And Now for Something Completely Different

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What Exactly is *On Shore and Sea*?

One of the two works OMP will be performing for its Spring 2020 show will be *On Shore and Sea* (OSAS), a dramatic cantata by Arthur Sullivan, with libretto by Tom Taylor. OMP has never done this work before, and thus it is completely different for us and our audiences; but it also differs in a number of ways from the kind of works OMP usually performs.

OSAS was composed for the opening of the London International Exhibition in May, 1871, “a celebration intended for the honour and advancement of the Arts of Peace.” This work was conceived and originally performed as a concert work rather than as a staged musical drama. The bare-bones narrative provided by the Argument is only loosely developed in the ten musical numbers. In addition to the chorus, there are two solo roles, who are given only descriptors: *La Sposina* (A Riviera Woman) and *Il Marinajo* (A Genoese Sailor). The work is nevertheless quite dramatic and inspiring.

In OSAS, the sailors head out to sea “[t]o brave the storm and to sink the foe,” while the women remain on shore “to watch and weep” until the men’s return. The sailors are captured by the foe and impressed as galley slaves, delaying their expected return and thus raising the women’s anxiety. But the men overcome their captors, seize the ship, and return home. In the words of the Argument, “Re-entering the port, they are welcomed home by their beloved ones; the sorrow of separation is turned to rejoicing, and the Cantata ends with a chorus expressing the blessedness of peace, and inviting all nations to enter this her Temple.”

The librettist cast the conflict as a clash between Genoese Christians and Muslim Northern Africans in the sixteenth century. He chose this setting “to keep clear of the national susceptibilities, and painful associations connected with recent warfare.” Unfortunately, what passed as politically correct in 1871 sounds tone-deaf at best and offensive at worst to modern ears. To avoid these problems, the director has adapted the libretto for our performance to make it culturally neutral, while preserving the intent of the work to celebrate the Arts of Peace.

We will do a staged performance of OSAS, meaning that we will have costumes, blocking, set pieces, and props; but the overall production design will be quite simple, congruent with the bare-bones, conceptual nature of the work. To enhance dramatic effect, we will add dancers for one number, as well as a small number of supernumeraries to act as the sailors’ captors.

*La Sposina* is a soprano role. *Il Marinajo* is a baritone role that might be suitable for some tenors. A large chorus is essential for this work, both men and women. The dancing and supernumerary parts are a good opportunity for people who do not sing or do not want to sing to participate in an OMP show.

Auditions for *On Shore and Sea* and for our other Spring show – *The Zoo –* will be held on January 27 and 28, 2020, 7pm-9pm, at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh St., Rochester*.*