

THE LORD OF CRIES

MUSIC BY

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LIBRETTO BY

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A WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION COMMISSIONED BY

The Santa Fe Opera

SYNOPSIS

Act I:

Prologue: Taking the Mask. Dionysus wrought bloody vengeance on ancient Thebes. If he must now come again, to forgetful Londoners, in 1897, what mask should he don?

Chorus: London in Chaos. A scourge is upon the city: girls are drawn spellbound out of sleep to meet three weird Sisters, returning home with wounded throats. Doctor John Seward, leader of Carfax Asylum, has imposed martial law; and all women found outside at night have been arrested—including the Sisters, who offered no resistance, only the refrain, “The Lord of Cries! Deny him not his place...”

Jonathan in Madness. Jonathan Harker, sent by Seward to meet a “petty boyar” claiming a deed to Carfax Abbey, has returned with a shattered mind. His wife Lucy Westenra is horrified to find him raving about a “Lord of Cries.” Doctor van Helsing gives her Jonathan’s travel diary. Seward promises to end this madness (which includes his own secret passion for Lucy), appealing to his father’s portrait for the fortitude to “repress! restrain!”

Montage: Dreams, diary, dispatch. | In a nightmare, an exotic prince dared Lucy to “Ask for what you want...” as did the three Sisters whom Jonathan met at the Count’s castle. | The Greek ship Semele blows aground after a monstrous storm—with only the captain’s corpse aboard. | Jonathan has a vision of the Lord of Cries.

The Stranger in Chains. The Count, like the Sisters, has been arrested unresisting. He assures Seward that Dionysus alone holds the right to the Abbey, warning: “He has asked you twice.” Lucy enters, and van Helsing exits, urging Seward to “Give him what he wants.” Alone together, Seward and Lucy read Jonathan’s diary in which the Sisters bid him “ask it in...” Jonathan’s words become Seward’s own, and the childhood friends can scarcely suppress their mutual desire. The walls tremble, and Dionysus appears in his true form at last. Madwomen break loose and tear the Asylum down.

Act II:

Dialogue in the Ruins. Carfax is shattered, and those who would rescue the inmates lose themselves in a mapless maze. The Sisters praise the beauty of the ruins and, when Seward enters his office, ask a third time whether he will acknowledge the Stranger's power. They seduce, he resists — and finally asks for what he wants, which is to stop the Stranger. They tell him he must behead the god in his animal form, becoming, briefly, a beast himself.

Lucy and the Wolf-prince. In her chambers Lucy tends to Jonathan. Hearing wolf-cries, she looks out the window to find her dream-prince. He asks her, for the third time, to ask him in. She considers, but demurs. She notices he casts no reflection in the glass. He doubts her happiness and challenges her morality. He provokes her to face herself; inflamed, she invites him inside.

Vengeance of the Lord of Cries. Van Helsing recounts Seward's wild night ride, and Seward carries in what he believes is the Count's severed head. Van Helsing gradually talks him out of his trance and he realizes what he has done. Dionysus offers to show everyone his reflection, and the ruins become glittering mirrors. The chorus mourns Seward's fate and warns the spectators of the wrath of the god.

(Courtesy of The Santa Fe Opera)