Tobias Picker

LILI ELBE

an opera in two acts
libretto (Eng) by Aryeh Lev Stollman



Sur la route d'Anacapri
Painting by Gerda Wegener - 1922

World Premiere: October 22, 2023, at Theater St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Roles:
LILI ELBE (historically known as Einar Wegener, pre-transition), Baritone GERDA WEGENER, wife of Lili, Soprano
CLAUDE LEJEUNE, fiancé of Lili, Tenor
DANISH COUNTESS / DAGMAR, sister of Lili / MATRON, Soprano
ANNA LARSSEN BJØRNER, famous actress and friend of Gerda and Lili / ORPHEUS / MOTHER WEGENER / YOUNG WOMAN**,** Mezzo-soprano
PROFESSOR WARNEKROS, Director of Municipal Women's Clinic in Dresden, Bass
ART CRITIC / MAJOR FERNANDO PORTA (Gerda's second husband) / CHRISTIAN X, King of Denmark, Bass
MARIUS WEGENER, Lili's brother, Baritone
HÉLÈNE ALLATINI, wife of Eric Allatini, friends of Lili and Gerda / EURYDICE, Mezzo-soprano
ERIC ALLATINI, (husband of Hélène Allatini), Baritone

SATB Chorus

Composer's note on casting:
The double and triple casting choices for Theater St. Gallen's 2023 world premiere production may be used as a guide for future productions. While Lili Elbe, Gerda Wegener and Claude LeJeune should never be doubled, there are other permutations of double or triple role assignments possible. The world premiere cast comprises ten singers in principal and supporting roles.

Instrumentation:
2(pic)2(ca)2(bcl)2(cbn)-4.2.2.1-timp.1perc-hp.pno-str(10.8.6.6.4)

Duration:
Full evening

Premiere Cast and Creative Team:
Director: Krystian Lada
Dramaturge and Role of Lili Elbe: Lucia Lucas, Heldenbaritonistin
Role of Gerda Wegener: Sylvia D'Eramo
Costume Designer: Bente Rolandsdotter
Set Designer: Marian Nketiah
Lighting Designer: Alexandr Prowalinski

LILI ELBE is an opera in two acts based on the life of Lili Elbe (1882-1931) one of the first persons to undergo gender affirmation surgery. Lili before transition was known as the acclaimed Danish landscape painter Einar Wegener. Lili was happily married to Gerda Wegener (1886- 1940), herself an important artist considered the Danish pioneer of Art Deco and a sought-after portraitist.

Synopsis:

When the actress Anna Larssen of the Royal Danish Theater, who had just premiered the role of Orpheus in a new play, could not come for the last sitting of her portrait, the centerpiece of a new exhibition, she makes an unusual suggestion; that the artist, Gerda Wegener, ask Lili Elbe, (at that time known as Gerda's husband, the artist Einar Wegener), to dress up and pose as Anna. At this sitting Lili is brought to a profound self-discovery, never before acknowledged. Like Orpheus compelled to look back at Eurydice, Lili can never again help turning away from her true self.

Lili, despite the support of Gerda, their friends Eric and Hélène, and Lili's brother Marius, encounters hostility even from her own sister Dagmar. Finally, through the efforts of Hélène she is introduced to Professor Warnekros who agrees to operate on her at the Municipal Women's Clinic in Dresden and help her fully live her life as a woman.

After her first surgery, through a dramatic encounter with the King of Denmark, she receives a royal decree confirming her gender identity and dissolving her marriage to Gerda. As a pioneer of gender affirmation surgery, Lili endures the terrible pains and dangers of the more limited and experimental medical science of her time, ultimately dying from complications after a second surgery.

During this journey both Lili and Gerda find temporary love in different quarters, Lili with the perfumer Claude LeJeune, and Gerda with the Italian Major Fernando Porta who will squander her money and leave her in poverty. Lili and Gerda, together at the end, declare their great and everlasting love for each other, which has never altered.

Tobias Picker, whose music, published exclusively by Schott Helicon Music Corporation, has been described as "displaying a distinctively soulful style that is one of the glories of the current musical scene," by *BBC Music Magazine* and "our finest composer for the lyric stage," by *The Wall Street Journal*, has drawn performances and commissions by the world's leading musicians, orchestras, and opera houses.

Picker's operas have been commissioned by the Santa Fe Opera (*Emmeline*), the Los Angeles Opera (*Fantastic Mr. Fox*), the Dallas Opera (*Thérèse Raquin*), San Francisco Opera (*Dolores Claiborne*), and the Metropolitan Opera (*An American Tragedy*). His operas have gone on to be produced by New York City Opera, San Diego Opera, L'Opera de Montreal, Chicago Opera Theater, Covent Garden, Opera Holland Park, English Touring Opera, the Glimmerglass Festival, and many other distinguished companies. In 2015, Opera Theatre of St. Louis mounted a major new production of Picker's *Emmeline*, that garnered universal acclaim as "a work of gripping emotional intensity and extraordinary musical expressivity," (*The Dallas Morning News*); "one of the best operas written in the past 25 years," (*The Wall Street Journal*); and "the greatest American opera of the 20th century," (*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). In 2022, Opera Theater of St. Louis will premiere Picker's sixth opera, *Awakenings*, based on the book by Oliver Sacks.

Mr. Picker's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* won the 2020 Grammy for best opera recording on the BMOP label, adding to the Picker discography of such labels as Naxos, Sony Classics, Virgin Classics, Angel, Chandos, Ondine, Albany, Wergo and Tzadik.

Picker was Artistic Director of Tulsa Opera 2016 to 2023 where he introduced the first openly transgender opera singer to the mainstage of an American opera company with Lucia Lucas as the first female in the role of *Don Giovanni*.

Aryeh Lev Stollman's first novel, *The Far Euphrates* (Riverhead), is a winner of the Lambda Literary Award, an American Library Association Notable Book, a *Los Angeles Times Book Review* Recommended Book of the Year, and a National Book Critics Circle Notable Book. *The New York Times Book Review* has called *The Far Euphrates* "radiant . . . remarkable both for Stollman's eloquently understated prose and for the ease with which he constructs his artful plot." *The Far Euphrates* has been translated into German (Kindler), Dutch (Meulenhoff), Italian (Marsilio), Portuguese (Betrand Brasil) and Hebrew (Sifriat Ma'ariv).

The Boston Sunday Globe called his second novel, *The Illuminated Soul* (Riverhead), "an admirable novel of ideas . . . profound." *The Illuminated Soul* has been translated into German (Droemer), Dutch (Meulenhoff), and Italian (Mondadori).

Stollman is also the author of a story collection *The Dialogues of Time and Entropy* (Riverhead). His story "Lotte Returns!" was commissioned and broadcast by National Public Radio. His third novel, *Queen of Jerusalem*, was published by Aryeh Nir/Modan in 2020, under the Hebrew title *Divrei Y'mai Naamah*.

Stollman has written the libretto for *Awakenings*, an opera composed by Tobias Picker, based on the book by Oliver Sacks, and commissioned by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, to be premiered by Opera Theatre St. Louis in 2022.

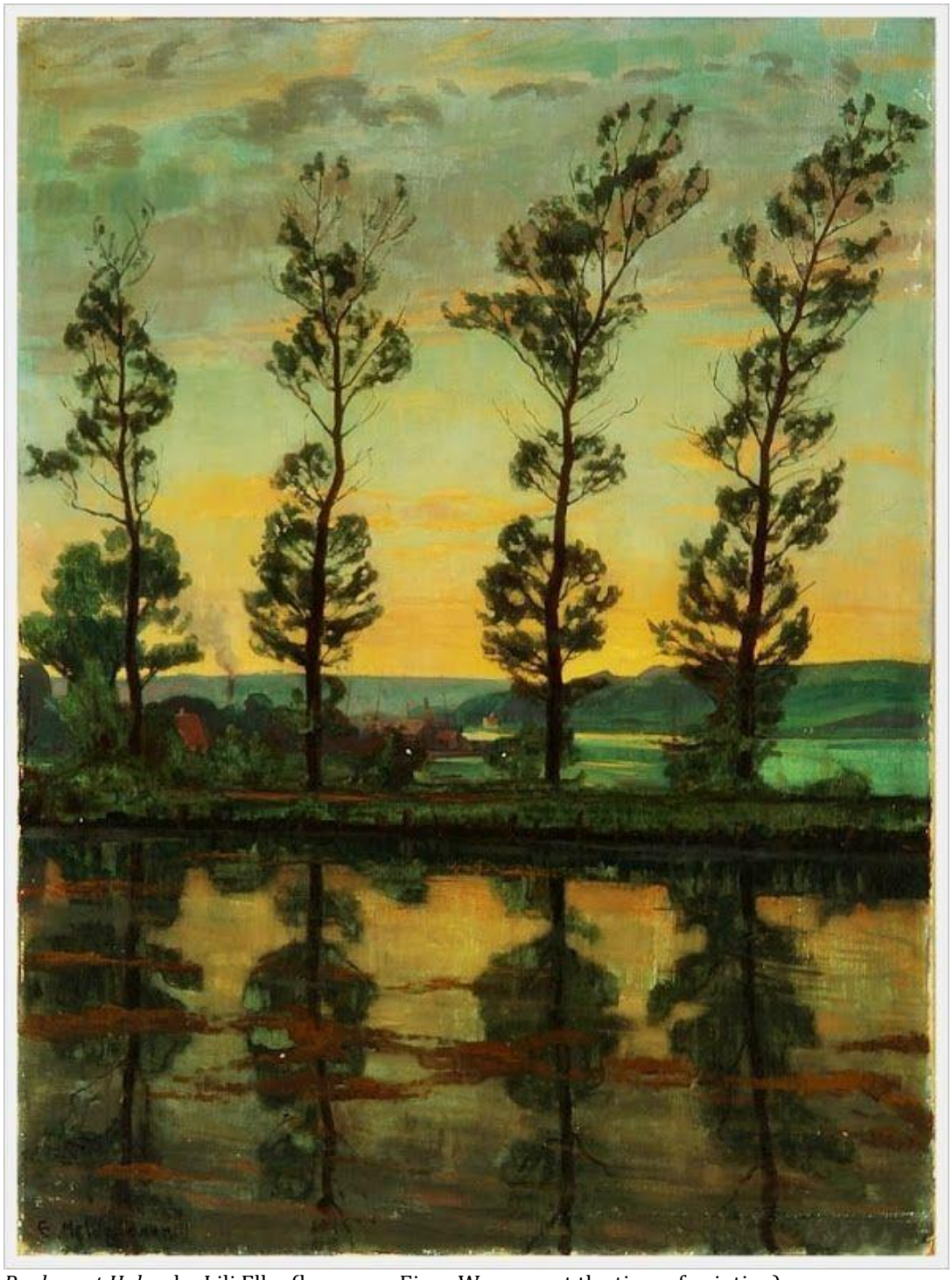
Dr. Stollman is a neuroradiologist at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.



Gerda Wegener and Lili Elbe (before)

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Poplars at Hobro by Lili Elbe (known as Einar Wegener at the time of painting)

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Queen of Hearts (Lili Elbe), Gerda Wegener, Paris 1928

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Lili Elbe, Gerda Wegener

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