

# KAFKA'S CHIMP

August 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10

## A World Premiere

**John Metcalf, *Composer***  
**Mark Morris, *Librettist***  
**Keith Turnbull, *Director***  
**Richard Pittman, *Music Director***  
**David Gaucher, *Set/Costume Designer***  
**Claude Accolas, *Lighting Designer***  
**Nicole Mion, *Choreographer***  
**Nicolette Theroux, *Stage Manager***  
**J. Knighten Smit, *Assistant Director***  
**Christine Reimer, *Assistant Set/Costume Designer\****  
**Rachel Wei, *Assistant Lighting Designer\****  
**David Fuller, *Assistant Stage Manager\****  
**Catherine Male, *Assistant Stage Manager\****  
**Jack Lauder, *Video Editor***  
**Terry Kerry, *Video Editor***  
**Richard Armstrong, *Extended Voice Coach***  
**Kelly Arnsby, *Head of Movement***  
**Selena James, *Singing Teacher***  
**Kathryn LaBouff, *English Diction***  
**Michael McMahon, *Head Coach***



## THE COMPANY

**Violin**  
**Viola**  
**Petronella**  
**Attendant/Waiter**  
**Petra**  
**Red Peter**  
**Marimba**  
**Director**  
**Frieda**  
**Kaye**  
**Double Bass**  
**Young Peter/Pierrot**  
**Soprano Sax**  
**Percussion**  
**Piano/Coach**

**Parmela Attariwala**  
**Krista Buckland**  
**Kim Cooper**  
**Michel Corbeil**  
**Chantal Deeble**  
**Steven Horst**  
**Christine Huang**  
**Michael Jones**  
**Allyson McHardy**  
**Frances Pappas**  
**Peter Pavlovsky**  
**Dave St. Pierre**  
**Chiyoko Slavnic**  
**John Thompson**  
**Liz Upchurch**

OPERA  
*America*



Conseil des Arts du Canada  
The Canada Council

Kafka's Chimp  
is a co-commission with Lontano Music Theatre  
in London, England.  
Development and production support from  
Opera America's Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest  
Opera for a New America Project, and  
commission support from the Canada Council  
and the British Arts Council.

## NOTES ON KAFKA'S CHIMP

*Kafka's Chimp* is inspired by Kafka's short story *A Report to An Academy*, and the *Two Fragments* associated with it: as well, it contains part of a poem by Aldous Huxley and some lines from *This Simian World* by Clarence Day. Using re-ordered text from these sources, the libretto tells, in the form of a report, of the capture of Red Peter, a chimpanzee who turned himself into a human to avoid going to the zoo.

Peter was a chimpanzee happily minding his own business in the Gold Coast with his family group when he was shot twice and captured. On being taken to "civilization," he decided to become a human. Judging from hints in the libretto, he seems to have been aided in this by a trainer and the Director, as well as other teachers who have had the disconcerting habit of going mad or themselves becoming ape-like. The opera opens immediately after Red Peter's capture and shows the inspiration that made him decide to become human, put on clothes, and begin to speak – or rather sing. The rest of the opera takes place much later – five or six years later, to judge from one or two of the comments he makes – and covers two days in his life, leading to the climax of his metamorphosis, his report to the Academy, which will confirm him as completely human.

During the two days, he becomes involved with two women, both of whom work on the Academy Distinguished Visiting Speakers Committee and who are known to each other and the Director: Kaye and Frieda. At one point, in the company of Kaye, he dreams of his past life as a chimpanzee. The events become further complicated by the presence of a number of chimps who wander through the human world, seeming to have anticipated Peter in becoming – if not fully human like him – partially human in that they can act and talk like humans. The unfortunate corollary? The Director himself gradually becomes more and more chimp-like and, in what should be his moment of triumph at the Academy, completely succumbs.

**MARK MORRIS**

## THE MAKING OF AN OPERA

### TEN YEARS PAST

*Kafka's Chimp* had its genesis in a partnership that began nearly 10 years ago, when composer John Metcalf, then artistic director of Music Theatre, hired Keith Turnbull, presently artistic director of Theatre Arts, as his associate.

Turnbull, in productions like 1972's *Sticks and Stones* by James Reaney, had long been at the centre of a movement to extend the Canadian theatre and find new modes of writing, developing and producing for theatre.

Metcalf, as creator of 1990's *Tornrak*, had similar concerns.

They were not just interested in creating contemporary, original work for their form but also in questioning the meaning and conventions of theatre itself. They asked, What is the discipline all about as the new millennium approaches? Metcalf knew of Kafka's story, liked the richness of a text that worked on many levels and had seen a fragment produced as a theatre education piece in London years earlier.

### SUMMER, 1991

By the late summer of 1991, the key elements were in place. It was decided that Turnbull would direct, Metcalf compose and Mark Morris would write the libretto: an exploratory workshop was planned for the following spring for which Metcalf would write 15 minutes of material.

### MAY, 1992

In May 1992, a crew of interpreters convened with them to gather source material, look at every available film about apes, explore movement, improvise extensively, and further develop content and narrative structure.

A central influence for the composer lay in music videos and the culture of MTV, which developed in a post-industrial world, eschewed the hierarchy of the industrial

city's theatre structure and embraced movement, technology and associated visual elements.

Metcalf found the supersaturated, accessible environment terribly attractive. "Of course, it's commercial, it's dubbed and the images are often loose associations at best, but there was a completeness of the senses to them that I liked and that I now feel when I watch this piece," says Metcalf.

The opera seeks to explore the relationship between instinct and intellect; contrary to contemporary views, that value logic over impulse, it hopes to suggest the various levels at which it is possible to gain information and understanding. "*The Report to An Academy* is one of Kafka's lightest inventions; it's very dense but it doesn't have the unrelenting darkness of Kafka's work," says Metcalf. "I'm happy to deal with seriousness but I don't want to give myself or the audience a bad time."

### WINTER, 1993

In 1993, with newly confirmed funding from Opera America, production dates were set for the summer of 1996, and the players gathered again at Banff for a full-scale development workshop. By then, Metcalf had written most of the music, a good part of Morris's libretto was in place, and a partial cast was in place. "We had seen enough of the piece to determine where it needed to go," says Metcalf. "We could understand character, narrative, dramatic intention; but the music and vocal characterization needed amplification. We had to consider many changes, and we were happy to do it. When you work quickly, your internal critic becomes very loud; it's important to turn it down, to allow the time to observe and understand the material."

### MAY, 1994

The project evolved further in May 1994, when a pre-production workshop brought together most of the instrumentalists and the cast, along with movement and design people. Working with a completed score, instrumentation and libretto, the workshop resolved many of the technical questions about sets, costuming and lighting.

## SEPTEMBER, 1995

"Then last September, I received a long fax from Keith; he said he felt that though it was an enormously strong piece, there were still parts that could be strengthened. He asked me, Would you agree to so some further work on the piece prior to production, and I said I'd be delighted. They weren't major questions, but they were important. Now a re-write for a composer is different than for a writer or any other kind of artist; if you change one note, the entire thing needs to be reworked. It's an enormous task – it involved two months

creative work and two months to get the materials in order – but I was happy to do it."

## AUGUST, 1996

Years later, the result of all these efforts, *Kafka's Chimp*, premieres at the Banff Arts Festival. And what remains so compelling for many is the structural complexity of an opera that effuses meaning: by the layering of information, the making of vast implications on subjects from education to human sexuality, the work provides a million points of entry for its audience.

"What's exciting is that the content is explored on every level of the piece," says Metcalf. "For instance, Kaye has a counterpart in the violin, which is played high up, close to the heart, and Peter has a counterpart in the saxophone, which is more masculine, played with a lot of pelvic action. The violin sets the characters into action: in the opening scene, when Peter hears the sound of the violin, he aspires to high culture and – putting it simply – get the girl. There are little suggestions, hints everywhere, on every level in this work – I think we've really broken new territory."

## AN EXCERPT FROM A REPORT TO AN ACADEMY

"Honoured members of the Academy!

You have done the honour of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now nearly five years since I was an ape, a short space of time, perhaps, according to the calendar, but an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done, more or less accompanied by excellent mentors, good advice, applause, and orchestral music, and yet, essentially alone, since all my escorts, to keep the image, kept well off the course. I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. In fact, to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself; free ape as I was, I submitted myself to that yoke. In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted it better; the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels; and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my will power sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to

crawl through. To put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike."

".... And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition. My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it, had soon to give up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon let out again.

But I used up many teachers, indeed, several teachers at once. As I became more confident of my abilities, as the public took an interest in my progress and my future began to look bright, I engaged teachers for myself, established them in five communicating rooms, and took lessons from them all at once by dint of leaping from one room to another.

That progress of mine! How the rays of knowledge penetrated from all sides into my awakening brain! I do not deny it: I found it exhilarating. But I must also confess: I did not overestimate it, not even then, much less now. With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage

and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent idiom: to fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.

As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. Nearly every evening I give a performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble. In any case, I am not appealing for any man's verdict. I am only imparting knowledge, I am only making a report. To you also, honoured Members of the Academy, I have only made a report."

**FRANZ KAFKA**

# WHO THE H . . . IS GEORGES APERGHIS?

Aperghis At Banff – For the first time in North America

## WATER AND GRAVITY

the music theatre of  
Georges Aperghis  
August 2, 4, 7, 9, 8 pm  
August 10, 2 pm  
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Cash bar opens at 9:30 pm  
August 1, 3, 6, 10 pm  
August 8, 10:30 pm  
\$6

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Pascal Dusapin, Marc Monnet,  
John Metcalf and others  
August 4, 9, 10, 4:30 pm  
\$10

# STICKS & STONES

A play  
by James Reaney

August 9 & 10, 13-18, 20-24  
7:30 pm  
August 17 & 18  
2 pm  
August 11  
4:30 pm

Margaret Greenham Theatre  
\$20

*Sticks & Stones: The Donnellys, Part I* pre-  
miered in 1973 at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre  
and was hailed as the first entry in the canon  
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**MUSIC AT THE WHYTE** takes Banff Centre artists to town. An  
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*August 9.*

**MUSIC FOR A SUMMER AFTERNOON** on *August 8 and  
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### COMPARSAS

Parade of Afrocuban performers  
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### FIESTA HABANERA

Havana-style dance party with  
Chucho Valdés y Grupo Irakere at  
Banff Springs Hotel  
September 1 8 pm

### PLEASE NOTE:

**Cabarets scheduled in The Club for August 2, 4, 7, 9, 13, 14 and 15 have been cancelled.  
We apologize for any inconvenience.**

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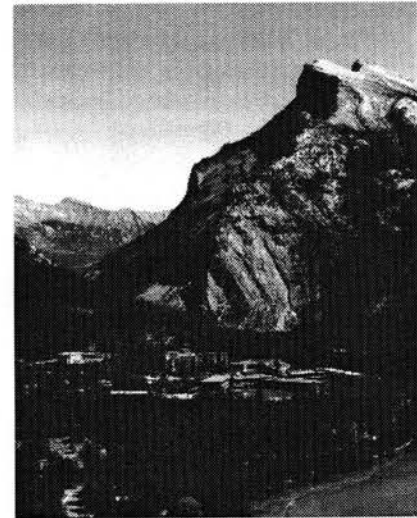
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