



David Hertzberg, Composer



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Hertzberg's THE WAKE WORLD

Hertzberg's WORLD, produced jointly by Opera Philadelphia and the Barnes Foundation located in central Philadelphia, one of the great art collections, and presented in its Annenberg Court, directed on a catwalk by DB Schlather. The opera in one act--but make no mistake, this is a major work--is "drawn out of the seed" of Crowley's eponymous story by the composer who served as his own librettist.

Whatever one thinks of the presentation, staged by Schlather in a manner that was as eccentric as (though less didactic than) Barnes or Crowley themselves--with the audience wandering around the hall, following the catwalk on which of the staging occurred, trying to get close to a story and its inhabitants that seemed determined to keep us at arm's length--Hertzberg's score was thrilling, rapturous and used a language that listeners can carry away with them.

His vocal writing is precise and clear in its intentions, showing off the glories of soprano Høglund's Lola, in a deeply demanding role that continued to grow in power throughout the piece. The prince of mezzo Rihab Chaieb (looking like a portrait of Barnes himself) was impressive as well. Last but certainly not least, was Hertzberg's grand work for a 16-part mixed choir taken from the Opera Philadelphia chorus (and a subgroup of seven characters drawn from the choir). I especially like bass James Osby Gwathney, Jr. as the man in the azure coat and soprano Jessica Beebe's Luna/Hecate, with her puff sleeved red dress looking like she's jumped out of a Rousseau portrait.

Elizabeth Braden, who was not only the chorus director but conductor of the chamber ensemble for which the piece was scored (a violin, French horn, trumpet, piano/ keyboard and percussion), showed deft insight and a strong arm in leading the forces in this challenging score.

