

Opera à la CNN

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With opera being one of the most exhilarating forms of escapism the human race has yet devised, you might suppose it would offer respite from the grubby chicanery of contemporary politics, but since John Adams's *Nixon in China* debuted, in 1987, such quaint assumptions no longer apply. While the *Nixon* gang—led by that perennial provocateur Peter Sellars, with Alice Goodman on board as librettist—went boldly where no one had gone before, these days traffic on the highway of so-called CNN opera is heavy. Just this month, fans have three specimens of the genre to choose from.

In Houston, Opera in the Heights presents the world premiere of Evan Mack and Joshua McGuire's *Yeltsin in Texas*, inspired by Boris Yeltsin's unscheduled visit to a supermarket in that city in 1989. A rising star in Russia with the Soviet presidency in his near future, Yeltsin took a look around and simply could not believe his eyes. At home, he declared, not even Gorbachev enjoyed this kind of selection. If Russian consumers, who spent their lives queuing up to buy basics, got wind of this, he added, there would be a revolution. (Oh no! Not again!) Following previews earlier this month in Fort Worth, the opera opens in Houston on February 22.

In Athens, the Greek National Opera hosts Sirene Operntheater of Austria's prize-winning production of *Chodorkowski*, by Periklis Liakakis and Kristine Tornquist (February 27–29). Once the richest of all the Russian oligarchs, the eponymous Mikhail Khodorkovsky today squeaks by on a few miserable hundred million in London. The opera traces his fall at the hands of a mighty nemesis, none other than Vladimir Putin. *The Economist* has dubbed our expat, ex-con hero "the Kremlin's leading critic-in-exile," possibly not a distinction to drive sales at the box office. (In select markets, Putin's name in the title might help.)

As for the now canonical *Nixon in China*, Scottish Opera's new co-production (with the Royal Danish Theatre and Madrid's Teatro Real) promises to send Glasgow and Edinburgh fans out into the night whistling Adams crowd-pleasers such as "News has a kind of mystery," "We no longer need Confucius," and "I am the wife of Mao Tse-tung." *Nixon in China* is in Glasgow February 18–22 and in Edinburgh 2020, February 27–29.

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