THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN

(Příhody Lisky Bystroušky)

Music and Libretto by Leos Janáček

UM School of Music Opera Theatre

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The Cunning Little Vixen

(Příhody Lišky Bystroušky)

by Leos Janácek

Opera in three acts after the novel by Rudolph Tesnohlídek
Translation and language coaching by Timothy Cheek

The Cunning Little Vixen premiered at the National Theatre in Brno on November 6, 1924.

Director: Joshua Major
Conductor: Jerry Blackstone
Assistant Conductor‡: Rachel Lauber
Scenic Designer: Peter Harrison
Costume Designer: Christianne Myers
Lighting Designer: Rob Murphy
Wig Designer: Guy Beck
Rehearsal Accompanists: Kathryn Goodson, Steven McGhee
Chorus Master: Gabriela Hristova
Stage Manager: Brett Finley

Setting:
The forest and the various locales in a nearby town.

There will be no intermission.

‡ Rachel Lauber will conduct the performance on Sunday, November 17, 2002.

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A very special thanks to the Friends of Opera for their support and purchase of the student performers' vocal scores for these performances.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Harry Ong, Jonathon Troy, Rebecca Pagels
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SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Summer; the forest in the afternoon — The animals play in the forest. The Forester, on his way home, stops for a nap. While he is asleep the Cricket and the Grasshopper make music. A young Frog, trying to catch a Mosquito, attracts the attention of a vixen cub. The Frog lands on the Forester, waking him. The Forester grabs the Vixen and takes her away. Dusk falls. The Blue Dragonflies search for the Vixen.

Autumn; the farmyard — The Vixen, now being reared as a pet, befriends the dog and rebuffs his advances. When she defends herself against the teasing of the Forester’s son and his friend, she is tied up. Night falls and the Vixen sleeps. In her dreams her spirit soars to freedom. At dawn the Vixen scoffs at the hens: they are exploited by humans and by their leader, the Rooster. The Vixen appeals in vain to the hens’ feminist feelings and, shocked at their conservatism, feigns suicide. Her plan has worked: when the Rooster is sent to investigate, she kills him, then polishes off all the hens. Confronted by the Forester and his wife, the Vixen bites through her rope and escapes.

ACT II

Autumn; the forest in the late afternoon — The Vixen taunts the Badger, ruthlessly evicts him from his comfortable home and takes it over.

Winter; the Inn — The Forester, the Schoolmaster and the Priest play cards. The Forester mocks the Schoolmaster about his reticence and hopeless love for Terynka, a gypsy girl. But the Forester is also vulnerable to taunts: mocked about his Vixen, he leaves.

Autumn; the forest in the moonlight — As the Schoolmaster stumbles drunkenly home, the Vixen peeps out through some sunflowers. The Schoolmaster mistakes her for Terynka and pours his heart out. The Priest, also the worse for drink, catches sight of the Vixen and confuses her with a girl he was wrongly accused of seducing when he was young. The Forester takes both men by surprise and fires two shots after the Vixen.

Summer; the forest in the moonlight — The Vixen meets a handsome Fox and tells him the story of her life. The Fox woos her, they mate, and, having scandalized the gossiping birds, are married. The forest creatures celebrate.

ACT III

Autumn; the forest at midday — Harasta, a poultry-seller, is about to pick up a dead hare when he sees the Forester, who suspects him of poaching it. Harasta explains that he is on his way to see Terynka, whom he is to marry. The Forester, realizing that the hare is one of the Vixen’s victims, uses it as a trap for her. The Vixen, the Fox and their cubs poke fun at the clumsily laid trap and the parents happily watch their growing family. Harasta returns to collect the hare. The Vixen lures him away so that the cubs can rifle his bag. But her gloating triumph at outwitting Harasta angers him and he shoots her.

The Inn — The Schoolmaster weeps when he hears that Terynka is to marry. He and the Forester both regret that the Priest has moved away. The Forester reflects on his age and sets off for the forest.

Summer; the forest in the afternoon — The Forester muses on the beauty of the forest, where life is continually renewed. He recalls his courtship and wedding. As he daydreams, the forest creatures appear, including a little vixen. The Forester tries to catch her but catches a Frog instead – grandson of the Frog who attracted the Vixen’s attention at the beginning of her adventures. Dropping his gun, the Forester surrenders to the forest.

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Hamlet scholar Harold Bloom calls Hamlet “the most original literary work in Western Literature, perhaps in the world’s literature.” Indeed, theater lovers everywhere continue to have a lively relationship with this popular tragedy. As Hamlet celebrates its 400th anniversary in 2002, the story of the crown prince of Denmark continues to captivate our imaginations. Regardless of whether it is someone’s first or twentieth viewing, the play and its characters feel dichotomously familiar and original. UM theatre professor Philip Kerr says that Hamlet “is a play that will continue to resonate in this very changing world,” and undoubtedly it does. For modern audiences Hamlet is both a part of the foundation on which modern drama has been built and a vibrant piece of theater that continues to appeal to audiences around the world, inspired countless theatrical revivals and no less than five feature film adaptations in the past decade.

From December 5-8, theatergoers will have the opportunity to celebrate this timeless drama when it is staged at the Power Center by the UM’s Department of Theatre and Drama. The play is co-directed by Mr. Kerr, who audiences will remember for his production of The Tavern last season, and visiting artist Mark Lamos. A familiar name at the UM, Mark Lamos accepted a Tony Award for Connecticut’s Hartford Stage Company in 1989, while serving as the company’s artistic director. He has directed for numerous other performance companies around the world including the Guthrie Theatre and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. He has also participated in several productions at the UM, most recently his collaboration with Mr. Kerr on the 1999 production of The Tempest.

It has been said that every great tragedy is the tragedy of the Life of Man, and certainly Hamlet’s predicament has always appealed to the general convictions of our society. Hamlet represents the good and the evil within all of us. Foreshadowing the psychologically realistic characters of modern drama, Hamlet is seen as a genuine, thoughtful, and sincere man who, despite his cultivated mind and royal manners, is still vulnerable to his own noble ambitions and capable of acting the part of madness with unrivaled power. All of these forces leave him terribly out of balance. This is perhaps why it is so tragic that Hamlet’s noble effort to do the hard work and ask the tough questions in search of a solution brings him answers that, despite their honesty, only scratch the surface of solving his problems.

The audience is, therefore, offered no clear-cut resolutions to the play’s themes of death and sex, or to the social and psychological drama created by these facts of life. We are instead left to sort out our own complicated and highly emotional responses to the drama. It is this internalization that makes the play resonate with us at each viewing. In the course of watching the play we feel both satisfaction – at seeing basic elements of our own lives treated dramatically – and pain – at the nagging persistence of these difficulties, just as in real life.

The use of such ambiguity in the play ultimately offers audiences a robust and vital affirmation of the value of human life. The play is essentially a moral drama whose theme is the existence of both good and evil in human nature. The appreciation of humanity with its own flawed nature is a central concern of Shakespeare’s work, and in Hamlet an evolution of attitudes leading to this conclusion is displayed in a grand and powerful portrait.

As Shakespeare plays are typically updated and directed to focus on certain aspects of the text, so too is the UM production. Kerr and Lamos have set the play in an undefined “time in the past,” and selected a fairly standard version of the play, choosing to downplay the political and military aspects of the play in favor of concentrating on the family drama. The cast comprises 30 student actors, and Mr. Kerr himself is cast as the Player King. An incredible design team has also been assembled for the production. UM faculty members Christianne Myers, whose costume designs are seen in The Cunning Little Vixen, and scenic designer Vince Mountain join the production team, as does Theatre Department Chair Erik Fredricksen. Internationally renowned for his skills, Mr. Fredricksen is responsible for choreographing the play’s numerous sword fights.

Come see for yourself. Hamlet plays December 5-7, 8:00, and December 8, 2:00 at the Power Center for the Performing Arts.

— Joel Aalberts, Public Relations Director
About the Creators

**Leoš Janáček** (Composer) 1854-1928. The son of a poor schoolmaster, Janáček studied at the Prague Organ School. In 1875 he was appointed conductor of the Brno Philharmonic Society. He held this position for a few years, then feeling his musical education was still lacking, he went to the Leipzig Conservatory. After that, he spent a year in Vienna furthering his studies. Finally in 1881, he returned to Brno and founded his own organ school, an institution he directed until it became the State Conservatory of Music in 1920. Janáček’s first significant composition was written when he was forty and his most famous works were produced after his sixtieth birthday. Though he composed chamber and orchestral works, piano music, a song cycle, ballet music, and a mass, he is known primarily for his operas. *Jenufa* (1904), his third opera, had its premiere in Brno, but it was not until the 1916 production in Prague that Janáček suddenly became famous. *Kát’a Kabanová* (1921) is often regarded as a pivotal work, having one foot in the post-romantic school and one in modernism. His next opera, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, turns to nature for its subject. In Janáček’s last two operas, the composer’s melodic language becomes more terse, rugged, and dissonant, though never atonal. The *Makropoulos Case*, written in 1926, turns from nature to an urban world of legal complexities and theatrical life. From the House of the Dead is a setting of Dostoyevsky’s prison diaries and the composer’s last work. Janáček caught a chill while taking a walk that rapidly worsened, turning into the pneumonia, from which he died at age 72 in Ostrava.

Janáček’s music relies heavily on the speech patterns of the Czechoslovakian language. He studied the melody and rhythm of speech for over thirty years, systematically notating his discoveries. He used his research to devise various motifs—short phrases of a distinct rhythmic and melodic content—that form the basis of expression in his music. Though he uses many folk-like materials in his work, his other compositional traits are more easily recognized. These include the declamatory patterns of his vocal music; a certain dry humor; tight, pared-down harmony; intense rhythmic drive; and sparse but skillful orchestration. These characteristics are also identifiable in his “Glagolitic Mass” (1926), his symphonic poem “Taras Bulba” (1928), his two string quartets, and many of his chamber works. Janáček was a musical anomaly—his work is of such originality and inventiveness that he has no musical predecessors or ancestors. While some of his operas, most notably *Jenufa* and *Kát’a Kabanová*, have always been performed, today’s audiences are able to enjoy a wider range of this uniquely satisfying and profoundly moving music. — NY City Opera

**Timothy Cheek** (Translator/ Language Coach) A.Mus.D., joined the School of Music faculty in 1994 following studies at Oberlin, the University of Texas at Austin, and Michigan. He served opera internships at the Teatro Comunale in Florence, Italy, and at the National Theatre in Prague. His performances as a collaborative pianist have taken him to twelve countries, and have been heard on world-wide broadcasts, PBS, and Austrian television. Highlights of his work include engagements at the Ravinia Festival’s Steans Institute, the Santa Fe Opera, the International Institute for Chamber Music in Munich, the Mozart Opera Studies Institute in Austria, the Israel Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv, and recitals in Hong Kong and at the American Academy in Rome. Mr. Cheek has held several grants, including an Olivetti Foundation Grant to perform in Italy, a Fulbright award, and an IREX grant to conduct research in the Czech Republic which led to his book Singing in Czech: A Guide to Czech Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire published by Scarecrow Press.

About the Cast

**Megan Besley** (Lisák/Fox) grad student, DMA Vocal Perf., Freeport, IL

**Brandon Brack** (Schoolmaster) grad student, MM Vocal Perf., Henderson, KY

**Erika Brehmer** (Ensemble) first-year, Wixom, MI

**Jaunelle Celaire** (Vixen) grad student, DMA Vocal Perf., Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

**Jennah Delp** (Ensemble) first-year, BM Vocal Perf/Teaching Certification, Singer Island, FL

**Leah Dexter** (Cricket/Frantík/Rooster/Fox Cub) grad student, MM Vocal Perf., Southfield, MI

**David Dillard** (Forester) grad student, DMA Vocal Perf., Minneapolis, MN

**Carla Dirlikov** (Dog/Woodpecker) senior, BM Vocal Perf., Ypsilanti, MI

**Arielle Doneson** (Ensemblejunior, BM Vocal Perf., Okemos, MI

**Dianna Dumps** (Forester’s Wife/Owl) grad student, MM Vocal Perf., H amilton, NJ

**Sara Emerson** (Ensemble) sophomore,BM Vocal Perf./Teaching Certification, Traverse City, MI

**Nathan Evenson** (Ensemble) first-year,BM Choral Music Educ., Orion, MI
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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JERRY BLACKSTONE (Conductor) is the director of choirs and chair of the conducting dept. UM: Chamber Choir; performances at National and Division conventions of the American Choral Directors Association, including February, 2003 appearances of UM Chamber Choir at ACDA National Convention in New York City. Guest Conductor: All-state and festival appearances throughout the United States and internationally in Hong Kong and Canada; preparation of choirs for performances with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under such conductors as Nicholas McGegan and Itzhak Perlman. Published Works: Working with Male Voices, Jerry Blackstone Choral Series.


PETER HARRISON (Scenic Designer) Opera: NY City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, O para...
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**JOSHUA MAJOR (Director)** is the director of the Opera Workshop. **UM**: The Conald, La Périchole, Falstaff, Susannah, L’Enfant et les Sortilèges/Le Rossignol, L’Elisir d’Amore, Gianni Schicchi, Ballo in Maschera. **Regional Opera**: La Traviata, Opera Theatre of St. Louis; Little Women, Central City, Opera Omaha; Idomeneo, Wolf Trap Opera; Don Giovanni, Opera Carolina, Fort Worth Opera; Romeo and Juliet, Madama Butterfly, New Orleans Opera; Un Ballo in Maschera, Edinburgh Opera; La Trágédie de Carmen, Werther, Eugene O’Neill, Cendrillon, Israel Vocal Arts Institute; The Pearl Fishers, Minnesota Opera; The Fall of the House of Usher, Opera Grand Rapids; La Cenerentola, The Kaiser from Atlantis, Yale Univ.

**CHRISTIANNE MYERS (Costume Designer)** is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Theatre and Drama. **Upcoming National Tours**: The Tell-Tale Heart and Other Classics, Theatreworks/USA; American Dream, The Acting Company. **New York**: The West End Horror, Bay Street Theatre; Heloise and Abelard, Juilliard School; Running Man, Muscic Theatre Group; Dare Club's Oedipus, Blue Light; Lincoln Center Institute. **Regional Theatre**: Vermont Stage Co.; Clarence Brown Theatre; Syracuse Stage; Caldwell Theatre; Irontale Ensemble. **Film**: The Office Party, HBO. **Other**: BFA, theatre design, Pace Univ.; MFA, costume design, New York Univ.


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During the current year, the Friends of Opera is seeking to provide funds for the purchase of musical scores for students, direct assistance to students through an opera competition award, and an opera workshop program. Additionally, we are asking all Friends to consider a gift to our Friends of Opera Endowment Fund so we can continue to grow the value of this Fund and thus provide a higher level of scholarship support for students. New Friends are always welcome. Your donation, regardless of size, does make a difference in the careers of talented students pursuing a career in opera. Thank you for your consideration.

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