

Frequently Asked Questions about
The Steiny Road to Operadom: The Making of American Operas

Contents: What is included in *The Steiny Road to Operadom*?

The core contents of *The Steiny Road to Operadom* are a collection of **essays** and **interviews** on contemporary opera in America. The appendix includes **Alenier's libretto** of *Gertrude Stein Invents a Jump Early On*, the **chronology of Alenier's opera development** through to its New York City premiere, **selected opera and music theater reviews** including a comprehensive feature on *The Mother of Us All* by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson, a list of **selected recordings of American opera and music theater**, a **short glossary of selected musical terms and composers**, a **bibliography**, and a short **index**.

Structure: What is the structural approach for this book?

Working in parallel are the stories of the historic collaboration between Gertrude and Virgil Thomson and the contemporary collaboration between the book's author Karren Alenier and composer William Banfield. Using a cubist approach the author, known to the reader as the Steiny Road Poet, tries to understand the world of opera. For example, she interviews five American composers to establish what opera, and specifically American opera, entails. She also talks extensively with composer Libby Larsen to explore the intersection between art and entertainment and what that means in a culture where most Americans would rather go to a baseball game than to see an opera. She talks with Plácido Domingo about his young artist program at the Washington National Opera and with one of its graduates. She interviews a dramaturg, a prolific librettist, a stage director, Gertrude Stein scholars, and a major newspaper's senior music critic.

Controversy: What kind of issues are broached?

Hot button topics like the difficulties of collaboration, the librettist as a second-class player in the operatic world, commissions, and finding venues and audience for opera weave through the discussions.

Audience: Who would be interested in *The Steiny Road to Operadom*?

The book should appeal to any adult or young adult interested in a story of process—how does one get involved with a complicated project like opera and what it takes to see such a project through to successful conclusion. Specifically, the book will engage artists and students working in the field of opera and music theater including composers, librettists, poets, playwrights, directors, dramaturges, stage managers, singers, actors, and educators. It will also appeal to academics and aficionados of Gertrude Stein and women's studies. Operagoers interested in

contemporary opera and the future of opera might consider this book their manifesto.

Uniqueness: What distinguishes *The Steiny Road to Operadom* from other books in the marketplace?

There are no other books available that talk about the detailed process of creating opera in America. Also the book does not require the reader to know about opera and the writings of Gertrude Stein. Through the voice and personal story of the Steiny Road Poet, a cross between Alice in Wonderland and Voltaire's *Candide*, the reader is invited to enjoy and share the adventure of learning about how to create an opera.

Impetus: How did this book come about?

The short answer is the core contents of the book is based on a monthly column entitled "The Steiny Road to Operadom" and published since March 2003 in Scene4 Magazine at scene4.com. The longer answer involves a rejected article written for print literary magazine and a hiatus while Alenier's collaborating composer worked up to writing the orchestra for their opera *Gertrude Stein Invents a Jump Early On*. A more complete story appears in *The Steiny Road's* chapter entitled "Hubris, Vanity, Rejection."

Author Goals: What does the author hope to achieve with this book?

Alenier's goals for this book involve two pursuits. The first is to open doors for follow-on productions of her opera *Gertrude Stein Invents a Jump Early On*. The second goal, vital to the first, is to champion the cause of opera so that it will not die with the elderly population who tend to be the predominant audience of most opera productions in America. The author is ardently reaching out to young people with *The Steiny Road to Operadom: The Making of American Operas*.

Book Title: The book title seems out of character for the serious subject of opera. What's the thinking behind this title?

Poets tend to be iconoclasts and the author, who insists on being called a poet not a librettist, wants to break the mold that opera is a stodgy subject for an elite class. The author acknowledges that her title nods to Gertrude Stein's seminal novel *The Making of Americans* and to Stein herself with the word *Steiny*. As in any poem worth reading more than once, the title has various levels of meaning. In the first level of meaning, a reader who knows nothing about Gertrude Stein or opera can enjoy the whimsy created by the words *steiny* and *operadom*. What the author intends with the title is to democratically attract attention from a diverse audience.

Future: What's next?

The author continues to write her monthly column, interviews, and feature articles for *Scene4 Magazine*. Before *The Steiny Road to Operadom: The Making of American Operas* was in its uncorrected galleys, the author had many more pieces of work that could enhance the story of developing opera in America. She believes she already has the makings of a second book though she is not yet ready to develop it, because first she wants to get her second opera project moved along.