



[OperaOnline.us](http://OperaOnline.us)

Worldwide reviews for a worldwide audience

**'The Fly' lands in LA: A must see, but don't bring the kids!**



Photo: Courtesy of Los Angeles Opera

**HOWARD SHORE  
THE FLY  
LOS ANGELES OPERA  
SEPTEMBER 7, 2008**



Photo: Courtesy of LA Opera

By: Carol Jean Delmar  
OperaOnline.us

“The Fly” is fascinating and interesting! That’s my take on it. It is a sci-fi opera and a must see – not so much for its musicality, but more for its theatricality and cinematic complexion.

Over the last few months, many of us, including me, have watched the 1986 film version of “The Fly” on TV, which features Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum, a soundtrack by Howard Shore, and a screenplay by David Cronenberg and Charles Edward Pogue. The word “gory” comes to mind, even more so than the original 1958 film starring Vincent Price, which was based on a short story by George Langelaan. And now the Shore-Cronenberg team has created “The Fly” opera as well, which premiered to mixed reviews this summer at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. A joint commission with LA Opera, “The Fly” had its U.S. premiere in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on Sunday, Sept. 7, and I was there.

Briefly, “The Fly” is the story of writer Veronica Quaife and scientist Seth Brundle, who introduces her to his laboratory which houses two telepods that have the capability of transporting objects from one pod to the other. She is fascinated, and the relationship between the two leads to an affair, but when Veronica leaves Brundle briefly to tie up some loose ends with her ex-lover, Brundle becomes jealous and uncertain of her sincerity. He decides to teleport himself while she is gone, but the experiment goes terribly wrong when a housefly enters the first telepod, and the DNA of the fly and Brundle is merged. Brundle soon takes on the characteristics of the fly, thus becoming increasingly dangerous to Veronica. She discovers she is pregnant with his child, attempts to have an abortion, but he successfully brings her to his lab where he attempts to fuse her DNA with his and that of the fetus. Makeup and a creative bodysuit transform him into a grotesque monster worthy of a horror film. Veronica is locked into a telepod. Her ex-lover, Stathis Borans, forces his way into the lab with a gun and rescues her, but he cannot free Brundle who is locked in a telepod and has been fused and turned inside

out by the machine. Once the telepod is opened, we see the tragic prehistoric-looking creature within it. Veronica grabs the gun away from Borans and ends the creature's misery, then is determined to give birth to Brundle's baby.

This opera is as good as any gripping movie gets, although it isn't like any opera I've ever heard or seen. The story is indeed set to music with singing and orchestration. The arias sound more like singing monologues than arias. There is some spoken dialogue, but then there is dialogue in "The Magic Flute" as well. What makes this opera so unique is that once I was accustomed to reading the subtitles as if at a foreign film, I became familiar with the singers' voices, stopped paying attention to them, kept reading the subtitles and watching the action, and came to the conclusion that the singers were merely actors who were talking the dialogue on various notes. I was no longer listening to the singers' voices or music per se. I wasn't hearing recitatives, but what I was hearing had a similar feel. I was wrapped up in the story, engrossed in the characters' actions and staging, but it was as if they weren't even singing. The music wasn't atonal or melodic -- it was simply the vehicle that was used to move the story forward.

David Henry Hwang's libretto proved successful in that vein, although at times, one of the characters would utter a word or phrase that seemed incongruous, and the audience would laugh. On the whole, though, the libretto is well-suited to the music.

As for the orchestration, that is not unlike a film score. Shore has received Grammys and Oscars for his soundtracks of "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. He is a talented, gifted composer, and the orchestral score of "The Fly" is musically exciting. But as I sat engrossed in the total experience, I wasn't focusing on the music as if attending an opera by Verdi, Mozart, Puccini or Wagner. The music in "The Fly" almost seemed like background music that was used to hold my attention so that I would feel the suspense inherent in the story as the remainder of the plot was unveiled. When I focused on the orchestral music, I discovered that it was intense and could probably stand alone, but I soon realized the impossibility of such a notion since the singers were in essence contributing voice overs. A CD could not create the spell that this opera cast on me. This is an opera dependent on the visual.

"The Fly" is therefore not your typical opera, but although the vocal music doesn't fare well with the melodies of the great composers of the past, this opera makes for an afternoon or evening of great theater and at times made me feel like I was seeing an exciting film that just happened to be taking place in a live theater. It was cinematically and theatrically riveting. But is it the opera of the century? I don't think so.

Plácido Domingo seemed to connect to the music and led the orchestra with passion and steadfast direction. The telepod music at times seemed recorded, although an enormous chorus was exposed during the curtain calls. Chorus Master Grant Gershon created the effect to perfection.

The two principal singers – Daniel Okulitch (Seth Brundle) and Ruxandra Donose (Veronica Quaife) -- were phenomenal and astutely directed by David Cronenberg. The

music was demanding and they were up to the task. Okulitch was called upon to be a singer, actor and gymnast (with the help of acrobat Cy Platt), and he succeeded on all counts. Donose was polished, secure, and handled every intricate phrase with precision, her voice never tiring. Both enunciated articulately, although Donose sometimes colored her higher-toned vowels so that the words weren't entirely comprehensible. I do not fault her though, because attention to voice and technique reign supreme.

Gary Lehman (Stathis Borans) was also a strong presence, but his voice wasn't as resonant and well-focused as the principals. Beth Clayton's mezzo was lush and luxurious although its top-to-bottom flow was uneven.

The intricate set was well-suited to the action. It was metallic -- elaborate or plain as required with furniture and props rolled in as needed -- and the set designer made good use of ladders, grids and screens. The station and telepods were effectively enhanced with flashing lights, dry ice for smoke, and sound.

Denise Cronenberg's costuming stayed faithful to the '50s period, and the fly makeup and creature fabrications contributed to the overall vision.

As for the nudity and love scenes, they added to the spell, were choreographed to the hilt, and were executed artfully.

I sincerely believe that "The Fly" is destined to have some longevity. It is an opera of our times that chronicles our technological age while still reaching out to the emotional depths of our humanity. It should bring younger people into the opera house, although it will turn some of the older, longtime and more conservative operagoers away. It is a new kind of opera with new formulas, almost in a category by itself, and it may appeal to a specific sci-fi cult audience. It isn't opera as we currently know it and only fares marginally well in the vocal music category. But "The Fly" is creative theater at its best, it is innovative and exciting, and it merits our attention.

Conductor: Plácido Domingo

Director: David Cronenberg

Set Designer: Dante Ferretti

Lighting Designer: A.J. Weissbard

Associate Conductor-Chorus Master: Grant Gershon

Fly Makeup-Creature Designer: Stephan L. Dupuis; Mark Rappaport's Creature Effects, Inc.

Costume Designer: Denise Cronenberg