
SEASONS IN HELL – A Life Of Rimbaud

Music: Harold Blumenfeld

Libretto: Charles Kondek

Rimbaud's character conveyed threefold – **Young Rimbaud**, literature's precocious teenage genius – baritone; **Older Rimbaud**, product of his renunciation of literature – baritone; **Muse**, a Madonna-like Ariel unseen by Rimbaud, at times singing lines from his poetry in the original French – soprano.

Kondek's libretto structured in two intertwining chronologies – Rimbaud the young writer - his poetic revolution achieved ages 15-19; and Rimbaud, trader, gun-runner in Africa, to death at 37.

In opera's final scene the two Rimbauds meet. Reconciliation. Younger Rimbaud retreats into family barn, extracts from himself *Une Saison en enfer* and its renunciation of poetry, gives birth to his new practical, fortune-seeking self. [An emptied, hollow shell? Or an incarnation of his wildest visions?]

THE SCORE EXCERPTS

1. Score p 20-24: Revolution in Poetry

The 16-year old formulates his poetic revolution in lines from his *Lettres du Voyant*, "attaining the Unknown through a long, immense derangement of the senses." A letter arrives from Paul Verlaine inviting him to Paris. Older Rimbaud appears briefly, commenting.

2. Score p 72-77: Act One Final Scene

Excerpt from Imaginary Orgy wherein "handsome demons, adolescent Satans surrender their five senses to the Seven Sins" as Rimbaud, Verlaine exult in erotic-violent extremis. Also in orchestral scoring, in **2-A**.

3. Score p 95-97: Africa

Older Rimbaud, suffering from tumor in knee, is borne to port by Ethiopian porters. In presence of servant-friend Djami he pauses to write home to mother as porters chant in Amharic.

4. Score p 119-123: Love Scene

Initiated by voice of Muse, Rimbaud instructs his Ethiopian mistress in French language. They make love.

5. Score p 137-143. From Final Scene.

As Rimbaud prepares 'to finish the story of my hell', Older Rimbaud is created. They come face to face in text translated from "Adieu" ending *Une Saison en enfer*. Trio of Reconciliation, Muse singing lines from *Bateau ivre* and rendered in English by the two baritones. Young Rimbaud enters barn. Older Rimbaud is left, burying bitter memories in a transcendent vision.

Shortly the opera will end as it began – with Rimbaud's death; but with it, an immense flowering of his youthful works, exploding down to and beyond the present. Death and resurrection.

The linguistic splendor of *SEASONS* places its libretto in the rare company of *POPPEA*, *TRISTAN*, *OTELLO*, and *PELLEAS*. – H.B.
