

Notes about the Production

Evolution of “Emancipation: The Opera”

The video scenes you will see are from three different productions. That is why the scenery is a little different in some of the scenes, and also why a character might be portrayed by a different person from scene to scene.

In 2012, as “*Lincoln and Booth*,” this was a first production in three acts that premiered at Dominican University of California in historic Angelico Hall in San Rafael, with the university as lead sponsor. We also worked with the staff and students at Dominican University, giving them opportunities to attend. The 2012 scenery was constructed in Sausalito and moved to the theatre. The participation of Gospel singers in the cast was great for us all. It meant we met with various organizations in the community, including in Marin City, and partnered with Bay Area Gospel Choirs.

The church where our librettist was choir conductor, Miller Avenue Church in Mill Valley, donated use of their space for our music and staging rehearsals. This unique relationship has continued over the years.

In 2016, thanks to a \$10,000 matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, we presented the opera as “*Lincoln: The African-American Connection*” at Golden Gate Seminary Chapel Auditorium in Mill Valley. This was a one-act, one-hour version. The minimal scenery consisted of furniture and props assembled by our stage director and her stage manager. The auditorium was filled with an expanded audience of Lincoln and Civil War fans, Golden Gate Opera fans, and friends and family of the singers in the Gospel Choir. The seats were office chairs, and volunteers rolled them into the auditorium. There were about 300 chairs and we had a full house.

In 2019, we decided to bring scenes to high schools and middle schools in Marin County, to help educate students about the history of racial injustice, from its origins in slavery in the United States. We prepared selections, but when the COVID virus arose, our plans to bring it into schools changed. We adapted, and in coordination with the Marin County Office of Education, we created, from our school program, an online course called a Distance Learning Course. The Superintendent felt this would work well for 5th Graders as well as Middle School and High School students. The most time-consuming part of preparing the course has been the editing of the videos and inserting subtitles.

The Librettist and Composer had one more scene in the works that they really wanted included, but we could not rehearse together with singers. We sent it by e-mail to Gabriel Manro, our

Lincoln, and he brought along Patrick Blackwell as Frederick Douglass. The pianist for that scene was Timothy Leon, who had worked with us on the Anti-Bullying opera, "*The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*," in 2017. That scene, "First Meeting," was filmed in Los Angeles, as a "Reading."

When you view this scene, you are seeing the opera in progress. This scene was the last one composed, and was filmed in August 2020 in Los Angeles during the Covid-19 pandemic, so the singers were not allowed to stand close to each other. "First Meeting" was recorded in a church, without scenery or costumes. The singers are reading the music, performing a reading of the new scene. Frederick Douglass is known for his hair, but our singer did not wear a wig. We wanted this piece in the opera because it tells a lot about slavery and conditions at the time.

Teacher Resource Materials: It is thanks to our talented volunteer Laurel Cleary, writer and designer, that the website for this project was constructed and the Teacher Resource Materials were created. Laurel worked with Roberta Wain-Becker, General Manager, and Librettist Christina Rose. We assembled an embarrassment of riches of Resource Materials for students on the website: biographies and events throughout history from which the Fight for the Black Human Rights evolved, from the Haitian Revolution to the Civil War, from the Civil Rights Movement to the events of 2020.

The opera in all its versions was created by composer John Cepelak and librettist Christina Rose of Mill Valley.