Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741): “Sposa son disprezzata,” from <i>Ottone in Villa</i> (1713)
Chapter 4: Womanizer	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): “Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!,” K. 418 (1783)
Chapter 5: Writer	Gluck: “Ballo grazioso” from <i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i> (1762) Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): “Ah, perfido,” Op. 65 (1795–1796)
Chapter 6: Liar	Joseph Haydn (1732–1809): “Berenice, che fai,” Hob. XXIVa:10 (1795)
Chapter 7: Killer	Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826): “Ah, se Edmundo fosse l’uccisor!” (insertion aria for Mehul’s <i>Helena</i>) (1815)
Chapter 8: Exit	Mozart, “Ah, lo previdi!,” K. 272 (1777)

The Infernal Comedy

OPERA OR MUSIC DRAMA—call it what you will—has always revelled in transgressions of the most shocking kind. Regicide, patricide, matricide, fratricide, sororicide, the premeditated murder of partners, children and best friends, whole cities and tribes put to the sword: these have been raw meat and rough drink to librettists and composers since the Florentine Camerata first began to experiment with monodic music drama. Audiences have thrilled to the palpable presence of evil on stage for over four centuries. Indeed, there is an argument worth pursuing that, as the tide of Christian faith receded in the 19th century, it was in the opera house that men and women who had lost or jettisoned their faith now encountered the absolutes of good and evil. Iago’s credo in Verdi’s *Otello*, for example, with that chilling word “nullo” at the end; or Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* inciting Gunter and Brünnhilde to acquiesce to the murder of Siegfried.

Why be surprised then that Michael Sturminger chose to make a piece of music theater for John Malkovich out of the life and—as will soon be clear—the death of the Austrian serial killer Jack Unterweger? Unterweger was convicted of murdering Margaret Schafer in 1974. He had strangled her with her own underwear and he was given a life sentence, which under Austrian law meant 25 years—15 in prison and then 10 years on parole. While in jail, Unterweger began to write poetry, short stories, plays and an autobiography. Impressed by his literary gifts, a number of Austrian intellectuals took up the prisoner’s case, including the 2004 Nobel laureate for literature Elfriede Jelinek. They petitioned for a pardon, arguing that the murderer was reformed and properly rehabilitated. Eventually Unterweger was released in May 1990, having served his 15 years in jail. Within no time at all he became a national celebrity, with frequent appearances on Austrian television where, among other matters, he would argue the case for the rehabilitation of criminals based upon his own experiences.



Tom Buchnell

John Malkovich in *The Infernal Comedy*

What no one knew was that Unterweger was anything but a reformed character. In the year after his release he killed a total of six prostitutes in Austria. And when a magazine commissioned him to write about crime in Los Angeles, and in particular to explore the different attitudes on either side of the Atlantic to the issue of prostitution, Unterweger grasped the opportunity to murder three Californian prostitutes. Sherri Ann Long, Shannon Exley and Irene Rodriguez were all beaten, sexually assaulted and then strangled with their own brassieres—Unterweger’s signature way of killing his victims.

In time the Austrian police made four from two plus two. (To be fair, Jack Unterweger was a prominent celebrity who was rarely of the public eye and we are most of us credulous in the face of fame.) But when the police called to arrest him, Unterweger had fled. It was the FBI who tracked him down in Florida, and when he was returned to Austria the murderer-turned-literatus was charged with the eleven murders. He was found guilty of nine crimes by a majority jury and was again sentenced to life imprisonment but this time without parole. On his return

to prison, Jack Unterweger took his own life. On June 29, 1994, he hanged himself with a rope he had made from his shoelaces and the cord from his tracksuit trousers. It is reported that the knot was the same knot that he had used to strangle his victims.

How did Unterweger avoid detection? Charm, says John Malkovich, who takes the part of the serial killer in *The Infernal Comedy*. “I saw him more than once on television. He became quite a celebrity here and hung out a cafe that is just about a five-minute walk from where I am now in Vienna. He was quite ‘the man about town’ at the time. He was someone who had a lot of charm. If you go over to that cafe where he used to go, you can talk to people who will tell you that he was nice and funny and always had a smile on his face. In retrospect, and given the events of his life, we should remember one of the things that he wrote—that the first thing he had learnt was to smile and that smile was already a lie.”

Michael Sturminger, author and stage director of *The Infernal Comedy*, argues that the lies go far beyond a killer’s smile; that Austria itself has never owned up to the truth about Jack Unterweger. “The Austrian media had been reporting about him all the time but had never been particularly interested in finding out the truth about him. The press had overlooked [much] because they had relied on the things that Unterweger himself had said in his interviews or had written about himself, at least half of which were not true. So the topic of what could be the truth, and what should be the truth about this person was very interesting for me.”

At one point in his libretto, Mr. Sturminger, speaking through the “character” of Unterweger, tells us that even Jack’s Wikipedia entry peddles fiction rather than truth about his history. For Mr. Malkovich, these lies or half-truths began at the very beginning. “The women in Unterweger’s life were victims in some way or other...indeed his mother was also a victim of [her son]. He made it up that she was a Viennese prostitute when in fact nothing could have been further from the truth. She was just a very young girl, really a kind of country bumpkin, who got

pregnant by an American GI who went back home a few weeks later without ever knowing about his unborn son.”

As Mr. Sturminger says, Jack Unterweger made people believe in him. “It’s fascinating to see that a lot of the women that he was involved with didn’t even believe that he was guilty even after the trial and [having heard] all the evidence against him. They could not believe that the person they knew had been the person who killed all these women. He must have been a very charming and interesting and lovely man. His young girlfriend who followed him for years still couldn’t believe that he was the murderer even after his trial. It was a little bit of a Jekyll and Hyde situation.”

What then is the truth that Mr. Sturminger puts on stage about the serial killer? “It’s a cynical story about a man who is tricking the whole world. At the same time it’s a story of a person who believes that he can do anything because no one understands who he really is.” To which Mr. Malkovich adds, “I think that in Judeo-Christian society the notion of redemption is so powerful and necessary that we’d all like to believe that we could be redeemed, even for things that don’t measure at all on the same scale as Unterweger’s crimes. So it’s understandable that someone should present themselves as a model prisoner, one who has learnt to write and has been rehabilitated, and so on. On that level, I think that *The Infernal Comedy* is about the notion that because we believe in something, it must be true. And that what we believe is borne out by the facts. It’s something that you have to be careful of: philosophies and ideologies scare me.”

Put another way, *The Infernal Comedy* would seem to circle that current cultural conceit, particularly in respect of celebrities, that what we see or are shown is the truth, that the outer self must surely be the same as the inner self. “Sure,” says Mr. Malkovich, adding that we confuse even ourselves. “That’s Unterweger. I think it is a tragic and haunting piece and story. But that’s not at all to excuse anything he did.”

Mr. Malkovich had originally intended to direct what was about to become *The Infernal*

Comedy rather than appearing in it. But before that decision was made, in the spring of 2008, Mr. Sturminger and conductor Martin Haselböck—the third member of the creative triumvirate—had to agree on how they would turn Unterweger’s history into music theater. Their solution was to look to the past as well as the present. So Mr. Sturminger wrote a sequence of monologues for Mr. Malkovich that began with the notion that he comes back from the dead. Unterweger steps out before the audience to promote a new book. “The piece starts out as if it’s stand-up comedy,” Mr. Sturminger explains. “Jack comes in saying ‘hello’ and being charming and funny. After he died, he tells us, he wrote his true-life story. Now he’s going to present it to the public for the first time. But his publisher has forced him to have this strange kind of old-fashioned music around it because they were concerned about the [need for] dramatic impact.”

Music underpinning speech looks back to an almost entirely forgotten 18th- and early-19th-century tradition, the melodrama. There are melodramas in Mozart’s opera *Zaide*, and Beethoven acknowledges the form when Rocco and Leonora are digging Florestan’s grave in *Fidelio*. Weber uses the same device in the “Wolf’s Glen” in *Der Freischütz*. Music raises the emotional temperature of the drama, hinting at things that cannot be said.

Then there are two sopranos on stage, performing arias by Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn and Weber. They depict heroines from the baroque and early classical periods singing of their grief and torment, their fury and their resignation—the emotional red meat of opera and the concert aria. “The two sopranos begin as concert singers,” Mr. Sturminger explains, “artists who are going to provide a bit of classical music between Unterweger’s monologues, but gradually they become characters in his life. Not always as definite characters with names but their stories and Jack’s life story somehow merge together.” Mr. Malkovich takes up the idea. “Their arias are chosen to...represent the women in Unterweger’s life, all of whom were victims in some way or another. He victimized...just about

every woman he met and so they kind of call him out from the grave in the piece.”

What is so modern about this dramatic idea is the blending of the elaborate and often highly artificial musical worlds of baroque and early classical arias with the lowlife history of a serial killer who was also a modern celebrity. It is as if Handel had turned Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* into an opera. John Malkovich believes “that’s why it works. There’s a kind of pure God-given talent such as Mozart’s, that affirms all of mankind’s potential for creating beauty, set against Unterweger, who encapsulates mankind’s potential for mayhem and cruelty. I think that this mix, which was Martin Haselböck’s idea, is unusually potent.” The potency of powerful music combined with dangerous emotions: the very stuff of music theater.

Christopher Cook

MUSIC ANGELICA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Adrian Kelly, *Conductor*

FIRST VIOLIN

Ilia Korol (*Part I only*)
 Cynthia Roberts
 Kati Kyme
 Owen Dalby
 Francis Liu
 Noah Strick
 Tatiana Daubek

SECOND VIOLIN

Piroska Batori (*Part I only*)
 Janet Strauss
 Jolianne Einem
 Amy Wang
 Maxine Nemerowski
 Jennifer Heilig

VIOLA

Robert Diggins
 Aaron Westman
 William Frampton

CELLO

William Skeen
 Shirley Hunt

BASS

Joshua Lee
 Jessica Powell

FLUTE

Stephen Schultz

OBOE

Gonzalo Ruiz
 Michael DuPree

BASSOON

Anna Marsh
 Kelsey Schilling

CLARINET

Nina Stern
 Laura Spino

HORN

Hermann Ebner (*Part I only*)
 Ferenc Varga (*Part II only*)
 Suzette Moriarty



Nathalie Bauer

John Malkovich is one of the most important actors of today's cinema. He has played in more than 65 movies and directs and produces films.

In 1976, John Malkovich joined Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, newly founded by his friend, Gary Sinise.

After that, it would take seven years before Mr. Malkovich would show up in New York and win an Obie in Sam Shepard's play *True West*. In 1984, Mr. Malkovich appeared with Dustin Hoffman in the Broadway revival of *Death of a Salesman*, which earned Mr. Malkovich an Emmy Award when it was made into a movie for television the next year.

He made his big-screen debut as the blind lodger in *Places in the Heart* (1984), which earned him an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actor. Other films would follow, including *The Killing Fields* (1984) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1987), but he would be well remembered as Vicomte de Valmont in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988). Playing against Michelle Pfeiffer and Glenn Close in a costume picture helped raise his standing in the industry. He would be cast as the psychotic political assassin in Clint Eastwood's *In the Line of Fire* (1993), for which he would be nominated for both the Academy Award and the Golden Globe.

Out of his interest in independent movies and his reputation as one of the most absorbing actors in Hollywood did the movie *Being John Malkovich* arise.

Mr. Malkovich has periodically returned to Chicago to both act and direct.

In early 2008, **Michael Sturminger** started a project with the renowned organist and

conductor Martin Haselböck, who was looking for a new connection between classical music and contemporary acting. *The Infernal Comedy*, a piece for orchestra, two sopranos and one actor, had its world premiere in Los Angeles, directed by and performed by John Malkovich. Following the production's initial success, *The Infernal Comedy* was produced and directed by Mr. Sturminger in 2009 at the Ronacher Theatre in Vienna and Pera Lada Festival in Spain. In May and June 2010, the production went on a tour including Luxembourg, Brussels, Paris, Istanbul, Hamburg, Athens, Saloniki, Malaga, Bilbao, Ravello, St. Petersburg and Toronto and continues to North and South America in 2011.

Alongside his opera productions, Mr. Sturminger regularly directs dramas at Vienna's Volkstheater (*Peer Gynt*, *Hiob* and *Du bleibst bei mir*) and has also directed several operetta productions, including *Die Fledermaus* with Franz Welser-Möst at Zurich Opera House (2008) and *The Czardas Princess* with conductor/intendant Stefan Soltesz at Aalto Theatre Essen (2010).

Mr. Sturminger has also worked in cinema. His 2004 film *Hurensohn*, starring Russian actress Chulpan Khamatova, received several awards. In 2008, his documentary *Malibran Rediscovered* with Cecilia Bartoli was shown on Arte TV and released on DVD. A DVD of *The Infernal Comedy* was published by Arthouse. Mr. Malkovich, Mr. Haselböck and Mr. Sturminger have recently created a second opera project, *The Giacomo Variations*, which will be published on DVD and performed in many European cities, including Vienna, Sydney, Moscow, Bruxelles, Hamburg, Paris, Turku and St. Petersburg.



Danish soprano **Louise Fribo** had her breakthrough in Denmark at age 21, soon after completing her training at the Bush Davies School in England. She was discovered by one of the leading producers of

the time, and after having played Cosette in *Les Misérables* and Cunegonde in *Candide* she received the Marguerite Viby Award. She then landed the role of the Fairy in the Danish TV *X-mas* series and subsequently became a name known to people across the country—especially to children.

Ms. Fribo has sung in operas, musicals and concerts. She has worked as an actress in TV series and films, dubbed the heroines of Disney, performed 700 shows of *Cats* in London, toured with legendary Bent Fabricius-Bjerre, done filming with Lars von Trier, and recorded four records in her own name. Presently Ms. Fribo is working mainly as an opera singer.

Her education as a coloratura soprano from the Royal Danish Opera Academy founded the base. After her debut as Zerbinetta at Theater Lübeck, she sang at the Salzburg Festival 2006 in Mozart's *Il Sogno di Scipione*, and the festival announced her to be one of their "Shooting Stars" in their Generation con Brio series. The opera has been recorded and released on DVD by Deutsche Grammophon.

Subsequently she has had engagements, such as Queen of the Night at Volksoper Wien, Fiakermilli at Staatsoper Hamburg, Blondchen at Deutsche Oper am Rehin, Waldvogel at Opera National de Lyon and Olympia at the Royal Opera in Denmark, for which she received a Reumert Award. Recently she received acclaim in Lübeck for the role debut as Ariel—the extremely high and difficult role in the opera *The Tempest* by Thomas Adés.

Ms. Fribo is a frequent soloist with all the orchestras in Denmark and has thus sung in numerous New Year and summer concerts. Most recently she has sung Mahler's Eighth Symphony with Trondheim Symphony and Eivind Aadland and has worked with such conductors as Simone Young, Gerard Korsten, Marc Soustrot, Ernst Märzendorfer, Robin Ticciati, Adam Fischer, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Michael Schonwandt and Martin Haselböck.

Current and future engagements include a world tour of *The Infernal Comedy* with John Malkovich. Additionally she will be singing her first Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* at Theater

Lübeck and in *Messiah* with Danish Radio Sinfonietta under Peter Dijkstra.



Susanne Ahlburg

Soprano **Martene Grimson** graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music before moving to London, where she completed her studies at the Royal College of Music's Benjamin Britten Opera School and at the National Opera Studio. She

was supported by the Royal Opera House Countess of Munster Musical Scholarship and the Madeline Finden Memorial Award.

Ms. Grimson was awarded second prize in the 2006 Kathleen Ferrier Competition and has given recitals at the Aldeburgh Festival, Wigmore Hall, the Royal Opera House (in the Linbury Studio and Crush Room), St John's Smith Square, Fairfield Hall and the Harrogate Festival.

Her recent concert engagements include *Pulcinella* with Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Thierry Fischer, Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* with the Bayerischer Rundfunk at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, under Ulf Schirmer, a concert performance as Dorinda in *Orlando* with Independent Opera at the Wigmore Hall, a Strauss tour of the UK for Raymond Gubbay; Haydn with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under Frans Brüggen in London and Bristol; Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* with the BBC Concert Orchestra under Charles Hazelwood at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and at the Chichester Festival; and Brahms's Requiem at the Royal Albert Hall under Sir David Wilcox.

Her operatic engagements include her role debut as Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* for Opera East; Melia in *Apollo and Hyacinthus*; *Iliad* in Idomeneo for Pinchug Opera in Sydney; First Witch in *Dido and Aeneas* for Opera North; and Mrs Gleaton in Floyd's *Susannah* and Laurette in Bizet's *Le Docteur Miracle* for the Wexford Festival. With the Classical Opera Company she has sung Hyacinthus in *Apollo and Hyacinthus*, Aminta in *Il re Pastore* and Cinna in *Lucio Silla*.

She recently made her debut for the Nationale Reisopera as Glauce in *Medea*.

Engagements this season and beyond include Despina in *Così fan tutte* for Longborough Festival Opera, Nanetta in *Falstaff* with Mid Wales Opera conducted by Nicholas Cleobury, and performances of *The Giacomo Variations* with John Malkovich in Vienna, Sydney, St. Petersburg and on tour in North America.

Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra is led by internationally renowned organist, conductor and composer Martin Haselböck. Regarded as southern California's premier baroque ensemble, Musica Angelica presents wide-ranging programs encompassing music from the early baroque through the early Classical era.

Since its founding in 1993, Musica Angelica has produced an annual subscription season of orchestral and chamber concerts in venues throughout Los Angeles County, programming a mixture of known masterworks along with rarely heard gems, and featuring many of the best Baroque musicians from across the country and Europe. Guest conductors have included Rinaldo Alessandrini, Giovanni Antonini, Harry Bicket, Paul Goodwin and Jory Vinikour.

Musica Angelica's first international tour, distinguished by sold-out performances and critical acclaim, took place in March 2007 in a joint venture with Mr. Haselböck's acclaimed European orchestra, the Wiener Akademie of Vienna. The ensemble presented 13 performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in Los Angeles, New York, Savannah, Mexico, Hungary, Austria, Spain, Italy and Germany.

In 1998, Musica Angelica issued a well-received recording, *Vivaldi Concertos for Lute, Oboe, Violin, and Strings*. In 2007, Musica Angelica raised its profile with a contract for four recordings on the German-based New Classical Adventure label. The first, released in 2007, is Handel's *Acis and Galatea*.

Based in Santa Monica, Musica Angelica collaborates with leading performing arts institutions in Southern California, including Los Angeles Opera, Long Beach Opera, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Norton Simon Museum

and the Los Angeles Master Chorale. Musica Angelica was co-founded by the late Michael Eagan, widely considered one of the foremost lute players in the country, and the late gambist Mark Chatfield.



Adrian Kelly was born in Hertfordshire, England. He studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was a choral scholar, and later at the Royal Northern College of Music. On completion of his studies he joined the Young Artists Program at

the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where he had the opportunity to work with conductors of the highest quality, including Antonio Pappano, Philippe Jordan and Sir Charles Mackerras. In 2002, he joined the music staff of the Hamburg State Opera. In Hamburg, he covered a large amount of the operatic repertoire ranging Cavalli and Handel, to Verdi and Richard Strauss. He assisted conductors such as Martin Haselböck, Ingo Metzmacher, Nicola Luisotti and Simone Young. During that time, Mr. Kelly also became the Chief Conductor of the Harvesterhuder Sinfonieorchester, a local student orchestra, with which he performed regular concerts in Hamburg's Laieszhalle, including Brahms's Second Symphony Mahler's Fourth Symphony and Richard Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*.

In 2009, after one year as Studienleiter and Kapellmeister at Theater Erfurt, Germany, he was appointed First Kapellmeister at the Salzburger Landestheater. There has conducted such operas as *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, as well as *L'elisir d'amore* and *Tosca*. In May 2010, the European Premiere of Carlisle Floyd's opera *The Passion of Jonathan Wade*.

Since 2009, Adrian Kelly has also collaborated regularly with the Salzburg Festival, as a pianist and assistant conductor, and in 2010 as a piano accompanist for an opera gala.