

## Don't Cry for Us, Richard Wagner: The Artwork of the Future and Evita

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Annoyed at the confectionary opera world of his time, composer Richard Wagner writes a series of essays including *The Artwork of the Future (Artwork)* in 1849, which outline his requirements for the synthesis of man's creative art forms to construct expressive music-drama. Denouncing the audience of elite intelligencia, Wagner calls for a return of opera to the need-based, community of the people (the "Volk") stating, "The artwork of the future is a communal one and it can only arise from a communal yearning... the coming together of all artists in time and place and for a particular purpose is what makes up this community. This particular purpose is drama" (Wagner 78). He deems the disciplines of dance, tone, and poetry "the three primal sisters," (27) who with the addition of sculpture, architecture, and painting, will "mutually [enhance] each art form through vital, overabundant interplay until [drama] reaches its fullest potential" (33) of achieving communication with the spectator on multiple sensory levels. In his introduction to Emma Warner's translation of "*Artwork*," Keith Warner claims that "the kind of [operatic] theatre that Wagner intended and the unique aspirations he had for the art form are still woefully absent from our lives" (Warner 6). Yet today, the principals of Wagner's essay are strikingly noticeable in a genre of performance postdating Wagner's lifetime; a genre born from the proletariat's music halls and minstrel shows: musical theater. An analysis of the key tenets of Wagner's work makes it clear that the ideals required for the achievement of *The Artwork of the Future* are clearly displayed in modern musical theater practices, evidenced by Weber and Rice's *Evita*. Moore 2

The syntheses of Wagner's disciplines, which produce effective audience communication, are constantly in play on the musical theater stage and can be seen in every moment of *Evita*. For purposes of analysis they will be broken down into specific moments in order to magnify their contributions and effects on the observer. Architecture and painting are called upon to create the world of the play for the spectator, by showcasing central themes and depicting contrasting environments like the movie house, a small Argentine town, the presidential palace, and Peron's political rally, which are central to the life saga of Eva Peron. Dance assists in the audience's understanding of story and character development while supplying a visual presence for tone and poetry in numbers like "Buenos Aires" and "Waltz for Evita and Che." The human body articulates character through its sculptural aspects, which can be seen in the physical work of the actors. Music and text work in unison during Weber's "Another Suitcase in Another Hall" and "Lament" to influence both the ethos and pathos of the viewer on a base level.

"And thus the poet and tragedian called forth the architect to construct a building worthy of and responsive to their art" (Wagner 58) thereby "creating the conditions for [drama] to live" (73). Architecture is entreated by Wagner to leave behind its solitary, "utilitarian" (60) existence, and set the stage for the enhancement of the dramatic world. Similarly, Wagner believes "Painting that depicts humans will never lead a healthy, necessary life when those same beautiful humans represent themselves fully [on stage] without a paintbrush or a canvas" (70).

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Here painting is implored to abandon its selfish aims of needless human portraiture to join architecture in creating theatrical landscapes. *Evita* displays how the combined art of scenic design, so advocated by Wagner, produces the varied environments required to tell the life story of Eva Peron. Scenic design is an essential storytelling tool in this piece, visually relating how Eva, Moore 3 born into the poverty class, manipulates her way to the big city of Buenos Aires, onto movie screens, and ultimately into the hearts of her people in the office of the first lady of Argentina. The environments in *Evita* are almost as important as Eva herself, as they assist in the audience's understanding of the heroine's journey from poverty, and her motivation to achieve power.

The story "begins with a short scene in a Buenos Aires cinema on the day [Eva] died" (Weber). The choice to introduce us to Eva's story via a movie house immediately illuminates this world of political performances and hints at Eva's persona as a glamorous film actress prior to her association with Juan Peron. In Wagnerian fashion, scenic design immediately enhances the text to foreshadow a central theme of the piece. Namely, to what extent should this peasant-class first lady, "a jumped up actress from the sticks," (Weber) be involved in politics? We then move to the biographical section of the text, which follows Eva through different cities, relationships, and ultimately the Peronist political campaign, delivering her finally to the balcony of the Casa Rosada, Argentina's presidential mansion. The astonishing aspect of *Evita's* storyline relies heavily on the striking socio-economic distinction between the starting and ending positions of Eva's life. This concept is visually enhanced by the contrast of the environments in *Evita*. For example, our first glimpse of Eva is in 1934, as a star struck fifteen year old in "a night club in Junin [, Argentina]", "her home town at that time" (Weber). Scenic design and costume elements convey the seediness of this low-class establishment, and prepare audiences to intellectualize and be affected by the bar's contrast to the sumptuous world of the Casa Rosada, and the grandeur of Eva's state funeral later in the show. Photographer Martha Swope documented the original Broadway production in a series of photographs including *Generals singing "The Art Of The Possible" in a scene from the Broadway production of the musical "Evita."* The original Broadway production, directed by Hal Prince with a scenic design Moore 4

By Timothy O'Brien and Tazeena Firth (*Evita* on Broadway), suggest that the episodic libretto of *Evita* required a minimalist set, on an open stage, in order to successfully convey each atmosphere while still "relaying [the] dramatic action to eye and ear in a comprehensible fashion" (Wagner 72). O'Brien and Firth might have chosen to spend their Broadway budget on static and more realistic portrayals of *Evita's* world, yet their choice of minimal but detailed set pieces conveys the feeling of dinginess and poverty when appropriate and contrasts it with the suggestion of plush luxury. This choice illustrates an understanding of the fast-paced requirements of the text, and also exemplifies the importance Wagner places on furthering dramatic action rather than showcasing over indulgent production value.

While *Evita* does not have a traditional, stationary set with walls to showcase Wagner's art of landscape painting, "A New Argentina," Eva's impassioned plea to "the descamisados" (Rice 64) to elect Peron, is an exhilarating moment cleverly depicting how architecture, painting, and sculpture can be used to create environments in alternative ways. Additional photos of Hal Prince's production, including Swope's *Patti LuPone as Eva Peron (C) singing "A New Argentina," in a scene from the Broadway production of the musical "Evita,"* feature Eva surrounded by an ensemble of Argentines who are waving colorful banners in support of Peron. The masses cry out for the new leadership Peron can provide by singing, "A new Argentina! / The voice of the people cannot be denied!" (Rice 64). In this scene, the sculpture and movement of the Argentinian workers, marching and waving their emblazoned red and white painted banners, establishes the architecture of the environment called for by the text. The audience is roused by the intense emotions of a political rally communicated by cries for justice, strident tonal qualities, wide legged stances, marching, and fervent color. Through the combination of Wagner's disciplines of music, text, sculpture, dance, architecture and painting, the artwork of Moore 5 the future is effectively and spectacularly realized on the musical theater stage during *Evita's* "New Argentina."

"While her facial expression remains fixed ... the feet alone have taken over the responsibility of expressing what they can ... [her] conduct is merely art, not truth" (Wagner 32). Wagner feels that dance, independent of story and music, serves as a superfluous luxury good, not truly accomplishing the ultimate goal of imparting human experience. However, when paired with her two sisters in musicals like *Evita*, dance is elevated "to the art of mime, from the broadest representation of generalized physical sensations to the most condensed, subtle expression of precise feelings of the mind and of the force of the will" (33). The production number "Buenos Aires" documents Eva's triumphant arrival from rural Argentina to seek her fortune in the big apple.

One of the heavier dance numbers in the show, Hal Prince's original production uses an array of Latin dancers as the citizens of Buenos Aires, to illustrate the fast paced and seductive world Eva encounters in her new city (New NickTahoe). The rousing instrumentation of the transition into "Buenos Aires," soon gives way to Eva's exultant text, and as she studies the ensemble traversing the stage she begs, "Let me dance to your beat make it loud let it hurt run it through me" (Rice 59). Eva, never a wallflower, eagerly joins their routine, and mirrors the other dancers, symbolically leaving the suburbs behind and assimilating to their way of life. As we watch the number progress, Eva's determination and fervor is strongly related to the viewer and easily understood by any audience member who has leapt at the chance to be a part of something transformational. In the 2012 Broadway revival, featuring Elena Roger as Eva (Gans), the number takes a slightly different tone as it builds through the dance break. The viewer watches Eva freely whirling from male to male, displaying her womanly wiles and partnering with them in co-dependent tangos (Frank Lair). These dance pairings represent Eva's Moore 6 sexual manipulations for the audience, as she conquers men to establish herself in the city. Through the course of the dance we understand that Eva will use her sexuality to bring her closer and closer to power.

In "Waltz for Evita and Che" ("Waltz"), Eva appears in a dream sequence where she faces off with her diametrically opposed foil, an outspoken symbol of the unwashed masses and anti-Peronism. Eva is dying and essentially deserting the Argentines. "Waltz" is written as an argument between dream Eva and Che, wherein Eva's role as savior of her people is mocked. In the 2012 Broadway revival, choreographed by Rob Ashford (Evita on Broadway), the traditional Viennese Waltz is cast aside in favor of another, more confrontational tango (Wender Jose). This is an exciting choice for the spectator as the aggressive movements of the tango serve to expose the inflammatory yet symbiotic relationship between Eva and her harshest critic. Furthermore, this dance choice harkens back to "Buenos Aires" and reinforces, for the observer, Eva's continued manipulation of men to appease her power hungry ego. As Che is considered a symbol of the people, this change in dance styles proposes that Eva has manipulated the Argentine masses to establish herself: reflecting a common critique of the real life work of Eva Peron. "Waltz" concludes with Eva sinking from Che's embrace to the floor, in a stylized movement which represents her debilitation by her illness. As a beautiful example of Wagner's belief in uniting text, song, and dance, Che backs away into the darkness, while Eva begins the last painful phrases of the piece, "What is the good of the strongest heart/ in a body that's falling apart?/ A serious flaw/ I hope you know that" (Rice 69). Eva is reaching for him in a heart-wrenching physical manifestation of her longing to continue the dance, her life, and her work. Given this musical theater example, it is easy to understand why Wagner maintains that "It is in drama that sister dance reaches her highest height and her fullest breadth, delightful when she Moore 7 rules, gripping when she submits" (Wagner 31). "Buenos Aires" and "Waltz for Evita and Che" are significant in regards to Wagnerian tenets as they illustrate how musical theater pieces like *Evita* use poetry, music, and stylized movement/ dance to more effectively impart moments of human emotion on a primal level.

"Sculpture deals with the external physical form from which we may only glean the shell, not the core of human nature. True, the inner being is most aptly expressed through outer appearance but only fully in and through movement" (65). Though similar to dance, sculpture can also be seen as the dramatic use of the human body to define the character. Much as a statue is paired down from a large block of stone, so is a character made real by the selection of the appropriate walk, turn, and physical gesture from a wealth of possibilities. The 1996 motion picture version of Weber and Rice's *Evita* stays close to the original stage script, featuring most of the same songs, in addition to one of the best portrayals of Che available for view. In "Oh What a Circus," our introduction to Che, actor Antonio Banderas is shown slouched over a deserted bar while the rest of the country mourns at Eva's funeral (Antonio Banderas). "Che is the only non-participant" (Weber). As he strolls through the streets of Buenos Aires physically dismissing the mourners, Banderas embodies for the audience a casual, even flippant attitude towards the proceedings, warning the viewer that "As soon as the smoke from the funeral clears/ We're all gonna see how she did nothing for years!" (Rice 57). The slack in his body and unaffected countenance during a time of national mourning immediately speaks to the viewer, setting him in contrast to the attitude of the solemn occasion; a contrast which he personifies through the rest of the story. Indignant, sulking, irreverent; all are all adjectives which can describe Banderas' portrayal of Che, who we recognize as the revolutionary anti-hero of the piece.

Though Che performs many minor characters through the show, every one is tinged with a Moore 8 touch of mockery and disrespect, commented on in a Brechtian fashion by his facial expressions and body language. Even without the text and music, the audience registers Che's opposition in harmony with Wagnerian tenets. "According to his particular skill ... the mime will impart man's inner being, his feelings and desires to the eye" (Wagner 74). Banderas is able to manifest a character interesting to the viewer using the sculpture of his body, which when paired with music and text, comes alive and communicates instantly on many emotional levels.

Still, the sculptural image most closely identified with *Evita* is a publicity shot taken for the original Broadway production of Patti LuPone in the role of Eva, taken by Swope, entitled *Patti LuPone as Eva Peron posing for the Broadway production of the musical "Evita."* The photo is a recreation of a moment in "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" in which Eva, having been elected first lady, urges her people to not applaud for her but rather to recognize that she is still one of them. Eva humbly bathes in her people's approval "'selling' herself to the full" (Weber) and coyly invites the adoration of the masses pleading, "I still need your love after all that I've done... Don't cry for me Argentina, the truth is I never left you" (Rice 65). The position of LuPone's upstretched arms, her tilted head, and the expression on her face perfectly illustrate for the viewer the many facets of Eva Peron. The glamorous actress, the powerful political figure, the savior of the people, and the martyr-saint can all be seen in one iconic, almost Christ-like pose. For audiences, the visual has been so encapsulating of the character, that it has been a staple of subsequent productions. Examples like Che in "Oh What a Circus" and particularly Eva in "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" serve as excellent examples of the art of sculpture as a Wagnerian dramatic tool in musical theater. So much so, that when paired with music, text, architecture, and painting, LuPone's unforgettable sculptural position in "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" makes Weber's ballad one of the most impactful moments not only in *Evita* but of the Moore 9 entire musical theater canon.

"Where the direct expression of vocal tone reaches its limit, when it can no longer communicate and delineate the precise feelings of the individual heart to the compassionate and sympathetic inner human, that is where, carried by tone of voice, language enters in" (Wagner 25). Like opera, the combination of text and song is musical theater's most effective story-telling tool. Wagner's point of view is one of a classical musician adding text to music. Conversely, the musical theater actor believes that when a play's text alone is not enough to convey the character's emotion, music intervenes to enhance the meaning. Both theories arrive at the same conclusion, from different vantage points. Namely, that "music must be put into service of the drama" (Warner 5). When analyzing *Evita*, a piece told entirely through song, it is essential to discuss music and text as a pairing, working together to tell the story. Like Wagner, Weber feels "music can cut corners and say something quite quickly that it would take far longer to say in words... enhancing emotion (Weber)." A poignant example of this pairing is a character that appears only briefly in the story; her song is "Another Suitcase in Another Hall" ("Another Suitcase").

Having ensnared Peron as her lover, Eva arrives home with him to find his previous mistress. "Prior to ... Eva, Peron's ... female companion had been a girl of no more than sixteen. It was not difficult for a hustler like ... Eva... to turf this unfortunate teenager out of Peron's apartment and out of his life" (Weber). In the 2007 London revival, directed by Michael Grandage (Gans), we are treated to a riveting theatrical representation of an intimate real life exchange. In the production, Peron notices his mistress and quickly exits leaving Eva to dismiss her on his behalf (Becketts 43). The talk-sung confrontation between the woman and the mistress's ensuing moments are an excellent example of the Wagnerian principal of pairing text with music to enhance character and further dramatic action. As a side note, also on display here Moore 10 is homage to Wagner's love of motifs for different characters. This song begins with Eva's "on the move" motif (Weber), a progression of notes featured throughout the show which conveys the feeling that Eva is advancing towards something she wants.

Textually, Eva digs "hello and goodbye, I've just unemployed you, you can go back to school" (Rice 62). The young mistress, shocked, says nothing. Eva haughtily responds "I like your conversation; you've a catchy turn of phrase" (62). The speech directive in the libretto for this portion of the text describes Eva's intended vocal quality as "almost affectionately" (62). With this directive in play, Eva's position takes on a chiding, menacing quality, and her text assumes the eerie tenor of a warning, daring the inexperienced mistress to tussle with her. Tonally, the mistress is cast with a more sympathetic lyrical voice to contrast with Eva's power-belt sound. Swept onto the street to ponder her future, the mistress begins to sing one of the most heartbreaking numbers in the show.

"Another Suitcase" is a song of rejection and bewilderment. The melancholic strains of the music pull on our heartstrings and are reinforced by the repetition of her lyrics "So what happens now?" and "Where am I going to?" (63), conveying to the audience member how misplaced this character feels. In this moment the pairing of disciplines affects the audience so deeply, that they are unable to resist sympathizing with the dejected mistress, seen picking her clothing out of the street where Eva has discarded it. As a result of this pairing, the observer is able to see the mistress as an example of what happens to women like Eva when their plans go awry. She is a woman who is quickly replaced and left without any prospects. Poignantly, later in the show, as Eva lies on her death-bed, stripped of her life's plans by encroaching illness, she will dejectedly repeat to Peron, in a similar manner, "Where am I going to?" (70). This specific music and textual reference to the earlier gut-wrenching moment has a chilling effect on viewers.

"The plot most suited to dramatic art and most worthy of dramatic performance is one whose conclusion coincides with that of its main protagonist, whose conclusion, indeed, is none other than the end of that protagonist's life" (Wagner 79). In Wagnerian style, the final scene of *Evita*, entitled "Lament" shows us a monolith wrestling with her own mortality and struggling to explain her life choices in her eleventh hour. We are presented with mournful measures of music befitting a death scene, including repetitive hints in the underscoring gently suggesting the waning of time. The lyric "I could burn with the splendor of the brightest fire/ Or else –or else I could choose time" (Rice 71) is significant for the audience as it linguistically enhances the music's haunting tones, amplifying Eva's choice to live fast even if it means dying young.

The progression of the melodic phrase upward through the beginning of the lyric and peaking at "brightest fire" calls to the audience on an elemental level, expressing just how high and emblazoned Eva wishes her star to become. The subsequent falling of notes downward, finally hitting bottom for the word "time," illustrates Eva's idea that choosing time over success would have been exceptionally wrong for her. The textual stumble of "Or else-Or else I could choose time" could be motivated by any number of reasons according to the actress portraying Eva, not the least of which would be that Eva is scared, in these last moments, and unsure that she made the best decisions in her life, prompting the audience member to reflect on whether they might feel the same. As Eva lies in her hospital bed, physically damaged, this section of music and text allows the audience to see another Wagnerian requirement: a weaker, wavering, real-life "human being in ... her full grandeur" (31). In her last instants, Eva Peron is a far cry from the self-assured daredevil we see in "Buenos Aires." "Lament" shines a gentler light on a character described as unsympathetic even by her author (Weber). In the final scene of *Evita*, Weber and Rice combine the disciplines and use musical theater to fulfill Wagner's demand to bring "the dead back to life through art... joyfully repeating and re-enacting his story and his death in the Moore 12 dramatic artwork, [and] filling the living with the joy of love for the departed... making his being our own" (80).

Richard Wagner's *The Artwork of The Future* served as a call to action for the artists of his day, inciting them to fuse architecture, painting, dance, sculpture, text, and music to a performance style which would speak to an audience member audibly, visually, emotionally and logically. Though his manifesto originally sought to transform opera from a luxury good to a product for the common man, it is readily apparent how the tenets of Wagner's work, are producing effective audience communication on the musical theater stage in pieces like Weber and Rice's *Evita*. Architecture and painting illuminate central themes and depict contrasting environments like Junin, Argentina and the Casa Rosada which is vital to the audience's understanding of the story. Dance develops plot and character while supplying a visual that represents tone and poetry in "Buenos Aires" and "Waltz for Evita and Che." The human body sculpturally manifests characters like Che and Eva Peron, one of the most famous musical theater roles. Music and text work in unison throughout Weber's work including "Another Suitcase in Another Hall" and "Lament" to affect the viewer on a primal level. In *Evita*, "From poverty comes abundance, from lack excess; the unschooled figure of the hempen homespun player takes on the bearing of a hero, the rough accents of everyday speech become the ringing tones of the soul, the wooden scaffolding hung with rugs becomes a worldstage with all its rich scenes" (Wagner 52). Moore 13

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