

Preview

WordStage: Bloomsbury and The Great War

by Daniel Hautzinger

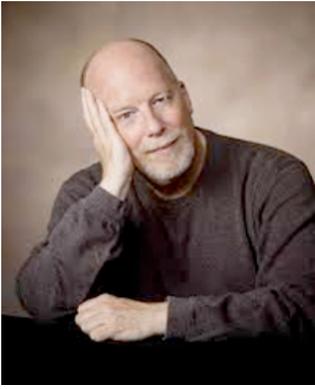


Take a historical artist's letters and diaries along with the impressions of their contemporaries, string them together with narration, interject related music from the period, and you get WordStage. "Its official tagline is 'chamber music reader's theatre,'" said Tim Tavcar over the phone. Tavcar, who is WordStage's artistic director, sees it as "a cross-pollination of the arts, the point of which is the words and their marriage to the appropriate music."

It's also educational, "a catalyst to excite people's curiosities," which explains why WordStage is often presented by institutions like the Beachwood, Lakewood, and Cleveland Public Libraries and the Shaker Heights Art Council. The latter commissioned the upcoming *Bloomsbury and the Great War*, which will be performed on Jan. 24 at the Shaker Historical Society in Shaker Heights.

The Arts Council wanted a work to commemorate World War I, which began 100 years ago. Tavcar originally planned a piece on the English poet-soldiers Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, but the Council deemed it too "esoteric," and asked for something with "broader name recognition," said to Tavcar. "So I said 'what about Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group, because a lot of them were pacifists.'" After the Council agreed, Tavcar wrote "a one-act play based on research and relevant quotes from the four people in it: Virginia and Leonard Woolf, a society hostess, Ottoline Morrell, and her husband Philip, who was in Parliament at the time." The Woolfs published Bloomsbury writers, including T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Sassoon, while the Morrells employed many of the men as farm laborers on their country estate so that they could achieve conscientious objector status.

Tavcar was inspired to pair his play with solo viola music by Rebecca Clarke after seeing a staging of the play *Not About Heroes* that used Clarke and Britten viola pieces as underscoring. And luckily "the work I had started to do on Sassoon and Owen will not be wasted, because the Beachwood library has asked for that for National Poetry Month, so I'll be doing that there in April."



Tavcar has experience in virtually every aspect of producing the arts: his biography lists such titles as Executive Director, Community Outreach Coordinator, Marketing Director, and Box Office Manager. “My experience is much more theatrical than it is musical,” he said, though ““I started life as an oboe major at Northwestern, and I’m a huge opera freak.” He ended up graduating from Northwestern with a degree in opera direction. (One of his upcoming WordStage programs is about legendary soprano Maria Callas). Of his interest in history, he says “I’m just nosy. I’m fascinated by groups of artists who work together, so I look for interconnections. The Bloomsburys were a group of insanely creative people, and I think in this day and age we’ve lost a little bit of that collaboration.”

Perhaps through the cross-disciplinary WordStage he is attempting to regain some of that collaborative spirit. “Some of the people that I work with say ‘It’s so nice that we’re doing this, because I would have never had a chance to work with actors or musicians in this way.’ The horizon is kind of limitless.”

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