

Tobias Picker

Dolores Claiborne

an opera in two acts
libretto (English) by J.D. McClatchy
based on the novel by Stephen King
commissioned by San Francisco Opera
WORLD PREMIERE: September 18, 2013

Principal Roles:

Vera · soprano | Selena · soprano
Dolores · mezzo-soprano | Mr. Pease · tenor
Thibodeau · tenor | Joe · bass-baritone
5 maids · sopranos | Teen Girl · soprano
Teen Boy · tenor | Mr. Knox · tenor | Mr. Cox · tenor
Mr. Fox · tenor | SATB Chorus



Cast and Creative Team:

Dolores Claiborne - Dolora Zajick | Vera Donovan - Elizabeth Futral
Joe St. George - Wayne Tigges | Selena St. George - Susannah Biller
Detective Thibodeau - Greg Fedderly
George Manahan, conductor
James Robinson, director
James Schuette, costume designer
Christopher Akerlind, lighting designer
Greg Emetaz, projection designer
Ian Robertson, chorus director

Instrumentation:

2.2.2.2-4.2.3.1-timp.perc-hp.pno-str

120'

Tobias Picker, called "our finest composer for the lyric stage" by *The Wall Street Journal*, has drawn acclaimed performances by the world's foremost musicians, orchestras and opera houses. His operas have been commissioned and performed by the Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Dallas, San Francisco, Montreal, and Metropolitan Opera companies among others. Mr. Picker has received numerous awards and prizes, including a Charles Ives Scholarship as well as a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, and was elected in 2012 to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has served as composer-in-residence of the Houston Symphony, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and the Pacific Music Festival. Picker's symphonic music has been commissioned and performed by the world's leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.



SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

1992 - The interrogation room of a police station. Dolores Claiborne is accused of murdering rich and imperious Vera Donovan, who employed Dolores as a maid and companion for forty years. Dolores reveals she hated Vera but denies murdering her. During the interrogation, we learn of Dolores' miserable life, her dead husband, her estranged daughter, and her relationship with Vera.

1952 - Vera's manor home. Dolores helps the other maids with spring cleaning, learning what it takes to please the snobbish and cruel Vera Donovan.

1962 - Dolores' rundown home. Her husband, Joe St. George, sings of his own miserable life while looking for a bottle of whiskey. Their daughter, Selena (15), returns from school. Joe begs for some affection from the sullen girl. Dolores returns from Vera's. She attempts to joke with Joe but he viciously strikes her with a plank of wood. The argument and violence escalate. The scene is interrupted by the reappearance of a terrified Selena.

1963 - On the deck of a ferry between the mainland and Little Tall Island. Dolores confronts Selena about her recent sullenness. Selena rebuffs Dolores. Dolores asks if she is 'in trouble' with a boy? Selena rushes off leaving Dolores alone and bewildered.

Determined to rescue her daughter and start a new life, Dolores goes to the bank to withdraw her life savings only to learn that her husband has withdrawn all of her hard-earned money. She vows to get it back.

Dolores helps serve at a summer party at Vera's. Guests and servants crowd the lawn. Vera notices that Dolores is not herself and asks what is troubling her. Dolores reveals Joe is beating her and has also stolen all of her money. Vera observes that the coming solar eclipse might be the perfect time for Dolores to rid herself of her husband since "accidents happen every day." The two women share their own experiences with men. Again Dolores breaks down, and further reveals that Joe has been molesting Selena. The horrid scene comes to life. (Quartet)

ACT TWO

1963 - Dolores prepares lunch and liquor to celebrate the solar eclipse with her husband. As the sky darkens, Dolores accuses Joe of molesting Selena and provokes him into a violent argument. She escapes his grasp and runs toward an abandoned well. As planned, Joe falls into the well. Dolores replaces the rotted planks of wood that had covered the old well as Joe's cries for help fade to silence.

1992 - Back in the interrogation room, the detective reminds Dolores that she is not there to talk about Joe and the past but about Vera Donovan. Everyone knows she got away with the murder of the abusive Joe, but the police are determined to pin Vera's murder on her now.



Dolores continues her story.

As the now decrepit Vera is lovingly but sternly cared for by Dolores in her empty mansion, she reveals shocking secrets of her past to Dolores. Vera goes in and out of dementia as Dolores tries to comfort her.

Alone in her empty apartment in Boston, Selena--who has long since left the island and become a lawyer--reflects on her own troubled life, her mother and her father. She decides to go to Little Tall Island to find out why she has not heard from her mother in some time. Night falls.

In the interrogation room, Selena joins her mother and explains that Dolores could never have killed Vera Donovan because in the end the two women loved each other. It is discovered that Vera has left her entire fortune to Dolores but Dolores curses her and storms out.

Back at her shabby home, Dolores unexpectedly finds Selena there, and the two women attempt to untangle the past. Selena asks her mother "what really happened in that house?" Vera's house appears and we see that, while Dolores is not looking, Vera manages to wheel herself from her bedroom to the top of the large staircase in her home. As she reaches the edge of the stairs, Dolores attempts to save her. In spite of her efforts, Vera hurls herself down the great staircase. But she is not dead. Vera begs Dolores to kill her. Dolores raises a large vase above Vera's head, but cannot go through with it.

In spite of her efforts, Dolores is not forgiven by her daughter, who says she never asked to be saved. Selena leaves. Dolores Claiborne--who has done everything a mother and a woman can to keep three lives together--is left alone.