



CURTIS
INSTITUTE OF MUSIC

LA VOIX HUMAINE

Curtis Opera Theatre

2022-23 SEASON

MADE WITH LOVE

CURTIS INSTITUTE OF MUSIC
2022-23 SEASON
Made with Love

Curtis Opera Theatre

Eric Owens, director of vocal studies and the Curtis Opera Theatre
Miloš Repický, Hirsig Family Chair in Vocal Studies

La voix humaine

Music Francis Poulenc
Libretto Jean Cocteau

Marcus Shields, *stage director*

Ruby Dibble, *mezzo-soprano*

Lisa Keller, *music director and pianist*

Frank J. Oliva, *scenographer*

Elliot Foster, *stage manager*

Matthieu Cagnet, *French diction coach*

Tuesday, February 14, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Black Box Theater

La voix humaine

Adapted from Jean Cocteau's iconic play, this intimate "musical confession" is a searing, psychological portrait of a woman slowly unraveling over the course of an anguished 45-minute phone call. Confronted with a truth she is unwilling to acknowledge, Elle teeters on the brink of sanity as her lover of the last five years reveals he is to marry another woman the following day. As grief gives way to denial and rage, she attempts to keep him on the line for as long as possible to postpone the inevitable last goodbye. This intimate production explores the illusion of connection and over-reliance on technology in the modern world through timeless themes of isolation, loneliness, heartbreak, and despair.

About the Artists

Marcus Shields, stage director

Marcus Shields is a visual artist and stage director based in New York City. As a stage director, his professional affiliations include: the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Merola Opera, Curtis Institute of Music, the Juilliard School, Atlanta Opera, the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, the Santa Fe Opera, and Opera National de Lyon.

He is the co-founder of OSSIA, a company exploring cultural communication of classical music and the Up Until Now (UUN) collective, an experimental performance collective. With UUN, Mr. Shields has created multiple films and music videos including *Up Until Now*, *Georgia*, and *Bad Choices*. *Georgia* was featured as the July 2021 installation in Times Square as part of the Times Square Midnight Moment. *Up Until Now*, a live performance film, has been featured in NewFest and, in September of 2022, was presented as a performance installation at the Center for Performance Research in Brooklyn.

Mr. Shields is a winner of OPERA America's Tobin Director/Designer competition, a graduate of the Merola Opera program, and a 2017 Drama League Director Fellow.

Mr. Shields is currently a member of the stage directing staff at the Metropolitan Opera, and creates work (theatre and film) throughout the United States.

Upcoming projects include: *Our Goode Friend Byrde* (Guildhall) and *Drawing from the Endowment* (A/Jane Performance Space).

Ruby Dibble, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-soprano Ruby Dibble, from Kansas City, Mo., entered the Curtis Institute of Music in 2019 and studies in the opera program with adjunct faculty member Julia Faulkner. All students at Curtis receive merit-based, full-tuition scholarships, and Ms. Dibble is the Margaret Aull Wynne and Milly E. Wynne Fellow.

Ms. Dibble has performed the roles of Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) and Mrs. Herring (*Albert Herring*) for the Curtis Opera Theatre; Flora (*La Traviata*) with Wolf Trap

Opera; Second Bridesmaid and covered Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*); Berta (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City; Der Sandmann (*Hänsel und Gretel*) with Bar Harbor music Festival; Prince Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*) and Ramiro (*La finta giardiniera*) with the University of Missouri-Kansas City Opera; Le Prince Charmant (*Cendrillon*), Female Chorus (*The Rape of Lucretia*), and Jennie Hildebrand (*Street Scene*) for Oberlin Opera Theater;

Ms. Dibble is the recipient of the Stephen De Maio Memorial Award from the Gerda Lissner Foundation. Other recent competition awards include first prize of the French American Vocal Academy Le Grand Concours Vocal Competition, winner of the National Society of Arts and Letters Shirley Rabb Winston Voice Scholarship, and winner of the Young Singers Foundation Bev Sellers Scholarship.

As a soloist, she has performed Jacob Druckman's *Counterpoise* with the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble. Ms. Dibble has been an apprentice with the Santa Fe Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City/UMKC. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and previously studied with Vinson Cole, Janice Ragland, and Marlene Rosen. In her spare time, Ms. Dibble enjoys hiking, traveling, and baking.

Lisa Keller, music director and pianist

Lisa Keller was educated at Catholic University, receiving a degree in piano performance; and at the Brevard Music Center summer program. She received her master's degree with the same distinction from Duquesne University, where she studied with Metropolitan Opera coach Warren Jones.

Upon finishing her graduate work, Ms. Keller was invited by Pittsburgh Opera general director Tito Capobianco to join the company as principal répétiteur, as well as coach and accompanist for its young artist program. She later served as pianist and vocal coach for the Hartt School of Music, Connecticut Concert Opera, and West Chester University School of Music.

Ms. Keller has studied with Maurizio Arena and served as vocal coach for the Ezio Pinza Council for American Singers of Opera program in Oderzo, Italy. She has served on the music staffs of Opera Philadelphia, Opera Colorado, New Jersey Opera Theater, Wexford Festival Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and Santa Fe Opera. She was principal pianist for the Philadelphia Orchestra's recent performances of *Salome*; workshops of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain*; and, with Opera Philadelphia, the world premieres of *Charlie Parker's YARDBIRD* by Daniel Schnyder and *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli.

Ms. Keller joined the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music in 2004 where she serves as master opera coach.

Q&A with Ruby Dibble

What challenges have you faced while learning this role and embodying a character like Elle, one who carries the full dramatic weight of a one-person opera like *La voix humaine*?

One of my biggest challenges when learning this role has been being patient. This show took longer than expected to sink into my deep memory and I had to frequently remind myself to just take it day by day and learn/memorize small section by section so that eventually I would be able to string all of those small sections together into the entire show. Elle as a character is also a tough nut to crack. At face value, she can be viewed as a woman who is powerless while waiting on a man to call her back. When first learning the piece, I too thought that Elle was yet another portrayal of the “crazy ex girlfriend” or woman dying of heart break. But, as I’ve worked with Marcus on this version of the show, it seems that Elle is actually a very strong person and perhaps the 40 minutes of *La voix humaine* is the story of a woman transforming in the face of tragedy.

What do you love the most about performing in French and singing Poulenc’s music?

I grew up speaking French, so I feel at home in the language; I went to a French immersion elementary school and spoke exclusively in French from kindergarten through 8th grade. Perhaps I’m biased, but I think French is the most beautiful language to sing in because of how the lines are often set up to facilitate stunning legato. Poulenc is funny about this, actually. He writes in direct opposition to the flowing line that French can provide for the singer. So much of *La voix humaine* borders on Sprechstimme, or talking on pitch, and the vocal line is broken up in an extremely percussive way. But then, when Poulenc does give into the legato of the French language, his long sweeping musical lines are all the more meaningful. Poulenc’s choice of harmony reminds me so much of the Jazz harmonies of his contemporaries. My first musical love was Jazz, so I find it to be quite poetic to sing in this piece in a classical vocal style while being supported by such Jazz-like textures.

“Technoference,” or the way technology interferes with human interaction, seems just as relevant in the 21st century as it was over six decades ago when Poulenc adapted Jean Cocteau’s play into an opera. In 1958, Elle’s mode of communication was a landline telephone, but Marcus Shields’s production is of the now, or in this instance, “au courant.” Why do you think audiences still connect so deeply with this character after all these years later?

Audiences today can connect with Elle’s story because now, more than ever, we are isolated by our technology. Elle longs for meaningful and honest communication from Monsieur but instead, has to settle for just a phone conversation—a cheap imitation. Elle says to Monsieur that “if only you could see me, everything would be different, but with this phone receiver, that which is done is done.” If Elle and Monsieur could be in the same place and speak face to face, perhaps their situation could be remedied and she wouldn’t feel so alone. Today, with smartphones and all the opportunities to connect with one another, our society has seemed to do the opposite.

We struggle to call strangers on the phone, make eye contact or even look up from our phones when crossing the street. Elle's phone being the thing that is stopping her from having meaningful connection is the same plight we face today.

The audience only hears your side of the story, not the silent "Monsieur" on the other line. What is your perception of this gentleman and his relationship with Elle?

The beauty of this piece is that we really aren't supposed to know all the details of Elle's relationship with Monsieur. If Cocteau needed the audience to know the exactly what is said between them, it would be a two person play. With the backstory between Elle and Monsieur being so purposefully obscured, I'm sure every person who has taken on the role has a completely different version of that story. That being said, in our production, we have discussed the idea that there may be a significant age gap between the two lovers. Poulenc notes at the beginning of the score that Elle is an "elegant young woman" and that her breakup should have nothing to do with her getting older and Monsieur leaving her for a younger woman. Later in the piece, Elle says that she has been with Monsieur for five years at this point. Baring all that in mind, there is a chance that Elle could have been pursued by a man much older than her before she was ready for that kind of relationship. Other context clues in the text point to Monsieur being a wealthy man, a man who has an assistant or a butler named Joseph. Elle also briefly asks about a court case that Monsieur may be working on: "Quel Procès?" There could be a world where Monsieur is a high profile lawyer who should not be seen with a woman as young as Elle, and perhaps that is why he ultimately chooses to marry someone else—perhaps someone who looks better in the public eye. It seems to me that their relationship was born out of secrecy and an unbalanced power dynamic, and ultimately that it what tips the scale to end their relationship. "

Do you have any dream roles that you'd like to perform in the future, and why?

I would love to sing Bizet's *Carmen* and Charlotte in Massenet's *Werther*. Both of which are sung in French which would be meaningful to me as a French speaker. As a performer who has done a lot of comedy, I am so intrigued to walk in the shoes of these tragic figures for a change. I am also a lover of Strauss and I would be thrilled to get to sing Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* or Der Komponist in *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Next From Curtis Opera Theatre

The Elixir of Love

March 10 & 12, 2023

Philadelphia Fim Center

Passion promised by a “magic” love potion proves to be no match for the real thing in Gaetano Donizetti’s hilarious bel canto masterpiece, *The Elixir of Love (L’elisir d’amore)*.

Ariodante

May 4–7, 2023

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

The Curtis Opera Theatre’s 2022–23 season concludes with Handel’s riveting tale of dark obsession, desire, and royal intrigue.

Learn more at [Curtis.edu](https://www.curtis.edu).

The Curtis Opera Theatre is generously supported by the Ernestine Bacon Cairns Trust, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, and the Wyncote Foundation.

Follow us @CurtisInstitute:



