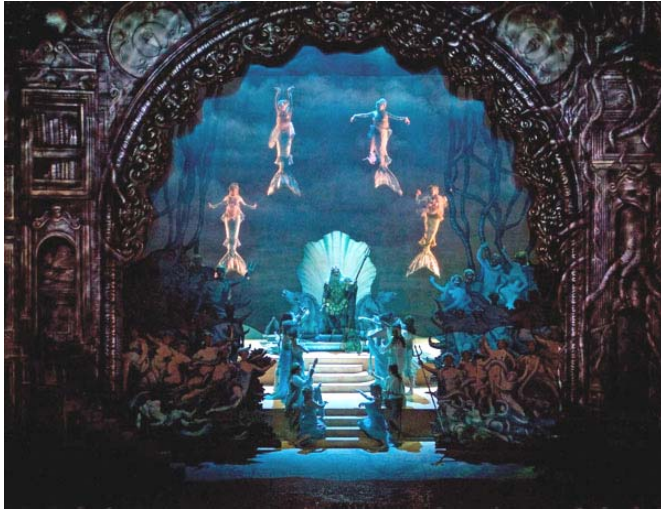


The Pescadero Opera Society presents

The Enchanted Island



Devised and written
by Jeremy Sams

Baroque pastiche in Two Acts

Sung in English

Setting: Prospero's Island

Characters

Prospero (countertenor)David Daniels
Sycorax (mezzo-soprano)Joyce DiDonato
Ariel (coloratura soprano)..... Danielle de Niese
Caliban (bass-baritone) Luca Pisaroni
Miranda (soprano)..... Lisette Oropesa
Neptune (tenor) Plácido Domingo
Ferdinand (countertenor) Anthony Roth Costanzo
Helena (soprano).....Layla Claire
Hermia (mezzo-soprano)Elizabeth DeShong
Demetrius (tenor).....Paul Appleby
Lysander (baritone)..... Elliot Madore
Quartet..... Ashley Emerson, Monica Yunus, Philippe Castagner, Tyler Simpson
Spirits, courtiers, water nymphs

Conducted by William Christie
The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra

Première performance at the Metropolitan Opera House on December 31, 2011

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Synopsis

The Enchanted Island is a pastiche of music by various baroque composers, including George Frideric Handel, Antonio Vivaldi and Jean-Philippe Rameau. It was devised and written by Jeremy Sams after *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare and was premiered by the Metropolitan Opera on December 31, 2011.

Background: Prospero, exiled Duke of Milan, lives on a remote island with his daughter Miranda. He is surrounded by his books, potions and instruments of magic. Prospero had at first taken up with the sorceress, Sycorax, who ruled the island. But, after having loved her he left her, banishing her to the dark side of the island, stealing her sprite servant, Ariel, and enslaving her son, Caliban.

Act I

The story begins some 16 years later — an aging Prospero conceives a final plan to ensure his daughter Miranda's future happiness and to end his own exile. He intuitively perceives that a ship is passing nearby bearing the King of Naples and Prince Ferdinand, whom Prospero has destined for Miranda. Prospero commands Ariel to perform a spell that will cause a storm and will shipwreck the royals on the island. In return, he promises Ariel his freedom.

Caliban, who has overheard their conversation, rushes to tell his mother, Sycorax. Sensing that Prospero is now vulnerable, Sycorax tells Caliban to steal a vial of dragon's blood from Prospero's cell, which she will use to restore her enfeebled powers so that she and Caliban can regain control of the island.

Prospero finds his daughter Miranda troubled by dreams and unfamiliar emotions. Meanwhile, Caliban steals the vial, vowing that he will rule the island with Miranda as his queen. He substitutes another vial of worthless lizard's blood, which Ariel mistakenly uses for the Tempest Spell (with catastrophic consequences): two pairs of honeymooning lovers — Helena and Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander — are shipwrecked and separately cast ashore on the island.



Prospero now commands Ariel to find Prince Ferdinand and cast a spell on him to ensure that Ferdinand and Miranda will fall in love immediately. But the first man Ariel sees is Demetrius, not Ferdinand. Ariel dutifully but mistakenly casts the spell on him and leads him to Miranda. The two fall in love, much to Prospero's fury.

Meanwhile, Lysander has come ashore, mistakenly cursing Neptune for washing his beloved Hermia out to sea. Ariel wrongly assumes that he has finally found Ferdinand and again casts the spell to make Miranda and Lysander fall in love — much to Demetrius' fury.

On the other side of the island, an exhausted Helena arrives, observed by Sycorax, who decides she will give Helena to Caliban as his queen instead of Miranda, the daughter of her enemy. Using the stolen vial, Sycorax conjures a spell to make Helena fall in love with Caliban (much to his delight) and hopes that the spell is strong enough to last.

Ariel, having cast a spell on the wrong man twice, realizes that the true Ferdinand must still be somewhere out at sea. He decides to go to the very top — and calls upon Neptune for help. The sea god appears, furious that a human, Lysander, has been cursing him and angry that Ariel has disturbed his peace. Ariel begs Neptune to find Ferdinand, and Neptune finally agrees to scour the seas.

Prospero observes the chaos that he has wrought — mismatching lovers, Ariel frantic, Caliban running wild, and Ferdinand nowhere in sight. He despairs of ever achieving his dream.

Act II

Hermia awakens from a nightmare, only to realize that her dream was all too true: Her new husband Lysander was swept away from her in the storm. She runs off to find him and discovers him doting on Miranda—with no memory of his wife.

Sycorax, meanwhile, exults in her revived powers and the certainty that she will soon have her revenge on Prospero and regain control of the island for her son.

Hermia is reunited with Helena. Helena's memory and emotions have been stirred by the sight of Demetrius, despite the fact that he is with Miranda and fails to recognize her. Hermia and Helena bemoan the fickleness of men. Helena then takes off after Demetrius, spurning Caliban, who is crushed. Caliban rushes to Sycorax for consolation, but she explains that hearts that love can always be broken.

Caliban, in his fury, steals a magic book from Prospero's cell and conjures a dream of himself as a ruler of the world, attended by loving subjects. When his fantasy spins out of control and the creatures turn on him, Prospero intervenes and disperses them.

Meanwhile, Neptune has found Ferdinand's ship and has sent it racing toward the island. Ferdinand looks toward his future. Like Miranda, he has been dreaming of an elusive someone.

Ariel sets about putting matters right, leading the five mismatched lovers through a forest maze until they fall asleep side by side. Ariel ensures through his magic that, when they awaken, the lovers are paired with their proper and previous mates. The five make their way to the shore to see Ferdinand and the king arrive, greeted by Prospero. Ferdinand reads the pardon which ends Prospero's exile. When he sees Miranda he falls in love instantly, deeply and forever—no spell required.

Sycorax enters and challenges Prospero. When he rebuffs her, Neptune appears and takes her part, berating Prospero for victimizing others as he himself was once victimized. Ashamed, Prospero begs forgiveness of Sycorax and gives the island back to her and her son. Neptune extols the virtues of mercy and Sycorax grants Prospero forgiveness. All join to celebrate a new day of joy, peace, and love.



The Enchanted Island

The Enchanted Island is a contemporary take on the 18th century tradition of operatic pastiches, in which new librettos were combined with music from various compositions to create entirely new theatrical pieces. The tradition was particularly popular in London, where Handel was a prominent practitioner. The score for *The Enchanted Island* comprises selections from a variety of Baroque operas, cantatas, and oratorios, many of which are rarely performed in contemporary opera houses. Handel, Vivaldi and Rameau, whose works are prominently featured in *The Enchanted Island*, all devised pastiches from their own music. The opera was devised and written by Jeremy Sams, a noted stage director, writer, translator, composer and lyricist, created the English-language libretto. It had its world premiere at the Met on New Year's Eve 2011.

The plot is ingenious and will delight anyone who knows the two plays. The four lovers from the *Dream* get shipwrecked on Prospero's island. There they play out a variation on the original play with everyone falling in love with the wrong person thanks to Ariel's incompetence. Ariel, in this version, is very much a Puckish character. The most important character in the opera is the witch, Sycorax. She is mentioned but never seen in *The Tempest*.

The music consists mainly of da capo arias but they are not as repetitive as is usual in Handel operas. Sams writes more words and also, sometimes, give the contrasting middle section to a different character so that the arias become more like dialogues.

The dramatic framework of this Baroque fantasy brings together situations and characters from two Shakespearean plays: the four lovers from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are shipwrecked during their honeymoon voyage on Prospero's island from *The Tempest*. In addition to the characters found in the original plays, *The Enchanted Island* imagines the sorceress Sycorax (who is mentioned in *The Tempest*, but never appears on stage) vying with Prospero for control of the island. The musical selections are drawn from the works of a wide range of Baroque composers, including some who are lesser known today.

The idea of this creative work originally came from Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager. "Imagine," he said, "taking the hidden gems from a century of music, and turning them into one opera. Oh, and it has to be in English."

Why not a pastiche? In the Baroque era the practice of borrowing music from one opera and fitting it with new words for another drama was commonplace. Gelb said that he wanted to "play the Baroque card" at the Met in a fresh way. His vision was carried out beautifully by librettist Jeremy Sams, who saw both the potential humor and the richness in the idea. He was aided by a top-notch cast, conductor William Christie and a brilliant production team headed by the director Phelim McDermott.

Gelb then invited Plácido Domingo to join the production (by his count, his 136th role) and asked if Sams could create a role for him. Thus the role of Neptune was born, which proved to be very handy for plot purposes. A god (Domingo has, amazingly, never played one) can always galvanize events, and put wrongs to right. Sams always wanted the characters to go on a journey, and Neptune was no exception. He started out depressed and irritable, his powers waning, his oceans polluted. But he rediscovered his mojo and intervenes in the affairs of men.

What gives *The Enchanted Island* its poignancy is the palpable respect for the beautiful borrowed music. In most numbers Mr. Sams recycled not just the arias, but the recitatives, retrofitted with new words. Where he had to compose new recitatives, he did it so well that you could not tell what was what.

The set inventively combines traditional scenery flats with sophisticated videos. When we first see the ship, it rocks gently atop waves created by old-fashioned cutout boards that lift and dip. But when the storm breaks, frightening video images evoke swelling seas, hail and wind as the ship goes down.

Neptune, with flowing beard and silver raiment, is introduced in a dazzling underwater scene with an aquatic chorus of courtiers singing “Neptune the Great” (using “Zadok the Priest,” a Handel coronation anthem). Four mermaids float above. And Ariel, coming to seek Neptune’s help, arrives in deep-sea diver’s gear. In a gripping recitative and aria, patched together with music from Handel and Rameau, a despairing Neptune comments on the sorry state of the world and bemoans that his gift to mortals, the sublime ocean, has been despoiled by man. In this short but crucial role Mr. Domingo could let loose and really sing, which he did with heroic fervor.

The Enchanted Island: The Video (2011)

Starring David Daniels, Joyce DiDonato and Plácido Domingo



For their Christmas pantomime in 2011, the Met chose *The Enchanted Island*, a mashup by Jeremy Sams of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*. The music is a pastiche of compositions by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau and lesser-known Baroque composers.

Countertenor David Daniels is impressive as Prospero as well as the contrasting countertenor sound of Anthony Roth Constanzo as Ferdinand. Danielle de Niese is a very busy Ariel and she is rewarded at the end with a showcase coloratura aria. Plácido Domingo makes an amusing guest appearance as Neptune, a performance that is mainly notable for his dodgy English enunciation. Bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni displays considerable acting and vocal ability in the important role of Caliban as does Lisette Oropesa who plays the delightful Miranda. The lovers’ roles are taken by an attractive quartet of young

Met stars. Conductor William Christie keeps everything ticking along nicely particularly during the masque, which uses music from Rameau’s *Les Indes Gallantes*.

Joyce DiDonato gives a delightful performance in this role going from twisted old hag in the first act to a beautiful queen in the finale. She also has the best music. I loved her first aria “Maybe soon,” with the long drawn out “Maybe...”

Countertenor David Daniels is impressive as Prospero and the contrasting countertenor sound of Anthony Roth Constanzo as Ferdinand is also impressive. Danielle de Niese is a very busy Ariel and she is rewarded at the end with a showcase coloratura aria. Plácido Domingo makes an amusing guest appearance as Neptune, a performance that is mainly notable for his dodgy English enunciation. Bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni displays considerable acting and vocal ability in the important role of Caliban. I particularly liked Lisette Oropesa’s delightful Miranda. The lovers’ roles are taken by an attractive quartet of young Met stars. Conductor William Christie keeps everything ticking along nicely particularly during the masque, which uses music from Rameau’s *Les Indes Gallantes*.