



Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television

Jennifer Barnes

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Television opera - that is, opera commissioned for television - was one of the earliest attempts by television to bridge the distinction between high culture and popular culture: between 1951 and 2002, in Britain and the United States, over fifty operas were commissioned for television. This book discusses three case studies, the first a live broadcast, the second a video recording, and the third a filmed opera made for television: Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (NBC, 1951); Benjamin Britten's *Owen Wingrave* (BBC, 1971), taking into account Britten's earlier television experiences with *The Turn of the Screw* (Associated Rediffusion, 1959) and *Billy Budd* (NBC, 1952 and BBC 1966); and Gerald Barry's *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1995), part of Channel 4's decision in 1989 to embark upon a series of six hour-long television operas. In each case, the composer's response to the demands of television, and his place within the production's hierarchy, are examined; and the effect of the formats and techniques peculiar to television on the process of composing are discussed. JENNIFER BARNES is Assistant Principal and Dean of Studies at Trinity College of Music, London.

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