

UK's Royal Opera House to perform 'Twitter' opera

August 11 2009, By GREGORY KATZ , Associated Press Writer



People walk by the Royal Opera House in central London, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2009. The Royal Opera House said Tuesday it hopes to perform excerpts of an opera now being composed on the Web by the growing community of Twitter users. The results will be put to music and, if all goes to plan, performed to an audience next month. (AP Photo/Sang Tan)

(AP) -- It probably won't be "Madame Butterfly," but it should be fun.

In an effort to get more people involved with opera, which sometimes suffers from an elitist, highbrow reputation, London's world-famous Royal Opera House is turning away - temporarily - from classic talents like Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini and giving the composer's pen to ... just about anybody.

All you need to contribute is a computer or a mobile phone and an

account on [Twitter](#), the popular micro-blogging site that is open to all.

It's a very democratic approach - the plot will be worked out by twitterers contributing one line at a time, then put to music by professionals - but some harbor doubts about the quality of the work that will be performed in September.

"It's a gimmick, but not a malign gimmick" [London](#) music critic Norman Lebrecht said. "I wouldn't put too high hopes on it. It won't produce great opera."

He said the use of Internet technology to concoct a collective work of art is not new - but that success stories have been very rare.

"In the earlier days of the Internet there were a number of collaborative novels, including some started by major writers, and none of them worked," he said.

Royal Opera House officials claim it will be the world's first "online opera story." Fans are contributing to the libretto line by line, their imaginations limited only by the Twitter format, which allows a maximum of 140 characters to be posted at a time.

Alison Duthie, director of ROH2, the Royal Opera House's contemporary program, said the use of Twitter is part of a wider effort to get more people interested in the art form.

"We wanted to engage with audiences in the creation of an opera," she said. "We felt it would be a good way to be interactive with the public and with audiences. We wanted to explore how to get people involved at a creative level."

The plot that is taking shape is surreal and, at the same time, very

dramatic, she said.

"At the end of act 1, scene 1, our hero had been kidnapped by a flock of birds and is in a tower awaiting rescue," Duthie said. "That feels extremely operatic, people are really getting into the story line."

There is also a talking cat.

More than 350 people have contributed so far, with more signing on every day as word of the unusual project spreads.

"It's the whole social networking thing," said Stuart Rutherford, a contributor. "Everybody wants to be involved in something together, even if it's in a small way. Hundreds of people will get involved and it's great to be able to say you took part."

He said the use of Twitter could help make opera more popular with young people.

"The Royal Opera House is saying 'We understand, we're not archaic,'" he said.

Once the hundreds of amateur authors have sent in their input, known as tweets, the work will be shaped by professionals, including a director and two composers, Helen Porter and Mark Teipler.

Then, several singers will be chosen and the resulting "mini-operas" will be performed during a Royal Opera House festival in September.

Neil Fisher, classical [music](#) editor of The Times newspaper, said he is slightly cynical about the project because it seems to be a way for the Royal Opera House to get "some easy publicity" before the start of the new season.

But he conceded it could be effective at a time when elitism and high ticket prices are dampening enthusiasm for opera.

"If it gets people into [opera](#) who wouldn't otherwise have had the chance, that's great," he said.

On the Net:

<http://twitter.com/youropera>

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