



**CARL UNANDER-SCHARIN &
MICHAEL WILLIAMS
THE ELEPHANT MAN**

THE TERRIBLE TALE OF THE
ELEPHANT MAN AND JACK THE
RIPPER, TWO FREAKS OF NATURE

NO!



MANY HAVE SOUGHT TO CREATE ART OUT OF JOSEPH MERRICK'S REMARKABLE LIFE: DAVID LEAN'S FILM, POMERANCE'S PLAY AND PETITGIRARD'S OPERA, TO NAME JUST A FEW. WHAT COULD I POSSIBLY ADD TO THE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ELEPHANT MAN?

Mankind has always been fascinated by disability for at some point in our lives, sooner or later, for a short or a long period, we all will be disabled in some way. Is this enough of a theme to base an opera on?

I read everything I could on Victorian England and the Elephant Man but my research took an unexpected turn when I came across the following: "During the time of the Whitechapel murders... locals were sure that Joseph Merrick was sneaking out of the hospital at night, killing local 'unfortunates'". The Elephant Man, suspected of being Jack the Ripper, based on the obvious assumption that the man who looks like a monster must be a monster

The literature on the Whitechapel murders was overwhelming and I was on the point of shutting that

Pandora's Box when I discovered Charles Van Onselen's *The Fox & the Flies – The Criminal Empire of the Whitechapel Murderer*. Van Onselen, a leading South African historian, builds a convincing argument that Joseph Silver, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, could well be the person infamously known as Jack the Ripper.

I soon made some startling discoveries. These two men, Joseph Merrick and Joseph Silver, were both in their early twenties, abandoned by their mothers, had absent fathers, were obsessed with the idea of sex and women, lived in Whitechapel at the same time, both desired, above all to be a gentleman and were highly particular about their outward appearance. But the similarity which fascinated me the most was that both of these



men suffered from a congenital disorder - one physical, the other mental - that would eventually be the cause of their death.

This was truly an epiphany: an opera about two very different men, one, a monster within and the other, a monster without. This idea is hardly original - I refer to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mister Hyde*. Yet in every opera there is always that moment where reality is replaced by musical possibilities, imaginative and mystical, and I was haunted with the idea of exploring their journey and bringing these two men face to face.

I therefore invite you to walk through the streets of old Whitechapel and into the lives of two very different Joes. Two men who might give us insight into the brutality and depravity, the humility and gentleness we are all capable of.

Michael Williams, Librettist

THROAT III

If Joseph Merrick could hardly talk, how then should he sing? The solution was Throat III, an electronic advanced musical instrument which was equipped with electronic sensor and worn by the singer as a glove. The singer moved his hand to control and develop the vocal quality of his sound throughout the opera.

Carl Unander-Scharin, Composer

PRODUCTION

Music: Carl Unander-Scharin

Libretto: Michael Williams

Conductor: Mats Rondin

Stage Director: Keith Turnbull

Costume Design: Annsofi Nyberg

Video Design: epí - Lene Juhl & Mark Viktov

Stage Image: Peter Öhgren

Light Design: Kevin Wyn-Jones

Choreography: Jo Leslie

Mask Design: Anna Andersson

CAST

Joseph Merrick: Håkan Starkenberg

Joseph Silver: Karl Rombo

Tom Barker and more: Mats Persson

Ginger: Susanna Levonen

Dr Treves: Peter Kajlinger

Dark Annie and more: Maria Sanner

Policeman and more: Lars Martinsson

Long Liz/Stepmother: Albina Isufi

Katie and more: Heddie Färdig

Polly/Princess Alexandra: Jenny Hertzman

NorrlandsOperan's Sympony Orchestra

The Elephant Man was first performed at NorrlandsOperan, Umea, on 6 October 2012.



Photos from *The Elephant Man, the Terrible Tale of the Elephant Man and Jack the Ripper, two Freaks of Nature* at NorrlandsOperan, Umeå, Sweden, by Malin Arnesson.

SOME OF THE PRESS REACTIONS

FASCINATING EXTREMES

"As a Hollywood action movie it all comes down to a male duel and the magnificent choir finale is a truly heartbreaking prayer for a more peaceful world."

SvD.se

A GREAT SUCCESS AND A BIG BREAKTHROUGH

"It was a great opera experience, well worth the long train journey and a few days in the City of Birches, Umeå."

Operalogg.com

MORE THAN JUST SCARY

"NorrlandsOperan's commissioned 'The Elephant Man' stems from some kind of timelessness: the idea of inner and outer beauty, goodness and evil, Dr. Jekyll-duality in all of us and the minimal acceptance of the deviant."

"The South African librettist Michael Williams has intertwined two macabre characters and stories to a full-length opera in two acts set in Victorian London."

"Composer Carl Unander-Scharin has an impeccable ability to combine styles without becoming coarse and creates a contemporary response to the popular music hall tradition... his music also has a sad, emphatic grace with unusual instrumentation and an almost Wagnerian crescendo in the final moments."

Dagens Nyheter

VICTORIAN HORRORS IN THE ELEPHANT MAN

"Hakan Starckenberg gives a very vivid performance using his whole body - his face grimaces in frustration as he tries to make himself understood..."

"The era is beautifully captured throughout the opera in both references to contemporary medical science and in the music hall genre. Unander-Scharin's music is melodic and aptly, a distillate of the moods and events taking place in the libretto."

Aftonbladet.se

TIGHT AND THRILLER-LIKE

"The members of the small ensemble are all very talented actors, Mats Persson, for example, really makes the manager Tom Barker come to life. And also from a visual point of view The Elephant Man is scenically impressive."

Nummer.se

To view extracts from the NorrlandsOperan production of *The Elephant Man* please visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP3fysaUTRI

The score is available through: www.electronic-opera.com/elephantman

STAGGERINGLY BEAUTIFUL

"Unander-Scharin's music is traditional in structure in the form of arias, duets and ensembles. If his music is always singable, it is because he is a singer... the music is at times staggeringly beautiful, especially when it blossoms in the pure orchestral sections."

Tidskriften Opera

NEO-ROMANTIC WITH A TWIST

"Carl Unander-Scharin makes me believe in the future of contemporary opera. He builds musical tension and resolution with equal parts of black humour – a sort of neo-romantic with a twist. But above all he has feeling for phrasing, a gift for any singer."

SR Kulturnytt

NO!