

Lily (1998)

Based on a short story by Walter Wangerin, Jr. Lily is an opera for general audiences. The opera is designed to introduce the medium to younger souls who will hopefully bring their parents with them. Wangerin's story tells the story of three sisters, each with a distinctive view of life and what happens to them as the seasons change. The three sisters, by the way, are plants.....

CAST:

Narrator: baritone

Bean Plant: mezzo-soprano

Marigold: coloratura soprano

Lily: lyric soprano

The Sun: tenor

The Wind in Due Season: dancer (non-singing)

Chorus: various birds and animals in the forest (5 voices (SSATB) minimum; larger ensembles are possible).

Plot Synopsis:

A kind narrator helps to tell the story of Lily, enlisting the aid of the other members of the cast. Three sisters are introduced in turn. All three interact with the Sun and the Wind in Due Season in various ways. Bean Plant wishes to be a VIP, a very important person. She determines that providing food is the key to achieving fame. The Sun provides a necessary ingredient to the growth of her beans. Her product is not especially attractive or artistic, but it is wholesome! Marigold, her sister, also wishes to be a VIP. Beauty is the key for her; what else does she need? The Sun is only there to provide a proper spotlight. Lily, the third of the trio of sisters is the awkward one; both Bean Plant and Marigold cannot explain why their sibling is so out of step.

But Lily has a deeply spiritual side that her sisters do not notice. She talks daily with the Sun and is enriched by their conversations. She cares about the Sun and everyone around her. It is Lily who is the first to notice that something is wrong with the Sun. As fall arrives, she notices that the Sun is not doing as well as he used to. She realizes that life is changing, and prepares herself for this reality. Bean Plant and Marigold are oblivious to the obvious changes.

Winter arrives. The Wind in Due Season, so welcoming and warm in the spring is now cold and destructive. As winter arrives, the Wind is transformed into a death-like figure. Bean Plant and Marigold now realize that the end of life is here; they panic, and have no idea how to prepare themselves. Lily understands her fate; when Death arrives, she is defiant, but even she cannot escape the end of life.

But spring arrives once again; the Sun and the Wind in Due Season return to their earlier life-affirming duties. Lily, as a perennial, revives and greets the new spring. New versions of Bean Plant and Marigold also appear. The birds and animals of the forest greet the new season and life begins anew.

Interpretation:

Lily is an allegorical tale; author Walt Wangerin Jr. mentions that the story was written to discuss matters of life and death with children. The story expresses the idea that how you focus your life has at least something to do with how you might face the end of it. Bean Plant and Marigold are incapable of looking beyond themselves. While this philosophy does not interfere with their early successes, it does not help them later on. Lily, who is a caring soul, and understands how to look beyond herself, is in a better position to face death, even as she knows that she cannot escape this ultimate fate. The use of the four seasons presents a version of the life process, with the reminder that spring does return, and new life blooms. The story also presents s Christian symbolism, although one does not have to be a Christian to derive benefit

from the opera's themes. Lily does make it clear that all creation is precious, even as we know that death will come to all.

Musical features:

Lily is an opera for general audiences, a production that has is designed to appeal to first-time opera goers. This goal has determined many of the decisions made for this eclectic score.

Each sister's appearances in the opera are governed by specific musical decisions. All three sisters make considerable use of triple meter. Bean Plant often uses a straight-forward simple triple format, with a pronounced Baroque style. Regular use of dotted rhythms helps to emphasize the duty-driven, workaholic nature that is Bean Plant. Bean Plant's vocal lines are far more disjunct than those of her sisters; this style presents her somewhat nervous and less social personality. The joy that Bean Plant takes in her work employs a more twentieth-century style, with an occasional nod to Stravinsky.

Marigold, on the other hand is a surface gal; her use of triple meter is straight from Vienna! Expect music in one, with Strauss-like strains and champagne-toasted atmospheres. Marigold's primary scene in the opera also features a song that can be taught to young audiences in the schools. Students can attend their first opera and also be a part of the cast, however briefly.

Lily is the awkward sister. As Bean Plant and Marigold discuss her, the music uses asymmetrical meters to make their point! But when Lily talks with the Sun, and with others, the meter switches to compound meters, 9/8 in many cases. This meter allows the feeling of three to be felt on more than one level, pointing to the depth of character that Lily displays. Her musical style is very lyric, with a touch of Ravel here and there.

Hymn tunes: *Lily* is a God-filled opera. Several hymn tunes are used in a number of places to underscore the drama, and also to highlight the presence of God.

- *Lasst uns erfreuen*, which some people know as an Easter hymn is used throughout the opera in subtle ways, especially during the spring season portions of the opera.
- *Just as I am*, a Christian hymn of great modesty and piety is used in a most ironic manner, transformed into a Vienna-like waltz to accompany Marigold, who is anything but modest!
- *Aus tiefer not (From deep affliction I cry out to you)* is presented by the orchestra as the fall season begins, to emphasize the unsettling nature of this new season, and Lily's concern for the declining health of the Sun.
- *If You But Trust in God to Guide You*: this well-known hymn is presented by the orchestra as Lily tries to tell her sisters that death is imminent but that they should not be afraid.

Lily is available in the following versions:

- Vocal score: voices and piano accompaniment.
- Full score: features a chamber orchestra: Flute, clarinet, French horn, trumpet, 1-2 percussionists, piano, strings.

For more information, please contact the composer.