

Malcolm Hill

How the Viking got his Horns

A Comedy-opera

in One Scene

mj340 composed 2015

www.malcolm-hill.co.uk

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HOW THE VIKING GOT HIS HORNS

A comedy-opera by Malcolm Hill

How the Viking got his Horns – a tale of medieval shamans and shapeshifting set in a 9th century Novgorod medical centre where Western medicine is considered as 'alternative' and anachronisms abound. A nervous Viking trader and his no-nonsense wife have just arrived in Russia. They see a locum, a shaman and a psychiatrist.

The cast, in order of singing:

oprano
Female Chorus
oung Tenor
Aezzo-Soprano
Bass
oprano
Baritone

The opera opens with a young medical locum waiting in the 9th century Novgorod Medical Centre for his next patient. The Centre where a few foreign medics have been brought in to work as 'alternative therapists', is run by a Shamaness - Christianity has yet to arrive in Novgorod. While the Vikings were famous for rape and pillage in Western Europe, they also worked as traders in the lands east of Scandinavia. The Narrator and Chorus sing alliterative verse honouring the North European tradition. Their function is, like a Greek chorus, to comment on the proceedings as well as to set the scenes.

A Viking trader and his wife enter. She lists his problems and presents the locum with a picture of his symptoms (see picture). He merely glances at the picture, sings, "No problem, I've just been on a one-day course, so I'm sure I can help", then ousts the Viking's wife. The locum tries to get the Viking to relax and when the Viking starts to explain what creates his problems the locum gets irritated. The lack of good communication between them leads to one of the Viking's symptoms appearing. This scares the locum who immediately dismisses the Viking with "Come back in six months if the problem persists – goodbye."

"Wait six months?!!" fumes the angry wife. They return to see the Centre's director, Shamaness Sidorova. Symptoms are again listed and the husband refuses to demonstrate his problems. The Shamaness announces that treatment will depend on whether they were caused by the Gods, by his enemies, by mistake for someone else, or by "life-style choices". She then starts an intricate incantation over the Viking, assisted by his wife. Exhausted, the Shamaness announces that if his problems had been caused by enemies or by mistake they will not recur. She explains what to do if they were caused by the Gods. "If caused by yourself, come back to us; here's a leaflet, goodbye."

A warm and sympathetic "alternative psychiatrist" puts the Viking at his ease and is obviously interested in his patient. Asked to describe when he was last happy, the Viking recounts his idyllic childhood on the farm, then how his world changed when he was sent away to rape-and-pillage school – he never enjoyed being a warrior and jumped at the chance to become a trader. The psychiatrist gently explains his diagnosis and the Viking realises that he is cured. Now that the Viking will no longer need the picture of his symptoms, the psychiatrist asks if he may make copies for an article in the next Lance-and-Pack-it. From this leading medical journal, the article will soon be badly translated into many languages. Likenesses of the picture will be recreated as moulds, amulets and statues. In time these will be considered examples of normal Viking wear. And so was born the myth that Viking helmets had horns.

Malcolm Hill writes: "In August 2014, we were in Krakow for to attend a harpsichord course. The weather was quite Katharine unpleasant and I found myself stuck in the flat with a broken television. I remembered the intriguing picture of the bronze plate and set about constructing a short story, A Viking in Novgorod, around it which could be the basis for another comedy-opera. I never accepted the theory that the figure on the left of the bronze plate was a berserk dancer. I took the figure to be a depiction of the same character as the wolf-pelted warrior of the right. By the end of the harpsichord course, I'd printed out a draft libretto by which I hoped could be sung Bath Chamber Opera plus а Narrator. By September, an initial version of the music plus a chorus was ready. During the boring process of inputting the score into Sibelius, I took the easy option of shortening some of the arias and reconfiguring the piece as a curtain-raiser to Women on Top. When we started rehearsing, even more outlandish anachronisms were added, often instigated by the cast."

Malcolm Hill studied in Holland and Sweden and at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he taught composition for 26 years. He has lived in Bath for over 30 years.

Theatrical Considerations

Props on stage:

Table or desk, with small stand for Symptom picture (which when inserted can be viewed by Locum and Audience alike)

2 chairs, covered by sacking

Floor covered by skins

Cut branches of silver birch on the floor adorn the back wall

3 advertisements for the Medical Centre on the wall (see separate file)

2 large maracas

2 small maracas

1 sand-drum

1 bunch of herbs

Pair of slippers (under desk) for Shamaness

2 leaflets on the desk for Locum and Shamaness to give to Viking

1 bird-cage with large-enough opening to let Kazimierz insert the claw quickly

[+ ad lib.: large stand for a flip-chart with Kazimierz' diagnosis (see below)]

Props offstage and Clothing:

Large bag for Wyf (for holding medical notes and Symptom picture) Picture of Viking's symptoms (the bronze plate – see separate file) Set of medical notes 1 Claw for Viking (one hand only) White coat for Locum Viking's head-band, which conceals pop-up horns Sling (or large pocket in tunic) for Viking to hide clawed-hand Shamaness at entrance wears fur and formal high heels Kazimierz dresses as an early 20th century Austrian psychiatrist [+ ad lib.: cigar for Kazimierz]

The first performance of *How the Viking got his Horns*, given by Bath Chamber Opera, took place on 11th February 2015 at the Rondo Theatre, Bath. The cast at this performance was:

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Shamaness Sidorova	Soprano	Jane Hunt
Narrator	Soprano	Susanna Watson
Viking's wife	Mezzo	Julia Rushworth
Medical locum	Tenor	Robert Jack
Dr. Kazimierz	Baritone	Simon Caldwell
Viking trader	Bass	Paul Feldwick
"Greek Chorus"	Sops&Altos	Chandos Singers
Director	Piano	Malcolm Hill

For pictures of the performance, see www.bathchamberopera.co.uk

Please see separate, coloured file (Viking Coloured Posters) for pictures of:

the Symptom Picture which Wyf carries,

the three Medical Centre advertisements which hang on the wall, and

two other pictures of rulers which could be on show if there is room.

The Symptom Picture could be used for publicity for the opera, as well as being printed in the programme notes and also stuck on a bark-coloured card (with uneven edges) to be used as the picture which Wyf shows to the three workers at the Medical Centre and which eventually is given to Dr. Kazimierz for inclusion in the Lance-and-Packit.

The three advertisements should be printed on bark-coloured backing.



* Metronome marks : first for large stage, second for small stage - essentially the limits. Distributed under Performance Restricted Attribution-NonCommercial–NoDerivs 3.0 License

































Vik keeps silent, but after a while he looks around and then looks at the audience in bafflement. Lcm just observes Vik, dispassionately.

Pauses in bars 144-148 according to action on stage.

























































A little Faster

















Sha starts a vocalise (any syllable) while swaying from side to side. She sets up a \downarrow . I rhythm at the start of each bar with the small maraca in her RH over Vik's horns. He is too tall so Sha indicates for him to sit down.





Three voices on this and the next page all at their own pace, not keeping the same pulse, all rubato while they act. Omit repeats ad lib if on small stage, one or more parts may repeat for more times.

Sha circles Vik while rattling sand-drum (which she taps lightly); then she puts sand-drum down and picks up large and small maracas. Wyf stops flicking Vik and picks up large and small maracas. Sha and Wyf back away from Vik, then hold their maracas vertically on high shaking them vigorously and approach him: they wave them pointing the maracas at an angle downwards over his head while shaking them, then stop shaking, return maracas to the vertical and back away to previous positions. They do this twice more, stopping singing when they stop shaking over Vik for the third time, and returning to their positions (during Chorus).











Start singing after third approach with the 4 maracas. Bars 469-484 non-rubato, all parts together as one section.


































































































